

BEXHILL TO HASTINGS LINK ROAD PUBLIC INQUIRY

Statement of evidence
from
Peter Poole
OBJ/114



Trees at Adams Farm, near Hastings, in the spring of 2005.

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I have been following the issue of a new road for Hastings and Bexhill since 1995, when I spoke at the A259 public inquiry into the trunk road proposals. The bypass issue was also raised in 2001, before the general election, and then amended to the current proposal. I later visited Adams farm in 2005, when the link road issue was raised prior to the 2005 general election. I painted a view from the farm, which appeared in an on-line exhibition of threatened sites, to counter the BBC television series, **A Picture of Britain**. I welcome the scaling back of the current scheme from the previous bypasses, although I am still concerned at its intrusion into the open countryside. The Combe Haven Site of Special Scientific Interest forms a natural break between Bexhill and Hastings, which the link road would sever from the wider stretch of countryside to the north-west. This open aspect, once severed, would spoil the continuous flow of countryside right to the urban fringe. Whatever the merits of any proposed Pebsham Country Park, and the consequent mitigation and landscaping that would be undertaken, the uninterrupted spread of open land could only be less should the link road be constructed. Compensation land can never add to the total amount of green space or habitat, only alleviate the problems created by a new development.

Bexhill and Hastings have much in common with two similar coastal towns, Brighton and Hove, which were granted a full bypass – the A27 – in the early 1990s. This should be a salutary lesson, as Brighton and Hove still have massive traffic problems. Indeed, new flats have been banned from one location – Lewes Road – due to excess air pollution. There have been many calls for park and ride schemes in Brighton & Hove, despite prior claims that the bypass would reduce urban traffic. Brighton and Hove also had their local amenity countryside – in other words, that of the urban fringe, irrevocably scarred by the roads and the resultant cuttings, noise and light impact. Tranquillity in the south-east has long been in decline, and such places for quiet recreation – near the towns, and thus not needing motorized transport to reach – are vitally important in the busy south-east. It would be tragic if Bexhill and Hastings suffered similar drawbacks from the proposed link road, if its stated benefits were less than expected.

However, there are differences between the two locations. Bexhill and Hastings are almost totally divided by the countryside, apart from the urban strip between Glyne Gap and Bulverhythe, parallel to the A259 and coastal railway. I accept that this is a narrow corridor for all traffic between the two towns: however, they have been constructed as separate towns due to the lie of the land, with the wetlands of Combe Haven in between, and to some extent this must be accepted as an inevitable condition of topography. Should infrastructure improvements be necessary, surely it is better to improve along the coastal stretch than attempt to bridge the wider gap between Pebsham and Hollington, which are clearly two suburban areas of towns whose natural focus is the coast and their nearby town centres. Of all the alternative routes for the link road, only the Green Route seemed to counter this possibility. However, it is far too long – particularly the wide loop around Pebsham itself. Could a small section of new road based on the Green Route – the part running parallel to the A259 – secure the primary objective of relieving the transport pinch-point between Bexhill and Hastings, while preserving the broader environment? I believe it could.



Clouds and evening sunlight form a dramatic sky over Bexhill, East Sussex, following the pre-Inquiry meeting of September 3rd 2009. A place appreciated for such tranquillity, and home to the famous De La Warr Pavilion.

The link road is largely being justified by its enabling of the North East Bexhill Business Park. I accept the need to create jobs, although not the degree of new housing demanded if the area already has substantial deprivation. The new jobs should be aimed at locals, wherever possible. The new business park should not be held to ransom if the link road does not receive approval. Has its feasibility been modelled without a link road? That said, the urban section of the link road might be acceptable in allowing such a business park to access the A259 and town centre. Could it be constructed as a separate entity, without the destructive rural section? If access to London is the issue, surely it would be better to site any business park in north-west Hastings, to use the existing A21 and railway – possibly through a dedicated halt – than attempt to span the land between Bexhill and Hastings with such a destructive new road.

My feeling is that the link road is being proposed to solve too many problems at once, with the hope of future opportunities being stated as dependent upon the scheme. I welcome the Greenway, for example, but this could be constructed in any case without the link road, to the benefit of all walkers, cyclists and equestrians. Given the right marketing, it could be an excellent attraction, similar to the 1066 Country Walk, in what would still be an unspoilt setting.

This multi-functional approach to the link road has necessitated a larger scheme than is environmentally sustainable. I believe the Compulsory Purchase Orders and Side Road Orders would be a very heavy hammer to wield for the current proposal, allowing East Sussex County Council to build a scheme that in many ways resembles the old Western bypass. Surely it would be better to tackle the perceived problems of local transport in a more tactical way, perhaps with the urban section of link road in Bexhill coupled with a short, carefully designed section from the Glyne Gap roundabout to as close a section of Hastings as would be possible, with less impact than the full link road. While I am not advocating a new road as such, I feel something of this nature could offer a pragmatic compromise between the various interests that have been raised. It would be even better to improve public transport, such as buses, and the rail system that Hastings Borough

Council quite rightly states is inadequate. However, I accept that such concerns might lie beyond the scope of the present Inquiry.

One point I wish to raise, however, is the question of public transport along the new link road, if built. Is there a definite plan to route buses along its length, or is the intention purely to relieve traffic along the existing A259? If the link road is being largely justified on improving accessibility between Bexhill and Hastings, it would be a colossal failure if – having sacrificed the countryside – no new public transport was implemented along this quicker route. This would be especially ironic given the partial utilization of the old railway line, which once provided a more environmentally friendly mode of transport than the private car. If new housing is built in north-east Bexhill, along with the business park, the need for such public transport would be even greater. It would cut congestion on the link road itself, which might otherwise nullify the perceived benefits. Also, any new community on the edge of Bexhill would be even further from the main public transport corridor along the Glyne Gap than existing residents.

Without wishing to over-simplify the argument, my feelings are written in the sand...



Thank you,

*Peter Poole
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