

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

10th MARCH 2010

**REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AND
COMMUNITY STRATEGY**

Report prepared by John Foster

1. All Saints Link Road

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider whether to continue to promote and implement the All Saints Link Road.

1.2 Recommendation of Assistant Director of Development and Community Strategy

1.2.1 That the implementation of the All Saints Link Road is not pursued as there is not a clearly identified mechanism to deliver it.

1.2.2 That the saved Maidstone Borough Wide Local Plan Policy T18 (iv) is reviewed through the LDF process.

1.2.3 That a recommendation is made to Kent County Council's Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste, either directly or through the Joint Transportation Board to consider deleting the ASLR as an adopted road scheme.

1.2.4 That officers are instructed to examine the feasibility of creating an environment which is less dominated by motor vehicles and more sympathetic to pedestrians in this area.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 The All Saints Link Road is a proposed new road linking Bishops Way, Mill Street and Knightrider Street. See Appendix 1. Its purpose is to take traffic out from the Archbishop's Palace, Gatehouse and Carriage Museum complex and reduce the traffic in Palace Avenue and Lower Stone Street. Its construction would bring significant environmental benefits to Palace Avenue and Lower Stone Street, on which there are many Listed Buildings, and significantly join together some of Maidstone's most valued historical assets of the Palace and the Barn again bringing about considerable environmental improvements.

- 1.3.2 The purpose for the new road was explained in the adopted Borough Wide Local Plan in 2000. It considered that the road could have wider benefits stating, "This connection will complete a good quality highway route around the south of the town centre thereby providing the opportunity to relieve High Street and King Street of through traffic. The removal of traffic from the precincts of the Archbishops' Palace/All Saints Church area, and from the historic listed buildings in Lower Stone Street, would considerably improve their setting and would generally improve access from the south of the town to the benefit of the commercial viability of Maidstone town centre. The achievement of this scheme is a high priority and the Borough Council will pursue all possible avenues to obtain funding, having regard to the considerable economic and environmental benefits of the scheme."
- 1.3.3 The route of the link is safeguarded under policy T18 (iv) in the Local Plan and is an adopted road scheme by KCC. The plan goes on to say that the Council would seek to exploit external funding sources in order to implement its construction.
- 1.3.4 A joint working group between Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council and Town Centre Management was established post 2000, to consider environmental improvements to Lower and Upper Stone Street, Wrens Cross and the All Saints area.
- 1.3.5 In 2006 Maidstone Borough Council secured Channel Corridor Partnership funding to produce a Regeneration Strategy for the High Street Ward. Urban Initiatives were commissioned to undertake the work. The consultants recognised the environmental, heritage and regeneration benefits of the ASLR but considered that the proposed alignment did not address townscape and accessibility issues successfully. It described the proposed ASLR as "...a sweeping road alignment that ignores the traditional street, block and plot layout found in historic urban area and creates problems with fronts and backs of properties as well as creating an awkward island site. Land is used inefficiently... the highway is effectively dominating this area of town". Urban Initiatives proposed a new alignment (ASLR Option 2 or ASLRO2), which is shown in Appendix 2. The new alignment was considered to offer a better balance between traffic movement and pedestrian accessibility. It created street frontages and offered the possibility of opening up new development sites.
- 1.3.6 Both alignments of the ASLR result in the need to redesign the junction at Wrens Cross, where Knight rider Street, Lower Stone Street, Mote Road and Upper Stone Street meet. The scale of this junction would affect the listed building at Wrens Cross. Wrens Cross and land extending from this corner of the junction (about 1 acre) is derelict and in need of renewal. KCC own the site and have been working with MBC on plans for its redevelopment.

- 1.3.7 In September 2008 the Regeneration and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested the Cabinet not to allocate further funds on commissioning the detail designs of the ASLRO2 until the costs of constructing the road were known and the resources to pay for it were clearly identified.
- 1.3.8 In December 2008 Cabinet agreed to progress the concept designs produced by Urban Initiatives which would enable cost estimates to be produced. MBC and KCC jointly commissioned Jacobs to produce an outline design of the whole of the ASLRO2, which would enable an initial signal design at each of the junctions to be carried out and the data from this and the proposed new junction at Wrens Cross tested using the Maidstone Town Centre Traffic Model. This work was expected to confirm that the ASLRO2 route was suitable to be included in the Core Strategy.
- 1.3.9 Jacobs reported in March 2009. A number of concerns were raised by the work. The land necessary to construct the ASLRO2 impinged upon a greater number of properties than previously indicated in the concept designs. A significant part of the Mill Pond required a bridging structure to be built. The report concluded the road, if constructed, would have a negative impact on traffic movements throughout the town centre.
- 1.3.10 Jacobs were subsequently asked to look at 2 further variants of the ASLRO2 scheme.
1. An adjustment at the northern end to bring the alignment closer to the east side of the Carriage Museum, in order to reduce the impact of the scheme on the River Len Mill Pond.
 2. A reduced scheme which consists of a route for northbound traffic only to the east of the Carriage Museum. South bound traffic would continue to use Palace Avenue and Lower Stone Street and Knightrider Street would remain unchanged.
- 1.3.11 In addition to providing plans of these two variants of Option 2, Jacobs were asked to provide cost estimates.
- 1.3.12 Variant 1 resulted in only a slightly reduced impact on the Mill Pond, but with the negative consequence of the road sweeping closer to the Carriage Museum. Variant 2, a reduced scheme, resulted in a greater impact on both the Mill Pond and the Carriage Museum.
- 1.3.13 Jacobs produced Early Cost Estimates to implement the whole ASLRO2 and the Variant 2 reduced scheme. Costs were presented as a range due to the uncertainty regarding aspects of the valuations, particularly statutory undertakers' ducts and plants.

1.3.14 The costs of construction and purchase of the necessary land and property to build the whole of ASLRO2 was estimated to range between £17,364,000 and £21,939,000. Costs for implementing Variant 2 ranged from £8,942,500 and £10,759,375.

1.3.15 ASLRO2 is a highly desirable regeneration project. However recent reports from Jacobs lead to the conclusion that the road is not deliverable and its continued promotion should not be supported for the following reasons:

1. The land necessary to deliver the road is considerably greater than previously indicated and would impact unacceptably upon many properties along its route e.g. bridging structure over the Mill Pond.
2. There is no identifiable means of funding the scheme. The ASLRO2 main purpose is an environmental improvement and regeneration scheme. KCC has made it clear that it is not suitable for transport funding. The availability of Government grants and external funding is in the future, likely to be restrained due to the current difficult economic conditions and resulting pressures on public finances. In line with the Council's Regeneration Statement 2009, using its land as a catalyst for regeneration has been considered. Whilst the ASLRO2 opens up the potential for some development land to be created it would not release enough value to cover the cost of the scheme. Opportunities for other developments that may benefit from the construction of the ASLR to contribute appear limited.
3. Traffic Modeling work demonstrates that, as currently proposed, the ASLRO2 would have a negative impact on traffic movements throughout the town centre.
4. Without a clearly identified mechanism for delivering the ASLRO2 it could not be carried forward through the LDF process.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 An alternative approach would be to continue to pursue the ASLRO2 in the hope of identifying a funding mechanism sometime in the future. This option has been rejected as it is a requirement of the Local Development Framework process that infrastructure identified in the Core Strategy is demonstrated to be deliverable and that a way of funding the infrastructure is made clear. If this is not produced then there is a danger that the Core Strategy will fail the tests of "soundness".

1.4.2 To delay a decision would result in uncertainty regarding the future of the Wrens Cross site.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 The ASLRO2 would have contributed to the Council's objectives regarding the economy and prosperity, in particular the regeneration and renewal of Lower and Upper Stone Street and the All Saints area.

It would have supported the Council’s aspirations around the Live and Enjoy objective, creating a new Heritage Quarter around the Archbishop’s Palace. It is therefore important that an alternative future and vision for this area is developed.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
The future vision for this area fails to result in substantial opportunities for environmental improvements.	C	2	A group incorporating MBC, KCC and the Homes and Communities Agency should be established to explore opportunities - potentially through the Single Conversation. When The Area Action Plan for the Town Centre is produced it should consider opportunities to improve the environment of the All Saints area.

(Likelihood: A = very high; B = high; C = significant; D = low; E = very low; F = almost impossible)

(Seriousness or Impact: 1= catastrophic; 2 = critical; 3 = marginal; 4 = negligible)

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

1.	Financial	
2.	Staffing	
3.	Legal	
4.	Equality Impact Needs Assessment	
5.	Environmental/Sustainable Development	X

6. Community Safety
7. Human Rights Act
8. Procurement
9. Asset Management

1.7.2 Environmental/Sustainable Development: The ASLRO2 would have removed traffic from the Archbishop's Palace complex and reduced traffic in Palace Avenue and Lower Stone Street bringing about considerable environmental improvement. It is not for financial reasons possible to remove the traffic but it is possible to explore whether an environment which is less dominated by vehicles and more sympathetic to pedestrians can be created at a lower cost.

1.8 Relevant Documents

1.8.1 Appendices

- Appendix 1 Alignment of the All Saints Link Road in the Local Plan 2000
- Appendix 2 Alignment of the All Saints Link Road Option 2 (ASLRO2) as proposed by Urban Initiatives.

1.8.2 Background Documents

Jacobs Report Number B1065600 Wrens Cross Junction All Saints Link Road – Option Variants - Early Scheme Estimates June 2009.

IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

Yes

No

If yes, when did it first appear in the Forward Plan?

April 2010..

This is a Key Decision because:

...It is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising one or more wards in the area of the local authority – the significance in this case is that the decision will change an established policy, plan or strategy.

Wards/Parishes affected: ...High Street Ward.....

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