

THAMES CROSSING
ACTION GROUP

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Date: 12th May 2020

Ref: 20/00430/FUL

Site: Skanska Construction UK Ltd Pilgrims Lane North Stifford Grays Essex RM16 5UZ

Proposal: Retrospective application for the temporary change of use of the existing coach /car park to a contractors compound for works associated with the proposed Lower Thames Crossing and associated highway and infrastructure works on the Essex side of the crossing.

We are writing to express our opposition and serious concerns to Planning Application 20/00430/FUL.

We also reference the fact that this is the second retrospective planning application for this site by the applicant/agent. The first retrospective planning application being Ref: 19/01858/FUL.

This application was for security gates and fencing for the site. We point to the fact the applicant knew he would leave the site exposed by removing the existing gates/blockade and should have sought and gained planning permission to erect the new security gates/fence before removing the existing gates/blockade.

In addition the application also states that the applicant was unaware they needed planning permission for the gates. We find this concerning and surprising considering we are talking about gates of roughly 8.5ft high and over 21ft wide.

We feel that any company/contractor being used for such a huge and impactful project as the LTC should have adequate knowledge and ethics as to follow correct planning permission regulations, and not be submitting retrospective planning applications, and claiming lack of awareness. We feel this shows complete disregard for the planning procedure, and/or a complete lack of knowledge and therefore we have absolutely no confidence or trust in applicant/agent.

Consideration and questions need to be asked as to who is actually responsible for this site. The Planning Application states that the applicant is Mr Danny Andrews of VIP Investments Ltd, yet the site is being referred to Skanska Construction UK Ltd, and in other documents there is mention of Balfour Beatty providing details of the site operations. Of course these are all in addition to the fact that the proposed LTC is a Highways England site. Surely some clarity and transparency as to who is ultimately responsible for this site is needed? We think so, especially when lame excuses are being used as to why retrospective planning applications are being submitted when such large construction industry players are involved.

We are also aware that historically this site has had a variety of planning applications submitted, and would draw attention to the fact that there have been many concerns about the impact to local roads with any use of this site, because it is already a very busy and often congested area, due to Lakeside, the M25, A13 and Dartford Crossing.

In 2008 an application for the same site for a once a week market was refused based on concerns that traffic would cause issues in the local area. That was for a market that would be held just once a week, not a site that could be operational 24/7 for 8 years.

In 2011 an application for the site to be used as a caravan/leisure vehicle storage park was granted but only with the proviso that the entrance gates be pushed back off the road far enough to allow traffic accessing the site to pull off the highway, in the interest of highway safety.

Judging by planning application 19/01858/FUL the current applicant/agent has not taken any of this into account when proceeding without planning permission to install the new security gates/fence so close to the highway. We feel this should be taken into account also.

With regard to this site, we know for a fact, as we have written evidence from Lower Thames Crossing that the site has been operational as an LTC compound since December 2019, with offices, welfare facilities, equipment and material stores. We therefore seriously question the fact that the applicant/agent has stated that work/change of use for the site started on the 1st of April 2020.

With regard to vehicle parking the applicant/agent state that 300 cars, 40 light goods vehicles/public carrier vehicles, and no other type of vehicles are being proposed for the site. We feel that while this may technically on paper be less spaces than the old coach park consisted of, it should be taken into account that in fact the site has been out of use for some years now, so in reality it would not equate to a drop in potential vehicles to the local roads, but actually an increase of over 300 vehicles compared to the reality of vehicles that have been using the site for some years now, as the site has been empty.

We have concerns on the impact this will have to the local roads, the congestion it could cause, and of course the increase in pollution (air, noise, and vibration).

We would also comment that in the Transport Technical Note provided by the agent within the application documents there is mention of Hi-Abs, Grab lorries and Low Loaders none of which we consider to have been mentioned in the details of site vehicles in the main application form.

In the same document in response to being questioned about where site vehicles will be going and which routes they would be utilizing, the applicant/agent has completely avoided answering the question directly with adequate info.

With regard to low loaders, it states "It has been advised that the Low-Loaders will only access the site occasionally". Again this is hardly clear and informative information, as occasionally could mean once a day or it could mean once a year depending on individuals perspective of what occasionally actually constitutes to them.

We find point 1.2.6 in the same document with regard to how long it is proposed for the site to be occupied extremely concerning. The applicant/agent states that "It has been estimated by Balfour Beatty that the site will be used for approximately eight years". We would remind Balfour Beatty and the applicant/agent that a Development Consent Order has not even yet been applied for in regard to the proposed LTC, let alone been granted, and that the project should not be considered a done deal and that no construction can legally begin until such time as a DCO is granted, if indeed it is.

We also take particular offense to the applicant/agent stating in response to section 20 in the planning application form that the site would be used for "Parking and storage of vehicles, plant, equipment and materials associated with construction of the Lower Thames Crossing." We again point out that construction cannot legally begin until such time as a DCO is granted and that the DCO application for the proposed LTC has not even been submitted yet, let alone been granted. At this stage the only LTC related 'works' that can be carried out are investigative survey works, and we consider any statements about construction of LTC to be misleading and inappropriately pre-emptive.

It will come as no surprise that we also have serious issue with 1.2.12 in this document whereby it is stated "Balfour Beatty have confirmed that gravel, sand and Type 1 materials will be stored on site, which will be delivered by 20 tonne eight wheel tippers. Drainage material will also be stored on site and will be delivered by 20 tonne flatbeds.

The gravel, sand and type 1 material will be taken to site by grab wagon and the drainage materials will be taken to site by hi-ab or by transit tippers”.

Yet again there is no mention of 20 tonne eight wheel tippers or flatbeds within the planning application.

Again this is misleading and inappropriately pre-emptive considering that the DCO application has not even been submitted for the proposed LTC, let alone been granted.

We also find the concluding statement in that document to be misleading and arrogant to say the least. It is not up to the applicant/agent to state whether the local authority should have any need for further clarification or information, or that there should be no sound transport based objections to the proposals. We find these statements highly objectionable, and we most certainly do consider there to be very good and serious grounds for objections to the proposals based on transport impacts to our roads and community.

Whilst we do not of course agree that the applicant/agent/contractors should be considering the LTC DCO being granted as a done deal, we do feel that since this latest info suggesting that they are proposing the site be used for the duration of the LTC construction, if it is granted a DCO, that we the public should be provided with more info and be given adequate time to respond to this application, since this relevant info was only provided on May 11th for an application with a deadline of May 14th.

In light of the fact this site has not been in use for some time we would also like for there to be some kind of biodiversity survey carried out, since there are trees and hedges on the site and without regular use could now be home to flora and fauna that should be taken into consideration. Of course in light of this being a retrospective application it could also be likely that wildlife could already have been disturbed or displaced due to the use of the site since Dec 2019.

We question on what level of knowledge and experience the applicant/agent has to assess affects to biodiversity on the site? It should not just be taken on their word without evidence that someone with experience and knowledge in this field has adequately assessed the site.

Section 17 of the planning application also states that there is no change to non-residential floor space on the site. We note that there is no mention of any additional buildings/structures in the planning application, yet we have photographic evidence that shows at least 2 new structures as can be seen in the following photos.



The building/structure in the photo above is an addition to the site.

As is the security unit just inside the new gates on the site.



In section 18 the applicant states that there are 20 existing employees, and that it is proposed to rise to 300. On which planning application did it state that there would be 20 employees proposed to get to the stage whereby they are now stating 20 existing employees? There was no mention of any staff in the previous retrospective planning application 19/01858/FUL. In fact that application stated there would be no need requirement to employ any staff.

We would also point out that Highways England announced late last year they would be rejecting any planning application for more than 250 houses in Thurrock due to the pressure such development would bring to the existing road network. If this is deemed a reasonable reason for them to reject any planning applications then surely it must be deemed valid to reject this application based on the pressure this site would bring to the existing road network!

Section 19 the applicant/agent states that the hours of opening are not relevant to the proposal. We feel that also to be completely misleading if this compound were to be used for the duration of construction, if the LTC is granted a DCO, as construction hours for the LTC are proposed to be very long hours, with construction sites open from 6am to 11pm and some overnight and weekend works too, on top of 24-7 tunnelling. If this site were to be used as a construction compound this could mean very long hours that we feel are most definitely relevant to the proposal.

In relation to Section 23 we would appreciate further detail of exactly what the Pre-application advice was. Especially taking into account that the application is a retrospective application, so surely any pre-application advice should have been to halt work on the site until planning permission had been considered and decided upon.

In light of all the above and also considering that we know from experience that HE/LTC contractors cannot be deemed responsible in their behaviours or trusted in our communities. We have experienced them immobilising sites earlier than HE expected and without clearance, parking on our pavements/cycle paths, dangerously positioned super bright security lighting rigs glaring in drivers eyes. Plus of course the repeated non-compliance of the 2m distancing rule while we are in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Putting not only workers lives at risk but also everyone else's and the NHS at risk.

(<https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/workers-are-still-unable-to-comply-with-2m-distancing/> and <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/all-ltc-work-should-be-halted-now/>) We definitely have more than enough reasons for not wanting and trusting yet more of their workers coming into our communities. Clearly Highways England are not capable of selecting and dealing with contractors who can be trusted or know what they are doing, which is why serious consideration needs to be taken in regard to any LTC related application.

Whilst of course we strongly oppose the LTC completely, realistically we understand that at this stage there are investigative works being carried out and there is an apparent need for a compound in Thurrock. However, we do feel this shouldn't mean that the applicant should be allowed to just do as they wish on this site and expect to be given permission regardless of their negligence of knowing planning procedures and not appearing to have any concern over the accuracy of the info provided in the application and the impacts the site will have on our local roads and community.

We would also question that members of the public would normally have the right to attend and submit questions at Planning, and Overview and Scrutiny Meetings which of course is not possible at this time. We feel in the interest of democracy that we should not be deprived of this right, especially in light of the potential relevance and impact that this planning application could have on our community.

We, Thames Crossing Action Group, strongly oppose this application, especially the misleading and inappropriate pre-emptive nature to both retrospective applications. We feel that this application should not even be considered until and unless adequate info and time is given for residents in Thurrock to respond, especially if the applicant/agent are now proposing this site could be used as a main construction compound, which has in no way been mentioned during any of the public consultations for the LTC. To be provided with such drastically different and impactful info so late in the process of this application (ie May 11th with a deadline of May 14th) is in no way to be considered adequate or fair. We would urge and appreciate Thurrock Council's consideration of ensuring that fair and adequate consultation is allowed to be carried out before this application is considered due to the nature and scale of impact to Thurrock.

Kind regards

Laura Blake

Chair – Thames Crossing Action Group

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