

## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT**

#### **REPORT OF THE HEAD OF SPATIAL PLANNING**

**Report prepared by Clive Cheeseman**

**Date Issued: 27 August 2010**

#### **1. MAIDSTONE QUALITY BUS PARTNERSHIP**

##### 1.1 Key Issue for Decision

- 1.1.1 To consider the re-launch of the Maidstone Quality Bus Partnership by Kent County Council.

##### 1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Spatial Planning

- 1.2.1 That Maidstone Borough Council confirms commitment to the Maidstone Quality Bus Partnership and to the inclusion of Park and Ride within it.
- 1.2.2 That the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport agree in principle to sign the Partnership document once suitable aims and targets have been agreed.

##### 1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

###### 1.3.1 BACKGROUND

- 1.3.2 A Quality Bus Partnership is a voluntary agreement between the Highway (and Transport) Authority, the local District Council and local bus operator or operators. It forms an integral part of the Local Transport Plan of the Highway (and Transport Authority) through which it helps to access central capital funding and grants. It also assists the bus operator/s to access similar investment
- 1.3.3 Its aim is to support the delivery of integrated transport policies that will deliver modal shift from use of the car to public transport. This is achieved by agreed targeting of the investment of the partners in areas where it will deliver improved transport infrastructure and services that will deliver growth in passenger numbers.

The existence of a Quality Bus Partnership does not transfer control of the bus services in that area to the local authority/ies. They continue to be provided by the operators on a commercial basis unless

specifically operated under contract. It does however encourage ongoing discussion and engagement between the parties about service provision and reliability, promotion and publicity, fare initiatives and other matters of mutual concern or interest.

#### 1.3.4 INITIAL PARTNERSHIP

1.3.5 An initial Maidstone Quality Bus Partnership was signed between Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council and Arriva Southern Counties in 2000. It included an indicative five year plan for investment and improvements which was then extended for the period up until 2011.

1.3.6 The plan for improvements was primarily intended to target the following key corridors;-

- Shepway Estate (service 85)
- Parkwood (service 82)
- London Road (services 70 – 72)
- Chatham Road (service 101)
- Tonbridge Road (services 6,7,85)

This involved Kent County Council providing new bus lanes, bus priorities and raised kerbing at bus stops. Maidstone Borough Council upgraded and improved the bus shelters and Arriva invested in new buses for these services. As a result of the investment in bus priorities on Sutton Road Arriva were able to operate more reliably and increase the frequency of daytime operation from every 15 to every 12 minutes. This resulted in a growth in patronage such that they then increased the frequency of service to operate every 10 minutes.

Between 2006 and 2009 patronage on services 82 and 85 grew by 14.4%. In 2009 Arriva were then able to introduce a further batch of new buses onto the town services in response to ongoing levels of passenger growth now being achieved. There have been similar improvements on the other corridors following the introduction of the partnership investments on them.

1.3.7 Whilst Park and Ride is not specifically mentioned in the original agreement it has benefitted from a number of the measures that have been introduced (bus lanes, real time information).

1.3.8 In addition the following other benefits and initiatives have been discussed or delivered through or in conjunction with the partnership;-

- Introduction of real time information to many town centre bus stops (and allied equipment on Arriva buses)

- Early introduction of automatic vehicle location system to improve bus priority at traffic lights
- Control of bus stop real time information transferred to new UTMC centre who are able to monitor service operation and check and override display if required
- Early removal of old style minibuses from other town services and replacement by "easy access" buses
- On basis of Quality Bus Partnership Arriva arranged early transfer and investment in low floor double deck buses for use on London Road and Chatham Road services
- Arriva upgraded and refurbished 25 single deck buses on use on local services including provision of improved internal visual displays
- Frequencies improved on service 7 (Tonbridge/Tunbridge Wells), 155 (Chatham via Aylesford) and 333/4 (Sittingbourne/Sheerness/Faversham) and low floor buses introduced
- Withdrawal of proposals to stop serving Detling village with northbound Sittingbourne buses, and to reduce frequency to Grove Green
- Trial re-routing of bus services to serve Fremlin Walk (Pudding Lane). Unfortunately this was not successful.
- Provision of additional school journeys on London Road to meet additional demand
- Review of bus stop provision in town centre and on key corridors by Kent Highways and implementation of raised kerbs where possible at bus stops on "low floor" bus routes to assist with access.
- Review of traffic calming measures in Shepway estate.
- Support for improvements to Maidstone East Station and provision of a transport interchange
- Targeted local marketing in Maidstone by Arriva, including fares initiatives
- Improved dialogue between the parties on operational issues and problems, particularly responses to road works and local events

1.3.9 The actions and aims of the initial agreement have also been used in the formulation of the Maidstone Air Quality Action Plan.

#### 1.3.10 PROPOSED UPDATED AGREEMENT

1.3.11 In recent years Kent County Council has introduced standard Quality Bus Partnerships in a number of districts across the county. They now wish to put in place a similar updated agreement for Maidstone to start later this year covering a period of up to ten years. They anticipate reporting progress on this to the Joint Transport Board at the end of July, requesting the nomination of a County and Borough member on the partnership.

1.3.12A copy of the initial draft of the proposed agreement is attached at appendix A. This will be subject to further discussion and agreement between the parties before it is finalised. Some actions and investment may be affected by the availability of future Government funding. It is however intended to be a working document and as such will be reviewed by the parties at least once a year to ensure that it remains effective).

1.3.13The key responsibilities and actions of each party are as follows;-

- Kent County Council –
  1. Plan and introduce where possible bus priority measures and improvements to bus stop infrastructure (e.g. raised kerbing).
  2. Improve the availability of customer information at bus stops.
  3. To monitor service reliability and customer satisfaction and take action where required to improve (in conjunction with Arriva).
  4. Marketing campaigns to encourage use and awareness (in conjunction with Arriva).
  5. To consider inclusion of Maidstone area services in plans for the extension of real time information in the county.
  
- Maidstone Borough Council –
  1. Provision of bus shelters at the busier key bus stops (as resources become available).
  2. To encourage s106 developer contributions for related public transport infrastructure, information and services.
  3. In conjunction with Kent County Council to ensure that facilities for Arriva buses to serve, and terminate in Maidstone Town Centre are maintained at all times, and that in the event of proposals for redevelopment of the High Street, which is an integral part of the public transport infrastructure of the Borough, Maidstone Borough Council will consult with Arriva and Kent County Council at all stages of the redevelopment process.
  4. Ensure that the requirements of public transport are considered in any proposals arising from the development of the Council's spatial planning documents including the Local Development Framework Core Strategy.
  5. Ensure that parking policy reflects the aim of the Council's transport policy to increase modal shift from car to bus by imposing appropriate parking charges in town centres.

- Arriva Southern Counties –
  1. To work with Kent and County Council and Maidstone Borough council over the design and implementation of a viable and sustainable network of local bus services.
  2. Introduce where commercially feasible improved bus services in response to the introduction of bus priority measures.
  3. Investment in provision of low floor buses.
  4. Improved driver training to NVQ level 2.
  5. Monitoring service reliability and customer satisfaction and take action where required to improve (in conjunction with Kent County Council).
  6. Marketing campaigns to encourage use and awareness (in conjunction with Kent County Council).

#### 1.3.14 AIMS AND TARGETS

1.3.15 The proposed agreement has headline aims of:-

- (A1) increasing the number of passenger journeys since 2008 by 2% p.a.
- (A2) increase in passengers expressing overall satisfaction with service provided since 2008 by 2% p.a.

The headline aims will be reached by working to more detailed targets as follows:-

- (T1) Percentage of services operating on time – 1% increase relative to changes in the level of congestion
- (T2) Number of stops with raised borders and bus stop clearways – to complete infrastructure improvements on routes 6 and 7 (Maidstone to Tunbridge Wells), 71 (Maidstone to West Malling), 82 (Maidstone to Parkwood), 85 Maidstone Hospital to Shepway), 101 (Maidstone to Chatham) and 176 (Walderslade to Chatham)
- (T3) Number of bus stops with timetable information – a 5% annual increase until 90% achieved
- (T4) Bus stops with new or replacement shelters – Maidstone Borough Council will, as resources become available, especially through developer funding from new housing growth areas, increase the provision of bus shelters at the busiest pick-up stops in the Borough
- (T5) Conversion of local town routes to low floor easy access vehicles – target is for 98% of Arriva bus services (excluding school day only services) in Maidstone to be operated by low floor buses by the end of the five year partnership

- (T6) Percentage of drivers with NVQ level 2 in Road Passenger Transport – target is 40% in year 1, 50% in year 2, and 60% in year 3.
- (T7) Annual percentage increase in number of passenger journeys on the Maidstone Park and Ride services – an annual increase of 2% over the five years of the partnership
- (T8) Annual percentage increase in number of passenger journeys on individual routes targeted for investment – a 5% increase in passenger journeys over the first two years following a route improvement
- (T9) Increase in passengers expressing satisfaction with service provided on individual routes targeted for investment – a 5% increase in passenger satisfaction over the first two years following a route improvement.

1.3.16 The above aims are not exclusive. Existence of the partnership will also give opportunity to discuss other measures and concerns and develop actions on an ongoing basis.

#### 1.3.17 PARK AND RIDE

1.3.18 The Park and Ride service provides an important alternative to use of the car for accessing the town centre, with up to 400,000 private vehicles using the three sites each year. For many people living close to the sites it also acts as their local bus service. It is recommended that Park and Ride is specifically added to the agreement as shown, with its own ongoing targets. It would also benefit from the support of the partners and wider inclusion in the publicity and promotion of the partnership.

1.3.19 Specific inclusion in the quality bus partnership will also help in seeking capital funding for Park and Ride through the Local Transport Plan process and embedding Park and Ride into an integrated and sustainable transport strategy approach.

#### 1.3.20 MAIDSTONE AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN

1.3.21 Measure 6 of the approved Air Quality Action Plan identifies improvement in public transport through involvement in the Quality Bus Partnership as a key measure to address air pollution and carbon emissions.

1.3.22 The target is to use the influence of the partnership to decrease the age of the local bus fleet and increase the percentage of vehicles operating to EU 4 and 5 requirements.

#### 1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

- 1.4.1 Future development in Maidstone and the surrounding area and background growth in traffic levels will both lead to traffic growth and adverse congestion and pollution unless actions are taken. Actions will need to include actively promoting and encouraging modal shift to use of the bus (including Park and Ride). To be effective these actions need to be planned and coordinated where they will have the most effect to deliver the required outcomes.
- 1.4.2 Coordinated actions and investment through the Maidstone Quality Bus Partnership have so far increased use of local bus services. Without an updated partnership in place it would be difficult for Kent County Council to obtain future investment for bus services and allied measures through the Local Transport Plan mechanism, and this may also affect the ability of Arriva to obtain local investment.
- 1.4.3 Failure to include Park and Ride in the Quality Bus Partnership may restrict its ability to attract capital funding.
- 1.4.4 Should an updated agreement not be concluded it is possible that the other parties may then decide to invest available capital and resources in other alternative locations.
- 1.4.5 Failure to have in place the Maidstone Quality Bus Partnership would breach the measures contained in the Maidstone Air Quality Action plan.
- 1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives
  - 1.5.1 Provision of good bus and Park and Ride services assists in delivering the Sustainable Community Strategy objectives of developing an efficient, sustainable integrated transport strategy.
- 1.6 Risk Management
  - 1.6.1 There is a risk that future investment in public transport will be restricted due to reductions in Government and other funding. If there is not an updated proactive partnership agreement in place this is likely to reduce the ability of the partners to bid for whatever funding may be available.
  - 1.6.2 It is to be expected that the provision of better, more reliable, bus services will result in some persons deciding to use the bus instead of the car. Having made the choice they are however then more likely to visit the town. Alternatively once in a car they may decide to go elsewhere to another town or out of town location. This may have an effect on car parking income but as less than 50% of town centre car parks are under the control of the council this is likely to be marginal.

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

- 1. Financial
- 2. Staffing
- 3. Legal
- 4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment
- 5. Environmental/Sustainable Development
- 6. Community Safety
- 7. Human Rights Act
- 8. Procurement
- 9. Asset Management

X

1.7.2 LEGAL

1.7.3 The Maidstone Quality Bus Partnership operates as a voluntary partnership agreement. Standard wording is included at the end of section 5 which concludes that;-

“Therefore, nothing in this agreement is designed or should be concluded as being legally binding on any of the parties, or in any manner restrictive to the commercial or operational activities of Arriva Southern Counties or any other organisation”.

1.8 Relevant Documents

1.8.1 Appendices

Appendix A – Draft of Maidstone Quality Bus Partnership (aims and targets subject to final agreement)

1.8.2 Background Documents

None

**IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?**

Yes

No

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

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This is a Key Decision because: .....

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Wards/Parishes affected: All.....

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**How to Comment**

Should you have any comments on the issue that is being considered please contact either the relevant Officer or the Member of the Executive who will be taking the decision.

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