

THAMES CROSSING ACTION GROUP

www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com

Thurrock Council Intervention Representation

Introduction

Thames Crossing Action Group (TCAG) represent thousands of people who are opposed to the hugely destructive and harmful, not fit for purpose £10bn+++ proposed Lower Thames Crossing (LTC). More info on us and our concerns and issues with the proposed LTC can be found on our website www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com. Whilst our group represent anyone from any area who is opposed to the proposed LTC, we began life as a Thurrock community group and many of our supporters are Thurrock residents. We also have a seat on Thurrock Council's LTC Task Force as a co-opted member.

For background, the proposed LTC is a National Highways (NH) road project for the Government. It is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP). NH attempted to submit the Development Consent Order (DCO) for the LTC in Oct 2020. This first attempt was subsequently withdrawn, as the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) were due to refuse it because of inadequacies in the application. Two years and two more consultations later in Nov 2022, the second attempt to submit the LTC DCO application was successful in being accepted for Examination. We are now in the early pre-examination stage of the DCO process, with the Examination stage anticipated to being in May/June for a 6 month period. Thurrock Council are a host Local Authority for this project, and the Borough would be hugely impacted by this project, if it goes ahead.

This representation was prepared and submitted by Laura Blake, Chair of TCAG on behalf of the group. TCAG can be contacted via email – admin@thamescrossingactiongroup.com.

Thurrock Council Intervention Representation

We begin by acknowledging the seriousness of the Thurrock Council Intervention, and the fact that clearly this matter is about a lot more than the proposed Lower Thames Crossing. However, since our group represent those opposed to the proposed LTC our focus in this representation is based purely on the aspect of Thurrock Council's position in regard to the proposed LTC.

As mentioned in our introduction, as a group we have a seat on Thurrock Council's LTC Task Force, and have been a co-opted member since the Task Force was set up in 2017. These are monthly meetings with representatives from all parties within council, officers, experts, and local resident and business representatives, with NH often also in attendance.

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We therefore have a good level of understanding of the work that the council has carried out to date in regard to participating in the consultation process, and now that we have reached the DCO stage.

The proposed LTC is a huge and complex project. Lots of evidence has been scrutinized and analysed by all host Local Authorities, including Thurrock, as well as groups like ours and other NGOs etc.

Information that has been shared in regard to the LTC, as a result of the work we have all been doing is used in official representations to Government and others.

Both Thurrock MPs, Jackie Doyle Price (Thurrock) and Stephen Metcalfe MP (South Basildon and East Thurrock) have voiced serious concerns about the proposed LTC and called on government to scrap it. Whilst I appreciate this representation is about Thurrock, for clarity I would like to mention that other MPs and Local Authorities have also voiced concerns.

Thurrock Council have an excellent LTC team that have carried out great work. However, recently it has been announced that the work has been stopped due to funding issues.

We understand that this is partly due to National Highways reducing the funding they have previously provided. Of course, it additionally doesn't help that the council are in the financial position they are. We understand and agree that the full picture of the council's financial position needs to be thoroughly investigated and necessary action taken, particularly against those who put the council in this position.

However, our understanding is that Essex County Council are in support of the proposed LTC. We are therefore very aware of the fact that Government have appointed Essex County Council as Commissioner and Best Value Inspector as part of the Intervention. We have concerns about whether the newly appointed Essex County Council positions could influence or interfere with the work that Thurrock Council have and should be carrying out to make official representation during the LTC DCO process.

We understand that Thurrock Council are in negotiations with National Highways to try and resolve the funding issue. This is of course appropriate because unless NH were inflicting the proposed LTC on Thurrock, the council would not need to be sourcing funding to make representation.

However, it is not clear if or how much National Highways would fund the council's representation, so it is essential that the council are able to find a way to continue the funding in one way or another.

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Considering the consultation process has been going on for so many years now, we also consider it to be value for money to ensure that the work and cost already covered by the council not now be wasted by stopping funding to make representation.

Why should the people suffer and be in a position where our council may not be able to fund representing us officially as a Local Authority because of other issues that have been going on, that are not the fault of residents nor likely the fault of any of the team at the council working on the LTC representation?

The proposed LTC would be hugely destructive and harmful. It would impact nearly 11% of Thurrock's Green Belt land, and in total will swallow up nearly 10% of all the land in Thurrock. It would negatively impact our existing local road network. It would negatively impact businesses in the borough. It would destroy and impact homes, lives, health and wellbeing, our natural environment, communities and so much more.

It is therefore essential that Thurrock Council are able to continue to make representation throughout the DCO application, and to do all they can in order to try and stop and limit the threats from the LTC to Thurrock and its people.

We would ask Government to kindly consider ensuring that the Intervention in no way interferes with Thurrock Council's ability to carry out the necessary work and make representation during the Lower Thames Crossing Development Consent Order process.

We thank you for this opportunity to make representation in regard to the Thurrock Council Representation. We would be happy to provide further info if requested.