

Maidstone Borough Council

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Date: 18 November 2015
My ref: FW/CAM

Dear Mr Govett

LEEDS-LANGLEY RELIEF ROAD AND INCLUSION WITHIN THE EMERGING MAIDSTONE LOCAL PLAN

Thank you for your letter dated 6th November 2015 in relation to the above matters.

I appreciate that you understand the complexities and difficulties we are experiencing with our Local Plan but I feel it is worth repeating the process to put it into context.

The National Planning Policy Framework (which sets central government planning policy) requires all local planning authorities (in England) to establish their objectively assessed housing needs in local plans. We have undertaken this exercise on a number of occasions as part of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) using up to date central government population projections.

The objectively assessed need for the Local Plan period of 2011-2031 is 18,560. Clearly, we are well into this time period and, currently, the number of houses completed, granted planning permission or are the subject of unsigned s106 agreements is over 8,500. Therefore, we are getting close to half of the need. I would also point out that 3,500 homes are planned in 3 broad locations, to be delivered in the final 5 years of the Local Plan i.e. 2026-2031. Lastly, we have a windfall allowance of over 1,000 homes.

Therefore, the amount of 'new' homes between now and 2026 is under 5,000. Many of our allocated sites are within the urban area. Indeed the High Street

Ward Members, of which I am one, made every effort to find additional space within our urban area where additional homes could be built.

I set out this contextual information not solely because of the phasing of development but because of the available funding.

We are seeking to align our Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) with our Local Plan timetable, therefore, we currently rely on Section 106 agreements with developers to contribute to infrastructure provision resulting from development. However, s106 agreements are subject to 3 legal tests:-

- Necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
- Directly related to the development; and
- Fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

One of the key means of passing these tests would be to include a policy in the emerging Maidstone Local Plan for the delivery of a Leeds-Langley Bypass much in the same way as the previous Local Plan Policy did i.e. T18 of the Maidstone Borough Wide Local Plan 2000.

However, we are not in a position to do so currently. There would need to be significantly more modelling undertaken to show inter alia that such a road would significantly reduce congestion caused by motorists driving toward Maidstone town centre and beyond, travelling along the A274. There would need to be extensive cost benefit analysis work, environmental studies, sustainability approval etc. At this point in time, I am unaware of any route formally agreed by Kent County Council and options for such a route would need to form the basis of public consultation.

As you point out, the funding would have to be set out in order for it to be examined by an Inspector. I am unclear on any recent cost estimates for the route but am clear that, to date, there has been no specific LEP bid for such a road. In order to make a successful bid, there would need to be extensive work undertaken.

The current timetable for the Local Plan is to report the Regulation 19 version to full Council in late January and hopefully the Local Plan will be examined by a government inspector in autumn 2016. This would mean that we comply with the Government's deadline for local plans of 'early 2017' and also be able to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply.

As well as not having the evidence for a Leeds-Langley Bypass, inclusion in the current emerging Local Plan would have a significant adverse impact on our tight timetable as our Local Plan Strategy would have to be re-worked.

This said, I am not necessarily against the principle of a Leeds-Langley Bypass and consider that the appropriate time for possible inclusion in the Local Plan is when the Local Plan is reviewed in 2022. By this time, there may well be firm commitment by KCC and all the evidence would have been compiled. This possibility can be 'signalled' in the explanatory text to the current emerging Local Plan and, secondly, within the Integrated Transport Strategy.

Please get back to me if need be.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fran Wilson', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Councillor Mrs Fran Wilson
Leader of the Council

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