

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

MAIDSTONE JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 2 AUGUST 2023

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillor Claudine Russell (Chairman) and Councillors Ash, Cannon, Carter, Chittenden, Clark, Cooke, English, Mrs Gooch, Hastie, Knatchbull, Passmore, Sams, Webb and J Wilkinson
Visiting Members:	Councillors Cleator, Garten, Harper and Spooner

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cooper, Grigg, Holmes, Khadka, Parfitt-Reid and Prendergast.

2. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following Substitute Members were noted:

- Councillor English for Councillor Khadka.
- Councillor Gooch for Councillor Grigg.

3. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman stated that Item 14 – Kent Bus Service Improvement Plan and National Bus Strategy Funding Update would be taken as an urgent item to allow an update to be provided to the Board. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 January 2023 had been circulated to the Committee and would be considered at Item 8 – Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 January 2023.

4. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor Garten was present as a Visiting Member for Item 11 – Questions from Members to the Chairman.

The following Visiting Members were present for Item 13 – Maidstone Integrated Transport Package and Item 14 - Kent Bus Service Improvement Plan and National Bus Strategy Funding Update:

- Councillor Cleator
- Councillor Harper

The following Visiting Members were present for Item 15 – Involvement in the Highway Aspects of Planning Applications:

- Councillor Harper

- Councillor Spooner

5. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

6. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

The following Councillors stated that they had been lobbied on Item 13 – Maidstone Integrated Transport Package:

- Councillor Cannon
- Councillor Clarke
- Councillor Cooke
- Councillor Gooch
- Councillor Hastie
- Councillor Knatchbull
- Councillor Sams
- Councillor Wilkinson

7. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

8. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 JANUARY 2023

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 January 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed.

9. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

10. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS

The Chairman adjourned the meeting between 6:38 p.m. to 6.44 p.m., to allow Local Residents to decide whether to ask their questions at the meeting or the next scheduled meeting, where a specific report on Cranbourne Avenue was expected.

There were six questions from Local Residents.

1. Question from Mr Peter Goddard to the Chairman of the Maidstone Joint Transportation Board:

In the absence of the questioner, the Chairman asked the question on their behalf.

'If the collective minds back in the day couldn't make the roundabout work with the then comparatively minimal traffic of the day and the existing modified junction doesn't work how does the current band of planners think the new

proposal agenda point 2.3 (A229 Loose Road Corridor -LGF Scheme) will work at the same junction with the existing traffic let alone the growing no of vehicles that will come from the continued house building on both the A229 and A274?

Successive Annual traffic surveys have listed these roads as over subscribed, never a day goes by that the traffic doesn't back up from the bridge approach into Hayle road then onto the A229 / A274 due to the volume of vehicles feeding into the 2 lanes that allows the only current direct access to the North or West sides of the town.

The remedy has always been and still is a completed Maidstone By-Pass it's many many years overdue, it could be mistaken for an M25 overflow car park not the county town of Kent'.

The Chairman responded to the question.

2. Question from Mr Gordon King to the Chairman of the Maidstone Joint Transportation was withdrawn.

3. Question from Mr Vincent Flynn to the Chairman of the Maidstone Joint Transportation Board

'Question in respect of agenda item: 2.3.4. Considering the significant risk to the health and safety of residents, who now have to exit from Plains Avenue and cross four lanes of traffic to head into the centre of Maidstone Town, and given that the consultation has revealed that most residents oppose the closure, which has produced no demonstrable improvement either environmentally or to traffic flow on the Loose Road, but has in fact negatively impacted surrounding roads, will the Council now order the reopening of Cranborne Avenue'.

The Chairman stated that as Kent County Council had not provided any information to support a response, a written response would be provided at a later date.

There was no supplementary question.

4. Question from Teniola Olukolu to the Chairman of the Maidstone Joint Transportation Board:

In the absence of the questioner, the Chairman asked the question on their behalf.

'Agenda point 2.3 (A229 Loose Road Corridor - LGF Scheme). The reasons for the closure has solely been focused on solving the problem for Cranbrook Avenue despite the reasons for the closure being a shared one with Plains Avenue and Marion Crescent thus what measures are in place to solve the problem this closure has now brought causing 100% of the problem to be on Plains Avenue?'

The Chairman stated that as Kent County Council had not provided any information to support a response, a written response would be provided at a later date.

5. Question from Miss Natalie White to the Chairman of the Maidstone Joint Transportation Board:

In the absence of the questioner, the Chairman asked the question on their behalf.

'A question in which I would like to put forward with regards to the above of Cranbourne Avenue being closed is how has this improved the infrastructure of the area?

I believe Cranbourne Avenue should be reopened as having diverted the traffic through Plains Avenue I have seen many accidents happen at this junction.

Many more residents in Plains Avenue now park their cars out on the road and not on their driveways to slow down the amount of traffic down this road as well as the amount of people racing down there too. One particular resident even parks his vehicle on the speed ramp by Loose Road end which causes untold amounts of traffic. Plains Avenue has become highly dangerous since the closure of Cranbourne Avenue with the high chance of school children being knocked down by speeding cars whilst walking to school. Turning right out of Plains Avenue onto Loose Road is extremely dangerous and also causes great tailbacks of traffic, putting traffic lights in here would not be the solution to this. Marion Crescent is also getting heavier with traffic due to Cranbourne being shut.

It would make sense to reopen Cranbourne Avenue for everyone (maybe not the residents that live by the traffic lights) but for everyone else as this would cause less traffic building up everywhere else, this would relieve some off Plains Avenue and also South Park Road which is in desperate need to be totally resurfaced not just repaired. If the length of the traffic light sequence at Cranbourne Avenue was longer then not as many cars would build up a long here (before it was letting 5 cars through if you were lucky).'

The Chairman stated that as Kent County Council had not provided any information to support a response, a written response would be provided at a later date.

6. Question from Mr Jeremy Day to the Chairman of the Maidstone Joint Transportation Board:

In the absence of the questioner, the Chairman asked the question on their behalf.

'We would like it to be known that we are very unhappy about the negative effects of the closure on our daily lives. The logical alternative to using Cranborne Avenue is using Plains Avenue. However, turning right out of, or into, Plains Avenue has become very dangerous and must surely be having a negative effect on traffic flow on the Loose Road (probably resulting in an increased number of accidents and near misses), the very problem closing the Cranborne Avenue junction was supposed to solve.

We understood that the closure was for a six month trial period, but it is now almost a year since the trial was supposed to be finished. Our question is therefore why has there been such a long delay in publishing the results of the study and please can we have an assurance that affected residents will be kept informed and their views taken into account? (Something that has been distinctly lacking so far).'

The Chairman stated that as Kent County Council had not provided any information to support a response, a written response would be provided at a later date.

To listen to the answers to these questions, please use the link below to access the meeting recording:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6_dH8KpyW8

11. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS

Question from Councillor Garten to the Chairman of the Maidstone Joint Transportation Board:

'KCC has been given powers by Government to enforce moving traffic regulations using Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras.

In spring 2022 KCC held a public consultation about possible sites where to use such cameras. Will KCC expand their ANPR enforcement and if so, would KCC be willing to enforce the prohibition for all motor-vehicles, in the pedestrian zone of King Street and High Street from Wyke Manor Road to Mill Street as well as Week Street (from St Francis Church) up to and including Gabriel's Hill?

Although buses, taxis and disabled drivers are rightfully exempt to traverse King Street and High Street, many non-exempt motorists flagrantly ignore the prohibition and use it as short cut while driving at inappropriate speeds. Pedestrian neither have a feeling of comfort nor safety, which they ought to expect in a pedestrianized zone and all too often prohibited drivers instil fear in pedestrians or even cause collisions with them'.

The Chairman responded to the question.

Councillor Garten asked the following supplementary question:

'Would the Joint Transportation Board take it into their work programme to pursue this request?'

The Chairman responded to the supplementary question.

To listen to the answers to these questions, please use the link below to access the meeting recording:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6_dH8KpyW8

12. MAIDSTONE JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

The previous request for an update on the County Council's implementation of the 2006 Highways Act was reiterated, alongside two new requests for an update concerning on-street charging for electric cars and the use of ANPR enforcement on King Street and High Street, Maidstone.

RESOLVED: That the following items be added to the Board's Work Programme:

1. Kent County Council's implementation of the 2006 Highways Act,

2. An update concerning on-street charging for electric cars; and
3. The use of ANPR enforcement on King Street and High Street, Maidstone.

13. MAIDSTONE INTEGRATED TRANSPORT PACKAGE

Mr Andrew Hammersley addressed the Committee.

During the discussion, several Board Members expressed concern at the slow progression of the schemes within the Maidstone Integrated Transport Package (MITP), which included the A229 Loose Road junction with the A274 Sutton Road (Wheatsheaf junction) and the impact to local residents from the closure of Cranbourne Avenue with an update on the scheme and experimental traffic regulation order requested; the A229 Loose Road junction with Armstrong Road/Park Way, the A26 Tonbridge Road junction with Fountain Lane junction and the progression of schemes relating to Willington Street given the road's importance in managing traffic flows in the surrounding area. Several questions were outlined for submission to the relevant KCC officer, with a written response to be provided outside of the meeting. It was requested that a presentation be provided at the next meeting on the current status, timelines and funding of the MITP schemes.

The Board expressed significant disappointment that Kent County Council (KCC) Highways officers had not attended the meeting given the board's remit and reiterated the importance of co-operation between both local authorities. It was felt that officers should be formally requested to attend the Board's meetings, with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to send a letter to express the Board's disappointment. The Chairman stated that KCC's Corporate Director had given assurance that KCC officers would be in attendance at the next meeting.

Several Members of the Board stated that the Board's remit could be reconsidered in the future, to ensure it functioned as intended.

RESOLVED: That

1. In the absence of County Officers the Board felt it was impossible to reach an informal conclusion on the report despite it being for noting;
2. The Board expresses its disappointment that Highways Officers did not attend the meeting;
3. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman be asked to write a letter to the Leader of Kent County Council, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation and the relevant Corporate Director; and
4. The Board requests that a written report be given in advance of the next meeting and a presentation be given at the next meeting on each project in the MITP to include its current status, timelines for delivery and funding.

14. KENT BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN & NATIONAL BUS STRATEGY FUNDING UPDATE

The Board expressed disappointment that the report had arrived late and that there were no Officers in attendance from KCC.

During the discussion, it was felt that the plan could be more ambitious with the funding available, such as through exploring alternative bus operators and reviewing the provision of services elsewhere in Kent. The previous budget cuts in relation to bus services were highlighted.

After concerns were raised that a District Focus Group (the group) between councillors and bus operators to discuss bus developments was not being implemented, the Chairman confirmed that the formation of an Enhanced Partnership Local Focus Group was underway between the Council's and KCC's officers. It was emphasised that parish councils should be involved in the group and that a report on the group's formation should be brought to the next meeting in October.

RESOLVED: That a report on the formation of the Enhanced Bus Focus Group be presented to the next Board meeting to include information about its membership, structure, purpose and timescales.

15. INVOLVEMENT IN THE HIGHWAY ASPECTS OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Board expressed dissatisfaction with the report provided, with specific reference made to the following; that there was no government guidance referenced, the National Planning Policy Framework was felt to be misrepresented through not including the 'sustainable' development presumption, and that the tone of the document was not suitable.

During the discussion, the involvement of KCC Highways in pre-application discussions was noted as having been helpful, but that there had been occasions where the authority had not given comments on planning applications. The importance of KCC highways commenting on a planning application based on planning considerations was referenced, with reference made to the interaction between the Local Plan Review process, the consideration of planning applications and raising highways concerns.

RESOLVED: That the Board refuses to note the report as it misinterprets the National Planning Policy Framework, fails to note government guidance on best practice for local authorities including highways authorities, on dealing with pre-application and planning decision processes.

16. MAIDSTONE HIGHWAY WORKS PROGRAMME

The Board expressed an interest in the progression of the A229 Hayle Road/Campbell Road traffic system, with the Highways Manager stating that a response from the relevant team would be given outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

17. DURATION OF MEETING

6:30 p.m. to 9:01 p.m.

Note: The Committee adjourned between 6.38 p.m. to 6.44 p.m.