

Bus Station Improvement Project

Final Decision-Maker	ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall
Lead Officer and Report Author	John Foster and Chris Inwood
Classification	Public
Wards affected	High Street

Executive Summary

To consider the proposals to improve the appearance of the bus station in Maidstone and to approve the draft designs for public consultation.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. To approve the draft designs for public consultation

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Committee	14 July 2020

Bus Station Improvement Project

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p><i>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure</i> • <i>Safe, Clean and Green</i> • <i>Homes and Communities</i> • <i>A Thriving Place</i> <p>• <i>Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve A Thriving Place and the identified action to be delivered between 2019 and 2024 to modernise the bus station in the County Town .</i></p>	John Foster Head of Service for Regeneration and Economic Development
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p><i>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Heritage is Respected</i> • <i>Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced</i> • <i>Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved</i> • <i>Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected</i> <p>• <i>The report recommendation supports the achievement of the Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability cross cutting objective by reducing the energy used by the bus station.</i></p>	John Foster Head of Service for Regeneration and Economic Development
Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Risks are set out in section 5 of this report</i> 	John Foster Head of Service for Regeneration and Economic Development

Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The project is funded in the current approved capital programme, with a budget of £1m, along with a further £90,000 in agreed external contributions from partners.</i> 	Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.</i> 	John Foster Head of Service for Regeneration and Economic Development
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Strategic Local Plan Policy (SP23) and the <u>Integrated Transport Strategy 2011-2031 (ITS)</u> provides a framework for making decisions on transport issues around the borough, specifically addressing problems with the Council's existing transport network and it's long term development. This includes improvements to the bus station. Accepting the recommendation will assist in the delivery of the improvements anticipated by the Local Plan and the ITS. If not already done so, any necessary agreements or contracts entered into must be in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and should be in a form approved by the Legal Services Manager. This is permitted pursuant to the Council's general powers under s.1 of the Localism Act 2011 and s. 111 of the Local Government Act 1972.</i> 	Russell Fitzpatrick MKLS (Planning) Team Leader
Privacy and Data Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Accepting the recommendations will increase the volume of data held by the Council. We will hold that data in line with our retention schedules.</i> 	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment</i> 	Policy & Information Manager
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>We recognise that the recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals.</i> 	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The recommendation will not have a negative impact on Crime and Disorder.</i> 	Head of Service or Manager

Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>On accepting the recommendations, the Council will then commence procurement of a contractor in line with financial procedure rules.</i> 	Head of Service & Section 151 Officer
--------------------	---	---------------------------------------

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Maidstone's main bus interchange located at The Mall Chequers Shopping Centre is neither fit-for-purpose nor user-friendly. It is not well lit and is threatening in character being essentially a tunnel under the Centre linking King Street and Romney Place. The draft Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) identifies the need for an improved bus station in Maidstone town centre. It is an unattractive gateway to the town centre and constrains efforts to encourage public transport uptake in Maidstone and increased bus use. A modernised and fit for purpose bus station is required if the ITS objectives are to be achieved, and will also contribute to increasing the vitality and viability of the Town Centre by improving its overall image as a modern and well cared for place with excellent public transport facilities.
- 2.2 The project has confirmed funding of £1,000,000 from Maidstone Borough Council, plus £30,000 each from KCC, Arriva and Capital and Regional (owners of The Mall). The total budget is therefore £1,090,000.
- 2.3 In early 2019 an architect and an Employers' Agent (EA) were appointed to work on proposals to refurbish the bus station. This work has included reviewing the current design and issues experienced by users, both members of the public and bus drivers. The architect has produced some initial design ideas which were costed by the EA. There has been a process of refining the designs to ensure it falls within budget.
- 2.4 Survey works have been scheduled to allow asbestos specialists and engineers to check the structure of the bus station which will dictate the final designs. A specialist lighting designer has also been appointed to review the current lux levels, and provide a design which will improve the lighting for both members of the public and bus drivers. A Road Safety Audit has been commissioned to ensure the designs are safe for users of the bus station.
- 2.5 Due to the nature of the works, the designers are able to produce a 'shopping list' of items within the project, which assists in monitoring the costs, but also allows stakeholders and the public to place items in order of preference. This will ensure that the final project produces the biggest impact whilst staying within the available budget. This list of proposals include cleaning the canopy on the Sainsbury's side, replacing street furniture, replacing soffits and floor tiling, new signage and real time passenger information, architectural and functional lighting scheme and public art. Appendix 1 sets out the architects response to the brief, the

challenges created by the fabric of the existing bus station and imagery of how it could look.

- 2.6 The surveys commissioned together with the detailed lighting scheme have enabled the cost consultant to price the works which are currently in budget. The results of the asbestos survey have yet to be received. Buildability advice has been received from local contractors to inform the designs. The shopping list approach set out above will enable the works to be prioritised in order of importance should tender prices come in over budget. The public consultation process will help identify which elements of the design are most important to users.
- 2.7 It should be noted that the implementation of these improvement works will inevitably disrupt the operation of the bus station. The tender documentation will require the contractors to explain how they propose to minimise this disruption.
- 2.8 Key stakeholders including Kent Highways, Arriva and the owners of the bus station (Capital and Regional) have approved the designs for public consultation purposes. An 8 week public consultation process is now proposed starting on 22 July 2020. This will include the following:
- Display boards and a comment box will be made available in the Mall Shopping Centre from 22 July 2020 for one week. This will not be staffed due to social distancing requirements.
 - Other poster sites will be considered to raise awareness of the consultation.
 - An online survey will be created and made available on the Council's website. This will be accessible on mobile formats and compatible with screen assisted reading technology.
 - The Data Intelligence Officer's contact details will be made available should a member of public need support filling in the survey.
 - Questions about the consultation can be sent to consultation@maidstone.gov.uk
 - Vulnerable groups will be specifically targeted for comment including Over 50s Forum and Disability Groups such as the Kent Association for the Blind.

The Communication team will promote the consultation widely on the Council's website, using social media and press releases.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 Do nothing

Without this investment the Bus Station will continue to deteriorate. Capital and Regional, the owners of the Mall Shopping Centre including the Bus

Station, have no incentive to invest in the Bus Station as it fails to produce a return on investment. The condition of the Bus Station will reflect badly on Maidstone Town Centre and the Council and customer use of bus services may even decline, leading to greater car use, increased congestion and poorer air quality.

3.2 Do minimum

Replacing the sodium lighting with LEDs lights to improve the dull and intimidating environment has been investigated as a do minimum option. This was rejected as not making a sufficient impact in terms of ambience, passenger facilities or passenger information required to trigger the desired modal shift and encourage bus patronage.

3.3 Do something

Relocating the bus station to an alternative site in the Town Centre has been explored in the Tri Study in 2018 (see paragraph 6.2). The lack of available land or property in appropriate locations, together with the restrictions on access due to Maidstone's one-way system has resulted in this option being rejected.

3.4 Do optimum

The complete redevelopment of the Mall incorporating a new bus station has been explored with the owners Capital and Regional. There is a significant viability gap for this option which is no longer being considered.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The preferred option is the one set out in Appendix 1. All main stakeholders are in support of this approach. It offers a relatively straight forward solution to radically enhance the Bus Station environment focused on the user experience which will make it more attractive, and potentially increase bus patronage in support of the strategic priorities in the Integrated Transport Strategy.

5. RISK

5.1 A complete risk assessment has been produced for the project right through to completion in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. However, this report is limited to the public consultation phase. The main risks include:

1. The public are not aware of the consultation and do not respond or miss the opportunity to respond

The consultation is planned to be open of 8 weeks and will be widely promoted by the communication team. A physical display of the designs will be set up in the Mall.

2. Vulnerable group find it difficult to engage

Involve Kent will be asked to promote the consultation opportunity to their network and the Council will actively seek the view of the Over 50s Forum, Kent Guide Dogs for the Blind and the Kent Association for the Blind. The online survey will be accessible by screen assisted technology. The Data Intelligence Officer will be available to support people to fill in the questionnaire.

3. The Council is unable to deliver changes requested by the public due to budgetary constraints or limitations of the building.

The questionnaire will be designed so that the users of the bus station can prioritise what improvements are most important. Due to the limitations of the building (effectively a concrete tunnel) it will not be possible to increase the number of buses it can accommodate.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 As per paragraph 1.1 above, Action PT12 in the 13th January 2016 version of the Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) identifies the need for an improved bus station in Maidstone town centre.

6.2 On 22nd January 2018 the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation committee resolved that improvements and potential investment into Maidstone bus station be investigated. This decision was informed by tri-study prepared by consultants WSP entitled "Maidstone Tri-Study – Bus Interchange Study, Town Centre Parking Strategy, and Park & Ride Study" (November 2017) which considered a bus interchange study, parking strategy and a study into the current Park and Ride arrangements. The bus interchange study concluded that the bus station is in the optimum location to serve the town centre and therefore recommended improvements to the existing station.

6.3 Furthermore on 28th March 2018 Policy and Resources Planning committee resolved that the project be funded in part from proceeds of the Business Rates Retention Pilot.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 The results of the public consultation process will be used to produce final designs which will be reported to ERL Committee in September 2020 for approval.

7.2 Preparation of Tender documentation will commence so that the Tender Period for a contractor can commence directly after ERL Committee's approval in September.

7.3 ERL Committee will be asked to approve the final designs in September and to seek delegated authority for the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services to enter into works contracts and any other necessary agreements for the project to proceed to completion.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

- *Appendix 1: Maidstone Bus Station Stage 3 Report*
-

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None