



18th May 2008

By Email only

Cllr Roger F Manning
Member for Cranbrook
Chairman Highways Advisory Board
Lead Member Highways, Transport, Waste & Environment
Bramley Dial
Cranbrook Road
Benenden, Cranbrook
Kent TN17 4ET

Dear Cllr Manning

Thank you for coming over to speak at the end of the Tunbridge Wells Local Board Meeting of the 14th May and for also promising to investigate why there is no current KCC Road Safety Plan on the KCC website. I attach correspondence which Cllr Ferrin elected not to investigate, but simply pass onto Alan Ash.

I am delighted that you have asked for an outline of concerns that the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum holds relating to the state of highway maintenance and I am pleased to hear from you that you wish to see the Kent Highways Service to be a service to be proud of. You have our full support in this aim and to this end I attach a link to a set of slides, which summarises just a few of our concerns:

<http://www.townforum.org.uk/focusgroup/highwayspages100408.pdf>

1.) Naturally, as this link guides you through only a few examples of blight upon our landscape we would be delighted to meet with you to further discuss this lack of highway standards. The following questions must be asked:

- Why do your contractors replace bricks with tarmac/different colours tarmac side by side?
- Why do you allow your contractors to replace bricks with tarmac?
- Why do your contractors not replace like with like?
- Why do you allow utility companies to get away with sub-standard repairs?
- Why do you not make all utility companies liaise with each other for when work is undertaken?
- Why do highways engineers seem to so blatantly ignore faulty lights constantly on/damaged street furniture?
- Why do your contractors promise to replace signs and then do nothing?
- Whatever happened to the agreement on highways standards held between KCC and TWBC when KCC took over all responsibility? Why was the agreement not complied with and adhered to by KCC Highways?
- Why do street lamps get left in a state of disrepair?
- Etc.....

2.) Frant Road Crossing

We are pleased to see that action is at last being taken to make the area of concern much safer to cross, however, this does not excuse the statement made by Alan Ash, Development Planning Manager, advising us that KHS were blissfully ignorant of the major concerns held surrounding this road. In order to underline our dismay I list below a variety of your staff who have been involved in knowing about the concern yet ignoring pleas for safety:

- Andy Smart – copies of emails as far back as 10 January 2005 from Mr J Wallace (Resident) also official letter on file from same individual sent to Mr S D Wood (Resident) dated 23 February 2005. In fact as far back as September 2004 a survey was promised to be undertaken to Mr Wallace.
- Behdad Heratbar sent an email dated 1 February 2006 to Mr Miller (Resident) and copied this to Mr Smart. On 2 February 2006 Mr Smart sent an email to Mr Miller while also copying in Mr David Bond.
- Apart from these people Jerry Ralph of the Contact Centre emailed Katie Brown of SP KHS on 27 January 2006 and Ms Brown then sent an email onto Mr Heratbar of the same date.
- Over and above this, an email was sent to Kent Highways Services dated 24 January 2006 from Mr Miller (Resident), which was addressed to the Highways Manager and letters were also sent to “The Highways Manager” from Mr Miller dated 10 September 2005 and 3 November 2005.

You will therefore understand my concern when you mentioned you would be talking to Mr Heratbar who was fully aware of the problems of Frant Road as far back as 1 February 2006. Furthermore at a Town Forum meeting, in which Mr Heratbar gave a presentation on Highways activity, he proclaimed that parking on pavements was not a concern and that people should have to expect it. I trust you will agree with me that this is not a comment that should be made as parking on pavements obstructs not only the disabled, but also potentially a nearby water main to be used by the Fire Service, which could be under a car. Naturally, such action also destroys pavements.

3.) The latest item of Street Clutter

In one of the slides you will have noted an advertising sign on a roundabout, which KCC believes is such a clever thing to do at such a dangerous location! Roundabouts should not be used for advertising and furthermore any advertising is a distraction and an unsightly item of “grot”, which we simply do not need. I would also advise that none of these signs have planning permission and that KCC are not complying Highway Safety standards, as they are placing adverts at dangerous locations. Furthermore, we assume that revenues are being gained through this activity, which has been gained via the use of a marketing company and we ask how much that cost.

4.) Road Safety

As there would appear to be no safety plan to cover this time period we ask how you make decisions upon road safety when they are being made upon outdated conclusions. We now have more traffic and many more children using buses.

5.) Pembury Road Cycle Path

Who in their right mind elected to set up a cycle path along this road only to have priorities between pedestrians and cyclists changed half way? If I was blind I would be most concerned.

6.) Longfield Road/High Brooms Industrial Estate

We were delighted to see that at last action has been taken to address this issue, but why did you have to employ consultants, at great expense we suspect, to solve what is conceivably an obvious problem, namely, changing traffic light set ups, widening access and more importantly to think about the future when constant planning applications are being made to have yet more industrial units. Due to this total lack of planning the entire industrial estate is at gridlock every day, especially when you bear in mind we have the A21 traffic also joining/leaving this area. The narrow railway bridge at the rail station simply makes matters worse.

We are aware of an application to build a small private hospital, which would be open to all people through NHS Patient Choice, we would not want to see an objection from Kent Highways based upon increased traffic flow, especially when Kent Highways could so easily get to task and solve this bottleneck and second when we know that Marks & Spencer wish to build a Food Hall on the industrial estate, which is something that is again not required, especially when one bears in mind Royal Tunbridge Wells has no quality supermarket in the town centre which is affordable/accessible. Surely, we need fewer cars going to and from supermarkets.

7.) Pedestrian Friendly Royal Tunbridge Wells

With the ongoing discussions of the Tunbridge Wells “Master Plan” it is imperative that active dialogue with interested stakeholders be enacted at the earliest opportunity. We look to you to ensure this happens, as we do not want to see what is meant to be a pedestrian friendly area to continue to be a rat run, even though there is a “Bus Gate”, which is clearly not monitored by anyone. Furthermore, we do not wish to see tax payers monies invested into the town centre only to see a “white elephant” due to bottlenecks, which affect this town on a daily basis.

8.) Getting Around Royal Tunbridge Wells

A paper was put forward by the Town Forum to the TWBC JTB. We are aware this is now being looked at. While aspects of this plan may not be acceptable they outline the need for urgent action. You will be aware, for example, that Royal Tunbridge Wells has vast volumes of through-traffic from East Sussex on a daily basis. As this traffic goes through the town there must be more joined-up thinking as to what can be done to improve traffic-flow and reduce congestion. In cases such as this hard decisions will have to be taken if you do not wish to see traffic jams getting worse year on year. Can some roads be made one way? Can some roads be prevented from turning in the opposite direction of natural flow?

9.) Replacement of Street Lamps

One assumes these are being replaced as they are either coming to the end of their useful life or they are being replaced with the posts that bend upon impact.

When KCC Highways does replace them why do they have to bend the base over at angles so as to obstruct pedestrians in many cases? Why do they then not replace bricks with bricks, but rather with tarmac?

Perhaps it is due to these posts bending so easily that we have so many posts buckled due to high sided vans parking on pavements and then reversing into them without due care and attention.

Since December 2007 - Crescent Road has been festooned with a variety of double lampposts – OLD and NEW (not functioning) – since when we cannot remember it has been for so long.

Planned Road Closures for essential road maintenance

While we are aware that details are advised in the press, not everyone reads the local papers. We ask if it were possible to have details of such activities advised in advance so we could post this information relating to the unparished area of Royal Tunbridge Wells onto our website.

You will see from the above examples of extremely low standard of highway maintenance/lack of communication that matters could be improved if the people you employed actually did their work properly and by way of example I ask:-

- Why use tarmac to replace bricks?
- Why not have ALL KCC and Local Authority staff report faulty lights?
- Why not open up active dialogue with bodies such as the Town Forum, which would help you tackle the indifference which has plagued Highways Department for so many years.
- It costs little to clean sign posts.
- Why have outdated signs?
- Why have too many signs doing the same thing?

Finally, I have heard that costs being charged for setting up road crossings have been charged at too high a rate, up to three times the amount it should cost. If this is true then it is scandalous, but more to the point do you have a spending watchdog/audit committee and what standards do you insist upon when asking for quotes?

As advised, we are delighted to see your most positive attitude and we applaud your stated intentions, but we must ask for full consultation to solve these matters. As you are an elected representative I would ask that you copy this email to Peter Gilroy, Chief Executive KCC and Paul Carter, KCC Council Leader.

I trust you will find the above and attached constructive and helpful in your quest to improve Kent Highways. Please reply to myself care of Samantha Timms, Senior Committee Administrator, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN1 1RS.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Thomas
Chairman
Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum

www.townforum.org.uk

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