

SAVE CAPEL CAMPAIGN
REPORT OF THE HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SUB-GROUP
November 2019

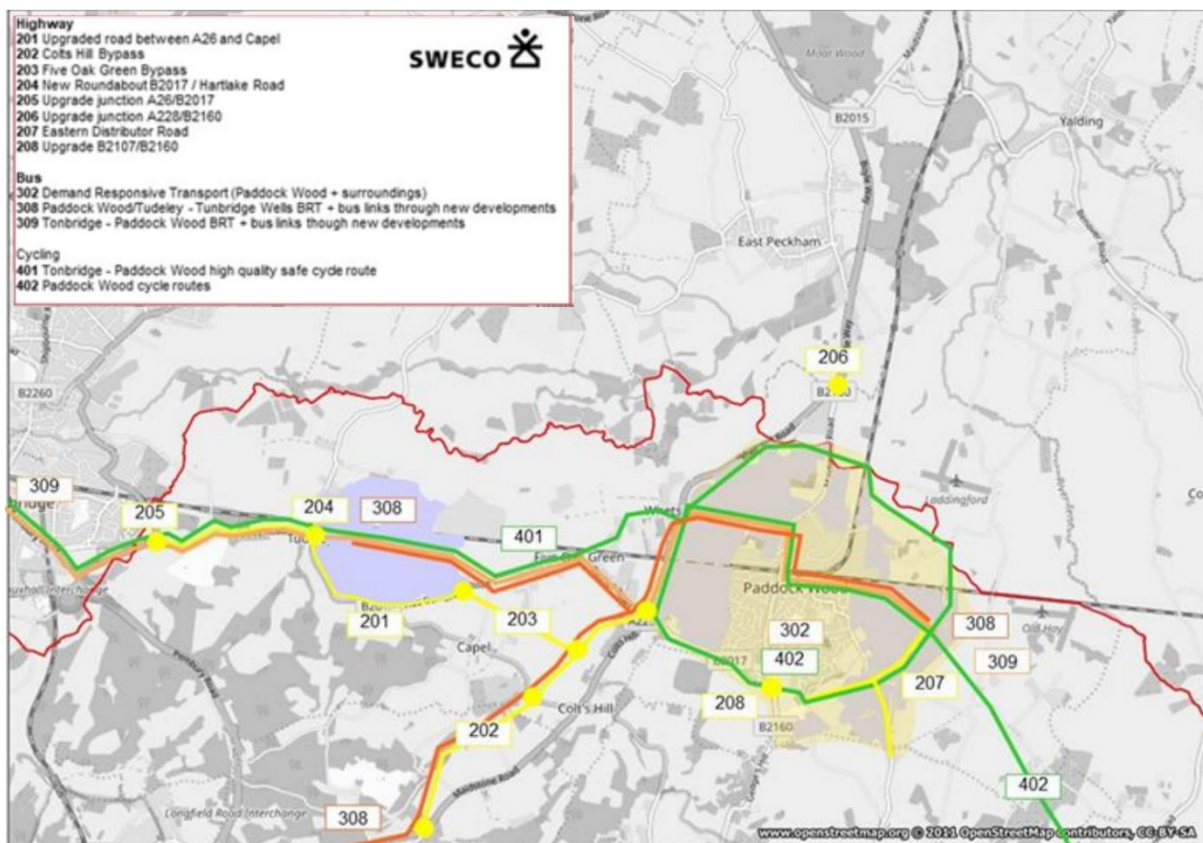
The Highways and Transport Sub-group was small, with only five members. However, this did not affect the group's work mainly because the Draft Local Plan (DLP) contained so little hard information about the transport links proposed. The Strategy relies on achieving a number of strategic transport links but provides no proper detail of these links and no assessment of the impact of the links on the AONB, Green Belt or the local environment. The Plan is deficient and unsound in these respects.

TWBC have indicated that they recognised the importance of transport planning and therefore the next phase will follow PTOD objectives (Public Transport Orientated Development) which will be developed as part of the Master Planning exercise for the new developments.

We look forward to seeing full details of the proposed infrastructure including a delivery schedule in 2020.

1. ROAD NETWORK

The local road network is inadequate to support any substantial developments and no real information is provided in the DLP about what is proposed or when (particularly whether before/after construction of housing). The DLP includes the following overview of proposed transport links.



The East Capel site (CA3) is served by and adjacent to the A228. This is now regarded as part of the Major Road Network and is due to be improved between Badsell Road and Pembury (the Colts Hill By-pass – 202 on map) at an estimated cost of £46m but the earliest this is expected to be complete is about 2028. Improvements to Dampiers Roundabout and Mascalls traffic lights (208) are already planned in relation to existing developments in Paddock Wood. The DLP includes the Colts Hill Bypass (202), improvements to the Beltring Roundabout (206), and a distribution road to the East of Paddock Wood to reduce traffic in Paddock Wood (207).

However, the Tudeley site (CA1) has poor road access, provided by the B2017 which is already congested in peak hours. TWBC recognise that a new link road would be required between the site and the A228 but we have no information about the precise route – an approximate route is shown on the map (203) as the Five Oak Green Bypass. KCC have commented that links from Tudeley Village to the east should minimise the impact on the road network in the settlement of Five Oak Green and have regard to Kent County Council minerals allocations in the vicinity. The exact location of such a link has not been determined. The most practical route would run from around Brampton Bank, crossing Church Lane just below St Thomas's church and Tanners Farm, and crossing Sychem Lane below Redwood Close. There are local concerns about the possible impact on local residences and on the historic church of St Thomas à Becket.

A dedicated bus and cycle route is shown running from Five Oak Green via Whetsted and Eastlands to Paddock Wood. The Plan includes reference to a dedicated bus-only link Paddock Wood to Tonbridge "with opportunity for automation" but what this means and where it would run are not clear. It sounds as fanciful as the reference to driverless vehicles using the proposed ubiquitous 5G network mentioned in the Infrastructure Plan. 3G would be good in parts of Capel!

The roads, roundabouts, bus lanes and cycle lanes that are finally decided upon will be described in the Pre-submission Plan, which is due to be published in August 2020.

The Infrastructure Delivery Plan does refer to additional capacity and upgrading on the B2017 Tonbridge to Capel, but that may just refer to improvements to the Somerhill roundabout and a roundabout at the Hartlake junction. However it appears that no thought has been given to what happens to cars, buses or cycles once they reach the Tonbridge boundary as access to the town via Vale Road is already heavily congested.

It is also clear that the additional road infrastructure, if it happens, will be too late. The earliest date for the Colts Hill Bypass is 2028, while at least 1500 of the houses at CA1 will be built by 2026. And the proposed link road from Tudeley to the A228 will until then have nowhere to go. As the new link road is not likely to be built before development starts, construction traffic will have to use the B2017 through Five Oak Green or from the A21, both sections being congested already in peak hours. So it is clear that for many years the local roads and communities will have to live with construction traffic and thousands of extra residents with no significant road infrastructure improvements.

The new link road should eventually reduce traffic in Five Oak Green and Alders Road.

Any increase in traffic from these developments (CA1 and CA3) to Tunbridge Wells for work, play or shopping will add to the volume of traffic using the Pembury Road route into Tunbridge Wells which already has severe delays. The residents of Tonbridge have recognised that people living in CA1 will use Tonbridge as their local town rather than Tunbridge Wells.

To serve the Tudeley site it is proposed to build a new roundabout at the Hartlake Road/B2017 junction (204) which will link into the CA1 site and to the new link road (203). Concerns have been expressed about the impact on the nearby Grade 1 listed All Saints Church and it is likely that the bus shelter and historic drinking fountain would need to be relocated.

KCC have commented that the proposed Colts Hill bypass and a direct public transport link between Tonbridge town centre/station, Tudeley and Paddock Wood town centre/station are absolutely key to the delivery of the Tudeley settlement and the Paddock Wood extension. Whilst the opportunity exists to deliver dedicated and direct bus routes through the allocated sites, little work has been done on connections into the existing town centre networks. This should be a priority as part of the upcoming master-planning exercise programmed for these allocations.

The County Council as the Local Highway Authority has fundamental concerns that the impact of the additional vehicular traffic brought about by the preferred growth strategy has not yet been effectively addressed in the Draft Local Plan by clearly defined mitigation measures. KCC would welcome continued dialogue to address these matters as the Local Plan progresses.

The transport challenge and opportunities section of the DLP must acknowledge the rapidly changing nature of transport. In particular, the section should acknowledge the period of transition to electric and alternatively fuelled vehicles and that there will be increasing use of shared/on demand vehicles.

Paragraph 6 of Strategy for Capel lists destinations to provide strategic transport links to. It should possibly include destinations to the north (Maidstone, Kings Hill, M20). Further work is required to assess this and to understand the impact on the wider road network and whether mitigation is required.

2. RAIL SERVICES

Creating a garden settlement at Tudeley of 2,800 dwellings will cause immense harm to residents of the Parish of Capel and to residents of Tonbridge. Similar developments in Kent have found few purchasers from the local area and have been offering incentives for people to move out of London and commute back in. It is very likely that the majority of purchasers will be commuters. The effect of several thousand extra commuters trying to get in to Tonbridge in the rush hours, trying to park and trying to get on to already over-crowded trains will be paralysing. Network Rail have stated that there is very little scope to increase capacity in peak hours – just a few shorter trains extending to 12 coaches – until the line has

been fully upgraded to digital signalling which will allow for more frequent trains. However, this will be decades away.

We have confirmation that Network Rail consider both the Tonbridge line and Tonbridge Station to be already operating above capacity and expect substantial growth in demand from developments down the line already planned.

KCC note that there is currently no reference to a new rail station at Tudeley Village in the Draft Local Plan or IDP. They believe the inclusion of an additional stop on this line in the heart of the new Tudeley settlement would make a considerable difference to the road traffic generated by these developments and believe exploration into the feasibility for a station should be pursued in conjunction with the master-planning exercise, prior to the Regulation 19 consultation. However, Network Rail have stated that it would be very difficult to justify a new station at Tudeley as the disbenefits to existing travellers from delays at the additional stop would outweigh the benefits to new travellers.

3. OTHER ISSUES

There are major issues concerning the lack of local roads in the CA1 and CA2 (Secondary School) sites both of which are intersected by the railway running in cuttings and on embankments. At present there is no public access between the parts of CA2, and CA1 has only the very narrow bridge under the railway in Sherenden Lane. Providing any road or footpath link between the North and South halves of these sites will require new bridges. Network Rail have indicated that each road bridge would cost between £15 and £30m, and each footbridge up to £4m.

Putting in such crossings at a number of points across the railway may be possible but it won't tie the two halves of the settlement together enough to make it one coherent settlement, so it will never satisfy garden settlement principles. Also, government policy on Garden Villages states that the developments should involve and have the support of the local communities. There is no local support at all for development at CA1.

There are many additional issues too to be addressed if the CA1 and CA3 developments do go ahead: bus services, provision for walkers and cyclists, parking etc. These will need to be reviewed at the next stage.

4. CONCLUSIONS

As recognised by the KCC response to the TWBC DLP, there is a lack of any detailed information about the transport implications of the proposed developments in Capel. We wait to see how these are addressed in the Local Plan to be published in 2020. Until then, all we can say is that it is difficult to see how the transport needs of this number of houses (in excess of 4,000) in a limited area can be accommodated.