



Mr Graham Dalton
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Cllr Charlie Simkins
c/o Members Desk
Kent County Council
Session House
Maidstone
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8th August 2014

Dear Mr Dalton

RE: Accommodation Bridge over the A2070 – Park Farm South and East, Ashford, Kent

I am the Kent County Councillor for Ashford Rural West and Chair of the Ashford Joint Transportation Board. It is of continuing concern to the Board that the delivery of extended bus services to new developments at Park Farm South and East utilising the accommodation bridge at Park Farm that spans both the A2070 Hamstreet Bypass and the Ashford-Hastings railway line has been subject to on-going delays due to a variety of factors.

The proposed extension to the provision of public transport is a much-needed facility, and the required funding has already been secured from the SPG6 'Green Infrastructure' fund. It has been the intention since the earliest days of this major development that a bus service would operate through the estate via the accommodation bridge. Indeed, this is included in the development brief for Park Farm South and East (2001) and the subsequent S106 agreement (2005). Outline technical drawings for improvements to the bridge have even been generated as early as 2003 (Buchanan Consulting Engineers).

The County Council has prepared detailed technical drawings of required upgrades for Highways Agency approval; Ashford Borough Council (acting on the County Council's behalf) have begun consultation on a scheme of parking controls to facilitate bus travel on the approaches to the bridge; the developer has constructed a temporary bus turnaround on the eastern side of the bridge and the 'kick-start' funding for the first three years of bus service operation has been secured through the SPG6 fund.

Whilst the type and form of enforcement system to regulate use of the accommodation bridge is still to be determined, this is being discussed regularly between the County Council and Borough Councils, and now it seems as though the entire proposal is at risk of stalling until the grant of Technical Approval for works to be undertaken on the accommodation bridge is forthcoming from the Highways Agency.



It is my understanding that the bridge as an asset was transferred from Kent County Council to the Highways Agency when the Highways Agency trunked the A2070, and the bridge is not believed to be in split ownership (between the Highways Agency and Network Rail), unless the Highways Agency reached an agreement with Network Rail subsequent to the trunking.

I am informed that although it is not believed Network Rail own any of the bridge, because the bridge spans the Ashford to Hastings railway line Network Rail will need to be co-signatories to the approval documents with the Highways Agency. The County Council has already engaged with Network Rail to set up a Basic Asset Protection Agreement to assist the approvals process.

I understand that when the County Council wrote to the Highways Agency (addressed to Kevin Bown, Asset Manager for Area 4) on the 9th May 2014 to seek views on the concept design, the response received gave cause for optimism – and I understand that an internal meeting was to be convened by the Highways Agency, with attendance from the HA's technical consultant (BBMM), NetServe and possibly Network Rail. To date the County Council has not received any further feedback from the Highways Agency regarding this matter, suggesting that no further progress has been made.

In order to make progress securing technical approval for use of the accommodation bridge as part of a planned extension to the public transport network, I would be grateful if the Highways Agency could with all possible expediency convene an internal meeting to clarify the following:

- What needs to be done and by whom
- The relevant approvals procedure(s)
- The associated timescale

As possible guidance on the way forward, officers at the County Council have proposed the following steps be taken to progress matters:

- The first stage of the approvals should be to agree the Category of the approvals. This will determine which documents from BD2 then need to be completed.
- Once the Category of the approvals is known your structural consultant can complete the approval documents and submit them for comment and ultimately approval.

The Highways Agency has previously advised the County Council's officers on two separate occasions that the accommodation bridge could satisfactorily cater for vehicular traffic (namely buses), and thus I would hope that formal technical approval would be forthcoming:

"No separate agreement required, if there is no change to the structure except usage as you have set out. It is designed for such use." (email from John Burns, November 2010)

"the bridge does not have a weight limit on it, so there are no issues with Buses using it." (email from Kevin Bown, September 2012)

The Joint Transportation Board, working with the County Council, Network Rail and the Highways Agency would like to agree to the most expeditious means of implementing an extension to the existing public transport network to incorporate Park Farm South, and connect this into the newer phases of Park Farm East and through further into the Finberry (formerly Cheeseman's Green) development, as a priority objective.

As the County Council is leading on work to progress the delivery of a scheme to improve the accommodation bridge through spend of already collected S106 monies, any formal responses should be copied to the relevant County Council officer (James Hammond) in the first instance.

The Board are keen to see this project advanced as a matter of urgency, and so on their behalf I must request that feedback is provided in respect of the previously supplied concept design for the

accommodation bridge, and an indication as to whether the Highways Agency would support a possible alternative option for the bridge that retains the status quo – for the bridge to be used as a 'link' on the public transport network but with no changes to the existing layout.

The Board's next meeting is set for Tuesday 9th September 2014, and I would sincerely hope that both I and the County Council's officers will be in a position to offer news of good progress regarding the accommodation bridge to the Board at this time. I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Charlie Simkins
Chair of the Ashford Joint Transportation Board
County Councillor for Ashford Rural West

