

## COUNTY COUNCIL – 24 SEPTEMBER 2025

### QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

#### Question to the Leader of the Council from Mr. Callan – Etchingham, East Sussex

The Queensway Gateway Road connection is at last, nearing completion. It is known for being years behind schedule. It is also substantially over budget. What many have forgotten is that this was not the original planned junction. This was defined as a temporary solution because Sea Change Sussex were unable to deliver the original budgeted and planned version.

Too many attempts have been made to deny accountability. ESCC has **always** had responsibility for the delivery of this project. It is set out in the contractually binding Service Level Agreement signed by ESCC and Essex County Council as the accountable body holding Central Government funds for SELEP.

I trust there will be no disingenuous denial of these publicly recorded facts.

When responding to a resident at the last Council meeting the Leader refused to give a latest cost estimate for fear of being criticised if it was wrong. Two months on and with all the accounting resources available to ESCC at his disposal he must now have a reliable latest cost forecast he feels confident he can share with the Council Taxpayer. The only reasons for not publishing now must be incompetence or embarrassment.

The disruption, delays and costs to motorists both private and commercial and businesses are enormous. The small town of Battle has suffered huge traffic flows including HGVs with no other choice that to use Battle as a diversion for month after month after month. Travelling to the Conquest from the West has been a logistical nightmare unless the appointment was between 10.30 and 14.30.

It is insufficient for ESCC spokesman to have made bland apologies based on the theme - 'it will all be ok soon, just be patient'.

No one can deny this project has been an unmitigated shambles from start to (almost) finish. The question is, why? Officers stay quiet other than to deny accountability. Councillors of all parties seem to be cowed into silence and claim they are trying to get answers(unsuccessfully) behind the scenes.

This is not good enough and the Leader has enough experience and is big enough person to acknowledge this.

#### QUESTION

The QGR project has been a shambles. As Local Government Reorganisation approaches and Unitary Authority Status increases, the scope of such projects will increase. It is vital REAL lessons are learned from this shamble to prevent anything similar ever happening again. The only way this can be achieved is by way of public examination by a Scrutiny Committee sitting and hearing all evidence in open session, including the giving and acceptance of witness statements from the public.

The Leader is asked to establish such an inquiry and in the answer to this question define the Terms of Reference and commencement date of the inquiry.

"Will the Leader establish such an inquiry, and in doing so define the Terms of Reference and commencement date of the inquiry?"

**Richard Callan – Etchingham, East Sussex**

**ESCC responses to both the statements made and the question from Mr Callan**

**A) On Responsibility for delivery of the project:**

East Sussex County Council had contractual responsibilities as the Local Accountable Body to the South East Local Enterprise Partnership Local Growth Fund programme. This included ensuring the completion of projects, whether delivered directly or by third parties, for which government funding had been received. As a result, the County Council had a formal agreement with SELEP and a back-to-back agreement with the delivery sponsor, Sea Change Sussex to complete the works.

As the project was not fully completed by Sea Change Sussex an options appraisal exercise was undertaken, to identify the best way forward to complete the Queensway Gateway Road development and a paper was presented to the Lead Member for approval decision on 14 March 2024. The recommendation was for the County Council to undertake the works for the final phases and instruct its own highways contractor, Balfour Beatty Living Places, to complete the development and open the road to the public. Those works are on public highway land and carried out under the permitted development rights as the Highway Authority.

**B) On the Temporary Solution to approved scheme:**

The original roundabout design for the final phase and connection to the A21 was replaced with a signalised junction due to land acquisition challenges. The revised scheme uses permitted development rights as the Highway Authority under the Town and Country Planning Act (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 and when the County Council elected to take over responsibility for delivery on 14 March 2024, the decision was taken to complete the project with a signalised junction which has received the approval of National Highways and the County Council. Additional planning permission was granted for a footway/cycleway on Beauharrow Road on 19 March 2025 (Ref: HS/3503/CC).

**C) On the costs of the scheme:**

Construction of the Queensway Gateway Road project is still ongoing; at this stage, final construction costs are subject to change due to site additional complexity from site discovery, resource changes, and final as-built construction requirements. As such, the County Council cannot provide a final account or provide an ongoing commentary on financial costs but confirms that the project is following its planned expenditure profile. Final project costs will be known after completion and any budget reconciliation work.

**D) On costs to motorists and businesses**

The Queensway Gateway Road project has required the use of traffic management measures and diversionary routes to ensure safe delivery of the scheme and to meet essential health and safety requirements on site. It is of course regrettable that these

measures may have caused disruption and inconvenience to residents and local businesses.

As the works take place on the region's strategic road network, it is almost inevitable that introducing any traffic management needed to deliver the project may inherently have some impact on public and commercial traffic movement.

The County Council, as the highway authority, is not obliged to pay compensation for traffic disruption or loss of business during the carrying out of road works or infrastructure projects nor does it have the funding to do so. That being said, these works, when completed, will ultimately deliver long term benefits for residents, visitors and businesses helping to improve connectivity, accessibility and economic growth.

**E) Lessons Learnt and a request for public examination/inquiry by a Scrutiny Committee.**

At this stage we are focused on completing the last phase of this project and all the County Council's resources for the project are focused on achieving this. Once the road has been completed and all construction operations have been ceased and the Council's contractors have exited from the site, as part of our procedures in closing out the activity on this project, and in common with other similar projects, we undertake post project appraisals to inform future projects. Scrutiny committee may wish to consider additional appraisals or review as part of their work programme.

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