

TRO10032 LOWER THAMES CROSSING

SUBMISSION FOLLOWING THE PROGRAMMING MEETING held on 16th May 2023

SHORNE PARISH COUNCIL (IP ref 20035603)

1. Thank you very much for allowing us to virtually attend, and speak at, the recent Programming Meeting, and for considering the content of this submission.
2. This document records and expands on our input that was made verbally. We will make additional input pre- and possibly post- the Preliminary Meeting(s).
3. For brevity, we have omitted a detailed introduction detailing our area of responsibility and the impact of the proposals. This will be provided later as part of our written representations.

Resources:

4. Parish Councils are composed of local residents who are elected to represent their communities as the lowest tier of local government. Shorne Parish has 9 Councillors (one post currently vacant), who are all ordinary members of the public, unpaid volunteers working without supporting resources. Councillors have already had a considerable amount of their personal time taken away by National Highways over the past decade. In practical terms, the burden has fallen on very few individuals. Parish Councils vary in size and personnel but generally have similar situations. Some areas are not Parished so lack this same tier of local representation.
5. Despite this handicap, the Parish Council has responded to all the previous iterations of the Lower Thames Crossing proposals, including the November 2017 Planning Inspectorate consultation on the Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Opinion, the 2018 Statutory Consultation, the April 2020 Supplementary Consultation, the July 2020 Design Refinement Consultation, the July 2021 Community Impacts Consultation and the May 2022 Local Refinement Consultation.
6. We have in the past been involved locally with other major projects such as the HS1 Channel Tunnel Rail Link, A289 Wainscott Bypass, Cliffe/Estuary Airport proposals and A2/M2 widening however this present DCO is the largest scheme to date and is a lot for a small Parish Council to cope with.
7. The Parish Council will however endeavour to attend and input into the present DCO processes as much as we can. For major meetings this is most likely to be through virtual attendance or viewing, followed by, or instead, the submission of written representations.

Timings:

8. There has to be a cut-off at some point but the recent Governmental statement announcing that build start would be delayed by two years anyway could mean that a little relaxation might be possible, however everyone involved also has other things to do.

9. Quality of input and breadth of participation are important, and so is getting this massive project and associated decisions right. Any additional stress on local residents through minor delays is likely to be marginal compared with what they have already been put through.
10. In the programme as presently proposed there are sometimes several meetings, of different types and topics, very close together (e.g. during 20th to 23rd June 2023). That makes preparation, attending meetings and providing input difficult if the same individual needs to be involved in all the meetings as well as writing submitted representations.
11. Similarly, 18th July is the deadline for submitting Written Representations (very important) but also for updates to the SoCG (less important), so it would be helpful if the SoCG deadline could be moved to later in the process.
12. The amount of material to be read and digested in this DCO is vast, and some of it is very complex and often spread over multiple files. This makes it difficult, especially for ordinary members of the public, to read and take in so that they can form opinions and respond. It could be helpful if topics and meetings could be spaced a little further apart to aid preparation and also participation by interested parties who are individuals.
13. It would be helpful if prior information of the exact themes to be covered, with increased detail and phrased so that everyone can understand, could be provided well in advance of each meeting. This would facilitate input, and the content of subsequent written representations, being optimised for each meeting and written submission.
14. National Highways have just opened an additional “Minor Refinement Consultation” which closes on 16th June. We will discuss this further in our submission before Programming Meeting 1 (to be held on 6th June 2023).

Local Impact Reports:

15. LIR’s are clearly important documents in influencing decision-making by the SoS. While the content is likely to at least cover the same topics as in their PADS Trackers, the number of items and amount of text in some of the submitted Trackers is reduced while the LIR allows full inclusion and discussion of all topics. Therefore it is important that all invited LA’s can and do submit one.
16. We have read the Advice Note about LIR’s and it appears that Parish Councils are not invited to submit LIR’s. While LA’s should have reference to what Parish Councils have submitted to NH in previous consultations and in their PADS Trackers they have no requirement to include any/all matters raised. LA’s need to consider the wider picture but nevertheless we would hope that LA’s support and will include in their LIR’s all valid concerns that Parish Councils have raised although we also note that we can comment on the LIR’s later.

*Shorne Parish Council
26th May 2023*