

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 20 July 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Fraser Massey (Chair), Gerard Rice (Deputy Chair), Luke Spillman, John Allen, Andrew Jefferies, Sara Muldowney, Terry Piccolo and Sue Shinnick

In attendance: Anna Eastgate, Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Transport Infrastructure Projects
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer

Laura Blake, Thames Crossing Action Group Representative
Robert Quick, Resident Representative
Westley Mercer, Thurrock Business Board Representative

Gareth Protheroe, Highways England Representative
Phil Stanier, Highways England Representative

Dermot Scanlon, PBA Consultants Representative

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being live-streamed onto YouTube.

1. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence received.

2. Nomination of Chair

Councillor Fraser Massey was elected Chair of the LTC Task Force 2020/21 with 5 votes.

3. Nomination of Vice-Chair

Councillor Gerard Rice was elected as Vice-Chair of the LTC Task Force 2020/21 with the agreement of the Task Force.

4. Minutes

The Resident Representative stated that his name had been missed from the attendance list.

With this amendment, the minutes from Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 16 March 2020 were approved as a true and correct record.

5. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

6. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

7. Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference were noted by the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force.

8. LTC Design Consultation

Mr Protheroe began his presentation by introducing himself and stating that he was the Development Director for Cascade, who worked on behalf of Highways England (HE). He introduced the design refinement consultation that was currently taking place and stated that he would be providing an overview to the consultation through his presentation, and wanted as many responses from stakeholders and residents as possible. He moved on and stated that the proposed LTC would be the biggest investment in Kent and Essex since the M25, and the Department for Transport and Highways England believed it would double road capacity, whilst supporting local and regional growth by opening up markets. He mentioned that there would be opportunities for residents both during the construction phase and in the longer term.

Mr Protheroe moved on to outlining the refinements to the scheme that had been made since supplementary consultation, including a reduction in the overall size of the development boundary and other changes such as, updated pedestrian paths, and fewer utilities diversions. He added that more detailed landscaping work had also been undertaken, and HE had completed some ecological mitigation measures. He clarified that because of COVID-19 no in-person consultation events would be taking place, and HE were adopting a 'digital first' approach, which included postal and telephone consultation. He stated that deposit locations and information points for consultation documents had been limited by government guidelines on COVID-19.

Mr Protheroe then discussed the reduction of the size of the development boundary, which had been reduced from 26.21km to 22.89km, which equalled a reduction of 12.5%. He stated that the homes affected by the scheme had also been reduced by 45% to 150 homes, and these reductions had been achieved through utility diversions. Mr Protheroe understood that the scheme would have a large personal impact on those homeowners affected, but felt this was relatively small for such a large scheme. He clarified that certain parcels of land would only be needed during the construction period for utilities diversions and construction sites, and would be returned to landowners in its previous condition once the scheme was complete.

Mr Protheroe moved on to discuss the environmental impacts of the scheme, and stated that the design refinement had also managed to decrease the impact of the scheme on areas of ancient woodland, and improve habitats for some species, through the introduction of green bridges. He added that 17 noise barriers had also now been added along the route, as well as landscaping proposals to minimise the visual impact of the project on above ground infrastructure. He added that the scheme also required a small number of permanent substations, some larger substations, and a switching station, which would all be fenced off to ensure security. He added that the refinement consultation also outlined the new plans for connecting the water mains to the Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM), and the use of trenchless technology for below ground utilities.

Mr Protheroe then explained the differences at the north tunnel entrance from supplementary consultation to design refinement. He clarified that the main improvement was the earthworks provision of nice views to Coalhouse Fort and Tilbury Fort, which had been added to the tunnel entrance. He stated that these earthworks would be used from construction spoil, and the area around the tunnel entrance would be returned to its current grazing usage. Mr Protheroe then moved onto the differences at the design refinement stage in Tilbury, and outlined the four noise barriers that would be over 700m long and 1-2m high. He stated that these would be positioned in Tilbury between the tunnel and Muckingford Road. He added that footpath 61 had also been realigned and amended slightly, and footpath 200 had been diverted to allow better connectivity for pedestrians between Tilbury and Chadwell St Mary. Mr Protheroe added that a new water supply would also be added in Linford to provide water to the TBM, which would be placed in the Fort Road, Lower Crescent, Muckingford Road, Coopers Shaw Road, Gun Hill area.

Councillor Allen questioned whether any water from the Thames could be used for the TBM. Mr Protheroe confirmed that HE had considered this option, but was not viable due to water quality, reliability, water extraction, and the lack of fire suppressant. Councillor Allen asked if the water used for the TBM would reduce water pressure for residents in Linford. Mr Protheroe confirmed that this was the reason a new water main was being added in the Fort Road area, and confirmed that water pressure would not be affected. Councillor Allen queried whether the noise barriers would be on the elevated sections of the LTC, near to the old power station. Mr Stanier confirmed that noise barriers in Tilbury would be located east near Station Road, and would be up to 2m high, as well as near Muckingford Road, where they would also be 2m in height. He added that noise barriers would also be added where the LTC crossed the Tilbury Loop Line and these would be approximately 1m in height. Councillor Allen queried when the Council and Task Force would be able to see the Ecological Impact Assessment (EIA), and Mr Protheroe confirmed that a working version of the document had been shared with Council officers, but would not be published until Development Consent Order (DCO) submission in autumn 2020. The Assistant Director LTC confirmed that various chapters of the early draft EIA had been shared with Council officers on the same day that the design refinement consultation had been announced, so officers had not had a chance to review it yet.

The Resident Representative questioned how effective the noise barriers would be. Mr Protheroe replied that he could not comment as HE were working with Thurrock to complete the Local Landscape Impact Assessment. He clarified that this document would take into account the landscape to ensure that noise barriers were as effective as they could be, but it could be difficult as the barriers required regular maintenance access. He added that HE created noise calculations based on traffic figures in surrounding areas, and the standard noise barrier was a 2m high timber fence. He mentioned that this would not be confirmed until the standard pre and post surveying had been completed. He highlighted that the EIA would set out the performance of the noise barriers, and further potential mitigation would be detailed at this phase.

Mr Protheroe continued with his presentation and outlined the changes at design refinement consultation to the Orsett Cock roundabout. He stated that the proposed location for the travellers site had been moved to adjacent their current site, with access from Gammonfields Way. He commented that the potential site would be 1.5 hectares, with an additional 1.5 hectares for access and landscaping. Mr Protheroe stated that changes had also been made to the A13 merge layout, as this would now be a two lane merge, rather than one lane. He stated that false cutting had also been removed between A128 Brentwood Road and Hoford Road due to a watercourse, but additional planting and fencing, including noise barriers 550m long and 6m in height, would be included to visually screen the road. Mr Protheroe mentioned that seven small substations would also be near the A13/LTC junction, as well as necessary maintenance tracks, and the previously proposed shared path under the A13 had been removed. He stated that at supplementary consultation a new footpath under the A13 had been considered, but had not been progressed to this stage due to the closeness to the A13. He added that HE had also considered the woodland near Baker Street, and in the new design, the public would be able to access this. He added that noise barriers would also be put in place at the Orsett Cock roundabout, which would be 500m long and 5m in height. The Thames Crossing Action Group (TCAG) Representative queried this figure, as in the consultation documents on page 59, it stated 2m high. Mr Stanier confirmed this was an error in the presentation and the noise barriers at Orsett Cock would be 2m high.

Mr Protheroe continued the presentation and confirmed that part of the Orsett Showground site would be permanently required for construction, as a gas pipeline would have to be moved. He added that a replacement site adjacent to the current site had been proposed. Mr Stanier confirmed that because of this, there would be a larger noise barrier near Brentwood Road. Mr Protheroe stated that in the Mardyke Valley, noise barriers up to 1500m long and 1m high would be in place, as well as long sections of the viaduct and embankment. He added that utility works would also be permanently created in this area, with access from Green Lane, which had increased the boundary development there. Mr Protheroe moved on to describing the changes at design refinement consultation at the junction between the LTC and M25, and stated that noise barriers would be in place which would be 200m long and

2m in height. He added that woodland planting would also have to be reduced in The Wilderness as a result of a watercourse diversion. He added that a small 3mx3m substation would be added near to Clay Tides Farm. Mr Protheroe confirmed that the Thames Chase Forest Centre (TCFC) would also need a new maintenance track due to multi-utilities diversion to the north of the site, but a proposed footbridge over the M25 would reconnect the TCFC with the wider environment. He added that sewer diversion works would also be needed from Ockendon Road to St Marys Lane, as well as overhead electricity cable diversion works around B186 North Road. Mr Protheroe also confirmed that a new footbridge would be added at junction 29 of the M25, over the A127, as well as gas diversion works near Folkes Lane, and the movement of electricity cables underground around the LTC.

Mr Protheroe stated that the design refinement consultation would last between 14 July and 12 August, and there was a specific consultation website, as well as moderated webinars and telephone surgery. He stated that consultation documents were available online and via post, and the online website also contained exhibitions, such as interactive maps, boards and videos. He added that there were also live events that had been promoted through various social media channels, and a leaflet drop to every affects resident within a 2km radius of the route. He mentioned that a total of 135,000 leaflets had been distributed, as well as print media and stakeholder engagement with the consultation.

Mr Protheroe moved onto outlining the progress of the scheme so far, starting with the first public consultation in spring 2016, the preferred route announcement in April 2017, and the statutory consultation in October 2018, the start of ground investigation works in July 2019, and finally the supplementary consultation in January 2020. He outlined the next steps of the project which included the conclusion of the design consultation in August 2020, DCO submission in autumn 2020, DCO examination, with a decision being made in 2022, and a targeted road opening of 2027/28.

Mr Protheroe hoped that residents and stakeholders would get involved with the design consultation, as 74,000 people had visited the consultation website for the supplementary consultation, with 6,000 responses submitted.

Councillor Jefferies opened questions and stated that as there were no public consultation events, large sections of Thurrock residents might not be able to access the consultation. He added that as leaflets had only been dropped within a 2km radius of the route, large sections of Thurrock such as Chadwell St Mary and Ockendon, may not be aware that the route might affect them. Councillor Jefferies asked if HE could write to all residents outlining the proposals. He also asked what HE plans were for woodland in Ockendon, and what footbridge work would be undertaken in that area. Mr Protheroe stated that residents who would be affected by the scheme had received two weeks' notice prior to the design consultation, to give residents enough time to request paper copies of the consultation. He added that a footbridge in Ockendon over the LTC had been included in the supplementary consultation, and had been wrongly listed in the presentation as a new feature at design

refinement. Councillor Jefferies felt that not all residents were aware of the route, even though it could affect their lives and asked for HE to consider all Thurrock residents, including those in Ockendon, Chadwell St Mary and Tilbury. Mr Protheroe confirmed that residents should have been made aware of the scheme during statutory and supplementary consultation, and the design refinement had not made any significant changes. The Assistant Director LTC felt that the design refinement consultation should have been postponed due to the lack of in-person consultation events. She highlighted that Thurrock Council had currently postponed any consultations due to concerns around engagement, particularly as deposit locations such as libraries and the civic offices. She stated that some areas of Thurrock had poor internet infra-structure, and Thurrock had documented this and raised concerns with HE.

Councillor Rice asked if HE had considered proposals to move the route further east, towards Canvey Island, which had better connectivity routes to A120, M11, A14, A1/M1, A127, A12 and A130. He felt that the proposed crossing would not offer a long-term solution to the problems at the Dartford Crossing, and would negatively impact the countryside and green spaces in Thurrock. He felt noise barriers should be put in around Foxes Green and Orsett Heath as some residential properties in this area would come within 200m of the proposed route. He stated that Thurrock residents have the highest rates of COPD outside of London, and the new route would increase pollution and respiratory problems amongst the population. He asked if HE had considered putting the route into a tunnel, or cut and cover, as had been done along section of the M25. He asked if HE could send a copy of the presentation made at the meeting to every resident, with particular focus on those in East Tilbury, South Ockendon, Orsett, Bulphan and Chadwell St Mary. Councillor Rice added that 6m high noise barriers should be added along Heath Road, Godman Road and Cedar Road, as well as near the tower blocks in Chadwell St Mary. Mr Protheroe responded that lots of investigation work had been done before the preferred route announcement in 2017, and the current location had been optimum. He added that the EIA would show the impact on air quality across the borough, and would present potential mitigation, when it was published at DCO submission. He added that cut and cover and tunnels along the route had been considered, but were not cost-effective. He added that the consultation documents were available to all residents for their consideration, and would be sent free of charge in the post, if residents needed it.

The Assistant Director LTC added that in general, noise barriers ranged from 1m to 6m in height, and asked HE if the height of the noise barriers along the route would be linked to land and road level. She felt concerned that a 1m high noise barrier would not be useful if the road was elevated higher than the existing ground. Mr Protheroe replied that no detailed designs had been developed, but the height of the noise barriers was based on the use of 3D land models of the surrounding area. He stated that HE also used traffic forecasting and webtag approved software to model the road conditions, before modelling with mitigations included to see the difference. The Assistant Director LTC shared her concerns regarding the visual impact of the noise

barriers, as this could negatively affect residents who would live near the proposed route. Mr Protheroe replied that the visual impact of the noise barriers would be discussed in the EIA.

Councillor Muldowney felt that the supplementary consultation had been flawed due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had distracted people. She added that she felt the design refinement consultation would also be flawed, for example the phone number to request consultation documents was not a Freephone number, and libraries were not open for deposit locations. She stated that at the last Task Force meeting, they had considered the response to the supplementary consultation, and asked how this response had fed into the design refinement consultation. She felt that she was not able to answer resident's questions, as the EIA was not being published until DCO submission, which she felt was too late. She added that she had also been having problems with the online supplementary consultation, as she had had to submit her response three times, and then received a bounce back email. She felt that all consultations should be accessible for everybody, including those that did not have access to the internet. Mr Protheroe noted Councillor Muldowney's feelings towards the supplementary consultation, and stated that it had been extended by two weeks due to the outbreak of the pandemic. He stated that all government guidelines had been followed, such as no face-to-face meetings, but felt that the consultation was still accessible. He added that he would look into Councillor Muldowney's problems with the email bounce back. He added that the response from supplementary consultation had been included in this consultation, such as the reduced impact for ancient woodland, and highlighted that a consultation response document would be included at DCO submission, in which all responses would be summarised. Mr Stanier confirmed that to call HE to request consultation documents was a standard local rate.

Councillor Spillman sought assurance from HR that the responses from all consultations would be considered before the proposal went to DCO submission. He felt that the borough had seen massive change in travel usage post-COVID19, as more people worked from home, which was a trend that was likely to continue. He asked if HE would pause the scheme to consider the fundamental changes in usage of cars, and if the scheme would still be necessary. Mr Protheroe responded that HE's current traffic model did not take into account travel post-COVID, but this position would be included as the scheme progressed. The Assistant Director LTC questioned the inclusion of green vehicles in the traffic model. Mr Protheroe replied that HE used conservative estimations in the number of green vehicles at road opening, as the EIA always considered the 'worst case scenario'. He stated that there was a piece of work to be completed regarding the level of traffic post-COVID, but people did not currently know the long-term effects or changes in working environments.

Councillor Shinnick queried the movement of the traveller's site, and the Assistant Director LTC confirmed that the petition had been submitted to Full Council asking for the Council not to consider any sites in the Blackshots area. She stated that the current proposal moved the traveller's immediately

west of their current location, which was approximately 350m away from the nearest properties.

Councillor Rice queried the proposed construction hours for the site, and asked if HE were going to try to reduce the number of construction vehicles. Mr Protheroe responded that HE would work with Thurrock to develop a Code of Construction Practice, which would set out the construction constraints and performance specification. He stated that the finalised construction hours would be set out in the local road impact report, which would be submitted at DCO. The Assistant Director LTC clarified that although Thurrock could impact the Code of Construction Practice, HE would have final sign-off of the document. She shared Councillor Rice's concern over the currently proposed construction hours.

The Thames Crossing Action Group (TCAG) Representative stated that she had been liaising with residents across the borough, and confirmed that some had received letters when they were outside the development boundary, and others inside the development boundary had not received anything. She added that HE's Lower Thames Crossing website had not been updated to reflect the design refinement consultation, which could also be confusing for residents. She added that the map books had some errors, such as wrong place names and spellings, and map book three was also incorrect. She felt that the design refinement consultation was rushed, and that HE needed to listen to the supplementary consultation responses before launching another consultation. She felt that some residents were also experiencing consultation fatigue, as there had now been three lengthy consultations. Mr Protheroe began his response by stating that if residents felt concerned regarding any letter they had received, they could call HE who would discuss the matter with them. The TCAG Representative stated that the land and property team took a long time to respond, in some cases up to fourteen days. Mr Stanier replied that if residents received a letter stating they were in the development boundary, they could schedule a follow-up call the next day.

Councillor Allen stated that the route needed to be right by design, and should mitigate the long lasting impacts that the route would cause to residents health. He stated that as the route would be a toll-road, any cost of the scheme would be repaid in full, and asked if some of this money could go towards protecting people's health across Thurrock. Mr Protheroe replied that this was not within the remit of HE, and would fall under the Department of Transport. Councillor Muldowney asked when an update would be received regarding the Health Impact Assessment, as the borough already had increased rates of COPD and other respiratory problems. Mr Protheroe replied that the HIA would be made public at DCO submission.

The Assistant Director LTC stated that she had written formally to HE and documented all the concerns that had been raised by the Task Force. She felt that the consultation was rushed and there was a lack of information sharing from HE. She added that once the DCO had been submitted, the Council's ability to change the route was dramatically reduced. She questioned what economic growth and improvement would be seen by Thurrock residents, and

questioned who the new earthworks and views from the north tunnel portal could be viewed by, whether for the resident or road user. Mr Protheroe replied that the scheme would benefit Thurrock as the Benefit-Cost Ratio proved this. He stated he would set out the specific benefits and look to share this at a later date. The Assistant Director LTC highlighted that the Benefit-Cost Ratio highlighted the benefits for the wider Essex area, Kent and the East Midlands, but did not show the benefits for Thurrock specifically. Mr Protheroe added that the earthworks views over the northern portal would be for the resident, as they would be able to access this area.

9. Task Force Priorities List

The Task Force Priorities List was noted.

10. Work Programme

Councillor Rice asked if HE could attend the Task Force meeting in September, and the Chair confirmed he would look into it.

The meeting finished at 9.22 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**

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