

Ralph and Brenda Todd
email: rbtodd@btinternet.com
1st September 2014

Dear Mrs Teresa O'Neill and Mr Gareth Bacon

Reference: Bexley's Growth Strategy

On Saturday morning I attended the TfL river crossing "roadshow" in Bexleyheath Broadway. I have also completed the on-line questionnaires for both Bexley's Growth Strategy and TfL's River crossing consultation – they seemed remarkably similar with the former mostly concentrating on the river crossing and little else to do with the Growth Strategy.

The sub-heading of the Growth Strategy is "our emerging vision" – how sad, if that is a vision for the future, I think you should surrender now. "Taking control of Change" presumes that your voters actually want change – perhaps a minority do, especially those living in the less "affluent" parts of the Borough and any comment I make beyond this does not preclude trying to improve the lives of all residents but particularly those less fortunate than perhaps I might be (and I don't consider myself better or worse off than most residents I meet).

From talks I give regularly to various groups around the Borough, open meetings I have attended in the past, and supported by the Council's own LDF it seems clear to me that the reason why the majority of residents like living in Bexley and wish to remain here is the fact that it isn't an overcrowded Borough and there are wonderful parks and open spaces from the river to the Bromley/Greenwich/Dartford borders.

The vision seems to be based on building, building and building (roads, warehouses, bridges, warehouses, homes and, oh yes more warehouses (for warehouse read also industrial storage, or logistics centres none of which provide anything like the job prospects you allude to given they are mostly computerised – all that is required are a few fork-lift truck drivers and a few managers). How many of your voters actually believe that "growth also has great potential to improve the lives of Bexley residents and businesses....." What is the % of residents crying out for this?

Proposals for the improved health of your residents and the natural environment – known to be a key factor in the well-being of the wider population receive just the briefest of mentions almost as a footnote to improved transport links.

Vision for Growth:

I have written to SD&T asking to detail those "large areas of vacant or underused industrial land" This was the response : "Large areas of vacant or underused industrial land relates to land within the Belvedere industrial area, at Erith and Slade Green. These areas are currently designated as primary employment areas within the Council's Unitary Development Plan but a proportion of these have been identified as surplus to requirements within the Council's Core Strategy. Again specific sites have not been identified but will be considered as part of the detailed planning process over the coming months".

I guess this means more steel framed boxes similar to those approved on Norman Road in May of this year – destroying yet more of the important and remnant Thames Marshes, either directly or indirectly through infrastructure developments.

You state a “poor environment associated with the area’s industrial past and present” – what does this mean, please specify. There is no mention of the poor environment due to poor air quality which is due, in the main, to far too much traffic in the Borough but you plan to encourage more and more cars and lorries by allowing TfL to bring forward bridge proposals.

You speak positively of ongoing housing estate renewal and new homes – both to be welcomed. However, it wasn’t long ago I attended a meeting where Council Officers were congratulating the Council on what a good job they had done in holding down the number of housing developments projected in the LDF to what they thought was a reasonable limit that would avoid excessive “over development”. According to my notes of that meeting I think they suggested a total estimated housing allocation of around 4,500 by 2026 with just over 400 in Belvedere. Now your “growth strategy” is asking me to comment on a figure five times that at over 22,000 with half of those in Belvedere – what on earth am I supposed to believe? Can you please tell me how this discrepancy has occurred and what am I to actually believe, the four year difference between the 2026 figure and your vision for 2030 cannot surely account for this increase?

I concur with the view that an improvement in public transport is highly desirable with extensions to Crossrail/DLR being worthy of further consideration – not withstanding my desire to retain all the open spaces currently available for the healthy benefit of local residents.

You state “changes in economy also create potential to release large areas of industrial land for other uses” – what does this mean and where are these specific areas?

In the diagrammatical presentation under Crayford you suggest “opening up the riverside areas” – what does this mean?

Finally, and in addition to all the above, I would like **Theresa O’Neill** and **Gareth Bacon** to personally address the next item – that of the river crossing –not one but two proposals.

I have responded to the Growth strategy consultation as best I could but despite all the words in the glossy brochure, what the consultation is really all about is the river crossing with one question about general transport infrastructure – no opportunity to comment about housing, business development, retail or the natural environment, just one of two options for a bridge.

The consultation is hugely biased in the direction of assumed need to concrete over yet more of the Borough and provide a bridge. By the time one gets to questions 6 and 7 it is obvious you have assumed everyone must be in favour of one of the bridges because one is asked to approve positive statements and prioritise them, no space/opportunity within those questions to state “neither option” and in question 7 if you tick “other” there is no opportunity to make

a suggestion - not when I was completing the on-line form anyway. . Even the brochure cover is biased towards a fancy bridge – but at least you do show how many boxes you intend to build and concrete laid on the wildlife rich, open spaces along the river. Nothing left for your voters to enjoy – perhaps you’ll encourage them to cross the Bridge to RSPB Rainham Marshes reserve. **A real vision might be to promote the green corridors that Rainham and the Crayford/Erith/Dartford Marshes and the River Thames could provide for a healthy environment for people and wildlife.**

Councillor O’Neill, on the 21st July 2011 you sat alongside Mayor Boris Johnson (and others) at an invitation/public meeting at Bexleyheath School where the Mayor, in answer to a question about River Crossings **gave an absolute assurance that having already scrapped the Livingstone plan there was “no way under his mayoral leadership would there be a river crossing in Bexley”** (I have written separately to him about this as part of the Tfl consultation). You sat there and agreed. On 21st January 2013 the following appeared on the Bexley web-site <http://www.bexley.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=15343> “Don’t let the bridge back in”. I seem to recall you having your picture taken at the top of Knee Hill to substantiate your stance.

Councillor Bacon I was heartened by your message [:http://www.bexley.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=11645&p=0](http://www.bexley.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=11645&p=0) particularly as you clearly recognised the inevitable “gridlock and delays” associated with a river crossing but do wonder exactly what you were referring to with the statement “getting the river link we really need” – can you expand please if you really do wish to “say NO to local gridlock and delays” .

Now I would like to know how you justify even allowing Tfl to suggest not one but two river crossing in the Borough. I suspect you might take the view the Tfl man took with me this morning (at the roadshow) that this isn’t such a “grand scheme”. Really? At what point is a bridge not a bridge? As he conceded to me, he doubts any person from Tfl has ever tried to drive around Bexley between the hours of 7.30-9.30am or 3.30-7pm and realises just how congested the existing roads are. The school run is a serious factor but not so much as traffic trying to get to major roads, A2 and A20. I had hoped my own Councillors would have experience of this but clearly none of them do, otherwise they wouldn’t be contemplating bringing in even more traffic into the Borough. I further suspect you’ll try and suggest that these bridges will direct traffic onto the A2016 but as we know full well, and the man from Tfl tried to explain, the prime objective will be to get the traffic as quickly as possible onto the A2 (and I’d suggest A20/M25) – that’s my issue in a nutshell. When the traffic analysis was carried out for the previous bridge proposal all surveying seemed to end around the top of Knee Hill/Brampton Road – absolutely no work along the North Cray Road, Gravel Hill, The Broadway, Erith Road. I offer any Bexley Councillor the same opportunity as I gave Tfl – join me any day of any week (outside school holidays) at 8am or 6pm and let’s take a drive from the A2016 to the A20 – any route you suggest. Additionally let’s stand on the River wall at Crayfordness any time of day and look across to the Dartford River Crossing and just

look at the number of trucks that cross in any two hour period and contemplate what happens to Bexley if even a small percentage of those decide to use an alternative bridge.

Two final points re the River crossing – you might try and the man from TfL did to tell me these bridge proposals are not as big as the Livingstone bridge, that just doesn't stack up. It is a fact that more roads equal more traffic and it is also a fact that Bexley's air quality is falling short of required standards – more traffic will certainly negate any good work the Council is attempting to do to improve air quality but will certainly send it back into a serious negative state.

I would also like to invite you and your colleagues on Bexley Council to join me and others in the Borough who really do care about Bexley and who are interested in the health and well-being of its residents and show you how important all those supposed "industrial/waste land" areas in the North of the Borough are for opportunities to walk, cycle and enjoy some of the most fantastic, not to mention in some cases, nationally or London wide important areas for wildlife, wild places and habitats.

I am sending this to SPandTteam as part of my response to the consultation along with copies to my own ward Councillors and the current Cabinet member for Environment and Leisure but await with interest your own responses to the specific points raised.

I am very disappointed and disillusioned by your change of heart regarding the bridge and your extremely poor vision for growth in Bexley. The Conservative Party long ago gave up any hope of retaining (even gaining) a reputation for being the "greenest government ever" and you have just demonstrated locally why that is.

Yours sincerely

Ralph Todd

(also on behalf of Mrs Brenda Todd)

Copied to Councillor Don Massey (Cabinet Member for Environment)

Christchurch Ward Councillors Roy Ashmole, John Fuller, Brad Smith.