

Leader's Statement to Full Council – Wednesday 21 February 2018

Update on HGV Parking

In my Leader's Statement last month I advised Members that I had met with Kent County Council Member for Planning, Highways Transport and Waste and his senior officers to discuss the location or locations of potential lorry parks within Swale Borough. Since that meeting the problem with HGVs parking overnight in laybys and slip roads on the A2 tragically led to a multiple fatality when a car clipped a foreign HGV on the A2 just west of Canterbury.

Myself and the Leaders of the other two district councils along the eastern A2, Canterbury City Council and Dover District Council, wrote to the Department for Transport to communicate our concern with this situation. We explained that the HGV drivers frequently use all the laybys on this section of strategic road network leaving no safe area for other motorists to use. Parked HGVs frequently overhang onto the running lanes of the A2 creating a hazard for passing motorists. Additionally their actions cause issues for residents living in nearby villages as the HGV drivers regularly leave their engines running and leave their rubbish behind when they move on.

The construction of the third Thames crossing will concentrate more traffic onto the M2/A2 corridor and bifurcation of Port of Dover freight traffic will increase this further, thus exacerbating an already difficult situation. There do not appear to be regular highway patrols on this eastern length of the A2 so HGV drivers know that there are unlikely to be repercussions from their parking.

As Leaders of the three district councils we formally requested that the DfT and Highways England provide suitable HGV parking close to the A2, possibly at one of the locations that were investigated during options for the Operation Stack lorry park. Once a suitable location is provided then we requested that overnight parking bans in the laybys are introduced and that sufficient highway patrols are extended this far east to enforce any restrictions.

LDF Consultants Report:

The Council is at the earliest stages of preparing the next Local Plan. The Plan will need to address the challenges facing the Borough – from transport, the economy and, especially the significant increases that it will need to make to housing provision from 2022. To help this early thinking, consultants were commissioned to undertake work to look at what the future drivers of change in Swale might be and what options there might be to deliver the scale of housing growth that the Borough is likely to face. Such is the scale of that possible growth and the nature of our other challenges, their work considered new and more radical options to delivering housing growth – including the possibility of new settlements.

As the consultant's report itself notes, their work does not represent the views or policy of the Borough Council or its officers – they are entirely their own for the Council to consider as it sees fit. The Council will drive the key decisions needing to be made. The future shape and content of the Local Plan will be taken by Members later in the process, following full consultation and engagement with all parties.

Mayor of London's Consultation

The Mayor has published the draft London Plan which is open for consultation until 2 March. This is the development strategy for the whole of London and provides a framework which the London Boroughs will need to adhere to in making their own local plans. However the scale and influence of London has across the whole South East is considerable and a number of concerns common to all Wider South East (WSE) local planning authorities have been identified.

The London housing targets being proposed through this plan and the lack of clear detail as to how they will be met is a key area. The scale is staggering.

- The currently adopted London Plan has a housing target of 29,000 dwellings per annum.
- The consultation plan has a target of 66,000 dwellings per annum based on the GLA's own projections and this only covers the first ten years of the Plan period.
- Evidence indicates that housing land supply exists for 65,000 dpa, which is to be achieved through very high density development.
- This means that even on the Mayor's figures there is a shortfall in housing land of 10,000 dwellings in London over the next 10 years or so.

However, the Dept for Housing Communities and Local Government (HCLG) target for London is 72,400 dpa. (as set out in the Planning for Homes in the Right Places documentation from Sept 2017). It is this set of figures which HCLG is now advising local planning authorities to use to prepare their plans. Using these figures, the deficit in the London housing land supply over the next 10 years could be as high as 74,000 dwellings.

It is unclear how discrepancies between the GLA target and HCLG targets will be resolved, or what the potential impact for other local planning authorities in the Home Counties could be, not least as they have a 'Duty to Cooperate' with the Mayor. The Mayor is not proposing to review Green Belt boundaries, and so reduces options for meeting London housing targets. This raises the prospect of considerable amounts of unmet London housing need effectively 'jumping' the Green Belt to local planning authorities in the Home Counties.

For the first time the draft London Plan is including strategic policies on engaging with the Wider South East local authorities, in particular on strategic infrastructure. These are high level and non-specific other than working with 'willing partners'. The main focus is on radial routes out of London, including the Lower Thames

Crossing/M2 /Channel Tunnel corridor. With the Thames Estuary Commission due to report in May, we need to ensure that economic development opportunities for Swale are very much on the agenda, and not just a focus for massive housing development and unsustainable commuting patterns.

There is little recognition in the London Plan of the extremely high development targets which WSE districts face in their own right, or the considerable amounts of supporting infrastructure or utilities which are needed to support that; or indeed whether the building industry has the capacity to deliver it all.

Whilst the infrastructure issues Swale and many other districts face may not be of the regional scale which the Mayor has identified, without them we cannot meet our own development needs, let alone any additional exported needs.

A detailed response to the London Plan will be sent to the Mayor from Swale BC and is aligned with very similar responses from Kent Leaders; the Kent Housing Group and points raised through the South East England Councils discussion with GLA.

Rural Crime:

Rural Crime encompasses a variety of different issues including theft of farm machinery, plant and vehicles; livestock theft/worrying; equine crime; flytipping; hare coursing; large scale fruit theft; and heritage crime.

Rural crime has a big impact on communities as it can have a detrimental impact on farmer's finances – losing livestock, fruit or other machinery or vehicles are not that easy to replace. Rural crime can also result in significant damage to fields and gates. There is an increasing fear of crime in rural communities that can feel isolated and bombarded by these different types of issues.

Kent Police have a dedicated Rural Liaison Team to tackle rural crime and they work very closely with Swale Borough Council through the Community Safety Partnership. There is a regular Rural Policing meeting to enable the sharing of information between the Police, Swale Borough Council and the National Farmers Union. The Rural Policing Team have also worked closely with our Environmental Response team to target waste carriers through Operation Assist.

The Community Safety Partnership have also recently organised a Rural Crime training session that sought to raise awareness with councillors, parish councils and partner agencies. This included highlighting what rural crime is, including the possible hidden modern slavery issues in rural communities; and the role that the Police, NFU and Crime stoppers play in tackling it. Attendees were also asked to highlight what actions they could take to help prevent rural crime and these are being considered by the CSP.

Cllr Andrew Bowles
Council Leader