

Submission ID: 16333

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Written submissions in relation to the Programming Meeting

Please accept this as a written submission from Maidstone Borough Council in relation to the Programming Meeting, as set out in the Notification of Preliminary Meeting (Rule 6 letter) issued by the Planning Inspectorate on 25th April 2023. The Council wishes to confirm its intention to attend this meeting.

Arrangements to participate in the Examination

Maidstone Borough Council has registered as an Interested Party and submitted Relevant Representations [reference RR-0628] on the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) Development Consent Order (DCO) application. It has also submitted a Principal Areas of Disagreement Summary (PADS) tracker [reference AS-074]. The Council's position on the LTC DCO application is set out in these documents. The Council may take the opportunity to provide additional representations during the examination of the LTC DCO, subject to resourcing and timing considerations as set out below.

The use of Microsoft Teams throughout the examination in blended/hybrid events is welcome. It is understood that the examination will largely be conducted through written representations. This format will help to ensure effective participation by the Council in the examination.

Local Impact Reports (LIRs)

The Rule 6 letter sets out that LIRs are requested from host Local Authorities and also invites other relevant Local Authorities to submit them by 18th July 2023. The Council understands that it is not a host authority and will need to coordinate its position with the upper tier Authority (i.e., Kent County Council).

However, as previously stated in its Relevant Representations, the Council has had to reference the absence of proposed air quality mitigations from the LTC as part of its Local Plan Review, which is currently undergoing examination.

Resourcing and timing considerations

The Council submitted its Local Plan Review to the Secretary of State for independent examination on 31st March 2022. The plan is currently undergoing Examination in Public (EiP). The Stage 1 Hearings took place from 6th September to 25th November 2022. The Stage 2 hearings are scheduled to take place from 15th May to 9th June 2023.

The Local Plan Review EiP hearings coincide with part of the period during which the Programming and Preliminary meetings and their corresponding Procedural Deadlines are tentatively scheduled. It is also noted that the applicant intends to undertake a non-statutory consultation on minor matters from 17th May to 16th June. The Council will endeavour to attend these meetings and make representations during the examination process, where appropriate, however recognising that resources available are likely to be more limited during this time owing to the Local Plan Review.

In terms of the scheduled LTC DCO examination hearings and their corresponding Procedural Deadlines, the Council is not currently in a position to provide specific comments on resourcing

implications. These will be in large part dependent on the outcomes of the Local Plan Review EIP hearings, including any direction provided by the Planning Inspector with respect to the plan process.

Notwithstanding the above, there is a significant volume of information associated with the application for the DCO. The resources required by the Council to review and provide informed comments on these in order to engage meaningfully in the examination, within the timescales set out, will be considerable, particularly given that the Local Plan Review is unlikely to be completed until mid-June 2023.

Statement of Common Ground

As set out in our Relevant Representations, a draft Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) between the Council and National Highways on the Lower Thames Crossing has been prepared. However, the SoCG was not submitted with the DCO application and is therefore not currently in the Examination Library (as indicated by the Rule 6 letter, Appendix F). The Council will continue to seek the cooperation of National Highways to ensure that a SoCG is formally agreed by both parties and submitted by the prescribed deadlines.

Should the SoCG be updated during the examination hearings this may have timing implications as the Council has protocols for formalising such statements through a Committee process.