

To: Maidstone Joint Transportation Board
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Date: 13 July 2016
Subject: Maidstone Integrated Transport Strategy
Classification: For Information and Discussion

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Maidstone Borough Council has undertaken a public consultation on the Regulation 19 Maidstone Local Plan, which has invited comments on whether the plan complies with legal requirements and meets the tests of soundness. The consultation closed at 5pm on 18th March 2016. The plan was subsequently considered by Maidstone Council's Strategic Planning, Sustainability & Transportation Committee and submitted for Examination on 20th May 2016. The Plan covers the period from 2011 to 2031 but, to ensure an up-to-date planning policy framework is maintained a review of the Plan will commence by 2022.
- 1.2 The suite of documents made available for comments as part of the consultation included a draft Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS), which is intended to identify the transport interventions necessary to support planned growth over the period to 2031.
- 1.3 Kent County Council, in its capacity as local Highway Authority, raised objections to the draft ITS as part of its response to the Regulation 19 consultation. The objections highlighted how the ITS should accord with the resolution made by this Board on 7th December 2015 regarding the initial implementation of a strategy covering the period to 2022, as part of ensuring that it is founded on a package of transport improvements that have been agreed by the County Council.
- 1.4 The representations made in response to the Regulation 19 consultation were reported to the 18th April SPS&T committee. These included objections from KCC to both the draft Local Plan and Integrated Transport Strategy. There was also an objection from Highways England. The local Plan and associated documents were submitted to the Secretary of State on the 20th May but this did not include the ITS. Therefore, the purpose of this report is to update Members with respect to the resolution made on 7th December 2015 and, moreover, to propose a joint Integrated Transport Strategy which can be submitted to the Secretary of State in time for examination in public.

2. Background

- 2.1 At a previous meeting of this Board on 7th December 2015, Members resolved:

" We agree in the absence of an agreed transport strategy and in light of the evidence presented to this Board demonstrating Maidstone's significant highway capacity constraints, this Board recommends that a transport strategy be taken forward urgently by the Borough and County Councils covering the period of the Local Plan, with a further review completed in 2022.

The aim of this strategy will be to mitigate the transport impact of future growth, in the first instance up to 2022. The strategy should comprise of the key highway schemes and public transport improvements agreed by the Board, and further traffic modelling will be required to identify its impact. It is proposed that the £8.9 million growth fund monies identified for transport be used to accelerate the delivery of these improvements. Existing developer contributions may then be used to support further measures.

The agreed transport strategy should also develop the justification for a relief road between the A20 to the A274 (the Leeds and Langley Relief Road), along with a preferred route, in order to allow testing with other strategic transport options and identify all source of potential funding to enable the schemes to be implemented at the earliest opportunity.”

- 2.2 The traffic modelling referred to within the resolution was undertaken by consultants Amey, who are jointly commissioned by the County Council and Borough Council, in order to identify how implementation of the strategy could impact upon highway network performance. The Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) needs to take into account the broad network-wide picture.
- 2.3 The assumptions applied in modelling analysis and the associated results were presented at the meeting of this board on 22nd February 2016. A summary of the assumptions and results, set against the previously modelled '2014 base' and '2031 Do Something 4b' scenarios, is presented in Appendix A.
- 2.4 Since the JTB meeting on 7th December 2015, the Borough Council's Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport (SPS&T) Committee, on 13th January 2016, agreed to present the draft Local Plan to Full Council for agreement and Regulation 19 consultation. This was subsequently agreed by Full Council and the draft Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State in May. The draft Local Plan contained transport policies and included a number of specific detailed highway improvements including the package of highway improvement schemes previously considered and supported by the JTB (see below and in Appendix B):
 - A20/M20 Junction 5
 - A229/A274 Wheatsheaf
 - A20/Willington Street
 - A274/Willington Street and A274/Wallis Avenue
 - A20/Hermitage Lane
 - A20/Coldharbour Lane
 - A249 Bearsted Road and Bearsted Road/New Cut
 - A26/Fountain Lane
 - The removal of a previously proposed park and ride site at Linton and an existing park and ride site at M20 J7 (which had been in the previous draft).

The draft plan also acknowledged the Bridges Gyrotory scheme which is already being implemented.

2.5 The 'Do Something' model runs also included the following strategy components (also referred to in Appendix B):-

- A typical 10 minute bus frequency.
- The discounting of walk/cycle trips to be based on a distance threshold of 5km within the town centre.
- A 50% increase in long-stay parking charges.

2.6 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) makes reference to planning for the longer term (preferably a 15-year time horizon), the need for plans to be kept up to date and for review in response to changing circumstances. At paragraph 157, the NPPF states that "each local planning authority should produce a Local Plan for its area. This can be reviewed in whole or in part to respond flexibly to changing circumstances".

2.7 The draft ITS covers the same period as the Local Plan (i.e. 2011-2031). Although not governed by the NPPF, the same principles of planning for the longer term, being kept up-to-date and review in response to changing circumstances apply.

3 Highways England

3.1 Highways England objected at the Regulation 19 consultation stage of the Local Plan in that they consider that insufficient modelling of the motorway network has been undertaken with specific criticism of the VISUM modelling relating to the original 2001 baseline traffic surveys and the lack of detailed modelling of the motorway junctions.

3.2 As a result of this objection, joint KCC/MBC meetings have taken place with Highways England and an agreed way forward has been found. This has resulted in Mott MacDonald being commissioned by Maidstone Borough Council to undertake detailed transport modelling of all 4 motorway junctions.

4 Proposed ITS Modifications

4.1 Further discussions between the Borough Council and County Council have taken place to identify how the draft ITS included in the Regulation 19 Local Plan consultation could be modified to the satisfaction of both authorities.

4.2 The following potential adjustments have been discussed:

- The ITS will be re-appraised in the future as part of the first review of the Local Plan to commence by 2022. The primary purpose of this exercise would be to identify any additional transport interventions to further support the Local Plan. The approach will be to
 - Establish, at the review point, whether additional highways mitigation is required;
 - Establish what the options for mitigation are;
 - Undertake a full appraisal of the options. Any options assessment would require, amongst other things, a technical evaluation including Sustainability Appraisal(s) and Strategic Environmental Assessment(s).

Further explanation and amplifications of the intentions regarding a potential South East Maidstone Strategic Link (Leeds-Langley Relief Road) scheme will be provided by Kent County Council. This will highlight how:

- Kent County Council has begun work to establish the justification for and delivery of such a project;
- Traffic Modelling has shown a link between the A20 and A274 would have a beneficial impact upon traffic levels in the congested south and south-east sector of the urban area; and
- The Borough and County Councils will work together to develop the detailed case, including full traffic and environmental impact studies, a preferred route and funding methods. This is reflected in paragraph 17.125 of the draft Local Plan.

5 Recommendation

- 5.1 It is recommended that the transport interventions identified in paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5, together with the firmer commitment to work together in relation to paragraph 4.2 are approved by Members as forming the basis of the transport strategy.
- 5.2 This matter be referred to both the KCC Cabinet Member for Transport and MBC's SPST Committee for approval.