

KEMERTON PARISH COUNCIL

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Planning
Tewkesbury Borough Council

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4th November 2020

Dear Sir or Madam

20/00896/FUL. DEVELOPMENT OF A ROAD BRIDGE OVER THE MAINLINE RAILWAY, NORTH OF ASHCHURCH

This letter is sent on behalf of Kemerton Parish Council in relation to the recent planning application for a road bridge at Ashchurch.

Kemerton Parish adjoins Tewkesbury Borough to the north of the Carrant Brook at Ashchurch. We hope that the Parish Council's views in connection with the application will be considered carefully.

The Parish Council has met and discussed the proposed new bridge and road at Ashchurch. The Parish Council's view is that the proposed bridge is entirely inappropriate under current circumstances and we therefore **object** to it.

The Parish Council believes that Tewkesbury Borough Council ("TBC") and Gloucestershire County Council ("GCC") are at real risk of pursuing a "bridge to nowhere", at great public expense and with serious adverse environmental and transport impacts. There is in our view likely to be significant public anger at the misuse of public funds.

Process

We are concerned by the process being adopted in respect of this application.

As a Parish Council, other than TBC's letter in response to our submission to their limited consultation process, we have had no direct liaison regarding the proposed bridge with either TBC or the applicant, GCC.

There has not been proper consultation with local residents and their representatives in relation to the proposed bridge. There was limited on-line consultation by TBC earlier this year, during which the Parish Council outlined our concerns by letter. It was clear to the Parish

Council from that limited consultation that there is strong local opposition to the bridge. No account appears to have taken account of that opposition.

Many local residents appear to be unaware of the planning application. We note that, contrary to usual practice, notice of the planning application has not as yet been displayed in the vicinity of the proposed bridge.

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It appears to us to be clearly inappropriate (and probably unlawful) that TBC should effectively be adjudicating its own application.

Objections

With the aim of:

- a. preserving the historical significant field pattern of the Carrant Valley between the AONB and Ashchurch;
- b. protecting the views from the slopes and summit of Bredon Hill;
- c. protecting the tranquility of the AONB;
- d. ensuring the safety of villagers due to increased unsustainable traffic levels as a result of development in neighbouring Tewkesbury Borough, and
- e. not wasting public money,

We **object** to the proposed Ashchurch bridge for the following reasons:

- (1) There does not appear to be any proper justification for construction of the bridge as proposed at present. Putting it at its lowest, there is currently considerable uncertainty whether the proposed Garden Town development for which the bridge is intended will ever proceed. The Parish Council believes that the relevant land is an inappropriate location and could not accommodate the unallocated 826 homes that the scheme it hopes to unlock, let alone a “Garden Town” of 10,000 houses.
- (2) As matters currently stand, the proposed Ashchurch Bridge is effectively a bridge to nowhere since the land it supposedly opens up is not allocated for development. To spend £8.1 million of public money (at least – see paragraph (8) below) on building a bridge and road with the associated adverse environmental and transport impacts at a time when the Garden Town project is, at best, uncertain is in the Parish Council’s view an improper use of scarce public funds.
- (3) The bridge will not alleviate the severe congestion issues on the M5 Junction 9 and the A46, which is currently at full capacity. Indeed, the Parish Council considers that it is likely to make the current congestion issues even worse, with additional traffic feeding on to the A46.
- (4) The Parish Council notes that a road network traffic modelling study was undertaken for the purposes of the January 2018 Concept Masterplan Report (“the Masterplan”) and that the bridge now proposed to be constructed at Ashchurch appears not to have met the requirements of such a substantial development as the Garden Town project. We refer to the following section of the Masterplan (pages 38 and 39):

“The traffic model tests indicated that the assumed scale of development could have a significant impact on the highway network as there is insufficient capacity to absorb additional demand. Without additional measures being employed, there was a significant increase in delays and journey times along all key routes, including the A46.

The most significant intervention tested in the study was a new Northern Access Road proposal to cross the railway, connecting between Aston Fields Lane and Hardwick Bank Road and effecting closure of the level crossing. This provides an

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alternative east-west route and distributes traffic movements more widely across the road network. However, the modelling results indicated that this intervention would not be able to support additional growth taking place on the western MOD site (900 homes), leading to significant congestion and delays.

In summary, this study's findings indicate that although there is some evident benefit in enabling development access to specific land parcels in the short term through localised link and junction improvements, such measures will be of limited benefit, either in the near term or beyond in considering more ambitious development proposals. The prevailing issues of traffic demand, related vehicle delays and the limited road network connections available mean that more substantial and comprehensive road infrastructure improvement is required to support anticipated development. To minimise the related negative impacts of such infrastructure, severance, noise, visual impact etc and to provide a more positive and active movement and living environment, then a related and comprehensive approach is required, predicated on sustainable transport." (emphasis added)

- (5) Bredon Hill is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. A bridge in the proposed location would impact on the view from the AONB which is seen widely from the hill. The Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines states that views from the Cotswolds escarpment, including Bredon Hill, are one of the 'special qualities' of the AONB. The height of the proposed bridge (more than 11m, equivalent to three double-decker buses stacked on top of each other) would not enable it to be adequately screened. The boundary of the AONB is less than 2km from the proposed development and clearly visible from the many public viewpoints.
- (6) The construction of the bridge and road would have a detrimental environmental impact on the unspoilt catchment of the Carrant. The development would have a negative effect on biodiversity and landscape. Kemerton Conservation Trust have produced evidence on the ecological importance of the Lower Carrant Valley. It is of ecological, archaeological and landscape interest. It has a substantial area of medieval ridge and furrow.
- (7) The Parish Council are concerned that the bridge would increase traffic onto the B4077, which would result in increased "rat-running" through the Bredon Hill villages to join the A46 at Beckford.
- (8) The cost of the bridge is stated to be £8.1 million. This appears not to include all the associated infrastructure that would be involved in the construction of the bridge and road. No details have been supplied by TBC of the additional cost of the necessary infrastructure and how it will be funded.

Yours faithfully

Jackie Shields

Cc.

Harriett Baldwin MP

Councillor Adrian Hardman, Worcestershire County Council

Northway, Ashchurch Rural, Bredon, Overbury and Beckford parish councils

Tewkesbury Town Council