

Stevenage Local Plan Objection to Matter 20

I object to the closure of Lytton Way and the consequential traffic jams that will occur.

Discussion

In the original layout of Stevenage the road layout was very well conceived. Much of the traffic during rush hours is in a North- South direction (South in the mornings and North in the evenings). The town planners set out the road system such that the traffic to the business region and the traffic to the retail region have separate routes (Gunnels Wood Road and Lytton Way, respectively). The traffic flow night and morning is very busy but still flows very well despite the growth of the town over the last 60 years including the addition of the Roaring Meg retail park. Most of the heavy goods vehicles are on Gunnels Wood Road and separated from the traffic travelling to the retail areas and town centre. The grid structure of these roads together with Six Hills Way, Fairlands Way and St George's Way with roundabouts at the intersections works very well to integrate the N-S traffic with the E-W traffic without huge traffic jams occurring. (The grid scheme with roundabouts at the intersections has become a design standard to even out traffic flows in new towns such as Milton Keynes).

The Stevenage Plan proposes to close Lytton Way to through traffic and to force the North – South traffic onto Gunnels Wood Road and /or St George's Way thus taking away one of the busiest roads in the system. The effects of the proposed plan changes will be as follows:

- The traffic to the retail parts of Stevenage will be forced to merge with the business traffic and HGVs on Gunnels Wood Road between Six Hills Way and Fairlands Way causing jams and congestion from the volume of traffic.
- South bound traffic arriving at Stevenage in the mornings from the A1 or Old Stevenage will be forced to use Gunnels Wood Road rather than Hitchin Road/Lytton Way.
- Closing Lytton Way defeats the natural flow balancing characteristic of the grid pattern road system by removing one of the few optional routes available to the driver when serious jams occur.

Furthermore a ground level pedestrian crossing of St George's Way is proposed in the plan. This will exacerbate the traffic flow on St George's Way, which is already the least useful of the N-S routes. An underpass or bridge is surely required?

At the time that the plan was submitted for Government Examination no traffic flow analysis* had been conducted. **As required by the NPPF document and associated References (Paragraph: 007 Reference ID: 54-007-20141010)*

This traffic flow analysis[#] has now been conducted and the results were reported at the Stevenage Plan public examination on Matter 3 (19 January 2017). Mike Axon, of Vectos, admitted that when they ran the traffic flow model of the Stevenage roads with Lytton Way closed at the railway station it predicted gridlock by 2021. In order to "make the system work" they had to modify the model, reduce the number of car journeys and spread the journeys over a longer time and even then car journeys would take longer. Axon went on to say that Stevenage town centre had remarkably good traffic flow compared to other towns and that restricting the flow was beneficial to encourage travellers onto public transport, to cycle or to travel at other times. So it seems that we have a good traffic system and the Council are set on a path to wreck it. Limiting traffic flow by stealth (i.e. not

increasing the capacity of an inadequate road network) might be a reasonable approach but it is very perverse to close roads in a good system to unnecessarily force people onto other means of transport.

So why is this retrograde proposal being considered? Well the main reason seems to be to move the bus station closer to the railway station and to better join Stevenage town centre to the Leisure Park (Stevenage Centre West). Moving the bus station also means that the Gordon Craig Arts and Leisure Centre has to be demolished and relocated at great cost (over £20M) and even with Lytton Way closed the town will remain divided by the railway line. There are other ways to more effectively link the railway and bus station without closing Lytton Way or demolishing the Gordon Craig Leisure Centre at great expense. One such alternative is to upgrade the bridge between the Railway Station and the Gordon Craig Leisure Centre to be a wider motorway style enclosed walkway. The railway passengers are already at bridge level as they exit the train station and it is only a short distance to the existing bus station, we just need to make the walk a more pleasant one.

Summary

Stevenage should retain the current locations of the Gordon Craig Arts and Leisure Centre, the Bus Station and not close Lytton Way to retain the good traffic flow we have been accustomed to. The walking distance from the Train Station to the Bus Station is not great but the walk can be much improved by an enclosed bridge over Lytton Way and by an enclosed walkway down the ramp from the Gordon Craig Leisure Centre to the Bus Station. Substantial cost savings would result,

R A Carter
13 The Brambles
Stevenage
SG1 4AU

#The Traffic Flow modelling work is reported in documents ED145 and ED144. The model showed gridlock occurring in 2021 with Lytton Way closed. Vectos rationalise that “is patently wrong” because people find alternative ways to travel to “minimise their inconvenience”. It is also claimed that “it is wrong from a common sense perspective because Stevenage at the moment is relatively uncongested, with a high capacity road network”. **But Lytton Road is not currently closed and the closure substantially harms this high capacity road network.** No gridlock would occur if Lytton Way remains open at the railway station. Much of the rest of these documents tries to rationalise the benefits of having a poor road system to reduce the use of the car by maximising the inconvenience to the car driver. The towns and cities that are used for comparison purposes (Cambridge, Brighton, York, Nottingham, Norwich, etc.) are in the main, larger towns with poor road networks. No mention is made of more comparable towns or towns with better road systems (e.g. Milton Keynes). The Traffic Flow model modifications are not convincing as they do not seem to be based on standard country wide factors or on local traffic intelligence. The whole intent is clearly to try and justify the closure of Lytton Way irrespective of the consequences.