TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

08 January 2008

Report of the Director of Planning Transport and Leisure

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 TM/07/03931/A10 – KENT INTERNATIONAL GATEWAY, LAND WEST OF JUNCTION 8, M20

Summary
To advise Members of this major application in Maidstone Borough and recommend that comment is made on the potential noise, air quality and possible transport impacts in this Borough.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This a major application submitted to Maidstone Borough Council. The site lies in the countryside to the east of Bearsted, close to M20 J8.

1.1.2 As the application has been submitted to Maidstone Borough Council and this Council is only a consultee. The details of the application are not held on our website. The full application may be viewed on the Maidstone website at the following location http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/kig_application.aspx or http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/planning__building_control/kent_international_gateway.aspx for the planning statement. The main website is a further route at http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/default.aspx.

1.1.3 The description of the development is set out below in extracts from the Design and Access Statement submitted by the applicants.

> *"The development is for a rail freight interchange, comprising an intermodal transfer area of 6.5 hectares, with associated large-scale warehousing and subsidiary commercial space, totalling 374,000m². The site is some 112.3 ha in overall area, situated on the south east side of Maidstone, immediately west of M20 junction 8. The Ashford to Maidstone East railway line divides the site into northern and southern parts and separates the western part from Bearsted, a community on the east side of the town. The situation of the site and the nature of the scheme are shown*

on the location plan, site plan and illustrative Masterplan provided on pages 5 and 6.

The intermodal area is a hard surfaced secured zone, served by new railway sidings and large cranes to a height of 25m. This facility enables container freight trains from either direction to be loaded and unloaded and the containers temporarily stored in-situ, or transferred to new warehousing close-by, to await onward transfer by road or rail, often after a consolidation process. Consolidation enables large loads of the same item to be broken down and integrated with items from other loads, to satisfy the particular requirements of manufacturers, distributors or retailers elsewhere in the country. In the case of the two largest warehouses on the attached illustrative masterplan totalling 171,000m², new railway sidings enter the buildings themselves, enabling goods to be loaded and unloaded in the interior without transfer to and from the intermodal area.

The need to retain goods at the facility for a period of time and to consolidate loads means that the warehousing needs to be located close to the new sidings and the intermodal area. The large scale of buildings is required because of the large quantities of storage space necessitated by rail freight transport. The scale is also required to make a range of rail services and destinations economic, this being necessary to attract business, underpin viability and allow for progressive growth in rail freight as the market develops.

The scheme responds to the strong thrust of Government policy, re-emphasised by the July 2007 rail White Paper, to encourage a shift in freight carriage from road to other more sustainable transport modes, in particular rail. This is part of the drive to reduce carbon emissions and combat climate change. Road freight distribution is one of the fastest growing sources of CO2 emissions and, without effective policy change, lorry transport is predicted to continue to increase substantially over the coming years. A reduction in lorry freight movement is also sought because of the need to reduce environmental intrusion and physical damage in both urban and rural areas.

In order to be effective, a strategic rail freight site has two fundamental requirements:-

i) A very close relationship to a trunk road serving a major established freight corridor, at a point where there is spare road capacity. It is thus able to draw lorry freight traffic off the road system effectively and conveniently. This also facilitates freight deliveries in the local area.
ii) Immediate access to a railway line with diverse wider connections, sufficient freight train capacity and a high standard of 'loading gauge'. The latter is the physical clearance in terms of bridges, cuttings and embankments to enable passage for the various different kinds of UK and European freight wagons.

In the context of these essential requirements, the KIG site is situated adjacent to Junction 8 onto the M20 motorway. The motorway is relatively uncongested at this point, becoming significantly more so to the west towards the M25 and London. The M20 is a key route through the London to the Channel freight corridor, the country's busiest. Being at a position well advanced from the Channel towards London and its surrounding towns, the site is well placed to serve this particular regional market as well as the rest of the country.

The site connects to the Ashford to Maidstone East railway line, which not only has ample rail freight capacity on account of the provisions of the Treaty which established the Channel Tunnel, but also has a high standard of loading gauge (W9). Trains coming from the Continent via the Channel Tunnel, a key anticipated market, can access the site via Ashford. To the west, the railway line serving the site provides straightforward access to the UK's spinal rail networks, via connections around the west of London.

A national distribution centre function is expected to predominate at KIG, but, as noted above, the scheme would also perform a regional distribution centre role."

1.2 Considerations

1.2.1 The overall key considerations in this case will need to be assessed in detail by Maidstone Borough Council. This Council's comments should focus on the aspects of the project that may have direct or indirect impacts on this Borough. In this latter respect it is relevant to consider whether there are any clear locational justification for the project being established here bearing in mind the potential traffic and transport implications of the scheme could be felt on the transport corridors that run through the Borough.

1.2.2 The applicants have submitted a planning statement that deals with broad planning policy, including the emerging South East Plan. The statement deals with the Panel Report of August 2007 mentioning the Panel's comment that there seems to be potential towards the north western end of the Channel Tunnel – London corridor. However I feel that it makes insufficient reference to the next part of the Panel report which goes on to point out that Channel Tunnel Rail Link can take W9 standard containers. It proceeds to suggest that that the text of the Plan be modified to identify a broad location for an intermodal link near to the intersection of the corridor, the CTRL and the M25. The importance of this proposal to move away from the Panels conclusions is related to the potential impacts of the traffic both by road to the intermodal depot and by rail through the Borough which would be generated by an intermodal depot. For instance an intermodal depot close to M25 with a connection to CTRL (now HS1 and which was built with an element of freight capacity) would almost eliminate any potential traffic impacts for this Borough. On this point The SE Plan Panel were clear on the general locational issues having considered representations and there seems little case to review this at this stage unless the Secretary of State takes a different view when considering the Panel's report.

1.2.3 The DHH has provided some comments on the application which directly relate to factors that are set out above. The environmental health issues raised by this application arise from the impact in Tonbridge and Malling of changes in traffic on the M20 and the Maidstone East railway line. Although the site is located to the east of Maidstone some distance from Tonbridge and Malling, it is likely that its impact in terms of changes in road and rail traffic will affect a much wider area. It is therefore crucial that in determining the application, Maidstone Borough Council is satisfied that these wider impacts have been properly assessed and any significant adverse effects have been mitigated so far as is possible.

1.2.4 In relation to noise and air quality, the impact of changes in traffic flow on the M20 in Tonbridge and Malling need to be assessed. Particular attention needs to be given to the impact on the Air Quality Management Area between junctions 4 and 5. It is noted that the Transport Assessment Report refers to some consistencies between the work undertaken by the applicant's transport consultant and the Highway Agency's modelling of the M20 between junctions 4 and 8. The Transport Assessment refers to the possibility of the impact of the proposed KIG development being added to the Agency's model. It is not known if this has been done.

1.2.5 Whilst the general concept of shifting freight from road to rail is to be applauded, it must be remembered that increased use of rail is not without potential environmental impact, particularly related to noise.

1.2.6 There are some major areas of concern which Maidstone Borough Council needs to consider that have potential imp0lications for this Borough and these can be summarised as follows:

- How the proposal should be assessed in relation to the SE Plan Panel's recommendations and whether the application is premature in advance of clearer national and regional policy on such major proposals of this nature,

- How it can be satisfied that the impact of additional freight trains on the existing railway has been assessed and, if appropriate, mitigated,

- How it can be satisfied that the estimated levels of transport impact of Heavy Goods vehicles on the M 20/A 20 corridor is correct and can be accommodated without additional pressure,

- How it can be satisfied that the impacts of traffic on noise and air quality on M20 in the vicinity of junctions 4 and 5 have been adequately assessed and that appropriate mitigation is provided.

1.2.7 At present I have some doubt as to whether these matters can all be satisfactorily resolved and the implications on the Borough could be potentially significant if that were the case and the scheme proceeded. Consequently it is appropriate that the Council raises initial objections based on these concerns.

1.3 Legal Implications

1.3.1 None.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 None directly arising from this report, although the Council may well need to be represented at any future public inquiry should that ultimately be the decision-making forum for the proposal.

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 There are potential environmental risks arising for parts of the Borough, depending on the assessment of the application.

1.6 Recommendations

1.6.1 Maidstone Borough Council **BE INVITED TO CONSIDER** the factors set out in Section 1.2 above in reaching its decision on this case and unless these matters can be satisfactorily resolved the Council **RAISE OBJECTIONS** to the proposed development.

The Director of Planning Transport and Leisure confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers: contact: Lindsay Pearson

Application documents and plans relating to the proposed scheme

Steve Humphrey
Director of Planning Transport and Leisure