

Committee: **Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment**

Date: **23 June 2008**

Report By: **Director of Transport and Environment**

Title of Report: **Petition urging the County Council to oppose housing development and associated relief road at East Grinstead in West Sussex**

Purpose of Report: **To consider a petition from Forest Row residents on the above**

RECOMMENDATION:

The Lead Member is recommended to advise the petitioners that the County Council does not object, *per se*, to the housing development proposed at East Grinstead, but has used, and continues to use, its best endeavours to oppose any associated road proposals at East Grinstead that would add significantly to traffic problems in Forest Row.

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 There are no specific financial implications in respect of the recommendations detailed in this report.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 At the County Council meeting on 25 March 2008 Councillor Whetstone presented a petition to the Chairman requesting that:

East Sussex County Council to use their best endeavours to oppose large housing development in East Grinstead as part of the area action plan which would necessitate a relief road that joins the A22 north of Forest Row.

2.2 The petition was organised by Forest Row Parish Council and is dated 10 August 2007. It contains approximately 730 signatures.

2.3 A copy of the petition is available in the Members' room. Standing Orders provide that where the Chairman considers it appropriate, petitions are considered by the relevant Committee or Lead Member and that a spokesperson for the petitioners be invited to address the Committee. The Chairman has referred this petition to the Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment.

3. Comments / Appraisal

3.1 The County Council has been engaged for a number of years on the issue of development and relief road proposals at East Grinstead. The Council's consistent policy approach has been to oppose schemes at East Grinstead in West Sussex that would lead to a significant increase in traffic in East Sussex. Despite this Council pursuing this stance at the Examination in Public, the West Sussex Structure Plan was adopted containing a proposal for 2,500 houses and an associated relief road.

3.2 Since then the County Council has been engaged with authorities in West Sussex that have been testing the impact of the development and relief road proposals on East Sussex. No solution has yet been found that would meet this Council's policy objective. Our views on the latest proposals for East Grinstead, included in the draft Area Action Plan for East Grinstead, were established at a meeting of Lead Member for Transport and Environment in June 2006. These are set out in Appendix 1.

3.3 These views were repeated in the response to the recent consultation on the Pre-submission version of the Mid Sussex Core Strategy which reiterated the strategic principles from the Area Action Plan. The Core Strategy document also proposed a reduced scale of development as an alternative, but this has not met our policy objectives of avoiding significant traffic increase in East Sussex. These views are set out in Appendix 1.

4. Environmental Issues

4.1 There are two main environmental issues. Current proposals for the relief road show a route that encroaches into the High Weald AONB connecting on the East Sussex side of the county boundary which the County Council considers is not justified and would consequently be difficult to deliver. In addition the County Council is concerned about the adverse impact of additional traffic on the A22 through the High Weald AONB and communities in East Sussex that cannot be satisfactorily mitigated.

5. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

5.1 The County Council does not object to housing development *per se* at East Grinstead. Its primary concern is to oppose any proposals that would lead to traffic growth in excess of 5% in East Sussex. As yet none of the proposals for housing and a relief road at East Grinstead that have been presented would restrict traffic growth below this level. East Sussex officers are continuing to work with the West Sussex authorities to try and find a solution that would meet this East Sussex objective. The County Council continues to use its best endeavours to oppose the development and associated road proposals that do not meet this objective.

RUPERT CLUBB

Director of Transport and Environment
17 July 2008

Contact Officer: Mike Langthorne 01273 481618

Local Member: Councillor Whetstone

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Mid Sussex Core Strategy - Draft Pre-Submission Document, January 2008
Report to Lead Member for Transport & Environment, 25 February 2008 - item 7
Report to Lead Member for Transport & Environment, 26 June 2006, item 10

County Council views on East Grinstead Proposal

1 The County Council has been engaged for a number of years on the issue of development and relief road proposals at East Grinstead. The 1991 - 2011 East Sussex Structure Plan contains a policy (TR43) which states that schemes in East Grinstead in West Sussex that would lead to a significant increase in traffic in East Sussex will be opposed. Despite the County Council's opposition to the proposal for a relief road contained in the draft West Sussex Structure Plan (WSSP) which officers pursued at the Examination in Public into that plan, the WSSP was adopted still containing the proposal. Yet this Council's policy of opposition remains.

2 In 2006 Mid Sussex District Council published for consultation a draft Area Action Plan for East Grinstead seeking to bring forward the WSSP proposal for 2,500 houses and a relief road at East Grinstead. This plan was reported to the 26 June 2006 meeting of the Lead Member for Transport & Environment where it was resolved:

To inform Mid Sussex District Council that East Sussex County Council:

- (1) remains opposed to any strategic development proposal in East Grinstead and associated Relief Road option that produces an increase in traffic on the A22 in Forest Row and across Ashdown Forest of more than 5%;*
- (2) is willing to work constructively with its partners in West Sussex and Surrey to achieve a Relief Road option that avoids a traffic increase greater than this;*
- (3) reserves its right to oppose the principle of the strategic development area at East Grinstead unless traffic capacity restraint measures are implemented which limit traffic increase on the A22 in East Sussex to 5% or less;*
- (4) opposes option 3b because of its impact within East Sussex;*
- (5) would support option 2e for the Relief Road if it was combined with traffic capacity restraint measures which limit the traffic increase within East Sussex to 5% or less; and*
- (6) reserves the right to appear at public examination to express the above views.*

3 The reasons for the decision were as follows.

- The three route options for the Relief Road put forward in the consultation all result in traffic increases in Forest Row and on Ashdown Forest well in excess of the 5% limit and, as a consequence, are material considerations. These increases arise because the Relief Road options are designed to create traffic capacity well beyond the transport needs of the strategic development area.
- Route option 1a/b and 2e, which avoids the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and East Sussex, could be supported as a route for the Relief Road, but only provided it incorporates the necessary capacity restraint measures to avoid significant traffic increase on the A22 in East Sussex. In the absence of such measures the County Council is prepared to take an objection through to the public examination stage of the Area Action Plan if necessary.

4 This remains the County Council's formal position.

5 More recently Mid Sussex District Council published the Pre-Submission draft of its Core Strategy for public comment. As the parent document with which the East Grinstead Area Action Plan must conform, it reiterates the strategic principles in the Area Action Plan

for East Grinstead. A report on this draft plan was considered at the Lead Member for Transport & Environment meeting on 25 February 2008 where it was resolved to reiterate the County Council's position on the Area Action Plan proposals. In particular, the County Council's formal comments on the Core Strategy, in response to the consultation question about what general principles should guide the development proposed for East Grinstead, include the following:

The County Council's clear and consistent position on this matter has been established for a long time and comments were provided to Mid Sussex District Council in response to the consultation on the East Grinstead Area Action Plan Pre- Submission Document. The County Council's position remains unchanged. In summary, the County Council would oppose any development allocation at East Grinstead which would materially increase the traffic flows (greater than 5%) on the A22 through Forest Row, because of the environmental and traffic impact. In that case the County Council would object to any Compulsory Purchase Order to acquire land for the full A22 / A264 relief road. The proposed Core Policy 20 would generate an increase in traffic in the order of 30% in the evening peak period through Forest Row in 2021 compared with a do minimum scenario and therefore cannot be supported.

The general principle established by the EIP Panel following examination of the West Sussex Structure Plan in proposing a strategic housing allocation was to "take full account of the traffic and environmental impact on both the immediate and wider surrounding areas". In that context the principle that the development should not materially worsen traffic or environmental conditions for neighbouring communities should guide the development proposed for East Grinstead. At present, the view from East Sussex County Council is that full account has not yet been taken.

6 The Pre-Submission Core Strategy also includes a contingent policy for East Grinstead, should the original proposals be undeliverable. In this regard the County Council's views included the following.

The alternative options in Core Policy 46 of development at East Grinstead for 1,500 dwellings at either location (v) or (w) and a partial relief road (should the development of 2,500 houses and a full relief road prove undeliverable) would still result in a material traffic impact in East Sussex. It is predicted that an 18% increase in traffic flow at evening peak period on the A22 through Forest Row would result with these options. Consequently the County Council can not support these options in 2021 compared with a do minimum scenario.

If the full East Grinstead development and relief road cannot be delivered then the contingent approach should be to utilise the location east of Crawley (nn) as indicated in core policy 47, rather than seek a reduced development at East Grinstead that would still involve an unacceptable level of traffic growth on the A22 at Forest Row