

LEEDS PARISH COUNCIL

**Mrs Sherrie Babington - Parish Clerk
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Clare Harvey
Data Intelligence Officer
Maidstone Borough Council,
King Street,
Maidstone,
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16th July 2018

Dear Ms Harvey

In response to Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) asking for feedback on the approach to the Local Plan in Oct 2017.

Leeds Parish Council (LPC) feel very disappointed and totally let down by MBC that after numerous JTB meetings over the last 18 months, where it was clear that Kent County Council (KCC) repeatedly stated the need for road relief capacity to support the extra c.18,000 homes in the MBC local Plan i.e. well before MBC's Oct 2017 Local Plan was published.

KCC particularly saw the need for a Leeds-Langley relief road to support the road capacity for the whole of South Maidstone and this has repeatedly been ignored by MBC as an immediate priority in the local plan, which is strange given KCC are responsible for roads and highways and not MBC.

MBC also ignored over 1,600 local signatures on a petition supporting a Leeds-Langley relief road that were formally presented to the JTB/MBC/KCC, that were generated by local residents. MBC have effectively (in our LPC view) put first their own housing pressures along with their own funding pressures and local politics, ahead of the wider communities in South Maidstone and in case they forget it, those they serve.

We at LPC wrote formally to the MBC Leader in Nov 2015 suggesting the use of Section 106 levy private sector monies to help pay for the road and to ease the burden on the public purse (LPC did so a year before the MBC local plan was even published) where we stated "At £50m that is only a charge on the developer, per property, of c £2,700 extra for every house in the 18,600 plan (given most new homes will exceed c £200,000 that's a small impact on their profits) and if that was achieved alone you would then have the £50m needed. So, we require MBC to focus too on supporting infrastructure too not just the homes themselves, and as such to help access the monies for KCC to build the Leeds-Langley relief road to keep the local economy flowing and maintain the integrity of local communities and rural villages."

MBC in our view failed in their Local Plan of Oct 2017 to build into it from the start, adequate road infrastructure to support the growth in housing over time (despite KCC supporting the relief road

as a priority), and MBC did so in our view to meet the needs of the “tictat” for approaching 18,000 new homes in our area (with potentially another 7,000 in the pipeline).

The funding for a relief road could part have been (and still could be) achieved by using Section 106 levy funding more strategically and inventively by MBC, along with other measures to get funding of £70m. Some Property developers have even shown their willingness to part pay for the relief road. However, MBC fail to recognise the current scale of the traffic problems, (even before they support the building of an extra c 18,000 homes) in their plan and now seek to thwart the proof of their error by using c £70,000 of public monies to stop the measurement by KCC of traffic volumes in South Maidstone, that could prove the case either way, with 18,000 new homes modelled into the equation too.

We only assume that KCC will have to spend the same amount of tax payer monies defending their legal position. If ever there as a case for a new Unitary authority in Kent, this is one example.

As much as it saddens us in the LPC to say, we the local communities are caught in the Politics of KCC and MBC and we feel those elected Tier 1 and Tier 2 Councillors should rise above this mindset and rather look to find a pragmatic way forward between the two Councils, rather than MBC investing what appears to be £70,000 of taxpayers money funding lawyers to fight KCC via a judicial review re the S106 use of funding. Rather the traffic volume review of South Maidstone area by KCC might be used to build the empirical case for a relief road (or not, as the case may be).

We can only assume MBC are spending this money to try long term not to see S106 monies diverted to their pet projects of e.g. more bus lanes (ironically causing more car congestion and air pollution) and extra cycle path options, neither that will have any effect on the HGV's driving from London or Dover to the Weald of Kent or the heart of Maidstone, let alone those people living in Maidstone's new homes wanting to work in local towns like, Canterbury, Ashford, Medway etc. I can't think of too many people in these new homes likely to cycle those distances and the buses don't run anymore either and given MBC don't fund buses they may end up with bus lanes and no buses running!

This underlines the lack of sincere approach by MBC in our LPC view in its development of its Local Plan published in Oct 2017 to search for a fact-based view and to respect the view of the highways authority in our area, i.e. KCC. Rather MBC has in our view pursued one of ideology and Politics.

LPC will continue its support for a South Maidstone Relief Road, for the enhancement of business productivity, jobs, clean air in our local villages/towns and rural communities in South Maidstone area. This is something MBC should be doing too, not just LPC and KCC, particularly given the Relief Road has the support of two local Members of Parliament!

Regards

John Govett
Chairman Leeds Parish Council

Copies to:

KM

Downs Mail

KCC – Cllr Paul Carter

KCC – Cllr Gary Cooke

Helen Whateley MP

Helen Grant MP