

Report to Environmental and Planning Services Standing Panel



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Date of meeting: 29 August 2006.

**Portfolios: Environmental Protection
Planning and Economic Development.**

Subject: Traffic in the Nazeing and Roydon Area.

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Recommendations:

- (1) That a focus day be organised with assistance from Essex County Council, in order that relevant local statistics and issues can be discussed with the local Members and Community.**
- (2) That the costs of holding such a focus day be met from the existing Local Plan budgets.**
- (3) That Cabinet receive a further report after the event making clear what further consultancy work is then required, and how that is to be funded, with assistance from the County Council.**

Background:

1. The Council has been made aware of concerns about traffic in the Parishes of Nazeing and Roydon in particular. Those concerns have been expressed in a number of ways; objections were made to the formal amendments issued by the Council in respect of its existing Local Plan, and were reported upon by the Inspector who conducted the Local Inquiry into that Plan. A group called Nazeing Action Group (NAG) has been formed, with a special emphasis on the impact of lorries in and around Nazeing. Councillors involved in the Environmental and Planning Services Standing Scrutiny Panel have also been considering these matters, specifically where they arise as the result of the re use of buildings. Local Councils have also raised issues concerning the responses given to applications for Goods Vehicle Operators licences.

2. Over the last ten years, at least, there have been a good number of factors influencing a growth of traffic, including the following;

- General economic growth in the numbers of vehicles; whether private light goods or heavy goods vehicles.
- Particular developments such as packhouses serving the supermarkets, and the development of substantial new glasshouse areas.
- The re use of a variety of buildings previously used for agriculture or in association with glasshouses; not only for residential purposes, but also for commercial/economic purposes.
- European inspired decisions to increase the weight of the largest vehicles that can operate.
- Changes made to the system of goods vehicle operators licensing in 1995.

- New development, such as the replacement of the Essex Road bridge within Broxbourne.
- Changes to how this Council is involved with highway matters, with the more recent decision of the County Council to take back such functions.

3. This is not an exhaustive list, and could be said to ignore factors which may have lessened traffic, such as increased taxes, changes to the way particular industries or sites operate; for example a glasshouse powered by coal boilers would have had frequent deliveries of coal, whereas one now powered by gas received by a pipeline will have infrequent attendance by vehicles for that reason.

4. The view regularly now expressed is that the growth of traffic for all reasons greatly outweighs the reductions for any reasons; however, an important issue is that there is no comprehensive study or research which amounts to a sound evidence base, and which could lead to changes in policy or practice, or which could lead to targeted investments.

5. Planning Officers and Officers from Essex County Council had a meeting concerning these matters on 20 March. That meeting considered whether drawing up a single tender for a substantial piece of work was possible, and concluded that it was not. Rather, County Officers suggested that a focus day be held in the first instance (similar to an event held quite some time ago in Maldon) The purposes of that would be to look at what information does exist already, to check perceptions against that, and to see whether the issues that require consultancy work can be narrowed down. An aim of the day will be to narrow the work required to further investigate statistics to those that would make real impacts on traffic in these communities, or the policies relevant thereto. A further aim will be to see if local targeted investment; for example improved signage about weight restrictions would be beneficial.

6. Some Members of the Scrutiny Panel saw merit in a focus day, whilst others felt that there had already been sufficient discussion and a considerable elapse of time, and that the issues were not lessening in their significance.

Sources of information

7. Information has been considered by the Scrutiny Panel; this amounts to decisions taken about the re use of buildings, and whether they were re used for residential or business purposes. More investigation of these records is required to detail floorspace figures. The County Council will have information such as traffic counts. Nazeing Action Group has recently undertaken some counts and the breakdown of traffic by car or HGV type. On selected roads in Nazeing, and found high total numbers at least.

Proposed focus event

8. The purpose of this would be to look in detail at the information, which is available, and would involve officers from both this Council and the County Council, it would enable Councillors to be involved (whether County, District or Local), and it would enable representatives of local action or interest groups and the local community to be involved. It would seek clarity about what further information needs to be collected and analysed; with a view to lessening that exercise, and to see if some targeted investment might be the best answer; for example to encourage better signage to draw attention to existing weight limits. Consequently, the discussion may usefully include some representation from Broxbourne and Hertfordshire.

Goods Vehicle Operators Licensing

9. There has been a system of licensing those operating goods vehicles for many years; the system was revised in 1995 and covers the location where vehicles are kept when not in use (amongst other matters). The District Council had previously been able to make comments or to raise objections on the basis of Planning considerations, Environmental

Health considerations and Traffic/Highways Safety. By 1995 it was already clear that objections had to be very specific, and professionally based, if the Licensing Authority was going to account for them in his decision.

10. The formal position since then has been that Planning Services have had little involvement with this system, Environmental Health have assessed applications but only made comments about matters such as noise if it was very clear that the point was worth making. Appropriate officers within Environmental Services made traffic and highways comments, until the County Council took these functions back.

11. Nazeing Action Group have made some representations about a number of cases recently, which led to officers at the Licensing Authority pointing out that the District Council can still make objections on "environmental grounds," which could include noise, fumes, vibrations and the visual appearance of the operating centre.

12. The Portfolio Holders for Environmental Protection, and for Planning and Economic Development met with Councillor Mrs Cooper and the Head of Environmental Services and the Head of Planning and Economic Development on 4 August. The previous day officers from Planning Services had met with Councillor Mrs Borton and representatives of Nazeing Action Group.

13. It is plainly necessary for the County Council to make traffic or highway comments/objections within the scope of the Goods Vehicle Operating System, and probably necessary for Environmental Health officers to make occasional selective but necessary comments/objections. What is less clear is whether Planning should revert to the pre 1995 position, and give consideration to each such application, and advise the Licensing Authority when planning permission does not exist, and then follow that through our procedures, and make occasional comments/objections on grounds of visual impact. This has workload implications for the Enforcement Team; in particular if such comments when they are made make little, or little apparent, difference to the decision of the Licensing Authority.

Statement in Support of Recommended Action:

14. A focus group offers opportunities for community and Member involvement, and whilst not seeking to avoid difficult issues, to at least see if the real points of contention can be agreed for further more detailed study. It is likely to be significantly cheaper than a significant tendered piece of work being offered to consultants first, and where the community perhaps considers their involvement to be less influential.

Other Options for Action:

15. The options range from doing nothing (which is not tenable given the Local Plan Inspectors comments) to the approach suggested, to the approach of giving consultants an initial large piece of work, at some expense, before finding that some less expensive but local targeted solutions exist which would be better value for money.

Consultation undertaken: This report was put in draft form to the meeting of the Environmental and Planning Services Scrutiny Panel on 29 August.

Resource implications: As indicated in the report.

Budget provision:

Personnel: From existing resources.

Land: Nil.

Community Plan/BVPP reference:

Relevant Statutory Powers: Goods Vehicle Operators Licensing Act 1995

Background papers:

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: None.

Key Decision reference (if required): N/A.