

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION: INSPECTOR'S MATTERS, ISSUES, AND QUESTIONS

Kent County Council Written Statements

Session R6 Air Quality

QnR5.3 Should the possibility of designating a Clean Air Zone be referred to in the Local Plan whether as an alternative to, or in addition to, the Low Emission Strategy and alongside the references to investigation of the Leeds-Langley Bypass?

R5.3.1 The County Council is undertaking work to develop the justification for a Leeds-Langley Relief Road. This will inform the scheduled Local Plan review by 2022, where it will be considered alongside a range of alternative transport options.

R5.3.2 There is scope to assess the implications of a potential Clean Air Zone designation as part of the review process, either as an individual form of mitigation or as a complementary measure to support other transport interventions. Such an approach reinforces the value of a coordinated - rather than piecemeal - approach to infrastructure planning that can be properly aligned with the National Air Quality Plan.

R5.3.3 The Local Plan should therefore refer to the Leeds-Langley Relief Road and Clean Air Zone designation as core elements of the scheduled review that will take place by 2022.

QnR5.9 Would the above ITS parking actions make any contribution to reducing congestion or the air quality impacts of transport in the foreseeable future?

R5.9.1 The decision taken by the Borough Council to withdraw the Sittingbourne Road park and ride service has reduced the availability of park and ride within Maidstone. This inevitably diminishes the role that such services can play in reducing congestion and the air quality impacts associated with travel.

R5.9.2 The jointly commissioned VISUM transport model has accounted for the scope to improve bus service frequencies on the main radial routes into Maidstone. The findings highlight how traffic conditions on parts of the highway network, in particular the A229 and A274 in the south eastern sector of Maidstone, make it highly unlikely that any marginal operational gains would lead to a level of model shift sufficient to meaningfully reduce congestion or air quality impacts.

R5.9.3 The scope to introduce bus priority measures must be viewed on a case-by-case basis to establish whether demonstrable overall benefits can be achieved. This will include a review of the consequential effects of such provision on other road users, which can include the localised worsening

or displacement of congestion and associated air quality impacts.

R5.9.4 The 50% increase in town centre parking charges forms part of the transport strategy covering the period to 2022 that was agreed by the Joint Transportation Board on 13th July 2016. The Borough Council's intention to implement these changes over a longer timeframe (by 2031) is at odds with the board resolution. It therefore remains unclear whether the application of parking restraint will enable a balanced package of transport interventions to be achieved, to the potential detriment of air quality.

QnR5.10 Does what the High Court describes as the urgent need for measures to address the current infraction of Nitrogen Dioxide pollution limits require more radical measures to encourage modal shift for journeys into Maidstone town centre so as to reduce the number of vehicles entering the town from both existing and proposed development?

R5.10.1 The County Council has maintained that a plan-led strategic approach to mitigation is required to ensure that development has the transport infrastructure necessary to support it. An uncoordinated, piecemeal approach to development is very unlikely to achieve meaningful changes to travel patterns and is not in the interest of existing communities and the travelling public, who will be faced with even longer queuing and delays.

R5.10.2 It is therefore imperative that major development in the most constrained part of Maidstone, namely the south eastern sector, does not come forward in advance of the scheduled 2022 review due to the severe impact it will have on congestion. The review will enable a wide range of transport options to be fully considered, including those offering scope to facilitate genuine modal shift.

QnR5.11 In particular, given the concentration of development close to a high frequency bus route in South East Maidstone, should the current Local Plan's bus lane proposal be reinstated along Sutton Road as a firm plan policy in order to encourage modal shift to a more reliable and (low emission) bus service to the town centre and to Maidstone East railway station?

R5.11.1 The County Council, as Local Highway Authority, does not support the inclusion of a policy that is at odds with the views of the Joint Transportation Board, who have rejected the concept of a bus lane on Sutton Road. Furthermore, the Highway Authority will neither promote nor permit such a scheme on the A274 Sutton Road. It must be emphasised that the Borough Council deleted the A274 bus lane from the Draft Integrated Transport Strategy at the meeting of its Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee on 14 December 2015. It is therefore clear neither Authority wishes to pursue such a scheme. It is highly unlikely that any marginal operational gains would lead to a level of modal shift sufficient to justify the disadvantages experienced by other road users.

R5.11.2 The forms of mitigation that may be required to support development in south east Maidstone have not yet been identified. It is essential that a range of strategic transport mitigation options, including forms of bus priority, are considered as part of the Local Plan review by 2022. Until the outcomes of the review are known, development in south east Maidstone is premature in view of the severe impact it will have on congestion.

QnR5.12 Would the potential benefits from modal shift for improved air quality and reduced congestion outweigh the loss of part or all of the grass verge in Sutton Road?

R5.12.1 It is not currently known whether any operational gains arising could achieve a level of modal shift that would compare favourably with other transport options that do not involve any loss of the verge along Sutton Road. This should be explored and clarified as part of the Local Plan review by 2022, including the proper consideration of a range of important environmental and social amenity matters.

QnR5.13 As Countryside Properties have given evidence that they would only be able to implement allocation H(10) Land South of Sutton Road at a rate that would deliver about 650 out of 800 dwellings within the plan period, should that 800 allocation be reduced by 100-200 dwellings in order to accommodate a park and ride site within the H1(10) allocation that would also make use of the above bus lane?

R5.13.1 No assessment has been undertaken to identify the impacts of this development scenario. It is therefore uncertain how a reduced scale of development coupled with the potential benefits of a dedicated, high frequency park and ride service could affect the balance of considerations, having regard to the prevailing road conditions and the disadvantages that may be experienced by other road users.

R5.13.2 The scope for public transport improvements of this nature to form part of the mitigation required to support development in this location could be explored as part of the Local Plan review by 2022.

QnR5.14 Should the Local Plan commit to identifying additional park and ride locations to the north and south of the town as proposed in earlier drafts?

R5.14.1 The County Council would welcome a policy commitment to reinstate the recently withdrawn Sittingbourne Road park and ride service.

R5.14.2 The scope for additional park and ride sites to form part of the mitigation required to support new development could also be explored as part of the Local Plan review by 2022.

QnR5.15 Should the creation of additional park and ride spaces be matched by a reduction in long stay car parking in the town centre notwithstanding the ITS commitment to maintain the present number?

R5.15.1 There is an opportunity to use parking availability and pricing as a means of encouraging uptake of a park and ride service, thereby helping to reduce the number of traffic movements within Maidstone town centre. This is consistent with the balanced approach to strategic mitigation that was agreed by the Joint Transportation Board on 13th July 2016 in their resolution on the content of a transport strategy covering the period to 2022.