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Response to consultation on Canterbury City Council Draft Local Plan

1 message

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From: Robert Atkins
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I wish to record my responses to the following three parts of the Draft Plan, and to have these responses taken into account in the evaluation stage of the planning process

1. Policy SS4 Canterbury Circulation Plan and Transport Topic Paper

I am strongly opposed to the Canterbury Circulation Plan which involves creating 5 Zones and preventing cars generally from driving between them except by way of the proposed outer ring route.

In public presentations about the Canterbury Circulation Plan during the past year, much was made of the circulation and zoning scheme adopted by the city of Ghent in Belgium as a model or at least inspiration for the Canterbury proposed plan, and by implication a validation. I regard this as misleading, for the following reasons.

Firstly, the two cities are in no way comparable. Ghent city has a population of over 231,000 and Ghent metropolitan area's population is getting on for half a million (over 472, 000), whereas the population of Canterbury city is only around 60,000, and even the district numbers only about 170,000. Ghent is the third largest city in Belgium (only Brussels and Antwerp are bigger), whereas Canterbury district is only 37th by population in the UK. Ghent has the cultural institutions one would expect of a major metropolis, with no fewer than 6 museums and galleries of international standing. It has a fully integrated public transport system of trams and buses, operated by a single regional organisation, De Lijn, run by the Flemish government in Belgium. Access to the heart of the city centre, including from areas on the outskirts of Ghent and the wider region, is therefore cheap and practical. The city also has 250 miles of designated cycle routes.

Secondly, the inner ring route (R40) which encompasses and links the 5 zones (plus the car-free historic centre) of Ghent's circulation plan bears no resemblance to the ring route proposed for Canterbury. It existed as a fully developed ring road before the zoning was introduced, is entirely contained within the central urban area, has full street lighting, and because of the many waterways in the city is largely on a level. This is in stark contrast to the proposed Canterbury outer ring, which does not currently exist as a coherent or complete route, and which would go far outside the city's boundaries into hilly and possibly unlighted areas. Where it would use existing roads, some of these, like Rough Common Road, would have their character entirely changed. Many other sections of the route would have to be wholly new roads which would be pushed through what is at present open countryside around Canterbury, notably the proposed route north of the university and the link from Sturry to Bridge. This would be to the inevitable detriment of the natural environment, and explicitly runs counter to Policy SS3, Point 7 of the Canterbury Plan, which states: 'Within the countryside, which is defined as any parts of the district outside of the settlement boundaries of the urban areas ... priority will be given to protecting the rural character of the district.'

One further general objection to the Canterbury Circulation Plan is that it will greatly increase journey times and add to volumes of traffic on the circulatory and feeder roads, because of the need to travel outside Canterbury just to get to a different part of the city. For example, to get from the Salisbury Road area where I live to the K & C Hospital, I would need to drive via Rough Common and the proposed Harbledown intersection with the A2, along a significant stretch of the A2, and then down the length of the Dover Road. With increased journey times come extra pollution and fuel consumption. Even electric cars will continue to create dangerous pollution in the form of rubber particles from the wear of tyres on the road surface.

Has consideration been given to what would happen if road works or – more disruptive because sudden and unforeseen – a major road traffic accident or flooding closed part of one or more of the roads intrinsic to the Circulation scheme? Given the complexity and rigidity of the scheme, it would be difficult to react in a timely way.

2. Policy C1 Canterbury city centre strategy

Point 1 of this policy states: ‘The council will work with its partners to revitalise the city centre through sensitive mixed-use regeneration ... and cultural and public realm enhancements.’

One such enhancement should be the reinstatement of Canterbury’s market, the dispersal of which has been a real loss to the character and vitality of the city. It could be more attractively designed and presented for shoppers and browsers and made into a coherent offering in St George’s St and the open area of Iron Bar Lane. Many European cities such as Munich, Frankfurt and, indeed, Ghent promote their markets for trade and tourism as part of their image of liveliness and entertainment. Ghent, for instance, devotes an entire tourist-oriented website to its many markets specialising not just in foodstuffs but in books, antiques, flowers and even second-hand bicycles. Nearer to home, market-days in our neighbour Faversham are a pull for tourists and more locally based visitors alike. Canterbury needs to be alive to the potential of a thriving market for its regional profile and tourist image.

3. Policy SS1 Environmental strategy for the district

Point 2 of this policy states: ‘The network of green and blue infrastructure – including rivers, streams and ponds – in the district, which provides important habitats, valued landscapes and spaces for recreation and which supports our health and wellbeing, will be protected, maintained and enhanced ...’ ‘Developments should provide multi-benefit connections or corridors between habitats, considering ecological connectivity and pollinators, as well as accessibility and usability by people.’

The lands of Kent University’s campus need to be protected and fostered under this policy, not least the so-called Southern Slopes, which have been the subject of controversy in the past. With their meadows, woodland, streams and ponds, these slopes are rich in varied ecology, including the host of Meadow Brown butterflies in the tall grasses in summertime. They also afford one of the most stunning views of the cathedral and the city. In terms of ‘health and wellbeing’, they have provided space for recreation, dog-walking, exercise and picnics for generations of Canterbury adults and children and must be preserved.

Robert Atkins

