

Wickhambreaux Parish Council

Parish Clerk: Chenice Howard-Sparkes,

Telephone: [REDACTED]. Email: wickhambreauxpc@gmail.com

Website: <https://wickhambreaux-pc.gov.uk>

Comments on

'The Growth Options for the Canterbury District Local Plan'

Two councillors from Wickhambreaux Parish Council (WPC) attended the pair of sessions held by CCC Planning in June and July of 2021 to discuss the consultation document for the local plan. In the Zoom groups in which they participated it was noticeable that only one person was in favour of any of the proposals offered in any part of the consultation. That person was representing a housing developer, and therefore it can be assumed, had a financial interest in the outcome. All other attendees were Parish Councillors who perhaps are more concerned with the lives and environment of their parishioners.

Our general view on the proposed set of options is complete disappointment in the apparent lack of understanding of the outcomes for what is being suggested. The plans smack of a desire to be 'cutting edge' and display evidence of 'form not function'. Good design puts function first, and there is lack of consideration of function in the consultation. The plans seem to be driven by money, and not by any general consideration of use.

It seems to us that the options were conceived in a pre-Covid19/lockdown world. No-one knows what the world will be like in the immediate future. It's highly likely that things will change. We are expecting more people to be working from home and wonder what the future of the High Street will be with shops closing due to the increase in online shopping. The move to having meetings over the internet has had a huge boost and it's likely that this will continue, meaning less business travel and less commuting.

This is not a good time to be making radical decisions about the shape of the area. A less 'cutting edge' and more gentle approach to development is needed at this point, one which worries more about longer term sustainability and allows for greater flexibility to react to any change that may be needed.

Here are several points that have been raised in our discussions:

- The country is heading towards electric cars, but no-one seems to be asking whether the necessary power will be available to provide all the night-time charging for these vehicles. Rural villages are likely to be poorly supplied with charging points and in many cases, it may not be possible for many vehicle users to charge their own cars at home.
- What about water? We are mostly supplied by aquifers, and although we are now getting extreme rain events, is there going to be enough water to ensure the supply for all the houses that are planned even before this plan is put into place?

- What about foul drainage? It seems that mains drainage for current projects is having to be replaced by immense cesspits because of the problems at Stodmarsh. The cesspit solution is far from sustainable. Cesspits must be considered as a retrograde step that will eventually be adding to the carbon footprint of the area.
- Why is there a preferred option suggested by officers who have conceived the plans? This doesn't seem to be democratic.
- Councillors consider that the preferred option is "insane" and will result in the "death of Canterbury" as a place for residents of the wider area to use as their central service point. Canterbury will become even more of a city of cafés used by the students and tourists. Rural residents will shun the city more than they do now because of the difficulty of getting in and out of it.
- We wonder whether the preferred option is a 'sacrificial' one, the intentional crazy plan that will draw most approbation, leaving one of the other plans as primary because that plan is less criticised. It's certainly the case that the preferred plan drew most of the conversation at the two consultations, leaving not much time to consider the other options. There are certainly other unusable plans, has anyone looked at a map and wondered where a 'New freestanding settlement' can be sited?
- The planner's overall view is that Canterbury should become a place where there is no place for private vehicles. We expect the problems with air pollution to be solved by the mandatory increased use of electric vehicles. Residents outside the city will be forced to use Park-and-Ride to access basic shopping. Getting the large weekly shop that people are used to making on a bus is not an option. People will be forced onto the internet, or to the supermarkets at the coast, or the big ones at Westwood Cross. The large supermarkets that Canterbury now supports are inside the no-go area and will close or be relocated to outside the city. Are they happy with this?
- The city is planned to grow immensely, there seems little interest in providing connectivity or real infrastructure for these new residents. Planning seems to be all about houses and there is apparently little thought into how these new estates will be serviced. A bus service will not provide an easy way for them to get to the large food shops. They will want to drive, increasing the internal congestion.
- If you are running a small business from outside the city, you depend on the current car parks so you can make a quick journey into the city to see your banker, solicitor, or accountant. You cannot afford a half hour meeting to be elongated. The implication of a complete no-go for private vehicles will mean these businesses will be forced out of the city or they will need to use the internet considerably more than they would like.
- One of the aims is to expand business in the city, this doesn't seem at all likely when it is so hard to get staff in and out without a private vehicle. Small professional businesses will move out so their clients can access them more easily.

- Canterbury as a biking city? Has it occurred to anyone in the planning department that Canterbury sits in the middle of a saucer where all exit points require the ascent of a steep hill? There is one exit that requires a gentler journey, but we'll leave its discovery as an exercise for the reader. Biking is a leisure activity and cannot be relied on to provide real work-oriented transport.
- Better bus service? This will be dictated by the market and will be subject to the same financial pressures for rural communities that we are experiencing with broadband. We will never get fibre to our houses without significant public financial support. However, if it does happen, then once it's there, at least it won't be removed. Any publicly funded bus service will be a target for removal when the district is looking to make cuts. There are precedents of funding removal happening in the story of CCC's relationship with the Parishes.
- Several of the plans apparently require an additional 14,000 to 17,000 homes to generate the money to provide a barely specified ring road, and this in addition to the 10,000 new homes that are currently planned. We think the new housing demand imposed by the Government is already a big ask for the whole area and adding more houses to this list seems to be adding insult to injury to the local population.
 - At the July Zoom meeting, it emerged that it was unlikely that these homes would provide all the funding needed for these new roads.
 - 14,000 homes must imply around 28,000 new private vehicles. Adding these vehicles is just replacing one congested road system by another even more congested system. More roads, more vehicles, identical congestion.
 - There is no actual planning for the route of the road. It's a bit like President Trump's hurricane, a Sharpie drawn on a map. It seems somewhat of a fraud to ask about such a radical change costing so much without some idea of some realistic routes.

Conclusion

None of the possible plans seem particularly attractive to the WPC. It's far from clear that the preferred option, touted by Andrew Thompson, Planning Manager, as a 'radical' new plan, will be better than the current overall development scenario. Given the real uncertainty about the level of social change that we may be undergoing in the next year or so, developing progressively along existing lines seems a better idea.

Canterbury Focus A and the Coastal Focus plans seem to be sensible directions that build on existing developments in the area and represent the best of a bad job.