CONSULTATION ON KENT FREIGHT ACTION PLAN

1. Summary

1.1 Kent County Council is currently consulting on a draft Freight Action Plan for Kent. This report summarises the content of the Plan and recommends that the Council respond to the consultation on a number of matters, particularly with regard to freight impacts at the Dartford Crossing.

2. RECOMMENDATION:

2.1 That the response to the consultation on the draft Freight Action Plan, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be submitted to Kent County Council.

3. Background and Discussion

3.1. A draft Freight Action Plan for Kent (Action Plan) has been produced by Kent County Council (KCC) to identify strategic mitigations/actions to address the impact of road freight on communities in Kent. A copy of the Action Plan has been placed in the Members’ room.

3.2. The Action Plan acknowledges that freight transport is important and makes a significant contribution to the Kent and national economy, particularly taking account of the KCC’s role as an international gateway. However an important strategic priority for KCC is to tackle issues arising from the impact of freight transport on residents and businesses in Kent. The Plan sets out the current situation in Kent and identifies existing and future actions that can be taken by KCC with partners to ‘mitigate the impact of freight on the County’s road networks and residents’ quality of life.

3.3. A high level policy approach with regard to freight is expressed in KCC’s Local Transport Plan (LTP4) (Cabinet 6 September 2016 Item 8). The Freight Action Plan describes itself as a ‘daughter’ document to the LTP and sets out in more detail the key freight issues and practical actions that KCC, as lead transport authority in the area, will take forward. Whilst the document has no statutory weight it provides a high level strategy/action plan for freight traffic priorities in Kent and will support future work streams by KCC, the Council and other partners including Highways England, regarding freight.

3.4. The Action Plan identifies five high level actions that KCC believe are required to address current issues and impacts. These are:

- To tackle the problem of overnight lorry parking
- To find a long term solution to Operation Stack (A20 lorry parking to alleviate port closures/delays)
- Manage routeing of HGV traffic to ensure use of strategic roads as far as possible
- Address problems caused by freight traffic to communities
To continue to make use of planning powers to reduce the impact of freight traffic

3.5 It is recommended the Council respond to the consultation as set out at Appendix A. The response highlights the need for greater elaboration of actions that will address local issues of importance to Dartford with regard to freight traffic, particularly at the Dartford Crossing. In addition, a more measured conclusion is requested in the report with regard to the current planning application for a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange in the north-west corner of the Borough (Howbury Strategic Rail Freight Interchange). An overview of these concerns is set out below.

Addressing Issues at the Dartford Crossing

3.6 Whilst the Plan notes the very high level of freight traffic using the Dartford Crossing, the severe impacts of this traffic are not identified in the Plan, nor specific actions proposed. The Plan would benefit from recognition of these impacts and proposals to mitigate them. In particular, the proposed Lower Thames Crossing at Location C should be supported in the Plan. Proposals for short-term mitigations, which are currently being discussed with Highways England, should also be included.

Reference to Howbury Strategic Rail Freight Interchange

3.7 A small section on rail freight is incorporated into the introduction of the Action Plan. The section sets out that KCC supports the provision of modal shift from road to rail to reduce heavy good vehicles (HGV) movements in the County, so long as it does not adversely affect peak rail passenger services. The section finishes with a focus on Howbury Strategic Rail Interchange (SFRI) proposal straddling the Dartford / Bexley boundary, which is currently under consideration. It is considered that the Freight Action Plan should set out a more measured assessment of this proposal, since there is a lack of clarity and uncertainty about eventual outcomes and consequently it is not possible to make a conclusive assessment of its merits.

Overnight road parking by lorries

3.8 The Action Plan sets out that 70% of freight coming cross channel uses Dartford Crossing. However the Plan states it is other areas of Kent that are impacted by inappropriate overnight cross channel lorry parking. A recent survey by KCC suggests that Dartford is one of the least affected districts in the County. It is recommended that given the periodic complaints from residents and the significant proportion of freight using the Crossing that this situation is periodically monitored by KCC.

3.9 As well as a proposed large scale lorry park to deal with Operation Stack, the action plan states that KCC are developing a strategy for a network of smaller lorry parks. Whilst these may assist with issues of inappropriate overnight parking, the Action Plan should note that these parks could also assist in alleviating issues of long and prolonged traffic
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queues during periods of severe congestion particularly at the Dartford Crossing, by providing space for lorries to wait for improved conditions in congested areas, before making their onward journey.

Managing the routeing of HGV traffic

3.10 The Action Plan highlights new technology which would assist with vehicle communications to assist with safety and traffic updates. It notes that a scheme for the A2/M2 corridor is being developed, however no further details are given in the report. Additional clarity should be given with regard to how the project will be progressed, timescales and potential outcomes.

3.11 The Plan also refers to restrictions KCC have put in place to limit the inappropriate routeing of HGV’s through villages. This is a significant issue in Dartford, particularly when incidents occur on the Strategic Road Network. It would be helpful if KCC were to explore extension of the scheme to this Borough.

Use of planning and DC powers to reduce freight traffic

3.12 As far as is reasonably practicable, the Plan recommends that freight generating developments should be located with good access to the strategic network. However in considering on-going issues arising on many parts of Kent’s strategic road network, this section of the report would benefit from providing more detail on potential mitigation measures that may be applied through planning obligations.

Conclusion

3.13 The Freight Action Plan for Kent provides a set of high level actions which will enable a targeted approach to address key freight issues experienced in Kent.

3.14 However, the Action Plan is generally unclear as to specific actions that KCC will undertake individually or with partners. The Plan would be more effective if it were to set out a clear set of identified actions, together with who will take these forward and indicative timeframes. This would enable ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness and highlight where there was need for review. In particular the plan should more fully consider how schemes applied at the County level, might assist in alleviating significant congestion hotspots such as at the Dartford Crossing. These alongside other local measures, have the potential to assist, in alleviating congestion and consequent air quality and other local issues. The draft response also suggests that reference to KCC support for Option C of the Lower Thames Crossing should be referenced in the document as this will assist in dispersing the concentration of cross channel freight traffic currently using the Dartford Crossing over a wider area.
4. **Relationship to the Corporate Plan**

The actions identified in the Freight Action Plan for Kent have the potential to support key aims of the Corporate Plan including ensuring that regeneration in Dartford is sustainable; reduction in overall health inequality in Dartford and creating a safer borough.

5. **Financial, legal, staffing and other administrative implications and risk assessments**

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**Risk Assessment**
The actions identified in the Action Plan together with incorporation of the Council’s comments have potential to benefit residents and businesses in Dartford. This includes actions that could support reduction in levels of poor air quality by reducing incidences of queuing freight traffic.

6. **Details of Exempt Information Category**

Not applicable

7. **Appendices**

**Appendix A – Freight Action Plan – Consultation Questionnaire**

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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<td>Tania Smith</td>
<td>X3103</td>
<td>Planning</td>
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