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22nd January 2021

Dear Alun Millard - KCC Highways and Transportation

A2 TEYNHAM BYPASS and TRAFFIC DISPERSAL THROUGH RESIDENTIAL AREAS – S.B.C. AQMA STRATEGY

On **19th January 2021**, I took the opportunity to listen in (Skype) on Swale Borough Council's "New Extraordinary, Local Plan Panel" Meeting. Their only Agenda Item being to agree the draft Borough Plan to go forward, **on 3rd February**, for approval of **Full Council on 24th February**. Ahead of public consultation.

Since the Draft Borough Plan was first put out to consultation, SBC has introduced major changes to the transport infrastructure of Swale Borough between Sittingbourne and Faversham (the "Teynham Bypass" on the A2 corridor) that I believe may now act to undermine the soundness of the **entire** new Borough Plan. If left unopposed, the introduction of a "Teynham bypass" would split the Parish of Lynsted in two, via an undisclosed route. It appears to me to be the height of irresponsibility to put at risk the whole Borough Plan that is designed to address housing supply across the whole Borough going forward to 2038.

The 19th January Meeting was the first time that communities have heard of this major departure from the draft Borough Plan previously consulted on.

Earlier draft Borough Plan documents were based on a strategy to balance new housing across the Borough with a focus on adding developments to existing major urban centres in line with current Government direction to Local Authorities. There was, at that time, a shortlist of options to balance urban planning across the Borough. Now we learn that KCC Highways and Transportation has been in negotiations with SBC Officials concerning a radical shift of emphasis towards major road-building connected to the A2 between Faversham and Sittingbourne and "dispersion" through residential areas.

Although SBC Officials said their Transport Strategy was NOT a joint document with KCC, nevertheless I cannot imagine that SBC thinking could have taken such a major shift in this policy area without your tacit approval to the principles underpinning it. As you will see SBC appears to consider that KCC will simply rubber stamp the proposal:

Transcript from Local Plan Panel – 19th January 2021

(a) Regarding the role and sequencing of KCC Highways inputs

The Chair's response to delaying Transport Modelling to late Spring – "we have confidence from previous runs and the work we have done with Kent Highways that this will not throw up any major problems with Transport Modelling otherwise we wouldn't be going down this route. Obviously, we couldn't start the Traffic Modelling until the Sites have been agreed. [brief sound drop out] So, it is fairly normal that a late part of the process. It takes KCC about 6 months to run one of these and no Council is going to sit around for six months having finished its Local Plan, waiting for the transport modelling to come back. You've built in the

confidence in that traffic modelling in the work already done. We're not envisaging any major problems with transport modelling."

It is odd that a "solution" to harmful levels of pollution in communities between Sittingbourne and Faversham is now based on a strategy to **increase** pollution from new developments between our two principal mainland towns.

The residents of Lynsted with Kingsdown Parish, along with other rural areas are already sandwiched between two polluting roads (A2 and M2). The suggested bypass is simply a pollution filling to the highways sandwich. This will also disrupt rural lanes and the network of public footpaths in open countryside at a time when we might hope to be encouraged to use those lanes and paths for our health and mental wellbeing.

SBC have persistently rejected ideas to measure particulate matter in existing AQMAs to further inform their decisions. This is in spite of clear direction by HMG that future health strategies should take account of the most harmful pollutants (PM2.5 especially) in pollution 'hotspots' (AQMs). If the existing levels of traffic have led to NOx "exceedances", it does not take a genius to see a link between combustion and friction particulates and soot emissions of diesel. Cleaner engines will aid NOx levels but not PMs. Arguably, E.V.s will increase PM2.5 friction particles through additional weight and more frequent braking/acceleration as congestion increases with increased housing inputs; traffic levels are also predicted to increase significantly over the planning period. It makes no sense to increase the input of vehicles onto the A2 through housing and commercial developments as proposed by SBC.

I should welcome your comments and advice on the proposed **two-fold SBC Transport Strategy as described by Officials and Councillors of SBC** intended to address the several AQMAs along the A2 between Faversham and Sittingbourne and beyond. This new Transport Strategy for the A2 will have a significant impact across the **whole** Borough but actually only result in moving the pollution further south by a few hundred meters and away from only **one** of those AQMAs (AQMA5 on Greenstreet/Teynham/Lynsted). That level of localised pollution will, of course, increase because of 1,100 new homes in and around Teynham adding **cumulatively** to the other significant developments already underway in Bapchild and Ospringe. The Chairman of the Local Plan Panel is very clear that KCC Highways will not present any difficulties, so I assume discussions between KCC Highways and SBC Officials is fairly advanced in two key policy decisions: -

1. Teynham Bypass

Residents have not been told the proposed route for the bypass but its success is **overtly** based on SBC approving plans for an **addition** of 1,100 new homes around Teynham Village and south of London Road in Lynsted Parish on Grade 1 agricultural land joining up Lynsted Lane and Claxfield Lane. SBC's draft Borough Plan would increase housing stock across the rural Ward of Teynham and Lynsted by **47%**. About **245 homes would be built south of London Road** with proposed junction "improvements" (so far undefined) where the A2 meets Claxfield Lane, Lynsted Lane and Station Road. The remainder of **855 homes to the north of the A2 will not use the 'bypass'**. Residential (real world) decisions will be to drive to Faversham or Sittingbourne. Faversham will require a simple left turn to add to existing traffic (at a roundabout?) through Greenstreet; Sittingbourne traffic will have to cross the A2 traffic (roundabout?) to turn Right. The introduction of this quantity of traffic and four or maybe five new /upgrade junctions will interfere with the flow of traffic on the A2. I am not aware that Emergency Services have been sighted on this proposal. The bypass is a fanciful and irreversible decision between KCC and SBC that will cost a great deal of money and simply **add** to

traffic burdens in AQMA5 and other AQMAs! Remember, it is not at all certain that through-traffic between the growing Sittingbourne and Faversham will ALL go along a new bypass. The fact that this is not now being modelled by KCC Highways ahead of a final decision on the Borough Plan that goes forward to Planning Inspectors (perhaps the Secretary of State in time) appears to be irresponsible at every level.

On previous planning applications [19/505036/OUT] KCC has firmly objected to new developments leading to Lynsted Lane on the grounds that rural lanes and their junctions with the A2 cannot be 'flexed' to accommodate the increased traffic burden from significant development proposals already in the pipeline. This earlier development proposal was also opposed by KCC Highways on the grounds that assumptions surrounding pedestrian behaviours and the dangers faced along a congested and overburdened Lynsted Lane. The new Borough Plan appears to compound this error by adding an urbanising link to Claxfield Lane. *For convenience, I attach the terms of your earlier objections based on constraints along the A2 and the specific conditions of Lynsted Lane.* Pedestrians face narrow and intimidating pavements (because of the volume of heavy traffic so close to the walker) between Claxfield Lane and Greenstreet services that become unusable during and after rain. Cyclists regularly use pavements because of the perceived dangers of heavy traffic along the A2 between Sittingbourne and Teynham.

Far from being a strategy to achieve SBC's policy objectives to reduce reliance on vehicles, the strategy for approving **more** housing in the rural spaces between Faversham and Sittingbourne is baffling! Traffic increases, pollution increases, valuable agricultural land is lost. I believe the SBC Proposal may lead to a challenge at the most fundamental level of the soundness of their entire Borough Plan! A misguided and unrealistic policy on pollution mitigation puts their whole Plan into question!

A bypass will also threaten the **sustainability of businesses in Greenstreet** with the removal of passing trade and more people using cars to conduct their complex "real world" lives from the new estates - schools, medical care, working, shopping (groceries and all other needs) and access to fast rail services (only available in the towns). Greenstreet has already declined in recent years as a commercial centre and will be further threatened by the act of pushing pollution further south on a new bypass. The Government has made it abundantly clear in recent pronouncements that they expect significant new housing development should be placed in and around towns and cities. This is because **the increased burden of population on services and infrastructure can be flexed more easily**. Access to those services from a town-centred Local Plan would more readily achieve the "active transport" strategies promoted by Swale Borough Council (SBC). The logic of an urban-led strategy makes more sense and helps cap vehicular pressure on the A2 road that joins our two urban centres! I believe this decision by SBC, apparently supported by KCC, flies in the face of central government requirements for new housing adjacent to the services and infrastructure that support all our lives (urban and rural).

2. Dispersion Strategy

The second thread of current SBC thinking is that pollution can be mitigated by "dispersing" traffic through residential areas. Their argument is that this will disperse pollution. That strategy will do no more than increase pressure on a wider population of residents, on their enjoyment of their homes and gardens and to the safety of themselves and their children. Apparently, this also has tacit approval of KCC Highways. SBC Officials reported in Committee that they have had discussions of their ideas and the Local Plan Panel Chairman feels encouraged to progress their Borough Plan on the foundation of those discussions.

Again, because we are not being told, I imagine that the proposed development sites north of the A2 and west of the existing village of Teynham will be joined up with the roads currently running east and west through the centre of Teynham Village? So, Honeyball Walk and Donald Moor Avenue might be repurposed with, perhaps, “dispersal” through the introduction of one-way systems to ‘even out’ the flows of traffic that then either have to join Station Road to the A2 or through the new development to the East of Station Road and onwards to the A2?

What this “dispersal” strategy fails to acknowledge is that while pollution is most **intense** adjacent to the cause of pollution (the kerbside) that pollution does not simply vanish one street away. My own amateur pollution measurements (Plume Labs, two Flow devices) have demonstrated that the “real world” pollution levels along the A2 can (depending on weather and wind direction – predominantly from the south-west) remain hazardous up to 1 kilometre away! So, “dispersal” of traffic will in fact create a harmful blanket of pollution hanging over even greater numbers of residents!

When the M2 shuts, residential areas can look forward to disturbed nights. Residential areas will become ‘rat-runs’ as we have found during extensive water-main works. For example, over the **next three weeks** there will be very important night repairs (8pm to 6am) on the M2 between Junction 5 (A249) and Junction 7 (A2/A299 Brenley Corner) (see Kent Online, 21st January 2021). These events (and following motorway accidents) demonstrate how fragile the “capacity” of the A2 is and fiddling with bypasses really does not address the urgent problems of the AQMAs at Ospringe, Greenstreet/Teynham/Lynsted and East Street in Sittingbourne. Nor does it address the “real world” impacts along the whole A2 whenever the M2 experiences difficulties.

In conclusion

What this draft Borough Plan fails to address is that, no matter which path a vehicle takes through or around Teynham (and Lynsted parish hamlets), that traffic **MUST** land somewhere along the A2 between Ospringe AQMA and East Street (Sittingbourne) AQMA. This can only be achieved by driving the bypass into existing lanes (Claxfield Lane? Cellar Hill?) or the sensitive Lyn Valley (a chalk/nailbourne feature that is a sensitive and important feature of our rural landscape). In that event, am I to understand that KCC Highways are content with introducing two new major junctions along the A2 and ‘development’ of junctions along the length of Greenstreet?

The entire justification for this bypass idea is predicated on pollution considerations and ‘mitigation’ of damage in one AQMA together with penalties inevitably borne by neighbouring AQMAs. This is not a strategy worth its name but an abdication from common sense or logic with the destruction of swathes of Grade 1 agricultural land. As one Councillor described it, the draft Local Plan is “schizophrenic” when it places in opposition – new roadbuilding and a desire for “active” transport and reduction of air pollution along the whole A2!! This draft strategy promotes the interests of car users and other vehicles over the interests of every other interest.

SBC Officials stated that the SBC Draft Transport Plan is **not** yet a “Joint” Plan with KCC Highways.

I invite your clarification in the absence of any public engagement by SBC Officials and the Local Plan Panel (LPP). More worrying is the very clear assumption by SBC that **KCC Highways will not present a problem to the Plan**. I have transcribed the relevant statement by the Chair of the LPP who obtained agreement to put forward these ideas to Full Council for their agreement and thereafter moving to ‘limited’ public consultation.

For your convenience, I attach a couple of transcriptions from the Meeting of 19th January 2021. These transcriptions help explain my request for confirmation and/or clarification from KCC

concerning this sudden, very late, revelation from SBC Councillors (the Panel) concerning a policy responsibility of KCC Highways. In particular, I am concerned that SBC LLP are recommending that the draft Borough Plan will go to Planning Inspectors (and, potentially, the Secretary of State) without further SBC scrutiny based on any public objections and **without a KCC-endorsed Joint Transport Plan** addressing the major changes to the A2 proposed between Sittingbourne and Faversham.

Because time is short, I am copying this letter widely across all interested parties for the sake of transparency – transparency that has been sadly lacking in the development of the draft Swale Local Plan. The LPP Meeting were advised by Officials that there are going to be limited opportunities for substantial objections to this part of the Local Plan going forward. On the one hand, one official (“James”) advised the Local Plan had moved on from Reg 18 to Regulation 19 saying that the key question is – “is this Plan sound or not sound”. Asked by Cllr Hunt about where that left the proposed Sites in public consultation, the Chair confirmed that residents could comment on **any aspect of the Plan** now and those comments would go to the Inspector examination in public. “It depends on public response”. However,

A second official interjected “Would you mind if I just added to that? The Council’s starting point is that the Plan is “sound”. So, if anybody wants to make representations about the Plan, the most effective way they can do that is to say - they don’t like this Site, these are the reasons why, and to suggest where would be a better site and why it would be a better site. Because, at the end of the day it has to go somewhere. We will not be able to go into the Examination without meeting our Local Housing Need figure. The Inspector will just kick it out on the first day.”. The Chair confirmed, saying “and we have met our housing need figure.”

Councillor Hunt objected strongly to this procedural device as it circumvented further scrutiny or response to Residents’ comments – he argued the process should wait longer to permit adequate discussion. Cllr Whiting closed LPP discussions to declare his view that the Local Plan is unsound:

“From the point of view of Teynham, I think Teynham is frankly being shafted here and is being sent no lifelines at all about how it is going to cope with the additional development that the Council would suggest it has. I don’t think it is a sound plan at all – a sound plan would have those details in here; it would show where that bypass was going; it would show how that bypass was going to be paid for; it would show how the traffic at either end of that bypass that is being talked about in Ospringe and going through East Street into Sittingbourne, how that traffic would be managed. It shows none of those things and I think it is wrong to suggest (I have every respect for the Officers) and we do need to go in with a sound plan, but I do not believe this is a sound plan and I think for that reason, it would be very difficult for people to come up with alternatives other than to simply say, as I think you have heard tonight from the two Ward members from Teynham, that ‘this is not a good idea and we shouldn’t be putting it in Teynham - go somewhere else’. I don’t think it is the responsibility of members of the public, on the limited information that they will have given – the four elements of information [are] still to come in [to the Plan]. We are going to go out to consultation on Reg 19 without much of that information and I think it is unfair on the public to comment reasonably, and suggest that their comments will only be valid, in a way, if they come back with solutions to build, to fix the problem that clearly up until now the Administration has failed to solve.”

Democratic Processes are under attack. Please note that the Local Plan Panel has pursued their bypass Plans for this short section of the A2 ahead of their meeting in November last year. Their idea was buried in such a way that anyone reading the Agenda would not have been alerted to it. Even considering the Covid restrictions, Swale Borough Council had ample opportunity to seek Parish Council and public engagement on this radical departure from the earlier Draft but they have chosen to 'fly under the radar'. We now learn from the latest Local Plan Panel (LPP) Meeting (19th January 2021), only minor Site changes can be made to the Local Plan through the anticipated February/March "Consultation". LPP are assuming the Full Council will 'rubber stamp' the Draft! It appears SBC will only seek inputs on choices of development sites rather than wider infrastructure questions or the damage being done to our family of AQMAs along the A2. This brings into question the "soundness" of the whole process and current Draft based on that secretive procedure.

Had our Parish Councils been alerted by SBC ahead of the Panel Meeting in November, our two Parish Councils have the means to secure public engagement on this "bypass" and "dispersion" strategy. But residents and Parish officers have now been denied that opportunity to engage with early thinking by Swale Borough Council Officials and key Councillors.

As Councillor Lloyd Bowen said - Teynham already has a bypass **it is called the M2.**

Yours sincerely,

Nigel Heriz-Smith

Attachments:

- KCC Highways Letters of 20th March 2017 and 30th June 2020
- Swale Borough Council Environment Protection Officers, 25th June 2020 – this repeated their objections to the Lynsted Lane development – but I have not been able to find that original objection/memorandum. Perhaps Environmental Protection SBC can dig that out for us?

Recipients

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