

## Transport Select Committee

### Oral evidence: Operation Stack, HC 496

Monday 21 March 2016

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Members present: Mrs Louise Ellman (Chair), Mark Menzies, Huw Merriman, Graham Stringer, Martin Vickers

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Questions 90-181

#### Examination of Witnesses

*Witnesses:* **Dr Hilary Newport**, Director, Campaign to Protect Rural England, Kent Branch, **Matthew Webb**, Chair, Stanford Parish Council, and **John Keefe**, Director of Public Affairs, Eurotunnel, gave evidence.

**Q90 Chair:** Good morning and welcome to the Transport Select Committee. Please would you give your names and organisations for the record?

**John Keefe:** I am John Keefe, director of public affairs for Eurotunnel.

**Dr Newport:** I am Hilary Newport. I am the director of the Kent branch of CPRE, the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

**Matthew Webb:** My name is Matthew Webb. I am the chair of Stanford parish council.

**Q91 Chair:** Dr Newport, you told us in your written evidence that you are against the proposed lorry park. Could you tell us what the environmental problems of having the park would be?

**Dr Newport:** The environmental impacts would be those of congregating traffic, wherever it was. In that location we are particularly concerned about the impacts on the setting of the Kent Downs AONB. We have been involved in public inquiries for other areas of development along that M20 corridor. In three cases that I can think of in recent history, they have been turned down by the inspector on the grounds of damage to the setting of the AONB. We could also talk of course about the air, noise and vibration pollution that would be caused, but in this location the most significant impact would be the visual intrusion on the setting of the AONB, in particular views from the AONB.

**Chair:** AONB is an area of outstanding natural beauty.



*Dr Newport:* I beg your pardon; yes, it is the Kent Downs area of outstanding natural beauty.

**Q92 Chair:** Are you saying that in relation to the specific proposal at Stanford it is a visual problem?

*Dr Newport:* Indeed.

**Q93 Chair:** Could you tell us a bit more about what that means?

*Dr Newport:* By their very nature, HGVs are mobile advertising hoardings. They are colourful and bright. They will be a moving element in the landscape that is even more arresting to the visual impact. There will also, of course, have to be the associated infrastructure, which would probably be gantries. There would be lighting associated with it. There would have to be security for the site, not only when it is in use but when it is not in use, to prevent incursions into it. The industrialisation that would be caused at what is a very open area of countryside is just not acceptable.

**Q94 Chair:** Can you see any way that those problems could be addressed and mitigated, at least in part?

*Dr Newport:* There is some mitigation possible through bunding and screening with vegetation, for example. What would not be possible would be to mitigate the visual impact of the views down from the AONB over the lorry park. The movement, light and noise that would be caused by the use of the car park is what would have an unacceptable impact.

**Q95 Chair:** Councillor Webb, could you tell us what the problems would be for the local community in Stanford?

*Matthew Webb:* We think regardless of where you build a lorry park of this size—it is not just a Stanford-related issue—the biggest concern to our community and the surrounding communities is the level of emissions those 4,000 lorries would give off. At the moment the largest lorry park in the UK is about 500 vehicles, so we are talking about a lorry park seven to eight times as large as anything that has been built in the UK. Worldwide, the biggest lorry park is about 900 vehicles, yet we are proposing to build a lorry park for 4,000 stationary vehicles, which have to run a lot of the time, whether they are moving in queues or running refrigeration units and spewing a large amount of diesel emissions and the particulates they contain into the public air. That is very likely to impact the health of residents, whether it be in Stanford or in any other village nearby.

**Q96 Chair:** Are you saying that your objection is a general one to do with emissions, and not something specific to do with your local community?

*Matthew Webb:* Our objections as a parish council have always been that we do not think a single large lorry park fixes the problems of Operation Stack. You asked me specifically what would be the impact on the community. In terms of impact, our biggest concern as a community is the environmental health impact to ourselves and our children from a large number of emissions, which no one has done any proper study about or put any figures on. There is nothing comparable out there, yet we are trying to rush this through without due process, saying that it will all be fine. I would not want to be the politician who turns round and explains why some small child is dying of cancer in 10 years' time.

**Q97 Chair:** But are you saying that it is a particular problem for Stanford?

*Matthew Webb:* No, it is a generic problem.



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**Q98 Chair:** So it is not particular to Stanford.

**Matthew Webb:** If it is close to a centre of population, the level of emissions is going to be a problem.

**Q99 Chair:** You do not have any specific local problems.

**Matthew Webb:** Other than that I would fully endorse locally the problems that CPRE has brought out in terms of visual amenity and the noise and light pollution. The lorry park is going to be within a few hundred yards of our village and slightly further away from the village of Sellindge, directly opposite other areas of population, where the light pollution from a site of that size will be very significant. There is only so much you can do to mitigate that. We talk about mitigants. It is one thing to say that we have mitigated smaller lorry parks with 300 vehicles, but this would be trying to mitigate the light and noise pollution for something eight times that size; we do not even know what is needed to do that. Highways England themselves have admitted that they have not had the lead-up time to design the mitigants that they would normally when preparing for something this big.

**Q100 Chair:** Both Sellindge and Westwell parish councils are supporting this proposal as a solution to the disruption caused by both Operation Stack and chronic fly-parking, which is also an issue that has concerned a lot of people. Why do you think they are supporting this as a solution to an existing problem but your parish council is not?

**Matthew Webb:** I cannot explain the views and thoughts of other councils. What I can say in the case of Sellindge parish council is that there has been considerable well-publicised dissent within the village, and that their residents' community does not support the position of the parish council. It has caused a lot of conflict in that village. As far as I know, Westwell is some considerable distance from the currently proposed site. They may well believe that it will be a solution. We do not believe that it is a solution, because it does not do anything to fix the causes of Stack. It just tries to move a traffic jam from the motorway into a field. You still have a traffic jam; you still have the impact on the economy of freight not getting to where it needs to get to. We need to increase capacity and resilience within the freight network so that those lorries keep moving, not just shift them into somebody's field.

**Q101 Chair:** Mr Keefe, Eurotunnel is against the proposal as well. Could you tell us why?

**John Keefe:** Eurotunnel is in favour of keeping traffic moving. What we experienced last summer was a very unusual set of events: a strike, a port blockade and ferries being taken out of service, combined with a migrant crisis that grew up in the summer months. Those circumstances have never existed previously, and they are highly unlikely to exist again in the same way. The enormous disruption that Operation Stack caused in the early part of the summer last year is something that has not continued since solutions were put in place for each of those events. We have not seen Operation Stack through the busiest part of the traffic year, which is the lead-up to Christmas. We have not seen it through the lowest part of the capacity year, which is the months of January and February, even though traffic has continued to grow. We do not believe that building a truck park and trying to use it for two different reasons is going to be a solution to the flow of traffic through the county. If the truck park was built and filled with what were previously fly-parking lorries, and then Operation Stack was called and had to fill up the same space, we would be in an impasse, because there would not be room.

In the traffic growth forecasts for the coming years, we are anticipating 30% growth by 2020 and 50% growth by 2025. That means 2 million trucks in 2020 and 2.5 million-plus trucks in 2025. If we have blockages to the flows across the channel, they are normally from



bad weather or technical incidents and they tend to last a very short period of time. There will be increased amounts of traffic. They are already beyond the level of traffic predicted for the truck park as it is described, with 3,600 lorries, so we would end up with a truck park that was full of fly-parked trucks, which could not cope with the number of trucks on the motorway, even for a short period of time, and would not be a proper solution to keep the trade flows moving that our economy relies on. We favour an on-motorway solution that takes into account the growth of traffic for the UK economy in total, looks at the problem holistically, so that we look at the alternative routes to the coastal ports that serve our trade with the continent, and looks at modal shift on to rail for a certain amount of that traffic by enhancing the rail freight network through Kent.

**Q102 Chair:** Let me take you back to the earlier comments you made. Are you suggesting that what happened last year was just a one-off event, and that apart from last year there is not really a problem?

**John Keefe:** Operation Stack has been happening on an occasional basis since the 1990s, but we have never had an incident of Operation Stack in the same way as we did last summer. The circumstances of last summer were unique. There was a strike that took out ferries, which were blockaded in port for months. The port of Calais itself was blockaded for long periods of time. Those are causes that have been dealt with and are unlikely to be reproduced. The migrant crisis that we have suffered over the last year is also under control in terms of security management in Calais. The unique combination of circumstances that was experienced in the early part of last summer has not been seen, even though there are perhaps as many migrants in the area as there were at the time, because the security is managing it.

**Q103 Chair:** But are you saying that before last year the situation on the motorway did not cause you any problems as Eurotunnel, and that your only concern is about what happened last year?

**John Keefe:** There are occasional technical or weather incidents in the channel that cause short-term delays to traffic.

**Q104 Chair:** Were those delays of great concern to Eurotunnel or not?

**John Keefe:** They are a concern, but they are short term. It is the same level of event as an accident on the M1 or M6.

**Q105 Chair:** Are you saying that it did not cause you any undue concern?

**John Keefe:** No; you are absolutely right.

**Chair:** There was no concern. As far as Eurotunnel is concerned, are you saying that unless there is a repeat of what happened last year you do not think there is a big problem there?

**John Keefe:** Last year was unique.

**Chair:** But do you think there was a problem before last year?

**John Keefe:** There was an occasional short-term issue with Operation Stack. If you look at the number of days that Operation Stack was implemented each year since the early 1990s, you will see that it is the same sort of occurrence as an accident on any other motorway.

**Q106 Chair:** I am asking whether that was of concern to you as Eurotunnel.

**John Keefe:** Any obstacle to traffic is a concern; of course it is.



**Q107 Chair:** But was it any particular concern? You are giving us the impression that what happened last year caused Eurotunnel a big problem, but that apart from last year, whatever else happened, you would see it as fairly normal disruption and not a particular problem. Is that correct?

**John Keefe:** I would agree with that. I would even go so far as to say that during Operation Stack last year the traffic kept moving through the tunnel. The whole point of the exercise that we are trying to deal with is how to keep traffic moving. The goods that are in those trucks are the trade that the UK has with its partners in continental Europe. Even though those trucks were stacked for long periods of time, eventually they all moved through the tunnel. The issue is not so much from our perspective, because ultimately the traffic will move; it is from the perspective of the disruption it causes to the rest of Kent. The disruption is either on a motorway or in a location. Those are the only solutions we are being offered. What we would prefer is that there were mobile solutions that could keep the traffic moving, rather than static solutions, because that is how the trade works.

**Q108 Chair:** Councillor Webb, do you have any alternative suggestions as to how the problem should be addressed? Do you think there is a problem, or do you, too, see it as just something that happened last year?

**Matthew Webb:** Clearly when there is disruption to cross-channel traffic there is a problem. That is why we have Operation Stack. I completely endorse what Mr Keefe was saying. Prior to last year, for 20-odd years, Stack has operated, on average, twice a year. That level of minor disruption is acceptable. It is not worth spending £250 million on a car park that might be used twice a year. In terms of alternative solutions, we should be looking to improve our capacity to get across the channel. Eurotunnel have already been doing that in terms of increasing the number of trains and their check-in procedures. The port of Dover has certain things in train as well. It would be good if we could have a virtual queuing system. We already have satellite navigation and data that show when Stack is on. That information could fairly simply, by means of an IT solution, be fed through to lorries to let them know that Operation Stack is on. They could then be diverted or slowed down well away from the port, as often happens in France, and their route through the south-east and Kent managed in such a way that they arrive in Dover and the Eurotunnel at a point when they are guaranteed to get on their crossing, as opposed to everyone trying to rush down to be at the front of the queue. We manage to fly thousands of planes around the world every day and not crash them all at the end of it. We can manage some lorries on a motorway in a more intelligent way than we are currently doing. The information is already there to do it.

**Q109 Chair:** You believe that the problem could be dealt with by the means you have suggested, involving different technology and different organisation.

**Matthew Webb:** Yes. There are already some systems out there that are being developed to help manage traffic journeys in this way. One that is out there at the moment is a system called “Motorway master”. I am sure it would not take an awful lot to develop that to help hauliers manage their operations in such a way that traffic is held back and released down to Dover and Eurotunnel in a more controlled manner.

**Q110 Chair:** Dr Newport, do you have any suggestions as to how the problem should be addressed, or indeed if you think there is a problem?

**Dr Newport:** I absolutely concur that smarter management of the existing vehicle fleets is definitely the way forward and is eminently achievable. The perspective we are coming from within CPRE Kent is that both Operation Stack and another lower Thames crossing—we are consulting on options for that at the moment—are symptoms of the same



underlying problem, which is the fact that at times there is just too much freight coming through Kent. It is obviously the case that the free movement of freight is important for the UK's economy, but the continued growth in that freight does not seem the cleverest of ideas to us. If there are ways that it can be successfully and more intelligently managed through the existing infrastructure, we would totally support that, but I think that fostering—

**Q111 Chair:** Let me stop you for a moment, because I want to clarify what you said about growth. You are not welcoming the idea of growth or the predictions of growth in freight.

**Dr Newport:** Smart growth is always to be supported, but the continued expansion of crossings through the existing Kent ports is too difficult to accommodate. There are alternatives that could be looked at. We fully support maximum use of modal shift and getting as much freight as possible off the roads and on to rail, but also the use of other ports of entry and exit. We have the London Gateway coming on stream north of the Thames at Tilbury. I do not believe that has plans for ro-ro yet, but that could be another way of easing the blockage, which Kent inevitably is. It is a narrow isthmus that separates the UK from the rest of mainland Britain. It will always be a bottleneck. We need ways to incentivise smarter growth rather than just expanding the crossings through the port of Dover. That would be the way forward.

**Q112 Chair:** Dr Newport and Councillor Webb, you have both suggested a solution to do with technology, and perhaps diverting routes to go to other ports. Do you know of any work that has been undertaken that would support that and show that it is a feasible option?

**Matthew Webb:** There are some technology firms looking into producing that kind of traffic management system.

**Q113 Chair:** Mr Keefe, do you have any view on that? Is it a feasible alternative? You have spoken about different infrastructure approaches. Is what you are suggesting as a solution based on any full analysis or study of what could be achieved—looking at how long it would take to do it?

**John Keefe:** There are a number of points. The first one is that the market itself will grow as the economy continues to grow. The UK economy is set to grow faster than any others in the coming years. Ninety per cent of the road-based trade with our European partners is through the channel ports—the port of Dover and the channel tunnel. It travels through those routes because of the economies of scale; there are more departures, shorter crossings and easier access to markets. But we send all the traffic down one road serving two ports. There are alternatives that exist: modal shift to railways and the use of the other route to the port of Dover along the M2 and A2.

We need to look at the problem in a broader sense. We need to look at how we can shift traffic through the county of Kent to the market. Part of that solution would also be the use of intelligent motorway technology to better manage the speed and flow of the traffic, but not just in Kent, because the traffic coming to Kent is from all over the UK. It is coming from the north, the midlands, the west country and Wales. We would need to manage the traffic significantly in advance of its entry to Kent. That means using the M25, the motorways that are coming south and many of the A roads that serve some of our other towns. It has to be dealt with in a holistic way. We cannot just bring it all into one truck park and say that will solve the problem. When you look at the volumes of traffic that are moving and the growth that is predicted, we need something that will work across the whole system.



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**Q114 Chair:** The Freight Transport Association tell us that, even when there is no disruption, they still end up with lorries queuing on the motorway. Is that a criticism of Eurotunnel? Do you think there is enough parking space there?

**John Keefe:** It is a criticism of the capacity that is available and the speed of growth of the economy, if anything at all. We have taken account of that and have recently expanded the terminal at Folkestone. We have also ordered more trains, so that our uplift capacity will be increased by 20% by 2018. We are looking at moving the traffic quicker and providing a bigger buffer zone to keep it off the motorway when it arrives and we do not have capacity.

**Q115 Chair:** You have just heard our other witnesses talk about virtual queuing and timed tickets using new technology. Those are some of the suggestions that have been put forward to us. Do you think that is realistic? Wouldn't that need Eurotunnel to co-operate? Is that going to happen?

**John Keefe:** It would need the transport operators to co-operate. The decision makers are the logistics managers of the hauliers who move trucks around the economy. They are making decisions as traffic heads towards any port or any destination and telling their drivers exactly which route to follow and which choices to make. It is highly likely that, if there is a disruption to service either at the port or at the channel tunnel, drivers who are on their way to those two locations will be receiving information from their logistics managers in their logistics hubs—wherever they are in Europe—and will be told, "Go to the tunnel" or "Go to the port," because that is where the traffic is flowing. That system already operates. The industry accommodates obstacles in journey times automatically.

**Q116 Huw Merriman:** I want to come back to the point about blight and to the point that maybe this solution is not needed because the situation does not happen that often, and in any event last year there were exceptional circumstances. On that basis, if it is not that serious, why would you object to the park being used? If the park was not used on such a regular basis, on most days it would not be the visual blight that you mentioned, Dr Newport, because it would not be used in that manner.

**Dr Newport:** The hard infrastructure would still be there. The gantries would be there; the security would be there; the footprint of the lorry park would be there. It is hard to imagine that if it were to be built it would be used only on occasions when Operation Stack operates.

**Q117 Huw Merriman:** Following on from that, Mr Webb, you said that your chief concern would be the emissions impact. You said that was not just from a parochial perspective but that you were worried about that generally in the air. Again, though, there is a huge emissions impact when all those lorries are currently queued on the M20.

**Matthew Webb:** No, because they are spread over many miles and it is distributed over a much greater area than herding them into one large square of lorries. It is a completely different demographic of emissions.

In answer to your other point in relation to why we would object if it was not going to be used very often, there are several reasons why we would object. First of all, it would be an indecent waste of public funds to spend £250 million on something that was going to stand empty, and was going to cost money while empty because it needs to be maintained. That in itself is not going to be cheap. If you then use it, as many people have canvassed, to solve the overnight lorry parking problem, it is a little bit disingenuous. People know in itself that it does not solve Operation Stack, which only happens a couple of times a year, so we have to use it for overnight lorry parking because then we can say it is fixing something else.



From a community point of view—the point of view of a lot of communities in Kent—the blight of overnight lorry parking and fly-parking that we suffer is much more of a daily problem and discomfort than Stack a couple of times a year. However, there are commercial interests in Kent at the moment. There is a lorry park in my parish already, which takes several hundred lorries, at Stop 24. They are looking to expand commercially using their funds, as is a lorry park in Ashford called Ashford Truck Stop. If those two lorry parks expand by the amount they want to expand commercially, that will provide enough overnight lorry parking capacity to cure the overnight lorry parking with no expenditure of public funds. Both those projects have been put on hold because they do not want to proceed in case they are subject to unfair competition from a state-funded lorry park.

**Q118 Huw Merriman:** The difficulty is that the Kent economy—the ratepayers of Kent—benefits hugely via this business, yet, as we heard in our last inquiry session, large parts of Kent ground to a halt. Businesses were hugely impacted, residents of other villages hugely impacted and rat-runs were created, and so on. As difficult as it is, one part of Kent needs to take the hit, if I can put it that way, in order for the wider part of Kent to benefit. To come back to the on-motorway point, we were assured by the Highways Agency and the police that there was no possible way of reconfiguring the motorway to make this work and, therefore, a lorry park was needed. Isn't the difficulty that there is a bit of a nimbyism scenario here—I understand that—when the whole of Kent needs a solution?

**Matthew Webb:** Nothing we have said is nimbyism. We are not saying “Not in my back yard.” We already have a lorry park in our back yard. We are even receptive to the idea of Stop 24 expanding its commercial operation, as we said in our submissions to Highways England and others, to help cure the problem of overnight parking. We completely agree with Eurotunnel: if you build one big single lorry park, you also build one big single point of failure. If anything happens slightly upstream of the entrance to that lorry park—if there is a breakdown on the way into or out of the lorry park, or if there is a fire in the lorry park—that huge lovely facility for 3,600 lorries will stop being used and everything will be back on the road. What you need, in addition to the smart management that we talked about, are smaller lorry parks or service stations that allow small numbers of lorries to be eased throughout the road network system and then nobody suffers in such a bad way. Nobody has to take a big hit, as you put it. We can all help to keep the traffic flowing.

**Q119 Huw Merriman:** I am not quite sure about your business's perspective, Mr Keefe. Did you lose any money last year as a result of Operation Stack?

**John Keefe:** Not as much as the transporters lost. At the end of the day, those trucks, when they cleared out of Operation Stack, travelled through the tunnel. There were a few loads that turned back because they had perishable goods and there was no point transporting them across, but overall Operation Stack is simply a slowdown to our business. It has far more impact on the county of Kent and its people.

**Q120 Huw Merriman:** I can well understand the other two witnesses taking the view that they do, but I cannot understand your business's perspective. If I can put it crudely, does it actually benefit you if this lorry park does not get built? Does it benefit your business?

**John Keefe:** No. Whether or not the Government decide to spend £250 million on a truck park that is a white elephant has no impact on our business as such. What we require in terms of our business model is that traffic continues to flow to the channel tunnel at the rate at which we can load trains and move them away. If that happens, our business model is entirely satisfied. But we are part of the community, and the disruption that was caused to our community by the events in France last year was significant. What we are trying to say is that



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the natural process is one of flow. Let us manage flow by using all the technology available to us and all the routes available to us. That includes the M2 and the A2 and modal shift to rail. It includes managing the problem across the motorway network and not just making it a Kent problem. That is the way we will keep the economic flows moving.

**Q121 Huw Merriman:** The difficulty I have is that last year we were told that Operation Stack as it currently stood—notwithstanding the fact that it did not go on for many days; it was 31 days last year—needed a fix. It was appalling for the residents of Kent. It was appalling for business. Now a fix comes in and you are telling us that it is going to be appalling for Kent and appalling for the neighbourhood. I am slightly baffled about it and as to what more can be done.

**John Keefe:** Let me be absolutely clear. We have never advocated a fix in the sense of a truck park. We believe that better management of the traffic through the motorway network would be the right fix, but that has not been discussed in great detail. We were offered Manston as a solution during the summer, which is something that we all hope will never happen. We are now being offered a truck park somewhere along the M20. We believe that is a solution to a unique event that happened last year. It is not taking account of the long-term issue we have, which is that Stack does not happen that often, but in the future there will be a great deal more traffic so we need solutions for that increase in traffic. We need to be able to keep that traffic moving, because those are our exports and the products coming into the country to keep our manufacturing and consumer industries operating. Those flows are on the increase as our economy grows. That is what we need to be addressing, not what to do with 3,600 trucks, which is not the real problem.

**Q122 Huw Merriman:** You say it does not happen that often, but back in 2008 there were 39 days when Stack was in existence. While the figures have not been verified, if it costs £250 million a day when it does occur—it has occurred pretty much every single year, perhaps with the exception of two—arguably the lorry park has paid for itself on that basis, assuming that it solves the matter completely.

**John Keefe:** We believe that the solution would be better were it to keep the traffic moving than to take it off and put it in a field.

**Q123 Chair:** Mr Keefe, Mr Merriman asked you if you had lost money last year. You said “not as much as some of the operators.” Did you lose much money?

**John Keefe:** No, because the traffic ultimately travelled through the tunnel. It was late, but it travelled through. We had the operating loss of running a train empty at times, but not significant losses, because, even when Operation Stack was in place for several days, the tunnel continued to move trains backwards and forwards and we continued to move most of them full. The real damage of Operation Stack was to the county of Kent and to the population of Kent. As long as the traffic has to travel across the channel it will eventually, so the traffic went through the port of Dover and it went through the channel tunnel.

**Q124 Chair:** Stanford parish council in their written evidence to us said that queuing could be reduced by allowing drivers to switch between the ferries and Eurotunnel if one of those is disrupted. Could that work from your point of view?

**John Keefe:** It does work. Every transporter who has a contract to move goods across the channel has a contract with the tunnel and one or all of the other ferry operators. They make that decision in real time already. That is what I was saying earlier. The logistics management of those companies will tell the drivers when they have information from us or the port. They will say, “There is a queue. There is a technical problem or bad weather;



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therefore transfer to the other route.” That decision is being made in real time as they come down the motorway network to the port. It might be even a junction or two ahead of arrival at the tunnel when a decision is finally made to go one way or another. That happens already in real time.

**Q125 Mark Menzies:** I should like some clarity about the locality, because clearly I am not from that part of the world. How far apart are Sedgefield and Stanford?

**Matthew Webb:** Sellindge and Stanford.

**Mark Menzies:** Thank you. Local knowledge is kicking in.

**Matthew Webb:** From the eastern extremity of Sellindge to the western extremity of Stanford is probably no more than about a mile or so.

**Q126 Mark Menzies:** Sellindge will also be affected during Operation Stack; is that right?

**Matthew Webb:** Sellindge is affected during Operation Stack.

**Q127 Mark Menzies:** The thing that comes to mind from looking at the comments from Sellindge—I have done some prior research—is that they feel pretty strongly that the current situation cannot continue.

**Matthew Webb:** Interestingly, if you do a bit more research into that, you will find that the view of the Sellindge residents association differs wildly from that of their parish council. Their parish council put in an opinion on the lorry park without canvassing much local opinion, and there are ongoing issues between the residents and their parish council as to what the parish council said.

**Q128 Mark Menzies:** Today, we have given the parish council due weight. Therefore I am going to give their parish council due weight.

**Matthew Webb:** I would say that I am speaking on behalf of my residents. Sellindge are not.

**Q129 Mark Menzies:** That is a matter of opinion.

**Matthew Webb:** It is—

**Q130 Mark Menzies:** Excuse me. Listen, when I am finished you can speak. Until I am finished you can't, so don't interrupt. If you look at Sellindge parish council's submission—and it is fairly clear—they feel quite strongly that during Operation Stack the pollution level goes from unacceptable to extremely unacceptable and that it cannot be allowed to continue. They see logic in having a lorry holding area near the channel tunnel and next to the port of Dover. The limit that they have identified is about 2,000. That is a lorry holding area by anyone's definition. They say that having the A20 going through the village results in a certain amount of air pollution, but while Operation Stack is in place this becomes extreme. What is of concern is especially the school and pre-school times when children are walking to school. It is important to have extra overnight parking at Stop 24 as the inappropriate parking that Sellindge has in its lay-bys affects the entire village. The tailback from the Eurotunnel entrance can be quite dangerous. At times there are lorries spread out over two lanes of the M20 when waiting to access junction 11A.

Again, let us put faith in the views of parish councils. We have put faith in your view, which is why we invited you here today. I am now putting faith in their view, on which it is very clear that they are in disagreement with you. You can say that they have not canvassed full opinion, but maybe you have not canvassed full opinion or maybe the people you have



spoken to tell you what you want to hear. It is parish council versus parish council. You are a few miles apart. One is dead against and the other one is looking at finding a practical solution. Which one should we listen to?

**Matthew Webb:** If you have read our submission, you will see that we are in favour of providing a practical solution. We have offered up practical solutions. We have also offered up practical solutions that include increasing the size of the lorry park that is already in our own parish. We are not against offering a practical solution. Sellindge's geographic situation when it comes to Operation Stack is slightly different. They have the A20 running through their village. During last summer that meant that for long periods they had traffic backed up through Sellindge as traffic was trying to use the A20. I can understand why Sellindge parish council feel that a lorry park directly off the M20 might be a better solution for them as a village.

Our premise is that a single large lorry park does not solve the problem, not that we do not want it in our parish or in our village. We think it affects Sellindge in terms of emissions, and so on, as much as it would affect us. Its location, proximity-wise, is as close to Sellindge as it is to us. Our views on a solution are that it is a holistic solution that involves increasing capacity throughout the road network and throughout the cross-channel operations and manages that flow better. Yes, if you build a lorry park for 3,600 lorries, you can park 3,600 lorries in it. It does not do anything to stop the circumstances that cause Stack happening. As Mr Keefe said, in the last eight months Stack has not happened once—not once. That is largely because of the efforts that have been made to mitigate the migrant problems on the French side of the tunnel and the industrial action. If we have those things in place and the causes are not happening to make Stack needed, then neither is a big lorry park.

**Q131 Mark Menzies:** But it is quite wrong for the Committee to be of the view that parish councils in the vicinity speak with one voice and all think that this is the wrong solution, because clearly that is not the case. Parish councils do not all share the same view; in fact, I have just quoted one parish council in the immediate vicinity, who make very clear what their position is. I have to say, when sitting here and looking at the piecemeal solutions being proposed as alternatives or hoping that it will not happen again because it has not happened for eight months, when we look at the history of Operation Stack and the misery it has brought not just to people who live locally, which of course we care about, but to the lorry drivers themselves, the haulage industry and the whole supply chain, all of which we have a responsibility to look after, we cannot go on the basis that, "It might not happen again because it hasn't happened in eight months and let's take a piecemeal approach." We cannot do that.

**Matthew Webb:** I absolutely agree, but what we are saying is not piecemeal; what we are saying is a holistic, strategic solution. Let's not say, "Let's hope it is not going to happen again," but look at the fact that stuff that has already been done, such as improving security on the French side of the tunnel and working with the French Chamber of Commerce to try to reduce the number of industrial actions, has helped. It is not chance that it has not happened; it is part of a solution.

**Chair:** Councillor Webb, these are all things that—

**Mark Menzies:** Can I get some clarity, Chair? Mr Webb, would it be acceptable to your parish to have a small lorry park near your village?

**Matthew Webb:** We already have a lorry park in our village for 300-odd lorries.

**Q132 Mark Menzies:** Let us take it to 600. Is that okay?

**Matthew Webb:** I have already said, while we have been sitting here, that if you have looked at our submissions you will see that we have already said we would be receptive to Stop 24 expanding by more than that.



**Q133 Mark Menzies:** What sort of number is good for you?

**Matthew Webb:** Not 3,600. First, there is the fear of the environmental health impact. Secondly, putting that lorry park in one place does not solve your problem. It cannot cope with the full quantity of traffic that is coming down on a day of Stack. That is why it needs to be distributed through—

**Q134 Mark Menzies:** You may have something in that and you raise an interesting point, but would you share the view of Sellindge that perhaps 2,000 is an appropriate number?

**Matthew Webb:** No. I think 2,000 is a complete mistake because it is neither one thing nor the other. If you are going to have smaller lorry parks, you need a lot more of them over a much wider area of the road network to make the impact on the environment small. If you are going to have a huge lorry park that can take all the capacity of Stack, you will probably need one that has 6,000 lorries in it.

**Q135 Mark Menzies:** So, if we go for one lorry park, it has to be a big one.

**Matthew Webb:** Only if you think one lorry park actually solves the problem.

**Q136 Mark Menzies:** So, if you do one lorry park, it has to be a big one. Quite interestingly—these could be very valid concerns—you highlight that putting everything into one area could be the wrong thing to do, and we should have a number of other smaller lorry parks of a smaller footprint across the way. What is the number that you have in mind for this particular lorry park?

**Matthew Webb:** I do not have a number in mind for this particular lorry park.

**Chair:** Thank you all very much.

## Examination of Witnesses

*Witnesses:* **Matthew Balfour**, Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport, Kent County Council, **David Monk**, Leader, Shepway District Council, and **Natalie Chapman**, Head of Policy for South East England, Freight Transport Association, gave evidence.

**Q137 Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Transport Select Committee. Would you give your name and organisation, please?

**Matthew Balfour:** My name is Matthew Balfour. I am the cabinet member for environment and transport at Kent County Council. I should also say that I am vice-chairman of the area of outstanding natural beauty.

**Natalie Chapman:** I am Natalie Chapman, head of policy for London and the south-east for the Freight Transport Association.

**David Monk:** I am David Monk, the leader of Shepway District Council.

**Q138 Chair:** Is there a big problem that needs a radical solution? We have heard from previous witnesses who do not consider that there is a massive problem that requires a big solution. Maybe there was an issue that arose last year that was very important, but there is not really a very big problem. What is your view, Councillor Balfour?

**Matthew Balfour:** I have listened with interest, and indeed I came and listened to your previous hearing. It is true that we have had a big problem. There is no way in which anybody can say that it will not happen again. Growth in traffic is increasing at an exponential rate. It is also true that we need to look at other solutions. We need to look at technology. We need to



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look at better road management. There are a number of different ways forward. Currently, if Stack happens again for any period of time, the only solution is to have what is quite rightly called a storage area, which means that the trucks can keep moving, but we need to have that off the motorway because if it is on the motorway Kent grinds to a halt. Businesses are affected and people cannot get to their hospital appointments, together with all the stuff you heard at your previous hearing. It is really important that we do something, I think the Prime Minister said “at pace”, which does not seem to be the case at the moment, but we need to do something as quickly as we possibly can.

**Q139 Chair:** Are you aware of any studies that have looked at the potential for technology-based solutions?

**Matthew Balfour:** I do not know of any academic research, but at Kent County Council we have commissioned research into what we can do. There are people who have designed apps. We have our own freight advisory website for routes and things. I am sure that there are others. The fact is that you cannot always make drivers do what they are meant to do. There was 30% compliance at the beginning of Stack the last time round, so there were a lot of wayward trucks going in the wrong direction.

**Q140 Chair:** Ms Chapman, could you tell us whether you think there is a big enough problem for the sort of solution that is now being proposed? Do you know of any studies that have taken place that look at other ways of addressing this and the potential?

**Natalie Chapman:** This is a huge problem for our industry. It is a huge problem for businesses in Kent and for local residents just trying to go about their daily business. Clearly last summer was a particularly bad year for Kent and a particularly bad year for our industry. We have seen Operation Stack as a feature on the M20 since about 1998, when it was first introduced. It has been there on and off. Last summer finally concentrated minds on the fact that we have to find a solution to end this situation. We cannot use part of our strategic road network as a giant lorry park and allow the entire county of Kent to grind to a halt. We have to find a better solution.

We are open to ideas as to ways to solve it, but nobody yet has come to us with a convincing way in which this could be managed other than providing a single area site. We believe that will be the simplest and easiest way to manage freight, also bearing in mind that about 85% of the vehicles are not UK registered. We have language and cultural barriers to get past, hence the low compliance rate initially when Operation Stack was put in place last summer. The more complicated we make the system, the more likely it is that it will fail.

**Q141 Chair:** Councillor Monk, what is your view of the proposal?

**David Monk:** First and foremost, Operation Stack is a blight. There is no question about it. We have been kicking on about it since its very start. Several solutions have been tried, including a moveable barrier, but the day they put the moveable barrier in we did not have Stack for two years, so they took it away again and then we got Stack again. That is the way of life.

I would like to explain where we are at the moment. The Government’s highways engineers have given us two options for a lorry park. Whether the lorry park is the right solution or not, they say that it is. Of those two solutions we are very much in favour of the Stanford west site because it uses both sides of the motorway and is contained within the motorway network; it does not go on to the local roads. Any other park that has so far been suggested takes lorries off the motorway, around roundabouts and back on again. As soon as you do that, you block the local roads. As far as we are concerned, we prefer the Stanford one. The south side of that, which, under the plan, is accessed by a bridge—hence the cost of this



particular one—is where it comes in behind Stop 24, the commercial truck stop. Before last summer they were looking to extend that, with Shepway District Council's backing, up to a capacity of perhaps 1,200. That is what they were looking to do before Stack hit. With the scheme that is coming on, we are saying, "Fine, let's still have the overnight parking on the south side," because it is a problem everywhere. It does not have to stop on the north side where pollution would be a problem and where the noise of refrigerated trucks would be a problem. If we put them over on the other side, there is a commercial operator that will operate it.

The next thing that comes along is, "Well, this is a lot of money." Yes, it is. "Can we put a service station on the north side?" If you put a service station on the north side, which you do not have to do, because you can access the one on the south side by the bridge, you will take more land. Why would you want to take more land? There is our conundrum. We are not opposed to any other solution, but we have only been offered those two and therefore we plump for the one that we believe to be the right one of those two.

**Q142 Chair:** We have been told in evidence that the planned lorry park is too big for normal Operation Stack events and too small for exceptional events such as happened last year. Do you think that is the case? Councillor Balfour, do you have a view on that?

**Matthew Balfour:** All the evidence suggests that, if it came to the worst possible case, we would have to use the side of the motorway going towards the coast for Stack as well. We would still retain the other side for traffic. It is extraordinarily difficult to decide whether you build a lorry storage area that is sufficiently large to cover any eventuality or whether you come up with a figure that would seem to deal with the problem in most events. Alongside that, I should also say that Kent and others are looking at providing other lorry parks up and down the motorway system to try to soak up what is called fly-parking.

**Q143 Chair:** Would that be in addition to the proposal?

**Matthew Balfour:** It would be in addition. The estimates are that there are at least 500 lorries a night not going into the lorry parks that currently exist. We have asked for powers from Government, but the difficulty is that to stop lorries parking underneath motorway bridges, in lay-bys or on village greens and leaving behind things which they should not, we would have to have a traffic regulation order. That would require little yellow lines all over Kent, with little blue plaques everywhere. We are looking to Government for help to be able to control fly-parking. Fly-parking would then produce sufficient income across the country, if it was taken off the roads, to provide commercial lorry parks, as there are on the continent. The dreaded word "holistic" came up once or twice, but that is part of the holistic solution. With technology you could have a panic park, if you want to call it that, or a storage area close to the tunnel and the port and then a series of other places where HGVs could safely go. A lot of the time their cargoes need to be kept safe. That is all part of the mix and that is where we need to get to stage by stage.

**Q144 Chair:** You say it is where we need to get to. Is any work being done on developing a plan for that?

**Matthew Balfour:** Yes, absolutely.

**Q145 Chair:** Who is involved in it?

**Matthew Balfour:** We have asked the Department for Transport. I have spoken to the Minister about it. We are requesting powers to be able to deal with the particular problem of fly-parking. It has been said that it is never going to happen again. Remember Donald Rumsfeld and his "unknown unknowns". We did not know that there was going to be a



shipping strike last year. We did not know that there would be quite such a problem with immigration. There will be other things that will happen. What happens if there is a really bad storm in the channel and a fire in a train in the tunnel? Everything will stop, but the lorries will still come.

**Q146 Chair:** Ms Chapman, how much does Operation Stack cost the economy?

**Natalie Chapman:** There are a couple of figures around that. We have done some estimates on the cost of Operation Stack to the UK lorries in the queue, bearing in mind that they are probably only about 15% of the traffic in the queue. We have estimated that to be about £750,000 a day. That does not take into account the wider impact on the Kent economy, or indeed the national economy. The £750,000 a day is just for the UK vehicles in the queue.

Once you start to expand and try to work up what the costs are to the wider UK economy, it gets a lot more difficult. There were figures bandied about of £250 million a day. That is something we referred to. There are questions as to where that originally came from. We understand that it was originally a port of Dover figure and was based on calculating a figure of £89 billion, which is the worth of UK goods passing through the port of Calais on the Calais-Dover route each year. That was divided by 365 days and that is how that figure was arrived at.

**Q147 Chair:** Are you still standing by that figure?

**Natalie Chapman:** As I say, it is not our figure, but in the absence of anything else it is the best figure out there. It is really difficult to understand what the direct costs of Operation Stack are and, indeed, what the knock-on impacts are. If you look at what is in the back of a truck, it could be anything and everything. It could be stuffed full of loo rolls or pharmaceuticals worth millions. It could just be a widget for a factory that in itself does not have huge inherent value but has massive value in the fact that it would stop that factory from operating. It is really difficult to understand what the total figure is, but it is substantial.

**Q148 Chair:** Are you saying that there has not been any comprehensive study done to find a reliable figure?

**Natalie Chapman:** We do not have anything as yet. We are aware that the Department for Transport has commissioned some work on that, but I do not believe it has yet reported. There may be some figures to come that may be more reliable and that we can then look at.

**Q149 Chair:** Is it an improvement for the freight industry to have lorries kept in a lorry park rather than on the motorway, in terms of the economy and their business?

**Natalie Chapman:** What would be an improvement, of course, is not to have Operation Stack and to keep those lorries moving. That is what we want, but we have to recognise that last year was particularly difficult. As Councillor Balfour said, there will be unknown things that happen and things that we do not anticipate that cause issues. When they do, parking lorries on the M20 causes a massive impact on the Kent and the UK economy and to the vehicles in the queue. We do not want to see them parked for long periods of time, but what you have to remember with Operation Stack currently is that it is a queue that is potentially constantly moving. Depending on the configuration of the lorry area, you could configure it in such a way that vehicles can park up and stop in lanes, as they do when they enter the port or Eurotunnel, and they can be in those lanes for long enough to take their statutory EU rest breaks. At the moment it causes real problems for compliance with drivers' hours rules. They could take their breaks and while doing that they can switch their engines off. We should not then have the issue of idling engines and air quality problems. If we could also have somewhere for refrigerated vehicles to plug into, that would be even better. The



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important thing is making sure the layout of such a site works so that whoever manages the site can optimise the flow of vehicles in and out when it is in operation.

**Q150 Chair:** What about the movement of vehicles in and out of the lorry park, if it was to be built, and the costs associated with that? Has anybody done any work on that? Are any of you aware of the cost of organising traffic in and out of a big lorry park?

**Matthew Balfour:** If it helps, I have a cost from Kent Police of just under £50,000 a day. That is just their costs. We had costs that were relatively minimal.

**Q151 Chair:** Was this to do with last year?

**Matthew Balfour:** This was last year.

**Q152 Chair:** I am talking about the future if a lorry park, like the one put forward, actually happened. Has anybody looked at the costs of actually operating it?

**David Monk:** I do not have an exact answer but I have been told in a discussion that both the port and the tunnel operators would be happy to control it. How they would do that I do not know, but as they are the ones that call them down I think that would work for the exit. How we would get them in there, I do not know.

**Matthew Balfour:** If I could help, Chair, I absolutely agree with David Monk. One of the problems associated with Stack as it is run at the moment is bits of paper. The lorry drivers are given bits of paper that are green, pink, blue or whatever it is, saying when they got into Stack so that they know when they are going to come out. Certain enterprising lorry drivers, I understand—I couldn't possibly put my hand on my heart—had photocopiers in their trucks. They were able to photocopy one a bit further up, as it were, and people were jumping the queue. I do not know whether that is true or not.

**Q153 Chair:** Those are allegations, not facts.

**Matthew Balfour:** They are urban myths. What I do know is that, if it is properly organised in terms of lanes, lights and number plate technology, we should not have much cost in terms of people. It could be run from a control room. I certainly think that the expertise that both the port and the tunnel have would be of immense help in doing that. The big cost of having police cars all over the place and then having to provide all sorts of other things in a motorway Stack situation would be gone. You could take the lorries off, the technology would put them into the right lane and then they could be taken out in the right way.

**Q154 Huw Merriman:** To be balanced, I want to ask about the blight on the surrounds, which we heard from the last panel was a concern. I have a map here and I hope that perhaps you, Mr Balfour, can assist. I guess your expertise locally is probably better, with apologies to Councillor Monk—perhaps you can decide who should answer. I notice there is already a big junction at junction 11. I also notice there is a rail line going alongside. Are we talking about a rural location or does it already have quite a concrete expanse?

**David Monk:** It is rural. However, the existing lorry park that we all keep talking about—Stop 24—actually sits between the motorway and the railway, which is why it is probably one of the best places in the country to put a lorry park.

**Q155 Huw Merriman:** Have you been involved in assessing any other sites that might perhaps be less intrusive on the surrounds?

**David Monk:** Yes. We have been party to the consultation from Highways England. They looked at several sites. Indeed, I went to county hall and went through every site down



the motorway until we came to the inescapable conclusion that, if you are going to use a lorry park, the place to put it is just above the tunnel so that it can suit the tunnel and the docks.

**Matthew Balfour:** For years, the county council has been looking at different sites. We have a rather secret list of where we think lorry parks can go. We have done a considerable amount of work. Somebody told me that at least £1 million has been spent already identifying places where a lorry storage area could go. Those plans were given to Andrew Jones, the Minister, at the height of the troubles last summer.

**Q156 Huw Merriman:** At the end of last year we heard from Councillor Carter, your council leader, that lots of different ideas were knocked around. Now that this has been landed on, do you think it is the best idea in the circumstances?

**Matthew Balfour:** Yes. The really important thing is to do something about it now. We do not want to get into an endless Heathrow/Gatwick/Boris island discussion for 30 years, please.

**Q157 Martin Vickers:** We heard from Mr Webb in the previous panel that his council was not being nimby about this. As elected members, do you genuinely feel that you are speaking with the backing of your local communities? Broadly speaking, what is public opinion?

**David Monk:** I can speak for Shepway District Council. The majority of other councils, parish councils and town councils supported the option.

**Matthew Balfour:** Kent must be supporting this. The misery that was caused last year cannot be allowed to happen again.

**Q158 Martin Vickers:** We also heard about traffic growth over the next five or 10 years and the ability of Eurotunnel and the road network to cope with the capacity. Do you feel that the proposals you favour can genuinely cope with the increases over the next 10 years?

**David Monk:** On the information that we have been given, what is proposed will cope with the majority of situations. That was what the design criteria were. There is now talk that it will be too small because the traffic is going to grow and grow. Even if that were so, we would land up back at our Stack position, which, while terrible for us, doesn't shut down the whole of Kent. Without it, we would be going up and blocking Maidstone.

**Matthew Balfour:** Sorry, I'm going to have to use the word. We have to have a holistic decision. We have the third Thames crossing coming, I hope. We need the bifurcation. At the moment, the M20 is the main route. We need the A2/M2 corridor as well, both to take its share of the traffic but also so that, if there is a problem on the motorway or on the A2, the other can cope. Going into the future, that is why we need all these other bits. The technology will come. At the moment, everybody is talking about driverless vehicles and road trains. If we can get that moving at the same pace, if we can have the controls we desperately need to stop fly-parking and if we can put in lorry parks, we can begin to get the situation under control. I am not complaining, but Kent is the gateway to Europe, or t'other way about, and we need that connectivity. If it breaks, we are all in trouble.

Chair, you were talking about economic events. I do not think anybody has calculated that Cowley had to stop making Mini cars and that, oh so sadly, Rolls-Royce motors had to stop making Rolls-Royces because just-in-time production requires you to have the widget to fit into the thingummybob, and, if it is not coming across or under the channel, you cannot make whatever it is you are making.



**Q159 Martin Vickers:** Councillor Balfour, during the talk about fly-parking and so on, you mentioned that you would need help and support from Government on legislation or regulation. I was not quite clear whether you were satisfied that you were getting the support you want from Government. What is your ask of Government now?

**Matthew Balfour:** What I would like is some overarching regulation that says that if you are an HGV you must park in a designated area. That is being very simplistic. We would obviously have to have some sort of incentive powers to get people to move on.

**Q160 Mark Menzies:** Following on from the previous set of witnesses, there was a belief that, rather than having one very large lorry park, a number of smaller ones spread throughout the area or down the spine of the motorway would be the solution. Ms Chapman, what are your thoughts on that?

**Natalie Chapman:** In principle, we are not opposed to the idea. We are sceptical about how it would work in practice. Given that the overwhelming majority of those vehicles are non-UK registered, it would be about how you would ensure compliance. The more complicated you make a system, the more chances there are for loopholes and for people to get around it. Drivers will use their initiative and will try to find a way around the queue if they can. We need to make sure that whatever system we have works for Stack and is close enough to the port and Eurotunnel to ensure the quick release of vehicles. That is important; we cannot have trains and ferries leaving half-empty during Stack. We have to keep the flow going, and we just need the most effective way of doing that. We also need to make sure that the system is robust and that it is properly enforced so that we do not have people jumping the queue. It might start with a small problem of compliance, but quite quickly it would grow to a very big problem of compliance.

**Q161 Mark Menzies:** If we were to go for four or five parks accommodating the same number of vehicles, is that likely to cost more initially and have increased operational costs and problems?

**Natalie Chapman:** I do not necessarily know about the capital cost of providing five sites rather than one. I imagine that there may well be some additional cost. Certainly the operational costs would be higher, because it would be a lot more complex. That is certainly my guess at it. I am not an expert in running such sites, but the more complicated you make it, the more problems you are likely to incur.

**Q162 Mark Menzies:** What are your thoughts, gentlemen?

**Matthew Balfour:** My comment is that I think it has to be both. I do not think we could have lots of little ones, because we do not have the technology to order the drawdown for the tunnel. What Natalie said is really important. Any big park or any Stack mitigation must be close to the ports and the tunnel entrances. It just does not work otherwise; there is too much leakage.

**David Monk:** Already Dover complains that being 23 kilometres away is too far. Both the tunnel and the port have put in extra lorry holding areas, and with that resilience I do not think it is too far away at 23 kilometres.

**Natalie Chapman:** If we are talking purely about Operation Stack, that is a single site. If we are talking about overnight lorry parking, yes, we need a number of sites. There is a tendency to mix the two up. Certainly when we initially responded to the Highways England consultation we said that we would like a solution to Operation Stack and overnight lorry parking and everything else. The priority in this instance is that it works for Operation Stack. We just need to be mindful that, while there is also a great opportunity to tackle overnight lorry parking, we must not lose the effectiveness of the site to manage Operation Stack. If that



decision is made, we need to make sure at the same time that we immediately look at the issue of the lack of overnight lorry parking facilities.

**Q163 Mark Menzies:** It is fair to say that during this investigation both issues have come to the fore. Clearly this is focused on Operation Stack. We need to find a solution and something that works long term for the industry and for residents. There has also been concern about overnight lorry parking.

**David Monk:** If we can solve that, we solve one of the greatest blights, which is the detritus left by lorries that fly-park.

**Q164 Mark Menzies:** We heard today that Stanford parish council is opposed to the proposals in their current form. What steps can be taken to mitigate the current proposals in a way that will help to remove some of the concerns that Stanford parish council or its residents have, thinking about things like park security and the detritus you mentioned, so that it does not become a dumping ground and impact on that village?

**David Monk:** It is very awkward for Government. Because there is a private site operator already in the vicinity, we believe that some arrangement should be made with that site operator, who, after all, handles lorries in and out every day with no problem at all. We fall foul of EU procurement laws, I think, but surely somewhere along the way somebody could come to some sensible arrangement.

**Matthew Balfour:** The whole thing needs to be balanced and thought through so that unintended consequences are avoided. We need a mixture. I am ashamed of the way Kent looks at the moment. It is absolutely disgusting. We did a litter pick the other day, because of the Spick and Span Ma'am campaign. Somebody who was doing it said that they were amazed at how so much of the rubbish was not produced in this country, if I can put it that way. The other thing is that what lorry drivers inevitably have to leave behind is really not a nice thing to find at the bottom of your garden.

**Q165 Chair:** But you think this problem can be addressed.

**Matthew Balfour:** I think so, with proper management; if we stop fly-parking, yes.

**Natalie Chapman:** The lack of overnight lorry parking is a huge issue for our industry. Clearly, fly-parking, as it has been termed, is not doing the image of our industry any good at all, either with the general public or in fact with the people we are trying to attract to work in our industry. We have a shortage of lorry drivers at the moment. We want to ensure that vehicles have somewhere to go. It is not necessarily people choosing not to pay to park; the overnight lorry parks in existence turn vehicles away every night. It is not that people just don't want to pay but that there is nowhere for them to go.

**Mark Menzies:** We are all constituency MPs around this table. If I was to put on my hat as a constituency MP, I would want not just Operation Stack solved but, more importantly from a constituency point of view, I would want to make sure that I did not have illegal parking, dumping of detritus, and so on, as a constant community blight. I would certainly encourage all of you to take on board both issues when this is being planned. I am not sure how it would fit in terms of 106 agreements or whatever, but it is important that any community hosting a park such as this has to have clear, tangible community benefit and community gain.

**Q166 Chair:** Do all of you feel those things can be addressed?

**Matthew Balfour:** I do, yes. I will just add—David will tell you his figure—that my understanding is that each and every district is spending over £1 million each a year picking up litter in Kent.



**Q167 Chair:** Talking about the specific problem, do you feel that these points could be addressed locally?

**Matthew Balfour:** Yes.

**David Monk:** Yes.

**Q168 Graham Stringer:** Going back to the point that Councillor Webb made, do you believe that all the talk of grand public sector solutions is squeezing out a private sector solution and stopping investment in lorry parks?

**Matthew Balfour:** We must not squeeze out the private sector, because in the end the private sector will be running overnight lorry parking. We need the big public sector gesture to deal with the Rumsfeld problem. If we get another bout of Stack that is the same as last summer, or even a small amount, the cost is absolutely dramatic for people's lives in Kent. It is really dramatic. We need all those different things.

**Q169 Graham Stringer:** The point of the question is this. Is having the grand solution—£250 million is quite a lot of money; even £1 million is a lot of money—delaying the initiative of increasing the size of current lorry parks, which could be part of the solution?

**Matthew Balfour:** If it is used in total as a lorry park, as opposed to a storage area for Stack, of course. Therefore, I do not think it can all be used. We need to set up the numbers and the mechanisms, and indeed have the regulation from Government, to ensure that the private sector will come forward with investment to create lorry parks. We will be as helpful as we possibly can in finding them locations, but the building and management has to be private sector.

**Q170 Chair:** Would that be in addition to the proposal?

**Matthew Balfour:** Yes.

**David Monk:** You are right. You have had submissions from both of the truck stop people—the one at Ashford and Stop 24. They are pausing until they see what the total outcome is. We believe that, sensibly, there could be a solution to deal with both sides, but we do not even have a site chosen yet. Uncertainty always breeds worry.

**Q171 Graham Stringer:** That is one of the things that has puzzled me all the way through, as I listened to the previous session and this session. Why haven't Kent County Council and its relevant district councils just come forward and said, "This is our solution," and asked for support from the Government in terms of site-specific locations?

**Matthew Balfour:** The answer is that we have.

**Q172 Graham Stringer:** But you said previously that you had not made it public.

**Matthew Balfour:** That is slightly different. What we must not do is make public the particular plots of land that we see as good for overnight lorry parking, because that could blight, as indeed we have heard from the parish. We have had, and have brought forward, plans for large-scale lorry storage areas, but for various reasons they never got off the ground.

**David Monk:** Normally finance.

**Q173 Chair:** Have you put those proposals to Government?

**Matthew Balfour:** Yes. Well, it depends what you call Government, but we did have—

**Graham Stringer:** What do you call them? We sometimes call them very rude names in here.



**Q174 Chair:** Who have you put your proposals forward to?

**Matthew Balfour:** We had a particular site that had been worked up. We had worked it up sufficiently to get money from the local enterprise partnership. Indeed, we had agreed some borrowing from part of the state-lending sector, if I can call it that. We were hoping to move that forward just when Stack started to happen, but it was not as good a solution as this. I think this is the right solution, but along with all the other bits and bobs that we have been talking about.

**Q175 Graham Stringer:** I have two final questions. Can you explain the difference between what Councillor Carter told us he believed was the cost of the solution and the latest figure, which is about five or six times that? Secondly, in terms of the public sector solution, who do you envisage the public sector being? Will Kent council taxpayers pay for it, or will it be paid for by all of us from our taxes?

**Matthew Balfour:** Are you talking about the big solution?

**Graham Stringer:** Yes.

**Matthew Balfour:** As to where Councillor Carter got his £150 million figure, I am not sure, because every site is different. The original figure, from memory, was £400 and something million. That was put forward in the summer, and included a whole lot of other work, such as strengthening the safety lane on the motorway and some other things that are jolly expensive. I am not sure where the £250 million came from. I am always slightly wary about public sector sums of money and budgets, because we all know that there can be contingencies in there that are just enormous. I would not bank on any particular figure until I actually saw the quantum for concrete and everything else.

**Q176 Graham Stringer:** Where do you think the balance lies between local government and central Government responsibility for paying for it?

**Matthew Balfour:** Surprisingly, I think that central Government should pay for it.

**David Monk:** I concur with that.

**Q177 Graham Stringer:** That is the least surprising answer.

**Matthew Balfour:** My reasoning is that, as I said, Kent is the bit of our country that all this goes through. If it was happening in Suffolk or Hampshire, would I say that Hampshire or Suffolk should pay for it all? Certainly not; I think it is a national problem.

**Q178 Chair:** The proposal is for a lorry park for 4,000 vehicles, and it is the size of Disneyland. Do you think that scale is justified?

**Natalie Chapman:** Stages 1 and 2 of Operation Stack—when you fully close junctions 8 to 11 coastbound—are 3,600. There were only two occasions last year when we also saw northbound. That was the first time I am aware of that traffic had been queued northbound too. In an ordinary Stack, if you can call it that, we would probably only be looking at a maximum of 3,600. You could try to build a site for the worst possible scenario, but at some point you have to put it in proportion. You need it to be enough that, in most cases of Stack, it would do the job and we would not have to close the M20. We still see the closure of the M20 as something unacceptable. It may be in very extreme circumstances, as we saw last summer, but hopefully we will not see those kinds of extreme circumstances again.

**Q179 Chair:** But you need something the size of Disneyland to do it.

**Natalie Chapman:** That was calculated as what was needed to fit that number of vehicles. The important thing is looking at the environmental mitigation such as the planting



and the materials used. This has been, relatively speaking, a quick process—some say not quick enough and some say too quick—for something of this size and scale. We need to look next at what Highways England is starting to look at in terms of how the mitigations can be done. There are all sorts of things that can be used. Environmental mitigation has really moved on in recent years. We hope that people really use their imagination about what can be done so that we minimise the impact on local communities.

**Q180 Chair:** Councillor Monk, is a lorry park the size of Disneyland justified or needed?

**David Monk:** As I said before, the Government asked their highways engineers to come up with a solution. They came up with a solution. It is not my solution. Of the two I have been offered, I will defend the Stanford west one at the size it is, because that is what they say I need.

**Q181 Chair:** Councillor Balfour, do you agree with that?

**Matthew Balfour:** The figure of 3,600 is what they are aiming for. Whether it should be the size of Disneyland I do not know. We keep being quoted things such as that it's the size of Wales. I would not know what the size of Disneyland is, but if it is 3,600 that we need, it is Disneyland we need.

**Chair:** That is a good point to finish on. Thank you very much.