

Dear Ms Batty-Smith

Thank you for your recent message and the message it enclosed from Councillor James Back.

The “Vision and Validate” philosophy of developing the highways network for residential and other development is not new and is already widely practiced. It generally applies to new developments and acknowledges the recent changes in working practices and how people now tend to lead their lives. It is in everybody’s interests that, instead of providing more car-based infrastructure, developers should design more sustainably and facilitate cycling, walking and public transport, and this is already happening. Whitfield would be a case in point.

What new developments are permitted and constructed is something that Kent Highways does not govern; it is a matter for the Local Planning Authority. If sustainability and healthy living is within the Planning Authority’s ambition for its residents then developments that provide these are more likely to succeed than those that rely on the private car. Accordingly, “Vision and Validate” is not recent or radical and most Planning Authorities are working in the way it recommends. The paper you referred to was not intended to introduce new thinking and we did not think it necessary to provide anyone to explain it.

The paper was in large part about planning meetings. We do not usually despatch Highways Planning Officers to district planning meetings as very often local members and the general public see those officers as a means by which development can be prevented, and are disappointed when that does not take place. It is by no means unusual for officers to be treated discourteously because they have not done what others wish them to do. I do not, of course, suggest that that happens at Dover. Our officers’ assessments of the highways aspects of development proposals are part of the documents that are provided to district members before planning meetings and it is there that the latter can make their views known.

Whether pre-application advice can be disclosed by means of a Freedom of Information request is a matter of fact.

The tone of the report was not intended to be dictatorial but simply to provide information about how this Council’s highways function conducts its business in respect of planning applications.

I hope this is helpful.

Best wishes

David Brazier
County Member for Sevenoaks Rural North East
Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport
Kent County Council