County Council Plan

Simultaneously with the consultants' study, the county council published its plan. This was in draft form so that public comment could be made before any final decisions were taken. The preamble points out that though the town is harassed by through traffic (on A28) which should be diverted, the road also acts as a residential spine road and as the main shopping street in the town centre. The fact that shoppers are enabled to reach the central shops by car is one of the trading attractions.

The main proposals are briefly as follows:

CONSERVATION
(i) The area shown coloured on map 1 is to be designated as a Conservation Area.
(ii) Outside the main shopping area, no further conversion of any building is to be permitted if it will result in adverse change of external appearance.
(iii) Grass verges and trees in High Street and the small garden at East Cross are to be preserved.

TRAFFIC AND PARKING
(i) A by-pass for Tenterden is intended in the long term, possibly taking advantage of the disused railway line, A. Car parks will be provided adjoining the by-pass with foot access to the centre.
(ii) A new distributor road, B, south of the High Street, is to be provided, serving a number of car parks as well as service roads giving rear access to the south side of the High Street. Footpaths will link through to the High Street.
(iii) The High Street is to be turned eventually into two culs-de-sac, to restrict use by vehicles, with area shown hatched reserved principally for pedestrians.

SHOPPING
To meet future demands a site, C, will be allotted adjacent to the main shopping core, served by pedestrian links to High Street and car parks. Small scale shop units only will be allowed in order to retain the intimate character.

Comments

The basic intentions appear sound, namely to take through traffic away on a by-pass, to provide a loop road to car parks in backland with a way through via new shops. Also the suggestion to block off the central narrow and pave it so that shoppers can still get by car near to the centre but not through. But since the by-pass to the north seems unlikely to be built for at least 20 years, Tenterden may well have gone past saving by then. Surely this means that the proposed relief road to the south, B, will have to be made capable of carrying through traffic with consequent wide intersections, in fact as shown on the map 1. This would have the following great disadvantages:
(a) It would spoil the delightful space at East Cross previously listed as something to be preserved under the conservation heading.
(b) It would sterilize valuable land at the back of the houses on the south side of the town.
(c) It would make a gaping hole with swept corners and probably a roundabout slap in the best (treed) part of the High Street on re-entering it—indeed curves on the plan suggest this.
(d) Car parks near the by-pass to the north would be inconvenient, for the ground rises steeply to the town and it would mean an uphill trudge.

SUGGESTION
Would it not be wiser to scrap the idea of a future by-pass on the railway route, which anyway would not absorb the traffic from the Hythe and New Romney roads, and to build a by-pass now on the route shown in map 2? This would not touch the town but would pick up all the roads to the south. Then, with through traffic relieved, the local loop road serving the car parks could be much narrower and slower, largely using existing roads. On the site it seems an obvious choice. Also the construction of this road would probably pay for itself through betterment of the land use.

SHOPS
The wisdom of developing future shopping here, well placed between car parks and High Street (as the council suggests), is apparent, much better than further spread along the High Street itself. Today this is scruffy backland, 24, but the opportunity is there, for the backs of the High Street buildings are often better than the fronts, having been less altered. Also there are many down-at-heel but good buildings here. This is the chance for a new shopping square or squares, 25. Tenterden is not the place for multiples but for small-scale shops. Having accepted Tenterden as a special place, the aim should be to attract small clean industries, such as furniture making, appropriate to its character.

QUERY
A question mark remains—how do you ensure that those qualities described in the consultants' report are in fact guarded when the diagram plan is translated into reality? When these development applications come in, surely, having got the feel of the place through the intensity of their scrutiny, the consultants should be retained to advise on where you go from here—to show how things could be and to guide future developments in the town.