

16 June 2023

Planning Inspectorate

Dear Sir/Madam

Request for Accompanied Site Visit Schedule to be amended to include A226 Forge Lane and Gads Hill School Junction. – Higham Parish Council (“HPC”)

Higham Parish Council (HPC) request that an Accompanied Site Visit is made to the junction of Forge Lane and Gad's Hill School (Grade one listed building, home of Charles Dickens) as the junction is unsuitable for additional HGV construction traffic to use.

Location

Google Maps Reference CF65+J39 Rochester

OS 51.411428,0.457854

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Public land therefore accompanied or unaccompanied is possible.

Reason for concern

Background

The A226 generally is suitable for HGV traffic, but not at the Forge Lane/Gads Hill School junction.

HPCs propose that construction traffic is banned from utilising the A289/A226 and that construction traffic utilise the originally envisaged haul roads. The haul roads were planned to be built, taking construction traffic from the A2 directly into the construction area with access to the construction compounds. This would reduce mileage, noise, vibration, fuel economy, nitrogen deposition and effects on ancient woodland.

Specific Concern

Narrow, congested, dangerous junction

The junction at Forge Lane/Gads Hill School is narrow. The cycle path is forced to cease. The footpaths are narrow. There is insufficient room to enable vehicles to turn left out of Forge Lane onto the A226 at normal speeds. Large vehicles turning left out of Forge Lane are forced to significantly clip the kerb. Coming up the hill from the A289 towards Gravesend, there is a right hand filter lane to turn right into Forge Lane. In the event that HGVs are coming in both directions and if a car is marginally over the stop lines at Forge Lane, then there is significant danger of collision between multiple vehicles.

In addition, at this junction there is an offset road, down the side of Gad's Hill School, Crutches Lane which leads to a car park for the school children. Even currently, it is very difficult for cars to exit right from Crutches Lane onto the Gravesend Road towards the A289.

School children are also crossing the A226 at the beginning and end of school between Forge Lane and Crutches Lane to access Higham Village, with no support, zebra crossing or pedestrian traffic lights.

Effect on Charles Dickens Grade 1 listed home

Gads Hill, the grade one listed house, was the home for Charles Dickens for many years. The front wall of the property is also grade one listed. Charles Dickens also dug a path under the A226 to his garden on the opposite side of the road where his chalet was sited. He wrote his novels in this chalet which is now sited in Rochester as part of the Charles Dickens centre. It is unclear at this time whether the path and steps under the A226 would support the weight of a significant number of additional HGV's passing overhead.

Effect on Higham Village Entrance and Egress

Forge Lane is the main exit for all village traffic from Higham. If this junction is affected in any way, the diversion would be along a narrow road Villa Rd or a four to five mile journey down through the village, over the railway bridge along the Lower Higham Road to get B2000 onto the A289 and back around to the A226. The village is easily blocked if egress from the village is restricted by any delays at the Forge Lane junction due to the narrow nature of the roads in the village and very limited egress points.

Proposal

Create Haul Road from A2 direct into Construction Area and Construction Compounds

HPC request that Examination considers whether, the originally proposed haul roads, direct from the A2 into the construction area and construction compounds be reinstated into the programme. Particularly in light of the two-year delay in construction. HPC understand that this haul road was deleted as it was considered by the Applicant, that to build a bridge over Thong Lane to enable the haul road to be effective, in the five year construction programmes was insufficient time. We ask the Applicant and Examination to consider whether the haul road can now be reinstated into the programme. This would remove the need for construction traffic to come along A226 and in particular the Forge Lane/Gads Hill Junction.

Alternative option (not preferred)

In the event that the haul road is not implemented HPC request that Examination requires the Applicant and KCC to review the layout of the Forge Lane/Gads Hill School junction and request that additional data is sought to ratify the concerns expressed above. HPC request

the data then be used to consider alternative layouts (perhaps the inclusion of traffic lights/deletion of traffic lights at Villa Road) and that these also be trialled in advance of the LTC construction traffic commencing.

A2/A289/A226 Marling Cross to Forge Lane and return to Marling Cross.

HPC would also request that the panel drive along the A2 from Marling cross, down the A289, onto the A226 and then return along A226 to A289 onto A2 to Cobham and Marling Cross exit.

HPC are concerned as to how the A2 to A289, and reverse, sections of road, will be affected particularly during the construction phase – but also after opening. Consideration needs to be made as to the impact on residents of both Medway council area and Gravesham area as to the ingress and egress of traffic. The A2/A289 junctions are heavily used. Delays to commuter and freight traffic needs to be minimised.

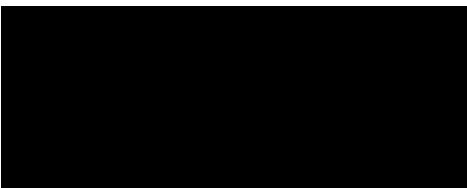
The concern is that significant delays may affect commuter traffic in particular during construction. Currently when the A2 becomes blocked London bound traffic from Medway, the Hoo Peninsula and Higham and Shorne traffic all utilise the A226 London/Gravesend bound to avoid the congestion.

Dover Traffic Impact – Bluebell Hill A229/ M20/M2 Junctions

HPC are concerned that the additional work needed to improve the M20/Bluebell Hill, A229/M2 Junction to accommodate the change in traffic routing to and from Dover will be significant. In the event that this is not implemented the affect on the M2, which has limited capacity will be significate. Alternative routes such as the A228 and A227 will be gridlocked and are not suitable for significant additional traffic.

HPC requested Examination Panel travels from the M25 down the M20 to Dover and returns via the A2/M2 route to Gravesend. to compare the capacity of the two and review the capacity of the A228 and A227 to support traffic in the event that the Bluebill Hill A229 Junctions are not modified to support traffic to and from Dover.

Yours faithfully



Linda Atkinson
Clerk, Responsible Financial Officer
Higham Parish Council