



## Stage 1 Final - Leeds Langley (Heath) Topic Paper

0	Introduction
	<p><b>Background</b></p> <p>The emerging development plan proposes a new policy area, LPRSP5(A), that includes a new Strategic Development Area around the Leeds / Langley corridor.</p> <p>A map showing the extent of the safeguarded land, in the context of Maidstone, area is appended to this topic paper.</p> <p>In this topic paper we outline the history and rationale for this policy– drawing on adopted policy LPR1. This adopted policy required the council, through its local plan review, to consider the case for a new road route connecting Langley Village with the M20 in the north – looking to avoid Leeds village and minimise any impact on the physical and historic environment.</p> <p>A summary of the proposed safeguarded area is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>An area of 435 hectares, the majority under control of a limited number of promoters who, originally promoted as separate parcels as part of the Council Garden Community proposal workstream</b></li> <li>• <b>Includes provision for new highway infrastructure of approximately 4km (2.5m) connecting A274 to A20, at a cost of circa £80m – meeting a long-held Council objective to improves access to the M20 for a large part of Maidstone Borough – that avoids the need to transit through the Town</b></li> <li>• <b>Potential for circa 4,000 houses, broadly split 2,000 southern end (A274/Langley Heath) and 2,000 northern end (A20/Leeds). These houses will fund the road in the absence of public funding</b></li> <li>• <b>Green space / country park</b></li> <li>• <b>Other policy designations to deliver a comprehensive Garden Community Style scheme avoiding potential piecemeal ribbon style development</b></li> <li>• <b>NO MAJOR DEVELOPMENT IS PROPOSED PRIOR TO A REVIEW OF THIS PLAN</b></li> <li>• <b>A REVIEW THAT, BENEFITTING FROM MORE DETAILED TECHNICAL EVIDENCE, CAN BETTER SHAPE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICES.</b></li> </ul> <p><b>As a safeguarded site the Council is able to delete the policy in the event that detailed technical work identifies ‘showstoppers’ or in the event national policy changes.</b></p> <p>This paper is supported by other, more detailed work including:</p> <p><b>Appendices:</b></p> <p><b>A. Letter from Cllr Payne (KCC) LLRR 20.10.01</b></p>



- B. Policy Designations, Indicative Route Alignment, and Indicative Development Parcels**
- C. LPR 1.76 Leeds Langley Corridor (Responding to LPR1) Stantec 2021**
- D. Leeds Langley Safeguarded Area in Local Context**

#### **What does the proposed policy say?**

The emerging policy LPR5 is noted.

- 2) A potential strategic development location will be safeguarded for delivering a new Leeds-Langley Relief Road.

*Figure 1: Extract from p64 Reg 19 submission (POLICY LPRSP5 – STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT LOCATIONS)*

The intention will be to commence detailed work on this quickly, in order that it will be ready to propose as an allocation in the next local plan noting the emerging policy LPRSP5(A)

#### **POLICY LPRSP5(A) – DEVELOPMENT IN THE LEEDS-LANGLEY CORRIDOR**

1. Land within the corridor defined on the policies map, will be safeguarded for potential future development, which will be required to provide a quantum of enabling development which will meet its own and future highway needs and to provide connectivity between M20 junction 8 and the A274.
2. Development proposals which come forward in the defined corridor will be assessed for their potential to prejudice the delivery of a new highway. Proposals for new residential and commercial development coming forward in the defined corridor will need to be accompanied by a masterplan demonstrating how the development of the site potentially contributes to or does not inhibit the delivery of a Leeds Langley relief road.

*Figure 2: Extract from p66 Reg 19 submission*

Paragraph 6.82 introduces the coupling of development and delivery of the relief road. Thus, two differing objectives become aligned, the (Highways Authority) aspiration for bypassing the two communities on the B2163 (A274 to A20), and the future (Planning Authority) need to provide a Local Plan Review for the next round of housing need.

#### **What is the objective (vision) for this area?**

The current B2163 forms a locally significant link between large parts of Maidstone Borough (inc. the rural southern areas) and the strategic road network (M20/A20) avoiding Maidstone town. But the current route is poorly suited to this role with the current route running through the (historic) Leeds village.

It has been a long-standing objective of the Council to address this with a new route. But so far funding proved elusive, and it is probable that, in the current funding climate, the route can only be delivered via development.



This is not because the route is poor, on the contrary the Councils evidence demonstrates that this is a scheme with a likely high VfM based on Benefit to Cost Ratio (summarised in LPR1.76) but that, in the current climate, most infrastructure funding is directly related to the delivery of homes and this proposal, while significant to Maidstone, is not significant enough to attract external funders.

The Council also considers that this is an area of Maidstone that could, in the future, help meet the need for more development land. There is a continued need to find more land for housing yet the supply of sites that can accommodate development is diminishing as 'spare' or surplus capacity is taken up – physical and also environmental capacity. Looking to future, this will only get harder.

Recognising this, the Leeds Langley area is seen as one that could be a sustainable location, one that avoids significant policy constraints and is in close proximity to the Town. But this land can only become sustainable on the back of a 'big bang' investment in infrastructure – incremental investment will not deliver the Council the future portfolio of land it needs.

As part of the Garden Community process, it became apparent that there was scope to connect two broad development parcels together with scope to compressively deliver the whole route.

But there was no policy framework to do this in detail, and certainly to the standard that would be needed to formally deliver the route and allocate land for development in this plan making round.

LPR1 requests that the Council explore options for the route, but it has become increasingly clear that; to delivery development here work needs to be undertaken in partnership with the development industry and landowners. It also needs a long-time horizon to evidence.

#### **Why a safeguarding policy?**

The Council considers that this is an area of the Borough that is not currently suitable for significant development mainly because of poor connectivity – an issue that the new route will address. The main barrier to delivery here relates to a lack of physical infrastructure that we consider can be overcome with time and a more robust policy footing.

In essence the land is not developable today but could become so with further work and with new physical infrastructure. The policy is intended to support a potential future housing allocation and ensure that the Council maintains a sustainable supply of land beyond this plan period.

As part of the Garden Community process industry stakeholders noted the 'catch 22' whereby LPR1 did not provide the flexibility and sufficient certainty for stakeholders to invest in assembling the evidence base for the new road. Or to assemble the unconnected land parcels into something comprehensive.



While it is normal for the development industry to assemble land, form consortiums and promote land for development, the level of risk needed to unlock this is higher than normal. The (so far) unsuccessful attempts to promote the route via KCC also undermines credibility.

So, the current policy solution was adopted. This provides a policy framework to base the significant technical investment to bring the route forwards. It also provides a common policy base for the group of landowners to work together, with the Council and communities, to delivery future sustainable development.

The Council is aware of a number of plans elsewhere that have struggled to be found sound because, in their case, critical infrastructure is needed to deliver the plan, and the strategy could not be evidenced in time. This has resulted in delays and plan suspensions. Given the challenges here, the Council would like to avoid this and hence the use of a safeguarding approach and without this plan of relying on homes coming forward.

In the event the safeguarding approach does not work, and that at the plan review the policy area cannot be made to work, the policy area could be deleted or carried forward depending on the findings of technical evidence undertaken between now and the plan review.

#### **What is the baseline case – i.e., without the new road**

It is useful to briefly consider the baseline case – one without the prospect of the link road.

The Council accepts that without the route there will be no improvement to the network and continued decline as more traffic uses the current route.

But also, because the road enables the housing development, there would be only limited housing growth in this area. Without the new route, development at both villages and at the northern end of the route around the M20/A20 would not be appropriate for significant development.

The Council views the proposal as a mechanism to secure sustainable growth locations to deliver development in future plan making rounds. This plan lays the groundwork for this. If this preparatory work does not commence now, then by the time the homes are needed there will not be a sustainable land supply solution.

The Council will respond the inspectors MIQs regarding the management of development in this area in the period before the new road is secured.

#### **What other options are available?**

The proposal includes a new road running around 2.5 miles. The Council has considered whether improving smaller sections could help achieve a similar objective to link the South Maidstone area to the M20, avoiding Maidstone Town). Furthermore, a non-road option has also been considered.

A public transport option is not considered achievable due to the nature of the traffic flows which are largely between the rural parts of the Borough and M20. These flows cannot



support an intensive public transport network. This rules out a non-road public transport option.

We have also considered scope to deliver only part of the route – if only the northern elements of the route were delivered (around Leeds) the likelihood is that majority of the transport benefits could be secured with less new route millage. But this would struggle to fund the expensive infrastructure investment needed, especially if following a western route avoiding the castle. A western (bypassing Leeds) route is likely to require a new bridge to cross the Mill Pond which is a significant cost. This cost can be shared if development is also promoted around Langley.

To the South, around Langley, any new infrastructure investment would still need to rely on the existing (or new) route northwards and would not be an appropriate location for strategic scale development. Hence why the Council considers the north and south as one scheme – it is unlikely either can come forward in isolation and there are synergies if they are delivered as one.

Furthermore, the A274 junction is also in need of improvement and therefore a comprehensive scheme to overcome the two main transport pinchpoints, A274/B2163 junction and Leeds village, is proposed.

#### **Other evidence**

The topic paper summarises the previous Stantec report, for Maidstone Borough Council (MBC), as part of Regulation 19 (Background Document 23a - Leeds Langley Corridor (Responding to Local Plan 2017 Policy LPR1). This report is already within evidence documentation as part of Reg 19 and identified as LPR1.76. The topic paper also introduces further specialist disciplines, for example heritage and ecology. The work from these disciplines will further define parameters and shape the next stage of work, to promote the role of the safeguarded area if accepted in the EiP.

Whilst this report was written with MBC having sight of the Inspector's MIQs (Matter 4 Strategic Development Locations issue 11 ), the specific answering of the MIQs has been dealt with separately between MBC and the Inspector. However, this paper intends to provide a consistent context and narrative with those answers.

#### **Local Policy Context**

The basis for this topic paper stems from the 2017 Local Plan LPR 1 sub items v and vi.

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<sup>1</sup> *Issue 1: Whether the identification of the Leeds-Langley Corridor as a potential strategic development location is justified? Whether the policy framework for the Leeds-Langley safeguarded area would be effective and consistent with national policy?*



Policy LPR1 is 'Review of the local plan' with sub-policy 'v' being 'Whether the case for a Leeds-Langley Relief Road is made, how it could be funded and whether additional development would be associated with the road' and sub-policy 'vi' being 'Alternatives to such a relief road'

In the Local Plan Update this is developed as part of LPRSP5: Strategic Development Locations with introductory text provided in paragraphs 6.82 – 6.92 outlining policy

LPRSP5(A): Potential Development in the Leeds-Langley Corridor and indicating a proposed safeguarded area.

Whilst the current policy of seeking the safeguarded area is not yet being accompanied with a definitive proposal to allocate development in the current plan period, such an action is feasible. This is possible due to significant land ownership a few major stakeholders.

However, it is more expected that with an agreed masterplan and mechanism for contributions defined in sufficient detail, an allocation in next review /plan period is envisaged.

#### **National policy context**

The Council is required to provide a robust assessment of its housing supply for the early years of the plan but in later years national policy allows Councils to adopt a broader approach.

The NPPF wording has changed in recent years, but previously stated plans should make specific allocation post year 10 'where possible' but otherwise a broad location approach was acceptable. The wording was changed in 2019 with the move to a 30-year vision but still retaining broad location approach.

While this proposal predates the recent changes to the NPPF regarding a 30-year vision, the Council considers this revision to policy helpful to help communities and stakeholders shape development in this area.

The Council is looking to use this flexibility in national policy to embed the evolution of the Leeds Langley proposal in the plan process and allow stakeholders a greater say in how the proposal evolves.

The intention is not that land should be formally allocated for development. Instead, the plan provides some clarity to help stakeholders work in partnership, and invest considerable sums, in turning the current policy vision or objective into a workable deliverable policy in a future revision of the plan.

The evidence so far confirms that the principles underpinning the policy are sound; there is workable road alignment and one that can be paid for by development, but the scheme is not yet worked up enough to form an allocation.

## **1 History to the Proposal**



The B2163 runs through the south of the district of Maidstone, from the A26 at Teston to the A20 near Leeds village, gaining traffic from the southern hinterlands, around the A229 and A274, towards the M20 at J8 section between the A274 and A20.

The final section from the A274 to the A20 and M20J8 passes through the two communities of Leeds and Langley. The presence of these two communities on this motorway-bound section of the B2163 leads to both capacity and severance issues.

Thus, some form of village bypass has existed as a proposal for many years and remains an outstanding aim of previous village bypasses programmes.

### **History as a transport proposal**

A Leeds-Langley Relief Road has had previous iterations of the proposal in policy documents:

- MBC Local Plan 2000 Policy T18 (item iii) 'B2163 – LEEDS & LANGLEY HEATH BYPASS (OFF-LINE)'
- Kent & Medway Structure Plan (2006) Policy TP7 (renamed from TP8) 'Future Strategic Transport Schemes'
- Kent Local Transport Plan 2016-2031 p25, p36 'We will be prioritising a feasibility study for the Leeds and Langley Relief Road' and p37.

Whilst these documents have shown consistency in the case for the highway scheme, the evidence has struggled to make a strategic case for funding – largely given the local nature of the proposal and the local nature of the benefits that accrue.

KCC have undertaken optioneering on routes (KCC route analysis 2018) and the route options have been shared with the developers under a Non-Disclosure Agreement.

### **History in the Development Plan**

From a historical perspective, this quadrant of Maidstone changed when the M20, in the form of a Maidstone bypass, replaced the A20. However, this was not accompanied with commensurate upgrading of the network joining to the A20 and the M20 junctions 7 and 8.

Junction 7 is reached from with the Maidstone built-up area via the unclassified Willington Street, New Cut and Bearsted Road. Junction 8 is reached via the B2163 through the villages of Leeds and Langley Heath. Leeds, in particular, is noticeably constrained with single lane shuttle working, bends, 20mph zone, and elevation changes.

In addition to the local traffic of Leeds and Langley Heath, the B2163 collects motorway traffic from the southern hinterlands of Maidstone including the Rural Service Centres of Coxheath, Marden, Staplehurst and Headcorn, and other communities such as Sutton Valence.

So, in summary, national policy delivered the M20 in the 1990s in line with the key national objective to connect the channel ports with London that ran through Kent. But many of the links – inclining the A274 were not upgraded and found they had new strategic significance to link the Motorway. Leeds Langley is one of these links.



Hence why this proposal was included in the adopted plan and the Council would like to take this forward via the new plan – although recognising that further work is needed to deliver to proposal.

### **Sustainable Transport**

It is undeniable that the major output of the policy is a new road, coupled with the homes needed to deliver it. But both KCC and MBC are mindful of promoting sustainable modes where appropriate/practical. Here, the intention is that the route includes high quality pedestrian and cycle links – proving a safe(er) route around the eastern side of Maidstone.

Also, a key feature of this route is that it is close enough to be connected to Maidstone via high quality, high frequency bus routes. A location further away would struggle to achieve this level of connectivity. The scale and critical mass proposed are also such that would facilitate improvements to public transport.

In line with best practice for new strategic roads, a wide cycleway and footway would be expected to be included.

Further, such promotion of sustainable modes would seek to enhance the pedestrian, cycling and bus connectivity both within the safeguarded area, making use of the reduced flows on the existing B2163, and to/from the A20 and A274 radial corridors into Maidstone and also, where practical, further out to south (Headcorn) and east (Harrietsham/Lenham). Extending the A274 urban bus route (the Arriva 82) or improving the longer distance Arriva no. 12 can be considered.

Possible connectivity to the train stations at Bearsted and Hollingbourne, and the railway parallel to the A20, would also be outlined. The reduced role of the NuVenture No13 can also be revisited.

The evidence document LPR 1.68 Maidstone Local Transport Model – Mitigation and Sustainability Sensitivity Test is noted in which Option 1e explores a non-highway solution based on the Sustainable Towns research,

So, while the scheme is, at face value a road proposal, the scale of development we think is achievable and the proximity to Maidstone town, means that there is scope for a new garden style community to be delivered – with high quality public transport (walking and cycling links) in Maidstone. The critical mass of development will not only help pay for the road but also support the wider sustainable transport package.

It is important that the policy proposal is seen a long-term option to deliver new homes (and economic development), following Garden Community principles, but that this requires the delivery of the road route to enable development here.

As outlined in LPR1.76., and summarised below, the land within the proposed policy area is largely free of constraints and has been drawn to reflect sensitive features nearby – including the Castle. But, although the land is reasonably free of constraints, it is currently undevelopable largely because of a lack of access.





<b>2</b>	<b>What is proposed today?</b>
	<p><b>Why an area of search?</b></p> <p>Whilst there is no formal route yet and more detailed site work would be needed, the Council has tested the principle of a route, funded by development, in this broad area.</p> <p>The policy area was established to provide stakeholders the planning certainty that, subject to more detailed work, the Council considers that a route can be delivered here alongside enough homes to deliver the route.</p> <p>The full extent of the land within the policy area is not expected to be developable.</p> <p>There is scope for significant areas of land to be undeveloped, with potential to provide communities facilities such as county parks to protect the settlement gaps through enhanced designations.</p> <p>The proposed safeguarded area also allows for MBC to provide further future designations on land-use and to consider defendable boundaries of the urban area, new communities and heritage areas including Leeds Castle, thus controlling ribbon development as appropriate.</p> <p>The area is now based on the main modification version as per LPRSUB011 which altered the boundary of the proposal between the version at Reg 18 and Reg 19 with areas of development being removed. This updated version is now deemed appropriate as the proposed safeguarded area,</p>
<b>3</b>	<b>Where is the proposed route?</b>
	<p><b>Does there need to be a road?</b></p> <p>For a self-sustaining development that can also enhance sustainable modes the critical mass of development would need new highway infrastructure. Whilst both Langley Heath and Leeds could arguably sustain small parcels of development, these parcels would be of a minor piecemeal size and not able to provide any strategic improvements in either sustainable transport or planning terms.</p> <p><b>Why is there no proposed route?</b></p> <p>Whilst the KCC transport route work did not define a firm route for a transport-led scheme, this topic paper shows a western route to provide as a 'development-led route'. The connection to the A20 becomes a fourth arm to the existing A20/M20 spur roundabout.</p> <p><b>What are the advantages to a western route?</b></p> <p>A western route avoids ancient woodland near Langley Heath, and proximity to Leeds Castle. In addition, potential boundaries, and designations with regards the edge of the Maidstone built-up area can be defined.</p> <p>The possible connection to the A20 would also benefit from a western route (see below).</p> <p><b>Where is best to connect in the south (A274)?</b></p> <p>On the working assumption that it is both a Langley Heath and Leeds Bypass, a connection is required to the A274 to replace the Plough Wents junction. This is currently a right-left stagger junction with the B2163 as the minor arms. A scheme would likely change this</p>



	<p>junction to a roundabout connection. There are some working options on its location and whether any of the existing A274 will be used as part of the route.</p> <p><b>Where is best to connect to in the north (A20)?</b></p> <p>The B2163 currently joins to the A20 at a 3-arm roundabout. A transport-led route could reconnect to the B2163, and this roundabout can be enhanced. However, this topic paper defines a connection to the larger existing three-arm roundabout which is the A20/spur to M20 junction 8. This has transport capacity advantages.</p> <p><b>What are the known (site or area) challenges?</b></p> <p>There are a variety of non-transport and transport issues that are noted. However, to avoid a presumption of acceptance of the safeguarded area as part of the EiP this work has not been substantively progressed. However, there is an intention to further this work in due course to the same standard of evidence as is being generated for the three Garden Communities that were sifted from the original seven proposals.</p> <p>The following topics are acknowledged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crossing the River Len. B2163 currently does this at a priority shuttle-worked bridge. The River Len widens out into a millpond to the west.</li> <li>• Proximity to AONB Kent North Downs.</li> <li>• The immediate fields/countryside as part of the Landscapes of Local Value</li> <li>• Ancient Woodland (adjacent to Langley Heath)</li> <li>• Leeds Castle (National Historic asset)</li> <li>• Leeds Village (Heritage area)</li> </ul> <p>These areas will be supported by heritage, environmental, landscape, ecological and biodiversity assessment. In addition, the impact of the highway infrastructure will also be considered, notably the crossing of the River Len or millpond and the likely height of the structure.</p> <p>It is noted that a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment did not identify any high-level concerns or showstoppers. A similar position is noted for other disciplines such as ecology and heritage.</p>
4	<p><b>How does this fit Wider Strategy? What happens next</b></p> <p>This topic paper has outlined that it is 'not all about the road', community development, future Local Plan Review and housing provision, sustainable transport and future land-use designations are also key components.</p> <p>The size of the safeguarded area allows for country parks and other open-space provision, reinforcing existing constraints and natural features and there is considerable further work to shape the future of this area.</p> <p>MBC will be continuing to engage with the agents and landowners towards:</p> <p>Stage 1 – MoU</p> <p>Stage 2 – draft SoCG presented to inspector at examination</p> <p>Stage 3 - SoCG and progression of area of search to broad location in next LPR or DPD</p> <p>The Council's aspiration is that this area can be available for formal allocation to meet housing needs in a future round, and this preparatory policy work is needed to secure this objective.</p>
5	<p><b>Summary</b></p>



The adopted plan presents the Council with a challenge; in summary to demonstrate why the route is needed and how it can be delivered.

Work undertaken by both Maidstone and KCC has concluded that the scheme is 'good' – as a transport proposal it achieves a good benefit to cost ratio. There is also no public transport solution that would limit the need for a road because the nature of the traffic flows are such that you cannot achieve the critical mass that a public transport solution would require.

But a good transport case is no longer enough to justify investment in a new road. Funders prioritise schemes that unlock new development. So there would appear to be no scenario where the Council's long standing objective, to deliver the road, can be achieved without development to enable it.

To address this, the Council, with the landowners have developed a policy led solution that uses development to pay for the route and also deliver a new community.

The Council recognises that these homes are not 'needed' at the moment. But there will be a time, most likely at the next plan review, when the Council is asked to formally allocate more land for development. So, the Council's strategy is for this plan round to lay the foundations to ensure that the various technical components are available when needed. Importantly the safeguarded policy provides stakeholder partners a framework that they can use to progress the expensive technical evidence.

The Council considers that this approach would appear to align with the recent changes to the NPPF and the new emphasis that the plan can play in supporting a long term 'vision' for the Borough. The Council notes that these changes to the NPPF were partly in response to failed Garden Community Proposals elsewhere and the challenge in assembling the delivery evidence to support formal allocations inside the plan period.

The Council accepts that the evidence is not sufficient to allocate the land for development nor to draft the detailed development management policies that would be required. This is a matter for a plan review to address. The Council also recognises that there is a risk that the technical evidence identifies new 'showstoppers'. And/or national policy may change between now and a plan review. In this scenario the Council would, at plan review, be able to delete the safeguarded policy and look to identify an alternative future portfolio via traditional call for sites etc. But the intention of the policy, and the product of the work to date, is that this area can be shaped to a sustainable location for future rounds of housing growth and also one whereby the Council's long standing objective to deliver a relief route is achieved.