

'No rush' to decide on second Thames crossing site

The transport minister Robert Goodwill has said the government will not be rushed into making an announcement on where the new Lower Thames Crossing will go.

During a debate in Westminster Hall, Essex Conservative MP Jackie Doyle-Price said: "There are some people that think removing the barriers will alleviate the need for a new crossing but I think that's wrong and I think that's short-termism.

"I feel we need two new crossings in London and another further down stream than the options before us today."

Ms Doyle-Price revealed that the Highways Agency preferred option A which would see a new crossing next to the existing crossing, something Dartford MP Gareth Johnson said would not help the situation.

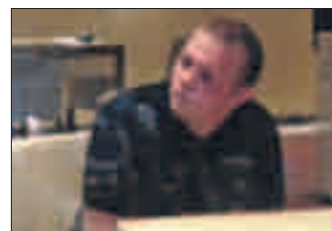
Ms Doyle-Price also said after discussions with Vopak, which stores petrol and gas at the West Thurrock terminal, she had learnt they would consider closing should option A be chosen. She was also against plans to go for option C, east of Gravesend.

She encouraged the government to look again at options D and E - Option D providing an M2 link to Canvey Island and Option E, an Isle of Grain link to east of Southend.

Transport minister Robert Goodwill said the previously dropped options would take "relatively little" traffic away, reducing the numbers by about 5%.

He concluded by saying: "This decision is not to be rushed. We will make an announcement as soon as possible."

From October, motorists will no longer stop at the crossing barriers to pay the charge, instead payment will be made online, via text, on the phone, or in shops. The penalty charge will be £70, discounted to £35 if paid within 14 days.



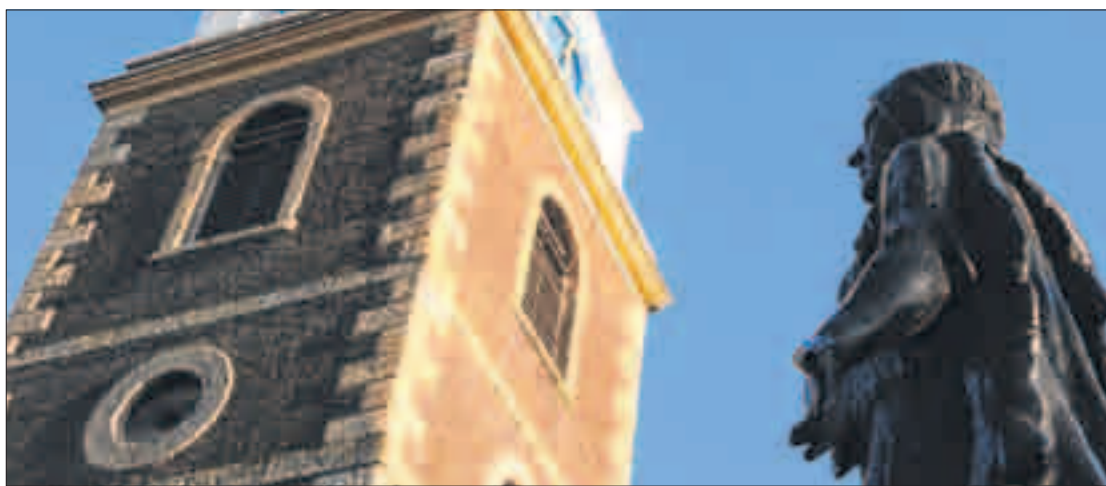
Man could help over fraud case

Police have released this CCTV image of a man they would like to speak to in connection with a theft and fraud offences.

The offences occurred between Monday, November 11 and Friday, November 15. The offender took post from a post box at the end of the victim's drive, opened bank accounts in the victim's name and then bought items.

Officers would like to speak with the man, as he may have witnessed the crime or can help them. Contact PC Andy Finnan on 101 quoting crime reference number B2/13/3946 or call Crimestoppers on 0800 555111.

Feather from headdress will cost around £1,000 to replace



The statue of Pocahontas after vandals removed the feather

'It is one of the tourist attractions which does attract people from America and the damage doesn't put us in a very good light'

Iconic statue targeted by metal thieves for third time

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Gravesend's iconic landmark – the statue of Pocahontas – has been targeted for the third time by thieves.

The bronze statue of the native American princess, which has attracted tourists from all over the world, has had the feather of her headdress stolen.

She stands in the grounds of St George's Church, a reminder of how Pocahontas died here, on her way back home to America, after spending a year in England.

The thieves would have had to clamber onto the 6ft plinth and then ripped the feather off her headdress, a further 5ft up.

A Gravesend council spokesman said: "This is the third occasion since 2010 that such damage has been done to the statue.

"On the first occasion in early 2010, the tip of the feather was broken off. It was anonymously returned to the council having been found or handed in to the church several months later.

"By that time arrangements had been made by the council

via its links with Virginia, USA, for a cast to be taken of the whole feather from the replica statue in Jamestown, which they were very happy to assist us with.

"From that cast, the council was able to get a replica made and we will use the same cast to do so again on this occasion."

The feather was first reported missing on December 23, although nobody knows when it was actually taken. A replacement will cost close to £1,000.

The spokesman said the theft was "shocking".

He said: "We don't know whether people did this for a prank but it's clearly wanton and it's not amusing. It [the statue] is one of the tourist attractions which does attract people from America and the damage doesn't put us in a very good light."

The story of the princess was immortalised by Disney in 1995 with their animated picture Pocahontas but people in Gravesend were aware of her story for decades before the statue was erected in 1958.

The monument, in the grounds of St George's Church gardens, is not the only homage to the princess' time in the town.

Stained glass windows and a tablet were also donated to St George's Church in 1914 by the society of Colonial Dames of America and there is also a mural depicting her saving the life of English captain John Smith, opposite Gravesend Station in Clive Road. After visiting England, Pocahontas was due to set sail from Gravesend and travel back to her native

state of Virginia in 1617, but became seriously ill just offshore and was taken back to the town where she sadly passed away aged only 21.

It is believed that she was buried in the grounds of the church shortly after.

Gravesend council has reported the crime to the police as criminal damage and investigations are on going.

IN BRIEF

Petrol station plans approved

Plans to turn an old hotel off the A2 into a BP petrol station, M&S Food and a McDonald's were expected to be approved last night (Wednesday). The 114-room Tollgate hotel is set to be demolished to make way for the drive-thru restaurant, with car park, 16-pump petrol station, and shop. The plans went before councillors at a planning meeting at Gravesend's Civic Centre. In total there were 33 objection letters, 363 circular letters and a petition opposing the idea signed by 1,784 people.

National BMX comps at park

Gravesend's Cyclopark will host a raft of BMX events throughout this year. On Monday riders were invited to the park to celebrate news that it will host regional and national BMX events in 2014, attracting more than 1,600 competitors. The evening also saw the launch of the park's BMX training programme, increasing coached sessions by 50%. Events at the park will include the BMX South East Regional Event on March 30; the BMX National Series Round 5 on April 12-13; and the British BMX Championships August 23-24. For details visit www.cyclopark.com



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