

## Strategic Road Network Access - Options Appraisal and Design (Preliminary)

Maidstone Local Plan Review - Lidsing Garden Village

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## **Document Control Sheet**

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## **C&A Consulting Engineers**

Park House, Park Farm East Malling Trust Estate Bradbourne Lane Aylesford, Kent ME20 6SN

Tel: 01732 448120

Landmark House Station Road Hook Hampshire RG27 9HA

Tel: 01256 630420

enquiries@c-a.uk.com



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## 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1 C&A Consulting Engineers have prepared this report for Lidsing Garden Village, a proposed allocation in the Maidstone Local Plan Review. The development would provide around 2,000 dwellings, 14 hectares of employment, a 3-form entry primary school, and a local centre.
- 1.1.2 This note summarises high level options that have been considered during the initial evaluation of development potential, masterplan development and concept access and in particular highway access to the Strategic Road Network (SRN) managed by National Highways. It principally considers matters of highways but where appropriate places signposts for consideration of other disciplines. These are not necessarily representative of the comprehensive set of constraints, opportunities and receptors that have or will be considered in defining a preferred option.
- 1.1.3 This report is a live document that will be enhanced in its consideration of non-highway matters and receptors, but also with more detail on the preferred option. The evolution of this document will continue through the remainder of the Local Plan process, through to outline planning application and ultimately to detail design/implementation. In this regard, the work should be considered a work in progress. Nonetheless, it provides a valuable steer on the rationale for the current preferred option and the relative implications of reasonable alternatives.

## 1.2 Access to the Strategic Road Network

- 1.2.1 The scale and location of the site means that a connection to the SRN would be desirable, specifically the M2 motorway which forms a southern bypass of the Medway Towns conurbation. A key constraint in the evaluation of these options is the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which is bounded to the north by the M2 motorway between Junctions 2 and 4.
- 1.2.2 Four high-level options have been considered in terms of access to the SRN and the local road network:
  - Do Nothing no new access to SRN;
  - No SRN connection local road network enhancements including east-west link;
  - Indirect SRN Access at M2 J4 the preferred option and in accordance with submitted plans connecting link road to M2 J4 as a southern fourth arm;

• New Direct connection to M2 - provision of a new M2 J3a but likely unachievable due to proximity to M2 J4.

# Option 1 - Do Nothing (No Direct/Indirect Access to the SRN)

## 2.1 Description

- 2.1.1 This option represents the do-nothing insofar as it envisages no new access to the SRN, nor any substantiative or targeted enhancement to the local network to manage or mitigate access to the SRN.
- 2.1.2 Under this option, access to the local road network would be delivered in a manner appropriate for the development and with localised mitigation of local road network as might be expected from any development. Figure 2.1 below is provided as reference for the following discussions.

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Wilderstade

Wilderstad

Figure 2.1 – Highway Network Reference Plan

## 2.2 Traffic Implications on the SRN

2.2.1 In Option 1, it can be reasonably assumed that access to and from the development and the SRN would take place in a manner broadly consistent with the existing adjoining residential and commercial areas.

- 2.2.2 The configuration of Hoath Way and J4 is such that access to J4 of the M2 would continue to be constrained. J4 of the M2 (see [1] on above plan) is a three-arm grade-separated junction. Numerous studies undertaken by the promoter for this scheme and others have identified notable shortcoming in this junction configuration that significantly limits its capacity. While localised improvement options exist to extract some betterment; this junction is ultimately constrained while it remains a three-arm grade separated arrangement. Roundabouts can provide high levels of capacity where there is a good balance to the turning movements and therefore a balance of opposition and opportunity. This will always be limited on a three-arm grade separated junction, simply because there can never be a very good balance in turning movements.
- 2.2.3 For example vehicles turning right from the north (Hoath Way) to the west (M2 London bound) essentially takes place unopposed, because there is no ahead movement west to east through roundabout (this takes place on the motorway) and there is not right turn from west to east (as there is no southern exit). Whilst this allows high capacity to be provided to the north-west movement, it heavily compromises the M2 exit from east, which gains little opportunity to join the roundabout, and gives rise to extensive queuing. This queuing already occurs and currently causes queuing that extends back to and along the mainline carriageway of the SRN. Options to effectively mitigate this junction would therefore include significant interventions that include major changes to the infrastructure, which are considered to fall outside of the scope of this 'do-nothing' scenario option. Such interventions are considered under Option 2 and 3.
- 2.2.4 Notwithstanding this, access to M2J4 is regardless constrained by the local road network and in particular access to Hoath Way at Sharsted Way. (see [2] on above plan). The details of this will be discussed below.
- 2.2.5 As a result of the above; coupled with a general distribution trend which sees a higher proportion of traffic routing to/from the west, this will put considerable additional pressure of M2J3 (see [3] on above plan) from development traffic with no opportunities taken to encourage reassignment of existing traffic away from this primary constraint.
- 2.2.6 An exercise is on-going by Kent County Council, in cooperation with National Highways, to improve M2J3 and the Bluebell Hill (A229) corridor more generally, however, this remains to conclude at this stage. It is clear however that the overall network around M2J3 has notable constraints and the challenges of improvement here will always be greater.

2.2.7 As will be detailed latter, the lack of a direct SRN connection or any other significant infrastructure would preclude a viable 'link road.' A benefit of a link road in this location is the provision of local route parallel to the M2, providing for local movements to avoid the SRN, reducing 'junction hopping' and otherwise ensuring that the SRN fulfils its primary purposes of serving strategic movement.

## 2.3 Traffic Implications on the Local Road Network

- 2.3.1 As discussed above, in Option 1 without direct access to the SRN or any significant infrastructure to enhance such access, the burden of development traffic generation will fall to a large extent on the local road network.
- 2.3.2 This option would likely assume a masterplan with multiple points of access to North Dane Way in the northwest; Hempstead Road in the northeast; and Lidsing Road in the south.
- 2.3.3 While some level of internal permeability of the masterplan is inevitable, without other significant infrastructure the network around the connection points to the northeast and south are unlikely to facilitate any real encouragement of through movement, particularly for traffic, such a through the delivery of a 'link road.' Lidsing Road is already used as a 'rat-run' through this area for connection between the south/west and east and it is the feeder connection which particularly constrain this. The masterplan will likely have to retain this connectivity and manage it; but opportunity to better facilitate and even encourage travel, including non-car sustainable modes, will be more limited.
- 2.3.4 Given the constraints to the south and northeast, the development would converge towards more of an extension to Lordswood than a missing link between Lordswood and Hempstead; missing the opportunity for wider benefit of this.
- 2.3.5 The development would be unable to derive any mitigation to the perceived 'ratrunning' issue through Bredhurst. In practice, it might be assumed that the development would increase traffic through Bredhurst as traffic routes towards M2J4 by less direct routes.

#### 2.4 Other Constraints

2.4.1 Option 1 would avoid the need for development to extend south of the M2 in the form of works to J4. This would avoid the risk of impact of the setting of the AONB.

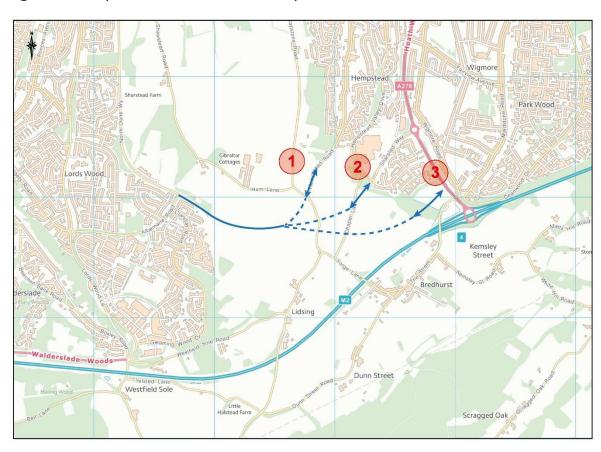
- 2.4.2 Conversely and as noted above, this option would preclude any real traffic assignment benefits, such as through a link road. Such benefits would have included reduction in traffic on rural lanes south of the A2 and through communities such as Bredhurst and Boxley. Traffic impact such as this is understood to be a consideration when evaluating impact on the AONB.
- 2.4.3 With an intensification of use of local roads through existing residential areas, it might be assumed that the risk of air quality and noise impacts are greater under this option.

## 3 Option 2 - Local Enhancements Rather Than New SRN Access

## 3.1 Description

- 3.1.1 This option envisages no new connection to the SRN at J4 or elsewhere; but instead focuses on significant enhancement to the local road network. It is assumed that the aim of this exercise would be to achieve some or most of the objectives of a 'link road' from east to west, but avoid routing south of the M2.
- 3.1.2 For the most part, connectivity to North Dane Way in the west remains the same for all options. In contrast, the variability here relates to connectivity in the east and in this respect this option encapsulates a number of sub-options at this local level. When considering the options evaluated, these can be broadly summarised as follows:
  - Enhanced connection to Hempstead Road;
  - Connection to Sharsted Way/Hempstead Valley Drive junction;
  - Connection directly to Hoath Way.
- 3.1.3 These options are shown indicatively below in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 - Option 2 Eastern Access Options



- 3.2 Traffic Implications on the SRN
- 3.2.1 This option would aim to improve access to the local network, without direct connection to the SRN; in doing so some additional level of east-west local connectivity could be provided that may have the scope to assist impact on the SRN.
- 3.2.2 The provision of additional east-west connectivity could assist in reducing SRN 'junction hopping' as more drivers are able to use the local road network. Likewise, it is possible that new opportunities will be created for movement towards the more appropriate SRN junction on the local road network. For instance, those seeking to travel between Lordswood and the east would be potentially offered great opportunities to do so via junction 4.
- 3.2.3 However, the benefits to the SRN are notably constrained by the nature of local connections in this option. Loading of development demand on to Hoath Way, either directly (Sub-option 3) or via other local roads (sub-options 1 and 2) would ultimately still load demand on to the northern arm of M2J4, further increasing the imbalance in flows that already lead to congestion, as discussed previously.
- 3.2.4 Whilst localised mitigation at M2J4 is likely to be possible; experience from developing improvement schemes here suggest that such proposals would delivery finite levels of additional capacity; without a wholesale change to the configuration. Where a junction between two dual-carriageways is formed in this manner, where one road terminates at the junction (Hoath Way) thus forming a three-arm junction, significant increases in capacity generally require wholesale changes. Typically, this might include a multi-level, free flow interchange, such as that illustrated below in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 - Example Free-Flow Three Arm Junction



- 3.2.5 The notable feature of such a higher capacity free flow interchange is that it would requires comparably large-radius slip roads on and off the southern carriageway of the motorway. These would encroach to the south considerably more than the roundabout as existing and in this case, into the AONB.
- 3.2.6 This option also requires wholesale reconfiguration of the on/off-slips of the motorway, including off-setting of the respective slips and an overall widening of the zone of influence of the junction to allow the appropriate radii for the slip roads. An indicative evaluation of this design approach suggests that the eastbound onslip, which would require a minimum centre line radius of 180m, would impact on existing residential areas. The result connection to the mainline carriageway would also be moved further east, closer to the existing MSA off-slip, which is already outside DMRB standards due to spacing. Finally, changes necessary to the western slips, particularly the off-slip would require significant modification to the Maidstone Road overbridge.
- 3.3 Traffic Implications on the Local Road Network
- 3.3.1 Whilst a solution that provides mitigation of M2J4 may be achievable, in the manner discussed above, it would continue be accessed from the local road network; most likely by one of the three sub-options set out in Figure 3.1.
- 3.3.2 The constraints on the local network mean that these options are considered unlikely to derive acceptable outcomes. Sub-option 1 would further direct development traffic and potential reassigning local traffic on to local roads through residential areas, which while currently operating within capacity, are unlikely to sustain demand from the development proposals.
- 3.3.3 Sub-option 2 appears reasonable from the outset, as it would connect to the existing three arm roundabout of Sharsted Way and Hempstead Valley Drive. However, it understood that this approach is precluded by ancient woodland (See Figure 3.3), seen along the southwestern edge of the highway. Regardless, such an access would also divert traffic to the existing constraint of the Sharsted Way/Hoath Way junction. Recent assessments of this junction have identified scope for mitigation; but that this is constrained by the scale of additional traffic it could accommodate and not to the level of the proposed development.





3.3.4 The third sub-option noted would envisage a connection directly to Hoath Way, south residential area of The Rise. This area is topographically challenging because Maidstone Road already runs underneath Hoath Way, largely precluding an adjoining junction. A junction incorporating Maidstone Road would need to be positioned to retain connectivity to Wigmore and making reasonable assumptions of land that could be made available, would place the junction very close to M2J4. The risk of negative interaction between the two junctions, even and possibly more so if the latter was made free-flow, would not be consistent with contemporary design standards and would most likely be rejected by National Highways and the local highway authority.

### 3.4 Other Constraints

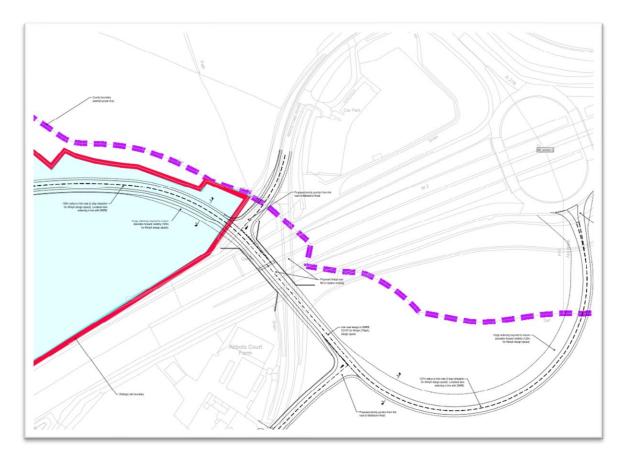
- 3.4.1 As noted above; mitigation of M2J4 in this scenario would be likely to give rise to a need for improvements that would encroach substantially in to the AONB (as per the example in Figure 3.2).
- 3.4.2 Options to secure improved connectivity to the local road network would put pressure on loss of ancient woodland, in order to secure access in the least worst location in highways terms.
- 3.4.3 The constraints of the local access solutions are unlikely to derive significant reassignment benefits for access to the SRN via local routes, such that traffic assignment on to the local rural lanes, including within the AONB would continue and possibly exacerbated.

## 4 Option 3 - Indirect SRN Access at M2 Junction 4

## 4.1 Description

4.1.1 This option is consistent with that previously put forward for consideration in the MBC Local Plan Reg 18 and 19 stages. It includes a new connection to the M2, indirectly via the creation of a fourth, southern, arm at Junction 4. This solution would also envisage a replacement/realignment of the existing Maidstone Road bridge crossing of M2, west of junction, to facilitate a link road connection from the SRN, through the proposed development and to North Dane Way at Lordswood in the west. The SRN components of the scheme are shown indicatively on Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1 - Indicative Alignment of Indirect SRN Connection at M2J4.



4.1.2 Again, the connectivity to the west remains the same as earlier options. Whilst connectivity to other local roads, such as Lidsing Road would remain, these are anticipated to be for local purposes only.

## 4.2 Traffic Implications on the SRN

- 4.2.1 This option would allow indirect access to the motorway network through modification of the existing junction. Subject to appropriate design of this junction, such an arrangement will allow this indirect access to be formed without impact on the existing mainline carriageway.
- 4.2.2 Presently, M2J4 suffers from congestion on both the Hoath Way approach from the north, due to high volumes of demand, and on the westbound off-slip due to the aforementioned demand preventing traffic from joining the roundabout in an effective manner from the slip road. The queuing on the arm is noted to extend back to the mainline carriageway, with the resultant safety concerns. The basis for these issues has been discussed under Option 1 and alternative major interventions considered under Option 2.
- 4.2.3 This option considers a further alternative where the capacity of junction 4 is enhanced by the creation of a fourth, southern arm. This approach directly responds to the shortcomings of the current three arm configuration, without wholesale change to the configuration. It is not envisaged that changes to the slip roads will be required and initial forecasting suggests that the changes could result in a net improvement to the operation of the SRN locally.
- 4.2.4 Looking at the SRN more holistically, this option would provide a new means for traffic in the local area to move between the east and west, without use of the motorway. It would facilitate a redistribution of demand between the M2J3 and M2J4, with traffic able to utilise the most appropriate access point to the SRN and minimise localised junction hopping.
- 4.2.5 When considered in combination with the access to North Dane Way and the link road, this scenario provides a significant new element of local highway infrastructure which enhances local connectivity and opportunities for sustainable travel; which subsequently support reduction in overall traffic generation and SRN impact.
- 4.2.6 In order to facilitate delivery of the link, this option would require a significant change to the configuration of the Maidstone Road overbridge; as was the case with option 2. This would result in construction disruption. Any new configuration would need to be designed and delivered in a manner that ensures both effective construction with minimised disruption, but that also provided for long-term futureproofing of the mainline carriageway.
- 4.2.7 As will be discussed later; this same connection between M2J4 fourth arm and link road via Maidstone Road would need to be constructed within the AONB.

## 4.3 Traffic Implications on the Local Road Network

- 4.3.1 This option would deliver a large component of local highways infrastructure, providing indirect access to the SRN. The new route options opened up by the approach would allow for more effective and appropriate reassignment of traffic to M2J4, reducing demand on Hoath Way to the north and the local feeder routes.
- 4.3.2 The option is anticipated to be successful in drawing local traffic to these routes and local connection at North Dane Way will increase movements around the point of connection in the west and residual consequence of this. However, North Dane Way and Albemarle Road are essentially over specified highway routes, originally designed and constructed in anticipation of an onward connection, similar to that considered in this option. Accordingly, the anticipated increase in demand arising from an effective new east to west connection can be accommodated within the local network capacity.
- 4.3.3 This option would likely derive betterment to local routes within Hempstead, as new opportunities become available via the link to Hoath Way at M2J4. While ostensibly an indirect connection to the SRN, this connection also allows for routes through to the local road via Hoath Way.
- 4.3.4 Current traffic forecasting suggests that such a connection will also provide relief to existing local rural lanes, including those to the south of the M2 within the AONB. In particular, the route through Bredhurst, which is currently considered locally to be a 'rat-run', will see net reductions in traffic as the new link road will provide an alternative, more appropriate link from east to west.

## 4.4 Other Constraints

- 4.4.1 A notable impact of this proposal is the need for a connector road from M2J4; which inherently must be located within the area south of the motorway and thus within the AONB.
- 4.4.2 Likewise, the proposals are anticipated require a reconfiguration of the existing Maidstone Road junction, which in association with the connector road will constitute further development within the AONB.

## 5 Option 4 - New Direct Connection to M2

## 5.1 Description

- 5.1.1 Options 2 and 3 previously discussed considered access strategies that enhance connectivity to the M2 at the existing Junction 4 and thus give rise to inherent works to the south of the junction, including comparably large-radius connector roads.
- 5.1.2 This alternative option envisages a scenario where such encroachment to the south could be achieved by the introduction of an additional motorway junction, which if formed as a simple 'three-arm' junction could, minimise the extent of construction taking place within the AONB.
- 5.1.3 Options to deliver a more comprehensive additional junction, such as with a fourth arm to the south, have been discounted on the following basis:
  - Securing a fourth arm would require a junction configuration and connection link that would essentially constitute a scale of development in the AONB comparable to Options 2 and 3, making it redundant;
  - 2. In the absence of any development or strategic road options to the south, a fourth arm would invariably connect to the local road network; creating the opportunity for unwanted and impactful assignment of traffic on to the road network, again contrary to the objectives of this option.
- 5.1.4 An approximate location for such a junction is shown in Figure 5.1 below. This has been positioned on the basis that junction needs to appropriately serve the proposed development and to maximise separation between the two existing Junctions 3 and 4, effectively creating Junction 3a.

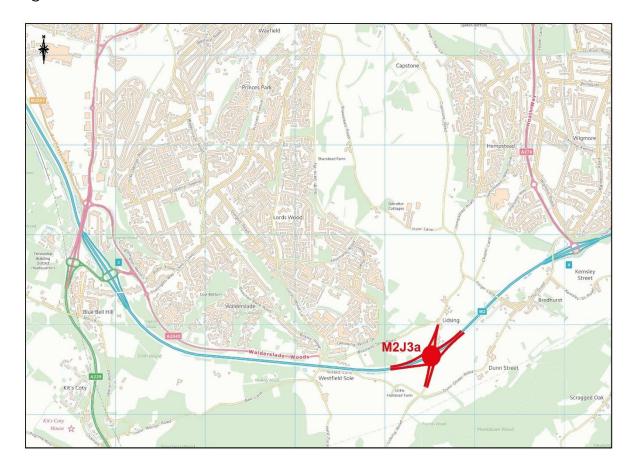


Figure 5.1 - Indicative Location of an M2J3a

5.1.5 For the purpose of this scenario, it is assumed that a link would again be provided from this new junction to the local road network. As with Option 2, there are a number of sub-options. Indicatively these can be considered to be either a connection to the west, at North Dane Way; or to the east in the manner shown under option 2. Given the constraints identified under option 2, it is assumed for current purposes that the connection would be to the west.

## 5.2 Traffic Implications on the SRN

- 5.2.1 Conceptually, this option would have the scope to provide relief to both Junctions 3 and 4 of the M2, to betterment of the operation of the SRN in traffic terms.
- 5.2.2 However, this betterment needs to be considered in the context of other implications, most notably safety as determined through the consistency with prevailing design standards.
- 5.2.3 Rural motorways (as is the case here) generally require a separation between junctions of 3km, unless a weave section length can be determined that allows this to be reduced. The spacing between M2J4 and a proposed M2J3a would be a little over 1km (as measured from the end of the respective slip roads).

- 5.2.4 A weave distance assessment, in accordance with DMRB CD122 "Geometric design of grade separated junctions", indicates a requirement for 2km, considerably greater than what is achievable here.
- 5.2.5 In the absence of a suitable weave section, National Highways would not endorse a new motorway junction on basic design principles. The consequence of a relaxation here would be an unsafe operation to the main line carriageway of the SRN.

## 5.3 Traffic Implications on the Local Road Network

- 5.3.1 As discussed, this option would secure a connection between the new junction and the local network at North Dane Way. The wider development would invariably also secure other access to the local network; albeit through movement may not be encouraged due to the limitations on the latter.
- 5.3.2 This option would facilitate improved access between the local road network in the west and the SRN, which could assist in addressing local traffic issues with access to Junction 3 and the feeder routes.
- 5.3.3 However, this scenario would not facilitate a strong east-west connection on the local road network and therefore would be unlikely to derive substantial benefit to the rural road network or local network in the east. To the contrary, the proposals would be likely to draw demand over the local and rural road network to the new SRN junction.

#### 5.4 Other Constraints

5.4.1 Whilst this option is intended to minimise the extent of works within the AONB, even the delivery of a modest and simplified three-arm roundabout junction would nonetheless include an element of works south of the M2. It would also give rise to an additional, elevated junction along the M2, within the setting of the AONB.

## 6 Preferred Option Design Refinement

## 6.1 Preferred Option

- 6.1.1 Based on the outcome of the above appraisal, the current preferred option is that outlined in Option 3 a new indirect connection to the M2 at Junction 4.
- 6.1.2 This approach is reflected in both the on-going master planning exercise and the emerging policy for the site allocation.
- 6.1.3 This design remains conceptual and it is envisaged that this options and design report will continue to evolve to encapsulate the localise design options appraisal exercise, within the confines of the preferred option. This will for instance examine specifics of the alignment of the connecting link south of the M2; balancing the need to minimise impact on the AONB and facilitate mitigation of residual impact.

## 6.2 Next Steps

- 6.2.1 In order to advance the preferred option design further information gathering is required. The initial objectives of this exercise will be to develop a design to a standard necessary to demonstrate to key statutory consultees the necessity; appropriateness and effectiveness of the preferred option.
- 6.2.2 The following is a non-exhaustive summary of the next steps in evidence gathering necessary to advance the preferred option design representing that which will be brought forward within the immediate Local Plan evidence gathering:
  - Further modelling of the development traffic impact, including an anticipated analysis using the Medway AISMSUN microsimulation subnetwork 5, which includes M2J4 and the adjoining network – in order to ascertain the detailed capacity requirement of the connection and inform an appropriate detailed network design;
  - An additional topographic survey of the area around the proposed connection and link; to supplement/supersede preliminary LIDAR data used to date;
  - Supplementary landscape, ecology etc. baseline assessment and appraisal of impact, both to inform detail route option and to assess the need and scope for mitigation of residual impact;

- Further consultation with statutory authorities and other stakeholders on the parameters of the design; including but not limited to community consultation on localised connections facilitated or otherwise by the preferred option;
- A preliminary (to Stage 1 level) design of the connection to M2J4, any enhancement to M2J4, the 'spur' to the south of the M2 and the bridge crossing;
- Commencement of a WCHAR based on the preferred option;
- Undertaking a Stage 1 Road Safety Audit of the preferred option.
- 6.2.3 It is anticipated that this 'live' options and design report will evolve to include the findings of the above evidence gathering exercise.
- 6.3 Initial Vertical Design of Spur
- 6.3.1 Notwithstanding the requirements for the information set out above in order to allow initial critical appraisal of the preferred option with respect to potential impact and mitigation requirements with respect to the AONB, a preliminary concept design of the 'spur' between M2J4 and the bridge crossing and junction with Maidstone Road has been advanced.
- 6.3.2 The design is indicative in nature and while based on appropriate highway design principles within DMRB, it is not presented for audit or consideration in highway design, road safety or other engineering matters at this stage. The purpose of the initial design is to provide an indication of the scale, massing and indicative levels of the spur for the aforementioned consideration of potential AONB impact and subsequently for feedback on this to inform the next stage of optioneering and design.
- 6.3.3 **Drawings 19-062-014 to 016** provide indicative long sections, chainage locations and extent of earthworks (with typical sections) for a possible alignment of the M2J4 spur.

Drawings



