

Post-Event Submission, further to comments made at Issue Specific Hearing 3
(by Robin Beard)

During Issue Specific Hearing 3, I once again questioned the wisdom of building the LTC's Orsett junction at its current location " and in particular, I challenged the assertion made by the applicant that they deliberately chose this location due to its proximity to the A1089. Mr Roberts, speaking for the applicant, maintained that if the junction were sited any further to the east, the connections joining the LTC to the A1089 would have been "longer and more circuitous"... but I maintain that the connections as proposed in the DCO are pretty long and circuitous anyway, since they involve doubling back via the Orsett Cock roundabout, so the merits of building the Orsett junction at this location are not apparent.

I instead proposed that this location was originally selected because of its proximity to the Dartford Crossing, so that the LTC would appear to road users as a nearby and easily accessible alternative, thus luring traffic away from the Dartford Crossing and reducing the congestion there. In support of this, I cited the fact that the original design for this junction featured west-facing slip roads (as shown in the plan view in Table 3.18, near the top of page 45 of document 6.1, the Environmental Statement Chapter 3), which would have allowed vehicles fleeing the traffic jams at the Dartford Crossing to use the LTC instead. If traffic going to and from the west had NOT been an issue, then a more easterly location (such as the one I have proposed) could have been chosen... but no, they chose THIS location, so I must assume that those west-facing slip roads were considered to be of primary importance.

When I spoke at the hearing, I made the mistake of estimating that these particular slip roads were removed from the design back in 2016 " but in truth, it was not until the 2018 Public Consultation that a new design was revealed, in which the west-facing slip roads were absent. But either way, I posited that by the time the designers realised that those west-facing slip roads would have to be removed from the Orsett junction, it was too late for them to select a different route, and they had no choice but to press on at their chosen location, even though its primary *raison d'Être* had ceased to exist!

Dr Wright responded to me, on behalf of the applicant, insisting that National Highways "were not in a fixed position after the preferred route announcement," and that the design as submitted for the DCO was indeed "the appropriate scheme and not high-bound by a previous decision."

...Far be it from me to contradict Dr Wright, but his words stand in direct opposition to what I was told at the 2018 Public Consultation! When I proposed my alternative route to Highways England at that consultation, the representative that I was talking to explicitly said that they did not have the authority to change the route at such a late stage of the design process... and when I asked him who would have that authority, he literally gave me a shrug and replied, "The Secretary of State?"

What's more, I think I can tell you the name of the man who said this to me, because I actually saw him at Issue Specific Hearing 4, and I recognised him instantly! He was sat at the table alongside the other members of the applicant's team, and he gave his name as Graham Stevenson... as far as I can tell, he is the Transport Planning lead for the entire Lower Thames Crossing project! I do not know if he held that position in 2018, he might have gone up in the world since then... but he holds it now, and I'm confident that he was the same guy who shrugged at me, back in the day.

Now it might be that what Dr Wright said was technically correct – when the west-facing slip roads were originally removed from the junction design, probably sometime during 2017, it might be that Highways England were still at liberty to change the route, but they simply chose not to. And then, by the time of the Public Consultation in 2018, it may well be that their window of opportunity had closed, which is why Mr Stevenson told me they no longer had the authority to change the route at that point... it might be that both men were telling the truth.

However, the fact that Highways England chose not to change the route when they could have done does not necessarily mean that the route submitted for the DCO is in fact the best route – because, as I said in my previous submission back in July, National Highways never actually considered the route that I am proposing, they somehow overlooked it completely! So when the west-facing slip roads were removed and the route was reviewed, none of the other routes they considered were any better than the one they had already announced... and it is therefore not surprising that they decided not to change it. And then when my alternative route was finally presented to them, by yours truly in 2018, it was already too late for them to adopt it... as Mr Stevenson said, they no longer had the authority to do what needed to be done. So the current proposal for the LTC, as submitted for this DCO, is in fact –high-bound by a previous decision,– despite what Dr Wright claims!

...Also, when I spoke at Issue Specific Hearing 3, I said that Highways England had told me (at the Public Consultation) that the reason why those west-facing slip roads were removed was because of a computer model, which showed that building them would be a 'bad idea'. Well, having consulted my notes from the Public Consultation in 2018, I can tell you that their exact wording was that the west-facing slip roads, according to the computer model, would be –of negligible benefit.–

I couldn't understand this at the time, and I still don't now – logically, if the goal of the project is to reduce congestion at the Dartford Crossing, slip roads that allow traffic from the Dartford Crossing to use the new crossing instead would be of tremendous benefit! But that's not all, because if you look at document 7.9, the Transport Assessment, section 7.3.23 says that the reason why there is no slip road from the LTC northbound to the A13 westbound is –because of physical constraints that prevent the cost-effective provision of the movement.–

Perhaps it's my imagination, but that sounds wistful, to me... it implies that they would have built the west-facing slip roads if only they could have, but alas, those pesky physical constraints simply did not allow it. No mention is made of the computer model, or of the west-facing slip roads being of negligible benefit... so could this be taken as a tacit admission by National Highways that those west-facing slip roads were in fact a highly desirable aspect of the original design, which had to be left on the cutting room floor because of the physical constraints imposed upon the design by their choice of route? And if so... isn't it a pity that a better route could not be found?!

Incidentally, in my previous submission I said that the construction of the junction at Orsett would involve the demolition of three listed buildings; but in 7.16, the Community Impact Report, section 6.13.95 claims that only two would be demolished – Murrells Cottage, and Thatched Cottage. But section 6.13.60 of the same document clearly states that 1 & 2 Grays Corner Cottage will also need to be demolished... and according to the 'British Listed Buildings' website, that is a Grade II listed building as well! (See my attached screenshot of the webpage, which you can look up for yourself at britishlistedbuildings.co.uk if you want to double check it.) So either their

website is wrong, or National Highways have miscounted...

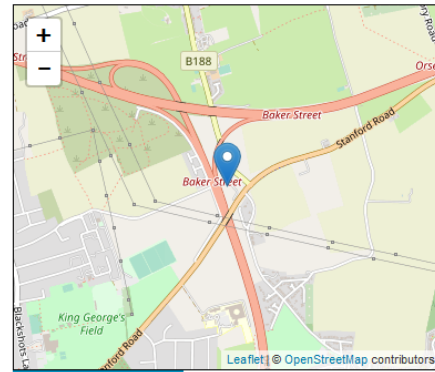
(Oddly enough, that same Community Impact Report says that construction of the Orsett junction would necessitate demolishing 16 residential properties, more than the 12 that I had said it would! Well, I could have sworn I counted them all... but I suppose everybody makes mistakes!)

1 and 2 Grays Corner Cottages

A Grade II Listed Building in Baker Street, Thurrock

We don't have any photos of this building yet. Why don't you be the first to send us one?

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Coordinates

Latitude: 51.499 / 51°29'56"N
Longitude: 0.3564 / 0°21'22"E

OS Eastings: 563657
OS Northings: 180416
OS Grid: TQ636804

Mapcode National: GBR NLS.T3N
Mapcode Global: VHJL5.4L87
Plus Code: 9F32F9X4+HH

Entry Name: 1 and 2 Grays Corner Cottages

Listing Date: 10 November 1981

Last Amended: 18 February 1982

Grade: II

Source: Historic England

Source ID: 1337056

English Heritage Legacy ID: 119609

Location: Orsett Heath, Thurrock, Essex, RM16

County: Thurrock

Electoral Ward/Division: Chadwell St Mary

Parish: Non Civil Parish

Built-Up Area: Baker Street

Traditional County: Essex

Lieutenancy Area (Ceremonial County): Essex