

Consultation: Lake Lothing Third River Crossing
Report by Head of Planning

Summary: The Broads Authority has been consulted on the proposal to construct a third river crossing at Lake Lothing.

Recommendation: That, subject to the detailed comments of the Navigation Committee, the proposal is supported.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 There are currently two river crossings in Lowestoft and there has long been an aspiration for a third. There is a bascule bridge located at the eastern end of the town, adjacent to the outer harbour, which takes traffic from the A12 into either the port or the town centre, whilst the crossing at Oulton Broad links from the A146 and takes traffic through the western suburbs into the town or to the through route north to Great Yarmouth. Both routes suffer significant congestion, especially at peak times, with the Oulton Broad crossing also affected by the level crossing at the Oulton Broad North railway station.
- 1.2 In 2015 Suffolk County Council consulted on three options for a third river crossing, located at the east, west or central section of Lake Lothing. The favoured option was the central location and this is the scheme which has been developed. In March 2016, a provisional funding agreement of approximately £73m was received by the Council from the Department for Transport for the Lake Lothing Third Crossing project.
- 1.3 The planning application for the third river crossing has now been submitted by Suffolk County Council. Development of this nature constitutes a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) so the application must be submitted to and determined by the Planning Inspectorate.
- 1.4 The Planning Inspectorate is undertaking a consultation on the application and, accordingly, has consulted the Broads Authority. The application will be heard and considered at an Examination by a Planning Inspector in due course in accordance with the NSIP process.
- 1.5 Members should be aware that the Director of Operations and Head of Navigation have been part of the working group looking at the design and development of the third crossing.

2. The proposed river crossing

- 2.1. The planning application proposes a third river crossing to be located towards the eastern end of Lake Lothing, crossing it between the eastern end of the

former Sanyo site in the south at Waveney Drive and the North Quay Retail Park to the north. It would be located broadly centrally within the area of the port.

- 2.2 The bridge is proposed as a lifting structure to enable tall vessels to pass through, with a deck height of around 12m above high water. There would be two bridge abutments within the river channel to support the bridge, with further supports on land. These abutments would be located approximately one third of the way into the channel, one each north and south, so that the bridge hole would occupy the centre of the channel. There would be fendering on the inside of the bridge hole to protect the structure, and a pontoon located at south quay.
- 2.3 It should be noted that height of the bridge deck is higher than that of the existing bascule bridge so many vessels would be able to pass underneath without the need to lift. This is, of course, relevant given that one of the reasons for the scheme is to reduce congestion, including that resulting from the need to open the existing bascule bridge.
- 2.4 The opening element of the bridge would be in the form of a pivoting deck of 45m in length which would be located upright to the south of the bridge when in the closed position (ie with traffic crossing the bridge) and which in the open position would turn vertically through 180° to sit parallel the ground to allow the main bridge deck to lift out of the channel. An artist's impression of the appearance of the bridge is attached at Appendix B and the following links will provide the details of the bridge:
<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/projects/TR010023/TR010023-000216-2.9%20Engineering%20Section%20Drawings%20and%20Plans%20Mainline%20Sheet%202%20of%202.pdf>
and a virtual fly through <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/transport-planning/lake-lothing-3rd-crossing/>

3. Consultation responses

- 3.1 The Director of Operations advises that "...the design and build of the third crossing has been done to ensure that:
 - The Navigation remains open (may be some reduced operational time but that will be managed)
 - The Bridge is designed to open.
 - The correct fendering and control systems will be in place to allow the opening/closing to meet traffic and navigation demands.

I am satisfied that the needs of navigator's has been expressed and assurance have been made that these will be honoured".

- 3.2 A report has been prepared for the 6 September meeting of the Navigation Committee and their comments will be reported orally.

4. Assessment

- 4.1 In responding to the consultation on this proposal it is appropriate to consider the principle of the scheme, and whether the Authority supports it, as well as the impact of the scheme on the Broads, including on the navigation.
- 4.2 Looking first at the principle of the scheme, the issues of traffic congestion in Lowestoft are recognised. The area is important to visitors to the southern Broads, both local and those entering the Broads system through Mutford Lock, and access issues and congestion discourage visits as well as impacting adversely on the visitor experience after arrival. Furthermore, the area is of national importance to the offshore energy sector, which is increasingly based in Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth and makes a very significant contribution to the local economy. Works to improve the access to and within the town and to the port, which will support both the leisure industry and the commercial sector, are very welcome and can be fully supported.
- 4.3 The construction of a third river crossing would introduce an obstruction within Lake Lothing and this would inevitably have an impact on navigation as passage through the waterbody would be impeded. It is the case, however, that for Broads navigators this would only affect those transiting Lake Lothing to enter or exit the system from the North Sea (rather than those navigating on the Broads themselves) and they will already need to pass through the two existing structures, one at each end. It is useful to compare the proposed new crossing to each of these. The proposed new crossing has been designed to have a deck height which is higher than that of the existing bascule bridge, so it is a lesser obstruction and allows passage for both a larger size and number of vessels, whilst when compared to Mutford Lock, the opening arrangements would be more responsive. The support of the Director of Operations is noted and the proposed bridge appears to be acceptable in principle.
- 4.4 The views of the Navigation Committee will be reported orally.
- 4.5 The proposed new bridge is a substantial structure and the 45m tall upstanding deck would be visible from Oulton Broad and, potentially, Oulton Dyke and parts of the Waveney valley. In local views, from, for example, Oulton Broad, it would be seen in the context of the port and the substantial structures and vessels therein, whilst from longer range views it would be seen as part of the general conurbation. In principle there is no objection, however there are a number of detailed points around the associated infrastructure which are worth noting.
- 4.6 It is not clear from the detailed plans how pedestrians and cyclists will access the bridge, particularly as there is a height difference between the access road and bridge. It is important that the new crossing is fully accessible and functions effectively for all users, especially given the number of homes and offices in the area. There are also redevelopment opportunities in the area and the 'avenue style' access road should be located so as not to compromise these. It is also noted that the visibility splay are all quite wide, exceeding the specifications set out in the Manual for Streets. It would be

useful to refer these comments to the determining authority as part of a response.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

- 5.1 The proposal to construct a third river crossing in Lowestoft is scheme which can be welcomed in principle as it would help to address the issues of congestion and delay which impact adversely on the use and development of the town. The views of the Navigation Committee are currently awaited, but subject to their being satisfied that the proposal would not have an adverse impact on navigation, the Authority's support for the scheme can be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate.

Background papers: None
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Appendices: Appendix B

Lake Lothing Third River Crossing



Figure 1: Artists' impression of the Scheme with bridge lowered



Figure 2: Artists' impression of the Scheme with bridge raised