

Dr Paul Rennie August 2006

Folkestone 2012

linear development and environmental sustainability

The announcement of an extension of high-speed (CTRL) rail services to Dover is an important enhancement to the transport infrastructure corridor through Folkestone. This offers an opportunity to re-think how Folkestone and Shepway may develop in the medium term and in relation to improved rail links with London. The award of Olympic status to London in 2012 makes the delivery of fast and reliable commuter services to Stratford and London a certainty.

Geographically, Folkestone has a unique environment. It is a coastal town, facing France, located at the point where the Downs sweep into the sea. The sea on one side and the downs on the other have tended to direct Folkestone's development along a strip that extends from the old town and harbour westwards to Cheriton, Sandgate and Shorncliffe. Beyond the harbour, the East Cliff remains relatively isolated and underdeveloped. The Warren, a natural wilderness beyond the East Cliff marks the eastern extremity of Folkestone.¹

The development of Folkestone as a seaside resort was made possible by the arrival of the railway in the 1840s. The resort was planned as an arrangement of Victorian terraces and squares. The resort (West End) was laid out in various stages and at regular intervals through to about 1910. The overall architectural

¹ Furthermore, Folkestone is located at the eastern end of Hythe Bay, a sweep of coastline only rivalled, in Europe, by the Bay of Naples.

effect of the resort is of a garden-city by the sea with styles ranging from Gothic, and Beaux Arts to the Arts and Crafts.



The development of Folkestone as a high-class Victorian resort has left several substantial and positive legacies. The first is a high density of substantial family houses. The second is that these houses are set in pleasingly mature and verdant arrangement of gardens and squares. The architectural environment is effectively a coastal park with housing.² Furthermore, the historical legacy of the railway is of a transport corridor served by several stations at relatively short intervals.

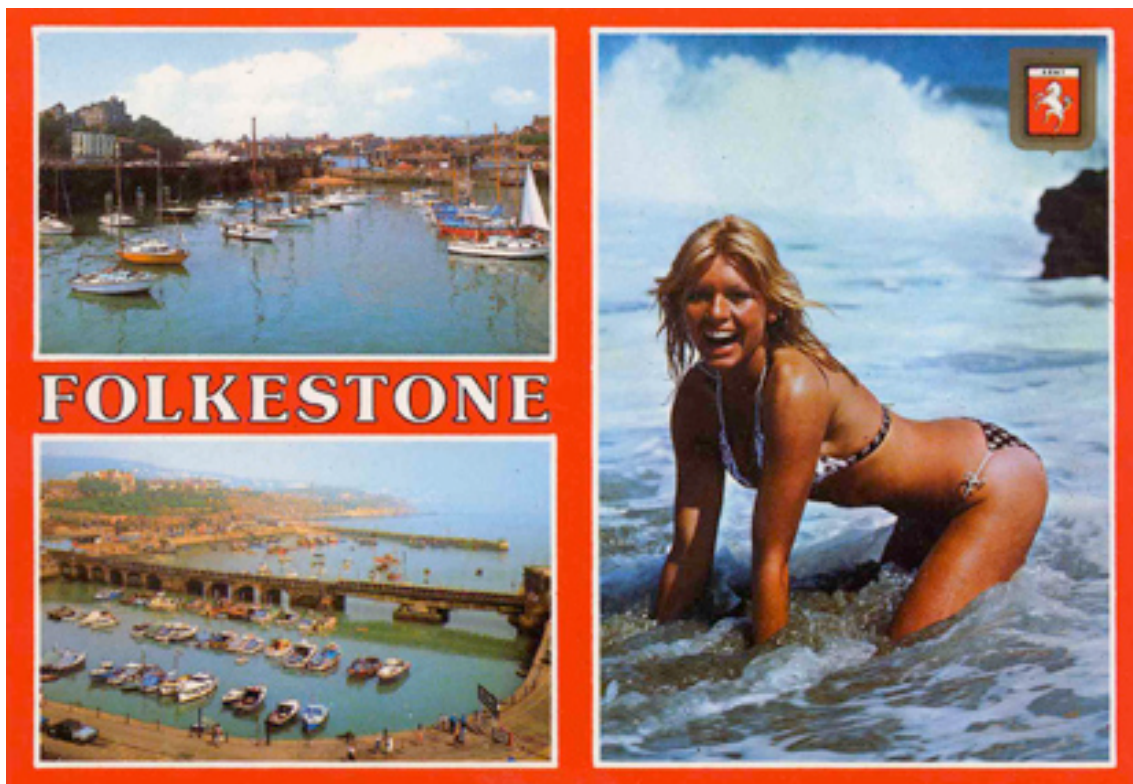
The extension of CTRL services to Dover has two important consequences. The first is that Folkestone no longer has terminus status.³ The psychological significance of not being *the end of the line* cannot be overestimated. The second is that Shepway, with its location between Ashford and Dover, has an opportunity

² The development of the resort has been shaped by the powerfully utopian ideas of the garden-city movement. Re-casting the town as environmentally sustainable re-connects Folkestone to an important philosophical legacy.

³ Folkestone is only the terminus for the harbour spur of the railway. The seaside location, travelling time and faded town centre have all contributed to the psychological impression of distance, isolation and decline.

to exploit its unique geography and to promote itself as an environmentally sustainable linear city.

The local topography and historical development of Folkestone has impacted on its railway. The town is well served with stations at the Harbour, Central and West End. Towards Ashford, there are stations at Sandling (serving Saltwood and Hythe) and at Westernhanger. A military station at Shorncliffe has fallen into disuse and should be revived for civilian use. All the stations should be modernised.



It is immediately obvious that the East Cliff, Old Town and Harbour area are not so well served by the railway. The Harbour station was effectively closed along with the harbour when cross-channel services ended. The eastward development and regeneration of Harbour, Old Town and East Cliff areas would be well served by access to CTRL rail services.

Conveniently, there is the possibility of providing a landmark station with parking and retail at Folkestone Junction. A reduction in road traffic would transform the existing architecture of the Old Town, Harbour and East Cliff.⁴ The pleasingly varied changes of level, that distinguish this area of the town, could be transformed into a series of walks and squares redolent of Mediterranean environments and lifestyles.

Furthermore, a station stop at Folkestone Junction would also serve any expansion of the town towards Dover at Capel and West Hougham.

The unique geography of Folkestone means that the town and railway are in close proximity along the whole length of a corridor that extends from the East Cliff through to Westernhanger – some 12 or so miles. For most of that length urbanisation is limited to between 2 and 4 miles on each side of the railway. This provides an ideal opportunity to promote Folkestone as a town where walking and cycling is prioritised ahead of cars and driving. This would distinguish Folkestone from the *subtopian* sprawl of Ashford and Canterbury.⁵

Assuming that the development and extension of Ashford occurs as expected, the point where Ashford and Folkestone (Shepway) meet will be at Westernhanger in the M20/CTRL corridor.⁶ Westernhanger has a leisure facility (Folkestone Racecourse), motorway access and railway stop. The old Roman

⁴ The cost of accommodating car ownership into civic development is expressed by the large amounts of space that have to be set aside for parking and movement. A substantial reduction in road traffic should free up extra space for development.

⁵ The separation of local rail services from the CTRL service requires careful consideration across the whole of East Kent. My own feeling is that local rail services should be consolidated into a single loop service that connects Ashford, Shepway, Dover, Thanet (Manston) and Canterbury. Trains would circle this loop, calling at all stations, at about 30 minute intervals and afford access to CTRL services at the main stations listed above.

⁶ Government, County and Local Councils have already identified the development of East Kent, especially around the towns of Ashford and Canterbury, as a priority. In these towns the model for development will be of small and medium sized suburban estates. This will tend, over time, to lead towards an undifferentiated and extensive suburban sprawl. In Ashford's case it is possible to imagine the town spreading from Charing to Sellindge and from Hamstreet to Chilham. By this reckoning Ashford might well cover an area of some 150 square miles! This model of urban development, based on American exemplars, assumes near universal car ownership and provides amenities at specific locations that can only be accessed by car and road transport (shopping malls etc).

Road (Stone Street) from Canterbury to Hythe crosses the motorway at Westernhanger. A motorway service station is already proposed at this junction.

It is not difficult to imagine the extension of motorway services and leisure facilities at Westernhanger. Extensive retail facilities there, a sort of Bluewater Two, would serve an area including south and east Ashford, Romney Marsh, Hythe and Folkestone.⁷ This development, including extensive car parking, would effectively mark the western end of a larger Folkestone conurbation.

The interaction of local rail and CTRL services is crucial. The CTRL service would connect Dover, Folkestone Junction, Westernhanger, Ashford, Ebbsfleet, Stratford and London within an hour. At a local level the railway corridor would have stations at Folkestone Junction, Folkestone Central, Folkestone West, Shorncliffe, Sandling and Westernhanger. Assuming the provision of ample car parking at the Junction and at Westernhanger and the proper co-ordination of local and CTRL services it is possible to imagine a coastal conurbation where 80pc of the population are within walking distance of a station and within an hour and ten minutes of London whilst living by the sea! In addition, all of the population would have easy access to the motorway network and to the Continent.

All of this would put Folkestone on a par with parts of London served by the extended underground routes. Also, I believe that this list of advantages would make Folkestone more convenient than either Ashford or Canterbury for access to London.

The point is that, given the geographical limitations of Folkestone's site, the town can only grow by adding value to the existing environment rather than by adding a large volume of population through the suburban expansion of the town.

⁷ The proposals, outlined above, broadly conform to Government policy as evidenced through independent advice into the productivity of the retail sector given by Kate Barker, Chief Economist at the Confederation of British Industry, in 2006.

Accordingly, every local policy decision should be taken on the basis of maximising local value. This is especially the case in relation to the neighbouring environments of Ashford, Dover and Canterbury that will, eventually, contrast unfavourably with Folkestone.

Folkestone and Shepway should seek to distinguish themselves positively from their neighbours at every opportunity.

The promotion of Folkestone as an environmentally sustainable linear development is possible because, through modern technological improvement, its geographical and historical legacies can be recast to the town's advantage.⁸



⁸ The opportunity to reconcile the ideas of garden-city communities and linear plans is unusual. Generally, linear plans have required a density of development beyond the acceptable limits of the garden-city movement. Indeed, the CPRE and other organisations have resisted linear development in England at every opportunity.

The chance to make the railway work for Folkestone and for it to become the spine of Folkestone's linear development should be seized with the utmost urgency.

The town's efforts to secure CTRL connections to London should not rest. The town should lobby for an additional stop at Folkestone Junction to support the regeneration of the Old Town and Harbour area. The station stop at Shorncliffe should be revived. Furthermore the CTRL and local railway loop interface should be co-ordinated at County level and above.

The advantages of Folkestone's development should be plotted against a model of linear expansion along the railway spine. Sophisticated travel-time modelling is available from **mysociety.org**. A detailed series of studies should be commissioned to underpin the town's own plans and to support the regeneration of the Harbour area and East Cliff.

The town should exploit the policy vacuum in relation to sustainable development and environmental concerns to promote itself as an alternative to the unsustainable sprawl of *subtopia*. The town's relationship with Conservative politics should facilitate a link to David Cameron's environmental agenda.