Matter 7 – Highways Infrastructure

Issue 1 –Strategic and Local Road Networks

Q1. Without the proposed bypass, what effect will the suggested changes to the Plan have on the B0217 through Five Oak Green? What mitigation measures will be necessary in this location and how will they be achieved?

1.1 The level of additional traffic generated along the B2017 corridor, as assessed within the Examination Document PS_049 'SWECO TW Local Plan Stage 3 Modal Shift Reporting', concludes on p12 that, without the Five Oak Green Bypass, improvements here should take the form of '*wider traffic management measures'* to direct additional traffic to the strategic road network, as opposed to a major highways scheme to accommodate traffic, such as the Five Oak Green Bypass.

1.2 The above is reiterated in PS_059 (Tunbridge Wells Local Plan - Local Junction Capacity Sensitivity Testing Technical Note (Nov 23)), which considers the updated development capacity figures of the PWeC sites, and associated removal of Tudeley Village, and tests off-site vehicle traffic mitigation measures across the local highways network, and indicates on PDF p7 that:
'Although the data analysis shows that congestion rises along the B2017 through Five Oak Green link in the Local Plan scenario, the demand is not seen as being of a level to justify a major expansion in link capacity or a new link road such as the Five Oak Green bypass that was previously considered.
However, it is recommended that consideration be given to the implementation of enhanced traffic management through the area to better support the flow of vehicles whilst also integrating this with enhanced infrastructure for people walking, wheeling and cycling in the area to enable them to safely travel along and across the link. More broadly the sustainable transport measures should be designed to maximise accessibility to Paddock Wood rail services to reduce the need for car travel on this link.
The design and implementation of such measures would be expected to be linked to Travel Plans and Monitor and Manage agreements for all major Local Plan developments in the wider Paddock Wood area.'

1.3 The above then being reiterated in the information contained in the appendix to TWBC Matter 3 Issue 2 statement (see p 23/55 of Sweco's - Strategic Transport Assessment – Modelling Appraisal (18/04/2024)).

1.4 As set out in our matters 3 and 4 statements such traffic management measures could take the form of speed reduction and attenuation features, supporting sustainable transport interventions and modal shift enablers, and could be delivered / funded by Paddock Wood developers through planning conditions and/ or Section 106 mechanisms.

Q2. What effect will the suggested changes to the Plan have at Kippings Cross (A21/B2160)? Do the conclusions and recommendations in the Kippings Cross Junction – Local Plan Mitigation Option Analysis remain relevant?

2.1 The latest position regarding changes to the Plan and mitigation at Kippings Cross is outlined on PDF pages 21 to 29 of PS_059 'Tunbridge Wells Local Plan - Stage 3 Part 2

Outcomes November 2023'. This explains that the junction functions over capacity under existing conditions and the addition of any significant development traffic triggers the need for improvements. The analysis completed by Sweco goes on to suggest two mitigation solutions that could address local plan growth, in the form of KX10 (primarily based around a new left slip lane from the A21 to the B2160 (Maidstone Road), with widened approaches on other arms); and to tackle wider growth in the Reference Case (RC) and include Local Plan issues, KX11 (based around an expanded elongated partially signalised roundabout).

2.2 PDF page 28 of PS_059 indicate that '*Sweco view this [KX10] as the preferred Local Plan mitigation as the results show that with added Local Plan demand the junction operates at an improved level compared to the RC'*; albeit Sweco recognise the potential impacts on third party land, including the need to take account of the listed building and historic farmstead, and the effect this may have on feasibility of such a scheme. KX11 being considered a viable option that could be taken forward for further development to offset RC and Local Plan related additional highway demand issues at the Kippings Cross junction.

2.3 We understand that following National Highways (NH) comments on the council's proposed response to the Inspectors Initial Findings that Sweco have been reviewing the issue of Kippings Cross. To this end appendix 1 of TWBC Matter 3 issue 2 statement encompassed an update from Sweco's – the Strategic Transport Assessment – Modelling Appraisal (18/04/2024) whilst reiterating in section 5.7 the position at Kippings Cross, in section 5.8 indicates that:
'At a meeting on 8th February 2024 between Sweco, TWBC, KCC and NH, the potential improvement options at Kipping's Cross were discussed. It was accepted that it will be difficult to deliver a highway scheme without significant costs and land take. It was therefore agreed to also consider an alternative strategy.
An alternative option for highway mitigation would be to improve the Pembury Road corridor to reroute traffic away from Kipping's Cross. Whilst the Badsell Road roundabout improvements and Colts Hill Bypass will improve this corridor to the north, it was discussed that improvements will also be needed at the A21 / A228 Pembury Interchange dumbbell roundabouts and potentially the Tonbridge Road signalised junction to the north.
Stantec has been commissioned by TWBC to consider capacity interventions along the Pembury Road corridor.'

2.4 It goes on to advise:
'It is expected that increasing capacity on the A228 will make this corridor a more attractive route option, in turn reducing pressure on the B2160 corridor and in particular Kipping's Cross Roundabout. Given Stantec are currently looking at options for the corridor, no additional optioneering work has been undertaken by Sweco. To reflect an emerging scheme along the corridor, the strategic modelling has assumed an uplift in capacity of 10% at the five junctions described above. These assumptions will be reviewed following the completion of the optioneering work undertaken by Stantec with a view to undertaking a further model run to test effectiveness, if required.'

2.5 We understand this information will be released with the councils matter 4 statement and thus reserve the right to respond to any additional information provided by the council in their matter 7 statement/ any SoCG with NH on this matter.

2.6 All the above means that the options presented in the 2022 'Kippings Cross Junction – Local Plan Mitigation Option Analysis' have been superseded.

Q3. What effect will the proposed changes to the Plan and distribution of growth have on the remaining "hotspots" identified in the evidence base? Will there be any unacceptable impacts on highway safety or will the residual cumulative impacts on the road network be severe as a result of the Plan?

3.1 The proposed changes to the plan have been reflected in revised traffic modelling undertaken by Sweco where in PS_059 'Local Junction Capacity Sensitivity Testing Technical Note' it is confirmed that residual impacts see 4 major hotspot junctions on the network requiring mitigation. Input from National Highways confirms a further 3 junctions are of concern.

3.2 The PS_059 report identifies that through achieving the targeted Local Plan modal shift and provision of identified mitigation measures at the hotspot junctions, impacts on highway safety and capacity can be addressed. In some instances, junction mitigation is subject to further detailed design and reliant on third party land, however it is anticipated that these issues can be addressed through development management and compulsory purchase processes.

3.3 To this end the Sweco Strategic Transport Assessment – Modelling Appraisal (18/04/2024) (appendix 1 of TWBC Matter 3 issue 2 statement) consolidates the analysis undertaken within the Sweco Stage 1-3 Strategic Model and Modal Shift Evidence Base reports, refs. PS_041, PS_048 and PS_049, confirming that whilst sustainable transport interventions will reduce Local Plan development impact, local highway improvements should be considered at 4 key locations on the network (Colts Hill bypass, Somerhill Roundabout, Hop Farm roundabout and junctions on the Pembury Road corridor) with 'Monitor and Manage' approaches to be taken at a further 3 junctions. These conclusions align with the PS_059 reporting and the common evidence presented of how impacts on highway safety and capacity can be addressed.

Q4. Where mitigation is required, can any significant impacts on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree?

4.1 With specific regard to the PWeC developments it is clear through the Sweco modelling work, conclusions of the PS_059 reporting, conclusions of Sweco Strategic Transport Assessment – Modelling Appraisal (18/04/2024) (appendix 1 of TWBC Matter 3 issue 2 statement) and costing / trigger points sets out in PS_061b, that subject to clarity on the proposed works to the Pembury Road corridor that significant impacts in terms of highway capacity and safety can be mitigated to an acceptable degree, whilst maintaining a comparable level of viability to the 2021 Submission Local Plan for PWeC developers.

Issue 2 – Policy Requirements

Q1. Where mitigation is required, is the Plan sufficiently clear what is required, where and when? Is the Plan effective in this regard?

1.1 The strategic highway improvements required as a result of growth proposed at PWeC are set out PS_061b 'Addendum to Local Plan Viability Assessment Appendix I'. This clearly sets out in Table 1A the required infrastructure interventions, their timings (by month), and costs.

1.2 Notably, where infrastructure items are consistent or comparable with those identified in the 2021 Submission Local Plan and the proposed changes to policy STR/SS1; the timescales for delivery broadly align with the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (Oct 2021) (CD3.142) e.g. the Colts Hill Improvements are identified as being delivered between months 73-84 in the PS_061b 'Addendum to Local Plan Viability Assessment Appendix I', which based on Local Plan adoption in Q4 2024 would see delivery in 2030-2031. This is also reflective of the 'Medium' term timescales identified for the Colts Hill Bypass in the 2021 IDP and 3.66 Strategic Sites Masterplanning and Infrastructure Main Report i.e. by 2025-2032. We would anticipate the updated IDP pushing this back to 31-32 to reflect the revised date for adoption as set out in the latest LDS (June 24 (PS_084) i.e. Q1 2025.

1.3 Whilst phasing and funding will ultimately be dealt with in the Phasing and Implementation Plan, conditions and s106 obligations as set out in the 'Strategic Infrastructure' element of Revised Policy STR/SS1, we understand that an infrastructure delivery/ housing trajectory plan is to be provided for week 2 and reserve our right to comment upon that when released.

1.4 Given the above we believe the plan is sufficiently clear and effective.

Q2. Have the costs associated with the necessary highway's infrastructure been tested and will it be viable?

2.2 We can confirm that the costs set out in the updated Viability Appraisal (PS_061) are, subject to clarity on costs sharing mechanisms and review to address the proposed expansion of Mascalls instead of a new 3FE secondary on parcel a, viable and can be delivered when required over the plan period.