

# Traffic Congestion in Maidstone

## Municipal Year 2011/12



### Evidence Pack

Evidence	Who gave evidence	Page
28/6/11 - Visit to Maidstone Traffic Control Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maidstone Traffic Control Centre Officers</li> </ul>	
12/7/11 – Visit to Medway Council	Medway Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Robin Cooper, Director for Regeneration</li> <li>• Ian Wilson, Road Network Schemes Manager</li> <li>• Consultant, Bob Bertrium</li> </ul>	4
26/7/11 - Regeneration and Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councillor Malcolm Robertson, Kent County Councillor</li> <li>• Peter Rosevear, Kent County Council, Strategic Transport and Development Planner</li> <li>• John Foster, Maidstone Borough Council, Economic Development Manager</li> </ul>	-
23/8/11 – Visit to Godstone Traffic Centre	Godstone Traffic Centre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sarah Haddow, Traffic Officer</li> <li>• Jeff Parks, Call Handling Officer</li> </ul>	7
23/8/11 – Visit to Chelmsford Borough Council	Chelmsford Borough Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John Pollard, Principal Transportation Planner</li> <li>• Anna Wheldale, Planning Policy Officer</li> <li>• Clare Stuckey, Planning Policy Officer</li> <li>• Ben Sherman, Parking Manager</li> <li>• David Green, Director of Sustainable Communities</li> <li>• Cllr Penni Panner</li> </ul> Essex County Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hannah Neve, Transport Planning Team</li> <li>• Alistair Southgate, Transport Planning Team</li> </ul>	9
23/8/11 - Regeneration and Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Meeting	Maidstone Borough Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rob Jarman, Head of Development Management</li> <li>• John Newington, Senior Pollution Officer</li> <li>• John Taylor, Director of Invicta Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• Christopher Finch, Member of the Public</li> </ul>	12
27/9/11 - Regeneration and Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Robert Patterson, Arriva, Business Development Manager</li> <li>• Norman Kemp, Nu Venture Coaches, Director and Company Secretary</li> <li>• Dan Johns, Streamline Taxis, Duty Manager</li> <li>• Dan Pigot, Mitsubishi, Corporate Sales Manager</li> <li>• Alistair Rhead, Mitsubishi, Manger for Electric Vehicles</li> </ul>	-
25/10/11 - Regeneration and Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Meeting	Maidstone Borough Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steve Goulette, Assistant Director of Environment and Regulatory Services</li> <li>• Flo Churchill, Intertim Head of the Core Strategy</li> <li>• Jonathan Morris, Principal Transport Planning Officer</li> </ul>	-
22/11/11 - Regeneration and Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graham Tanner, Kent County Council, Sustainable Transport Team Leader</li> </ul>	-
Compiled responses to call for evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various Members of the public</li> </ul>	16

## **Medway Council - 12 July 2011**

The Committee met at the Maidstone Bus Station to catch the 8.15am 101 bus to Chatham. By getting this bus, the Committee hoped it would portraint a good indication of how popular this bus route was, as it arrives in Chatham Bus Station for 9am. Funnily enough, this bus broke down upon entering the surrounding areas of Chatham, and the Committee was required to walk to the next bus stop and continue their journey on the next arriving bus – just 3 minutes later.



We were scheduled to arrive at Medway Council to meet with Robin Cooper, Director for Regeneration to discuss the reasons behind changing their one-way system to become a two-way system, and what obstacles they had to overcome.

Mr Cooper gave a presentation showing how Medway had transformed over the years through development both in residential and retail areas. He explained their aspirations, and what was needed to achieve this.

Ian Wilson, Road Network Schemes Manager assisted Mr Cooper, and presented the process that takes place regarding monitoring traffic throughout the city using a similar system to that of Maidstone's. Medway's main difficulties concern the traffic flow between the Medway Tunnel towards Upnor, and the High Street bridge towards Rochester. Although the M2 is close by, the Council is only required to liaise closely with the Highways Agency to ensure that Medway did not suffer any repercussions of hold-ups.



The new Chatham Bus Station is currently undergoing new development just across the road from the present Station, allowing better facilities for both the disabled and visually impaired.

With a current population of 256000, Medway have a vision to build 17000 new homes between 2011-2026, providing homes for the current 2500 people on the housing waiting list. Their vision for Medway as a whole is that by 2026, 20000 new jobs will be available, making a ratio of 1:1 for the residents and local jobs. Previously their unemployment figures reached 25%, as opposed to the current 4%.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Figures correct at time of meeting on 12 July 2011.



*Drill Hall Library – at 184meters is the longest in Europe.*

*Before development.*

*Drawing of proposed development.*<sup>2</sup>

Medway is understood to hold a mix of industries from tourism to universities, and creative arts to heavy industrial labour. They have produced two books to promote their unique set of skills throughout the city, entitled 'Made in Medway' published in 2007 and 'Made in Medway 2' published in 2008 both by Steve Rowland and Bianca Donnelly. Medway hope to become a World Heritage site by 2013, and already have secured four Olympic Countries to use their leisure facilities in Gillingham in 2012.

It became apparent during the course of the meeting that Medway had two main advantages over Maidstone. Firstly, that they are a unitary Council, and therefore have only themselves to consult. Secondly, that they have the land to develop as required.

Medway started the plans for the traffic system in 2000, and had it agreed in principle by the Medway Council Committee before securing funding via the Homes and Community Agency. Once this was in place, it took two years to get the 2-way system in motion, taking 8years in total.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer asked the Committee to email their thoughts on what they learnt from the meeting. Below are some extracts from the Committee:

From Councillor Springett.

1: "We could really do with asking KCC what their plans for Maidstone are - assuming they have some. (It is much more tricky trying to co-ordinate with another body, whereas Medway don't have this issue) Do they have any plans for traffic changes to reduce congestion or do they intend to leave that to Maidstone.

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<sup>2</sup> All Medway pictures provided by Medway Council, on 12 July 2011.

- 2: KCC have recently received funds towards their 'Growth without Gridlock' plan. What do they intend to use this money on - and can we have some of it.
- 3: In an ideal world, a ring road around Maidstone would be the solution, but I suspect this is tricky. So are there any areas where we could utilise existing roads - possibly with improvement/widening, to start forming a ring road segment by segment - like the M25 was built! The A406 North Circular is formed or a network of existing roads.
- 4: I firmly believe that we must pursue money from KCC for the Leeds Langley bypass, which could itself form one of the segments of a future ring road, and enable a lot of traffic to avoid the town centre.
- 5; I thought what... [Bob Bertrium] said about reviewing existing traffic flows at junctions was very interesting. I think the existing lanes over the river bridges have been the same for years, - and still cause confusion to those not familiar with them.
- 6: I thought the Medway Innovation Centre was a fantastic idea, especially when linked in with the university to give a route for new graduates to get started. Perhaps we need another University? It would be interesting to see which University courses are over-subscribed elsewhere to see if we could supply much wanted places here. I presume this would fall under KCC, but we could ask the question.
- 7: We obviously don't have the advantage of the land availability that they have along the river and the old MOD training site, so we are hampered in some respects. We do however have vacant sites in town which could be reviewed possibly. Kent House and the land adjacent spring to mind."

#### From Councillor Newton

"I personally found it very interesting and the regeneration plan particularly well presented by Robin Cooper. The Regeneration of of Chatham has been long overdue but seems to be progressing at a pace. Chatham has always appeared as the poor relative in the Medway Towns but in reality it has great potential due to its historic value to the tourism industry.

Medway recognises the value of Chatham for its tourism value and has reacted by creating what appears to be a good traffic management plan albeit it could do with more pedestrian crossings at traffic lights as our experience today demonstrated how difficult it was to cross some roads particularly if disabled.

I don't believe that Maidstone Borough has the same drive possibly because of KCC.

It would be interesting to get the KCC Officer responsible for regeneration to undertake a similar presentation as a comparison.



Changes particularly in traffic management in Maidstone need to be bold to go forward.

Realistically I doubt whether there is an appetite for a real change within the town centre.

We somehow need to get our hands on money to carry out change and take the public of Maidstone along with us.

The Made in Medway Book was a good idea. Perhaps the MBC PR department would like to get themselves involved in such a project. Councils always get criticism for whatever they do and it might be a good idea to let Maidstone people know what Maidstone is achieving in the world of commerce.

### **Godstone Traffic Control Centre – 23 August 2011**

The Committee had previously visited Maidstone Traffic Control Centre on 28 June 2011, and as part of best practice were visiting Godstone Traffic Control which covers Kent, Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire. We were met by Sarah Haddow, Traffic Officer who gave us our tour of the facilities and explained the functions of the various teams and the presence of the Southern County Radio within the office.



Ms Haddow informed the Committee that the fundamentals of the traffic patrol crews were changing, for example, previously they had 2 crews per patrol car, and the same number of staff were on duty whether it be rush hour or not. This will become 1 crew per car, and shift patterns will change to allow for peak hours. They have recovery staff that relieves those on duty during a severe accident.

On average, it takes 12 seconds for cars to cross the QE II bridge during the day, and 7.5 seconds in the evening when the tolls do not operate.

The electronic road signals which display notices such as 'queue ahead' and 'stay in lane' are automated in response to the traffic officer inputting details about the incident on their logging system. The control centre often receive calls explaining that the sign is wrong, at which point a patrol car is despatched to investigate the area so that the sign can be cancelled. It is mostly a case that

there was cause for that sign, however it has been resolved quickly so the sign is no longer required.

The Committee were astounded to discover that the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge at the Dartford Toll Crossing has been under government ownership since 13 September 2009. Ms Haddow informed the Committee that the bridge had been paid for over a 10 year period since it first opened in 1991.

*This gave the Committee pause to question if tolls throughout Kent's roads would work, in a similar fashion to those running through France, so that foreigners entering the UK through that gate paid to help maintain the roads. However, it would not be possible to charge only foreigners, although it may be possible to charge all passing vehicles according to emission size, similar to that used for Car Tax.*

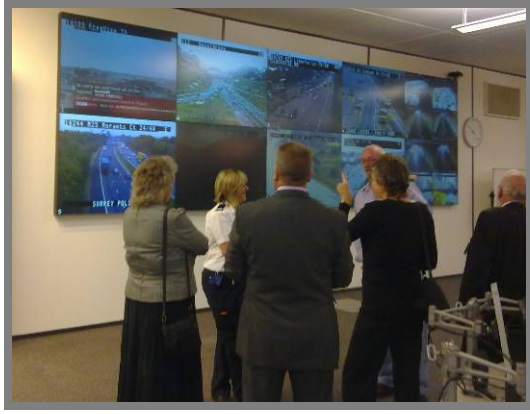
There are approximately 300 cameras operating via Godstone, which have manually operated wipers for bad weather. The cameras recordings are stored for 7 days, however the quality of the recording degrades over time, so after 6.5 days the cameras store still images. The recordings can be put onto a hard disk, however this needs to be requested by officials for specific reasons.

Ms Haddow introduced the Committee to Jeff Parks, Off-Road Operator who was handling the calls from various sources including breakdown services, and the emergency roadside telephones.

Mr Parks explained his touch screen computer, and the various colour codes that symbolised the status of the incident. They have a timescale for dealing with issues, for example, 4 minutes to assign the task to a patrol car, 3 minutes to ensure electronic signals are displayed and the patrol cars have 20 minutes to reach the incident. As the patrol cars can only travel at the same speed as the public, they can use the hard shoulder with caution.

The Committee heard that there is a system in place for if staff needed to evacuate the building (possibly for a bomb, flood or fire threat). The control centre practices for such events every Sunday. The neighbouring control centres share their facilities, so although signals for their own areas can't be set, they can still receive calls and deal with the various agencies as they would normally. Each control centre has sufficient TV screens so that both areas can be monitored from either site.

The training for this job consists of an 8 week training course in a specialised centre in Birmingham. They are assessed every 2 weeks and have 3 exams to pass, covering a practical, theoretical and road works exam which once all are passed results in an NVQ in Traffic Management.





# Chelmsford Borough Council – 23 August 2011

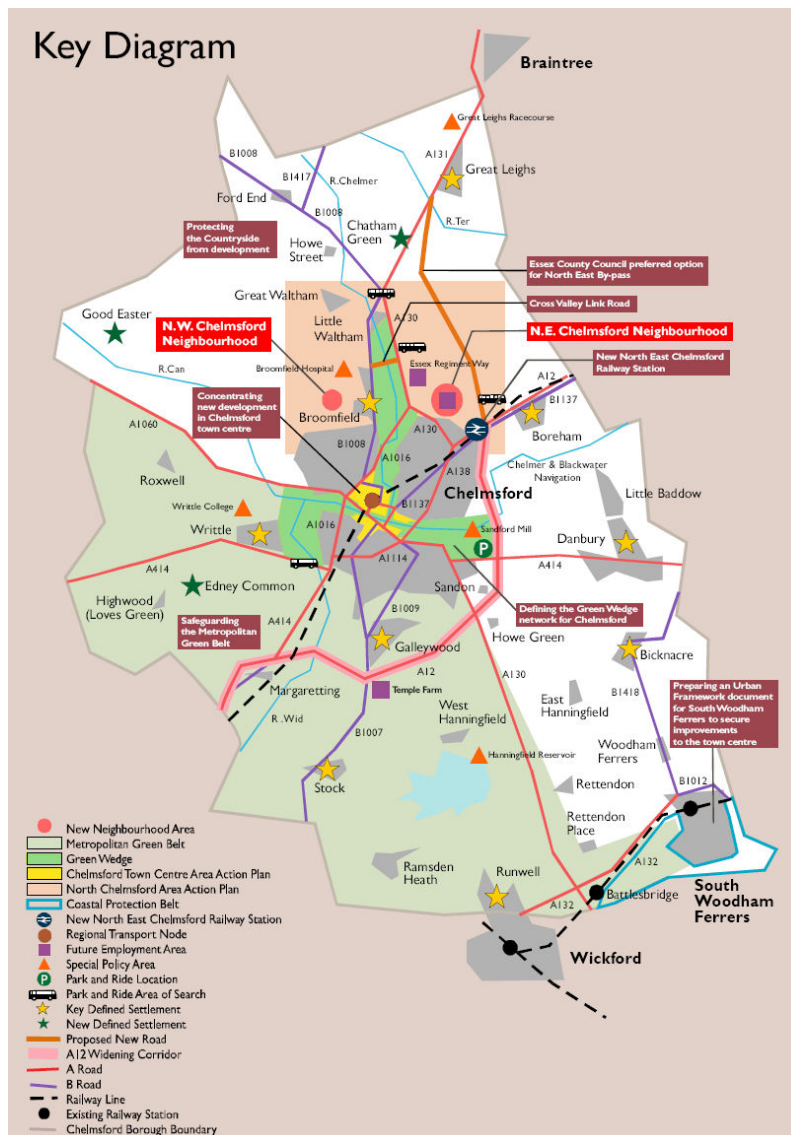
Chelmsford is Maidstone’s closest county town, and therefore the Committee decided to visit the council as part of best practice for the review. We were greeted by a number of staff, both from Chelmsford Borough Council and Essex County Council and the meeting took place in their Committee Meeting Room.



John Pollard, Principal Transportation Planner gave a short presentation on their Local Development Framework Transport Aspects, attached at **Appendix A**.

It was highlighted that the key component to their success was the genuine working relationship that they had with partners. For example, they have a ‘5-a-side’ team that comprises 5 Borough Councillors and 5 County Councillors that meet 4 times a year. They have been working in partnership since approx. 1998.

The borough’s transport structure is mapped below:



Some vital changes have occurred as a result of a high demand for public transport. In 2007 a new bus station was built next to the current train station in the centre of town. Also, a new train station is being developed just outside the town centre, close to a neighbouring Park & Ride site. A study has showed that there is the same number of passengers using the train at 7.30am going London-bound, as inbound.

*Chelmsford recently received funding to make improvements on the bus sites and a 1.7mile dedicated bus lane.*

Chelmsford currently has two Park & Ride sites, both of which are 5 miles out of the town centre. They are investigating having a third site depending on demand. The price is per passenger, not car and hope to increase the cost to £2.50 in 2012 which is Maidstone's current fare. Under 16's travel for free in Chelmsford, whereas in Maidstone only two under 17's may travel for free if accompanied by an adult. Another significant difference is the opening hours, as the 3 Maidstone sites have a last bus service at 6.30pm compared to Chelmsford who close at 7pm. Should a passenger miss the last Park & Ride bus in Chelmsford, they can use their pass on a regular bus to the site. Their Park & Ride sites are operated with a barrier, allowing a late passenger to exit the car park.

A fly-over had been erected to improve the traffic flow at a well used roundabout 'The Army and Navy Roundabout'. Traffic lights at the roundabout had been tested previously, but did not solve the problem. Since the fly-over opened, travel time had improved up to 80%.

Elsewhere around the town part time signals are in operation during peak times only, to allow the major roads to get through and holding back the 'rat run' routes. Approximately 15-20% of temporary lights are also in operation at various roundabouts, and a couple of T-Junctions.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer asked the Committee to email their thoughts on what they learnt from the meeting. Below are some extracts from the Committee:

From Councillor Denise Joy:

"For me Christina the fantastic working relationship with County / 5 a side meeting 4 times a year, Park and ride success in Chelmsford and the Dartford tunnel info from Godstone Traffic Control Centre were the key points I learnt today".

From Councillor Val Springett:

"I found yesterday very interesting. The Godstone trip was really good, although not terribly pertinent to the traffic in Maidstone, apart from the fact that they can see congestion on the A20 caused by M20 issues.

As regards Chelmsford, I thought we gained a great insight into how things SHOULD work between Borough and County, and I think we should be more persistent in our attempts to get KCC to talk to us and work with us and MBC Officers. I got the distinct feeling the Officers would welcome our support in this.

Park and ride was very interesting, and I think the fact that commuters can access the return later by using the normal bus network and automatic barriers to exit should be explored. The problem we will no doubt encounter is cost, especially with the automatic barriers!

The potential for children to access the P & R free without an adult opens up a potential to reduce traffic congestion at school times. By offering a free service, therefore saving parents money, especially those who cannot easily afford the £100 cost of the Freedom Pass.

It would be worth talking to the Traffic Management team regarding their view on part-time traffic lights."

Extract from the minutes of the meeting on 23 August 2011

Mr Finch introduced himself and stated that he was a chartered surveyor by profession, and had studied pedestrianisation at university as part of his dissertation. He explained his views that were outlined in Appendix A of the report in the agenda, highlighting that Maidstone was populated with traffic lights especially around the town centre's gyratory system which did not allow vehicles to proceed in a smooth manner. Mr Finch circulated a map of the Town Centre, attached at Appendix A and suggested to the Committee that the bus stop on Tonbridge Road near Maidstone West train station should enter Station Approach, and stop outside the train station so to allow the Tonbridge Road traffic to utilise the two lanes more freely. He also suggested that due to the Whitehouse car showroom no longer trading and was up for sale, a roundabout could be placed there to allow access in and out of Barker Road and onto the Tonbridge Road/London Road, rather than use the gyratory unnecessarily, possibly as part of a wider regeneration scheme. This would make easier access for the new residences, Lockmeadow and the station, especially with the new high speed rail service being introduced. Mr Finch highlighted that London Boroughs were able to fine cars that were idle in yellow box junctions, however the Committee had learnt in its day visit to Chelmsford Borough Council that this was not possible for any Local Authority outside London. He also considered reducing the number of traffic lights/junctions at various points through the town 'ring road', and possible re-alignment or other roads as part of possible future regeneration schemes.

## **Appendix A**

### **Maidstone Congestion Difficulties (A Practical Regeneration Led Solution?)**

Note -This is mainly a 'blue sky' exercise and has not been designed or trialled in any way.

#### **Forward**

Maidstone, similar to many towns and cities throughout UK and the world experiences traffic congestion, usually at peak times although bottlenecks may occur at any time.

Maidstone has a number of arterial roads that meet at a central point in the town centre. These roads are A26, A20 and A229. It has two dual carriageways (part of the A229 and part of A249/A20) and three junctions to the M20 motorway (J5, 6 & 7).

Near to Junction 5 and Junction 7 are Park & Ride facilities located at the A20 and A249 respectively, a further park & Ride is located further away from the town and is not viewed as a facility supporting motorway commuters.

The town has two rail stations Maidstone East & West. Maidstone east is adjacent to the town centre and Maidstone West lies to the west of town beyond the river Medway. There is a further 'halt' Maidstone Barracks which acts as a transfer point for passengers wishing to change rail-line services.

The town is served by a number of independent bus operators.

## **Symptoms of Congestion.**

Clearly the main cause of congestion at either end of the working day is commuter traffic -both work and school run related.

A second cause of congestion is the town's proximity to the M20 and should the M20 motorway become closed between Junction 4 and 8 in either direction, the traffic is mainly routed through the town centre.

Thirdly and allied to the above paragraph, is Operation Stack. This congestion related occurrence is more prevalent during times of bad weather in the Channel or industrial action at the costal ports.

## **Causes of Congestion**

As previously mentioned the town centre acts as a focus point for three main routes that meet at the River Medway forming a gyratory (#1). The transport network at this point comprises 5 roads, all of which feed onto a bridge gyratory system. Of these 5 feed routes, 4 are controlled by traffic lights monitored and controlled by Kent Highways Services and of these 4, one route is exclusive for buses and taxis. Additionally one set of lights doubles as a 'pelican crossing'. Only one area of the gyratory is designated as a 'Yellow Box' junction.

To the west of the bridge gyratory is another gyratory (#2) at Tonbridge Road (A26) and London Road (A20), to the South-east of the bridge gyratory is a further gyratory (#3) bounded by Palace Avenue (A229/A20 -southbound), Knightrider Street ('A249/A20') and College Avenue (A229 -northbound).

On the east side of town is one further gyratory system (#4) bounded by Sittingbourne Road/Wat Tyler Way (A249) and Ashford Road (A20).

Each of these gyratory routes become heavily congested at the morning and afternoon 'rush-hours' and at times traffic can 'back up' on all the main routes into town by 1 mile, increasing journey times by 20 minutes or more. Of specific note, gyratory #2 and #3 remain extremely congested during most of the day.

Other factors which are peripheral to congestion but may be considered to potentially impact greatly upon local pinch points in the town centre include:

### **Barker Road junction.**

This road is the only way in and out for the residents of Hart Street, the commercial trade estate and users of the Lockmeadow entertainment complex. The junction is controlled by traffic lights and at peak times these lights contribute to traffic flow issues at gyratory #1.

### **St Peter's Street junction.**

The junction of St Peter's Street and the bridge gyratory is not controlled by traffic lights. St Peter's Street has become increasingly populated by commercial and residential interests, and recently a new hotel and furniture store has been built.

### **Romney Place junction.**

This can sometimes cause tailbacks into Lower Stone Street and round to Palace Avenue.

### **Mote Road junction.**

This junction provides right turn access to Mote Road from Watt Tyler Way and also right turn access from Mote Road to Watt Tyler Way.

### **Diagnosis of Congestion**

It is certainly clear that traffic volume peaks during the morning and evening rush-hour periods caused by people driving to work or as part of the school-run, or a combination of both. Many of the town's roads arterial roads are narrow by modern design standards, these restrictions being due, in the main, to the sides of the road being bounded by residential or commercial property on one or both sides.

The town 'ring road' (effectively J6 M20 via the A229 to J7 M20 via A249) is interrupted by gyratories # 1,3 and 4 and also traffic lights at the junction of Mote Road.

There are a number of traffic control points beyond the gyratory systems which contribute to congestion.

### **Solutions to the Problem?**

The following are suggestions for what MAY be solutions to some of the issues surrounding congestion in the town's environs, but are no means definitive.

Firstly and as a general point, it has been noticeable that congestion in the town has diminished in recent months and appears, in part to be directly proportional to the rising cost of fuel. Humans are creature of habit and it will remain to be seen whether they adapt to the environment of higher fuel costs as part of their general expenses, or that it brings forth a more permanent change in vehicle use behaviour. It could therefore be argued that some form of road-pricing may reduce vehicle transport movements further, however this is outside the scope of this paper.

In 1999 I prepared a dissertation for my BSc Honours degree which studied the effect of pedestrianisation on town centre rents, the result of this work drew a number of views from retailers and agents of which accessible and plentiful town centre parking, and an efficient road network were seen as key elements in enhancing a town centre's viability. It is certainly the case that the town's road network is not efficient and it is also questionable whether the bulk of town centre parking is accessible, the exception being Fremlin Walk, however this car park can create traffic problems onto the main road at times of peak usage, so could of itself be viewed as interfering with the efficiency of the road network.

The main routes of the town appear littered with traffic lights, at nearly every junction on the through arterial roads there is a set of traffic lights either purely for traffic management or with an element of pedestrian control. Many of the junctions may potentially be considered suitable for re-alignment, redirection or closure, with a view to reducing the interruptions to traffic flow whilst still maintaining the integrity of the road network.

Widening this to identify certain specific areas where realignment may improve efficiency of vehicle flow without detriment to the pedestrian.



### **Barker Road.**

There is redevelopment potential of the immediate area bounded by Barker Road and part of Hart Street and to include the former Whitehouse car showroom. The development of residential flats at Hart Street has increased traffic flow at this location and the recent introduction of a fast service to London from Maidstone West will increase the demand for commuter parking in this area. Realignment of London Road and Barker Road to introduce a roundabout would remove the need for traffic lights at this junction, it would also negate the need for any vehicle to traverse the bridge gyratory in order to reach Lockmeadow, improve access to Maidstone West and increase the ease with which vehicles travelling from the A20 may reach the A26. Further realignment would enable the bus stop at the beginning of Tonbridge Road to be relocated to the station area, thus reducing obstruction on the traffic route of Tonbridge Road. (Benefits –improvement to the Barker Road/Maidstone West junction/access should reduce congestion in all directions).

### **Earl Street & Medway Street.**

The traffic control at Medway Street could be removed and access to and from the A229 could be closed off, with traffic re-routed via Earl Street. Medway Street is little more than a service road to access retail delivery areas and a car park. Closing Medway Street would have no effect upon the operation of existing businesses or service provision. (Benefit –reduces number of interruptions/delays on A229).

### **Lower Stone Street & Romney Place.**

Close off the left turn into Romney Place except for buses and private hire. Close off to private cars access to Lower Stone Street from Romney Place. (benefit –reduces tailbacks onto Lower Stone Street and Palace Avenue).

### **Mote Road & Watt Tyler Way.**

Close off the right turn capability on Watt Tyler Way and Mote Road. Construct a new roundabout at the junction of Watt Tyler Way and Romney Place. (benefit –freer flowing traffic northbound on A229).

### **Gyratory #4.**

Re-route traffic flow at these junctions. Close off access from Watt Tyler Way to Sittingbourne Road and create new roundabout. Redirect traffic to new roundabout at Square Hill Road linking to Andrew Broughton Way. (benefit – likely to reduce bottleneck congestion/virtual gridlock, also links 'island site' to the main town area).

I did sketch some of these out some time ago as part of a presentation to the Regeneration Group which never occurred. I have since got rid of them, but can re-draw if necessary and if considered they will aid the descriptions given above.

Christopher S Finch MRICS

6<sup>th</sup> July 2011

## Compiled responses to Call for Evidence

In response to your notice re Traffic Congestion Review, it would help immensely if MBC provided a replacement for the Armstrong Road park & ride facility that it promised at the time of the closure.

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Re sought views on traffic congestion.

I am not a professional in traffic management but travel about Kent and Sussex by car in the course of business.

Compared to other towns. Maidstone has a less serious problem than many other centres. For instance Canterbury and Tunbridge Wells are much more difficult to get through at rush hour times. Yesterday I had a meeting at Maidstone Council offices at 09:30. I left Caring Lane, Thurnham at about 09:05 and arrived in King Street at 09:15.

To get to the centre of either Canterbury or Tunbridge Wells I would need to allow at least half an hour from the outskirts to get to the centre. Places like Brighton are even worse.

However it is easy to be complacent about this matter. Certainly there are congestion problems when there are motorway problems on M20 or indeed when there are road works in the town. The London and Sutton roads do become congested at times.

Current development considerations for Maidstone will make the problem acute. I believe Maidstone should restrain its expansion ambitions in line with existing road systems. There is no proven urgent need for large scale development in and around Maidstone. Any growth decisions could be deferred for at least 10-15 years without impact on economic progress.

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The Parish Council considered the matter at its meeting last night. The only comment is whether MBC could please look at ways to encourage lorries not to use Maidstone as a through-route. We feel that some lorries drive into the town centre needlessly, adding to the congestion and pollution. There must be some means of encouraging drivers to seek alternative routes.

Regards,

Teston Parish Council

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Having just seen your advertisement on my bus into town, my suggestions to relieve congestion in Maidstone are as follows:

1. Stop allowing cars to park on narrow roads e.g. outside Gidds Ponds Cottages, nr New Cut Road, or through Bearsted village.
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2. Ensure no parking zones are actually enforced, along with resident parking bays and disabled bays ( trust me, they are not currently).
3. Encourage use of public transport by allowing us disabled and pensioners to use our bus passes all day - I now have to use my car more frequently for early appointments.
4. Ensure the traffic lights do not change when there is no traffic around - Willington Street/Ashford Road,outside Haynes garage (coming from Sittingbourne Road)and the main crossroads for Wat Tyler Way/A20 are prime examples.

None of these measures would cost much, if anything, but all would work - so the Council will probably ignore them!

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My comments on the traffic congestion in Maidstone are as follows-

- a) Firstly, it is necessary to establish the volume of traffic that is passing through Maidstone rather than stopping for work or shopping.
- b) Because the Maidstone traffic is going in various directions, especially near the two bridges,it is all stop and start caused by the numerous traffic lights that are needed.
- c) Traffic flow will improve if the direction of traffic is changed and the the number of traffic lights is reduced.
- d) Unless the motorist is given some encouragement to shop and dine in Maidstone the town will die.

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Further to the article in the Kent Messenger mid August addition, where the issue of congestion & pollution has been raised with an intent by MBC to address this issue. We have had the same view for over 6 years and have now been making rapid headway with Senior Officers and Councillors of MBC, With their positive support we have been able to progress our plans which address some of the issues raised in this editorial.

Green Leaf Leisure Ltd is a boat operator already providing boat hire services to the public on the upper Medway in Tonbridge. We are also the owners of the Barge Riverside restaurant in Maidstone and gained permissions back in 2008 from MBC to provide a congestion club, i have already had talks with both Malcolm Greer. Steve Goullete and the Environment agency and gained permissions to implement this service from April 2012.

Our Aim's:

We will be introducing a congestion club where our aim is to optimize the use of the River Medway providing a fleet small passenger boats that pick-up from designated pick-up points along the River up-to Tovil and all the new flats along the way to Maidstone near the Barge and the bridge where you can either walk across to Maidstone Barracks or Maidstone East. this service will run both in the Mornings from 6.30am - 9.30am and then again from 5pm - 8pm in the evening. This service will be using electric engines and is looking to optimise solar energy to provide a green solution that reduces congestion from our roads

while reducing pollution, it also makes use of our fantastic River Medway, which a lot of town's would give their right arms to have.

This project is already planned to be under-way next year, but we would welcome any assistance, Grants or subsidy MBC, KCC or Central Government is able to offer. There were grants available from central government for optimisation of the River Thames and separably for solar energy, but these routes are time consuming and one needs to know the approach to obtain these types of Grants which we have no experience off.

This Project could be a trail blazing opportunity for both the people in Maidstone and the council, where i recognise it doesn't solve all our towns congestion problems, it does offer a green solution that would seriously impact the issues raised in your article in the KM.

There is already some services that provide a park & ride service between Malta Inn and Maidstone which is excellent. but these services are unable to offer this service due to there boats Drafts (depth in the water ) which wouldn't allow them to operate in the locations needed to make this service work.

Other Areas of service for the River Medway we are currently offering or planning for 2012 are as follows:

We are providing a Safety boat & Surveying service to KCC which provides boats and qualified operators for river projects.

We have been approached and had meetings with KCC Licensing to become their mooring Bailiff for town centre areas of the Medway, which is under their ownership to charge and manage their moorings.

We aim to provide a boat service that provides trip to our site in Tonbridge and one coming back to Maidstone each day through the Holidays. Providing access for a lot of people that have never been up river and for tourism.

Provide a Nature trail and river safety to both Junior & secondary schools, through education to ensure that the River is their for future generations and in light of the resent deaths on the River making children aware of the dangers of the River in a safe, controlled but fun way we are also in talks with the Kent Fire Brigade to collaborate our efforts.

We have already launched The Maidstone Riverside Arts & Makers Fair which is gradually building momentum. This project started late in the year when schools colleges & universities had already broken up for summer. This project will start to fully materialise from April 2012. This project works on the bases of non-profit/volunteer and has no revenue streams from its users that is sometime associated with a charity.

As we have sites in both Tonbridge and Maidstone and communication with both their councils we aim to also provide bicycle hire along the banks of the Medway as KCC is currently regenerating the tow path this green service could also be tailored congestion of the roads. This service will be like what you

see in London where their aou pick -up and drop off point where people can just pay for the time they use.

This year we have been busy obtaining to required skills and qualification needed to develop these areas. and have already got available 6 Life guard qualified staff, 4 qualified p11 commercial boat operators, which will grow alongside the requirement. All the above provides a safe and green approach to making more use of our River and providing a safer river by life savers and creating more use. The above is supported by

The police, the environment agency and a range of MBC officers & councillors .

I am also on the executive committee of the newly formed Tourism Association and have been asked to also be on the new River association which is being form by the Environment agency in September this year.

As you will see from the above i care about were i live and the river and believe if everyone done something to change their area for the better the world would be a better place for all.

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My comments are below. I'm sorry that they are so lengthy, but you will note that I have been observing the problems in London Road since the end of 2009.

I hope that you find some value in them.

#### London Road Traffic lights: Queens Road and Buckland Hill

My observations relate to traffic going towards the town, but similar problems are experienced in the return direction.

#### Queens Road Traffic Lights

There does not seem to be sufficient priority given to traffic on the London Road. Often there are only a few cars waiting in Leafy Lane or Queens Road, and the London road traffic is halted to let them out. This can happen when there are queues on the London Road back as far as the Poplar Grove/Grace Avenue junction. It is often the case that the Queens Road lights can turn green, but only allow about 6 cars to pass before turning red again. (I frequently observe this.) I have been in correspondence about this situation with Councillor Robertson since October 2009. He has passed the information to Jacobs, responsible for operation of the traffic lights, and has received some answers. It appeared that there were unconnected traffic sensors preceding the lights, so the system was not aware of the waiting traffic in the London Road. I have commented that there are no traffic cameras on the London Road, so it is impossible for those at the The Maidstone Urban Traffic Management Control to be aware of the situation in order to make adjustments.

Two points:

Surely it is correct that priority should be given to the flow of traffic into, or out of, the town on the London Road. I appreciate that traffic flowing out of Queens Road is also important, but perhaps the flow from Leafy lane could be restricted, either by time or frequency that their lights go green.

It is a fact that every time the traffic lights change, time is wasted. I would have hoped that a computer program would have been available to maximise the traffic flow times, which might well indicate that the time periods should be extended.

### Buckland Hill Traffic Lights

The only comment I have to make is that too much priority is given to traffic flowing out of Buckland Hill on to the London Road. When compared to my comments above re the few cars which can pass through the Queens Road Traffic lights, I find that I can be 100yards away from the lights, coming up Buckland Hill, with **no cars in front of me**, and I can still pass the lights at green!

I agree that I personally find this convenient at times, but it does nothing for the flow of traffic along the London Road!

Whilst I appreciate that most of the information required can be found from Traffic Light Computer downloads etc. the lack of sufficient sensors in the approach roads and the complete absence of cameras must make this impossible, and I believe that the employment of a human observer for some periods would be the best way of understanding the problem.

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I travel from Queens Avenue to near Tonbridge to go to work and have done for nearly 30 years. During the school holidays this is a lovely journey through the country side but during term time it has become a nightmare.

The problem starts as soon as I leave my house when I do battle with all the parents dropping off their children at Shernolds school. As if this wasn't bad enough, the problem is compounded by the cars and vans using Queens Avenue as a "rat run" to avoid the lights at the bottom of Queens Road. I have had several exchanges of correspondence over the years with officers and Councillors from MBC who have promised to look into the matter and to report results of traffic surveys etc they were planning to carry out but nothing has changed. There was proposal to paint double yellow lines along part of Queens Avenue several years ago which I objected to as this would only serve to displace the school run cars further down the road, prevent me or my visitors from parking outside my house and do nothing to stop the rat runners.

Going up Queens Road past Oakwood park is always difficult but, the biggest problem area, is the junction of Queens Road with the Tonbridge Road combine with the the lights at the Hermitage Lane/Fant Lane cross roads. This is a disaster area, made worse over the years by the additional housing built along Queens Road on the "Melford Drive" estate, which has increased the traffic flow trying to get onto the Tonbridge road, a large proportion of which then appears only to queue again at the lights to turn right up Hermitage lane. The addition of traffic islands on the approach to these lights means that once more than 5 or 6 cars are queuing there, the traffic which wants to go straight ahead cannot get past and results in my sitting there, unable to move, frustratedly watching the lights turn from red to green to red again.



All this means it can take me 15 - 20 mins from my front door, to getting past the Hermitage lane lights in the morning, a distance of approx 1.5 miles.

I am sure it would ease congestion no end if there were direct access from Queens Rd to Hermitage lane via the housing estate on the old hospital grounds, as was, I understand, originally intended. With sufficient will, this could be done by creating a filter via St Andrews Road or through the new estate.

Alternatively, some of the very wide verges and pavements along Tonbridge Road could be used to permit more cars to wait to turn right without holding up the straight through traffic.

The other nightmare on my way to work is the junction at the the Wateringbury lights. However, I presume these are outside your jurisdiction.

I hope these suggestions help and would be interested in your comments. On past experience however, I shall not be holding my breath as what appears to me to be a common sense approach to traffic planning and management around Maidstone, always seem to pass MBC by.

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I am writing in response to the Traffic Special Report on page 19 of the Kent Messenger dated 18th August 2011 about air quality and traffic gridlock in Maidstone. Below is the email that I sent to my then ward councillor who was asking for solutions to improve air quality in Maidstone about this time last year. Although the subject was air pollution it did cover traffic congestion, which is a main contributor to air pollution. There was no direct response to my email so have have no idea how seriously my comments were received.

My views on how to improve air quality in Maidstone.

One of the main reasons for air pollution in Maidstone is caused from vehicle exhausts fumes. I have 3 relatively simple low cost ideas for improving this problem.

My first idea is to stop buses waiting at the roadside with their engines running pumping out fumes and polluting the atmosphere. I use the term wait to clearly distinguish from stopping to let passengers on and off. In fact in can be described as roadside parking with the engine idling, which is prohibited in some European countries.

A typical example of this is with the Arriva number 89 service, which I now frequently use. I have noticed a regular occurrence at the bus stop in Maidstone town centre just past the Queens Monument at the beginning of King Street. The bus stops for the passengers to get off, then the bus display changes to "Sorry Not In Service". The bus then waits, with the engine running, between 10 and 15 minutes. The driver then changes the display and lets on the waiting passengers before beginning its schedule service. Sometimes during the waiting period the driver is not even in the bus but is outside having a cigarette break

with the doors closed and the engine running. I have also noticed this happening at other stops for other services. I must say that the driver does not appear to leave the engine running on hot days. I realise that this is a stop for a break in the scheduled service, but there is no need to have the engine running during this period.

I have also noticed that taxis waiting along King Street, outside the old post office, often wait with their engines running so that they can gradually move along towards the front of the line.

Another cause of pollution is the traffic congestion. It appears to me that with the existing design of traffic routes and the vast number of traffic lights in the borough of Maidstone that traffic becomes trapped, clogging up the main routes making it difficult to get out of the town. So I believe that by concentrating on getting the traffic flowing out of the town would improve the situation and reduce pollution. Before I retired I travelled through the town along the A229 so I know this stretch well and whilst stuck in traffic I would often think of ways where the traffic flow out of town could be improved. I have 2 ideas to improve the traffic flow leaving the town going south.

Traffic from Loose going into town joins up with traffic from the Sutton Road at the Wheatsheaf and goes down in 2 lanes to the traffic lights at Armstrong Road. The inside lane only then continues down to Shields Crescent into town. One idea is to make a change from Armstrong Road going down into Shields Crescent by keeping the traffic to just the one inside lane until well into Shields Crescent. This would allow the traffic coming up Stone Street, out of town, to flow freely into the now free outside lane in Shields Crescent. Then make the section of road from Shields Crescent up to the Armstrong Road Traffic lights into 3 lanes with the outside lane a right turn only into Armstrong Road. This would only involve moving over the one traffic light island in the middle of the road or even doing away with it altogether.

In the past, whilst going south on the A229 in the late afternoon, I have often been held up at the white rabbit roundabout and then slowly crawled through the town to find the cause was vehicles stopping in Upper Stone Street and taking out one of the two lanes. The vehicles were stopping for deliveries, such as a car transporter, or for calling into the fish and chip shop. In both cases the drivers could have used side roads. I did make a suggestion a few years ago to have red lined non-stopping routes like they have in London but I was told that these could only be used on London Bus routes. So as an alternative suggestion, provide a couple of traffic wardens with bikes so that they can patrol the main routes to keep them clear of stopping vehicles.

In summary my 3 low cost ideas are; -

Stop vehicles waiting/parking at the kerbside with engines running.

On the A229 between Armstrong Road and Shields Crescent. Have one lane

going north into town freeing up a lane to allow 3 lanes going south out of town.

Provide bikes for traffic wardens to keep main routes open.

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The main reason for poor air quality in Maidstone is the lack of a ring road around the town due to bad decisions by both MBC & KCC.

All traffic from north Kent travelling to the Weald & vice versa have to travel through Maidstone, including HGV's such as Staplehurst Transits wanting to join the M20.

This situation will be made worse if the recycling centre at Tovil goes ahead with a lot more HGV's travelling through the town.

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So far the authorities have done a good job of killing off the town centre by making it costly and difficult to park in the town. People have to drive round and round to find a parking space creating congestion. Visitors and people working in the town do not have the free parking our councils are privileged to. The cars produce a lot of fumes driving around for car parking and the council must make the town vehicle friendly by creating more car parks which can compete against the free parking of out of town shopping areas - hence more and more cars drive through the town but do not stop to shop in it. This is THE COUNTY TOWN of Kent - help it to live up to its name - do not suffocate it

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Thanks for the opportunity to comment on the traffic problems/solutions in/for Maidstone.

In **South Maidstone** where there is major congestion and air quality issues:

- 1a at least one **Park and Ride** service needs to be re-established.
- 1b Park and Ride services need a **fare structure** such that it is cheaper to use the service rather than to park in Maidstone. (eg the Canterbury City P&R service)
- 1c Leeds/Langley bypass must be resurrected
- 1d Upper Stone Street widening scheme must be carried out

In Central Maidstone:

2 Medway Bridges Gyratory needs rearranging so that through traffic on A229 does not have to cross the river

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I hope you do not mind this email, but we just read a newspaper article saying you'd like maidstone residents views on parking and traffic around our town.

For us, it is difficult living near the centre. We live on Wheeler st which we can not park on and every day the road it self suffers from heavy traffic (people use it as a shortcut) and many large goods vehicles that stop oncoming traffic while blocking the light from homes. But the biggest problem is in the evening and nights as the road has narrow pavements and we have witnessed many accidents, near misses with children, cars hitting garden walls and many more due to speeding cars. I have written to the council asking for speed humps but nothing has happened.

Parking is also a large problem as we have to park on a neighbouring street (hedley) and there is no where near enough spaces for residents and on the weekend shopping take them all.

Sorry to moan but I hope this information helps?

Regards

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Boxley Parish Council has been invited to give its views on traffic congestion in Maidstone.

The following was agreed at its last Environment Committee Meeting.

The council has frequently complained about heavy traffic on Bearsted Road and New Cut Road, and the continuing development in the Newnham Court area which is exacerbating the problem. The congestion along New Cut Road extends back into Grove Green as traffic becomes trapped. Another area for concern is Boxley Road through the Village towards Penenden Heath roundabout, generally at peak hours. The northern end of the Parish does not suffer from congestion within the MBC area.

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I am a homeowner at xxxx Maidstone. I have a young family of two boys aged 3 and 4 years old and I am writing to express my concerns over the parking in the area in particular, however also how this effects the driving and visibility when driving in this road and nearby roads; Allen Street and St Lukes Road.

In Albany Street, there are parking bays which should mean that between certain times cars should be parked within these however this is not always monitored particularly at the top of the road where we live. We are fortunate to have access to a driveway however when cars are parked over the bay, it is very difficult and sometimes impossible to park on the driveway. The bays are too high and allow for no turning room at the top of the road. It has been mentioned that the flower beds may be removed in Albany Street and I feel this should be done as a priority to allow more parking spaces. Often cars are parked diagonally which means to get past with a buggy we have to step out onto the road which is making an un-necessary walk on the road.

At the bottom of the road, there are two very untidy and damaged flower beds with single yellow lines next too them. These need to be double yellow lines so cars cannot park there as with the flower bed plus a car parked next to it on a yellow line, the road becomes very narrow and I would dread to think what would happen if anyone at the top of the road needed an emergency vehicle such as a fire engine or ambulance as it would be near impossible for it to get through. These flower beds are NOT pretty and are really not required. Also as it is when you go out at night, when no parking restrictions are in place you almost have to take you life in your hands as you pull out of Albany Street onto Allen

Street and also the same applies when you come out of Allen Street onto St Lukes Road. More often than not the cars that park on the ends over the bays and on the corners in these roads are black cabs registered with Maidstone Borough Council. However, lots of other larger vehicles park this way too which restricts the vision and you have to end up pulling out and just hoping that no other vehicle is coming.

On occasions it is so tight due to the cars parked in the bays but then also over the bays, on the yellow lines, on the corners, anywhere there is a slightest bit of space that I can not even turn left onto Allen Street without knocking a car.

I feel that these issues really need to be looked into as a matter of urgency before there is a serious accident or an emergency vehicle is urgently required but cannot get through.

This is in response to the news release ; ref KJ/110808.

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Responses from the public by phone:

He walks and uses P&R frequently, however main concerns are regarding the commercial deliveries in Week Street as he feels they are there restricting the way for pedestrians after 9am.

He is not convinced that the Stoneborough Bus Station can handle the volume of busses.

With regards to the gyratory system over the river, he feels the road markings are not helping, and advises to take them off. Make 2 lanes for each side making it a two way system.

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Wants to know what happened to the P&R service that was promised after Armstrong Road one was closed two years ago. Now has to travel to Willington Street to use P&R, and is a firm believer in P&R services.

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Uses the busses frequently and acknowledges that there are problems with traffic in town.

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Harrietsham – cars park all along road 'nazitin' style  
Bus can't get to kerb, making it difficult to get on/off especially for pushchairs/disabled.

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Lives on Linton Road. New traffic lights at the Swan Pub/bowls club have increased traffic congestion as not enough time given to go through the lights, especially at peak times.

Also, that road is frequently dug up, and no explanation why. Is not helpful when during the day – proposes it to be done during the night/weekends instead. Also queried if the company digging up the road could pay the council a fee for disturbing the traffic flow.

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**Responses from the public by facebook:**

"Has St Peters Street onto the bridges been mentioned at all? It seriously could do with being added to the traffic lights system now that the business park there has grown so much. Dayum, asking for MORE traffic lights in Maidstone, I must be feeling ill!"

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"For the residents as we are only given one maybe 2 permits for cars. There are 230 flats and 200 parking spaces. If there's 2 cars for one flat that's 400 cars and no where to park without getting a parking fine. It's very difficult for residents to park, it would be good if we could use the asda living car park over night maybe ? " "Joint the bridge roundabout from at peters street, It needs traffic lights there even if it's only temporarily on during peak times. "

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"M20 Junction 7 through to New Cut is appalling at peak times."

Trying to get on the roundabout to go up A229 from Stacey Street area. Now that there is that slip road for traffic turning left from Maidstone bound traffic on A229, it cuts down the chance for those in the jam waiting for a gap to get on. It needs traffic lights on that roundabout for rush hour."

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"heading towards the town centre from loose ... loose road/sheals crescent/college road"

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"over the bridges, something needs to be sorted there"



**Committee Member recommendations based on Ward experience:**

That a dedicated monitor screen be pointed towards St Peter Street and one towards Tonbridge road constantly during peak traffic flow hours at the Traffic Control Centre to assist traffic management on the gyratory.

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That ways to encourage the use of public transport and reduce congestion be developed to include wider aspects of the relationship between park and ride, parking standards, on-street parking and development control, including the use of contributions from developers towards highways and public transport schemes.