

**STRATEGIC PLANNING,
SUSTAINABILITY AND
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

1 December 2015

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Yes

MAIDSTONE BRIDGES GYRATORY IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

Final Decision-Maker	Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee
Lead Head of Service	Paul Spooner Director of Regeneration and Communities
Lead Officer and Report Author	Abi Lewis Economic Development Officer
Classification	Non- exempt
Wards affected	Bridge; High Street; Fant

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the draft final designs set out in Appendix I, II, III and IV are approved.
2. That delegated authority is given to the Director of Regeneration and Place in consultation with the Chair of Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation to agree the final designs that go out to tender.
3. That delegated authority is given to the Director of Regeneration and Place and Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Chair of Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation to agree and enter into a funding agreement with KCC.
4. That an update on progress be reported at a subsequent meeting of this Committee and the Maidstone Joint Transportation Board.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- *Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough* – The proposals are intended to reduce congestion and travel times in Maidstone Town Centre and enable the regeneration of the western riverside. The scheme also includes measures to protect town centre businesses from flooding.
- *Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all* – This scheme provides the opportunity to make significant improvements to the public realm environment in the vicinity of the Maidstone Bridges Gyratory.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport Committee	1 December 2015

MAIDSTONE BRIDGES GYRATORY IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 In December 2014 Maidstone Borough Council's Cabinet approved the allocation of £1.14m New Homes Bonus monies for the design and construction of the Maidstone Bridges Gyratory Improvement Scheme. This is in addition to £4.6m from the South East Local Enterprise Partnership Single Local Growth Fund. The project is being delivered in partnership with Kent County Council (KCC).
 - 1.2 Detailed design work is nearing completion and it is intended that the project contract will go out to tender in January 2016, with the main body of works starting in May 2016.
 - 1.3 Prior to commencing the tendering process, approval from Strategic Planning & Sustainable Transport Committee is required to progress with the project as outlined in this report.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Maidstone Gyratory is a recognised congestion and air quality hotspot within Maidstone town centre, lying at the point where the A20, A26, A229 and A249 primary routes converge and cross the River Medway.
- 2.2 This scheme involves the construction of two additional northbound lanes on Fairmeadow, alteration of the existing central islands and implementation of revised traffic signals with associated signage (Scheme Plan attached).
- 2.3 The scheme will negate the need for northbound traffic to transverse the two bridges and will deliver a more direct route reducing congestion and improving journey time reliability. The scheme is anticipated to increase the capacity of the overall junction by 15%, resulting in a reduction in delay during peak hour periods of approximately 25%.
- 2.4 The cost of the scheme is £5.74m. £4.6m South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) funding and £1.14m contribution from Maidstone Borough Council's New Homes Bonus.
- 2.5 Detailed design has been progressing in conjunction with KCC through regular Steering Group meetings. The original scheme layout and civil engineering works to the carriageway remains predominantly unchanged; bar an extension to the lane separating the central islands to create increased capacity for queuing on the new north bound lanes at the newly introduced traffic signals.
- 2.6 Opportunities to introduce additional benefits into the scheme have been discussed with KCC officers, and Members of both KCC and MBC. The Lower High Street at the junction with Bishops Way will be redesigned, with the scope of works including the regrading and resurfacing of pedestrian

footways and associated landscaping. Materials used during Phase 2 Town Centre Improvement works will be continued in this area (Appendix II).

- 2.7 Work is being completed to ensure sufficient capacity in the pedestrian waiting 'pens' on the Bishops Way crossing. The pavement levels on the other side of the crossing will be altered to remedy the sloping gradient, improving accessibility for disabled users. The area made redundant following the closure of the subway will be redesigned to create gentle ramping up to the crossing point (Appendix III). The existing Trief kerbing will be replaced to relieve the existing footpath 'pinch point' on the junction of Broadway Bridge and Bishops Way. Following the completion of detailed design the scheme will be subject to a Stage 2 Road Safety Audit which will consider the layout of junctions, position of signs, carriageway marking and lighting provision.
- 2.8 Both the subways on either side of the High Street will be closed and sealed. This facilitates greater improvements to the public realm environment in addition to providing protection to properties against flooding. Modelling work undertaken by the Environment Agency indicates that the flooding of properties in this vicinity in December 2013 was a result of flow through the subways.
- 2.9 Access to the River Medway will be retained through the Medway Street subway, removing the need for shared cycle and pedestrian use across Broadway Bridge. Other access to the river remains from the surface pavements on all axes of the gyratory.
- 2.10 Options to affix a flood gate to the subway entrances are being investigated which will provide flood protection during occasional severe flooding.
- 2.11 An application to the Environment Agency to purchase demountable defences is being developed which, combined with the closure of the two southern subways and the flood gate at the Medway Street subway would create a flood barrier of circa 800m in length, protecting many of the properties that were damaged during the floods of 2013.
- 2.12 Consideration was given to an 'at grade' crossing on the western side of the Broadway Bridge to improve pedestrian and cycle travel from the St Peters Bridge to the High Street. Modelling work indicated that this would negate the benefits achieved through the main scheme works. Proposals for improvements to drainage, lighting and aesthetics in the Broadway subway are therefore being developed and agreement with KCC on the procedure for cleansing following flooding sought.
- 2.13 New signage for pedestrians and cyclists to assist navigation of the Gyratory, particularly the western side of the River Medway, will be installed. This will link to work being undertaken as part of the Destination Management Plan.
- 2.14 A landscaping scheme for the Gyratory area is being developed, and opportunities to introduce tree planting are being investigated. Planting is proposed against the retaining walls following the closure of the subways, on the western side of Bishops Way and outside the Allianz building. It

should be noted that this scheme area is heavily networked with utilities apparatus and Statutory Undertakers may enforce restrictions. Planting schemes are also being developed for the existing green areas within the scope of the project area.

- 2.15 It is also worth noting that as a result of the discussions with KCC officers on the Bridge Gyrotory scheme, negotiations are underway between Maidstone Borough Services and KCC to transfer the maintenance of a number of green spaces, verges, planters etc. currently the responsibility of KCC to MBC, thereby introducing an improved maintenance regime in the wider town centre area. KCC would take over responsibility of green spaces currently managed by MBC that are closer to their own depot. This would be cost neutral to both KCC and MBC.
- 2.16 The existing Air Quality Monitoring Station is to be removed from Fairmeadow and new equipment installed at Lower Stone Street, adjacent to Miller House. This has been identified as an air quality hotspot. Existing diffusion tubes in the vicinity of Fairmeadow will continue to monitor air quality levels and it is proposed that DEFRA grant monies be used by Maidstone's Environmental Health team to install additional monitoring equipment on the Town Hall. This, combined with computer modelling, would pick up pollution levels associated with the Bridge Gyrotory.
- 2.17 A comprehensive communications plan has been developed jointly by KCC and MBC to give residents and businesses access to clear, timely information about the project, to communicate the long term benefits of the project and to manage expectations around journey times during construction. A business survey will be circulated capturing access needs during the project build period.
- 2.18 An agreement is currently being drawn up between KCC and MBC setting out the terms on which finance will be released.
- 2.19 The scheme is scheduled to go out to the tender process in January 2016 with contract award in March 2016. SELEP monies need to be spent by March 2017.
- 2.20 Pre-works (e.g. site clearance) will commence in January/ February 2016 with the main contract construction starting in spring 2016. In order to minimise disruption the contractor will be required to deliver 12 hour working days, 7 days a week (where possible), operating road closures at night and retaining access to the High Street where possible. The Environmental Health team is being consulted to ensure steps to mitigate noise disruption are included in the works contract. The works have been timed to coincide with the school holidays when there are significantly reduced traffic volumes.
- 2.21 The scheme is progressing through Permitted Development and therefore planning permission is not required.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 Option 1 – Continue with the project as outlined in this report
This option will ensure that the main Highways Scheme is delivered as required and an improvement to the flow of traffic in the town centre achieved. Additional benefits will also be realised, with significant improvements to the at-grade crossings over Bishops Way, upgrades to drainage, lighting and aesthetics in Broadway subway, an opportunity to enhance existing landscaping within the Gyratory vicinity and wider town centre and the provision of flood protection for businesses and residential premises previously affected by flooding.
- 3.2 Option 2 - Do nothing
MBC could decide not to contribute to this scheme. In this case the Single Local Growth Fund (SLGF) allocation of £4.6m will be lost as the business case to the LEP was predicated on the availability of this funding. It is likely that this would severely damage MBC's reputation with SELEP and the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership and jeopardise further bids for SLGF. This scheme is also fundamental to the delivery of the emerging Integrated Transport Strategy.
- 3.3 Option 3 – Reduce the budget allocated to this scheme
The scheme design has been progressed on the basis of the commitment of MBC funds made at Council in December 2014. A reduction in funding could mean that business case supporting the scheme would have to be revisited and may not be supported by SELEP. A reduced budget would no doubt impact upon the deliverability of additional benefits outlined in this report.
- 3.4 Option 4 – Reduce the scope of the project
A reduction in the scope of the project would result in the aspirations of the Council to improve pedestrian areas and enhance landscaping not being met. The opportunity to protect town centre business and residential premises from flood would also be lost.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 This report recommends Option 1 - MBCs continued commitment of £1.14m to this scheme and the progression of the project as detailed in section 2.
- 4.2 As outlined, the widened scope of the project affords the Council the opportunity to reap far greater benefits than initially outlined in the Highways Scheme. The project provides better value for money in terms of achieving the Council's aspirations to deliver a transport scheme to alleviate congestion in the town centre, as well as improvements to public realm, enhanced landscaping and the chance to protect property from future flood events. These additional elements cannot be delivered retrospectively.
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5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 Feedback from Maidstone Joint Transportation Board indicated a desire to ensure that the project supported the integration of the western side of the

river with the Town. Members also requested tree planting in the scheme area and the consideration of cycle routes across the Gyratory.

- 5.2 At the informal Member briefing held on 28 October 2015 feedback suggested the need to retain access to the River Medway through the northern subway, reiterated the need to introduce tree planting in the scheme area and requested the removal of a shared use route for pedestrians and cyclists across Broadway Bridge.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 A comprehensive communications plan has been developed with KCC, identifying various channels through which to provide ongoing, up-to-date information about the scheme.
- 6.2 A business engagement event will be held with Town Centre Management providing information on the scheme, as well as collating data on access requirements. Engagement with members of the public will also be held in the Town Centre in the lead up to Christmas.
- 6.3 Local media has been initially engaged and subsequent press releases will be issued updating readers of progress. A social media campaign will be launched with regular updates of MBC and KCC website content.
- 6.4 Variable Message Signs will be installed on key access routes from January 2016.
- 6.5 Other channels of engagement include blue pages, ward and parish councillors, and local business organisations.

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The project supports both Corporate Objectives and notably "Securing improvements to the transport infrastructure of our Borough" and "Enhancing the appeal of the town centre for everyone".	Director of Communities & Regeneration
Risk Management	Risk management is being carried out as part of the project documentation.	Economic Development Manager
Financial	MBC contribution of £1.14m is approved within the Council's Capital programme.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team

Staffing	Existing staff resources in Economic Development and Planning Policy teams.	Head of Commercial & Economic Development
Legal	A legal agreement setting out the terms under which MBC will pay KCC its contribution to the project will be required. Progress on this point will depend on Kent Legal Services. Where appropriate care must be taken that all necessary public consultations take place, and are properly documented. Funding deadlines must be adhered to if the project is to proceed.	Legal Team
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	An Equalities Assessment has been undertaken by KCC and their agents.	Policy & Information Manager
Environmental/Sustainable Development	N/A	
Community Safety	N/A	
Human Rights Act	N/A	
Procurement	KCC will be the procuring authority.	
Asset Management	The Highway and subways assets will be maintained by KCC.	

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Maidstone Gyrotory Scheme Plan
- Appendix II: Improvements to pedestrian crossing point, Lower High Street
- Appendix III: Improvements to pedestrian crossing point, Broadway Bridge

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS