

## **BUCKHURST 2 MULTI-STOREY CAR PARK, SUFFOLK WAY, SEVENOAKS.**

**Planning ref: SE/14/02988/FUL**

Application: "Erection of a part two, part three-storey car park structure to provide 578 car parking spaces. Buckhurst 2 Car Park Buckhurst Lane Sevenoaks KENT TN13 1JJ"

### **Introduction.**

Thank you for consulting Kent County Council (K.C.C.) on the above planning application.

The application proposes the expansion of an existing surface level car park known as the "Buckhurst 2" car park. This is a long-stay car park formed of 285 car parking spaces and located in Sevenoaks town centre. A new twin deck structure, spanning the existing surface level car park, proposes an additional 277 spaces with the upper 2 decks accessed/egressed by way of vehicular ramps.

The Buckhurst 2 car park site is accessed exclusively from Suffolk Way and passing through the Suffolk Way (a small short-stay) car park. Suffolk Way leads from a signalised junction with Sevenoaks High Street and Pembroke Road, approximately 150m to the northwest. Leading from its junction with Suffolk Way, the access through the leisure centre is a single carriageway two way road. This provides access to the Suffolk Way car park, the entrance of which lies immediately beyond the Suffolk Way junction, and Sevenoaks Leisure Centre before reaching Buckhurst 2 car park. This route features parking bays positioned perpendicular to the carriageway for the majority of its length, these forming part of the Suffolk Way car park.

### **Consideration of issues.**

The High Street /Suffolk Way junction is a particularly busy junction in the heart of Sevenoaks and suffers from significant morning and evening (midweek) congestion, a situation which is mirrored on a Saturday lunchtime/late afternoon. Localised congestion and air pollution associated with queueing traffic has been the subject of concern to Sevenoaks residents and businesses.

It is important to note that even without the pressure of the proposed car park, the performance of the junction is expected to deteriorate between 2014-2018 as natural background growth/traffic levels increase, placing the junction under increased pressure.

The applicant's Transport Assessment (TA) recognises that the increase in parking provision at the Buckhurst 2 car park will increase the number of vehicles using the High Street /Suffolk Way junction.

The TA states:

*[7.4.3] "It is noted that the junction is predicted to exceed desirable capacity parameters during all peak hours, exhibiting a negative PRC (practical reserve capacity) value. Queues are predicted on the south arm, west arm and particularly the north arm during the morning peak hour and all entry arms during the evening peak hour. During the Saturday peak hour queues are predicted on all arms and particularly the north arm."*

Figures for additional number of vehicles included within the Transport Assessment include 182 additional vehicles in the morning (08.00-09.00) peak and 136 in the evening (17.00-18.00) peak.

In February 2014, new pedestrian facilities were introduced on each of the four arms of the High Street/Suffolk Way junction which compounded the problem of traffic congestion and queues in Sevenoaks.

In an attempt to facilitate a solution to the worsening of peak hour traffic congestion at the High Street /Suffolk Way junction, a series of meetings took place between KCC and SDC throughout Summer/Autumn 2014 (23<sup>rd</sup> July, 4<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> October).

Significant attempts were made to develop practicable, deliverable mitigation measures so as to facilitate the delivery of the expanded car park and optimise the capacity of the High Street/ Suffolk Way junction. KCC and SDC were unable to agree upon a scheme that would efficiently and safely mitigate the impact of the additional vehicles associated with the expanded car park on the High Street/Suffolk Way junction and the free and safe movement of vehicles using that junction.

Both KCC and SDC recognise that the area already suffers from significant traffic stress at peak times and that the additional vehicular movements linked to the car park extension - predominantly in the morning and afternoon/evening peaks will severely impact on existing traffic congestion. This includes traffic backing up in both directions on the High Street at peak times, reaching and potentially going beyond the junction of London Road (the A224) and worsening the situation along Seal Hollow Road and Dartford Road.

The volume of traffic accessing the car park from the Suffolk Way/High Street junction in the morning peak is significant and exacerbates existing queueing on the High Street. On the southern arm, only 3 vehicles can perform a right turn into Suffolk Way via the existing filter lane and due to the constraints associated with (already narrow) footways and historic building lines, it is impossible to facilitate increased capacity at this location.

Congestion and queuing occurs in both directions along the High Street, including in the direction of the B2019 Seal Hollow Road and the A225 Dartford Road in the morning peak. Any future expansion of the car park at this site will inevitably severely worsen this situation, potentially making the town a less attractive place to work within or visit.

In an attempt to improve the speed/throughput of traffic at this location, the applicant's proposed mitigation which includes the reduction of some footway widths in the town centre is not desirable. KCC does not aspire to reduce the width of pedestrian footways in busy town centre locations.

### **Proposed mitigation**

As part of the pre-application discussions, KCC presented serious concerns to SDC regarding the ability of the junction to function efficiently post-construction. People using the car park are likely to find that they experience lengthened queues when attempting to exit the new car park during the evening peak, as traffic queues will worsen along Suffolk Way and back up into the car park, most likely stretching back well inside the new facility.

The mitigation proposed for the junction proposes the removal of an “all red” pedestrian phase (when vehicular movements are essentially “locked down” and pedestrians have the ability to walk across all four arms of the junction at the same time). This would be replaced by a “walk with traffic” option on the Suffolk Way arm. Pedestrians would only be able to get half way across the Suffolk Way arm of the junction at any one time and enter a larger central (staggered) pen.

This could lead to pedestrians losing patience waiting for the traffic to stop and the pedestrian green phase to commence (hence attempting to cross in between traffic). This compromises the safe passage of pedestrians at one of Sevenoaks Town Centre’s busiest road traffic junctions. For example schoolchildren may become fed up waiting for the “green man” and simply dart across the road between traffic, endangering their lives.

KCC has serious reservations regarding the buildability of the larger central island on Suffolk Way proposed by applicant, having ruled this option out as part of considerations during the introduction of the pedestrian phases. The concept of a larger central pedestrian island and a “walk with traffic” option on the Suffolk Way arm of the junction is not welcomed by KCC, nor do we believe the proposed mitigation is deliverable.

The proposed infrastructure is likely to be repeatedly damaged by larger vehicles (such as articulated heavy goods vehicles); specifically those attempting a right turn from High Street into Suffolk Way, the swept path analysis suggests things would be particularly tight in this regard. The narrowed footways and very tight turning movements is also likely to lead to large vehicles over-hanging the footways, to the detriment of pedestrian safety.

In this respect, KCC would resist the High Street/Suffolk Way junction mitigation/rebuild taking place as currently proposed.

## **Summary.**

KCC believes that this if given consent, this planning application would contribute an additional, unsustainable level of traffic to the Pembroke Road/High Street/Suffolk Way junction, particularly during the midweek morning peak (08.00-09.00) and late afternoon peak (17.00-18.00). The junction already operates above capacity at peak times and an unsustainable development such as a multi-storey car park will inevitably worsen the situation, as demonstrated in the applicant’s Transport Assessment.

Up to 182 additional vehicular movements will be added the network in the morning (08.00-09.00) and evening (17.00-18.00) peak hours, at this location, which will place severe pressure on an already traffic congested local network and significantly inconvenience local people who need to pass through their home town at key times of day.

There would also be a severe impact on a Saturday lunchtime/early afternoon (12.00-14.00), as well as late afternoon (extra queuing/backing up out of existing car park along Suffolk Way, as traffic returns to the junction). KCC suggests that this development – if approved – will have a significant detrimental impact on the free and convivial movement of vehicular traffic across both the immediate and the wider area of Sevenoaks town centre.

If the Planning Committee is minded to approve the application, KCC would expect SDC to engage and contribute financially to feasibility/technical studies to identify required infrastructure that will address the impacts of the additional vehicular movement associated with the expanded car park both prior to – and following – the construction of the new facility. SDC as the applicant will also be required to fully fund any mitigating measures.

KCC asks the applicant to very carefully consider the implications – as set out in this response – of approving an unsustainable town centre development which could render the town centre highways network incapable of supporting the weight of traffic at the aforementioned times of day/week.

KCC has grave reservations as to the ability of the existing network to absorb any more motor-borne traffic which will inconvenience the lives of those choosing to live, work and visit Sevenoaks Town Centre. KCC would encourage SDC to consider the congestion, air quality and future economic development implications of a town centre that relies so heavily on an expanded, centrally based multi-storey car park facility.