

Swale Borough Councillor's Report

Travel and 'sustainable' development

A better way of getting about is possible! The problems with Dunkirk Hill being closed has again highlighted the problems of getting an adequate bus service and will have pushed some people to travel by car instead. However, when it comes to planning for new homes, we are often told that developments need to be "sustainable", which is the idea that one's daily needs could be met without the use of a car. This raises the question, what does a realistic alternative to using the car mean?

We feel it ought to be that public transport, and the cycling and walking network, are so good that using them would be the obvious thing to do. This might mean that buses came every 15min or less, and cost less than it would to use the car. They would run from early morning to late evening so shift workers could use them, they would be clean and comfortable. Cycling routes would be safe from traffic so all ages could use them with confidence and not be intimidated by fast and close-passing traffic.

Very often we are told that restrictions on development on highways grounds can only come if safety is involved, but this always seems to mean that there has to have been some injury or fatality before action can be taken. Apart from the fact that this is an approach to safety that would be unacceptable in any other sphere, it also is a very narrow definition of safety, and does not take into account the damage done by increased emissions, both of CO₂ and other pollutants, and the damage to health done by time sat in cars rather than being active: even if it just walking to the bus stop. A recent study showed that just 11 minutes walking a day could cut the risk of early death by 10%.

It is a huge challenge to provide high quality public transport and walking & cycling routes in our rural ward. Swale Borough Council has been working on plans to improve walking and cycling routes in the 'Parishes to Town' project started through the Eastern Area Committee. It is critical that a better model to fund rural public transport must be found. This is a challenge for all levels of government, but it must be met if local plan policies for sustainable development and

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