

From: Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment & Transport

To: Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste.

Decision No: 17/00138

Subject: Proposed B2163 Leeds & Langley Relief Road

Key decision Major Scheme with costs over £1m

Classification: Unrestricted

Electoral Division: Maidstone Rural East
Maidstone South East
Maidstone Rural South

Summary: This paper gives an overview of the current situation with the proposed Leeds and Langley Relief Road, identifies a programme for taking forward the preparatory work and proposes the use of section 106 developer contributions to progress traffic survey and modelling work to develop a draft business case to support future funding opportunities.

Recommendation(s):

As Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste, I agree to give approval to the Director of Highways to progress feasibility work on B2163 Leeds & Langley Relief Road utilising section 106 developer contributions.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Maidstone Borough Council, Local Plan (MLP), Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP), May 2016 includes the following:

“3.18 For the longer term the MLP and ITS [Integrated Transport Strategy] confirm the intention to investigate and assess the justification for a Leeds - Langley Relief Road at the first review of the MLP. KCC have advised that strategic traffic modelling indicates that a link between the A20 and A274 could have a significant beneficial impact upon traffic levels in the south and south east sectors of the urban area. A significant amount of work is required however to develop the detailed case, including full traffic and environmental impact studies, strategic alternatives, a preferred route and funding methods, and progress will be taken into account as the IDP is reviewed in the future.”

1.2 The Inspector, at the Examination in Public stage of the Local Plan, recognised that, *“The Borough Council is generally supportive but funding the road would be a significant challenge unless it were to support further major*

development". He formed a view that its delivery is unlikely until very late in the plan period at the earliest.

- 1.3 Maidstone's Local Plan was adopted in October 2017 and includes the following:

"4.157 Some of the VISUM modelling options tested included a proposed Leeds-Langley Relief Road (LLRR) that would relieve traffic on the current B2163 towards junction 8 of the M20 motorway. The results indicate that construction of such infrastructure may have a beneficial impact on some traffic movement patterns in the south east sector of Maidstone. This is however seen against the context of traffic movements generally in which Maidstone town centre itself and intra-urban movements (from one part of Maidstone urban area to another) are the key drivers behind trips on the network.

"4.158 The case for the justification of the construction and the delivery of a LLRR lies with the County Council as the highway authority. To date, the detailed costings (estimates vary between £50 and £80 million), environmental and route appraisals and also an assessment of whether future housing requirements would necessitate and also support construction of a LLRR which will be required to progress the proposals, have not yet been undertaken. It is therefore considered appropriate to give detailed consideration to the potential construction of the LLRR post 2031 at the review of the local plan (which will be completed by 2021)".

- 1.4 The implication is that at the start of the formal review, sufficient work would have been done to establish a preferred route for the Relief Road and to have prepared a business case and identified potential sources of funding.
- 1.5 Although the Inspector dismissed the Relief Road as an early contributor to delivery of the Local Plan housing needs, poor traffic conditions in south east Maidstone have led to increasing public interest in a Relief Road and regular requests for updates on progress.

2. Policy Framework

- 2.1 The scheme supports the Strategic Statement objectives of supporting existing businesses and encouraging economic activity with housing growth and job creation by reducing congestion and improving infrastructure and accessibility.

3. Scheme Background

Route Standard

- 3.1 The Relief Road has over recent years been contemplated as a 50mph single carriageway - where the design standards would be more sympathetic to the

topography, land use and local hamlets - providing environmental benefits by removing through traffic from both villages. This followed the very first consultation in the early 1990's where the severe impact of a high standard dual carriageway on the varied topography was considered unacceptable by the local community.

Route Options

- 3.2 Various routes are theoretically available within an area that is attractive, near to Leeds Castle, in sight of the North Downs AONB, of varied topography and geology and with a range of physical and natural environmental aspects.
- 3.3 A Relief Road has an estimated cost of at least £55m at today's prices, and this would be more like £75m in cash terms, allowing for inflation.

Assessment Status

- 3.4 Initial feasibility work carried out in 2015 included:
- Option drawings showing routes, variations and junction options.
 - Environmental constraints desktop assessment.
 - Geotechnical desktop study.
 - Surface water drainage strategy.
 - VISSUM and forecast traffic assessment for Local Plan.
 - Land referencing and acquisition cost estimates.
 - Overall scheme options estimates.

4. Further Assessment Work

- 4.1 For any proposed scheme with such a long history it is necessary to take a 'step back' and challenge previous assumptions. Any future funding Business Case will need to consider the strategic, economic, financial, commercial and management case for a scheme. It will need to consider all options including doing nothing and other transport alternatives, and to consider sustainability issues and the human rights aspects of those who would be affected by a proposed scheme.
- 4.2 An important element of such an assessment is to carry out scheme specific traffic modelling and this will require traffic surveys. The VISSUM modelling for the Local Plan provided a helpful high level view but more detailed work is required to fully assess the need and the relief road options. Such aspects would need inter alia to consider and identify:
- the problem in terms of congestion and journey times;
 - traffic that would use the Relief Road;
 - changes to the wider network such as the A274, Willington Street and B2163 westwards towards Linton;
 - impact on the A274 between Five Wents and Horseshoes Lane;
 - what interventions would be required on B2163 to maximise use of the Relief Road and relief to both villages; and

- whether the scheme should include an intermediate junction on the B2163 between the villages.
- 4.3 Such modelling is vital to fully understand the potential traffic benefits and to calculate the 'benefits to cost ratio' (BCR). Achieving a high BCR is a fundamental pre-cursor to any chance of attracting external funding support.
- 4.4 The traffic modelling would also inform the development of the route and junction options. Some of the current outline design work would also need to be reviewed to ensure that route and junction options are feasible and the environmental impacts are fully understood, so that there is confidence in options that might be offered for future public consultation.

5. Commentary

- 5.1 Traffic modelling and feasibility work are essential steps in the next stage of scheme development, but there are wider aspects to be considered that would be required to contribute to the successful delivery of a Relief Road.
- 5.2 All major schemes are a balance of advantage over disadvantage. It is important that the feasibility work is thorough so that it can be fully explained to the local community as strong local support is also a vital factor in influencing government funding support.
- 5.3 There is currently no source of government funding available. The South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) receives significant funding but that tends to be for smaller lower cost schemes. However, Kent is not alone in requiring larger major infrastructure improvements and such schemes do feature in other LEP programmes around the country. There are obvious hurdles but a scheme with significant benefits and widespread public and political support has the potential to attract funding.
- 5.4 Government funding bids require a significant level of third party match funding contributions. As planning authority, the Borough Council has a major role in securing and maximising Section 106 contributions towards a Relief Road.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The County Council is under severe financial pressure and has no revenue to fund this development work. However, there are three existing unilateral undertakings from developments currently under construction on the A274 Sutton Road from which up to £200,000 can be used.

7. Programme

- 7.1 Subject to the views of this Cabinet Committee, officers will use the available unilateral undertakings funding to support the traffic surveys, traffic modelling and further feasibility work. Consultants will be commissioned. Traffic surveys

are most sensibly undertaken in neutral months and these will be planned for spring 2018. Traffic data assessment, building and validating a traffic model and option testing will take a year to complete.

8. Conclusions

8.1 A Relief Road has been an aspiration for many years and there is understandable local interest. Scheme specific traffic modelling will identify the need and quantify the transport and economic benefits. This will clarify if there is likely to be a strong business case that could form the basis for taking advantage of any future funding opportunities. Securing funding will always remain the biggest obstacle.

9. Recommendation(s):

As Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste, I agree to give approval to the Director of Highways to progress feasibility work on B2163 Leeds & Langley Relief Road utilising section 106 developer contributions.

10. Background Documents

None

11. Contact details

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