Rt Hon Patrick McLoughlin MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

2nd January, 2014

Dear Secretary of State,

FUNDING FOR A MULTI-STOREY CAR PARK AT HASLEMERE STATION, SURREY

I understand from Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP that you will be meeting him this
month to discuss funding for the construction of a multi-storey car park
(MSCP) on the site of the station car park in Haslemere, Surrey.  I am in
touch with Jeremy Hunt on this matter but felt it important to write to you
directly in the light of representations made to me by local residents,
which raise a number of critical questions that are worthy of due
consideration before Central and Local Government commit to a specific
plan.

The concerns raised with me may be summarised as follows:

Haslemere has been designated as a Neighbourhood Area under this
Government’s Localism Act.  Haslemere Vision, a not-for-profit
organisation, has been incorporated and established in order to work in
partnership with Haslemere Town Council to enable the community to create a
vision of the future for Haslemere and surrounding villages. The Town
Council has delegated to Haslemere Vision the tasks of consulting with the
community to create a shared vision and then preparing a Neighbourhood
Development Plan as envisaged by the Act.  Haslemere Vision’s current work
on the Plan includes the development of a holistic approach to transport
and parking.

The current timetable for developing the Plan includes consulting with the
community on “alternative futures” for the area in May/June 2014 and
putting a draft Neighbourhood Plan to a local referendum in 2015.

Against this background, given that parking is a key issue to be addressed,
and that the scale, location and nature of parking provision required could
vary depending on the community’s views, it seems premature, and possibly a
constraint on community wishes, to make a definitive decision on building a
MSCP at the station at this stage, before the Neighbourhood Planning
process has been developed further.  Even though actual planning permission
for a MSCP was granted in 2009, the direct and second order effects in the
town merit further engagement in the community at this time.

Furthermore, the proposed MSCP design is seen by many residents as
inappropriate in scale and form and not consistent with the Haslemere
Design Statement, which was adopted as a "material consideration" by the
Planning Authority, Waverley Borough Council, on 17 July 2012.

Lastly, I think it is worth mentioning that in the light of the local
community's positive adoption of localism above and beyond the limitations
of local council structures, there is a serious risk that moves to rush to
a solution for a MSCP in Haslemere, without pause for engagement, will
create the very negative impression that the principles of the Localism Act
are being ignored.  If the Department for Transport does agree to assist
with funding of a MSCP, I will be suggesting to Jeremy Hunt that funding
should conditional upon the fulfilment of proper and transparent engagement
steps within the community as described above, as well as between the
respective tiers of Local Government.

I would be happy to meet you and/or your officials to discuss these issues
if that would be helpful.

I am copying this letter to the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP.

Yours sincerely,

Nikki Barton
Councillor for Haslemere, Surrey County Council