

Shorne Parish Council

————— Borough of Gravesham —————



PARISH COUNCIL MATTERS

May 2017

Lower Thames Crossing Decision

On 12th April 2017, the Secretary of State for Transport Chris Grayling MP announced the Government's decision to locate the Lower Thames Crossing east of Gravesend.

The Parish Council is very disappointed, although not entirely surprised by this decision, since variations of Option C were the only choices option offered during the consultation. Perhaps the only surprise is Highways England's change in recommendation from the Eastern Southern Link (ESL) to the Western Southern Link (WSL), which has been accepted by the Government.

Highways England say that they have listened to concerns raised about impacts on communities and protected environmental areas, and have conducted further assessment of both routes south of the river. Their assessment showed there is very limited opportunity to reduce the community and environmental impacts of the eastern link, particularly on the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and ancient woodlands.

Additional assessment was also conducted for the junction between the western link and the A2 to understand the extent to which the traffic performance could be improved. Their assessment identified that by re-working the design for the junction, it could offer a 70mph route without significantly increasing environmental or community impacts.

As a result of their further assessments, they amended their recommendation to the Western Southern Link, connecting to the A2 between Thong Lane and Marling Cross.

Whilst this may come as some relief to parishioners who would have been severely and directly impacted by the eastern link, it is no comfort to our parishioners in Thong and Shorne West. It also makes little difference to our neighbours in Chalk.

No-one should underestimate the potential impact on traffic through all parts of the parish, especially if the proposed junction with the A226 Gravesend Road goes ahead. This would entail the re-routing of the A226 southwards across farmland between Thong Lane and the Shorne boundary, and would result in a significant increase in traffic on Gravesend Road, as well as the feeder roads to it.

The Parish Council maintains that a crossing east of Gravesend will do little to alleviate the problems at Dartford, and that another crossing will inevitably still be needed at Dartford.

Lower Thames Crossing Actions

The Parish Council has met to discuss the implications of the Government decision and the actions that need to be taken, and work is now underway to identify specific areas of concern.

Legal opinion received from our barrister last year advised that there were insufficient legal grounds for a successful challenge against the consultation process, and that a challenge on the decision itself would be doubtful. The Parish Council has therefore decided not to embark on a costly legal challenge, which would result in continuing uncertainty. However, this does not preclude us from providing evidence and support for any challenge which may be mounted by a leading environmental organisation on wider air quality and environmental considerations.

The Parish Council has arranged to meet Highways England to obtain a better understanding of their plans, and we will seek regular engagement to influence the development of the design, and to obtain maximum mitigation against the adverse impacts. This will include extending the tunnels south of the A226 Gravesend Road, the removal of any junction on the A226, and the maximum use of cut & cover to lessen the impact of the link road, as well as other environmental considerations.

Lower Thames Crossing Public Meeting – 11th May 2017

This year's Annual Parish Assembly will be extended to include a presentation and discussion on the Lower Thames Crossing proposals. This meeting is open to parishioners from all parts of the parish, and residents from Thong and Shorne West are particularly invited to attend.

The meeting will take place from 7:00pm to 8:00pm on Thursday 11th May at the Village Hall, before moving on to other parish assembly topics.

Shorne Residents' Consultation Responses Discounted

In February last year, Shorne Parish Council held a public meeting at the village hall which was attended by hundreds of parishioners. During the meeting, parishioners were presented with a range of possible responses they might want to consider, using their own words, if they did not agree with Option C. The information was subsequently posted on the parish council website for those who were unable to attend the meeting.

The Parish Council is extremely concerned to note that Ipsos MORI has identified responses from 946 individuals who included all or some of the possible responses presented, together with their own comments, and has determined that this constituted "an organised campaign". As a result, it appears that the responses from 946 individuals opposed to Option C have been discounted from the members of the public opinions, and instead counted as one single group under the category of stakeholder organisations.

The Parish Council considers that the views of these 946 residents primarily from Shorne have been unfairly misrepresented and that this has distorted the results of the consultation. The Parish Council will therefore be writing to Ipsos MORI requesting that the 946 responses are reclassified as members of the public.

It appears that the responses of 7,615 residents from Gravesham and Thurrock who opposed Option C have been treated as organised campaigns and discounted from the results from members of the public, as well as 5,625 individuals associated with The Woodlands Trust.

If you think that your consultation submission may be one of those that has been discounted, you can contact Ipsos MORI by email to ltcc@ipsos.com, or by writing to them at 3 Thomas More Square, London, E1W 1YW.

Annual Parish Assembly

Parishioners are invited to attend the forthcoming Annual Parish Assembly, which will take place at Shorne Village Hall, immediately following the Lower Thames Crossing meeting on Thursday 11th May.

This is your opportunity to hear from the Chairman of Shorne Parish Council, and representatives of other local organisations about what has happened during the previous year, and what is planned for the coming year. It is also your opportunity to ask questions and to raise issues of importance to the parish. We look forward to seeing you there.

Bob Lane

Shorne Parish Council