

A. GENERAL COMMENT ABOUT THE OVERALL CONCEPT OF THE TRANSPORT STRATEGY

As we have stated in responses to previous consultations whilst the concept of a sustainable “bus lead” strategy is fundamentally to be applauded, our concern is that it is predicated on factors ultimately beyond the control of CCC - although this may change with the future move to unitary authorities combining the present transport remits of CCC and KCC, both of which authorities will then disappear as separate entities.

B. GENERAL CONCERNS ABOUT THE IMPACTS OF EVER-INCREASING TRAFFIC FLOWS ON THE A2990 (“OLD THANET WAY”)

Key features underpinning this Local Plan appear to be unsound. Our assessment is below.

We note that, including the identified development proposals of the draft Local Plan, a total of some 2889 new houses and flats will be being built or will already recently have been built in Whitstable, as well as business and industrial units, schools etc. This amount of growth would be unprecedented in Whitstable, and road traffic and associated safety hazards would increase accordingly and mostly relating to A2990.

Among the locations particularly affected would be the congested Prospect Retail Park traffic signals, from which there are frequently queues up to 1000m long in the evening peak period, stretching back to the A299 dual carriageway and causing risk of high-speed rear-end collisions and then with similarly long tails-backs at the Long Reach roundabout.

Although it appears that CCC hopes the queue length might be reduced by building a new eastbound A299 junction at Chestfield Road (Policy W4), to be paid-for by building houses at Brooklands Farm, there is no guarantee that the junction would ever be built. In practice, developers are often very accomplished at postponing, reducing or even removing onerous planning obligations.

Whether or not the new junction is built (as proposed only with eastbound slips), the proposed developments would increase westbound traffic on A2990 Old Thanet Way and southbound traffic on A290 Clapham Hill. This would make the Long Reach roundabout and Clapham Hill even more congested, difficult and hazardous for pedestrians to cross, especially for the elderly and those with impaired mobility or vision – also cyclists negotiating the locality. Neither CCC nor the KCC Highway Authority appear to have any idea how to address this – even though the Plan sets the precedent for the proposed placing of traffic lights on the highly congested Wincheap roundabout in Canterbury.

At busier times of day, it can take up to 12 minutes to drive from the A299 at Yorkletts to Chestfield station, the main problem being delays at traffic signals and other road junctions along the Old Thanet Way. This journey could be made considerably quicker via the new junction and Chestfield Road, so it is obvious the new junction would cause considerably more traffic on Chestfield Road, which is residential and a Conservation Area.

Another problem that the new junction would create is increased development all along the A299 corridor. The improved connectivity provided by the junction would encourage

developers to build on all the agricultural land there, and current government planning law offers little opportunities for Councils to stop this happening. This is an almost certain outcome, yet the Council have provided no evidence that they have evaluated the consequences. The final draft Local Plan must therefore be regarded as unsound.

Recent surveys carried out for the Bodkin Farm planning application (Policy W6), show that the busy but narrow pedestrian pavement under the railway bridge at Chestfield station would be unsafe for large numbers of pupils from the proposed Bodkin secondary school, especially as this route is already used by primary school pupils walking to Swalecliffe Primary school. There is no room to widen the footway or make it safer without huge expenditure on a separate route under the railway.

The intensively used pedestrian crossings here cause considerable traffic delays that would increase if the Bodkin development goes ahead. There is no evidence that this has been taken into account in the Council's plans. The Local Plan appears to be unsound in this regard too. Bodkin Farm does not appear to be a suitable site for a new secondary school, and therefore we must oppose Policy W6 on road safety grounds.

Access to a primary school may improve at some point in the future as one is planned for Brooklands Farm, but there is no guarantee this would ever happen. Meanwhile children would need to be driven to school in town or else Swalecliffe, the latter adding yet more traffic to the congestion and road safety problems on Herne Bay Road at the railway station.

C. SPECIFIC TRAFFIC CONCERNS ABOUT THE WHITSTABLE TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

The basic concept of a town centre strategy is to be applauded. Indeed many of the stated ambitions are actually matters our Group has sought to champion in the past, including in various earlier Plan consultations, ie that the dominance of traffic and improvements in the "public realm" for pedestrians need to be addressed in Oxford Street, High Street and Harbour Street and that traffic in and around the town centre just generally needs to be reduced. It is stated that having a "Park and Bus" (not even "Park and Ride") as part of the new site W6 south of the OTW opposite Whitstable Heights will further aim to reduce such traffic although there are mixed views about whether this will actually be the case since issues for Whitstable are not like those for Canterbury city centre and anyway since there is no detail of any associated "fast bus link" to Whitstable town centre as mentioned in the strategy.

This lack of "fast link" detail is perhaps symptomatic of the fact that there is no real detail on any aspect of how the underlying traffic / realm ambitions will be achieved. If traffic entering the town centre from the south is to be reduced then there are a few potential options. It could be directed away from Borstal Hill further east down the OTW (A2990) to Millstrood Road and Church Street (the latter is still signed to long stay car parks!) but neither of these are easy roads for much extra traffic. Otherwise once entering the town centre from Borstal Hill / Canterbury Road (thus including vehicles perhaps increasingly to be approaching via Joy Lane with the completion of the improved Seasalter Lane) traffic could be diverted along Cromwell Road to the Gorrell Tank car park – although here much increased two-way traffic along a road engineered to be part of a reverse-direction one-way system in the early 1990's would not be without its own highways issues.

The other inescapable possible solution to work towards realising both ambitions would be to reconsider that fuller one-way system through the town centre for traffic heading north towards the sea, with the 'return' via the already engineered Cromwell Road, which would not only reduce traffic but also create the opportunity for a much improved and safer

“public realm” in a pedestrianised Harbour Street. However, this was not implemented in the past for various reasons and likely even now to be very contentious. It’s also not all clear who would be the “stakeholders” for this, especially since there seems no longer to be any formal Chamber of Commerce to represent the varying interests of town centre businesses.

D. ACTIVE TRAVEL

We are very pleased to see the continuing ambition to ‘finish’ the Crab & Winkle Way down to the Harbour but feel that other opportunities to improve walking and cycling routes both within and to / from CT5 have been missed in the Local Cycling and Walking Improvement Plan (LCWIP). Perhaps more opportunities may exist in the future when any further funding becomes more clear.

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