

LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CALLED IN PLANNING APPLICATION FOR PROPOSED HEYSHAM TO M6 LINK ROAD

LAND TO THE NORTH OF LANCASTER BEGINNING AT THE END OF
THE A683 HEYSHAM TO M6 LINK PHASE 1 AND RUNNING IN AN
EASTERLY DIRECTION TO CONNECT WITH THE M6 AT JUNCTION
34 OF THE M6

**Planning Inspectorate reference:
APP/Q2371/V/07/1200928 and
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PROOF OF EVIDENCE ANDREW DOBSON

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1. INTRODUCTION.

1.1 I am Lancaster City Council's Head of Planning Services and have held this position since June 2002. I am a Chartered Town Planner and have 28 years practicing experience in town planning. I was previously employed as the Borough Planning Officer with Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council in Cheshire and my professional expertise covers a wide range of Strategic and Local Planning activities, together with the delivery of a large number of major development projects. At Lancaster I am responsible for the City Councils Forward Planning and Development Control functions, together with Engineering Services, Building Control and the Arnsdale/Silverdale AONB Unit.

1.2 In my evidence I am tasked to cover the following matters: -

- a. Spatial Planning Justification from the Local Planning Authority's perspective.
- b. Compliance with the Development Plan
- c. The Sustainable Transport benefits expected from the scheme.
- d. The matters relating to sport and recreation and the relationship to Government Policy Advice in PPG 17.

2. THE CITY COUNCIL'S POSITION AS A STATUTORY CONSULTEE ON THE PLANNING APPLICATION.

2.1 Lancaster City Council made two key representations in the formal process since the adoption of the Lancaster District Local Plan in April 2004 made provision for either route, once environmental impacts had been considered.

2.2 An extraordinary meeting of Council was held on 31 August 2004, to consider the County Council's Environment Directors conclusions on the Environmental Impacts of both routes. The City Council resolved to support the selection of the northern route subject to two provisions. Firstly that it should include a link bridge into the Luneside area to open it for regeneration. Secondly that the extra capacity created within the City Centre gyratory should be used to facilitate significant alternative transport measures.

2.3 The subsequent detailed planning application was considered by the City Councils Planning and Highways Regulatory Committee on 20 February 2006 as part of the City Councils role as statutory consultee. The Committee resolved to support the application subject to a number of comments covering technical and sustainable transport provisions. It was acknowledged at that stage that the third Lune Crossing had been removed from the scheme, and would be subject to separate negotiations through the Local Development Framework process. This did not reduce support for the scheme. Further amendments to the scheme were

reported to the same Committee on 21 August 2006 and the City Council raised no objections subject to the following recommendations: -

- a. The scheme should be delivered in conjunction with a full range of sustainable traffic and transport initiatives to avoid the estimated 20% reduction in traffic on the gyratory network being filled by private vehicular traffic.
- b. The scheme shall also include a full investigation of the potential for park and ride facilities for the north of the city, either at Caton Road, or at the intersection of the link road with the A6.
- c. That consideration be given to the comments of the City Council's Environmental Health Services which include measures to address construction noise.
- d. The County Council should address the outstanding concerns of the Environment Agency.
- e. All Heavy Goods vehicle movements should be routed from the M6 along the link road once constructed.

2.4 Lancaster City Councils formal position at this inquiry is therefore that it supports the scheme for the chosen northern route, and believes that this is consistent with its adopted Local Plan and the aspirations in the City Councils Community Strategy.

3. SPATIAL PLANNING JUSTIFICATION.

- 3.1 Lancaster District is preparing its Local Development Framework. A key strand of its Core Strategy (Appendix A) is to be a self sufficient and truly sustainable local economy. To do this we need to ensure that we are able to attract the right types of investment into the District to create quality jobs and not just low waged service sector employment. We need to ensure that the current congested city centre gyratory network has some relief from through traffic to give us the chance of implementing alternative transport links into the primary centre of the district to enable it to grow without grinding both local and through traffic to a halt. Our significant growth potential for the City Centre, to realise the tourist potential from its historic core in line with English Heritage and the North West Development Agency Guidance, and to protect ourselves from losing shoppers to the expanding centres to the south and north also needs to be realised.
- 3.2 The traffic congestion in the historic core arises from geographical constraints. The main A6 route to the north and Scotland runs through narrow sections of the city centre's historic core. The position is then complicated by a complex gyratory system separating traffic into one way flow through three separate but linked gyratories, one of which provides the only means within the urban area of crossing the River Lune, the main physical barrier between the communities of Lancaster and Morecambe. The communities cannot operate independently as Lancaster City Centre is the prime service centre for the district, and Morecambe/ Heysham are principle locations for industrial and commercial sites and home to a large

proportion of local commuters into the city centre. In the morning and evening peaks the congested traffic on the bridge crossings either way has a restraining effect on the whole of the gyratory system and traffic remains crawling or at a standstill throughout all the arms of the gyratory, and the surrounding network. The position is largely the same with non peak weekend traffic, and outside the peak even the smallest incident such as a breakdown, or a minor accident can reduce the whole network to a standstill.

3.3 It is in this context that the City Council needs to strengthen the role of the Lancaster City Centre as a regional service centre and to exploit the full potential of the City's heritage potential as an economic driver. The Position Statement produced by the North West Development Agency and English Heritage date March 2007 (Appendix B) lists the strategic development priorities for Lancaster. Addressing the constraining influence of traffic and access, and exploiting new development opportunities for tourism and leisure are key priorities.

3.4 The City Council is currently considering major development proposals submitted by Centros Millar for a significant expansion of the City centres retail offer, including a department store and development of its cultural quarter around its two theatres. A key determining factor which will influence a transformation in the City's attractiveness to visitors and it's rural communities will be the ability to deal with the current access constraints. Unlike the more successful historic cities of Chester and York, there are currently no Park and Ride facilities serving Lancaster.

- 3.5 There are significant threats to Lancaster as a regional service centre exacerbated by ease of access to other centres in the region. Preston and Carlisle offer a wider range of shopping. Preston has recently announced the inclusion of John Lewis Partnership in a proposed addition to the City Centre facilities. There is also evidence of shopping trips being made to wider destinations such as Manchester City centre and the Trafford Centre. The threats to the districts retail offer are described in the White Young Green report informing the Local Development Framework (Appendix C). This does not need to be the norm for the residents of Lancaster and Morecambe if steps can be taken to address travel patterns and congestion in the urban area of the district.
- 3.6 We also need to enable our geographically isolated communities in Morecambe and Heysham to attract new businesses which can gain access to the Motorway network without being impeded by Lancaster's Traffic problems. The Urban Splash vision of transforming Morecambe into the Brighton of the north can only be accelerated by the provision of direct access to the resort via the M6 link. It is the lack of this access for example which plays a significant role in dissuading major hotel operators from expressing an interest in operating the restored Midland Grand Hotel.
- 3.7 The North West Regional Spatial Strategy advises that "best use should be made of the existing infrastructure, with new road construction only being considered once a thorough examination of all possible solutions to the problem have taken place". However the Strategy recognises that further investment in infrastructure is required to provide relief to

communities adversely affected by heavy traffic. “In some locations, the provision of a suitable bypass may be the only way to resolve traffic-related problems”.

3.8 A common disadvantage of the industrial sites at Heysham and to a lesser extent White Lund is that they have limited access to public transport and poor access to the motorway network. Completion of the Heysham-M6 link is an essential component in assisting deliverability of these industrial sites. In the City Councils review of the Local Development Framework it will rely on recent studies by Regeneris and Kings Sturge (Appendix D) examining the supply of employment land as part of the evidence base for it's Local Development Framework. 18 ha of land was forecasted to be needed for employment growth up to 2016 with a further 6 ha required by 2021.

3.9 There is currently around 63 ha of land available for employment development in the district with 68% of that on the Heysham peninsula. It is not the quantity of land available that is problematic for the economy of the district, it is the quality defined by lack of adequate servicing and access. In the survey work undertaken with local businesses by Faber Maunsell, the lack of efficient access to the M6 and the wider transport network was one of the crucial constraints regularly raised by the business community. Some de-allocation may take place in the Local Development Framework though this is likely to be quite limited. The firm advice from the consultants is to avoid the loss employment sites in the Local Development Framework.

3.10 The economic value of Heysham Port cannot be understated. Presently there are around 3,900 sailings annually and the port employs some 160 people direct, with larger numbers associated with the haulage industry operating around it. It is the largest port in Lancashire and is an important hub for the movement of freight between the UK, Isle of Man and Ireland. The port is undertaking a substantial investment with larger ferries being phased into operation significantly increasing the number of commercial vehicles capable of being carried on each trip. Evidence of the projected increases in freight movements obtained from discussions with the Ports General Manager will be given by the County Council's witnesses. Ferry arrivals and departures are currently key periods for stress in the Lancaster gyratory network. Increasing the number of heavy goods vehicles being carried on each trip can only make matters worse.

3.11 Local Authorities can work with bodies such as Network Rail and the freight transport companies to assist in the transfer of freight from road to rail. The Lancashire Local Transport Plan encourages the use of Quality Freight Partnerships as a means of reconciling economic, environmental and social concerns. Whilst the Lancaster District Local Plan favours greater use of the branch line to Morecambe and Heysham and the establishment of a freight rail terminal at the Port, those Partnerships cannot yet achieve these goals. More details on this issue are given by Mr McCreesh in section 4 of his evidence. The improvement of rail freight links to the Port can only realistically be a long term objective and for this

reason the improvement of the road network remains critical to deliver medium term support for the viability of the Port and the local economy

3.12 Socially, the areas containing the greatest concentrations of multiple-deprivation (indicated by measurements of income, health, employment, education and child poverty) are the Alexandra, Poulton and Harbour Wards in Morecambe/Heysham. The geographical isolation of the peninsula, as the Morecambe Action Plan indicates, is a contributory factor to this social exclusion. Facilitating improved access to these areas via the link is considered to be a key factor in providing greater opportunities and choice for the residents in these wards and surrounding areas.

3.13 One of the strategic actions arising from the Morecambe Action Plan (Appendix E) is the development of the link road, and it is recognised that the link would augment the regeneration of Morecambe by providing improved accessibility for both residents and visitors, and also enhance the interest of developers who may otherwise be reluctant to invest in the resort. However the opportunities arising as a result of the improved access must be balanced against the likelihood that existing residents would be more able to access employment opportunities and other retail areas outside the district.

3.14 To create true sustainability the City Council is seeking to stimulate a transformational agenda in the local economy to encourage greater investment in knowledge based industries associated with the University and Higher Education sectors in the District. The Draft Regional Strategy

(Appendix F, para 5.3 page 10, policy W2 page 21 and 22, policy CNL4 page 83) also advocates this transformational agenda. If this can be achieved Regeneris (Appendix G, para 4.6) forecast that some 8,300 jobs could be created between 2003 and 2015. Delivering that transformational agenda will be dependant on a number of factors, but solving one of the major constraints, that of accessibility and mobility around the urban area ranks amongst the highest priorities.

3.15 The City Council is also taking significant steps to increase and improve the retail and leisure offer of Lancaster City Centre and by the time the Inquiry has commenced it will be considering the significant planning proposal, referred to in paragraph 3.4, to increase retail floorspace in the City Centre by about a third. It is hoped that these initiatives will counterbalance the potential for the link road to encourage trade and business loss to other areas.

3.16 The Regional Economic Strategy emphasises the need for economic inclusion, and this is especially relevant to Morecambe and Heysham. Sites chosen for development need to have “the right physical connections, in terms of proximity and transport links”. It is the City Councils view that the Northern Route would not only be a key driver in assisting economic regeneration of the coastline, but also would benefit and sustain the rural communities closest to the road by improving access from the urban area.

3.17 Worsening journey time reliability is a major problem, not just within the main routes around the centre of Lancaster but at both Junctions 33 and

34 of the M6. Traffic regularly tails back beyond Galgate at J33 and, rather dangerously, on the inadequate northbound off slip road at J34 and onto the nearside lane of the M6. Congestion represents one of the biggest, and most immediate threats to sustained economic growth at both district and regional level. The present road pattern of the historic core of Lancaster, coupled with the restriction caused by the lack of vehicular river crossings, is an obstacle to providing a first-class transport infrastructure, with damaging effects on the competitiveness of the district's businesses. This was the view consistently corroborated in the responses to business questionnaires evaluated by Faber Maunsell.

3.18 Should the scheme proceed then there will be inevitable disruption to the transport network during construction, resulting in temporary impacts upon business interests in the district. The reconstruction of the motorway slip roads alone is guaranteed to adversely affect the travelling public, whilst local diversions (such as the closure of Foundry Lane during bridge building operations) will cause disruption to the local populace. The significant benefits to the local economy of improving accessibility and persuading moves to a modal shift in travel outweigh these disbenefits in the longer term.

3.19 The Lancashire Local Transport Plan 2006-2010 comments that the link would have a positive social effect by improving road safety and health in the district, which would lead to enhanced air quality within the urban areas and an expanded walking and cycling network. Another potential benefit associated with the removal of traffic from the residential road

network, particularly to the east of the City Centre is the likelihood of fewer road traffic accidents.

3.20 The reduction of urban traffic would lead to improved accessibility for public transport, and the potential for a range of transport benefits which would help the most disadvantaged groups of society.

3.21 There is clearly a strong case to be made for supporting the link in terms of improving economic development. National planning advice requires Authorities to ensure that infrastructure is provided to support business performance. It also recognises that positive economic growth can deliver social benefits, where proposals are properly planned.

3.22 The social and economic progress envisaged as a consequence of this bypass, despite the absence of the Luneside Link, is considered to be of major importance to the wellbeing of the district as a whole.

4. COMPLIANCE WITH THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN.

4.1 The Development Plan for the area comprises the Regional Planning Guidance for the North West RPG13 (March 2003), The Joint Lancashire Structure Plan (March 2005) and the Lancaster District Local Plan (April 2004).

4.2 Of material relevance is the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy of January 2006, which has undergone its examination in public. The Panels report was published in March 2007. In addition the City Council's emerging Core Strategy for its Local Development Framework is material as it was

submitted on deposit to the Secretary of State at the beginning of May 2007.

4.3 The Regional Planning Guidance for the North West RPG13 (Appendix H) refers to the Heysham/ M6 Link in Policy T.10. The Draft Regional Spatial Strategy identifies the link road as within the Regional Funding Allocation Programme in Policy RT8 (Appendix F, pages 44 to 46).

4.4 The Joint Lancashire Structure Plan (Appendix M) identifies the link road as an improvement to the strategic road network in Policy 8.

4.5 In the adopted Lancaster District Local Plan the Heysham/M6 Link has sub chapter (4.2) dedicated to it (Appendix I). The policy arising from the chapter gives strong support for the completion of the link, identifies the two routes which were being considered at the time of adoption, and effectively safeguards them from development. With the passage of time and the rejection of the western route, the policy supports and protects the northern route.

4.6 The Heysham M6 Link Road in the form of the northern route is in my opinion in full compliance therefore with the Development Plan.

4.7 In addition to the Development Plan, the link road is also supported by other significant material considerations. These are the North West Regional Economic Strategy (Appendix N, action 76), the Lancashire Local Transport Plan (Appendix O), the Lancaster District Community Strategy (Appendix J), and the Lancaster and Morecambe Vision Board's Strategy for the District (Appendix K). The Vision Boards Economic Vision

cites the implementation of the Morecambe/Heysham-M6 link on page 11 as a key action to realise its vision. The Community Strategy describes the implementation of the M6 link road and many of the complimentary transport measures associated with it as key to implementing its vision for travel and access.

5. SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT BENEFITS EXPECTED FROM THE SCHEME.

5.1 The Lancaster District Local Plan (Appendix I) in paragraph 4.2.1 highlights two strategic purposes for the road: -

- a. To provide a direct link for Morecambe and Heysham traffic (particularly for port and tourism traffic) and assist the regeneration of the Lancaster and Morecambe area (particularly Heysham) and:
- b. To contribute as one of a number of measures, to solving the traffic problems of Lancaster, improving safety and environmental conditions there and enabling existing road space to be used more effectively to give priority to buses, cyclists and pedestrians.

5.2 Arising from these strategic objectives it is logical that the City Council in supporting the scheme has asked the County Council to deliver a full range of sustainable traffic and transport initiative to be implemented concurrently with the link road.

5.3 The estimated reductions in traffic volumes associated with the link road are 4 % on the City Centre gyratory and 25% on the two Lune bridges.

Whilst modest these two traffic reductions, together with other initiatives arising from sustainable transport measures, and measures associated with new development, could be designed to make a major impact on modal shift in traffic patterns.

- 5.4 Once strategic through traffic to Heysham Port, the employment sites on the Heysham peninsula, and that associated with seasonal tourism is discounted most of the remaining traffic on the local highway network is local inter district. That which arrives from outside the urban areas is usually associated with workplace commuting or weekend leisure and shopping.
- 5.5 In support of the planning application the County Council have produced the Lancaster and Morecambe Connectivity Strategy (Appendix P).
- 5.6 The strategy includes a range of measures to improve public transport provision, to intercept inbound traffic into the network, and to influence modal shift in localised travel in line with the objectives in PPG 13. These include: -
- a. Park and Ride facilities near junction 34 of the M6
 - b. Park and ride between Lancaster and Morecambe
 - c. Improving public transport to the major employment locations at White Lund.
 - d. An improved number of bus priority lanes and quality bus corridors.

- e. The introduction of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) into Lancaster to provide; Car Park Guidance, Travel Time monitoring, Variable Message Signs, Access Control, and Urban Management Control.
- f. Personalised Travel Planning.
- g. Travel Plans and Car Clubs.
- h. City Centre Parking Strategy

5.7 Negotiations and initial designs have already commenced to acquire and design a park and ride facility adjoining M6 Junction 34 on Caton Road. The absence of a Park and Ride facility on the fringes of the City continues to consistently affect the transport choices of both residents and visitors. The A683 Caton Road westbound corridor will experience a reduction in traffic volumes of 32% and it is argued that this will be sufficient to allow the provision of an inbound bus priority lane.

5.8 Lancaster is one of only six urban areas in the Country to be designated as a Cycling Demonstration Town. With significant investment being put in place to create cycle networks away from the busiest traffic corridors the relief of major through traffic, particularly Heavy Goods Vehicles, from the main route network inside the urban area can only increase the potential for improved access to these networks, and confidence among the resident population to use cycling as a serious means of travel around the urban areas of Lancaster and Morecambe.

5.9 In December 2006 the Lancaster and Morecambe Vision Board, with Lancashire County Council as the accountable body, commissioned a critical study to examine in detail what initiatives need to be put in place to alleviate the current levels of congestion in the urban area and improve the quality of life for residents. A key part of that study is the “Assessment of the potential to transfer roadspace to alternative modes following the construction of the Heysham to M6 Link Road” (Appendix L, Section 4). The City Council as a key member of the Lancaster and Morecambe Vision Board believes that this study, the tender for which has now been awarded to Faber Maunsell, will be crucial in securing the complimentary transport measures that the City needs in order to realise its full potential.

5.10 If the measures proposed to be delivered in conjunction with the Heysham to M6 link road are brought into effect, the aspirations of Lancaster City Council in giving their support for the scheme will have been met, and, for the first time in decades a major step change can be made towards influencing travel choices. Lancaster is not part of a larger urban conurbation. It is a medium sized city in a large rural area where its resident population and those of its satellites rely on the car as the only practical means of travelling around. With opportunities for choice in regular and reliable alternative transport I would expect those who can to opt out of sitting in traffic queues for significant periods of time to consider the alternatives. The historic City of Lancaster could at last begin to reap some of the rewards enjoyed by its fellow historic cities such as Chester and York where commuters and tourist related visitors can enjoy access to

the un-congested historic cores by Park and Ride schemes or other sustainable modes.

6. THE LOSS OF PLAYING FIELDS, ADEQUACY OF REPLACEMENTS AND THE ISSUES ARISING FROM NATIONAL POLICY GUIDANCE IN PPG 17.

6.1 Lancaster and Morecambe College object to the link road proposals on a number of grounds. In my evidence I have been asked to deal with the specific issue of loss of open space and sport facilities and how this should be reconciled with national policy in PPG 17. All other aspects of the college's objection will be addressed by other witnesses.

6.2 It is a matter of fact that some 2.3 ha of the campus of Lancaster and Morecambe College will be taken to construct the link road. This corridor of land also bisects the collage campus separating the main core of campus buildings from some of its sports pitches and peripheral areas of open space. The corridor of land taken has been protected for highway development since the early 1960s.

6.3 The bisecting of the campus in this way is unfortunate but there is no other option if the link road is to join up with the first phase of the link to Heysham Port which meets Morecambe Road immediately opposite the College campus.

6.4 There will inevitably be major change to the way in which the College campus operates so in overall terms, in the consideration of this matter, the Secretary of State has to decide whether the impact on the College,

and the alleged consequences of that outweighs the overall strategic need for the road and benefits to Lancaster District.

6.5 Planning Policy Guidance Note 17; Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, requires that existing sports or open space facilities should generally be protected from redevelopment. The relevant paragraphs are 13 and 15 which make it clear that where existing playing fields or pitches are proposed to be lost to development, planning permission should not be given unless those facilities are replaced by equal or preferably better quality or quantities of provision in a suitable location.

6.6 The position taken by PPG 17 is broadly reflected in the comments of Sport England in response to the planning application.

6.7 The current position in Lancaster district is that there is a severe shortage of formal sports pitches in relation to the National Playing Field Associations standard (1 full size football pitch to 1,000 people). The current level of provision in the district to meet that standard would be 133 pitches, when in reality there are at last count 61.

6.8 The Lancaster District Local Plan (Appendix I), in chapter 6 Recreation and Community Services, also acknowledges the deficiency in outdoor playing space. As a result of this deficiency Policy R1 of the Local Plan states: -

- a. THE AREAS IDENTIFIED ON THE LOCAL PLAN PROPOSALS MAP AS OUTDOOR PLAYING SPACE WILL BE PROTECTED FROM DEVELOPMENT.

b. EXCEPTIONALLY WHERE THERE IS CLEAR JUSTIFICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD RESULT IN THE LOSS OF SUCH SPACE, THIS WILL BE PERMITTED ONLY WHERE SPORT AND RECREATION FACILITIES CAN BEST BE RETAINED AND ENHANCED THROUGH THE REDEVELOPMENT OF A SMALL PART OF THE SITE OR ALTERNATIVE PROVISION OF EQUIVILANT COMMUNITY BENEFIT IS MADE AVAILABLE.

6.9 In recognition of the fact that the data informing the Local Plan is some years old the City Council has recently commissioned a further study to assess the existing and future needs for open space in the district to inform the preparation of its Local Development Framework and meet the requirements of paragraph 1 of PPG 17.

6.10 Account should be taken of the fact that Lancaster District has a large rural hinterland and sits in close proximity to the Lake District National Park and two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, all of which also offer Lancaster's population access to outdoor sport and recreation activities not normally available to urban populations.

6.11 Given the current position in Lancaster District it is appropriate that the impact on the provision of sports provision at Lancaster and Morecambe College, arising from the construction of the link road, should seek to ensure that replacement facilities are equal to or better than those to be lost.

- 6.12 In assessing whether this is the position I have examined the County Council's proposals in their document which responds to objections and comments. I have noted that they intend to provide and lay out two new pitches and a training grid to equally match the existing provision on the site. They also state that a section of the existing playing field are poorly drained and that this poorly drained area could be improved.
- 6.13 I have noted the Colleges position in response and their criticism that the playing fields will be isolated from the main campus and that users will not be able to access the pitches directly from the changing facilities. I have visited the site on a number of occasions when good weather has placed use of the outdoor pitches and informal recreation areas in high demand. On these occasions I have noted that the pitches immediately adjacent to the campus buildings have been heavily used, and in contrast the pitches to be separated from the main campus by the road to be vacant. Indeed it seemed to me that those pitches already experience some degree of segregation because of their location on the other side of extensive car parking areas and by being away from the main administration blocks. In addition they do not enjoy open access along their whole boundary as access is currently gained through restricted access points in a hedgerow.
- 6.14 With the provision of an underpass from the main campus to the pitches, which will be short in length, well lit, and not open to wider public access, I do not believe that the perception of segregation will be significantly worse than the current position. The issue of distance and ease of car parking nearby has also been raised. Whilst I acknowledge that it would be more

convenient for changing facilities and car parking to remain closer to the pitches, I think that the proposed situation is counterbalanced by the improvement in the quality of the pitches, and hence, during periods of poor weather, the potential for greater usage with poor drainage overcome. In relation to overall sports pitch provision in Lancaster district therefore, the current position is not made worse by the proposal. The County Council's Landscape Architect will deal specifically with the qualitative improvements to be derived as part of the compensatory provision in this case.

6.15 Beyond the issue of mere replacement of the existing pitches I can understand the Colleges concern that severance of the campus could impede their further development as a sports college. How that further development could take place anyway without acquiring more land or shared facilities is unknown as it appears that all available land within the campus is currently used. I am however aware of a number of wider opportunities to develop that role which are not so site dependant.

6.16 All the main higher education establishments in Lancaster have developed aspirations for growth and as the Head of Planning Services I have been asked for advice on numerous occasions on how they might go about meeting those aspirations. Whilst all the establishments tend to prefer developing on site campuses I have expressed a planning view that there is no reason why facilities should not be shared between establishments, and why some sites elsewhere within the urban areas could not be used to spread the benefits of growth in the education sector to help with the wider

regeneration of the urban area. In relation to this point I feel that the comments made by the college about needing open space to buffer their development aspirations ignores the concept that they could develop further facilities elsewhere in the urban area.

6.17 The University of Lancaster for example is proposing an investment of some 18 Million pounds in developing its sports education provision on site, and has aspirations for further growth in that sector. There appears to be no practical reason why new investments could not be cross funded and shared between the University and Lancaster and Morecambe College, and I have been advised informally by the University that they would be open to discussions about sharing facilities. The University campus is approximately 5km from Lancaster and Morecambe College and easily accessible by public transport.

6.18 I have also recently been involved in discussions with the Vale of Lune Rugby Club who occupy the open recreation land to the north west of the college campus. The club wish to invest in new spectator and changing facilities and to lay out improved pitches on their land. They wish to facilitate this by obtaining planning permission for limited housing development on part of the site, but will have to justify such a case by demonstrating major community benefits from the investment. The Vale of Lune Rigby club is sited within walking distance of the college.

6.19 From the outset I have suggested that the Club and the College would be well advised to collaborate in that venture to assist in meeting both their aspirations for improvements in their facilities.

6.20 In conclusion, I take the view that the minimum requirements of PPG 17 and the Development Plan have been met by the County Council's proposals to replace the existing pitches with ones which are of better quality including one formal training pitch replacing an informal area. They have included in the scheme the means to retain access to the pitches. I accept that the college may see the physical arrangements as less convenient to them, but it is my firm belief that the overall benefits of the link road to the district significantly outweighs the inconveniences to the college in this regard.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 The Inspector will consider a wealth of evidence to demonstrate how important the completion Heysham/ M6 link is to the future of Lancaster District. It has the potential to make a significant step change in the means by which strategic commercial traffic travels through Heysham Port between England and Ireland. It has the potential to have the same effect upon travel in and around the urban area of Lancaster and Morecambe. It is the means by which the delivery of Park and Ride facilities to Lancaster's disadvantaged historic core, can be realistically achieved, and it will provide certainty for the economic strategy of the district, that the employment potential of the currently isolated Heysham peninsula can be unlocked.

7.2 Failing to deliver the scheme will create a significant degree of uncertainty for Lancaster and Morecambe. The future for regenerating Morecambe/Heysham and delivering Lancaster as a higher order service

and tourist destination will have to be reconsidered, without the link or the means to introduce the benefits arising from it. With the Heysham/M6 link featuring as key infrastructure to deliver the vision in the City Council's Community Strategy, LDF Core Strategy, and the Vision Boards Economic Vision I can only speculate that a considerable rewrite of these strategy documents will be necessary, with the uncertainty causing demonstrable harm to the districts investment potential in the region.