



CPRE/2

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

**Appeal by Kent International Gateway Limited
APPU2235/A/09/2006565/NWF**

Kent International Gateway, Land West of Junction 8, M20, Maidstone, Kent

**Statement by Victoria Wallace, Chief Executive of the Leeds Castle Foundation,
on behalf of Protect Kent (the Kent Branch of CPRE)**

ECONOMIC IMPACT



The Kent Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.

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1. Leeds Castle is a Grade I listed heritage property dating back to Norman times. It is situated in 1200 acres of land a mile east of Junction 8 of the M20, and of the proposed KIG site. My submission, made through CPRE Protect Kent, is on behalf of the Leeds Castle Foundation, the charity charged with preserving the castle for the benefit of the public. It does so entirely without state subsidy, through its trading activities, and provides enjoyment for millions.
2. The castle, which is uniquely beautiful, and has long been known as “the loveliest castle in the world”, adds to the cultural life of the area, offering open air theatre, concerts and other arts events, as well as popular family entertainment such as jousting, craft shows and activities for children during school holidays. These provide the income which sustains the place for future generations. It nestles in a valley in the lee of the downs, with far reaching views across the surrounding countryside.
3. My submission opposing the KIG development covers two principal areas, separate, but interrelated. These are the impact on the important local tourist economy of the area, and the impact of the volumes of traffic the scheme will generate.
4. For the vast majority of the 600,000 annual visitors to Leeds Castle this development would mean arriving at the castle through the heart of an industrial zone, on roads clogged with Heavy Goods Vehicles. This is hardly conducive to attracting tourists to Kent.
5. As well as providing a great deal of pleasure, the castle is an important economic driver for the area. It provides employment for over 350 people. The Castle is without doubt one of the most recognised tourism brands in Kent, and by far the most visited historic house south of London. A trip to the castle motivates many to come and stay in Kent (a fact supported by 16,000 click-through visits to our partner hotel chain from our website in just three months.) This has a huge impact on other historic properties and attractions in the vicinity, which then become additional places for visitors to go while in the area. Our popularity creates a trickle down effect for other tourism businesses. The tourism industry in Kent isn't insubstantial – you can't ignore activity worth £2.5 billion to the local economy and generating 50,000 jobs. Not all will be affected of course – but the developers are placing this eyesore in the heart of the county, at a critical junction of its major access route.
6. If Maidstone and Kent are to become areas which attract more tourists, as is the county council's vision, and as it purports to be in the existing MBC local plan, and in the circulated draft core strategy document, it would be extraordinary to allow the visual appearance of the key gateway to the attractive rural areas to the north and south of the M20, along the designated brown sign tourist routes, to be contaminated by such a massive development in this way.
7. In 2008, SEEDA, Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council consulted on a draft tourism strategy, full of sensible, worthwhile goals,

including ensuring that the rural areas of the borough, many of which are of great beauty and interest, are promoted.

8. The key access point to these areas, both in the weald and on the North Downs (an area of outstanding natural beauty) is via Junction 8 of the M20. The county town, Maidstone, has a great deal to offer (the river, an excellent museum, some first rate medieval architecture, and plans to develop a historic cultural quarter). It is entirely reasonable that as Maidstone's tourism offer develops, many visitors will wish to combine the two – perhaps staying in Maidstone and travelling to the castle, or staying in a rural village, and combining a visit to the castle with a meal or some shopping in the town. But if this development goes ahead, the two will be separated by a vast industrial estate spanning the length of the A20; a miserable prospect, which will only deter tourists. The aspect of the borough is already blighted to the north in the Malling district with the factories at Aylesford. If the county takes tourism seriously, it cannot allow a development of this scale and such a negative impact to take place.
9. The development is also entirely out of scale for the area concerned. It would have a detrimental effect on the ability of existing local businesses to employ people, as the quantum of jobs being created in an area of already high employment would only lead to wage inflation. This in turn could lead to an increase in demand for affordable housing in the area, which is already a major problem, especially for those on low wages. These are the very people who currently work in the tourism industry in the area. Without them, businesses cannot be sustained.
10. Visitors from the UK and overseas will now have to approach the castle and its parkland from the motorway network not through countryside nestling at the foot of an area of outstanding natural beauty, as at present, but through an industrial estate and freight forwarding station, with nose-to-tail lorries. The impact on the aesthetic environment of the castle is therefore significantly affected by the proposals. This will limit dramatically the castle's ability to attract visitors who of course also use local restaurants, pubs, hotels and other services. An economic impact assessment of our two open air concerts in 2007 showed a net benefit of over £2 million to the wider local economy. That's just on two nights. Local publicans and hoteliers believe as much as 30% of their trade is because of the castle. This would be severely diminished if the area was blighted by an unsightly, noisy industrial development.

The Impact of Traffic

11. The developer's environmental statement claims that the additional traffic and noise on the castle would be *negligible* in the operational phase. But this cannot be the case if 3000 people are to be employed on the site, and its purpose is to transfer road freight via Junction 8 of the motorway onto rail, thus stimulating significantly more freight traffic movements through the junction. The developer's own figures assess the impact on the A20/M20 junction would be increased by over 235%. It is through this junction that well over 80% of visitors to the castle must come.

12. No mitigation strategy has been proposed, which is completely unacceptable, especially as the junction already fails to cope with volumes of traffic at busy times. Kent Police already place onerous conditions on our premises license when we hold events which exceed the capacity of our main car park (just 2300 cars, considerably fewer than the daily additional traffic movements likely with this scheme) and insist on additional traffic management, entirely because the M20 junction cannot cope with this additional traffic, especially on Friday evenings when our licence is already reduced by 2000 people (representing just 800 vehicle movements.) Kent Police's own existing position therefore would support our contention that it is not feasible to place this additional pressure on the junction. The consequence would be that the development would jeopardise the larger scale cultural and entertainment events at the castle, which at present have a significant positive economic impact on the area, and are essential for the charity's survival.
13. It is not just the motorway junction that would be affected. The developer's impact assessment also fails to take account of the many directions from which the workforce of the site might come. Their assertion that the B2163 Leeds to Langley road (single track in places, yet the main artery to the M20 junction from the Weald of Kent), or the unclassified road through Hollingbourne leading to Sittingbourne would be wholly unaffected by the development, is also not credible, given that it is highly likely that people who lived in those areas and beyond would work at the KIG depot. This too would have a detrimental affect on those who work at the castle, and in tourism businesses beyond, and on our accessibility and desirability to visitors. It would create a traffic blackspot which would inevitably reduce the castle's appeal to its customers. As a result the Foundation would lose valuable income and the ability to continue to preserve the castle.
14. In conclusion I would note that we are not a nimby organisation, objecting to any local development. As a charity we have to ensure that any engagement in processes like this one are based entirely on what is in the castle's best interests, ignoring our private views, or those of the community around us. These objections are practical and based on fact. We are a charity faced with the very real prospect of the key mode of entry to our location being log-jammed, and rendered hideous, restricting our ability to trade. This has major implications not just for the charity, but for the people it employs, and the other businesses in the area it feeds.