

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE KIG JOINT PARISHES GROUP
Held on 20th May 2009 at 7.30pm.

The meeting was chaired by Richard Jacques

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from absent group members.

2. KIG Update.

Richard Jacques briefly updated all present on the current situation and spoke regarding the second stage and the Inspectors Inquiry.

He welcomed Mark Watts from Luther Pendragon to the meeting and invited him to speak regarding the second stage and the work that he could undertake for the Joint Parish Group.

Mark Watts spoke regarding the Statutory Regional Transport Plan recently issued by the Government and its contents.

He spoke regarding the way in which he would undertake work on behalf of the JPG should it agree to appoint his company.

He informed members that the Inquiry would be led by MBC's experts and based on planning law, KCC would undertake their case from a Highways perspective and the JPG's role would be to be the voice of the electorate and give the case from the community perspective.

He spoke of the recent decision for the St Albans proposals and the time scales involved. He stated that the Inquiry commence in November 2007 and finished in December 2007, the Inspectors report took 6 months and was issued on 4th June 2008. The Secretary of State took the decision in October 2008 to reject the proposals. However on 5th May 2009 the applicant resubmitted the application and the process has now started all over again. He stated that this highlighted the importance of the sites to developers.

He spoke regarding the structure of Pendragon and the expertise available within it. He confirmed that should he be appointed he would be part of a team of three working on the project.

Mark Watts spoke of the Rail Freight Interchange Investment Group, this is a new company which has been set up to promote site such as KIG and their aim is to persuade Government to allow more rail freight interchanges across the country.

He spoke of the tight timescale and stated that work by the JPG should start immediately; the Government starts its recess in mid July and this will last up to the Public Inquiry therefore the JPG had only a brief window of opportunity.

The aim of the JPG would be to have the proposal rejected; however Mark Watts spoke of the secondary objective which would be to have the time scale extended beyond the General Election.

He stated that the role of the JPG should be to support MBC at the Inquiry and to give a credible and community based perspective, to speak with one voice and create a mood of opposition. He stated that the JPG needed to rebut the arguments in favour of the scheme.

Mark Watts stated that there would still be the opportunity to influence the Planning Inspectorate and the final decision after the Public Inquiry. He spoke regarding the political views and how the Secretary of States views could be influenced.

He spoke of the strategy of the JPG during the second stage, stating that a coalition of support should be sought at Westminster, this would mean sending letters, news releases and other bespoke material, giving well argued important objective evidence. The group was advised to build a strong, national, local and sector media profile; it should have an online presence and undertake local campaigning.

He advised the JPG to build coalitions with neighbouring Parish Councils and others involved in similar campaigns such as St Albans, Howbury Park and other areas where AXA are active. He spoke regarding the United Nations Sustainability Development and informed members that AXA had recently signed up to this. He stated that the JPG had an opportunity to weaken AXA's credibility by making contact with this organisation and informing them of AXA's proposals.

The time scales were discussed and Mark Watts stated that the process would take 8 to 12 months which would take it beyond the General Election. He stated that the JPG would make the difference by putting forward the strength of feeling from the local community.

Richard Jacques thanked Mark Watts for his presentation.

He informed the meeting that he, John Horne and Peter Waite had attended a meeting with MBC, KCC and StopKIG to discuss the way forward and the Public Inquiry. He stated that it was clear from this meeting that the JPG would be the only group to represent the community perspective at the Inquiry.

Peter Waite spoke regarding the meeting and stated that MBC, KCC and StopKIG left the JPG in no doubt that they were concentrating on the practical issues not the community perspective.

Richard Jacques confirmed that MBC and KCC were unable to help the JPG financially; however they were willing to share information and evidence.

He stated that the JPG needed to start work immediately and all members would be required to undertake some work in some way.

He spoke regarding the finances of the group and stated that the JPG needed guidance regarding the Inquiry stage and how to represent itself at the hearing. He confirmed that the JPG was now a Rule 6 party making it a key player in the Planning Inquiry.

He asked Mark Watts for details on the costs involved in order to commission Pendragon.

Mark Watts informed the meeting that the rates for the appointment of his company was in the region of £200 - £350 per hour, recognising that the work was being undertaken for a public sector organisation.

He stated that on his assessment the project would require one full time person for one day a week. This would calculate to £7000 a month and Luther Pendragon would be prepared to undertake the work for £5000 per month.

The work would involve supporting the JPG during the Public Inquiry. He suggested an initial commitment for a three month period, allowing both parties to review the situation following this.

David Burton from Langley asked how the JPG could move forward with StopKIG. Richard Jacques confirmed that the JPG had been advised not to join forces with StopKIG at an early stage as they are a pressure group and that they were Bearsted and Thurnham based, whereas the JPG directly represented its electorate and 15 parishes and its spoke for a much wider community.

The financial implications were discussed by all present and it was suggested that thought should be given to the cost per person. Members discussed the importance of the threat to their local community and the need for their views to be represented at the Planning Inquiry.

David Burton spoke regarding the non parished areas and it was suggested that the JPG could provide a leading role by capturing other non-parished areas and this could be done by their elected members.

The finances were once again explained to all present. Richards Jacques stated that parishes could not be forced to stay in the JPG; however it was the only party taking forward the community issues and that any split in the group would be seen as a major weakness in the fight against KIG.

Mark Watts spoke further regarding the finances and he offered to meet with parishes should they have particular concerns.

Gavin McLaggan spoke regarding the discussions of the evening and the tight time scales, he urged the JPG to appoint Mark Watts (Luther Pendragon) to progress the case on behalf of the JPG and he formally put this proposal forward for consideration.

The proposal was seconded by June Harrison and agreed by all present.

It was agreed that priority would now be given to holding a strategy meeting with Mark Watts.

3. Date of Next Meeting.

To be arranged.

The meeting closed at 9.35pm