

Brentwood Borough Council response to the Lower Thames Crossing Design Refinement Consultation, August 2020

Principle, Wider Benefits and Unresolved Issues [Q4. Other Comments]

The Council welcomes the opportunity to formally engage with Highways England on the Lower Thames Crossing project and notes the changes proposed as part of the Design Refinement Consultation. The Council notes the ongoing cooperation with Highways England regarding Lower Thames Crossing and the Statement of Common Ground between our two organisations. In this regard, the response to this consultation should be read in conjunction with comments made to previous Lower Thames Crossing consultations.

The Council continues to support the need for an additional river crossing. Evidence and experience show that Dartford is heavily congested, which not only delays journeys but also has a negative impact on the local and national economy.

The Brentwood Local Plan was submitted for examination-in-public in February 2020. Examination is now underway. Proposed development near to Lower Thames Crossing work at M25 junction 29 include delivery of a garden village (Dunton Hills Garden Village) and strategic employment land (Brentwood Enterprise Park), among other things. This has been the subject of comments made in response to previous Lower Thames Crossing consultations.

Previous comments made and ongoing discussion between the Council and Highways England include:

- Need to understand projected traffic conditions through collaborative working on various modelling evidence;
- Need for the Lower Thames Crossing to support economic growth aims in the borough and wider area;
- Importance of delivering improved transport capacity in South Essex through joint working with the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA);
- Opportunity for the Lower Thames Crossing route north of the Thames in Essex (Thurrock Borough specifically), to provide more connections that could unlock new development potential, and the need to work closer with ASELA on this;
- Resolution of the existing access at M25 junction 29 to Brentwood Enterprise Park (an area of new employment land being proposed through the Brentwood Local Plan, one of the two largest new employment sites in Essex), and Codham Hall Farm (existing employment uses);
- Questions about use of land proposed for new employment uses at Brentwood Enterprise Park during the construction of Lower Thames Crossing

(long-term or permanent access through the site, gas pipeline diversion, etc);
and

- Further clarity on the environmental mitigation proposed as part of proposals at M25 junction 29.

On the basis of the above outstanding issues, noted in the Statement of Common Ground, the Council continues to object to proposals at M25 junction 29 and surrounding land impacting the delivery of Brentwood Enterprise Park (such as constraining access to the site and constraints on the delivery of new employment development on site). Further engagement is requested from Highways England to help resolve these issues, providing alternative options that can ensure the delivery of necessary improvements at M25 junction 29 for the Lower Thames Crossing project, and the delivery of economic growth at Brentwood Enterprise Park. This includes working with Essex County Council as local highways authority with responsibility for nearby roads such as the A127 and B186.

The proposals at M25 junction 29 risk undermining a key aim of the Lower Thames Crossing project, which is the stimulation of economic growth. The Council requests that further engagement with Highways England take place to coordinate proposals for highways proposals.

In terms of enabling wider economic growth, Lower Thames Crossing should take account of the cumulative growth proposed throughout Brentwood Borough and the wider South Essex area should be considered in the proposals to invest in M25 junction 29, where the A127 joins the London orbital road and connects to the wider strategic highway network. This would provide for a more holistic response to road infrastructure required rather than investment on an individual project basis.

The Lower Thames Crossing proposals do not currently take account of proposed growth that has yet to be allocated, such as Brentwood Enterprise Park. However, the Lower Thames Crossing construction access required from the B186 utilises the work undertaken by those promoting growth at Brentwood Enterprise Park. This approach is inconsistent and unfairly uses proposed growth to the advantage of Highways England without any benefit to the efforts that the Council is making to deliver development.

Non-motorised uses around M25 Junction 29 and the A127 (including the B186 Warley Road and Brentwood Enterprise Park)
[Q1 i & j. Design Refinements North of the River in Thurrock and Essex]

The Council welcomes the efforts of Highways England to consider the wider benefits of the project outside of highways construction. In particular those efforts to consider non-motorised uses and prioritisation of those walking and cycling (and horse riding). This is consistent with the Council's work to set a vision for sustainable travel improvements as a result of new development. This is relevant in the south of Brentwood Borough where the Lower Thames Crossing proposals impact M25 junction 29 and surrounding land, and the Council's proposals are to bring forward economic growth at Brentwood Enterprise Park, along with other employment and housing development (see South Brentwood Growth Corridor

Sustainable Transport Vision, Brentwood Borough Council, February 2020 - <http://www.brentwood.gov.uk/pdf/14022020155022000000.pdf>).

Through efforts to deliver sustainable transport improvements, the Council has been engaging with groups such as Trailnet and Cycle Brentwood. A key focus of our discussion has been on the role of Lower Thames Crossing. The Council agrees with the view of our local organisations, that the Lower Thames Crossing project should help to deliver wider benefits to non-motorised users and not just meet statutory obligations to compensate for the direct loss of routes due to the development. As the consultation states from its outset, this is the most ambitious project of its kind in the country and the largest single road investment project in the UK since the completion of the M25 over 30-years ago. With this in mind, the opportunity has to be taken to ensure wider benefits are achieved beyond the statutory minimum.

With regard to the proposals made through the design refinement consultation, there is an opportunity to deliver improvements incorporated with other planned transport investment, such as that mentioned in the South Brentwood Growth Corridor Sustainable Transport Vision. Instead of a standalone footbridge over the A127 as proposed, this could be incorporated into a multi-user bridge that accommodates pedestrians, cyclists and horses. This could be achieved through joint work with proposals to bring forward Brentwood Enterprise Park, either in terms of upgrade the B186 bridge as it crosses the A127 and the junction improvements included, or as part of the need to improve the existing bridleway bridge over the A127 as it links the Enterprise Park to Codham Hall Farm. The Council questions whether the location of the proposed footbridge is appropriate given the above opportunities for multi-use routes and the lack of engagement regarding how it may impact delivery of Brentwood Enterprise Park.

Joint work needs to take place with key partners, including the development industry and local groups. Engagement with local cycling groups would better inform proposals to link the wider cycle network and encourage more people to make sustainable travel choices. This could include relatively simple intervention such as new signage to indicate recommended cycle routes away from busier main roads.
