

## FARNHAM TOWN COUNCIL HART LINK ROAD – POSITION PAPER January 2023

1. Farnham Town Council (FTC) welcomes the agreement reached at the FIP Board meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> December that the construction of a Hart Link Road should “remain on the table” for further discussion rather than the proposed recommendation “that further work on the route be paused and that it is removed from any emerging designs”.
2. This position paper represents FTC’s contribution in a balanced way to this further discussion on the basis that FTC has consistently argued that construction of a Hart Link Road is an essential part of the Farnham Infrastructure Programme (FIP) if it is to meet its objective of reducing traffic passing through Farnham Town Centre and improving air quality.
3. The construction of a Hart Link Road is not a new proposal – a summary of the background history is given below : -

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| 29 <sup>th</sup> May 2018                       | Suggested by Jim Duffy as part of the pedestrianisation proposals put forward by the local Conservatives in presentation to The Farnham Society  |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> March 2022<br>FTC Full Council | <p>When the Farnham Infrastructure Programme (FIP) was established the Hart Link Road again came forward as part of Option C (Pedestrianisation) Surrey County Council (SCC) decided not to pursue any modelling of this option since not considered to be realistic.</p> <p>When debated by the Full Council meeting of Farnham Town Council held on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2022 it was agreed that SCC should be advised that the Hart Link Road should be included as part of the Option B proposals under which changes to traffic flows in Central Farnham were to be evaluated. In response SCC and Atkins stated that it was not possible to alter the transport demand modelling to accommodate including the Hart Link Road as part of the evaluation of Option B.</p> |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> June 2022<br>FIP Board         | Paper prepared by SCC without any consultation and circulated to all members of FIP Board with only 2 days’ notice which “recognised that whilst there are some benefits the proposed Upper Hart link would have a significant negative impact on the local area”  |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> August 2022<br>FTC Full Council | <p>In response to the public consultation exercise undertaken between July and October FTC again stressed the need for construction of the Hart Link Road. Extract from minutes : -</p> <p><i>“There was substantial discussion on the proposal for a Link Road from Castle Street to the Upper Hart Car Park with an aspiration for a longer-term connection to West Street. Council noted its previous request for this option to be included as part of the Option B proposal had been ignored and there had been a last-minute report to the last FIP Board to dismiss this as an option on the grounds of cost but it had been agreed that the decision be deferred for consideration by FTC.</i></p>   |

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|   | <p><i>Cllr Ward reminded Council that Surrey CC had often said the Town Council was not clear in its views, and it was time to say what FTC wanted. On a proposal by Cllr Ward, seconded by Cllr Attfield, <b>it was agreed nem con</b> (with Cllr Beaman abstaining) that FTC reaffirms its aspiration for construction of a link road between Castle Street and the Upper Hart and its continuation to West Street as an essential element to any measures to provide access and remove town centre improvements”.</i></p>   |
| <p>15<sup>th</sup> December<br/>2022<br/>FTC Full Council</p> | <p>In response to analysis of public consultation exercise FTC yet again emphasises need for construction of Hart Link Road. Extract from minutes :<br/> <i>“In discussion, councillors argued that a connecting road between Castle Gate in Castle Street and West Street should not be removed from the draft programme, that the report was not balanced and only made negative points about the proposal (some contradicting proposals made by SCC elsewhere). The cost for delivering an objective which would have lasting benefits was relatively small in the cost of the overall improvements for the town centre and would reduce a large percentage of through traffic using the current gyratory system.</i></p> <p><i>The Link road would provide access for residents and visitors from North Farnham to the Hart and The University for the Creative Arts as well as West Street, as an essential part of successful town centre improvements and minimising traffic moving around the town centre. The potential opportunity to extend this link road to West Street at a future point (if not done immediately) should be incorporated within the Farnham Infrastructure Programme.</i></p> <p><i>Farnham Town Council Resolved BY 10 VOTES to NIL with four abstentions the following Motion “Farnham Town Council strongly supports the construction of a road between Castle Gate and West Street as a way of ameliorating traffic through the Borough, before the Borough is narrowed.”<br/>(Draft Minutes to be formally approved in Jan 2023)</i></p> |
| <p>16<sup>th</sup> December<br/>2022<br/>FIP Board</p>        | <p>Further paper produced by SCC again without any consultation in which it was recommended that “that further work on the route be paused and that it is removed from any emerging designs”. It was, however, agreed that further discussions should take place regarding this proposal.</p>  |

- Both of the SCC papers at the June and December FIP Board meetings on the Hart Link Road were produced without any consultation with FTC (or WBC) and are heavily biased in emphasising the negatives with little mention made of the likely benefits. Whilst it is accepted that there would be some negative effects it is FTC’s view that these disbenefits are far outweighed by the likely benefits and this position paper has been produced to present members of the FIP Board with a more balanced analysis to allow a rational decision to be made.

#### **CLAIMED DISBENEFITS/NEGATIVES WITHOUT CONSIDERING THE POSITIVES**

- The SCC papers produced for the June and December FIP Board meetings regarding construction of a Hart Link Road list a number of potential disbenefits although most of these are outlined in only very generalised terms without any specific detail and without any reference to balancing benefits. They include the following viz : -

**Close Proximity to Existing residential properties, UCA, Strugar medical centre, Potters Gate Primary School, and Waitrose :**

6. SCC state that construction of the proposed Hart Link Road would introduce safety concerns for pedestrians accessing these facilities along with severance and reduced safety for vulnerable road users. SCC did not, however, balance this disbenefit against benefits that would be gained resulting from the consequential pedestrianisation of the bottom half of Castle Street that would make it much safer for the significant number of pedestrians who currently cross Castle Street where vehicles are constantly turning left from The Borough. This is a dangerous crossing point – a danger that resulted in a pedestrian refuge having to be recently restored at the bottom of Castle Street following a considerable number of public complaints. This crossing point would become even more dangerous for pedestrians if the Hart Link Road was not constructed but pavements on The Borough were widened and right turns allowed from Castle Street.
7. Potters Gate Primary School is located to the west of The Hart so there are few pupils who go to the school who would need to cross any new Link Road whilst from observation most pedestrians using Waitrose approach from the Lion and Lamb Yard and there are hardly any residential properties that generate any pedestrian movements. Any disbenefits of a Hart Link Road could be reduced by a strategically placed lighted pedestrian crossing near the UCA where students cross to and from UCA and those attending The Stugar medical centre (a private specialist medical facility). It is not envisaged that the construction of a Hart Link Road would materially affect the activities of the church located in the Upper Hart car park.
8. **Noise** : SCC argues that construction of a Hart Link Road would redistribute traffic resulting in higher noise levels in the local area although it is also recognised that the transfer of traffic would benefit residents in the Castle Street area. The number of residents in the Castle Street area is, however, far greater than the number of residents who would be affected by construction of a Hart Link Road and even these could be protected by provision of appropriate sound insulation facilities.
9. **Air Quality**: SCC argues that due to the increase in traffic air quality would be reduced although it is recognised that air quality levels in Castle Street would be improved. It also, however, follows that air quality in The Borough which is an area with long standing high levels of pollution would also be improved. If a Hart Link Road is not constructed the proposed widening of pavements on The Borough and the allowing of right turns from Castle Street is likely to increase traffic tailbacks on The Borough and Castle Street stretching back to Downing Street which will increase air pollution over an even wider area of the town centre.
10. **Impact on Landscape and Townscape in a Conservation Area – Loss of established vegetation, changes to existing views, loss of private green space and gardens, light pollution**: Whilst it cannot be denied that construction of a Hart Link Road would have some impact on landscape and townscape in a well established Conservation Area no account has been taken of the improvement to the impact on landscape and townscape that would result from the pedestrianisation of the bottom half of Castle Street. In the SCC paper presented to the December FIP Board meeting it is stated that construction of a Hart Link Road could lead to proposals for residential development of land to the west. It is, however, known that developers have already identified this land for residential development whether or not a Hart Link Road is constructed – this is land that is not allocated for any kind of development in both Waverley's Local Plan and Farnham's Neighbourhood Plan.
11. **Impact on Historic Environment** : This is a very subjective area but yet gain no account is taken of the improved view of Farnham Castle that would be gained from pedestrianizing the bottom half of Castle Street. SCC's statement that construction could (not would) have a

detrimental impact on the site's archaeology and heritage is not supported with any substantive evidence.

12. **Impact on Biodiversity** : SCC's statement that there would be an impact on biodiversity is also not supported by any substantive evidence. It also seems perverse to argue that if the Hart Link Road was to be constructed there would be a requirement under NPPF to provide a 10% biodiversity gain this would be a disbenefit!
13. **Loss of Car Parking Spaces** : There would inevitably be some loss of car parking spaces in the Upper Hart car park – this was quantified as a loss of 86 spaces (out of a total of 373 spaces although the WBC website states that the Upper Hart Car Park has 325 spaces whereas the SCC paper states that it has 327) in the paper produced by SCC for the December FIP Board meeting. Without seeing how this figure has been calculated it is obviously difficult to comment on the accuracy of this calculation. Suffice it to say that the Upper Hart Car Park is never fully occupied.
14. **Does not align with Optimised Infrastructure Plan (OIP) objectives** : The OIP identified that the high level of car dependency in Farnham was one of the main reasons behind Farnham's traffic problems and that one of the primary objectives should be to create solutions making walking, cycling and public transport a more natural choice for shorter journeys. Without investment that is certainly significantly more than the estimated amount to construct a Hart Link Road it is difficult to see how this objective can be achieved anyway. If anything, construction of a Hart Link Road would create conditions where it would actually be easier to incorporate dedicated provision for cyclists and pedestrians in the lower half of Castle Street if it was to be pedestrianised.
15. **Does not align with local or national policy objectives to achieve carbon neutrality** : SCC argues that new road construction does not accord with local or national policy objectives to achieve carbon neutrality. Apart from being rather perverse when SCC is arguing at the same time that there should be investment in the A31 there is a difference in investing in the strategic national road network and investing in local road schemes where benefits outweigh any disbenefits. Attention has already been drawn to the fact that if the Hart Link Road is not constructed and pavement widening takes place on The Borough and right turns allowed from Castle Street it is likely to increase traffic tailbacks on The Borough and Castle Street stretching back to Downing Street which will not help achieve carbon neutrality since it would increase air pollution over an even wider area of the town centre.
16. **Additional Renewal and Maintenance Costs**: The Hart Link Road only requires a very short stretch (less than 1 km) of new road to be built – the rest of the Link Road would utilise existing roads. The additional renewal and maintenance costs would be marginal if indeed any at all when offset against the lower maintenance costs that would be incurred if the bottom half of Castle Street was to be pedestrianised.
17. **Junction of Link Road with West Street**: In the paper produced by SCC for the December FIP Board meeting it was stated that a signalised junction at the junction with West Street would be required resulting in additional time delay for existing journeys. The need for a signalised junction is not necessarily required – it is FTC's view that the increased traffic flow could be accommodated by a mini roundabout. Any additional time delay at this junction is likely to be measured in seconds and likely to be significantly less than the time delays that will be incurred by existing journeys if the Hart Link Road is not constructed and there is pavement widening in the Borough and allowing right turns from Castle Street that are likely to cause traffic tailbacks on Castle Street and The Borough stretching back to Downing Street

18. **Delay in delivery of other town centre improvements:** This is not an argument – other measures to improve Farnham Town Centre could proceed without any delay whilst a formal proposal for construction of a Hart Link Road is developed.
19. **Funding Difficulties:** The cost of constructing the Hart Link Road as far as West Street is £10.3 million of which £8.6 million is estimated to be required for the cost of acquiring land and constructing a short new stretch of road from Castle Hill to the Upper Hart Car Park. No further details have been provided as to how these cost figures have been estimated but even if correct they represent only a very small proportion of SCC's original multi million budget for implementing the FIP and would have the added benefit of allowing the lower half of Castle Street to be totally pedestrianised that would help meet the concerns that some have that the FIP proposals are not radical enough to resolve Farnham's traffic problems.

## **UNDERSTATED BENEFITS**

20. Although both SCC papers recognise that construction of a Hart Link Road would have some benefits these are completely understated. Construction of a Hart Link Road would allow the total pedestrianisation of the lower half of Castle Street which would result in the following benefits: -
- Traffic flow on The Borough would be simplified since there would be no traffic turning into or out of Castle Street
  - There would be no need to allow traffic to turn right from Castle Street into The Borough
  - The level of traffic having to use the gyratory system would be significantly reduced
  - The proposed pavement widening on The Borough could be implemented without resulting in traffic tailbacks affecting Downing Street
  - With a reduction in traffic air quality in Farnham Town Centre air quality in the town centre would be significantly improved
  - Pedestrianisation of the lower half of Castle Street would significantly improve the environment of local residents living in the area
  - Pedestrianisation of the lower half of Castle Street would allow a number of active travel measures to be introduced to encourage greater use of cycling and walking
  - Pedestrianisation of the lower half of Castle Street would go some way to meeting the demands of those who believe that the current FIP proposals are not radical enough to resolve Farnham's current traffic problems.

## **CONCLUSION**

21. This position paper has been prepared by FTC who know the town to present a more balanced analysis of the benefits and disbenefits of the construction of a Hart Link Road. It is FTC's view that the benefits far outweigh the disbenefits and that the construction of a Hart Link Road should be an essential integral part of FIP. If the Hart Link Road is not constructed and the pavement widening of The Borough and allowing a right turn from Castle Street into The Borough proceeds then traffic is likely to tailback along The Borough and Castle Street stretching back to Downing Street resulting in a deterioration rather than an improvement in traffic conditions and air quality in Farnham town centre.