

From Cllr Gordon Craig (Berkeley Vale Ward Councillor)

Matter 5b(PS36)Sharpness Response

I welcome the SLC review and very much feel that it gives a detailed professional view of a situation I have long recognised as a local councillor.

The report concentrates on the viability of an operating railway in this location and rightly concludes that it is not viable. However it is by no means certain that even if viable this railway could ever be built for a variety of reasons including layers of land ownership and required permissions. It was interesting to listen to the debate on this report which was skilfully brought out by the inspector and to witness the swift change of tack by Mr Fong & Mr Russell when faced with it. Suddenly PS36 which they had previously hailed because of its good connectivity was hailed because of its poor connectivity and remoteness which would evidently be more in keeping with "Garden Town" ethos. At this point I'm sure it was not lost on the inspector that Mr Russell had previously described poor connectivity as the reason for excluding Sharpness from further development in the previous local plan. As someone who has been a local councillor through both examinations I am well positioned to confirm that Mr Russell's observation in the last plan was correct and nothing has changed since that time, except perhaps for a desire by the promoter and planning authority to create a garden town ...somewhere!

Following the acceptance of the report and during the hearing, the promoters suggested that new residents would not need to commute out because the area would attract sufficient new employers to provide jobs for all. Sharpness has been identified as a new business hub for decades yet today there is nothing to show for it. Although tonnage through Sharpness dock has remained fairly constant for many years, employment levels have actually reduced as mechanisation has taken over. The other significant business at Sharpness is Howard Tenens, this is a distribution centre occupying a significant footprint but with computer controlled automated picking it provides little local employment. The inspector will be aware that while Howard Tenens was founded on logistics its core business today is commercial property development. To that end they have prepared the ground on a site next to their current Sharpness warehouse, this ground has remained undeveloped beyond that point for many years despite continual promotion, given previous lack of success in attracting business to this location that is perhaps not surprising.

On the basis that sustainable development and in particular something on the proposed scale of PS36 should be based on a sound foundation, the foundations under PS36 would seem decidedly shaky.

Gordon Craig

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