

Extract from Council Minute 412 and 413 24th April 2014

Extract from Minute 412

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3 Mr Goodman advised that he wished to ask a question relating to the proposed Sevington warehouse development. He had been a resident of Willesborough for over 40 years and had seen Hythe Road change from a peaceful street to an urban freeway. Many people were concerned about the massive increase in traffic that the Sevington warehouse development would generate and that it would impact dramatically on Junction 10 in spite of the planned mini Junction 10A and that the resulting gridlock would spread back down Hythe Road into Willesborough as it often did. He was recently stupefied to hear an official from the Highways Agency declare that Junction 10 was operating well below capacity. No-one who had had to use the appallingly designed junction and had wasted hours in stationary traffic watching emergency ambulances struggling to reach the Hospital could believe that. With regard to the planned road alterations to facilitate the Sevington development, he understood that London bound heavy goods traffic emerging from it would join the A2070 at a signal controlled junction approximately 300 metres from Junction 10. Already traffic queued at peak hours along the A2070 northbound up to and beyond the junction with Barrey Road. The extra traffic from the development would have great difficulty joining the northbound carriageway of the A2070, and this would make the consequent gridlock at Junction 10 even worse than it already was. He questioned how Ashford could support a scheme that would generate worse gridlock on Junction 10 at peak hours as a matter of routine.

Councillor Robey, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development, advised that there were two questions being asked in relation to Junction 10 under the Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting on the 10th April 2014 and he would respond then.

Extract from Minute 413

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3 Mr Ross advised that he wished to ask three questions. He lived in Mersham and advised that the village would be significantly affected by the impacts arising from Junction 10A. The current design of the proposed interim Junction 10A provided for slip roads only in the direction of to and from Folkestone. This would not seem to offer any alleviation of the current congestion on the north going A2070 and the existing Junction 10 let alone meet the increased traffic volumes that would result from current and planned developments to the south east of Ashford. It seemed reasonable to assume that a substantial proportion of the increased traffic that would be generated by the aforementioned developments would be directed towards London or the railway station and that any increase in traffic in the direction of Folkestone would be minimal. He questioned whether Ashford Borough Council was willing to share with Council Tax payers the outcomes of any traffic modelling studies undertaken to date, that they had effectively funded, and to consider re-visiting this modelling to re-validate the current design and if necessary modify same. If the contention in Question 1 proved to be

correct and the design of interim Junction 10A was not modified did the Ashford Borough Council have any contingency plan to address the likely congestion that would arise? The current plans for an interim Junction 10A indicated Highfield Lane would no longer connect to the A20, but would be aligned with the single track, narrow Kingsford Street, directing traffic to the centre of Mersham. Under the AXA/DMI proposed plans for U19, Highfield Lane would be upgraded to a two-lane highway. There was a petition of over 230 residents who are totally opposed to the proposal, primarily on the grounds of the safety of residents in Kingsford Street and Mersham. Should a decision be taken to proceed with Junction 10A he asked if the Council would acknowledge these concerns by closing off access between Kingsford Street and Highfield Lane effectively making Kingsford Street a cul de sac.

Councillor Wedgbury apologised for interrupting, he felt it was important for all present to understand that it would be Kent County Council that would make the final decision on this issue not Ashford Borough Council. Therefore the questions being put forward should be put to Kent County Council rather than this Authority.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3 Mr Murphy from Mersham and Sevington Parish Council advised that he wished to ask a question. He was representing the residents of Sevington and Mersham to raise their concerns about Minute 397 considered under item 8 of the agenda. When the Parish representatives attended a meeting on 20 January at the Council Offices, they heard disturbing conclusions being drawn that did not reflect the facts presented. The message on 20th January was that the interim scheme would fail. If it were assumed that a reduction of 15% in traffic volumes from "green" measures was achieved, would such failure be avoided. The 15% reduction was stated as the maximum that could be credibly hoped for. He questioned why the Council was supporting a scheme that would trigger significant additional building in the Ashford Borough with associated incremental traffic and congestion when the analysis to date predicted failure.

Councillor Robey, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development advised that the three questions each raised issues regarding the design and likely operational effectiveness of the proposed interim Junction 10A. To avoid repetition the following position statement was designed to address all the points raised. The proposed interim Junction 10A had been subject to traffic modelling by the specialist consultants advising the Highways Agency, which was the Agency of Government responsible for improvements to the national motorway network. This work had concluded to the Highways Agency's satisfaction that the interim scheme will help divert sufficient traffic movements away from the existing Junction 10 and that the overall impact will be to create sufficient capacity for the new arrangement to last well into the 2020s. The assessment of when the scheme would come under pressure was based on the year 2030 not on the date of opening. This assessment took account of the extra traffic further planned development in the area would generate in that time. On this basis the scheme was put forward for funding from the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) by Kent County Council and the LEP had provisionally identified substantial funding towards this project. It remained the position that the Council wished to see the full, all movements Junction 10A scheme

opened as soon as it was needed. But in the absence of any specifically identified government funding to deliver that scheme, the interim Junction 10A proposed was an important step forward if the growing congestion problems at the existing junction were to be addressed which would otherwise only get worse. The interim scheme has been designed to be easily converted into the full scheme when funds allowed. Against this background the Borough Council's Cabinet considered the interim scheme at its last meeting and decided to support the project in principle at this stage. Kent County Council was now responsible for taking forward the project by testing it in detail and working up detailed designs, including the way local roads such as Kingsford Street and Highfield Lane were dealt with. This work would take several months and would provide the detailed information required for all parties to fully assess the proposals. Full information would need to be submitted by the County Council when a planning application was made for the new Junction 10A and related road improvements and this would, as normal, be available to the public to enable them to comment. When a planning application was made the Borough Council, as a key consultee, would need to consider the detailed evidence and full assessment of the project before concluding whether or not the scheme delivered the anticipated benefits, would work effectively and should be supported.

Councillor Bartlett drew attention to the minutes of the report on Junction 10A. He felt that whilst the minutes referred to a number of pros and cons there was also reference to one Portfolio Holders view that the report dwelt too heavily on the pros. He agreed with this statement. He wanted to set out some additional cons that were not set out in the report that went before Cabinet. Therefore he felt that the Cabinet may have misled themselves by supporting a scheme that was bad for Ashford. He referred to a meeting at International House on 23rd March 2011 at which he said the Council was told that the link road from the A2070 to the Junction 10A at Highfield Bridge may not be attractive to road users and would not remove trips using Junction 10. Because of that users, could expect the same level of traffic to use Junction 10 once Junction 10A was built. At a meeting at the Civic Centre on 30th May 2012 he said the Council was told that modelling accuracy would be lower for this privately funded scheme than one that involved public money. As this scheme would be privately funded the traffic modelling would be less reliable and less accurate, that was what the Highways Agency had advised. At the Highways Agency meeting on the 20th January 2014, the Highways Agency would not and indeed could not change the way in which traffic joined the M20 at Junction 10 other than altering the timing of the traffic lights on Hythe Road which fed the M20 entry. With the additional building in Willesborough, Sevington and Mersham that was intended, by the Cabinet, to follow the construction of Junction 10A, it meant that traffic leaving Willesborough seeking to join the M20 either to reach Tesco or the William Harvey Hospital would have no choice but to be held at the traffic lights for much longer than they were at the present time. It was also advised at the meeting on 20th January that the interim scheme was designed to ensure that traffic did not queue on the M20 and it was not a concern to the Highways Agency that there would be queues on the existing Junction 10 roundabout. The new design would fail every evening rush hour, not might, not maybe, but would fail. The result of this scheme according to the Highways Agency would be twice daily traffic chaos. Highfield Lane traffic would be directed through the village centre of Mersham, through Kingsford Street and Mersham would therefore become a rat-run for traffic from Bilsington, Kingsnorth and Aldington heading towards the A20. He felt that the most disturbing

aspect of the report was contained at paragraph 22 where it stated that 'the scheme would assist the Borough to deliver its future housing targets of 700 houses per year'. Without the scheme the report stated that these houses would need to be built in, what the report author described, 'unsuitable parts of the Borough'. He felt this set out the mindset of the Cabinet very clearly, that the 700 houses being built, would be built in Kingsnorth, Mersham and Stubbs Cross. This scheme would have the wholly undesirable effect of building yet more in a very congested part of the Borough. In short, he felt that it was a poor show that the paper to Cabinet did not cover these points. Colleagues from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee may wish to consider these further. In fact, they did, the paperwork had been delivered to Officers that evening to enable a more formal debate of these issues.

Councillor Robey, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development, requested that Councillor Bartlett submitted his comments in writing.

Councillor Bartlett advised that the comments had been submitted as part of the Overview & Scrutiny Call-In, and he was certain that Council Officers would be able to provide copies of all of the questions that he had asked that evening. He was happy to send the minutes of the meetings with the Highways Agency, to the Portfolio Holder, which seemed to have not been properly considered in drafting the Cabinet report.