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## Great Easthall Bus Lane, Sittingbourne

To: **(Swale Joint Transportation Board – 13<sup>h</sup> January 2020)**

Main Portfolio Area: **Growth, Environment & Transport**

By: **Simon Jones, Director of Highways, Transportation & Waste**

Classification: **For Information**

Ward: **Murston / Teynham and Lynsted**

Division: **Sittingbourne North / Swale East**

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**Summary:** This report considers a request received by a Ward Member to allow general traffic to use the bus-only link between Oak Road and the Great Easthall housing development

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### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This report is intended to inform members about requests that have been made to a Ward Member by residents of the Great Easthall housing development, wishing to allow cars to use the bus-only link road that connects the development to Oak Road.
- 1.2 Members are asked to consider the request and recommend whether any further action is taken in this regard.

### **2 Background**

- 2.1 The Great Easthall housing development was granted planning approval in 2004 under planning reference SW/02/1180, and was assessed on the basis that all vehicular traffic would access the wider highway network via the distributor standard road, Swale Way, rather than through the existing residential streets in Murston that would have a significant impact on traffic volumes and the amenity of those residents.
- 2.2 In order to encourage the use of public transport, and discourage car journeys to shorter destinations within the town or nearby amenities/services, a bus link was provided on the expectation that it would generate around 4 bus movements an hour through Oak Road, and have a minimal impact on the capacity of the associated highway network and on existing residents.
- 2.3 Due to the proximity of the development site to the town centre and local amenities, and the convenience afforded to public transport to reach these destinations easier than by car, lower parking provision was provided within the earlier phases of the development to further encourage the use of sustainable transport.
- 2.4 The bus link was opened for use by buses in 2008, after the earlier phases of development at the western end of the site had been occupied, and was originally controlled by traffic signals that showed green at one end of the route and red at the other, which then reversed when activated by an approaching bus fitted with a transponder. The single lane width of

the bus link and lack of intervisibility between each end was designed as such so that general traffic could not see whether it would have clear passage through the restriction.

- 2.5 The traffic signals were later revised to their current system showing red at both ends, due to some cars ignoring the bus only signage, and passing through while their direction of travel remained on green. The traffic signals now only activate a short green cycle to allow a bus through when approached by one fitted with a transponder.
- 2.6 Despite this system of traffic control, some non-permitted vehicles continued to contravene the bus link under red light conditions, and the police confirmed that they would not take action against offenders unless a Traffic Regulation Order was in place to formally restrict use to buses only. Consequently, the Swale JTB approved the making of the corresponding Traffic Regulation Order in June 2010, and the police have since been able to enforce the restrictions.
- 2.7 In January 2019, due to an apparent increase in the frequency of vehicles abusing the link and confronting buses head on, the bus operator temporarily suspended services in and out of Great Easthall. Following a police operation in February 2019 to catch and penalise offenders, they resumed bus services once again as the offending appeared to have ceased immediately afterwards.
- 2.8 During the last Quality Bus Partnership meeting held in November 2019, the bus operator suggested their drivers were reporting that the number of vehicles contravening the restriction had been increasing again.
- 2.9 A Ward Member has now been approached by some residents of Great Easthall, requesting that the bus link be opened up to provide them with a convenient driving route to and from the development.
- 2.10 Further to the above, Arriva informed KCC on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019 that the current level of violation by cars had become too great, and they were withdrawing their services again with immediate effect due to the safety concerns. They have confirmed that they will not resume services to Great Easthall until enforcement has been addressed. The development is therefore not being served by any buses at the time of writing this report, and the issue of enforcement will be looked into accordingly.

### **3 Appraisal**

- 3.1 The roads and footways forming the Great Easthall housing development are currently unadopted, including the bus link, although it is intended that the Highway Authority adopt these as publicly maintainable highways once they have been constructed to the Highway Authority's satisfaction and any remedial works completed. Consequently, the developer is the street manager at this time for the development.
- 3.2 Changing the operation of the bus link would involve physical works to facilitate other vehicles use, and the extinguishment of the Traffic Regulation Order that currently prohibits any vehicles other than buses from using it. The physical works needed are likely to involve the removal of the traffic signals and widening of the road to allow two-way movement, due to insufficient vehicle queuing capacity ahead of the signals.
- 3.3 The developer has constructed the bus link in accordance with their planning obligation and will not be expected to bear the costs of undertaking the changes required to meet the residents request. Any costs involved would therefore have to be funded from other sources
- 3.4 As mentioned in the background section of this report, access to Great Easthall was considered at the planning application stage and a bus only vehicular access to the development through the existing residential streets in Murston was proposed. This would have been a factor that would have influenced those residents views on the proposals

during the associated consultation process when they made their representations, and an aspect officers and Members would have borne in mind on how this would impact on the lives of the existing local community when weighing up the planning balance of the development proposals.

- 3.5 The planning application was also supported by a comprehensive Transport Assessment that studied the effect of traffic distribution, and this included strategic modelling of the local highway network, and detailed analysis of junctions that would be directly impacted by the development proposals.
- 3.6 The effect of allowing all vehicles to access the development from Oak Road could have a significant impact on the local highway network within Murston, with the vehicles associated to circa 600 houses switching distribution patterns to use this route, as would employment traffic associated to the industrial units on Swale Way in order to short cut the town centre or congestion in Dolphin Way/Church Road. In addition, there is the potential that through traffic with origins and destinations much further afield could also see the route as an attractive cut through to shorten journeys. The Transport Assessment would have had to consider an entirely different distribution in this scenario, and the strategic model amended and additional junction analysis carried out to account for this change in routing.
- 3.7 It is likely that in addition to Oak Road, Tonge Road and Church Road (Murston) being used by development traffic to access destinations in the town centre and to the west of the site, vehicles attracted towards Faversham will increase flows on Lomas Road, Scraps Hill, Church Road (Tonge), Hempstead Lane and Lower Road too. These are relatively narrow country lanes, where it would not be desirable to increase vehicular activity, particularly around Tonge Mill where local residents have recently made their concerns known about traffic movements.
- 3.8 The traffic signal junctions at Swanstree Avenue and Murston Road would be expected to see an increase in demand if the bus lane were opened to traffic, and possibly more vehicle movements through the A2 between Sittingbourne and Faversham as this route could become more attractive for some destinations instead of choosing the M2 corridor when accessed via Swale Way. These currently experience some congestion under existing conditions, and it would follow that the operation of these would suffer as a result of increased levels of traffic routing through.

#### **4 Conclusions**

- 4.1 It is considered that the proposed request by residents of Great Easthall would undermine the promotion of sustainable modes of travel associated with the development, which was fundamental to the acceptance of this site for housing during the planning approval process. In addition, the proposal has the potential to significantly alter traffic flows in the local area to the detriment of highway capacity, highway safety and residential amenity.

#### **5 Recommendations**

- 5.1 It is recommended that the contents of this report are noted, and no further action be taken in respect to removing the current vehicle restrictions.

Future Meeting if applicable:	Date:
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***Annex List***

<i>Annex A</i>	<i>Constructed Bus Link Scheme</i>
<i>Annex B</i>	<i>Photograph of bus link from Oak Road</i>



Annex B

