

Pyestock Planning Inquiry – November/December 2008

Statement by Councillor Adrian Collett

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- 1.1 Good evening. My name is Adrian Collett. I am the County Councillor for the Yateley East, Blackwater and Ancells Division of Hampshire, which includes the whole of the Pyestock site. I am also Chair of Blackwater & Hawley Town Council, Vice Chair of Hampshire Police Authority and the Liberal Democrat Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the Aldershot Constituency, which includes all of Farnborough, including those areas which are so significantly threatened by this proposed development.
- 1.2 In my opinion the application being considered at this Inquiry is one of the most potentially damaging proposals that I have seen during my 28 years as a local councillor. I believe that it would cause irreversible damage to the quality of life of hundreds, if not thousands, of local residents and to the quality of the local environment.

2 Strategic Gap

- 2.1 The Blackwater Valley towns occupy the area immediately to the west of the Greater London Green Belt and as such are under tremendous pressure for development. The Strategic Gaps, therefore, are vital to prevent the whole Blackwater Valley from coalescing into one unplanned soulless urban conurbation.
- 2.2 It has been suggested that Strategic Gaps may not exist in the future, but for now they do and it is unthinkable that this strategic gap would be removed without being replaced with some other planning policy which is designed to achieve a similar objective in this location.
- 2.3 Residents in both the Southwood area of Farnborough and the Pondtail area of Fleet would be able to hear activities at this site throughout the 24 hour day and would be able to see the lights of the site through the trees throughout the night. There is no doubt that an intense use of this site, as proposed, would effectively reduce the gap between Farnborough and Fleet to two insignificant fractions of its current state, either side of the site.

3 Access to the Motorway Network

- 3.1 Residents of the St John's area of Farnborough already suffer from the impacts of the traffic on the A327 Minley Link road. The construction of this road was agreed several years after these houses were built and occupied, so it is an imposition which these residents did not know about when they bought their houses.
- 3.2 The obvious impact is noise, and this is certainly a problem – more so than the visual impact, but a perhaps more significant impact is that of vibration. Even when they can't hear lorries on this road – and it has to be said that lorries have a far greater impact than cars

– they can feel them. I have been in residents' houses when the lorries have thundered up and down the link road and the thought of up to 100 extra lorries an hour is intolerable. With a 24/7 site operation, how will people ever be able to sleep, and what good will a noise barrier do to protect people from vibration disturbance?

To have a distribution centre of this scale, which requires that access to the motorway network has to travel so close to so many houses, just goes to show that this is a completely unsuitable site for this type of development.

4 Routing Agreement

- 4.1 It isn't clear how any lorry routing agreement can genuinely be made enforceable. If, purely for example, Tesco were to use this site as a distribution centre, would a lorry which was due to deliver to the Ancells Farm Tesco shop really have to get onto the motorway first to find its way that half a mile to Ancells Farm? I suspect not.
- 4.2 But what would there then be to stop lorries claiming to be visiting Tesco shops in the Aldershot, Church Crookham, Darby Green, Heath End, Hook, Sandhurst or Yateley branches, all fairly close by, from also using local roads. And if they did that how on earth would it ever be possible to determine which lorries were keeping to the agreement and which weren't? The same could apply with any other company which chose to use this site.
- 4.3 I ask this because there may be plenty of reasons why drivers may wish to avoid using the M3 at J4a. For example, getting to Wokingham or Bracknell from this site would be much easier and quicker via Yateley than via the M3, M25 and M4, particularly when those motorways are congested!

5 Congestion

- 5.1 So turning to congestion on the M3, I travel most days down to Winchester for my County Council and Police Authority duties. I join the M3 at J4a and as often as not the London-bound carriageway is nose to tail. I often wonder what makes people persist in travelling that journey day after day when it's so often congested all the way to the M25 and I realise that it is because those good people have no choice. As I travel westwards the queue often stretches all the way back to Hook and sometimes to Basingstoke, and I just thank my lucky stars that Winchester is my destination and not Greater London.
- 5.2 On occasions there will be a collision which closes the motorway. The A30, which is the road that the M3 was built to by-pass, then grinds to a complete halt and a motorway full of traffic tries to find its way around the local roads. Most people around here are very familiar with what happens when the motorway is closed. Sometimes, however, just a breakdown, particularly of an HGV, can cause the motorway to run slowly and people to divert off to avoid the ensuing congestion.

- 5.3 For all these reasons it defies logic to try to understand how the M3 can be expected to cope with all this extra traffic without either widening or some other major capacity building alterations. Until something along these lines can be proposed this is clearly the wrong place for a major traffic generator like this application.

6 Air Pollution

- 6.1 The poor air quality in those parts of Farnborough which are adjacent to the M3 between J4a and J4 is already a major concern which is being taken up by Rushmoor Borough Council. The extra journeys that this development would generate would clearly add to that problem, but the extra congestion that those journeys would clearly cause would mean that the air pollution impact of this development would be that much worse. Residents of Farnborough deserve better than this!

7 Section 106 Agreement

- 7.1 As the local member for this site I was disgusted to learn that an agreement had been reached between Hampshire County Council's Director of Environment and the Appellants on the eve of this Inquiry without them even having the courtesy to show me or the other local members a draft for our comments. I would have been less unhappy if that agreement had secured the provision of measures which significantly mitigated the impacts of this development, and if it hadn't followed a meeting at which local members set out our concerns to the Director's staff.
- 7.2 In fact I don't understand why they felt that this agreement was even necessary. It is unthinkable that you would approve this appeal with less in the way of mitigation than is contained in the agreement. If you were minded to approve, and I sincerely hope that you will not be, then I trust that you will look a lot further than that which has so far been secured.
- 7.3 Let me give you just three examples:
- (i) The agreement secures a contribution of £250,000 towards implementation of the Fleet Town Access Plan. This plan requires developer contributions of between £3m and £5m to fund it. At this rate that would mean that Fleet would need to accommodate between 12 and 20 developments of this scale just to implement its Access Plan. The developers have clearly secured themselves a very good deal here!
 - (ii) Construction of so-called noise mitigation measures along the A327 Minley Link, the effectiveness of which cannot be judged until they are in place if recent ineffective noise barriers on the M3 are anything to go by, and nothing at all to deal with vibration impacts.
 - (iii) Nothing to increase capacity on the M3 despite the severe congestion which already exists.

There are plenty more examples which I'm sure the SPLAT evidence will cover.

8 Cody Park and Pyestock North

- 8.1 I was a member of the County Council's Roads and Development Sub-Committee which considered the transport implications of the outline application for the development of what is now known as Cody Park. This was to be phase two of a consolidation exercise.
- 8.2 Phase one was the relocation and consolidation of the old Royal Aircraft Establishment (or RAE) onto the new Qinetiq site south of the old Ively Road. Phase two was the relocation and consolidation of this Pyestock North site onto the other side of the old Ively Road. The development paid for Ively Road to be moved so that both parts of the new campus could be joined together.
- 8.3 There was little else in terms of highway improvements required of the phase two development as their case was that this was merely what already existed on the Pyestock North site moved into a new location. If that development did not require significant, and I mean significant, improvements to the highway network, then this one should. The site owners/developers can't have it both ways. Between the two sites there will be a massive increase in road usage and that needs to be accommodated.

9 Summary

- 9.1 There is much more that I could say about this development, but I am aware that these issues will be covered by SPLAT in far more detail than is appropriate at tonight's session and other people are waiting to give their views.
- 9.2 In my opinion the applications being considered at this Inquiry are probably the most damaging I've ever seen in north east Hampshire. I believe that this site is totally inappropriate for such an intense form of development and that, if approved, these applications would change the nature of this whole area in the most negative way for ever.
- 9.3 I would, therefore, strongly urge you to reject these appeals.