

Meeting note

Project name	Lower Thames Crossing
File reference	TR010032
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	14 October 2021
Meeting with	National Highways
Venue	Microsoft Teams Meeting
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.

Overview

The Applicant provided updates since the last meeting. National Highways are continuing with their stakeholder engagement and working through the consultation responses. The Applicant added that the initial coding of responses had been completed and is now being organised in a more structured manner.

The Applicant added that the Transport Decarbonisation Plan is being fed into its design considerations; particularly in light of sustainable and active travel on local road networks. The Inspectorate questioned the impact of the Transport Decarbonisation Plan on National Highways' approach to cost-benefit analysis. The Applicant stated they were unaware of a fundamental overarching change although emphasised the importance of reflecting on the social value of the Proposed Development.

Reconfiguration of A13 Junction Design

The Applicant briefly explained that it was looking at the reconfiguration of the A13 Junction design and its impact on the broader scheme and the local road network. The Applicant is continuing to assess which of the options are preferred.

Tilbury Fields (Community Consultation proposals)

The Applicant reminded the Inspectorate that the Community Consultation activity included proposals for 'Tilbury Fields', an area proposed for ecological mitigation and open space. Its role as functionally linked land with respect to affected European sites was also noted by the Applicant.

The Applicant explained that the western section of the site serves several purposes including public realm open space and ecological mitigation for invertebrates. The

Inspectorate asked if another function of Tilbury Fields was the management and deposition of spoil including that from the tunnel excavation. The Applicant confirmed that this was the case, and was being factored into its considerations.

Some of this area has since been identified as part of the Port of Tilbury's expansion plans. The Applicant is seeking further constructive discussion with the Port in respect of construction scheduling and sequencing. The Applicant is looking at alternative options for Tilbury Fields, including on the eastern side of the Proposed Development, although the extent of the land available is constrained by an area of known heavily contaminated land.

The Inspectorate queried intentions going forward to discuss this change with Natural England and understanding of the implications for the Applicant's information to support an assessment under the Habitats Regulations. The Applicant confirmed its intention to liaise with Natural England in the coming weeks to discuss matters.

Tilbury Link Road

The Applicant confirmed that the Tilbury Link Road would not be incorporated into the Proposed Development. It was noted that Thurrock Council were concerned with the drainage impacts of the Proposed Development. The Applicant explained that it was looking to configure the drainage pond on the eastern side of the section to open up flexibility on the western side for adjustments in the event of a Tilbury Link Road being brought forward. National Highways are consolidating their ideas currently; having completed a requirements gathering stage through working with Tilbury Port, Local Authorities and other key stakeholders.

Other changes arising from consultation and engagement

The Applicant is working through the responses it has received to the consultation activity. The Applicant has been working with statutory undertakers to understand modifications to proposed alignments to reduce potential impacts. The Applicant has been working with Landowners where there may be minor refinements to the order limits, including in respect of construction compounds. The Applicant has been working with environmental stakeholders in respect of changes to mitigation for example in respect of lower noise road surfaces and potential acoustic barriers. The Applicant indicated that work with Local Authorities progresses to understand the matters that they raised during the consultation.

Programme Update

A programme update was provided by the Applicant. Following the consultation activity, the Applicant will finalise key changes and start final design in October/November. Following that, the Applicant will start to engage with landowners that will be affected by local changes. The Applicant anticipates a consultation on the changes in February 2022. The Applicant indicated that this would not be a consultation on the scheme as a whole but would be more localised and specific in nature.

The Inspectorate queried as to whether the timeline allows for revisions to the Habitats Regulation Assessment and Environmental Statement for those stakeholders involved. The Applicant noted that the programme allows for a significant amount of detailed

engagement with them on these matters; to talk through any matters arising and to seek to propose solutions.