



Ashtead Independents

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Woodfield Lane Widening

25th July 2015 by admin

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This is Cllr Townsend's reply to Cllr Hunt's explanation, which is below:

Number of points to answer concerning Cllr. Hunt's riposte to many residents on the Woodfield Lane widening project (please read all 8 points as they provide clear and honest responses to each of Cllr. Hunt's).

1. Planning monies as he says can be objected to by the developer that has provided them, although I have been reliably informed by an officer, that has never happened at all in his experience. There appears to be a 'threat' that the developer might be told they 'should' object ! Having said that it is SCC who have responsibility for this Infrastructure money and the relevant minutes of the Local Committee, who unanimously agreed this project, state clearly 'Funding has been identified from developments in the Ashtead area which should be sufficient to cover the cost of scheme development and construction of whichever option is taken forward.' There is every reason to see the money used for the widening project can be related to the 93 homes constructed on the Parsons Mead site, as a considerable number of residents who now live in those homes will be using the route down Woodfield Lane to the station. The widening project will obviously ease the congestion for them as well as all other Ashtead residents. It is not 'stretching any test of reasonableness'.
2. Schemes mentioned by Cllr. Hunt have been pavements on the Lanes, one-way system on the Lanes and a recent one that I have been talking to residents about, namely a crossing point on Ottways Lane. Other Councillors who represent Village ward have previously listened to residents' concerns who felt the first 2 proposed schemes mentioned would increase traffic speeds and reduce safety. What has been suggested recently to our Councillors is a 20mph speed limit or traffic calming.
3. The issue of the trees has been addressed with both SCC and MVDC officers, and their safety and protection is paramount and has been confirmed by those officers.
4. Cllr Hunt's claim on the A24 crossing nearby Stag Leys is dubious to say the least as this was an integral part of the Cycle Path project completed last year. A SCC project with no involvement from Cllr. Hunt.
5. To say he has a clear mandate from the election is stretching things. The two election leaflets that mention the widening project state 'The Parsons Mead development money should be spent in the Lanes area – not widening Woodfield Lane which would threaten the avenue of trees near the station' and under Issues on the Doorsteps – 'The lack of a safe crossing point in Ottways Lane in the Maple Road to Ottways Avenue area. Surely the Parsons Mead planning money could fund that' .I've touched on that above in 2. Another stating 'The threat to the avenue of trees near the railway station from the ARA/Independent dogma to widen the road and it would be better to try yellow



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lines' (again the trees are covered clearly in 3. above). Neither of these are Pledges from Cllr. Hunt – he states clearly on his last leaflet that he has five 2015 pledges and none mention in any way the widening project. Just for information Cllr. Hunt has one of those 5 pledges to 'Resolve the Tesco site' – How ? might be the question.

Furthermore Cllr. Hunt is but one Councillor in the Village ward, there are 2 other Independents representing that ward, as well as two Independents representing the Common ward (in which this project is situated) and two more Independents in the Park ward (where the Parsons Mead site is situated). That makes 6 out of 7 Councillors in Ashtead that all support the scheme, one of which is also the County Councillor that is enabling it to go forward. How Cllr. Hunt says he has a mandate is beyond me.

6. The time taken for the project was due to Common Land issues known at the time of the consultation and in the agreed Local Committee report, which stated 'Officers enter in discussion with the appropriate authorities to resolve the common land issues associated with Option 3 (Parking Lay-by)'. It has taken around a year to get Minister of State approval and may have taken longer if not for the intervention from our local MP Chris Grayling. It is also to be remembered that the weather damage over Christmas 2013 and early 2014 resulted in many SCC Highways staff having to be taken off their other jobs, and as a result the timing slipped. Had this not been the case the project might well have been completed by now. Local Government does move slowly, unfortunately, but we had been ready to start until Cllr. Hunt's intervention. The comprehensive consultation, as residents know, had a clear majority for the road-widening solution over the other two options (yellow lines and a one-way system).

7. A land swop is mentioned by Cllr. Hunt as 'shrouded in secrecy' and 'this secret land swop'. The Conservative Executive member responsible for Assets (eg. land) knows about this swop and has done so for some time – the Leader of MVDC confirmed that very recently to me. This swop only involves the land at Woodfield Lane and land at Deepdene in Dorking. No other land is involved, so the 'piece of land formerly used for car parking' mentioned by Cllr. Hunt is not involved in any way, a complete 'red herring'. Again as the land is not in his ward he would not necessarily have known but the Councillors in the Common ward, where the land lies, do know.

8. Cllr. Hunt's very last sentence again refers to possible action by the developer on the use of their money which is covered in item 1 above. I wonder what Cllr. Hunt is suggesting ?

In response to the emails that Cllr Friend received, Cllr Hunt issued the following email:

Cllr Friend has kindly forwarded the email you have written about this scheme and me. It is a pity that the ARA/AiA email issued by Mr Unthank requesting an email campaign had not suggested that emails be sent to me as well since I am being portrayed as the one person stopping the scheme.

As part of the Infrastructure Needs Review which the District Council has launched, the infrastructure needs of areas are now being reviewed. This approach is in contrast to that of the previous coalition Independent-led administration which was a housing numbers led approach (you may remember the "Housing and Gypsy Travellers Sites" review which called for possible sites to be suggested to meet the housing need). I whole heartedly agree with the new approach as it means that the



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infrastructure needs of areas – schools, doctors, drainage and yes, highways – will be a key consideration in then considering the housing numbers that an area can realistically cope with. Such a review will help Ashtead in my opinion, and when I have explained this to residents they agree. Do you?

It follows that the use of Planning Gain monies from developers will be considered in the light of that review. This is because if say a school is full, then new housing could presumably only be considered after that school were expanded or a new one built, rather than have to accept catch-up. Likewise if a road can cope with more traffic it will then be able to accept more housing, whereas a road with an existing and unsolved traffic issue will presumably be less likely to have more housing.

Further, and as far as I am aware this has not been stated in the SCC consultation or the ARA/AiA emails so far, there is a legal requirement that planning infrastructure monies can only be spent on items which relate to the development which led to the monies being generated. This means that if the road scheme is not directly related to the development scheme then the developer can demand the money back. While a couple of housing schemes on the northern side of the railway line have generated highways infrastructure monies and so improving the capacity of Woodfield Lane to accept more housing development on the northern side of the railway line is fully in accordance with such monies (and indeed further housing might be an unintended and unfortunate consequence of road widening since the capacity of Woodfield Lane has always been used to help protect the area from additional housing numbers), the possible road widening would cost far more than those existing schemes have generated. As a result the proposal would require a significant portion of the highways funds generated by the Parsons Mead development in Park Ward, approximately one mile away from the railway station. While some have argued that the 94 houses in that scheme use the dozen or so spaces in Woodfield Lane for parking, I think it is stretching any test of reasonableness since the width and parking issues in Woodfield Lane pre-date the Parsons Mead development. Indeed the previous Independent County Councillor, David Gollin, looked at possibly widening the road and concluded against it due to the risk of affecting the trees. Further, at the time that the Parsons Mead development was approved (and I voted against it so it is not that I love that development!) the highways issues that arose concerns were related to traffic in the roads near the scheme; no one at the committee said that it would cause issues at Woodfield Lane. As a consequence the developer could – and should – object to the use of their money so far away from their housing development.

Further, at the time of the original SCC consultation some three years ago there were no costings given on the consultation forms to allow people to judge whether items were cost-effective. We are all fully aware that the cost would not be a council tax issue directly, but clearly if the money were not spent here it could be spent on other improvements. Indeed I have many residents in my Village Ward who want the Parsons Mead highways money to be spent near that housing scheme.

As you do not live in Village Ward you will probably have not seen the leaflets issued in the recent election (although I am aware that Mr Unthank did copy parts of one leaflet in another mass email issued by him just before polling day so you may have read the part that was copied together with his comments). In that election I made clear statements that I agreed with residents in Village Ward who want the Parsons Mead highways money to be spent on highways safety schemes near that development. I led the calls to have a pedestrian crossing installed on Leatherhead Road near Stag



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Leys, and I met with Ashtead's County Councillor to raise with him the possible location where it was indeed subsequently installed – this encourages children who live on that side of Leatherhead Road to be walked to school rather than be driven. This reduces car traffic in Ottways Lane, and so helps to reduce the all year increase that the housing development has generated. That is the type of scheme that residents in my ward who have seen the effects of the Parsons Mead development on local roads want. Hence my clear commitment in the recent election to seek the highways monies spent near the scheme. It is not – as some have tried to portray it and some seem to have accepted – simply 'Chris Hunt trying to stop the widening'. I stood on a clear election platform on the issue and not only was I re-elected but the Independent candidate polled the lowest share of the vote that I have ever known. I can understand that the ARA/AiA must be upset that their candidate did so poorly, but I believe that I have a clear election mandate in this matter. When combined with the council's commitment for an Infrastructure Needs Review when assessing housing numbers it is not, as Mr Unthank has said just me stopping the scheme.

Further, I have always been a councillor who has promoted public consultation over issues. While the ARA/AiA email bemoans this 'delay', I would say that this widening project has taken years – is it over three? – to get to the stage when the Common land issued were only recently stated to have been resolved. At the time of the initial consultation it was not stated that it would take so long and I wonder if people would have voted for the schemes they did knowing the timeframe or costs. Indeed no one option secured a clear mandate. One or two people have tried to portray the road widening and the one way schemes as both 'against the yellow line option' but they were not presented as a joint scheme and in a similar manner, by combining the support for the yellow line and the one way options, one could say that there was a clear mandate against the road widening! I have not tried to merge such schemes to create a false result in the same way others have; the simple fact is that no one scheme was favoured by a majority.

Further it was only recently that I was told that the widening was part of a land swap involving another plot of land in Ashtead as well as some land in Dorking. This has never been the issue of any council consultation or debate. We do not know the actual value of the lands involved nor the terms of any secret agreement that has been apparently reached. This is very worrying. Further it appears that part of this three way land swap (two plots in Ashtead for one piece of land apparently near a mausoleum in Dorking) includes a piece of land in Ashtead formerly used for car parking in the recreation ground car park which now has a shipping container like structure on it. It is apparently used for storage purposes although again there appears to have been no consultation over this. As somebody who is keen to ensure there is local parking in Ashtead, I am sure you will agree that the loss of that off-road parking area is to be regretted – yet again, there has not been any debate as to its worth as part of a land swap for something next to an historic burial plot in Dorking. Putting aside the parking and planning implications of the loss of parking at the Recreation Ground car park and displacement of parking onto local roads, I have to say I am concerned that details of this land swap of public owned land have been so shrouded in secrecy. I hope you can understand that as a councillor I am duty bound to ensure that council's assets – land owned on behalf of all residents – are properly used. Again however, the ARA/AiA email did not mention that did it? You may have known the full details of it, but I suspect that most residents – like me – would have been unaware of it. Yet this secret land swap is at the heart of the widening.



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The proposed consultation will enable the Infrastructure needs to be considered and inform the public of the possible land swap and what all the implications are. The consultation is to inform residents of these issues and seek views. If in the light of that residents want to widen Woodfield Lane so that car parking no longer reduces the capacity of the road for traffic then as the councillor in Ashtead who has championed consultation I will support it. I am know the council as a whole will then act accordingly in its various decisions (although presumably only once any possible future action by the developer over using the money has also been firmly resolved).

After this was put on the ARA website, Cllr Chris Townsend received many replies, not all from those living “over the line” and extracts of some are below:

‘Would you please tell Cllr. Hunt that he risks incurring the heart-felt wrath of those of who have prayed for years for a solution to the Woodfield Road problem by his last-minute and unwarranted interference in a project that will bring relief to every household on the north side of the railway. It is really important to us and we will not forget it if he continues to stand in its way.

We are thus seriously disappointed to find you (Cllr Friend) and Cllr. Hunt behaving in ways that seem more in accord with the behaviour of Labour Councils of the 1970s – where, if the public vote results in the “wrong” outcome you keep them voting until they come up with the “right” outcome.

Given the publicity surrounding this issue and the ill-feeling it has stirred up you (Cllr Hunt) do appear to have dug yourself into a hole by overruling this democratic decision My view is that the best way out of the hole would be to announce that you (Cllr Hunt) have now had time to thoroughly re-appraise the evidence that supported the Option 3 widening scheme and that this scheme shall now be implemented without delay. To do otherwise would irreparably damage both your own reputation, that of a Conservative led Council, and destroy any lingering faith in the worth of public participation in local democracy.

Please add me to the list of Ashtead residents who wish for the prevarications of Cllr. Hunt to come to an end, and for the widening of Woodfield Lane to proceed as previously agreed, and as soon as can be scheduled.

I was both surprised and disgusted to read that Cllr Chris Hunt had stopped the Woodfield lane Widening scheme. As I understand this was democratically agreed to some time ago by sending out letters to every home in the vicinity and also providing a Public Exhibition at the Ashtead Peace Memorial Hall both of which I contributed to and I was one of the 45% who was in favour of this scheme. I do hope that local people can rise above this apparently appalling overriding of the wishes of the people of Ashtead and that the proposed and agreed scheme goes ahead ASAP.

I am utterly dismayed to hear that there may be a further delay in this scheme. The scheme has already been subject to a full consultation and as a resident who would be directly affected I am satisfied that there has been widespread public involvement across Ashtead in developing the way forward. I urge you to take forward the current preferred option of widening the road immediately.



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This is utter nonsense and a further waste of councillors' time and public money. It was properly and professionally studied last time and we must just get on with it. No doubt somewhere there is an ulterior motive.'

It may well have come to your attention that an article in the latest Leatherhead Advertiser reports that Cllr. Chris Hunt has stopped the Woodfield Lane widening scheme and suggests a further consultation.

He states that 'We're going to ask locals what they feel about it. When it was discussed before it was a very low response rate with very little information'.

The facts are that the previous SCC Highways consultation to which he refers sent 5,500 letters to every home and business in Ashtead, giving details of the 3 options proposed. There was a very well attended Public Exhibition held at the Ashtead Peace Memorial Hall for all residents, giving clear and detailed plans for each of the options, which allowed residents to question officers on those plans. The whole process was a professional and comprehensive piece of work. The consultation resulted in just under a 20% response rate, which is very good. It showed a 45% preference for the road-widening project, against 32% for yellow lines and 15% for a one-way system. The Local Committee then, less than 2 years ago, unanimously approved the road-widening scheme as clearly the most popular.

Cllr. Hunt also states that 'If people want the widening it's going to cost hundreds of thousands'.

The cost included in the report to the Local Committee was £105,000 and this will not be from Council Tax. It will be found from Developer contributions towards Infrastructure for Ashtead that arise from planning developments, both in the Park and Common wards. There will be funds remaining available for any future projects.

The issues concerning the trees in Woodfield Lane have also been addressed with both SCC and MVDC officers confirming their preservation and protection.

As you can see, we find it most unfortunate that this has come up at the 11th hour, as the road-widening project is due for completion over the next few months, including the re-surfacing of that part of Woodfield Lane as part of the project.

If you want the project to be completed ASAP, please write/email the Leader of MVDC, Cllr. James Friend (cllr.friend@molevalley.gov.uk) copying it to both your Surrey County Councillor Chris Townsend (chris.townsend53@ntlworld.com) and the Chief Executive of MVDC Yvonne Rees (yvonne.rees@molevalley.gov.uk).