

Meeting note

Project name	Lower Thames Crossing (LTC)
File reference	TR010032
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	5 August 2021
Meeting with	Highways England (the Applicant)
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	Project update
Circulation	All attendees

Summary of key points discussed and advice given

The Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) advised that a note of the meeting would be taken and published on its website in accordance with section 51 of the Planning Act 2008 (the PA2008). Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely.

Consultation update

The Applicant confirmed that it had held various events as part of its ongoing community impacts consultation. It had observed a decline in physical attendance at events and a shift towards digital engagement, despite the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions. At the time of the meeting, the Applicant had received nearly 1500 responses to the consultation, most of which had been submitted online.

Stakeholder engagement

The Applicant confirmed that engagement with stakeholders was ongoing. It highlighted correspondence received from the Gravesham, Thurrock and Kent local authorities (LA), including a request for a four-week extension to the consultation period. The Applicant was reviewing the correspondence but was comfortable that an eight-week consultation was reasonable. The Inspectorate queried what Development Consent Order (DCO) application submission date had been conveyed to LAs. The Applicant indicated that a target date of November 2021 had been discussed with local authorities but stressed that a submission date would be kept under constant review to allow for the due consideration of consultation responses and ongoing stakeholder engagement.

The discussion revisited the elements of s51 advice issued by the Inspectorate that related to the adequacy of consultation activities.

The Applicant advised that it had issued LAs with updated operational traffic modelling data following a decision to include an additional lane on the A13 element of the scheme. Engagement with LAs on the traffic model had been ongoing since circa 2016, and current discussions were focussed on how growth was accounted for in the model, and on addressing concerns regarding the representativeness of the model for LA roads. The

Applicant had also been preparing additional modelling for the LAs to demonstrate how their aspirational local plan(s) may be reflected in the traffic model.

The Applicant was due to issue LAs with a dataset comprising scheme-wide mitigations and controls. It was also proposing to hold workshops with LAs on some of the traffic impacts on local junctions, with the intention of agreeing the nature of the impacts. The Inspectorate noted that it was worth reflecting on the potential amount of work due to be undertaken before the target submission date of November 2021.

General land and property update

The Applicant provided an update in respect of ongoing negotiations with landowners to mitigate impacts and seek agreement where possible. Negotiations were stated to be progressing with LAs, and the Applicant stated that it had sent 860 letters offering voluntary agreement to landowners with no active contact. Land referencing was also stated to be ongoing. The Inspectorate encouraged the Applicant to submit a Compulsory Acquisition Schedule with the application and the Applicant confirmed that this should be possible.

The Applicant advised that it had been tracking all Bona Vacantia land arising within the Order limits and had been reporting this to the Bona Vacantia government division. The Applicant confirmed that there were currently no freehold interests within the Order limits which had not yet been confirmed to be escheated or disclaimed, and that there were only three other interests within the Order limits which had yet to be officially disclaimed.

The Applicant provided an overview of the scheme's interaction with Crown land. Affected plots included land held by HS1 on a long lease from Department for Transport, and Thames Chase Community Forest and Jeskyns Community Woodland which were owned by the Forestry Commission.

The Applicant stated that Highways England had also acquired 100 hectares of farmland known as Hole Farm and other land in order to create a community woodland; however, this was outside the scope of the LTC project with the exception of mitigation land and its management.

Special Category Land (SCL)

The Applicant advised that it had included SCL and private recreational land as part of its community impacts consultation material, such as in the *'You said; we did'* document and ward summaries. This included open space and common land sites, and the fact that it was proposing to provide replacement land for six sites. The Applicant confirmed that it had continued to engage with LAs and landowners who owned affected assets alongside the consultation programme. The Applicant noted that there were conflicting opinions between landowners/ rights holders and Natural England regarding whether the Osrett Fen common land should be open to the public.

The Applicant advised that the 'Tilbury Green' and 'Walton Common and Parsonage Common' common land sites would be temporarily impacted by the scheme, although it had removed some impacts through design refinement. It was in the process of preparing an application under section 38 of the Commons Act 2006 to apply to construct works on common land which would have a similar timeline to the DCO

submission, and was engaging with Natural England, the Open Spaces Society, and Thurrock Flexible Generation Plant (TFGP) to understand the impacts. The Applicant indicated that TFGP's proposed replacement land would not be impacted by the scheme.

The Inspectorate highlighted that a key issue on the (currently live) M25 Junction 10/A3 Wisley Interchange Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) examination related to the ratio that was used for replacement land, given that variations in the ratio can cause substantial changes to the case for CA. The Applicant advised that it was aware of this and had taken this into account.