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Dear Geoff

Castle Way, Leybourne – Traffic Management Proposals

I would like to thank you and your colleague from Peter Brett Associates for the interesting and helpful preview of the traffic management options for Castle Way and Park Road in Leybourne after the new bypass is completed.

The Borough Council's meeting cycle is such that I will not be able to come back to you with a member endorsed view of the proposals by the end of your consultation period at the start of May. Therefore I am submitting some officer level comments that I hope you can accept on the basis that I may need to follow this up with some additional views when my members have had an opportunity to consider the matter later this month.

My comments will be very general observations on the broad principles for the important reason that I do not consider that the Borough Council is simply a consultee in this process. When the Kent Highways Partnership ended in 2005, the County Council agreed to continue sharing decisions on local highway matters with the Borough Council through the reconstituted Joint Transportation Board. I am sure both Borough and County members of the Joint Transportation Board expect that they will be invited to endorse the proposed way forward for the traffic management treatment of Castle Way and Park Road at its next meeting on 12 June or the one after that in early September.

A further reason why my observations, or those of Borough members, can only at this stage be at a level of broad principle is that anything more detailed needs to be informed by the results of the public consultation exercise you are currently conducting. It will be essential therefore that an analysis of the public consultation is included in the report to the Joint Transportation Board to help the members reach a view on the most acceptable option.

As far as the process of the public consultation is concerned, the County Council and its consultant Peter Brett Associates merit being commended for the thorough and professional way this has been conducted and the quality of presentation of the materials both at the earlier workshop and at the public exhibition itself. My one reservation on the process relates to how widely the interest and views of the local community have been engaged. My perception is that you have certainly captured the attention of the immediate neighbourhood of Castle Way and Park Road and been able to reflect these in the various options. I am not sure that this is equally so for the broader community beyond the immediate neighbourhood who will have strong views

about permanent closures of Castle Way, whichever location might be chosen, especially as this has not yet been overtly justified as really necessary.

This is an important point. Driving some of the proposed options are perceptions about what traffic might do after the bypass is opened rather than any real evidence about what will happen. Indeed the new bypass will create impacts on the local network that cannot at this stage be clearly forecast and will take a little time to settle down. On that basis and knowing that there is limited funding for the work, I would recommend strongly that, whatever option is finally adopted, it is installed experimentally in ways that are impermanent. Doing so will allow any required changes needed to deal with how the traffic really behaves after the bypass is opened to be carried out readily and without substantial abortive expenditure.

Current traffic conditions in Castle Way help explain why closure has its attractions for residents to address concerns about rat-running in the future. Similar concerns underpin the options for closing Birling Road. However I do not believe the case is the same. Birling Road is an important local access road notwithstanding its poor width and condition and it certainly merits a continued role in the local network after the bypass is finished. If conditions are then deemed to be unacceptable by the local community and those who need to use this road, the case for closure can be revisited.

I hope you find these comments constructive because they are meant to be. I recognise that a great deal of time and effort has been invested in trying to identify a package of measures to improve the well being of a community that has suffered greatly as traffic volumes have increased over the years on the A228. Subject to what the public consultation reveals, I believe the approach needs to be an iterative one capable of addressing any as-yet unpredictable changes in the local traffic patterns. I look forward to your report on these proposals to the Joint Transportation Board.

Yours sincerely

Steve Humphrey
Director of Planning & Transportation