

From: Michael Payne, Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport  
Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director, Growth, Economy and Transport

To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee

Decision No: N/A

Subject: **Dover Fastrack Update**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

**Past Pathway of Paper:** N/A

**Future Pathway of Paper:**

**Electoral Division:** Dover District Council

**Summary:** The purpose of this paper is to update and seek feedback from Cabinet Committee on the Dover Fastrack service.

**Recommendation(s):** Cabinet Committee is asked to note progress and comment on the Dover Fastrack service.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 An urban expansion masterplan for Whitfield was adopted in April 2011 and development work has already commenced. The core strategy proposes the development of at least 5,750 new homes, with a mix and quality of housing, aimed at encouraging new residents of working age and those with families into the District. A series of facilities would support the new homes including a new local centre and a school.
- 1.2 The new developments are intended to form three separate areas which will form a cluster of neighbourhoods, none of which would individually overwhelm the existing village of Whitfield. It is therefore important to ensure that both the existing and new residents benefit from improved infrastructure and services.
- 1.3 The masterplan includes provision for a fast bus link to the town centre and rail station as integral to the development. Work has been carried out to investigate the creation of a bus rapid transit system to serve the expanded Whitfield. This is envisaged as being on similar lines and quality standards to the successful Fastrack service introduced in Kent Thameside in 2006 with bus priority measures, segregated busways and camera enforcement sections of route, including a new bridge over the A2.
- 1.4 The vision is for a high-quality bus link that competes well with the private car on speed and cost which is attractive enough to promote significant modal shift. Fastrack Kent Thameside is a proven example in this regard, with a mode share even greater

than the comprehensive bus network in London. Fastrack buses have a mode share of 22 per cent in the new development areas it serves, versus 18 per cent in the capital. With a figure of 25 per cent, forecast from 2025, as an average, Fastrack will account for a quarter of all people movements within a 500 metre radius of its routes. Dover Fastrack would also be designed to avoid overwhelming the Whitfield roundabout on the A2 with traffic congestion, as well as other local routes.

- 1.5 It is envisaged that the first stage of the delivery will be the extension of the existing service 61 into the early phases of the new developments. This would be followed by the introduction of the specific, faster high-quality service once the required facilities are in place. Building on the success of KCC's Fastrack brand and service provision in Kent Thameside, it is proposed that a Dover Fastrack is implemented.

## **2. Financial Implications**

- 2.1 At this stage, there are no significant financial implication to KCC as the project (initial service and infrastructure) is funded within the confines of the £16.1m Homes England contribution. Beyond the funding, the service is forecast to be fully commercially viable and in line with the existing Fastrack model, supporting infrastructure would be maintained and enhanced through a market tested departure fee. A fee that grants exclusivity.
- 2.2 However, further iterations of the network design may seek additional funding. For example, a redesign of Pencester Road is currently being modelled which would save significant journey time for Fastrack and, furthermore, unlock a bus link to the from Dover Priory Station and the Town Centre to the Port of Dover, currently unserved by public transport. This is outside of the scope of the Homes England funding.

## **3. Policy Framework**

- 3.1 Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering Growth without Gridlock includes the priority to :

‘Work closely with bus operators and other partners to ensure that public transport has a high level of modal share’

‘The successful Fastrack bus service will be extended’

- 3.2 For Dover District Council, Dover Fastrack is a key part of the managed expansion of Whitfield as a place to live and work. Dover Fastrack supports the sustainable development of new housing in Whitfield and at the former Connaught Barracks site, along with commercial development on the White Cliffs Business Park in Whitfield.
- 3.3 The Whitfield Urban Expansion was established in principal in Dover District Council's Core Strategy adopted in 2010, along with the redevelopment of the former Connaught Barracks site in Dover.
- 3.4 Dover District Council is currently reviewing their Local Plan for the next twenty years to 2040. This will confirm an ongoing commitment to developing new homes, infrastructure and employment space in Whitfield.

#### **4. The Report - Progress Update**

- 4.1 Public engagement on the Fastrack project took place between 10th and 26th July 2020, mainly online and via remote methods. Meetings were held with Whitfield Parish Council, Guston Parish Council and Dover Town Council to discuss the project objectives and invite comments.
- 4.2 Over 250 people responded to the on-line survey, of which 55% said that Dover Fastrack would provide an effective public transport link, 41% said they were likely or very likely to use the service and 60% said that the proposed number of stops was correct. Town and Parish Councils expressed a mixture of support for and reservations about the project. Dover Town Council was supportive and requested further information about the bus route through town, when available. Whitfield Parish Council accepted the need for the project but raised concerns, for example regarding the potential impact of dust produced during construction. Some residents have also raised concerns around emissions and have been advised that only new ultra clean buses would be specified. Anything less, simply doesn't fit the Fastrack philosophy.
- 4.3 In addition, meetings were held with residents of Dover Road south of Frith Farm through to Old Charlton Road. The residents were asked to consider selling land they own in front of their properties in order to widen the road, but none were willing to do so. This will not prevent delivery of the project; as a bus service already operates along Dover Road.
- 4.4 The attached application for planning consent was submitted to Kent County Council on 18th August, reference KCC/DO/0178/2020. The application is to be determined at KCC's Planning Committee on 9th December. The consultation period expires on 3rd November. At the time of writing this report; objections and queries have been received, including from Highways England relating to traffic modelling, from Halsbury Homes and from Guston Parish Council. These will be considered carefully upon closure of the consultation period.
- 4.5 Site investigations are complete, including the geotechnical investigations, which were delayed by Covid-19 restrictions and were undertaken during July and August. The information gained is being fed into the detail design development, which is progressing well. The detail designs should be ready for use in procurement early in 2021.
- 4.6 Negotiations continue to secure the necessary land for construction.
- 4.7 On 7th September a formal request was submitted to Homes England for an extension of time and scope. The proposed new project programme is required due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions; it would see the bus service commencing early in 2023, rather than by March 2022. Homes England is considering the request. As the project is an enhancement of the existing bus service, current residents will not be adversely affected.
- 4.8 With support from Invicta Law, KCC Public Transport is drawing up the Partnership Agreement that will underpin the initial Fastrack service development and will be an annex to the Dover Quality Bus Partnership (QBP) agreement (2009) between

Stagecoach, Dover District Council and KCC. This will be agreed by all existing parties. At the point where significant new infrastructure would give a new commercial advantage, access to these sections of Dover Fastrack will be subject to a competitive tendering exercise and standalone contract.

## **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1 As development of the scheme is ongoing, a formal recording of cabinet committee views for Dover Fastrack will allow Dover District Council and Kent County Council to consider these at the Dover Fastrack Project Board. The scheme also aligns with our Local Transport Plan and will strengthen our Fastrack brand further.

## **6. Recommendation**

**Recommendation:** Cabinet Committee is asked to note progress and comment on the Dover Fastrack service.

## **7. Background Documents**

- 7.1 Dover Quality Bus Partnership Agreement
- 7.2 Proposed Dover Fastrack Route Map
- 7.3 Planning Application KCC/DO/0178/2020

## **8. Contact details**

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