



Meeting note

File reference	Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) - TR010032
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	28 May 2020
Meeting with	Highways England
Venue	Teleconference
Meeting objectives	Project update meeting
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.

Project update overview

The Applicant explained that following its supplementary consultation held between 29 January 2020 and 2 April 2020 ('Supp-Con'), the extent of the red line boundary (RLB) for the Proposed Development had been reduced in some areas. Of note, proposed land-take within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) had been significantly reduced.

The Applicant explained that its team had been working from home since the COVID-19 restrictions had been in force. Whilst some survey work had been able to continue adhering to social distancing constraints, some had had to be suspended until after the restrictions had been lifted or relaxed. The Applicant noted it had sought guidance from the Construction Leadership Council about how to progress its ground investigation (GI) surveys and that, in consideration of that guidance, GI and archaeological work had been continuing with advised safety measures in place.

Supp-Con overview

The Applicant provided an overview of its "Supp-Con" consultation exercise; a subsequent consultation exercise held in addition to its full Statutory Consultation exercise ('Stat Con') conducted in 2018. As part of Supp-Con a total of 135,000 leaflets had been circulated to properties within 2km of the site and 274,000 emails

had been sent to advertise the consultation and invite responses and attendance at 17 exhibition events.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions being implemented midway through Supp-Con, four of those exhibition events had been cancelled. To account for this the Applicant extended the consultation period by a week and provided a substitute telephone consultation service to offset the impact of the cancelled events. The Inspectorate queried whether the approach had been agreed with the relevant local authorities. The Applicant confirmed that it had informed local authorities of the approach but noted some local councillors had requested that Supp-Con be postponed and reopened once COVID-19 restrictions had been lifted or sufficiently relaxed.

The Applicant provided an overview of the scale of response it had received to Supp-Con which included approximately 6.5k responses via a combination of online, email and paper submissions. The Applicant outlined the 'top 20 issues' that had featured in the responses and stated that it was actively considering whether the issues raised should inform any changes to the Proposed Development.

The Applicant noted it had received a mix of responses both opposed and in support of the Proposed Development. A large percentage of the responses expressing opposition formed part of a campaign by the Woodland Trust (WT) with regards to potential impacts on ancient woodland.

Further consultation

The Applicant announced that it planned to undertake a further consultation exercise focusing on design refinement ('D-Con') beginning in July 2020 and lasting for around 30 days. The proposed duration reflected the expected scope and scale of the proposed changes to the application. D-Con would be a 'digital first' consultation due to uncertainty as to when COVID-19 restrictions would be lifted. It would include a telephone service, webinars and virtual exhibitions. Although D-Con would be a principally digital consultation, the Applicant explained that print materials would also be available on request. The Applicant is exploring a number of 'digital first' channels including; a video relay service which would enable the hard of hearing to engage. The Applicant confirmed it had shared its draft proposed approach to D-Con with the relevant local authorities and awaited responding comments.

The Application

The Applicant set out that it would be providing the Inspectorate with a shapefile of its finalised red line boundary (RLB) in early autumn 2020, ahead of anticipated submission of the application in later autumn 2020. The Applicant queried the preferred method for submitting the application documents. The Inspectorate advised that the application should be submitted via a file transfer website. It was agreed that the Inspectorate would contact the Applicant offline to provide advice on using file transfer websites and to explain the Inspectorate's preferences for referencing and structuring the application documents.

Approach to open space and common land

The Applicant provided an overview of a number of parcels of land comprising open space and common land that had been identified within the RLB. The Applicant explained it would be applying the relevant legal and policy tests and that the

application would include provision for replacement land to be provided where necessary.

The Inspectorate queried whether the replacement land had been identified by the Applicant. The Applicant confirmed this was the case, and that the replacement land parcels would be included in the information to be consulted on at D-Con.

The Inspectorate asked whether the Applicant had experienced any issues with identifying interests in the affected common land. The Applicant noted ongoing work by its land and property team seeking to identify those interests.

M25 Junction 28 interface

The Inspectorate observed that the Applicant's current RLB was in close proximity to the RLB for the M25 Junction 28 application that had recently been submitted to the Inspectorate and queried whether the RLBs overlapped. The Applicant confirmed that the two RLBs overlapped slightly in one area and that Highways England's LTC and M25 J28 project teams were in close dialogue to ensure any interfaces were dealt with appropriately.

Other matters and future engagement

The Applicant provided a brief response to the Inspectorate's comments on its draft Development Consent Order (DCO)¹.

The Applicant stated that it would share its Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Stage 1 screening with Natural England (NE) and the Inspectorate on 3 June 2020. A draft of its Statement to Inform an Appropriate Assessment would also be shared with NE.

¹ Available at: <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/projects/TR010032/TR010032-Advice-00013-1-Lower%20Thames%20Meeting%20Note%20Final.pdf>