

Lower Thames Crossing: investing in communities

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The Lower Thames Crossing will connect the M2/A2, A13 and M25 and will be the longest road tunnel in the UK, stretching 2.6 miles. In total, it will involve the construction of over 14 miles of new road and around 50 new bridges and viaducts.



*Welcome to the UK
English for Speakers
of Other Languages
(ESOL) student in Bata
Heritage Centre near
Thurrock in Essex
(All photos: MOLA)*

Well in advance of any construction starting, The Lower Thames Crossing is delivering an ambitious programme of wider investment in local communities and the environment. We have developed projects with a strong understanding of local needs and priorities, based on established relationships with stakeholders and delivery partners. As part of this work, National Highways has worked with Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) to deliver transferable skills training sessions with Welcome to the UK.

Welcome to the UK is a charity set up to help families from overseas to positively engage in their community. New arrivals from eastern Europe, Russia and Sri Lanka attended sessions

to help them learn English and transferrable skills such as IT and social skills, building confidence and teamworking, as well as learning about the heritage of the area.

Following on from the skills sessions, which included classroom workshops and a site tour, the groups were tasked with documenting their experience by designing a flyer on local heritage for future groups, with top tips, travel information and points of interest. They also chose to set up a blog to tell others about their experience.

These sessions and activities are part of a wider community archaeology and heritage programme we are delivering for Kent and

Essex over the next two years, comprising workshops, training, community digs, guided walks, talks and heritage site visits. The purpose is to empower local people along the route of the Lower Thames Crossing to take an interest in recording, visiting and appreciating heritage and archaeological sites, as well as helping with wellbeing and enjoyment of their local area.

The Lower Thames Crossing project is also helping local people to discover their local heritage and archaeology at Shorne Woods Country Park in Kent, through a range of engagement activities and training. This is also part of the wider community archaeology programme we are delivering for Kent and Essex. The investment from National Highways Designated Funds has enabled the Kent community archaeology team, part of Kent County Council, to extend the work they started in 2006. Shorne Woods Country Park is a Kent County Council 300-acre country park near Gravesend and was historically part of the Cobham Hall Estate, comprising woodland and heathlands. The foundations of the 13th-century Randall Manor, home of Sir Henry de Cobham and his descendants, still survive below ground and this is one of the areas of focus for ongoing community archaeological digs.

Over the past 17 years, the team of volunteer archaeologists has unearthed many items of interest, including Mesolithic flints, the stone and chalk foundations of medieval buildings, medieval roof and floor tiles, and evidence for the clay workers and RAF personnel who used the site in the 20th century. These and many more finds are now displayed in Shorne Woods visitor centre.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

The Lower Thames Crossing project will also serve as a pilot for wider community engagement, using initial audience mapping to identify groups that live along the proposed route of the development but tend not to be represented in traditional archaeological activities. On a more strategic level, it provides an opportunity to explore how projects could be tailored to these under-represented groups.

A key benefit for National Highways was the ability to start conversations about the construction work in a neutral or even positive way, through participation in archaeology and heritage projects. The projects were instructive in putting archaeology at the forefront of community consultation and engagement about, and with, the Lower Thames Crossing. Working with local people proved to be a more positive way to engage communities living near the development than simply



Welcome to UK ESOL student draws home village in Ethiopia as part of her heritage

handing out leaflets. By developing a better understanding of their own environment, participants were also able to better understand the development. Exploring the relationships between communities and their home/environment supports us in building resilient societies who are connected to their landscapes, as well as helping to navigate sensitive conversations about the impact of developments on those landscapes.

With credit to Kent County Council Community Archaeology Team.

KEY OUTCOMES/MESSAGES

- using archaeology, it is possible to start conversations about construction and development work in a neutral or even positive way
- by gaining a better understanding of their own environment, people were also able to better understand the development
- archaeology and development can go hand in hand to improve wellbeing and enjoyment of local areas, even for groups who would not usually engage with archaeology