



20th December 2018

To lrc.consultation@traverse.ltd

Dear Madam/Sir,

RE: Consultation on a Lower Thames Crossing

As stated in our responses to previous consultations on a 'Lower Thames Crossing', Kent Wildlife Trust is opposed to a crossing at this location. We believe that road developments should only be considered as a last resort within a sustainable transport strategy, and the only sustainable way to reduce congestion is to reduce demand. This has the additional benefit of reducing air pollution and the greenhouse gasses that result in climate change. Air pollution is the leading environmental health risk factor in the UK, and climate change is one of the greatest threats to our environment and the 'ecosystem services' which we depend upon. A Sustainable Transport Strategy, which must be planned and fully integrated with conservation objectives and the land use planning process, should:

- prioritise environmentally sensitive maintenance and improvement of the current road network over new road schemes
- reduce the need to travel, for example through: well-designed towns, cities and neighbourhoods; and improved transport technology
- promote reductions in private vehicle use in order to reduce traffic levels, fuel consumption and vehicle emissions, including fiscal measures and car share schemes
- minimise dependency on private vehicle use by increasing and improving public transport and active travel routes, which are well connected to essential services

The current proposals are contrary to the Government's aspirations within the 25 Year Plan for the Environment, and Highways England's Biodiversity Plan (published June 2015). The loss of ancient woodland, an irreplaceable habitat, is unacceptable.

Please note that the following comments are made in regard to Kent and the crossing. They may be equally applicable north of the Thames but as there are likely to be further issues not raised here the views of Essex Wildlife Trust should be sought.



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General Comments on the Preliminary Environmental Information

Within the EIA Regulations PEI is defined as “...*information that...is reasonably required for the consultation bodies to develop an informed view of the likely significant environmental effects of the development.*” Having reviewed the information provided within the consultation documents on Terrestrial Biodiversity and Marine Biodiversity, we consider that the consultation has failed to provide a sufficient level of information to enable us to take an informed view of the likely significant environmental effects.

Paragraph 16 of the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) states that “...*a Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR), which sets out survey methodologies and results, and the potential likely significant environmental effects of the Project, has been prepared to allow consultees to take an informed view on these matters. The PEIR therefore forms an important part of this consultation.*” Except in a very few cases, the PEIR does not contain the results of the surveys, and only sets out broad potential impacts, and so has not followed the SoCC.

Paragraph 9.5.1 of the PEIR states that “*Data from surveys that are currently ongoing or have not yet been started will be included in the ES. This will include arboricultural (tree) surveys which are due to commence this winter, bird surveys (ongoing until March 2019), surveys for bats, Section 41 mammals, invertebrates, lichens and bryophytes, reptiles, Phase 1 and detailed botanical surveys, otters, water voles, dormice and badgers. Surveys will include any ‘gap filling’ for newly identified areas within the Development Boundary which have not been surveyed to date.*” The same is true of the Marine Biodiversity chapter, paragraph 10.5.1 states “*To date, only a preliminary desk-based study review of available marine baseline data and information has been conducted. A further, more detailed, review will be completed to establish a more complete baseline for the ES.*” Table 10.7 sets out the surveys that ‘may be required’.

Planning Inspectorate advice states that “*Applicants should consider carefully whether publication of the PEI at a more advanced stage in the design process of the NSIP, where more detailed information is known about the Proposed Development and its environmental effects, would generate more detailed responses and so better inform the design of the Proposed Development and their EIA. This may provide a more effective consultation exercise.*” We consider that given the vast majority of the environmental information has been deferred to application stage, giving no formal public consultation stage, this current consultation is premature. We strongly recommend a further consultation when the survey results and likely impacts can be presented.

We appreciate that there is no prescribed format for a PEIR, but given that the Terrestrial Biodiversity chapter largely comprises an overview of the desktop study and ‘filler’ material available elsewhere (for example, the conservation status of bat species), and the Marine Biodiversity chapter is even more lacking in meaningful information, we feel unable to take an informed view of the likely environmental effects. The closest the document comes to setting these out is the table of potential effects and mitigation at the end of each chapter. We note that these are ‘potential’, rather than ‘likely’, and there is no attempt to quantify the degree of impact or mitigation. We therefore strongly recommend further consultation when this information is available. Nevertheless, our comments on the potential impacts and mitigation are provided below.

Ancient woodland

Ancient Woodland is an irreplaceable habitat and therefore we strongly support any further design changes to avoid direct impacts and fragmentation and minimise indirect impacts.

As stated in our previous responses, we expect new woodland creation at a minimum of 30 hectares created for every one hectare lost. Mitigation will also be required for indirect impacts (for E.G. from light, noise and air pollution).

Newly created woodland should be as an extension to existing woodlands, and informed by the species composition already present and being lost/degraded.

New woodland creation should not be undertaken close to the planned or existing road network or where it will be isolated by the road network (regardless of proposed green bridges etc.). If this is done for reasons other than mitigation it should not also be counted as mitigation (for example, the landscape elements between the sliproads at the A2 junction).

Mitigation for Fragmentation

Mitigation for fragmentation should, in the first instance, reduce fragmentation by design, and prioritise avoiding fragmenting those assemblages that are more prone to fragmentation (I.E. woodland).

A number of features are suggested to reduce fragmentation – green bridges and culverts (tunnels). We are supportive of any measures to reduce fragmentation and maintain movement of species across and between habitats. However, the efficacy of these features is mixed, and it is important that the design of these features takes into account the best available evidence. In particular they should be of sufficient width with planting integrated with connecting habitats.

Design features and landscaping should aim to discourage species movement where there is a risk of mortality (for E.G. by being hit by traffic or falling into drainage features) and encourage it where the features to reduce fragmentation are located. In other words, these features should be integrated with mitigation and landscaping.

Where features such as green bridges and culverts/underpasses are multi-use (E.G. pedestrian rights of way, roads), the design should be sufficiently robust such that this does not compromise its function. Lighting in particular needs to be avoided or carefully designed.

Acoustic fencing, whether during construction or permanent, also has the potential to cause habitat fragmentation. Its location and design should be such that key wildlife routes are maintained, while taking into account the paragraph above about reducing road mortality and encouraging 'safe' routes.

Bird Surveys

The bird surveys appear to be more advanced than those for other taxa and more information has been provided, though it is also not complete. As local landowners we consider that the RSPB are best placed to provide specific input regarding the adequacy or otherwise of the survey work undertaken or planned for birds in this area. We therefore recommend that you seek their input on this issue.

Piling Noise

Percussive noise from piling has the potential to disturb both terrestrial and marine species. We support measures to reduce any piling necessary and use of soft-start/vibro where piling is

necessary. Table 10.8 of the Marine Biodiversity chapter states these measures will be used 'where possible'. Any constraints on the use of these methods needs to be clearly set out and justified.

Marine Biodiversity Surveys

It is of some concern that there is at present no commitment to undertaken any actual fish surveys/marine/boat-based surveys. It is important to use desk based data and evidence where relevant and appropriate and up to date, but it does not replace the need for up-to-date surveys. IN addition, there is a need to determine presence of tentacle lagoon worm near to the proposed jetty site for this proposal.

Presence of the Beluga Whale in the Thames

There is a chance the beluga whale currently residing in the Thames Estuary will still be present during construction. Noise considerations in terms of predicted noise outputs should include the range at which belugas are affected (e.g. the frequency at which temporary/permanent threshold shift occurs in belugas (if known) so that impacts can be avoided.

Yours sincerely,

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