

From CPRE Kent and Joint Parishes Group  
c/o Queens Head House  
Ashford Road  
Charing  
Ashford  
Kent  
TN27 0AD

22 June 2015

Dear Councillor Wilson

Agenda for Policy and Resources Committee – 24 June 2015

We are deeply concerned at the inclusion of item 13 on this committee agenda, which is the report of the Director of Regeneration and Communities – Economic development strategy – and request that it is removed from this agenda.

The principal reason for this is that the report centres around development at Junction 8 of the M20, and recommends its approval. This report completely fails to acknowledge that a Public Inquiry has recently been held in to two planning applications at J8, following refusals by the Planning Committee on the principal of development here and not on details. The Borough Council employed a top planning barrister, Mr Stephen Whale, to conduct the case against the development. The Inquiry has not yet reported and proceedings are still active, therefore the matter should be considered sub-judice. Accordingly it is inappropriate to pre-empt the Inspectors decision. Until this is received this report should be held in abeyance or abandoned.

The report also fails to note that the last Cabinet decision on this subject was that land at J8 should not be developed and it is not included as employment land in the Draft Local Plan.

We are also concerned at the “survey” of residents carried out by FACTS, which was clearly designed to provide an apparent public acceptance of development at Junction 8. The exact question asked in a telephone call was “*Over the next 16 years Maidstone’s population will grow by about 20%, meaning an extra 17300 jobs will be needed for our residents. To deliver as many of these jobs as possible in the Borough the Council will need to consider allocating land for a new business park at junction 8 of the M20. To what extent would you support this idea?*” This is then followed by 5 levels of support, starting with “*support strongly*” This wording, read out in an instant telephone interview, is clearly leading to a specific answer biased towards acceptance. As such, we believe that this survey should be totally disregarded. We assume that this bias by FACTS was the result of it’s terms of reference, or improper council pressure.

There are several other aspects of this report which cause concern, not least the contradictions between several of the numeric assessments included in Agenda item 12 and a number of statements included in this report.

There is also a general failure to recognise that Maidstone's principle assets are that it is surrounded by accessible countryside, and has small villages for those who like this lifestyle. Both of these two aspects of the Borough are under threat. This lessens the attractiveness to possible employers and acts against economic growth.

We ask that this report on Economic Development Strategy be withdrawn from this agenda.

Yours sincerely

G W M Thomas for CPRE  
J N Horne for Joint Parishes Group

Cc Ms Alison Broom  
All members of the P&R committee