

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda
Item No.

Report of Corporate Director for Place
To

The Cabinet

On

18th March 2014

Report prepared by: Paul Mathieson (Group Manager) and
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Transport and Planning Policy Group

Update on the Thames Crossing announcement Place Scrutiny Committee

Executive Councillor: Councillor Cox
A Part 1 Public Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update Cabinet Members on the recent announcement from Government on the Lower Thames Crossing.

2. Recommendation:

- 2.1 That Members note the report, and that:

- 2.2 **The Director of Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection, Waste & Transport continues to review the further detailed work that the Government plans to carry out in order to make a strong case for investment directly benefiting Southend.**

3. Background

- 3.1 On 21 May 2013 the Department for Transport launched a public consultation on options for a new Lower Thames crossing. A consultation document setting out why Government believes there is a need for additional river-crossing capacity in the Lower Thames area, listed 3 options. The options were:

- **Option A:** At the site of the existing A282 Dartford-Thurrock crossing;
- **Option B:** Connecting the A2 with the A1089; and
- **Option C:** Connecting the M2 with the A13 and the M25 between junctions 29 and 30.

A variant of **Option C** was also considered that would involve widening the A229 between the M2 and the M20. The variant was considered to

understand whether the added value of widening the A229 would materially improve the business case for **Option C**.

- 3.2 **Option C** is the longest route of all the options, passing largely through undeveloped land that is designated as Green Belt. A route at this location would also pass through environmentally sensitive areas, including the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, ancient woodland and the Thames Marshes Ramsar site, where development would need to be proven to be of 'overriding public interest' before it could go ahead. Overall, **Option C** would result in the greatest impacts on environmentally sensitive areas of all the options.

Option C variant additionally involves widening the A229 between the M2 and the M20. It has been shown to have similar impacts to **Option C** but, owing to the enhanced connectivity it provides, it is expected to bring the largest economic benefits.

- 3.3 The Secretary of State for Transport announced in December 2013 that one of the location options for a new Lower Thames crossing consulted on between 21st May and 16th July 2013, known as **Option B**, has been discarded. Feedback on the consultation showed that **Option B** received limited support and would frustrate plans for development in the area. The consultation response document can be found at the following link:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/265999/consultation-response-summary.pdf

- 3.4 In response to the important points made by consultees, the Department for Transport plans to carry out more work on the remaining options. A further announcement regarding the consideration of **Options A** and **C** (including **C variant**) will be made as soon as possible.
- 3.5 In parallel with work to inform the final location decision, working closely with the DfT, the Highways Agency have started making preparations for outline design work so that the crossing can be delivered as quickly as possible once the decision is made.
- 3.6 In the meantime, the Department for Transport remains committed to introducing free flow charging at the Dartford-Thurrock crossing by October 2014. This will help alleviate congestion on the crossing in the short term.
- 4.0 Members will recall the report that went to Place Scrutiny on 8th July 2013 on the New Lower Thames Crossing and the response that was sent to Department for Transport (DfT).
- 4.1 A report was presented to Place Scrutiny on 8th July 2013 and members opted for the **Option C variant**, and it was also strongly recommended that the 'Free Flow Tolling' should be introduced as soon as possible in 2014. This was sent in the response to DfT.

- 4.2 In discussions with Dft, it is clear that they will only be considering options **A** and **C**. Members will consider it a lost opportunity that a more ambitious alternative further to the east linking to the M11 which gives better access to Southend and avoids the M25 altogether was not considered.
- 4.3 The route chosen for Option C joins both the A13 and A127 and then the M25. So whilst the route is closer to Southend, it does not offer the access benefits that would accrue from having only a short driving distance on either A13 or A127. This would open up more opportunities for visitors and businesses to Southend, including a convenient link to London Southend Airport, Town Centre and Seafront and the proposed Airport Business Parks, bringing greater economic benefits.

5 Other Options

- 5.1 This report offers no other options as it is for information only.

6. Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 That the Director for Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection, Waste & Transport continues to have dialogue with DfT on this project.

7. Corporate Implications

7.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

- 7.1.1 None this is an information report for future consideration

7.2 Financial Implications

- 7.2.1 There are no financial implications

7.3 Legal Implications

- 7.3.1 There are no legal implications

7.4 People Implications

- 7.4.1 There are no people implications

7.5 Property Implications

- 7.5.1 Nil

7.6 Consultation

- 7.6.1 This is not a consultation

7.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

7.7.1 No equalities or diversity implications

7.8 *Risk Assessment*

7.8.1 A risk assessment is not required

7.9 *Value for Money*

7.9.1 Nil due to being an information report

7.10 *Community Safety Implications*

7.10.1 No community safety implications

7.11 *Environmental Impact*

7.11.1 None at this stage

8. Background Papers

8.1 Department for Transport: Option for a New Lower Thames Crossing – Consultation response Summary – December 2013

8.2 New Lower Thames Crossing Report – Place Scrutiny – 8th July 2013