



Meeting note

Project name	Lower Thames Crossing
File reference	TR010032
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	18 February 2021
Meeting with	Highways England
Venue	Microsoft Teams
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.

Programme timeline

Highways England (the Applicant) reconfirmed that it intended to submit its Development Consent Order (DCO) application in late 2021. Notwithstanding this the Applicant accepted that the submission date would be linked to the consultation timeline; any delay to the carrying out of consultation would be likely to result in a proportional delay to the submission date.

Stakeholder engagement

The Applicant advised that the proposed resubmission timeline had been shared with Local Authorities (LA) alongside a proposed consultation start date in April 2021. The Applicant presented key documents that it had shared/ would share with LAs prior to consultation being carried out.

The Applicant presented its engagement activities with LAs and environmental bodies since November 2020. It also presented its planned engagement activities with Thurrock, Havering, Gravesham, Kent and Essex LAs. The Applicant stated that it was developing Planning Performance Agreements with some LAs.

The Applicant updated the Inspectorate with regard to the preparation of Statements of Common Ground (SoCG).

The Applicant confirmed that it had shared its draft approach to consultation with the key LAs on 12 February 2021. The Applicant had found the feedback received useful and

was looking at the possibility of adjusting aspects of the consultation and it's the consultation timeline accordingly.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

The Applicant confirmed that it had sought advice from Natural England (NE) in relation to the HRA following the withdrawal of the first iteration of its DCO application. The Applicant had also considered the Inspectorate's section 51 advice relating to the use of *de minimis* arguments and the adequacy of the in-combination assessment to inform the development of the updated HRA. The Applicant confirmed that it was updating its Stage 1 Screening Report and Stage 2 HRA Statement to further explain the rationale behind conclusions.

The Applicant advised that it had engaged in further consultation with NE regarding impact-effect pathways. The Applicant highlighted several documents forming part of the DCO application which would provide clarity on the nature of the consultation and agreement with NE on the HRA conclusions.

The Applicant was confident of agreement with NE in relation to most screening conclusions, however some matters would likely continue to be under discussion. The Applicant had looked at the possibility of additional mitigations in relation to the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA following advice from NE, however agreement on the conclusion of no adverse effects on integrity relating to the Epping Forest SAC and North Downs Woodlands SAC had not yet been reached.

The Applicant confirmed it has expanded the matrices to provide extra clarity, and had corrected formatting errors that had been identified. The Applicant has consulted further with NE on the assessment of in-combination effects, and was updating its assessment to provide additional clarity in response to advice received from the Inspectorate.

The Applicant reported that in preparing its assessment of recreational pressure on European sites it had assessed whether public rights of way (PRoW) would change during construction, and stated that NE had agreed that there would be no change affecting recreational access.

The Applicant confirmed that it remained compliant with DMRB standards, including in relation to assessment of air quality effects on ecological receptors.

Revisions to the Order Limits (OLs)

The Applicant provided an overview of the changes being made to the OLs. These had been driven by engagement with stakeholders, including affected utilities, and to enhance mitigation in environmentally sensitive areas. Some changes were stated to be cross-informed by the work to the HRA. The Applicant was due to present the revised OLs to LAs and statutory environmental bodies in March 2021. The Applicant stated that all affected landowners would be consulted in accordance with section 42 of the PA2008. The changes to the OLs would be presented to the wider public within the forthcoming consultation materials.

The Applicant confirmed that there were currently sixteen changes to OLs proposed, representing less than a 1km² increase in the land required to deliver the scheme.