

Report To: Ashford Joint Transportation Board

Date: 11th December 2018

Report Title: Kingsnorth rail halt

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Summary: Report to consider the background to the proposed rail halt at Park Farm and confirm whether or not it is to be constructed.

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 The initial proposition that there should be a new rail halt at Kingsnorth formed part of the Ashford Borough Local Plan 2000. Policy S17 for the extension of the Park Farm development on both sides of the A2070 (including what is now the Bridgefield part of the development) made provision for the construction of a rail halt as a means of encouraging alternative means of transport to the private car.
- 1.2 The 1st Section 106 Agreement for Bridgefield required the developer to identify and reserve land for a potential rail halt and use 'best endeavours' to pursue the provision of a rail halt and provide documentation of that with Network Rail (NR) and the train operating company. A developer cannot simply go ahead and construct any addition to the national rail system as it needs the agreement of the rail authorities to actually proceed as a deliverable project. In the event, the developer did approach both NR and Southern Rail about the prospect of a rail halt in this location.
- 1.3 Comprehensive documentation of the discussions with NR about the feasibility of a rail halt was provided by the developer and, in summary, the response towards the latter half of the last decade was that the scheme was not one that NR wished to take forward but that the door was, essentially, 'left ajar', for any business case to be made for it.
- 1.4 When negotiating the 2nd Section 106 Agreement following the resolution to grant the 2nd outline planning permission (10/01711/AS), as NR had not categorically refused to entertain the merits of a rail halt, besides rolling forward the safeguarding of the rail halt land the Council also required the developer to fund an independent consultant to progress the business case for the rail halt.
- 1.5 Peter Brett Associates (PBA) were appointed to undertake this exercise but the outcome was that NR was still not persuaded that a viable business case existed for a new rail halt. In essence, they considered that the halt would simply displace trips from Ashford International Station rather than generate new patronage and there would be the attendant practical issues of timetabling and journey time increase on the Ashford – Hastings line (through deceleration, stopping, acceleration) to consider, given the proximity of the halt to Ashford International.
- 1.6 Accordingly, the necessary consents from the railway authorities were not able to be achieved within the deadline in the Section 106 Agreement (and there has been no indication since of any change in the stance of NR).

- 1.7 Whilst this process has been played out, policy S14 of the new Local Plan to 2030 has been prepared and, earlier this year, formally examined by the Planning Inspectorate. This relates to the further extension of the Park Farm development south of Bridgefield. As the position on the rail halt had not been finally resolved at the time of drafting the policy, reference to the rail halt still appears in the policy but only in the context of contributions to its provision 'if required'.

2. Conclusion

- 2.1 The potential for a rail halt at Park Farm has been a long held aspiration in successive Local Plans but despite the efforts of both the Council and the developers to persuade Network Rail and the train operator of the potential benefits of a halt, there remains no support for its provision or for services to stop there.
- 2.2 It is accepted that the geographical proximity of the proposed halt to Ashford International could have given rise to some practical difficulties if commuters had sought to use the halt as a 'Park & Ride' facility on anything other than a very local scale. The creation of an additional stop on the Hastings line was also perceived as working against the general desire to improve journey times on the Marsh Link service.
- 2.3 The lack of any support for the delivery of the rail halt (or likely support in the future) amongst the railway authorities means that there can be no requirement to pursue a financial contribution towards it through the proposal for Site S14 and this has been reflected in the recent resolution of the Planning Committee to grant planning permission for the development of Site S14.
- 2.4 Consequently, it is now reasonable to conclude that there is no prospect of a Kingsnorth rail halt being delivered in the foreseeable future and that no reliance should be placed on it when considering the context of transportation matters in the area.

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