

(For Democratic Services use)

Decision Number: 34 (2015/16)

## Portfolio Holder Executive Decision Statement

### The Local Authority (Executive Arrangements)(Meetings and Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

<p><b>Subject:</b> Highways England released a consultation for a new Lower Thames Crossing. The consultation specifies a number of route options at two locations, including a preferred option at Gravesend. Works to improve existing road infrastructure are also included in the proposals.</p>
<p><b>Details of Decision taken</b> To agree the wording and send the proposed response to Highways England's consultation for a new Lower Thames Crossing.</p>
<p><b>Reason for Decision</b> To ensure that the Council's views on the proposals are taken into account.</p>
<p><b>All Documents considered:</b> SDC "Proposed Lower Thames Crossing" response and consultation material [available from <a href="https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/cip/lower-thames-crossing-consultation">https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/cip/lower-thames-crossing-consultation</a>]</p>
<p><b>Details of any alternative options considered and rejected by the Member when making the Decision:</b> The Council could not have responded to the consultation. This was rejected as future decisions could impact the District.</p>
<p><b>Financial implications</b> None</p>
<p><b>Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement</b> None</p>
<p><b>Equality Impacts</b> (Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty)  None</p>

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Local Member (s), other Portfolio Holders and/or Directors/Heads of Service Consulted



Cllr R. Piper (Portfolio Holder for Planning)

Cllr R. Hogarth (Portfolio Holder for Economic and Community Development)

Details of any conflicts of interest

a) declared by any executive member who is consulted by the Decision Taker

b) and any details of dispensations granted by the Chief Executive in respect of any declared conflict

Decision taken by:	Portfolio Holder for Planning
Signed by Portfolio Holder	
Date of Decision	29/03/2016.
Record made by:	
Date of record:	29/3/16

## SDC Response - Lower Thames Crossing

Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on proposals for a new crossing over the Lower Thames Estuary. This is a nationally significant infrastructure project that is being proposed; one which will significantly impact the South East region and have wider, national implications for the economy and tourism.

The proposals for a new crossing are welcomed by SDC. There is currently significant strain on the Kent strategic road network, especially with routes that go through the Sevenoaks District. The Sevenoaks District has a number of major routes which are frequently used by commuters, freight and LGV traffic especially during peak times. Routes within the District include the M25, the M20 and M26, the A20, A21, the A225 and A228. The M20 is a significant route for freight and tourism as it provides access to the coastal ports of Folkestone and Dover, and connection to mainland Europe. The M20 also provides links to the M25, both directly to Junction 3 and an indirect link with Junction 5 via the M26. Junction 3 of the M25 (Swanley) has significant pressure from traffic from either direction i.e. those wishing to continue to the existing Dartford Crossing and traffic wishing to join the M20 from the existing crossing.

The existing Thames crossing at Dartford is over capacity, almost on a daily basis. The crossing was originally designed for 135,000 crossings a day, which is estimated to be over 49 million crossings a year. Figures from Highways England show that 50 million crossings are made each year; that is an estimated increase of 860,000 crossings that were not designed for (approximately 2%). As a result of increased usage, the number of accidents that have occurred on the crossing is significant, with an estimated 300 closures a year which are a result of an accident. According to Highways England, it can take between three to five hours to clear built up traffic either side of the Crossing, following an accident. There is also anecdotal evidence to suggest that the removal of the tolls and the introduction of Dart Charge is not improving the flow of traffic at the Crossing. The data and evidence of usage for the current crossing suggests that the current issues with overcapacity, incidents and closures are going to increase significantly over the next 20-30 years, if a solution is not found.

The proposals have considered a number of options at two distinct locations; Location A which proposes a new crossing which is parallel to the existing Crossing at Dartford, and Location C, a new crossing located to the east of Gravesend near Higham and Shorne.

SDC considers Highways England's preferred option at Location C to be most appropriate in the long-term. The proposed location would allow road users greater choice to cross the Thames, improve travel journey times and improve the flow of traffic across the north section of the Kent strategic road network. Greater economic benefits could be realised with a new crossing at a new location. The new crossing would allow greater opportunities for more employment and housing land to be realised, which would create greater opportunities for businesses to locate near high quality infrastructure, as well as greater connections with mainland Europe. The improved connection between the M2 and M20 at Bluebell Hill (A229) will also contribute to improving traffic flow will relieve pressure on the M20 up to the Swanley interchange. In addition, pressure would be relieved from the

existing Dartford Crossing, as the new location would redistribute traffic flows. While traffic flow forecasts up to 2041 shows that the current Dartford crossing will still be at capacity, it is expected that the number of accidents could be reduced, and traffic flow will improve. However, if the crossing were to close at Dartford due to an incident, consideration should be given to how diverted traffic will impact on the new crossing with additional traffic flow.

SDC notes that the proposal at Location C will impact a number of environmental and heritage assets, as well as impacting the diversity within the Thames Estuary. This includes a number of assets which are designated at international, European, national and local levels. This includes ancient woodland, specific ecological habitats, scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings, conservation areas and Registered Parks and Gardens. SDC appreciates that the purpose of the consultation (at this stage) is to determine the preferred route at Location C, and that further ecological and environmental surveys will need to be carried out as part of the work to establish a clear preferred route. SDC considers that it is important to recognise the potential environment and ecological impacts early on in the process but stresses that all future surveys are conducted in close partnership with the relevant authorities and public bodies to determine the true nature of impact on important sites. This should also form the grounds for sensitive design and provide any mitigation strategies once an application for works is made.

Furthermore, careful considerations should be given to the impact that these proposals will have on local communities, both close to the proposed route as well as the wider area. Increased traffic movements around the development will create increased disturbance, noise and air quality issues to surrounding communities, not just after completion but during the construction phase as well. While the new Crossing will create better linkages between Kent and the rest of the country, SDC urges Highways England to consider the significant impact that will effect nearby communities, and carefully consider the measures required to mitigate the impacts on local communities, both during construction and completion.

Location A involves a parallel crossing to the existing crossing at Dartford. SDC considers this proposal as much less appropriate as it would compound the existing problems with the current crossing including delays, increasing number of accidents, slower journey times, and a failure to address air quality concerns on the approaches to the Crossing. If this location was taken forward, the M25 corridor between Junctions 2 and 29 (at least) would have to be widened to accommodate the extra traffic. There are limited opportunities to improve the existing road network to improve capacity and additional connections to access a new crossing at this location.

In conclusion, SDC is supportive of a new Lower Thames Crossing at Location C, as it creates a new connection between Kent and Essex, brings further economic benefit to the South East region and improves traffic flow across the major routes in Kent. SDC is also mindful that improvements will have to be made to a number of junctions to ensure that the proposal functions properly, including improvements along the A229. While the

redistribution of traffic across the Kent road network is welcomed, SDC is mindful that proper consideration should be given to environmental and ecological constraints.

