

Notes for the Microsoft Teams Meeting

8th September 2020 at 3.00 pm

Invited to attend:

Minister Rachel Maclean

Damian Green MP

Gerry Clarkson – leader of Ashford Borough Council

Ben Rimmington - DfT

Kyle Cliff – DfT

Clair Bell – County Councillor

Paul Bartlett – Borough Councillor

Mersham Parish Council Chairman – Peter Turley

Sevington with Finberry Parish Council Chairman – Rick Martin

Mersham Parish Councillors – Stewart Ross, Geoffrey Fletcher, Melanie Wells, Peter Hawkins, Gavin Murphy, Kenton Stewart

Sevington with Finberry Parish Councillors – Jan Oakley-Hills, Robyn Bartram, Andy Whybrow, James Townsend

Linda Arthur – Village Alliance

Christine Drury - CPRE

Clerk to both Parish Councils – Tracey Block

Introduction by Minister Maclean

Minister for the EU Exit in place to minimise impact on Britain and in particular in Kent – minimising impact on residents of Kent.

The big picture as far as negotiations are in process of negotiating agreements and looking at concluding trade agreements and looking at how the effects of disruption can be minimised and looking at implementing plans to alleviate the disruption. The amount of disruption depends on how ready the hauliers are, disruption might be because the hauliers may not be ready at the borders.

Also this site is to be used for control of traffic movements.

Apologies for the way this has been carried out so far – we were not transparent but we are now trying very hard and looking at concerns and understanding the issues of the unique situation. We are committed to assisting the locals and understanding the problems here.

Introductory remarks from Damian Green MP and Gerry Clarkson, if they so wish

Damian Green - Thank you to Rachel – this is unusual and good that the PCs have direct contact with the Minister and the officers.

Handover to Ben Rimmington/Kyle Cliff to address the questions raised in the letter from Mersham Parish Council

Cllrs Martin and Turley to be invited to raise follow-up questions on specifics on behalf of their Councils as we proceed through the questions.

Sevington questions to be put forward initially:

Rick Martin - PC meeting last night has produced the latest questions.

People living on the doorstep of the site and want to know will they be financially compensated for house price and disruption?

Minister Maclean – entirely understand these concerns will minimise disruption. There are strict rules we are governed by and when the compensation can be provided.

Ben Rimmington – Director in DfT, appreciate why the question is being asked. Appreciate the disruption and grateful for involvement. We do not think this leads to any compensation because this is a site that will only be used for 5 years and we do not see this as something that will be brought forward.

Rick Martin – Regarding the specifics of the plans for the sites, when will local residents see the plans and be able to engage with regard to these?

Ben Rimmington – we are not hiding these, they have only been drawn up recently. Kyle is to share his screen.

Kyle Cliff - There will be a web portal for this will go out next week and letters will be sent out with links to these. Feedback will be sought and we will look at feedback and then follow through with drawing up the plans. A plan was shown.

This scheme will be heavily reduced after 6 months – We have taken the design and layout for the perimeters for the previous plan and we are following this through and will adhere as close as possible to the previously approved plan. Landscaping and visual impact will be as would have been in original plan.

Rick Martin – there is soil being piled up on other lands, drainage is being put in when there are no plans submitted for these.

Kyle Cliff – there are no plans to develop the eastern side. We are shifting earthwork and have to leave on the eastern side until we can dispose of it and once we can, it will be disposed of. Parish Councils can look at what would be preferred of on this area.

Rick Martin – with regard to stakeholder engagement, parishioners felt the initial news was badly handled and people want to know when stakeholder engagement will improve. Need reassurance that stakeholder engagement will improve.

Minister Maclean – I have individually guaranteed that this will improve. Sure that the plans will assist, need to keep all lines of communication open. Would be keen to improve as best we can. We want to improve the engagement and understand that this will have affected people.

Rick Martin – is there an engagement committee coming forward that Parish Council can be involved in?

Kyle Cliff – virtual stakeholder event held 2/3 weeks ago which PCs were not invited to. We have built up our engagement team and have plans to action these. Very keen to provide as much information as possible.

Ben and Kyle – happy to engage with Parish Councils.

Mersham Parish Council

Pete Turley – important to limit the encroachment on the parish of Mersham and wish to

protect the aspect of the village and do not wish it to extend beyond Highfield Lane. Want to keep the field as a Green corridor, think that this might be encouraged by the Minister. Need to protect this area in perpetuity.

Kyle Cliff – we do not want to develop this land and we are very happy to have discussions with regard to this piece of land. We are aware of the sensitivity of this site. This is a time limited development and will be available in the future.

Gerry Clarkson – we want to work together. Do appreciate what you are facing and we are pleased that you have re-asserted that this is only assisting in the transition period. The eastern area of land MUST be protected and I am adamant that this will be an environmental buffer. We are the largest Borough in Kent and I will be looking at a planning map to ensure that this piece of land will be taken ownership to keep as a very protected area.

Ashford Borough Council is fully behind protecting this piece of land.

Pete Turley - Greatly appreciate this – what will be first action to progress this?

Pete Turley – You talk about temporary nature of this. What will happen next? After the 5 year period?

Ben Rimmington – the first thing that will happen is we will get planning approval so that will not prejudice the parcel of land to the East.

After 5 years – Kyle was discussing that the lorry holding capacity is only for 6 months, this need will have dissipated after 6 months. After that DeFRA and HMRC will be processing lorries. After 5 years, the private sector could well take on the checking of lorries that HMRC are undertaking. If required after 5 years, further permission would be sought.

Pete Turley – the village is concerned that the site would be sold in order to maximise the Government’s return and there is concern about further disruption after 5 years, would like reassurance that future disruption will be minimised.

Ben Rimmington – we want to work with Borough Council for future provision on this site and will come back to the Borough Council to decide what comes next.

Minister Maclean – with regard to the proposition behind your question, the government is preparing for this transition period. We take the view that we need to spend money in order to mitigate against the unknowns. I do understand the beauty of the site.

Pete Turley – thank you.

Further questions

Linda Arthur – represent the Village Alliance, looking to protect our villages from development. There is an ancient hedge on the side of the lanes, now that Highfield will not be realigned can the hedge be kept. There have been archaeological remains on this site.

Minister Maclean – remains have been checked, they are not Saxon.

Kyle Cliff – there are no plans to remove this hedge. Toby Howe is managing the construction for KCC.

Toby Howe – Project managing the site. Hedge line is being kept, in the South site, this will remain and no intention to remove it. Archaeologists have said the wall is not Saxon and was 18th Century. Bones/remains are being analysed. Local people will be provided with leaflet about what has been found on site.

Clair Bell – Looking adjoining site. KCC has a target of planting 1.6 million trees and wonder if we could use this for planting up on this site – Parish Councils could communicate with regard to this.

Communication is key – in Ashford we previously sent out a weekly email to residents/Parish Councillors etc, an update from the Planning Officer was sent out. Thought that was very useful.

Minister Maclean – I think that is an excellent idea will get something going for this as would ease disseminating of information.

Paul Bartlett – thank you for arranging this meeting. It does a lot of credit to you and your team.

All of the lorries will use MOJO and will probably use J10a but may use J10. KCC doesn't have any powers in moving traffic offences, how can we ensure lorries will do what they should do. Concerns about hospital are understood.

Ben Rimmington – we do not intend lorries to use J10, legislation will be passed that ensures lorries are only on prescribed routes so we will have powers to provide fines to lorries in wrong place. Will be working with Kent Police and DVSA.

Toby Howe – I wish to ensure that the network is kept flowing – Traffic Management Plan is being developed and KCC looking at being able to support HE, DVSA and the Police so that freight can only access the site from J10a.

Paul Bartlett – long standing issue with A28 if a piece dividend could be given forward funding for this road. South Eastern LEP has fallen short of providing this.

Minister Maclean – your request has been lobbied.

Closing remarks by Minister Maclean – and if they wish, Damian Green and Gerry Clarkson

Gerry Clarkson – Thank you for meeting, first class and very useful. Will comment re: Eurostar later. Forward funding would be most appreciated.

Minister Maclean – very welcome and will look at Eurostar issues for you.

MP Damian Green – Hope that the lesson of the non-existent Saxon wall is learned making it clear communication is necessary. Have very responsible representatives here. Hope we can build on Eurostar issue and look at gestures of good will that people of Ashford deserve.

Minister Maclean – weekly email communication is very useful.

This is not the end of engagement and we wish to work together.

Another meeting will be scheduled, thank you to all in the meeting and we appreciate that the impact is disproportionate to the local residents.