

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE REGENERATION & ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 26 JULY 2011**

PRESENT: Councillor Burton (Chairman)
Councillors Cuming, Beerling, Black, English, Mrs Joy,
Ross, Springett and Newton

24. The Committee to consider whether all items on the agenda should be web-cast.

Resolved: That all items on the agenda be web-cast.

25. Apologies.

There were no apologies.

26. Notification of Substitute Members.

There were no substitute members.

27. Notification of Visiting Members.

It was noted that Councillors Ian Chittenden and Nelson-Gracie were Visiting Members interested in agenda item 9.

28. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were none.

29. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.

Resolved: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

30. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2011

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2011 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

31. Update on the Visitor Economic Business Unit

The Chairman welcomed Brian Morgan, Assistant Director of Regeneration & Cultural Services and John Foster, Economic Development Manager to the meeting and invited them to provide the update.

Mr Morgan stated that the creation of the Visitor Economy Business Unit followed the prioritisation of service areas by the Cabinet as part of the Budget Setting process. Whilst Economic Development had been identified as a high priority, tourism had been identified as a low priority with a subsequent reduction in investment. It was also noted that the Heart of Kent organisation which provided information on accommodation and tourist attractions was ceasing, making every Local Authority responsible for their own area. Financially, the Council needed to reduce services that were provided in the Museum, Theatre and within tourism. All of these factors contributed to the creation of the Visitor Economy Business Unit (VEBU). Mr Morgan continued by explaining the two main purposes of the VEBU, being to provide an administrative role and to promote the borough as a venue for tourism for the purposes of growing the economy which was reflected in the Council's priorities.

Mr Morgan stated that he had done some research on a report in 2006, which mentioned the intension for the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) in the Town Hall to be moved to the Museum East Wing once the redevelopment had been completed. The move in May 2011 was driven by two factors; to reduce costs and make better use of staff (as it was not possible to fund and serve three buildings). Furthermore by moving the VEBU and VIC staff to the Museum early it allowed cross training to take place. This was duly noted in the Cabinet papers that had been provided in the agenda, and already savings had been identified from the structure.

In answer to a question, Mr Morgan stated that the previous delay in the East Wing development was unfortunate. The Council was addressing issues that arose from the surveying of the building. Mr Morgan informed the Committee that overall savings that had been allocated for this financial year from the staff re-structure of £149,000. Mr Morgan offered to provide a breakdown of the figures with the last audit report and a copy of the operational plans for the VIC to the Committee. In answer to a question, Mr Morgan explained that the current delay in opening the Museum was due to electrical work that was required. However, he had been advised that it should be able to open early September 2011. The Committee noted that this would miss the summer holiday season, and enquired if they should be concerned about this. Mr Morgan stated that the peak time was from July-November, and therefore was not concerned. In relation to the opening ceremony, the Committee enquired if plans were being made for September which included the press, local hotels and other amenities. Mr Morgan informed the Committee that as well as delivering a phased opening of sections, a programme was being developed for the first opening in September 2011.

The Committee asked Mr Morgan if there were any plans for the vacant space within the Town Hall. Mr Morgan stated that Mr David Tibbit, Property and Procurement Manager was heading this project and the Committee was advised to address him directly. The Committee noted this, and agreed that the use of the space on a temporary basis for events should be investigated.

The Committee commented on the lack of signage throughout the town, as many people were not aware that the VIC had moved to the Museum. It was noted that previously, the VIC being situated on the High Street meant that visitors were experiencing more of the towns facilities, as smaller shops tended to be near the High Street, and the Committee was wary that large signage for fast food restaurants were dominant. Mr Foster informed the Committee that the VEBU is aware that better signage was required, and had recently acquired permission from the old Army and Navy store on Week Street to use one window for advertising. In answer to a question Mr Foster stated that communication regarding the move of the VIC had been done through media means such as Maidstone Matters and Downs Mail, and noted that staff and Members needed to be kept more up-to-date with the timetable in the future.

Mr Morgan stated that since the VIC had moved the Museum, the number of visitors had been reduced partially because the Museum was still under construction and potentially because of the relocation of the VIC, however it was too early to confirm that. The Committee asked for the figures relating to this to be provided.

The Committee thanked Mr Morgan and Mr Foster for the information and looked forward to receiving further information in due course.

- Resolved:** That Mr Morgan and Mr Foster be thanked for the information and that:
- a) the breakdown of the staffing figures, the last audit report and a copy of the operational plans for the VIC be circulated to the Committee;
 - b) the space in the Town Hall being used on a temporary basis for events be investigated;
 - c) better and bigger signage for both the VIC and the Museum be explored, and where possible include the Hazlitt Theatre;
 - d) the Committee be kept up-to-date with regards to the timetable on the Museum;
 - e) the figures relating to the number of visitors since it moved to the Museum be circulated to the Committee; and
 - f) the opening ceremony in September 2011 should include the press, local hotels, train stations and other local amenities.

32. Traffic Congestion Review

The Chairman welcomed County Councillor Malcolm Robertson, Peter Rosevear, Kent Highways Strategic Transport & Development Planner, and John Foster to the meeting, and invited Councillor Robertson to begin.

Councillor Robertson gave a presentation of information, attached in Appendix A. Councillor Robertson informed the Committee that as the oldest standing Member of Maidstone Borough Council, he recalled days in 1955 when watching the traffic was a pastime sport, and shared with the Committee a Kent County Council supplemented newspaper from 1985

entitled 'Maidstone-a way ahead' that showed an artists impression of what the proposed road networks would look like, attached at Appendix B. He informed the Committee that the 'Rail Action Plan for Kent 2011' was a good document and advised the Committee to consider the information within as part of the review. With regards to the train network, the Committee heard that the service to Cannon Street was not in the current franchise and it was deemed not commercial enough by the Train Operating Company (TOC); therefore it was no longer available. However, a new service to Blackfriars is being sought that will eventually be part of Thameslink. It is expected to include Maidstone from 2016/18. Kent is proposing that in the new franchise some services to Blackfriars should be taken from Sevenoaks and given to Maidstone for the interim period from 2014 till Thameslink happens, so as to provide a continuous service to the City.

In answer to a question, Councillor Robertson stated that if funding was available he would redevelop the south side of the town, in particular the Upper Stone Street to Hail Road area.

The Committee heard from Mr Rosevear, who stated that the Transport Strategy used 2007 data to predict the situation in 2026, and this was how all Local Authorities Planning Authorities form their strategies. The Committee discussed the lack of vigour towards the Leeds/Langley by-pass, as it was noted that many people were travelling to the West by going through the town. Although there was much development required, it was agreed that the Committee should have a high vision and ambition in order to achieve what the borough needs, as it was noted that the by-pass was not wanted, but needed. Mr Rosevear stated that traffic was entering the town because it wanted to be there, not because it was passing through the town. The Committee asked for evidence of this information to be provided.

With regards to the gyratory system, the Committee discussed that the Traffic Control Centre visit on 26 June 2011, highlighted the need for more cameras to allow the four exits to be permanently watched, without tree foliage obstructing the view. As development on St Peters Street had been fruitful, this had created a large affect on the traffic entering the gyratory system. The Committee agreed that two cameras on the gyratory system and two tv screens in the control centre should be provided, and a tree surgeon should be allocated to keep the trees at a suitable height.

In answer to a question, Mr Rosevear stated that traffic lights were necessary to assist the smaller side roads that join the main road network and although on temporary occasions having no traffic lights had been effective it would not hold on a permanent basis.

Mr Foster informed the Committee that a survey looking at the perception of the town centre had identified that there was not enough parking, too much congestion and type of office facilities provided was not attractive for businesses. Whilst he appreciated that there was a problem to be solved, he cautioned the Committee that the solution needed to allow Maidstone to remain attractive.

Resolved: That the officers be thanked for the information and that:

- a) evidence showing the traffic going to the town, not through the town be circulated to the Committee;
- b) the Committee adopt a high vision and ambition whilst carrying out the review; and
- c) 2 cameras, 2 TV screens and a tree surgeon be funded by the Council for the use at the Traffic Control Centre to assist traffic management onto the gyratory.

33. Local Strategic Partnership: Quarter 1 update

The Committee noted the quarter 1 update of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), and requested that the quarter 2 update be presented verbally on 25 October 2011.

Resolved: That the LSP quarter 1 update be noted and that quarter 2 be provided verbally on 25 October 2011.

34. Future Work Programme

The Committee considered the future work programme and heard from Mr Bob Bertrum, a consultant who the Committee met on their visit to Medway.

Mr Bertrum explained his background and proposed to the Committee that he provides an appreciation of what the Members are looking to achieve, and where possible concludes with a solution at no charge to the Council. Mr Bertrum explained that he was willing to investigate without charging the council because of his career and interest in civil engineering as well as a wish from a professional point of view to help address the problem. The Committee thanked Mr Bertrum for his offer, and informed him that once the Committee had reached a decision they will be in contact.

The Chairman highlighted the recent emails regarding the employment and skills training that had been distributed by Councillor Black, and asked the Committee to decide how they wished it to fit in with the current work programme. The Committee confirmed they wanted to finish the review on traffic congestion before commencing the next review which was scheduled for November 2011. However, the Committee was encouraged to do some investigations regarding employment and skills training schemes that were currently underway within each ward, in preparation for the reviews' scope. Although Councillor Black was free to continue with planned meetings in connection to his ward, the Chairman advised that should his meetings be relevant to the Committee's review, Councillor Black should advise the Committee accordingly.

Resolved: That:

- a) Mr Bertrum be thanked for his proposal and the Committee will be in contact; and

- b) the Employment and Skills Training topic should proceed as scheduled in the work programme for November 2011.

35. Duration of Meeting

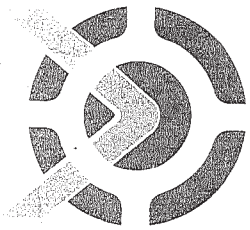
6.30pm to 9.05pm.

Traffic Congestion in Maidstone

- Very long standing issue in Maidstone. High Street traffic watching was a 'sport' when I was a primary schoolboy! Then the Maidstone Bypass was built – which is now part of the M20.
- KCC recognised worsening problem in mid 80s and started to address it. Demonstrate KCC special newspaper describing 3 schemes.
- Two schemes built. Third never built. Since then, there have been several iterations of schemes to replace parts of the original Southern Approach solution. All now abandoned. e.g All Saints Link and upper Stone Street Lay-by widening and earlier Upper Stone Street contra-flow scheme.
- I have observed this problem closely since before I was first elected in 1981 and I do have some thoughts about what can be done.
- Congestion is an interesting phenomenon. It is a very non linear process. When grid lock is close a 5% reduction in volume can produce a massive improvement in flow. That is very important to understand.
- It is most unlikely there will be any new very large capital schemes undertaken in the next 10 years. The Leeds Langley Road will not be built for very many years. Even getting any further Park & Ride launched will be difficult.
- Traffic must be kept flowing by trying to restrict growth and by small incremental improvements both on an off highway.
- KCC/Jacobs-Babtie has carried out computer traffic modelling with the VISUM model. All growth scenarios show gridlock. It is just a question of when? – How far into the future?
- Considerable care needs to be taken with the distribution of peripheral housing allocations so as not to worsen congestion. Maximum use must be made of existing infrastructure with unused capacity.
- For instance, I believe the currently proposed distribution in the draft Core Strategy is wrong. It will lead to early gridlock in the northwest corner of the Borough. 1000 houses in west Maidstone and 500 houses in Lenham/Harrietsham is mistaken. It should be the other way round. The road network in the Maidstone / Malling interface and around Junction 5 of the M20 is already overheated at peak times. Maidstone Hospital has difficulty with blue light access. ALTERNATIVELY: There is considerable untapped capacity in the A20 east of Hollingbourne. There is easy access to the M20 at Junction 8. There are multiple road routes into Maidstone Town Centre from the east via the M20. There is a need for more passengers on the Ashford/Victoria rail line. There is available secondary school capacity. Employment land is available. I'll pursue this no further here, but you will understand the point I am making. Housebuilding and employment development will generate additional traffic.

- There will be future growth south of the town on the A274 Sutton Road and further out on the A229 Loose Road. This growth will have to be LIMITED and artificially constrained until such time as the Leeds Langley Road can be built.
- There are a number of congestion hot-spots around the borough that will need attention. New Cut Road / Bearsted Road M20 J7 area, Fountain Lane / Tonbridge Road, A274 Sutton Road Wheatsheaf. There are several more.
- **The UTMC has been very successful. Continuous improvement should be funded here. It returns excellent value for money. There is no better way of making a further investment.**
- Good quality bus route operations, especially from the south of the town, are going to be essential. Bus priority measures need to be investigated. Is an **additional** bus lane between Mangravet and the Weatsheaf economically feasible? Should there be a bus-only lane from the Weatsheaf to Sheals Crescent? Is an additional bus lane from Huntsmans Lane to New Cut Road on the A20 Ashford Road worth building?
- Park & Ride will have to play an expanded role in the future. A Park and Ride combined express bus service from Parkwood seems the only way of achieving more capacity on that corridor. The viability of a service from Linton Cross Roads will need to be borne in mind in future years. MBC retains ownership of land at the foot of Bluebell Hill – Again a future aspiration.
- Park and ride remains a conundrum in Maidstone. There is very considerable parking capacity in the town centre and only a small minority of it is under the direct control of MBC. This is different to Canterbury for instance. It makes effective establishment and operation of Park and Ride difficult. Should MBC adopt a different policy in managing its off street parking so as to make P&R more attractive as new sites are developed? It would affect revenues!
- Air pollution reduction could be a 'driver' for raising funds for congestion reduction measures at some hot-spots in the borough. This should be considered. However, air pollution due to vehicle exhaust is rapidly reducing as the vehicle fleet is being replaced. NO_x, CO, and particulates are all reducing. Very modern vehicles essentially produce just CO₂ and water vapour.
- The educational School Choice policy has led to a situation where all of the desirable and preferred Secondary schools are in west Maidstone. It is leading to very unsustainable travel patterns during school term. It is a considerable contributor to traffic congestion in **all** parts of the town. Fundamental ways of addressing this need to be found. – Partnership with KCC?!!
- If every car driver substituted walking for just one car journey every week it would make a worthwhile contribution to reduced congestion on the roads!
- FINALLY – and this could be one of the most important contributors to reduced congestion. We need to be much more aggressive in our attitude to government in getting high speed Internet connections available throughout the borough. Parts of even the inner borough are very poorly served. Maidstone is not on BT's priority list for getting **Infinity** FTTB. Other Kent towns are going

to get it before us. This must be changed. More people working from a home office more days of the week could dramatically cut car journeys.



A KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SUPPLEMENT
ANNOUNCING NEW ROADS FOR MAIDSTONE



Maidstone - a way ahead

FEBRUARY 1985

'A fair attitude' over blight homes

KENT County Council has taken "a fair and compassionate" attitude to people whose homes and businesses are affected by the Southern Approach Road proposal.

On the advice of County Surveyor Mike Cottell, the Highways and Public Transport Sub-Committee decided at its meeting on February 12 to treat affected properties as "blighted".

Members agreed that this should take immediate effect despite the fact that the scheme has been approved for consultation purposes only.

Mr Cottell told members that the main alignment of the Southern Approach Road followed that of the currently approved scheme, "inherited" from Maidstone Borough Council at local government re-organisation in 1972.

The new proposals require the demolition of 89 homes and the acquisition of parts of the gardens of a further 20.

This total of 109 includes 73 which are already affected by the old scheme, but there are three residential and some commercial properties which were affected by the old scheme but are not by the new proposals.

Properties affected by the new proposals are not legally blighted, but as Mr Cottell pointed out, for all practical purposes, there was little doubt that they would be blighted as soon as knowledge of the highway proposals were made public.

"This will leave owners of newly affected properties, especially owner/occupiers of residential properties, in the invidious position of not being able to sell their properties on the open market and yet unable to serve a valid blight notice on the County Council," he told members.

£30 million schemes to ease town congestion

A £30 million package of road schemes for Maidstone, which will ease congestion and hopefully bring a new age of prosperity to the County Town, was outlined by Kent County Council this week.

The package seeks to increase the traffic capacity of the main routes into the town; to improve circulation within the town centre, thereby enabling the town to continue its development in an effective way, and contribute to economic growth and the provision of employment.

Straddling

It also seeks to improve north-south access to and from the M20 via the A229.

The new roads are the subject of a special exhibition at the Stoneborough Centre which opens on Saturday and remains open for a whole week including the following Saturday March 2.

It is hoped all the schemes will be completed in the next 10 years.

The first road to be built is the Albion Place-Mote Road scheme costing

approximately £8.35 million. Work is due to start here in 1987 and will involve a viaduct straddling the Len Valley from Ashford Road to Mote Road.

This will assist the flow of north to south traffic as well as improving the access to the Stoneborough Shopping Centre.

A formal planning application is going before Maidstone Borough Council for their comments.

The second of the three schemes to be tackled will be the Maidstone Spine Road costing £10 million. Work is due to start in 1989 on this new road stretching from the new Maidstone Bridge to the Running Horse roundabout on the Chatham Road.

It will follow the riverside, then pass through the old Maidstone Barracks past Springfield where another roundabout will be created, and eventually, by means of a dual carriageway, to the Running Horse.

The third and most ambitious scheme is the Southern Approach Road costing approximately £15 million.

This road runs from Sheals Crescent to a large roundabout just south of Knightbridge Street, linking up with Bishops Way to the north and the Albion Place-Mote Road scheme to the east and College Road to the west.

The Southern Approach Road also incorporates a special underpass leading to and from the town centre which will be for the use of cars and light traffic only. Lorries will have to remain on the dual carriageway.

The three schemes are explained in more detail elsewhere in this publication.

AN END TO THE JAMS



A typical traffic jam in Maidstone. Now Kent County Council offers a solution.

Let's end the frustration and avoid stagnation

by Michael Odling, Chairman of the County Council's Development Planning and Transportation Committee

THE rapid growth in Maidstone, The County Town, and its economy are inevitably giving rise to increasing traffic congestion.

We all know the problems. Solving them isn't going to be easy in a well built up and historic County Town where any new roads can't avoid having a profound effect on people and buildings. Much has already been

done with the bridge gyratory system.

Nevertheless the County Council as the Highway Authority for Kent plans to improve traffic conditions.

To leave things as they are would be a prescription for frustration, congestion and ultimately stagnation as employers and shops moved elsewhere.

The schemes contained in this document are a solution put forward by the highway experts.

Under wraps

I believe the people of Maidstone need time to digest all the details about the road schemes before coming forward with their comments after the Summer. That is why



Michael Odling

we are putting forward all the road plans now and not keeping some of them under wraps until the Borough Council asks for your views on the Local Plan later this year.

So it is over to you. Take your time over reading all the details in this eight page

supplement and visit the exhibition in the Stoneborough Centre where you can of course ask questions.

We would be particularly keen to hear where you feel extra parking facilities should be provided.

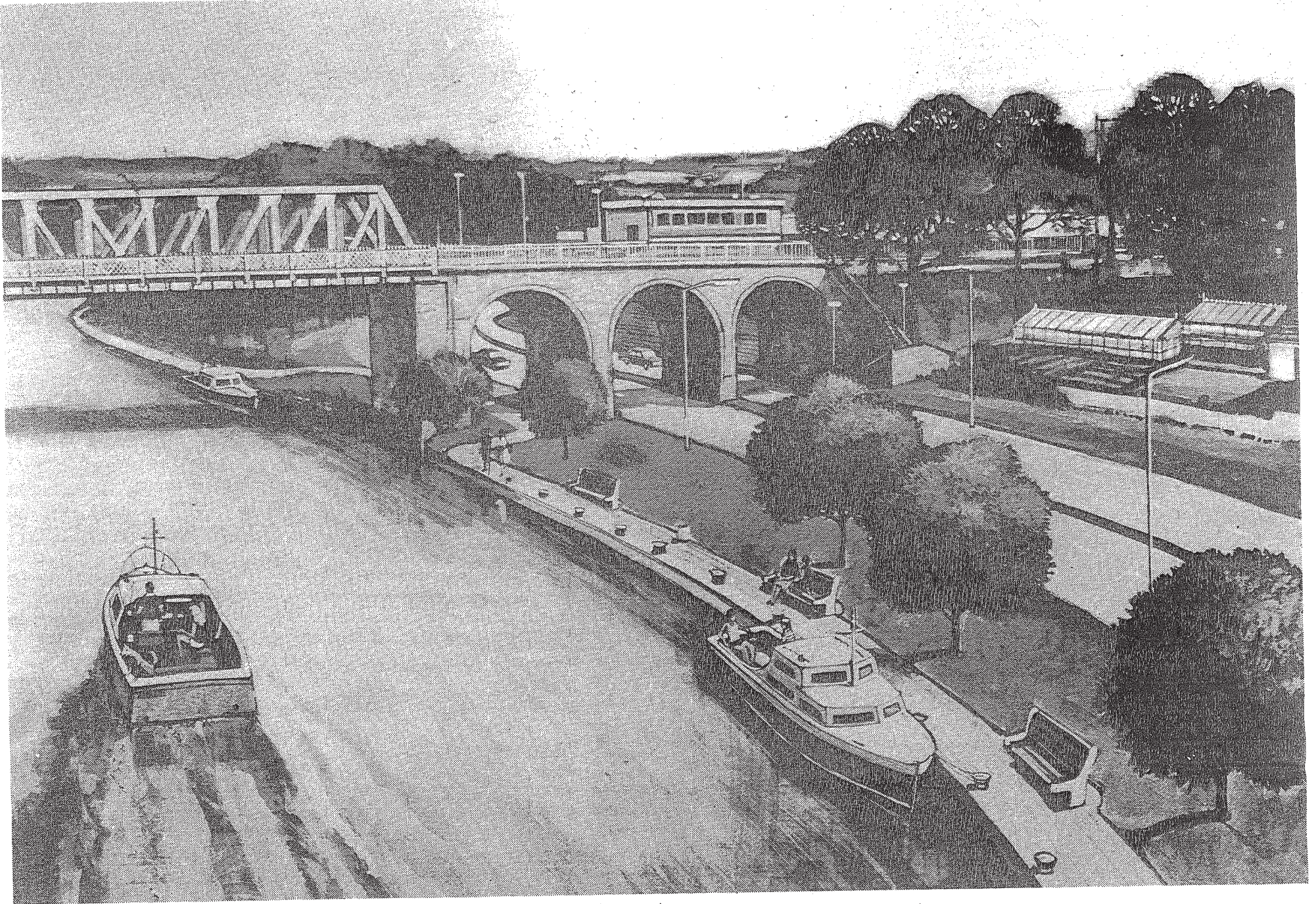
The County Council would also welcome invitations to address local clubs or meetings and explain the strategy further. The schemes contained in the strategy add up to some £30 million and I fully realise they pose some of the most important questions ever faced by the town and its population.

That is why we will value every comment and consideration put forward when the times comes for public consultation.

Where to find the exhibition



MAIDSTONE SPINE ROAD



The Maidstone Spine Road will it is hoped, utilise the existing railway bridge arches to the right of the High Level bridge.

Easing the flow and releasing more land for development

THIS scheme will provide a dual carriageway between Fairmeadow, north of the two bridges, and the Running Horse roundabout.

There are two sections to the project, the first and more important part being a road on a new line from Fairmeadow, passing through Maidstone Barracks to Springfield and the second being the dualling of the existing A229 between the Running Horse and Invicta Barracks.

The main objectives of this road are:

- to increase the capacity of this part of the network for movements between the bridge gyratory and the north

- to reduce town centre traffic flows particularly along the line of the existing route - St. Faith's Street, Museum Street, Station Road, Week Street and Sandling Road

- to allow the release of land at the Barracks for redevelopment

- to provide connection to a possible additional river crossing from Buckland Hill.

Minimise

The line of the road protects Listed Buildings in Sandling Road, St. Faith's Street and the Officers Mess at the Old Barracks.

No homes are lost and a minimum number of business premises will go as

a result.

The choice of route is determined by the need to pass under the Maidstone East Railway line alongside the river, to join Sandling Road between Mill Block offices at Springfield and the Flowerpot Public House, and to minimise the need for land at Invicta Barracks.

It is hoped that the construction of the Maidstone Spine Road would be able to utilise the existing arches of the High Level Bridge in which case train services would not be interrupted.

Don't forget, Stoneborough exhibition open until March 2

Spine Road extension: No homes will be lost

THE extension of the Maidstone Spine Road, which will take northbound traffic out of the town via the Chatham Road, will not affect homes along the route.

In fact, the parking arrangements for people living along the western side of Chatham Road,

opposite Invicta Park Barracks, will be improved by means of laybys.

Basically, from the roundabout which will be constructed at Moncktons Lane, the scheme involves widening the road to a dual carriageway.

Wishing

The main effect on people living in the Ringlestone area will be their access to the new road.

It will be necessary for people wishing to drive into town to use Calder Road. Traffic signals will be installed at this junction to

allow easy access to the new dual carriageway.

Drivers using other junctions - Dickens Road, Ringlestone Crescent and Gibraltar Lane will only be able to make left turns onto the new road. They will have to use either the proposed roundabout at Moncktons Lane or travel up to the Running Horse roundabout if they wish to turn right into town.

Any land which is needed for the road construction will be taken from the barracks side of the road. This can be seen clearly from the scheme drawings which are on display at the Stoneborough exhibition.

Access to the barracks on the east side will be maintained.

Determine

Exactly how this will be done has not yet been decided, but talks with the Army will determine whether the existing access point is moved slightly to be opposite Calder Road, or whether another access at the Moncktons Lane roundabout will be created.

If the entrance to the barracks is opposite Calder Road then it will be controlled by traffic lights.

WHY IS IT ALL NECESSARY?

Implications
are serious –
developers
will be
driven away

AS a centre of population, employment and trade, Maidstone has expanded considerably in the past 20 years with a consequent increase in the volume of road traffic generated.

This traffic is carried on a road network which does not have adequate capacity.

The only helpful addition in recent years, has been the new bridge over the Medway and the continued operation of the network relies heavily on traffic management measures, including Urban Traffic Control, being able to redistribute congestion delays.

Since the second bridge was opened in Maidstone in 1978 traffic flows have increased considerably to a point where severe peak hour traffic jams are experienced on the existing one-way system.

Capacity

Recent developments near the bridge, such as the Crown Courts and B & Q have added to the problem and further developments on the Brewery and Segas Sites are likely to make matters worse.

In order to try to alleviate the situation an experimental scheme involving additional traffic signals at the Fairmeadow and Broadway junctions will be installed during the next few months.

This should give some small increases in capacity but the main benefit will be a

much greater control of the system to ensure that it performs at optimum efficiency.

In 1981 there were typically some 8,000 vehicles inbound to Maidstone in the morning peak period. If the land-use and population changes forecast to occur by 1991 happen then it is likely that by that time there will be a 50% increase in movements to some 12,000 vehicles per hour.

Attracted

We are now three years into the ten year period and during peak periods congestion is a regular feature on most radial routes into the town centre.

This not only means a delay to traffic wishing to reach the town centre but also to traffic travelling across the town to reach, say, the M20.

This is particularly so from South to North as the M20 already acts as a bypass from East to West.

It is clear therefore that the town centre highway system could not cope with an increase in traffic remotely similar to that likely to result from forecast land-use changes. Indeed if the road network were to remain the same the main radial routes could probably accept no more than a 10% increase in traffic.

The implications for Maidstone are therefore serious. Drivers will seek alternative routes on roads which are far from appropriate to carry "through" traffic and eventually congestion could become so serious that developers cease to be attracted to the town centre area.

It must be emphasised, however, that until improvements are carried out there is great concern about the implications of development on congestion in the town centre.

This should give some small increases in capacity but the main benefit will be a

WHERE TO PARK?

THE construction of the three road schemes will mean that some sites currently used for car parking will be lost.

These sites have not been developed in order to allow for the construction of the roads and have been used for car parking in the interim period before the schemes are constructed.

The lack of sufficient car parking spaces is a problem in Maidstone and the loss of

any spaces will obviously exacerbate the problem.

Additional parking provision is an important issue for the Local Plan.

Both the Borough Council and the County Council are in the process of identifying what additional sites should be allocated for car parking and how the additional parking spaces are to be financed.

When you consider that each space in a multi-storey car park costs about £1,000 the problem becomes urgent.



This map of Maidstone Town Centre indicates how the three major road schemes are linked.

Protection of our ancient buildings

NEW road schemes, particularly when they pass through the centre of a town, must be planned with a considerable eye keeping a protective watch on the environment.

And that is just what the Kent County Council's planners have used in plotting the path of the Southern Approach Road.

Demolition

In the immediate areas surrounding the route there are a number of fine old buildings, many of them

officially listed. The planners looked at a number of routes and have come up with a final plan which avoids the demolition of any of these beautiful buildings.

The new road passes behind the Tithe Barn, known as the Carriage Museum, which is Grade II listed, and also avoids the Grade I Archbishop's Palace and various Grade II items in the Palace Gardens.

The College Gateway (Grade I), The College

(Grade II) and All Saints' Church (Grade A) are also preserved, and may be enhanced as this area could later become pedestrianised.

Unaffected

In Knightrider Street, the row of buildings of which the Minstrel Wine Bar is one extremity, are preserved. These are all Grade II, as is Knightrider House which has the new road passing within a few feet of it.

The listed buildings in Lower Stone Street, including the Fisherman's Arms public house, are unaffected as are Grade II buildings in Upper Stone Street including Wrens Cross.

The Corral Almshouses in College Walk (Grade II) will have a much quieter existence, while nearer the town centre, All Saints' Primary School and the Cutbush Almshouses will not only be quieter, but safer too, with traffic reduced to a minimum.

THE SOUTHERN A

A six-point road

THE main objective of this scheme is to provide a high class route for the A229 between the existing dual carriageway at Bishops Way and the end of the present one-way system at Sheals Crescent.

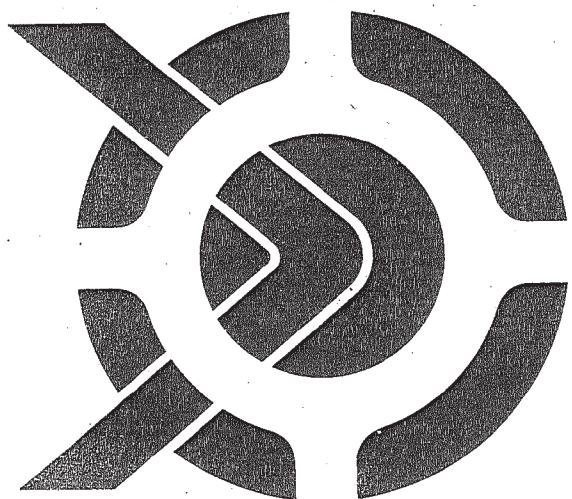
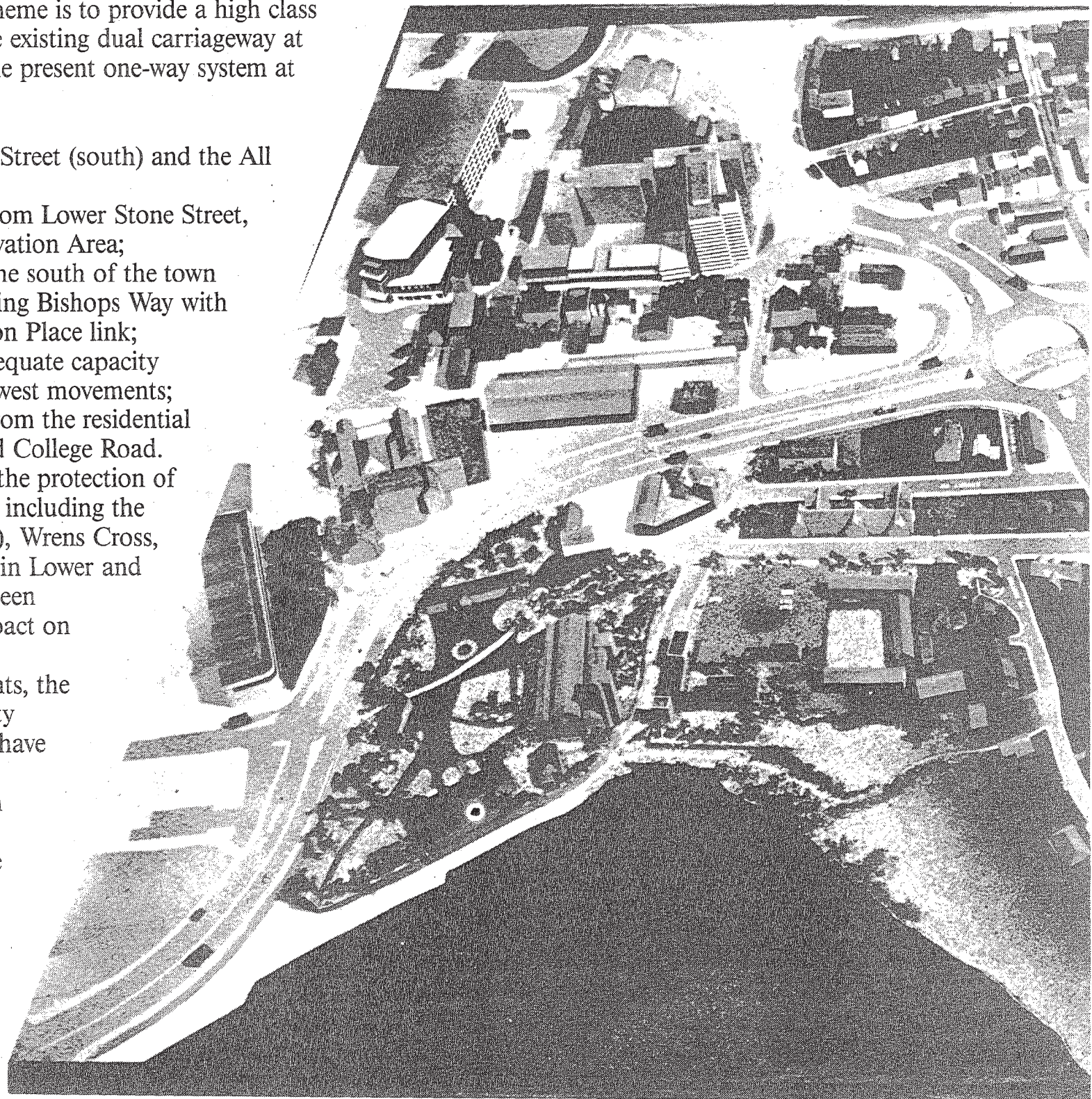
Other advantages would be:

- to remove traffic from Mill Street (south) and the All Saints' Conservation Area;
- to remove through traffic from Lower Stone Street, part of which is also a Conservation Area;
- to provide a route around the south of the town centre for east-west traffic linking Bishops Way with the proposed Mote Road-Albion Place link;
- to provide a junction of adequate capacity between north-south and east-west movements;
- to remove through traffic from the residential district astride Hayle Road and College Road.

The planners have achieved the protection of Listed Buildings and frontages including the Carriage Museum (Tithe Barn), Wrens Cross, Knight rider House and others in Lower and Upper Stone Street and have been concerned to minimise the impact on other properties.

The environmental constraints, the need to avoid excessive property demolition, especially houses, have created difficulties in finding solutions which are efficient in traffic engineering terms.

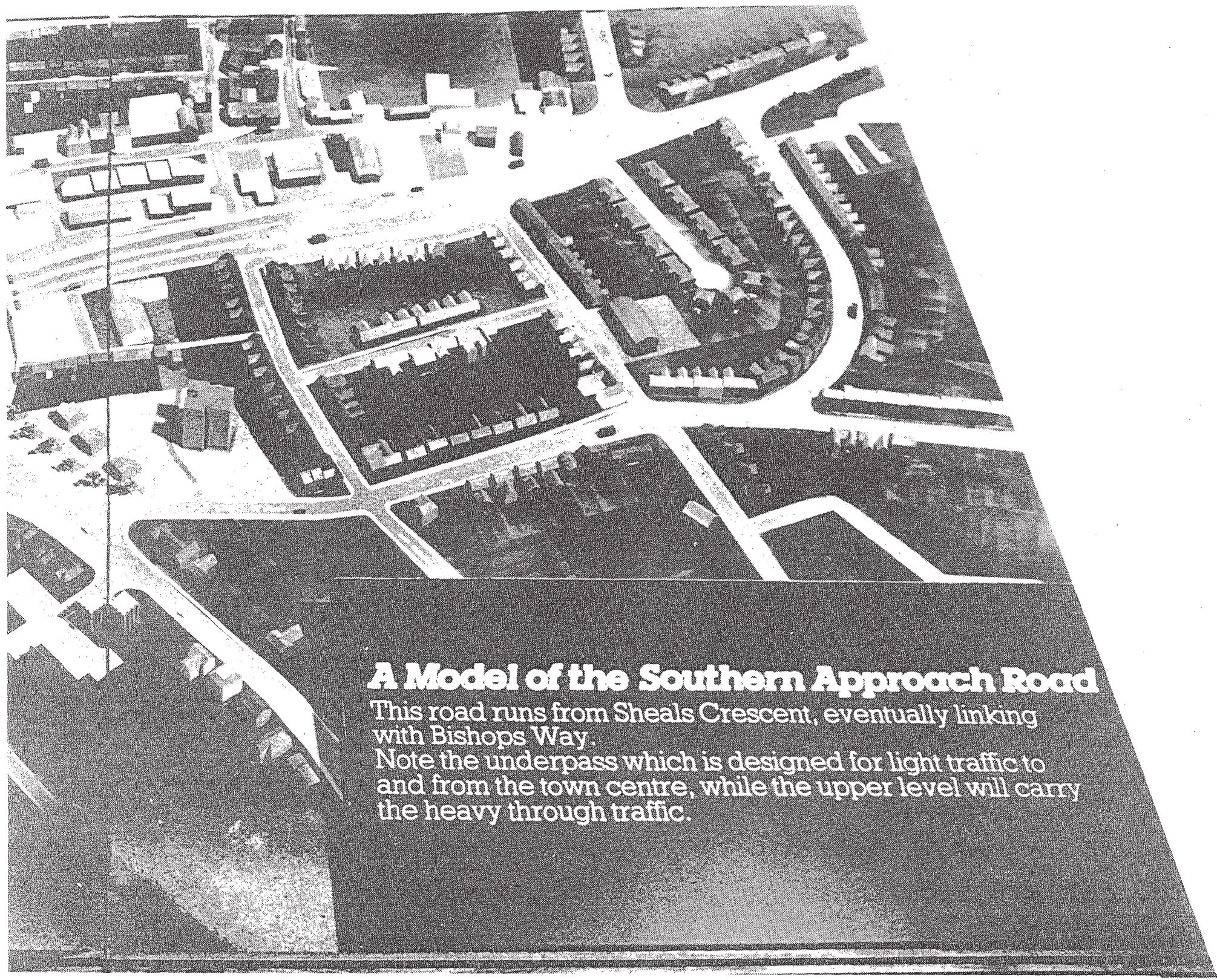
Many options, including the route shown on the approved Town Map have been investigated. One of these alternatives which follows approximately the Town Map route has been selected as the preferred line.



This fascinating and informative model of the £15 million Southern Bishops Way to the North, the Albion Place/Mote Road to the South. The model will be on show at the Stoneborough Exhibition situated at Stoneborough until next Saturday, March 2, inclusive.

APPROACH ROAD

plan for Maidstone



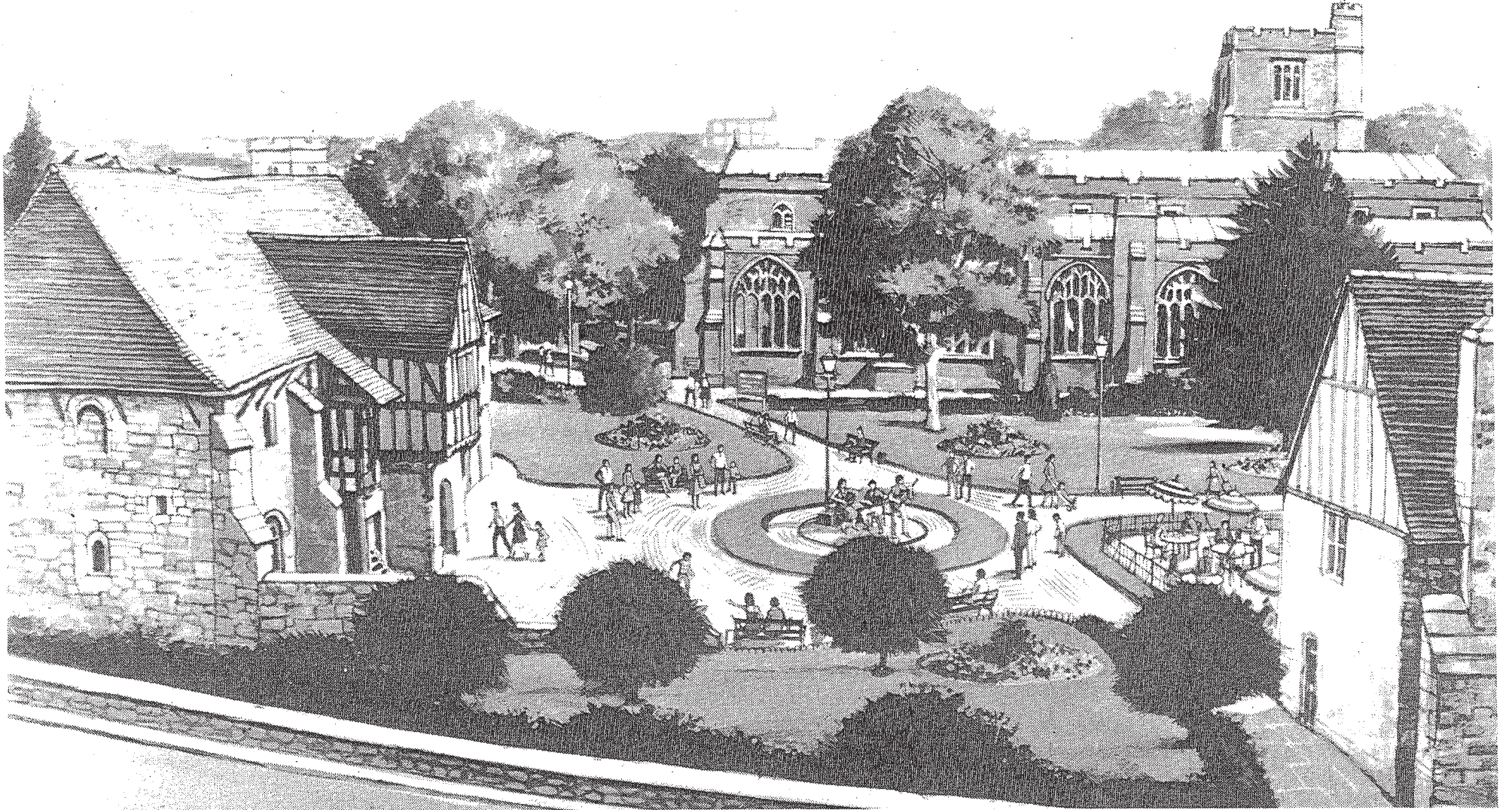
A Model of the Southern Approach Road

This road runs from Sheals Crescent, eventually linking with Bishops Way. Note the underpass which is designed for light traffic to and from the town centre, while the upper level will carry the heavy through traffic.

Approach Road illustrates how the new system will link up with East and College Road to the West. It will be there from Saturday



A TRANQUIL SETTING



The construction of the Southern Approach Road paves the way for many environmental improvements. Here, the Borough Council is the decision maker, but an artist has given his own idea as to how the All Saints' Conservation Area could become once the road is built.

'Market value' will be paid for blighted homes

THERE will be plenty of help and advice available to those whose homes or businesses are affected.

Of course many freehold property owners will be seeking the advice of their own solicitors or chartered surveyors, but the County Council will also help to guide people through the jungle of the Compulsory Purchase Order procedures, or CPO as it is known.

Once the route of a road has been formally approved, properties physically affected by the line of the road automatically become "blighted", and owner occupiers can serve notice on the County Council to buy their homes at a market value that ignores the existence of the road proposals.

But in the case of the Southern Approach Road the County Council has agreed to treat the affected properties as 'blighted' from now.

If there is a difference of opinion as to what is "market value", then the Lands Tribunal adjudicates.

Owners must first of all show to the County Council that they have found it difficult to sell their homes. So efforts must be made to find an alternative private sector

buyer by the usual means of advertising the property or putting the house with an estate agent.

If the County Council does buy the property the vendor's survey fees, solicitors fees, and removal and disturbance expenses are also paid.

It is not the County Councils wish to make anyone homeless as a result of the road scheme and the County Council will take all possible steps to ensure alternative accommodation is available.

Ownership

Of course, if the road scheme is not scheduled for some years, it could be worth first-time buyers purchasing the freehold of a home which is blighted, accepting that they will only be residents for a few years, and safe in the knowledge that at the end of the day, they can call upon the County Council to buy the property.

Once the road scheme is accepted, a CPO is initiated and it is prior to this that affected owners are contacted by the Property Services Department.

Information will be sought about the ownership of the house and eventually a CPO Schedule is completed and published.

The County Council would want to do this two to three years before the construction date.

First there would be an offer of voluntary negotiation on the part of the County Council, and only if this fails would a CPO be

issued.

A public inquiry may be held, but before that the County Council would seek to remove any objections. But if the inquiry went ahead, evidence would be heard from both sides and

the Secretary of State's decision awaited.

If the Secretary of State gives the go-ahead the County Council issues a Notice to Treat, which means that it instructs the freeholder to sell the land to

the Council at a "fair market price".

There might also be a public inquiry at the time of the planning application and it is not unusual for this inquiry and the CPO inquiry to be combined.

Those affected by the scheme will be kept informed by the County Council of all the relevant procedures and Council officers will be on hand to answer any questions and allay unnecessary fears.

A GRAVE PROBLEM

ONE problem encountered in the planning of the Southern Approach Road, which has yet to be overcome, is the consecrated ground which forms the small garden area behind the Carriage Museum.

This attractive garden displays the gravestones of those buried there, neatly positioned around the walls. Part of this garden is required for the roadworks where it connects with Bishops Way.



The gravestones, lining the walls of the garden behind the Carriage Museum.

The consecrated ground is under lease from the Church Commissioners to the Borough Council. The 99-year lease still has 43 years to run.

The Kent County Council will have to compulsorily purchase the land and

application will have to be made to the Chancellor of the Canterbury Diocese for a faculty to be granted.

This procedure will take time, but at the end of the day, the land which is developed would no longer be consecrated.

There would be need for Home Office approval for the disinterment of the remains of those buried there under the Burial Act of 1857.

These remains would then be re-buried on another piece of consecrated ground, and the County Council is aware of the sensitive nature of the problem.

MAIDSTONE is a town with tremendous potential, not least in the field of environmental improvements.

The Borough Council has been quick to seize these opportunities in the past as is evident from the transformation of the Riverside in the town centre.

The proposed new roads network will offer fresh opportunities to the Borough. The All Saints' Conservation Area is a classic example.

Here we have some of the finest buildings in the County - All Saints' Church, The Tithe Barn, used as the Carriage Museum, and the Old Palace itself, a popular venue for meetings of all kinds.

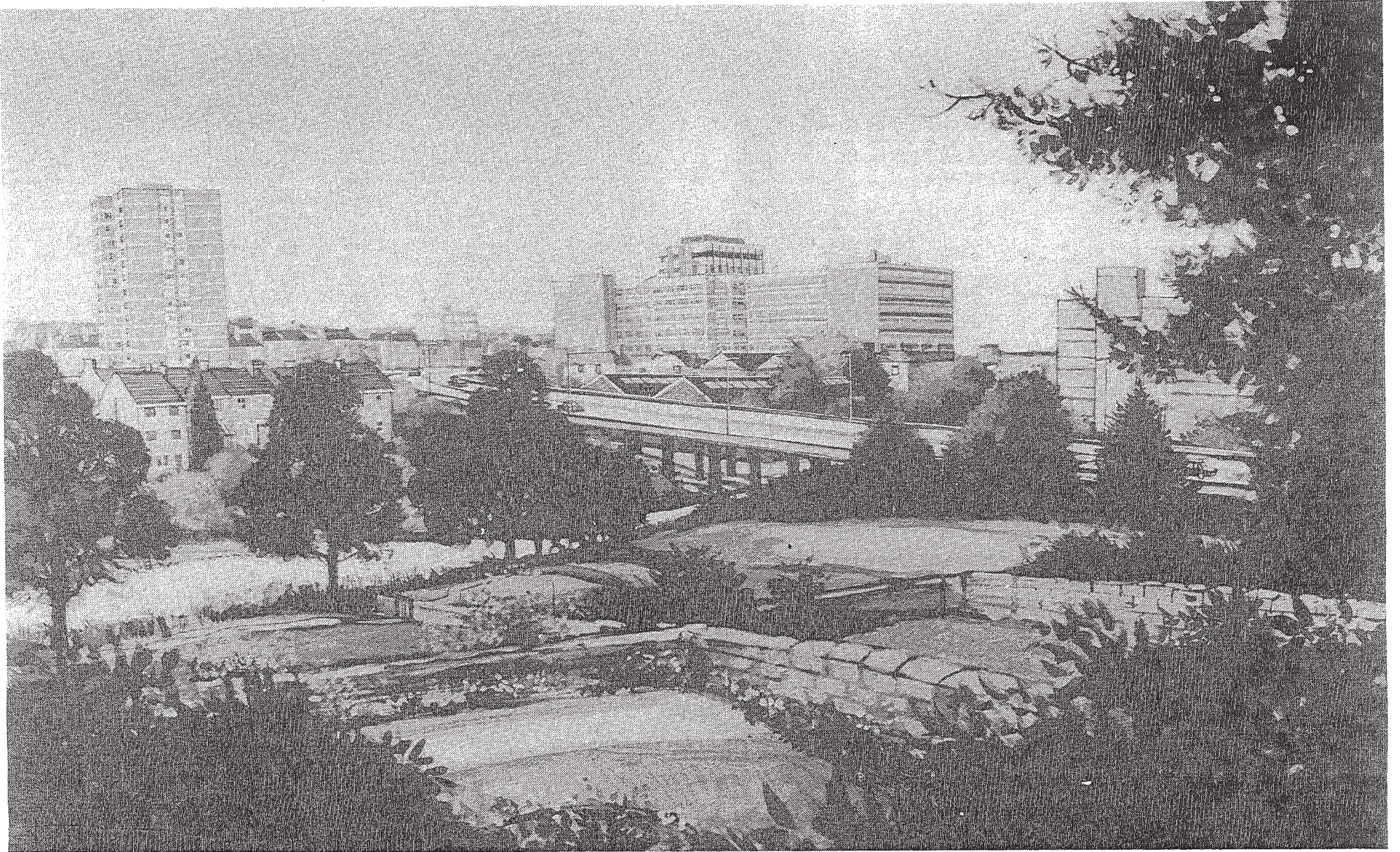
There is already an attractive garden area around the Old Palace, but should the Borough Council wish to make the whole area open to pedestrians only, this will be possible, once the Southern Approach Road is complete.

The busy Mill Street, carrying a huge volume of traffic from the south of Maidstone, at the moment bisects this most attractive area of the County Town.

But once traffic is removed, the Borough Council might decide to transform the area into an attractive piazza with brick-block paving, seating, a small bandstand and perhaps even some kind of refreshment facility.

The new pedestrianised area would more than complement the existing Riverside Walk facilities already provided by the Borough Council and which have received so much public praise.

ALBION PLACE – MOTE ROAD



An artist's impression of the viaduct that will span the Len Valley, from a point on the Ashford Road, near the Haynes showroom, to Mote Road. The access to the Stoneborough Centre will also be improved by this scheme which offers new chances to enhance the beauty of the Len Valley.

New viaduct will sweep across the Len Valley

THE main objectives of this scheme are

- To provide additional capacity for traffic movements between the north and south of the town and in doing so link Sittingbourne Road directly with Mote Road.
- To provide improved access to the Stoneborough Shopping Centre and its large car park.
- To provide an improved intersection for north-south movements with east-west traffic on Ashford Road.

Listed Buildings in the Ashford Road Conservation Area will be protected and the planners have also given much thought to minimising the loss to other commercial and residential property as well as the environmental impact on the trees and wild life of the Len Valley.

Between late 1982 and

early 1983 eight basic routes generating some 19 alternatives were considered by Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council.

The options were ultimately reduced to a shortlist of four which were reported to the County's Highways Sub-Committee in January 1983.

Of these four, members selected Option 1G/2 as the preferred line and the proposals were publicised.

Traffic is retained in Albion Place and crosses the Len Valley through an existing gap in the property fronting Ashford Road, by means of a viaduct.

A formal planning submission for the scheme is going to Maidstone Borough Council for their views before coming back to the County Council for a final planning decision.

The plan of the scheme is shown in the exhibition and any comments on it can be made to the County Planning Officer.

When the crossing over the Len Valley was being assessed by the planners, an embankment was considered along with the viaduct, which was eventually

chosen.

The viaduct turns out to be £700,000 cheaper than the embankment.

In environmental terms a viaduct will enable a more open aspect to be maintained, allowing greater opportunity for future amenity enhancement of the valley.

A minimal area of land is required for the supporting columns of a viaduct, with the remainder of the land being open to restricted use after the construction period. An embankment would have put this land permanently out of use.

The viaduct also allows existing river flood flow capability to be retained as required by the River Authority.

One big 'plus' factor was that there would be less disruption to traffic during construction, because the viaduct obviates the need for large volumes of 'fill' earth to be transported through Maidstone.

Although the slopes of an embankment would be landscaped and planted, the viaduct alternative, with emphasis on aesthetic design, enables the retention of the open aspect of the valley.

Peace for Almshouses



The Corral Almshouses at College Walk will have a much quieter existence once the Southern Approach Road is built.

IF MAIDSTONE IS TO REMAIN BUOYANT, SOMETHING MUST BE DONE NOW

by Mike Cottell, County Surveyor, Head of the Highways and Transportation Department of Kent County Council

As a newcomer to Maidstone I was able to cast a fresh eye over the town's traffic problems shortly after I took up the post of County Surveyor in May last year.

My first impressions were that Maidstone was a buoyant, popular town with a road network ill equipped to handle its heavy traffic

levels at peak periods.

The County Council had done its best to extract the last ounce of capacity from the existing network by employing high tech electronics to monitor the traffic levels and adjust the traffic lights accordingly.

Prestigious

Kent led the way in this field and many distinguished engineers still come from far and wide to see the computer nerve centre at Springfield.

But we have now reached the stage where new roads are the only answer if the peak hour traffic delays are not

going to stretch further and further into the rest of the day. Already many roads suffer severe congestion for four or more hours each weekday.

Any visitor to Maidstone quickly spots the attractive town centre sites where development is either taking place or could take place.

As two examples, the "Wig and Gown" area opposite County Hall will soon hold a prestigious new office block for an insurance company bringing many new jobs.

The shopping precinct near the Medway Bridge is also rapidly nearing completion. Not to mention the existing attractions which have always brought people to the County



Mike Cottell

Town.

All these sorts of development will bring increased traffic and hasten the need to increase road capacity if Maidstone is to maintain its buoyant, attractive outlook.

Planning the routes of new roads is never easy and in Maidstone it has been particularly difficult. The highway engineers have taken the greatest care in planning to minimise the impact of any proposed scheme.

Take, for instance, the Southern Approach Road where it threads its way carefully through an area with a number of churches and old buildings.

But careful as they have been there are still questions that only the people of Maidstone can answer.

Do we for instance preserve the boarded up but historically listed Knightrider House at the expense of a nearby office block that is

modern but provides jobs? I will be very interested to hear your views on that question when we ask for comments on the schemes later in the year.

As a highway engineer I am of course excited by many of the proposals and the opportunities they provide for attractive modern design, care for pedestrians, better road safety and the smooth flow of traffic.

Buoyant

Above all they provide an opportunity for Maidstone to remain a buoyant commercial and industrial centre of Kent. But I also realise the pro-

posals create some problems that will cast a shadow over some homes and commercial premises and I will give this assurance now to those people directly affected.

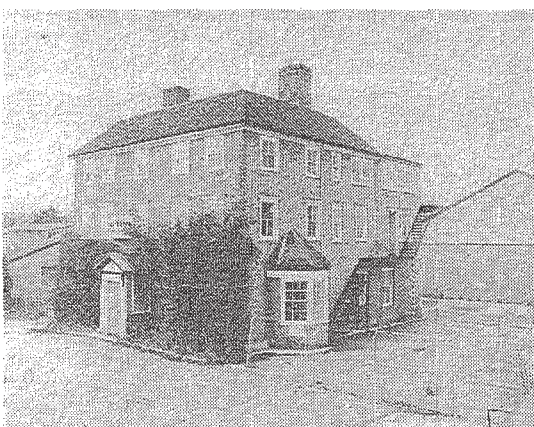
My Department will ensure that you are fully informed about your rights and the details of the proposals. Officers will also be available to answer any questions. Your views will also be especially important when the consultation period comes.

The schemes will benefit many, many people who live and work in and around Maidstone but we will do all we can to help those directly affected by the road proposals.

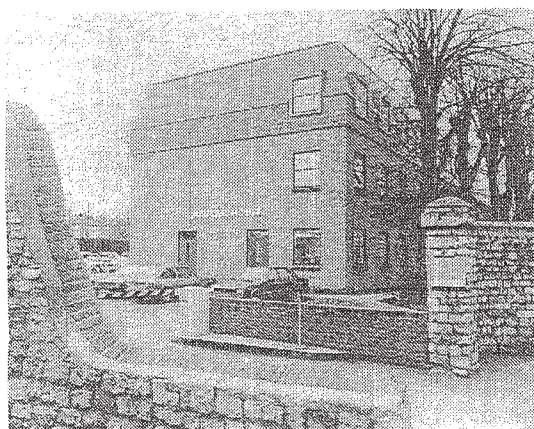
Planners weighed all the options

'We're giving the public time to digest the proposals'

WHICH WOULD YOU SAVE? KNIGHTRIDER HOUSE OR CHAUCER?



County Surveyor, Mike Cottell, poses the question: "Do we preserve the boarded up, but historically listed, Knightrider House (above), at the expense of a nearby office block, Chaucer House (below), that is modern but provides jobs." The public's views on this point will be welcomed in the autumn.



WHEN highway engineers start planning a new road they look at all the options.

A lot of time and expertise goes into the selection of the final route, and that choice is only made after the effects of the new road on people and the environment have been carefully studied.

The design of the Southern Approach Road was a typical example. The planners are now satisfied that they have considered all the options and weighed them carefully.

Unacceptable

Once it had been established that the current traffic situation was unacceptable, two main options were considered in depth.

● should the existing highway network be utilised as much as possible?
OR

● should a completely new road be constructed?

The first option would have meant that Sheals Crescent, Hayle Road and Upper Stone Street would remain as main traffic thoroughfares to the detriment of the quality of life of those living along the route.

'Trapped'

After considerable research, the second option was decided upon.

There was one basic problem, which the highway engineers had to overcome,

and that was how to handle traffic flows from north to south and from east to west at one big junction.

Would the answer be many sets of traffic lights, or a roundabout?

Interlinked with this decision was the need to preserve ancient buildings.

The traffic light system would be able to handle the expected traffic but the planners felt it would be relatively confusing to motorists and would inevitably cause problems for pedestrians.

There would also be individual pockets of land which would be "trapped" in the middle and therefore sterile in terms of future development or use.

With a roundabout, all movements are catered for, but with traffic signals some traffic movements would be difficult or impossible.

One scheme looked at meant that fewer homes had to be demolished, but Hayle

Road, Sheals Crescent and Upper Stone Street remained major traffic routes.

The planners felt that the original line of the Southern Approach Road on the Town Map, did little to give easy access to the Tovil side of the town.

Dangerous

Again there was a need to strike a balance - the extremely delicate balance of making the new road effective, possibly at the expense of homes which would have to be demolished.

Originally, the blueprints of the current scheme had a much larger roundabout, but it was felt that this would enable the traffic to travel round it at high speeds, possibly making it dangerous to use especially for two wheelers.

By providing an underpass, the size of the roundabout can be reduced. This easy access to the town centre from the south without using the roundabout, had to be restricted to cars and smaller vehicles because of the need to have a relatively steep gradient.

Settled

It would have been impossible to construct the underpass with sufficient headroom for larger vehicles without making the gradient too steep. So the end result is that lorries will have to use the upper level of the road.

The route settled upon has the advantage of allowing reasonable access to all parcels of land nearby. There will be no sterile plots as a result of the construction of the Southern Approach Road.



All the proposals will be on show at the Stoneborough, Level 3, from Feb 23 to March 2

by Major Terence Holden, Chairman of Kent County Council's Highways and Public Transport Sub-Committee



Maj. Terence Holden

MAJOR roads are the main arteries in the body of a town. They are tremendously important for many reasons.

It therefore follows that any proposals for major new roads are equally important and have to be carefully examined and tested before the construction workers move in.

The new road proposals outlined in this supplement could form the major new arteries for the Maidstone of tomorrow and will have an effect on everyone who either lives in Maidstone or journeys into the town.

That is why the County Council is going to so much trouble to explain the

proposals and give as much background information as possible.

We are in some respects taking the wraps off some of the plans a little early. We could have chosen to have released a lot of information when the Maidstone Local Plan is ready for public scrutiny.

But we felt road proposals will be a vital part of that Draft Plan and people needed time to fully digest the road implications before moving on to consider other important questions posed by the overall plans for the future of Maidstone.

As Chairman of the County Council's Highways Sub-Committee I shall be watching progress very carefully through the various checks and balances of public opinion.

All the proposals are likely to be tested by Public Inquiries of some form or another, and it is of paramount importance that people whose homes or businesses are directly affected both know and have ample opportunity to make their views known.

Important

I will, however, just say this. Maidstone's traffic congestion problems will not go away and will in fact get worse if nothing is done.

By bringing our proposals forward at this stage we hope to give the residents of Maidstone as much time as possible to think about these most important issues.