



KELLY TOLHURST MP

Member of Parliament for Rochester and Strood

Mr S Ee
Assistant Director – Regeneration
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Via email: futurehoo@medway.gov.uk

6th April 2021

Dear Mr Ee

'New Routes to Good Growth' consultation – Housing Infrastructure Fund

I am writing to you as the Member of Parliament for Rochester and Strood to outline my position on the 'New Routes to Good Growth' consultation in relation to the Housing Infrastructure Fund where Medway has secured £170 million to improve the highways, railways, and environmental landscape on the Hoo Peninsula and surrounding area.

The plans are wholly contained in my constituency and this is the largest infrastructure project that Medway has undertaken in a generation. It is essential that any proposed work is justifiable, deliverable, will also protect our environment and greenspaces, and will not adversely impact my constituents.

I have already raised several of my concerns with you directly in previous meetings and in formal correspondence prior and during this consultation period.

Throughout this document, I will review each workstream in turn. I will outline some of the concerns that residents have brought to my attention, but I will also provide my own personal view on the proposals as well.

1. Highways

Firstly, I have received several emails from residents who are specifically opposed to the Phase 1 highway work to create a new junction at Higham Road and overbridge on the A289 Hasted Road. It was concerning to learn that some residents in the immediate vicinity of this work had not been informed prior to the consultation, but I am pleased that the HIF team had rectified this and also extended the consultation to allow more time for residents to make their views heard.

I know that the Council have held separate meetings with residents to discuss the concerns held regarding the flyover, however, I note that some residents believe that there are more questions to answer and that the meetings have not been long enough.

I understand that groundworks are currently being undertaken to assess whether the flyover is deliverable. I strongly feel that this work should have been carried out prior to the consultation and I am alarmed that the Council is unsure whether it is possible to deliver the flyover despite consulting on it.

Residents have submitted their own alternative proposals to the flyover and the councillors for Strood Rural ward have also made suggestions which I understand the HIF team are giving consideration to. I would be most grateful if you could also keep me updated on your review of these proposals.

I would also like to endorse the comments made by Cllr Gary Etheridge in his email (dated 1st April 2021) to you and other members of the HIF team where he requests a design review of the Wainscott Flyover and Sans Pareil roundabout and a review of the proposed alternative routes.

With regards to phases 2, I have concerns regarding the spur link road proposed between the Main Road Hoo and Bell's Lane roundabout. From the consultation document, this would appear to only be a single carriageway road which I feel this will be insufficient to help with traffic congestion on the A228 especially in light of the large amount of housing proposed and the expansion of commercial premises at Kingsnorth (such as Amazon and Uniper's new MedwayOne estate). In light of this, we could see the same problems with egress on and off the Peninsula in a few years time when the single carriage way roads reach capacity.

I also oppose the spur link road as its construction will be built through the southern end of the Deangate Ridge Golf Course which will mean that a large part of the course will be lost – this is an important local asset with the greenspace enjoyed by local residents and essential for natural wildlife.

I was proud to campaign with the community against the closure of Deangate in 2018 and will continue to protect any development on this site.

I see that local improvements will be made to Upchat Road roundabout, however, I understand that this is a military road and not under the control of the local authority. Similarly, Woodfield Way is used by the military to access their base in Wainscott. I would like to ask whether Medway Council have approached the military to share details of their proposals and what solutions are being considered with regards to the crossing of heavy military vehicles on the roads incorporating phases 1 and 2.

Furthermore, the proposed changes to the Bell's Lane roundabout and Dux Court Road in phase 3 are lacking in detail. It would appear Dux Court Road will be widened to accommodate the new signalised junction, however, there is a weight restricted bridge along Dux Court Road and the impact that heavy congestion may have at this location needs to be fully considered.

The improvements to Four Elms Hill roundabout in phase 5 are encouraging, but they are long overdue and should have been completed with the funding from the LGF - years before the HIF bid came into fruition. It has a history of being an extremely dangerous junction, and sadly many local residents have lost their lives on this busy road. Having a signal-controlled crossing is a step in the right direction, however, I am concerned at the effect that this could have on pollution levels in this area which are already very high. I also still feel that more can be done to address safety, including the installation of traffic cameras to deter excessive speed.

Finally, on the road scheme, the changes to Sans Pareil roundabout and Wulfere Way in Phase 6 are far from satisfactory and again are lacking detail. In relocating the access road, residents have raised concerns regarding pedestrian safety and the impact of rising pollution levels in Wainscott. With commercial traffic going to or from the Medway City Estate, I would like to ask whether businesses on this estate have been advised of these proposals as they will undoubtedly have consequences to their business operations.

As I have mentioned throughout the consultation period, it would be useful to see a schedule of works so that residents can understand when each phase of the highway workstream will start and finish.

Understandably, the consultation puts great emphasis on the need to improve the major routes on the Peninsula, however, there appears to have been little consideration given to address the improvements which will be needed to local existing roads in the villages, particularly Hoo and High Halstow, which are due to see an increased level of housebuilding in the near future and the current issues with

traffic congestion could be amplified if local roads are not improved prior to the construction of new homes.

On a final note, as one of the RSPB's Nightingale Species Champions, I am concerned about the impact that certain phases of the highway scheme could potentially have on the habitat of Nightingales. This is particularly relevant to phase 2 which will see significant construction work through Deangate Golf Club – a breeding ground for the Nightingale.

2. Rail

In writing this response, it is extremely disappointing that significant changes to the rail scheme have been made while the consultation is still ongoing. I note that this is due to the analysis showing a low demand for the Medway rail link which would connect the Hoo Peninsula to other stations in Medway and beyond.

Following the removal of the Medway link, I feel that we are in a position where the rail service will not actually benefit residents or our local economy. I note that the Council may add the link in the future if there is a demand for the service, but there is little clarity on when this might be and how money will be ringfenced to ensure that this will work will go ahead.

We are now solely relying on London commuters to bolster the service and keep the scheme relevant. However, as I have previously stated, I have significant concerns about the viability of the scheme especially in light of the Covid-19 pandemic where we have seen a dramatic fall in commuters using rail service and a change in habits as more people now start to work from home.

I am also deeply concerned that design and cost work for the new station have not been completed ahead of the consultation. We still do not have any information about whether this scheme can be delivered to budget or indeed to the timescales set by Government.

Now that the line from Hoo will only be bound for London terminals, the railway scheme will do little to improve traffic congestion on the Peninsula. The majority of residents will continue to use their cars to travel to and from work.

If changes are already being made to the rail scheme, I would argue that changes can also be made to the highway and environmental workstream as well.

3. SEMS/Environmental

Compared to the other two workstreams, the consultation document has an absence of detail regarding the full vision for the environmental sites which will be constructed. Out of the 64-page document, only seven pages relate to the SEMS project and most of these are made up of photos that have little substance or information.

Much of the focus in the document is on the Cockham Community Parkland proposal and how any future sites must be in line with the design principles outlined in the previous consultation on the parkland.

I understand that the HIF team are working on a draft vision for the SEMS/Environmental element of the scheme and that the consultation is being used to help define a local vision that reflects the interests of current communities and path users. However, as I have requested throughout the consultation, it would be good to see the draft vision for each proposed site so that residents have a better understanding of what greenspaces will be protected from development.

I would also add that there is a distinct lack of environmental information in the consultation, particularly around air quality. I note that the environmental impact assessments will not be completed until long after the consultation has closed and I hope that these will take into consideration the effect that these proposals will have on air pollution on the Peninsula and the surrounding areas.

Without these crucial environmental impact assessments, it is very difficult to understand the impact that these proposals may have on the natural landscape and how environmental concerns will be addressed.

Conclusion:

As I have said before, Medway Council's new Local Plan is predicated on the success of the HIF bid. If one part of the proposals fall down, this could leave the entire scheme in jeopardy.

It is unsettling to see that we are still without a draft Local Plan and that key parts of the evidence base are outstanding, such as the Strategic Transport Assessment, and yet we are continuing with a major infrastructure project without a plan to give some direction as to the way forward for development in Medway.

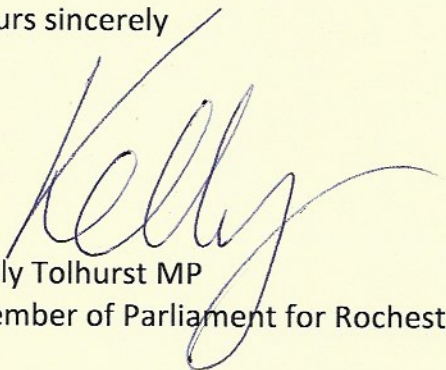
I remain deeply sceptical that the HIF programme can be delivered to time and to budget, and the consultation document has not provided me with the confidence I need to support the scheme.

I would also argue that the validity of this consultation is now in question given that key parts of the railway workstream have been changed, and as investigation works on the deliverability of the proposed Wainscott flyover had not been completed prior the period of consultation.

Therefore, I am unable to give my backing to any part of the proposals due to the concerns that I have raised above and I would like to put on record my objection to the proposed work.

I look forward to having the opportunity to comment further on proposals during the HIF's implementation.

Yours sincerely



Kelly Tolhurst MP
Member of Parliament for Rochester and Strood