

To : Maidstone Joint Transportation Board

By : Tim Read – KCC Head of Transportation

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Subject : Maidstone Transport Strategy Options

Classification: For Information and Discussion

Summary : A Kent County Council report that clarifies KCC's position on progress towards an Integrated Transport Strategy

1.Introduction

1.1 This report has been produced with the aim of clarifying Kent County Council's position on the huge challenges that lie ahead in the delivery of affordable infrastructure to support sensible levels of housing and employment growth in the Borough.

1.2 KCC's submission on the Draft Maidstone Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation clearly stated its serious concerns over the size of the proposed housing target and the planned locations, and the severe impact that this would have on the highway authority's ability to manage the network. Maidstone town centre has a long history of severe peak hour congestion problems resulting from uncontrolled disproportionate growth, and KCC as the Local Highway Authority will not accept this being simply compounded by excessive further development. The KCC response therefore presented sustainable levels of growth in sensible locations matched to affordable infrastructure with minimal impact upon the public purse.

2.Background

2.1 KCC has been reviewing the potential for various improvements to the capacity of the highway network, as shown in the attached Table. This is very much work in progress, and any options chosen will be tested through the use of the Maidstone transport model once housing and employment targets have been agreed.

2.2 The model has now been updated to 2014. MBC have requested that the next step will be to establish the Do Minimum position at the 2031 target year for the Local Plan. This will form the base from which the impact of the Local Plan aspirations, and the transport measures that will support them, can be assessed. The model work is specifically aimed at the urban area. Development in the rural areas will have local traffic and transport impacts to be addressed.

2.3 As Local Highway Authority, KCC's view is that whatever growth levels are planned, further highway capacity improvements will be necessary, but will need to balance the desire to increase capacity with the physical impact that they can cause to the environment, both urban and rural. KCC also needs to be convinced of the effectiveness, affordability and deliverability of any transport infrastructure that is eventually promoted as being necessary to support the Local Plan, and that the cost to the public purse is minimised.

3.Delivery of Infrastructure

3.1 Both authorities have a vital statutory interest in progressing work on the Local Plan and a duty to co-operate. The absence of an adopted Local Plan and agreed Transport Strategy has become a considerable difficulty in dealing with current planning applications. KCC has had to adopt a piecemeal approach to negotiating what it believes are appropriate contributions to network improvements as each site comes forward.

3.2. The total cost of the schemes shown in the attached Table is, at a minimum, some £60m. This is before the consideration of any complementary transport measures that could assist in reducing the rate of traffic growth. One of the main challenges will be to produce evidence to an eventual inquiry by the Planning Inspectorate that the infrastructure necessary to support the growth aspirations can be delivered, and indeed, is affordable. KCC will insist on this funding being guaranteed before embarking upon the complex and expensive process of promoting major road schemes.

3.3 KCC currently expects that the future funds likely to be available will fall short of the total indicated in the Table. The estimation of future available funding is extremely complex. Recent negotiations have yielded up to £3,000 per dwelling through S106 Agreements. If this figure were to be repeated for all new dwellings throughout the life of the Local Plan, the total yield would be some £40m – as over 4,000 of the 2010-2031 objectively assessed need figure have already been built. It is essential that both authorities to work together in seeking funds from developers, so that each contribution is a positive step towards an agreed comprehensive strategy.

3.4 The location of sites is also a factor. For instance, it would be unreasonable to expect development in the rural villages to fund capacity improvements in the town, as their direct impact would be very small and would come with its own local infrastructure needs, and by their location, would reduce pressure on the town's transport system.

3.5 KCC will continue to bid for central government funds such as the Local Growth Fund and any successor grants. We have already been successful, with recent awards of £4.56m to the Bridges Gyratory scheme, and £8.9m towards the Integrated Transport Strategy. The Bridges Gyratory will also be supported by a welcome contribution from MBC's New Homes Bonus.

4. Objectives

4.1 The aim of this report is to promote discussion about the location of development in transport terms, about scheme options, and to seek Members' views on what they see as an acceptable target level for journey times for the Integrated Transport Strategy. It is extremely unlikely that we would be able to reduce the impact of congestion in the town of the substantial levels of growth planned to "nil detriment" – ie to stay at their current levels without fundamentally re-assessing where the development should be located and what infrastructure it can be guaranteed to fund.

5. Additional Measures

5.1 Many of the measures shown in the Table appended to this report are at early stages of preparation. The initial cost estimates will be subject to change, but they give a general picture of the overall costs. The proposals will need to be amalgamated with the Borough Council's sustainable strategy for the Local Plan, so that both authorities can work towards a common approach to present to a government planning Inspector at the eventual Examination in Public for the Local Plan. More assessment work is required to clarify the impact and benefits that each element would entail.

5.3 In addition, MBC is currently considering the responses to their additional call for housing sites. The allocation of new sites may have an impact on the need for improvements elsewhere on the network, Both MBC and KCC would need to consider the cumulative impacts of all the potential sites.

6. Working Group

6.1 As referred to above, many of the schemes require further work, and a formal assessment of their costs and benefits, before they can be considered for adoption as part of an Integrated Transport Strategy. KCC will form a Working Group with the MBC to pursue these and other emerging schemes, which will include representatives from this Board and other interested parties, such as the Kent Association of Local Councils and the SMART group.

7. Summary

7.1 This report is intended to set out the Highway Authority's position and to promote debate and discussion. KCC would welcome clear guidance from Members on their preferences and priorities for the next steps in producing an Integrated Transport Strategy.

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