

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

18 November 2009

Report of the Director of Planning Transport and Leisure

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 KENT INTERNATIONAL GATEWAY (KIG) AND KENT ROAD FREIGHT INTERCHANGE

Summary

To provide an update on progress with the KIG public inquiry and a situation report on the emerging proposal at Borough Green/Platt.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 As the Board will be aware a major Public Inquiry is currently in session following an appeal against the non-determination by Maidstone Borough Council of a planning application to site a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange in the vicinity of Bearsted, near to Junction 8 of M20 motorway.
- 1.1.1 The proposal covers an area of 112 hectares (about 285 acres) and incorporates a new rail access to the Maidstone East/Ashford line, and inter-modal freight transfer and storage facility to enable containers to be unloaded from trains or lorry trailers, considerable areas of warehousing, business and industrial units.
- 1.1.2 The main players at the Public Inquiry are the promoters of the scheme, Maidstone Borough Council as the planning authority, Kent County Council as the highways authority, local Parish Councils, the CPRE and a number of local groups who have formed to seek to prevent KIG going ahead.
- 1.1.3 The Borough Council has submitted objections to the proposal primarily related to potential air quality concerns adjoining the road and rail routes through Tonbridge and Malling. To a large degree these have been able to be overcome during the preparation of technical evidence being prepared in advance of the Inquiry. In this matter the Council has engaged specialist consultants to ensure its position is thoroughly defended and a statement of common ground has been able to be agreed relating to this issue. This has not removed the Council's objection entirely but has reduced the concern to a relatively small number of properties and the Inspector will need to have regard to that in his findings on the case overall.

1.2 Proposed Kent Rail and Freight Terminal Borough Green and Platt

- 1.2.1 As preparations for the KIG appeal commenced in the early part of this year, broad proposals emerged for a potential alternative to KIG on a site at Borough Green and Platt. This is being promoted by Cemex and other owners of land to the north east of Borough Green between the M26 and A25 extending eastwards to the A20 and M26 junction at Nepicar and Wrotham Heath.
- 1.2.2 Although this scheme has received widespread and recent media coverage it remains at an early stage of preparation. It seems the proposal includes a connection to the West Malling to London railway line with new railway sidings, warehousing, associated commercial development and new highway links to the site near to the M26/A20 junction. The land involved includes primarily mineral working sites that are in various stages of excavation and restoration.
- 1.2.3 It is understood that the primary purpose of the KRAFT transport interchange will be to transfer goods brought in by rail to smaller consignments for onward transport by road. We understand that 12 trains per day are currently envisaged travelling mainly between Continental Europe and the site and that some 200,000 containerised units could be handled every year. It also proposes a new rail borne aggregates depot unlike KIG. The project includes a reference to new road infrastructure but this does not entirely accord with the re-emerging scheme for the Borough Green Bypass. Beyond that there is little detailed information and certainly no business case at present to support the proposal. It is also understood that a planning application will only be advanced in the event that the KIG scheme ultimately fails the appeal process.
- 1.2.4 Cemex has made some written submissions to the Inspector of the KIG Inquiry advancing their site as an alternative but not advancing any significant detail of the basis for the project. In order to make the Borough Council's position clear, we have also submitted written evidence to advise the Inspector that the scheme has not been worked up any detail that could or should warrant for his serious consideration. We have also sought to draw attention to the very significant planning and transport issues and difficulties that we foresee at the Borough Green/Platt site.
- 1.2.5 Quite apart from a range of local planning considerations that would be vital in protecting the interests of local communities, the site is also within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Although at a regional level, the need for such facilities has been recognised, there has been no specific or detailed case of "very special circumstances" advanced to support the Borough Green/Platt proposal. Our preliminary view is that the site does not accord with the policies of the South East Plan and neither has it taken into account the prospect of alternative sites including those in non-green belt locations or those already granted planning permission elsewhere in the region.

1.2.6 We do not believe that any further significant work is being done on the KRAFT scheme in advance of the outcome of the KIG proposals. Nevertheless we are carefully monitoring the progress at the KIG Public Inquiry and in all that we are doing in that respect we have taken advice from Counsel to ensure our position is protected.

1.2.7 It now seems certain that should a formal and properly constructed proposal for the Borough Green/Platt site come forward it will fall to the newly constituted Infrastructure Planning Commission to determine its fate, unless any incoming Government moves quickly to dismantle that mechanism. If the case was to be a matter for the IPC then the Borough Council as the relevant local authority would be consulted prior to the submission of the application and to be a statutory party during the examination by the IPC.

1.3 Legal Implications

1.3.1 There are none arising as a direct result of this report

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 There are none as a direct result of this report although costs have been incurred as part of preparations for the KIG inquiry and should the KRAFT project emerge as a formal proposal in due course there will be significant but as yet unknown financial implications for the Council.

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 The Council's position in respect of both proposals must be carefully played in pursuit of its planning policies for the area.

1.6 Policy Considerations

1.6.1 The main policy considerations guiding the Council's approach to these matters are within the Local Development Framework.

Background papers:

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All public Papers held in connection with the KIG public inquiry

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