

<b>Committee:</b> Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee	<b>Date:</b> 9 September 2020
<b>Subject:</b> Lower Thames Crossing Design Refinement Consultation	<b>Wards Affected:</b> All
<b>Report of:</b> Phil Drane, Director of Planning and Economy	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report Authors:</b> Name: Phil Drane, Director of Planning and Economy Telephone: 01277 312610 E-mail: philip.drane@brentwood.gov.uk	<b>For Decision</b>

### Summary

Highways England are again inviting views on the Lower Thames Crossing, a proposed new motorway connecting Essex and Kent through a tunnel beneath the River Thames to provide additional road capacity. Several design refinements to the scheme have been set out in this latest consultation. A draft response to the consultation has been submitted to meet the consultation deadline, as set out in Appendix A. This focuses on implications of development for M25 Junction 29 and the surrounding area.

### Recommendation

**Members are asked to:**

**R1. Approve the response to the Lower Thames Crossing design refinement consultation as set out in Appendix A.**

### Main Report

#### **Introduction and Background**

1. The Lower Thames Crossing is a proposed new motorway connecting Kent, Thurrock and Essex through a tunnel beneath the River Thames. On the south side of the Thames, the new road will link the tunnel to the A2 and M2 in Kent. On the north side, it will link to the A13 and junction 29 of the M25 in the London Borough of Havering, and areas for associated works in the south-west of Brentwood Borough. According to Highways England it will provide much needed new road capacity across the river east of London with quicker and more reliable journeys locally, regionally and nationally.

2. This is the most ambitious project of its kind in the country. It is the largest single road investment project in the UK since the M25 was completed more than 30 years ago. The crossing under the Thames will be the longest road tunnel in the country. At 16 metres in diameter, it will be one of the largest bored tunnels in the world.
3. There have been several consultations held regarding the Lower Thames Crossing as the project has progressed, which the Council has responded to. Most recently the Council responded to the Supplementary Consultation launched in January 2020 (Item 432, Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee, 18 March 2020). Alongside the consultation response Members were presented with the Council's sustainable transport vision for bringing forward growth in the south of the borough (South Brentwood Growth Corridor). This vision was prepared alongside the Brentwood Local Development Plan and the development proposed to meet housing needs and achieve economic growth. It includes proposals for sustainable transport connectivity with sites such as Brentwood Enterprise Park, which physically relates to the M25 Junction 29, A127, B186 (Warley Street), and the Lower Thames Crossing proposals in that area.
4. Several design refinements are now being proposed following the Lower Thames Crossing Supplementary Consultation earlier this year. Through this latest Design Refinement Consultation, Highways England are providing a project update, outlining the latest design refinements and revised development boundaries, and explaining the environmental assessments.
5. Following this consultation, a Development Consent Order (DCO) application is to be submitted by Highways England to the Council as local planning authority. This is expected in October 2020. The DCO examination is due to take place after that and during 2021. The decision and Final Business Case are expected by early 2022 followed by construction start. The targeted road opening is 2027-28.

### **Issue, Options and Analysis of Options**

6. This latest consultation sets out several refinements to the design of the proposed road and areas through which it passes. Most of these are outside Brentwood Borough or areas that are near the borough boundary. An overview of these refinements are:
  - a) Minor changes to highways design;
  - b) Updated paths for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders;
  - c) Reduction in the overall size of development boundaries (reduction of the development boundary by 12.5% and the number of properties

affected reduced by 45% from 270 properties down to 150, 40 of which require demolition);

- d) Environmental impacts update (reduced impact on some ancient woodlands, improved habitat and ecological connectivity at green bridges);
- e) Addition of 17 noise barriers;
- f) Fewer utilities diversions (refined proposals including small permanent substations installed across the route); and
- g) More detailed landscaping proposals.

7. Key changes that are physically relevant to the borough mainly relate to refinements outside of the proposed road changes, such as:

- a) Routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders: A new route with signalised crossing on M25 junction 29 is proposed. The bridleway on the east side of the M25 within Brentwood Borough is proposed to be realigned and amended to accommodate shared use with maintenance vehicles, as well as realigned alongside the proposed improved slip road for vehicles travelling westbound from the A127 to southbound onto the M25. In addition, a new footbridge is proposed over the A127 linking existing bridleways/footpaths;
- b) Electricity pylons: Proposals to reposition overhead electricity distribution cables to underground near the B186 (Warley Street); and
- c) Additional land: Proposals for additional land needed for multi-utility works off the B186 and near M25 junction 29.

8. Key changes nearby in the London Borough of Havering include (north to south):

- a) Additional land for gas pipelines: Gas diversion works near Folkes Lane;
- b) Additional land for electricity pylons: Maintenance of overhead electricity transmission cables south-west of M25 junction 29. Underground electricity cable diversion works near Franks Farm; and
- c) Additional land for sewerage pipes: Diversion works from Ockendon Road to St. Mary's Lane via the B186.

### **Reasons for Recommendation**

- 9. The Council has engaged with Highways England on the Lower Thames Crossing project to date. It is proposed that issues raised in previous consultation responses are maintained where relevant and/or unresolved.
- 10. A point is made to highlight the fact that Lower Thames Crossing proposals do not adequately consider cumulative growth in South Essex in terms of the

opportunity to plan for required investment at M25 junction 29 and the wider highway network. In addition, proposals at Brentwood Enterprise Park are on the one-hand not considered because of the stage that the Local Development Plan is at, but on the other-hand is used to enable construction access through the site. This seems an inconsistent and unfair way to approach joint working given both Highways England and the Council are progressing projects to deliver development for the benefit of economic growth. A more holistic view of the projects would deliver added benefits and efficiencies.

11. The design refinements within Brentwood Borough mainly relate to proposals for new or improved routes for non-motorised uses (walking, cycling and horse riding) outside the highway network. Whilst this focus and investment is welcomed, proposals could be improved by combining this with other improvement schemes required by the delivery of new development in the area, such as Brentwood Enterprise Park.

### **Consultation**

12. The Lower Thames Crossing Design Refinement Consultation took place between 14 July and 12 August 2020. The response set out in Appendix A was submitted in order to comply with the consultation deadline. This is subject to Member approval in accordance with the recommendation.
13. The consultation took the form of an online exhibition in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has resulted in a 'digital-first' approach to consultation, including postal and phone facilities for those without internet access. Consultation documentation, including maps, computer generated images and video context, are available to view on the Highways England website at: <https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/ltc/design-consultation/>

### **References to Corporate Plan**

14. The proposals in this report relate to transport infrastructure investment to improve links, capacity, and sustainable transport choices. These contribute to the Council's Corporate Strategy 2020-2025, specifically key priorities to grow our economy, protect our environment and develop communities.

### **Implications**

#### **Financial Implications**

**Name/Title: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Director of Corporate Resources**  
**Tel/Email: 01277 312500/jacqueline.vanmellaerts@brentwood.gov.uk**

15. There are no direct financial implications arising from the Lower Thames Crossing consultation.

## **Legal Implications**

**Name/Title: Amanda Julian, Director of Law and Governance**

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16. As a nationally significant infrastructure project with implications for the borough, it is important that the Council respond regarding proposals set out in the Brentwood Pre-Submission Local Plan. Engagement in this way is consistent with the Duty to Cooperate and the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement.

## **Economic Implications**

**Name/Title: Phil Drane, Director of Planning and Economy**

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17. The potential economic benefits of a new crossing will likely benefit Brentwood businesses and contribute to unlocking growth opportunities in the South Brentwood Growth Corridor, as proposed in the Brentwood Local Development Plan. However, the design of proposals at M25 junction 29 remain a point of discussion with Highways England in terms of the physical impact on delivery of Brentwood Enterprise Park, a key strategic employment land proposal.
18. Good transport connections are vital for economic growth. The areas that the Lower Thames Crossing will serve are home to economic hubs, ports and neighbourhoods. The crossing will provide new connections between all of these and ensure better journeys, fewer delays and give more certainty on how long journeys will take. In addition, good connections across the region and throughout the country are essential for business growth. Highways England set out that many representatives from a range of businesses indicate their main concern is transport infrastructure. The project will also create new training and job opportunities during construction that will boost both the local and regional economies.

**Other Implications** (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

19. The Lower Thames Crossing proposals involve partnership working with Essex County Council as highways authority (in addition to Highways England). The proposals also have implications for the South Essex Joint Strategic Plan. This will need to be considered through the plan-making process for both the Council and the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA), of which the Council is a partner.
20. Following the consultation, the DCO application will be submitted by Highways England to the Council as local planning authority. A DCO is the means of

obtaining permission for development categorised as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP). This includes energy, transport, water and waste projects. This is a statutory process and has implications for the resources of the Council's Planning Development Management Team when assessing the DCO in line with set requirements and timeframes.

## **Background Papers**

- Highways England Lower Thames Crossing Design Refinement Consultation, July-August 2020: <https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/ltc/design-consultation/>
- Brentwood Borough Council response to the Lower Thames Crossing Supplementary Consultation, March 2020 (Item 432 Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee, 18 March 2020): <https://brentwood.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=392&MId=2106&Ver=4>
- Brentwood Borough Council response to the Lower Thames Crossing Statutory Consultation, December 2018 (Item 263 Ordinary Council, 5 December 2018): <https://brentwood.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=128&MId=2027&Ver=4>
- Brentwood Borough Council response to the Lower Thames Crossing Route Consultation, March 2016 (Item 416 Policy, Finance and Resources Committee, 22 March 2016): <https://brentwood.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=359&MId=1749>
- South Brentwood Growth Corridor, "A Sustainable Transport Integration Vision", February 2020: <http://www.brentwood.gov.uk/pdf/14022020155022000000.pdf>

## **Appendices to this report**

- Appendix A: Brentwood Borough Council Response to the Lower Thames Crossing Design Refinement Consultation, August 2020