

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE KIG JOINT PARISHES GROUP
AND LORD BERKELEY
Held on 19th June 2008 at 7.30pm.

The meeting was chaired by Richard Jacques - TPC

Richard Jacques introduced Lord Berkeley to the meeting and welcomed him to the meeting. He gave a short introduction to all present and explained the set up of the Joint Parish Group and its aims to Lord Berkeley. He outlined the questions that the JPG were going to put to him during the course of the evening and then passed the meeting over to Lord Berkeley

Lord Berkeley spoke regarding rail freight and his background within this industry. He informed the meeting that he was well acquainted with the industry from his work with Euro Tunnel and his role as Chairman of the Freight Rail Group. He stated that it was Government Policy to have as many terminals as possible in order to deal with rail freight.

He stated that the purpose of his attending the JPG meeting was to give a background in order to develop the JPG arguments whilst sitting on the fence.

He spoke of the situation regarding the CTRL rail freight and informed the meeting that the tunnel was built to take EU rail freight from the UK to France. He suggested that the cost of using this service were due to be cut by 50% and stated that at present this side of the CTRL was under used. He suggested that this would increase with competition.

Lord Berkeley stated that in the new few years the Government would challenge some of the restrictions at the CTRL to allow other types of freight to use it. He stated that he would like to see 200 trains use the tunnel with freight.

He spoke regarding terminal and their place in the country, he stated that forecasts show a growth by centres of production, he referred to the large market from the UK to the continent and beyond.

Lord Berkeley stated that AXA had brought the centre part of the Barking terminal, he also suggested that the land between the railway and the A13 could also be purchased to expand this depot. He stated that this location was in the centre of consumption. He suggested that the demand was west and south of London.

Lord Berkeley stated that he was unable to put himself in a position to give a view on the locations for rail terminals, he could outline the facts for views to be ascertained. He stated that he would not lobby for or against KIG but he was willing to give facts.

The meeting was opened for questions from JPG members.

June Harrison of Leeds Parish Council spoke regarding issues of employment and traffic. She asked Lord Berkeley about the high price of crossing the channel and KIG's transport assessment. She spoke regarding the number of HGV lorry movements and questioned the additional number of support vehicles for the proposed site and the addition of these vehicles on the motorway network. She stated that 80% of potential workers would have to travel from surrounding areas to work via car and the risk of accidents. She stated that the Parish Councils were in favour of getting the traffic off the road onto rail but in achieving this, the immediate local area would suffer from an increase in traffic.

Lord Berkeley responded to this question. He stated that as with all freight rail terminals the local traffic would increase but the trunk road traffic would reduce further a field. He stated that that is the way it works, the key to rail freight is to keep it on rail for as long as possible.

He spoke regarding the issue of trucks and confirmed that the Cabinet had produced new papers; he stated that more and more foreign lorries are coming into the country especially in Kent. He stated that the problem was that the foreign hauliers compete with the UK hauliers and they use tax-free fuel, he spoke of the problems with the lack of enforcement, stating that this was a serious problem but not confined to Kent.

Lord Berkeley stated that he would like additional checks out in place to try to police this issue.

With regards to the points raised regarding jobs and public transport, he stated that June Harrison had a point and made no further comments on this issue.

Geoff Licence of Bearsted Parish Council asked Lord Berkeley about the finance and business aspects regarding the proposed development. He asked about the business case for having the Kent International Gateway in Bearsted.

Lord Berkeley stated that he did not know the answer to this question. He spoke regarding rail freight businesses and the economics of rail freight travel; he stated that size matters and spoke of the planning bill due in The Lords next month. He stated that at present KIG falls within the scope of independent planning conditions. He stated that there was a need for the site of the development to be as close as possible to the port of delivery, a balance had to be taken and he stated that this was an avenue that the JPG may wish to pursue.

Paul Mace from Hollingbourne Parish Council spoke regarding site-specific issues. He read out some wording from the planning application supporting documents and he asked Lord Berkeley if he agreed that it was the wrong location for a rail freight interchange.

Lord Berkeley spoke regarding the Strategic Rail Strategy, he stated that this was the only policy still in existence and still relevant which could be quoted. He spoke of the method of transporting the freight and referred to the percentages quoted in the planning papers and suggested that the issues regarding figures could be sought via other similar depots.

He spoke regarding other sites and the advantages of being rail connected. He stated the key was to make as many facilities as near to the rail as possible. He suggested that the JPG might wish to use Howbury terminal as a comparison to KIG. He also indicated that there was a need to be careful to ensure that the rail was not into the application just to get planning permission.

Terry Laing from Downswood Parish Council asked the following question...

'You have previously been quoted in saying that your focus is on UK initiatives that rail must be brought into contention for the freight carried by road. Given the location and the commodities currently handled throughout Kent how is this feasible?'

Lord Berkeley spoke regarding temperature controlled freight. He stated that this was not done in this country at present, however it was possible and was likely in the future.

He spoke regarding possible companies capable of transporting such freight. He spoke regarding the rail capacity and the size of the wagons for freight.

He spoke further regarding the requirements for freighters carrying temperature-controlled freight and of the capabilities of the depots already up and running.

Peter Titchner of Ulcombe Parish Council spoke regarding the increase in lorry movements in the area should the KIG application be approved, he referred to the location of the proposals as madness. He stated that this type of development should be linked with the major ports. He stated that the UK had a very short-term vision and that such development needed govern investment to ensure that the infrastructure was in place.

He asked Lord Berkeley what his views were on the motorways of the seas concept and the continental gauge.

Lord Berkeley stated that the gauge was the continental gauge and the usual height of the container for rail freight was 9'6" and was the standard size. He stated that freight goes on different types of wagons and continental wagons would not go past the stations in this country. He confirmed that the 9'6" gauge is no in Kent apart from on the CTRL rail and investment needs to be put into raising the bridges on the existing freight wagons, again he confirmed that the 9'6" network is available via CTRL but the cost restricted the use of this.

With regards to the motorway by seas concept, he stated that this was a fantastic idea; he spoke about traffic forecasts for freight and the reluctance of Government to do its own forecasts for freight. He stated that containers would probably treble by 2030 and questioned where it was gong to, he stated that deep sea container traffic goes to Thames Haven and Felixstowe, continental traffic goes to Thames, Humber Tyne and Tees and some to the Scottish East Coast.

Rail freight containers have to go into ports and some need gauge enhancements. He stated that the government does not seem to think north of the country.

He stated that more investment is needed on the network as when the freight hits the ports it needs to be transported inland.

John Horne Ward Councillor and Thurnham Parish Councillor asked Lord Berkeley about Environmental issues. He spoke regarding the potential development and the affects that this would have on the North Downs Aquifer, he spoke regarding the additional projected dwelling over the next 5 to 10 years and the water shortage on the southeast.

John Horne referred to the draft water bill and the shortages of water on the area. He asked about the extra demands for water by the development and the changes to the aquifer caused by the development. He asked whether strategic bodies considered the total environmental impact that such developments can have.

Lord Berkeley stated that it is his job to look at these problems and no one seems to consider the infrastructure. He stated that the key is to get the right information and evidence. He stated that the developers would commission their own studies and opposing evidence needed to be ascertained.

He stated that water was a problem in the area and all developers have to consider this matter and come up with answers.

Paul Mace from Hollingbourne Parish Council asked a further question regarding the possibility of people like AXA having a hidden agenda.

Lord Berkeley stated that the KIG would not come under the new planning bill, as this was unlikely to happen for a number of years, however rail freight interchanges would be incorporated in the Bill when it did come into force.

He spoke regarding the question of the hidden agenda and the possibility of this application being a cover for another application. He suggested that this could be a question to put, or to seek a condition on the application.

He stated that the JPG could ask for limits to be placed on the site if approved.

Geoff Licence referred to the master plan on display in the room and asked if there was a possibility of subsidence on existing properties, this was discussed.

Terry Laing asked Lord Berkeley if he lived near a rail terminal and whether he would like this and what his views were on this.

Lord Berkeley answered this question and stated that no he would not like this.

Mike Bernal from Hollingbourne Parish Council mentioned similar depots, which were also considered not in the best locations. He stated that private industry seemed to be driven by sheer profit and the need for Government to have an input into the locations.

Lord Berkeley stated that this was not a government issue it was for the planning system to sort out.

Richard Jacques concluded the discussions for the evening and thanked Lord Berkeley for his time. He stated that he was delighted with Lord Berkeley's input into the discussions. He referred to the plan of KIG and asked Lord Berkeley whether he felt that the plan was a plan for a rail interchange or a speculative application for other reasons.

Lord Berkeley stated that he would have liked to see a lot more rail lines on the site or planning for the provision of rail lines.

Richard Jacques thanked Lord Berkeley once again on behalf of the JPG.

He closed the meeting at 8.00pm