

From: David Brazier – Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

**Simon Jones – Interim Corporate Director for Growth,
Environment and Transport**

To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee - 29 June 2021

Subject: A229 Blue Bell Hill Improvement Scheme

Decision No: 21/00046

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: None

Future Pathway of report: For Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: Maidstone Rural North - Paul Carter
Maidstone North East – Ian Chittenden
Malling North East – Andrew Kennedy

Summary: The A229 Blue Bell Hill is a strategically important link providing the shortest route between the M2 and M20 and connecting both the County town of Maidstone and the conurbation of Medway. The congestion and safety of A229 Blue Bell Hill along with its key junctions, has long been a concern. DfT Large Local Majors funding programme offers KCC an opportunity to undertake a significant major project that addresses the issues and provides for future growth.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse, or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport on the proposed decision, and indicated on the proposed decision sheet included in Appendix A, as follows to give approval to:

- i) the feasibility design options for A229 Blue Bell Hill Improvement Scheme to be developed and further explored to establish a preferred option which best meets the objectives for the scheme;
- ii) to progress the preferred option through the next stages of development and delivery including any ancillary works such as drainage and environmental mitigation;
- iii) to submit a planning application/development consent order for the scheme, following completion of the outline design process and public consultation;
- iv) take all steps necessary to obtain and implement all Statutory Orders and approvals or consents required for the schemes;
- v) all acts required to acquire the land and rights for the carrying out and completion of the A229 Blue Bell Hill Improvement Scheme, including by means of a compulsory purchase order;

- vi) to enter into Agreements to allow the County Council to design and deliver a scheme on Highways England and Network Rail (High Speed 1) infrastructure;
- vii) to enter into Large Local Majors funding, developer funding and other such funding Agreements subject to the approval of the Corporate Director for Finance;
- viii) to enter into construction contracts as necessary for the delivery of the scheme, subject to the approval of Strategic Commissioning;
- ix) the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment & Transport, under the Officer Scheme of Delegations, to take further or other decisions as may be appropriate to deliver the A229 Blue Bell Hill Improvement Scheme in accordance with these recommendations.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The A229 Blue Bell Hill is a section of dual carriageway which runs between Junction 6 of the M20 in Maidstone and Junction 3 of the M2 at Blue Bell Hill village. This section of road is a key link between the M20 and M2, and between Maidstone and Medway.

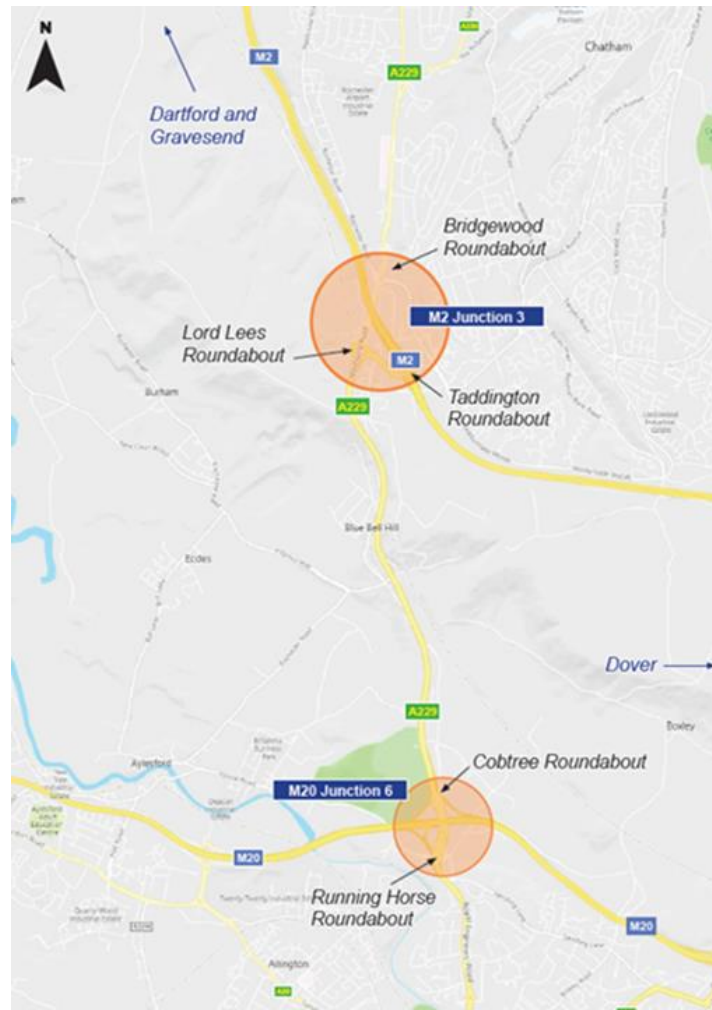


Figure 1 - Plan showing the location of the proposals

- 1.2 A feasibility study was undertaken to assess the key routes in Kent against the objectives of the Major Road Network. This study ranked the A229 as the second worst section of A road in the county against criteria of traffic levels, delays, collisions, and journey time reliability. It also determined that the M20 and M2 junctions have a significant role in the delays and collisions on Blue Bell Hill.
- 1.3 Road users of Blue Bell Hill have long experienced high volumes of traffic which result in significant congestion issues and concerns about road safety. These congestion issues are likely to be made worse by future housing developments in the surrounding area and the new Lower Thames Crossing, which will both generate additional traffic.
- 1.4 Proposals that have been developed previously have not been sufficient to impact on the existing issues and therefore more significant improvements to Blue Bell Hill are required to improve journey time reliability, reduce delays, and improve road safety across this section of the road network.
- 1.5 A bid has been submitted to the Department for Transport at Strategic Outline Business Case stage for funding from the Large Local Majors programme.

1.6 This report provides an overview of the project and recommendations for the required decisions to allow the scheme to be progressed through the next stages of development.

2. Scheme Description and Delivery

2.1 The overall aim of the scheme is to improve journey time reliability and road safety. This will allow the road to accommodate an increase in future traffic, expected as a result of the Lower Thames Crossing and proposed local developments, while providing suitable routes and facilities for public transport, pedestrians and cyclists.

2.2 The aim of the scheme is supported by a set of objectives, agreed by the key stakeholders:

- To improve journey time reliability at M2 Junction 3 and M20 Junction 6 interchanges of the A229
- To reduce congestion along the route
- To enable the local area to develop in accordance with population and housing growth predicated under Local Plans
- To reduce the impact of additional traffic from the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) and allow LTC to maximise potential benefits it can provide for the Kent area
- To improve road safety and address known collision hotspots
- To make best use of existing assets including land and highways
- To provide suitable routes and facilities for public transport
- To provide safe and improved routes for pedestrians and cyclists
- To improve air quality, particularly in the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA)
- To protect and enhance the local environment.

2.3 An optioneering process has been followed to establish the two options that were submitted as part of the Strategic Outline Business Case. The process involved ideas generation workshops with stakeholders followed by a sifting process (making use of traffic modelling) to determine the potential impact of these different ideas on traffic levels. The works were also assessed against a number of criteria as laid out by the DfT.

2.4 The ideas that scored best against the criteria were combined into three options which were taken through to a public consultation exercise.

2.5 As a result of further work and the results of the public consultation option 3 was dropped from further development. Whilst option 3 provided a number of benefits, these were outweighed by the significant impacts on the M20 and the local area.

2.6 The remaining options 1 and 2 can be viewed on drawing numbers 60633526-ACM-HML-A229_SW_ZZ_ZZ-DR-CH-0025 P04.2 (Appendix C) and 60633526-ACM-HML-A229_SW_ZZ_ZZ-DR-CH-0026 P04.2 (Appendix D) and a summary and comparison of the options is provided below:

Table 1 - Summary and Comparison of works for Options 1 and 2

	Option 1	Option 2
Northern end of Blue Bell Hill		
Improvements to the slip road onto the A229 southbound at Lord Lees Roundabout	✓	✓
Increase the road width between Taddington and Lord Lees Roundabouts to four lanes	✓	
A new slip road onto the M2 (westbound) from the A229 immediately after Lord Lees Roundabout	✓	✓
Upgrade of the current signalised junction at Taddington Roundabout allowing traffic travelling from the M2 eastbound to A229 via a new bridge over the M2	✓	
A new separate left turn lane from the M2 westbound to the A229 at Taddington Roundabout	✓	✓
A new slip road from the M2 eastbound to a new junction arrangement at Bridgewood Roundabout		✓
Southern end of Blue Bell Hill		
Enlarge the Running Horse Roundabout to the west	✓	✓
Improve the slip road onto the M20 eastbound from Cobtree Roundabout	✓	✓
A new grade separated junction, where the existing Forstal Road bridge is currently located		
Along the length of Blue Bell Hill		
Widen the A229 to three lanes when travelling southbound towards Maidstone (between Lord Lees and Cobtree Roundabouts)	✓	✓

- 2.7 Further details of the design options can be found in the Consultation Brochure in Appendix E.
- 2.8 The scheme is at a very early stage and the options will need to be developed further through more detailed modelling and additional design work before a preferred scheme can be determined.
- 2.9 An assessment of the options at this stage has not demonstrated that either would be more preferable to the other. Benefits and disbenefits have been reviewed against a number criteria to make the assessment.
- 2.10 This preferred scheme would then be progressed in more detail followed by further public consultation and Statutory Consents and Orders.
- 2.11 KCC will work very closely with Highways England to meet their requirements to allow for the sections of the scheme on the Strategic Road Network to be progressed.
- 2.12 KCC plan deliver the Improvement Scheme prior to the opening of Lower Thames Crossing.

- 2.13 The scheme supports the policy objectives of supporting existing businesses and implementation will support the Council in meeting its Strategic outcome for “Kent Communities to feel the benefits of economic growth by being in work, healthy and enjoying a good quality of life”. This will be achieved through the schemes aiming to improve the operation of key transport networks, as well as helping support growth by enabling new residential development.
- 2.14 The key priorities are set out in the County Council’s Local Transport Plan 4 ‘Delivering Growth without Gridlock’ in terms of providing additional highway capacity, improving accessibility, and reducing congestion will also be benefit aims. The improvements, which are noted in LTP4 will set out to provide improved growth and economic prosperity through having an efficient highway and transport infrastructure.
- 2.15 Programme for delivery
- Submission of the next stage of the business case to the Department of Transport including details of the preferred scheme – Summer 2022
 - Planning permission and consents – Spring 2022 to Summer 2023
 - Further detailed design – Summer 2022 to Summer 2024
 - Submission of full business case to the DfT – Winter 2024
 - Construction to begin – Spring 2025
 - Completion of scheme – Summer 2027 (this is to be completed before the Lower Thames Crossing opens to traffic)

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 Initial feasibility work has been undertaken to allow the Strategic Outline Business case to be submitted to the DfT. The work has also included discussions with Highways England and other key stakeholders. A public consultation took place in Autumn 2020.
- 3.2 KCC is currently forward funding £1.6m from its feasibility reserve capital line for the development cost of the scheme and this will be reimbursed through developer contributions and other external funding should the DfT funding be secured and the scheme progress. If the funding bid is not successful, the feasibility costs to date will be abortive and a cost to KCC.
- 3.3 Should KCC be successful with the funding bid to DfT, the costs for developing the scheme through the next stages will be covered by the grant. The DfT will contribute 85% of the total scheme costs.
- 3.4 The scheme is expected to cost a maximum of £199m (based on estimations within the Strategic Outline Business Case). The funding request from DfT is for £169m (85%) with the remaining £30m (15%) due to come from developer contributions (s106) and other external funding sources. Opportunities for these additional funding sources are being pursued. There is a risk that insufficient funds could be available from s106 and other sources and KCC may have to underwrite the match funding element to ensure that the 85% Government grant funding is secured.

3.5 The project is currently within the existing KCC budget book (Row 60 Page 57 section 5 – Capital Investment Plans) at £99m based on the Pre-strategic Outline Business Case costing. This figure was based on a very basic scheme design. Following further scheme development, a thorough exploration of the possible options for the scheme and traffic modelling, the scheme scope has needed to increase and therefore the project is now expected to cost £199m.

4. Legal implications

4.1 There are no immediate legal implications. The purpose of the report and recommendations are to secure appropriate legal authorities to develop and progress the scheme and allow the funding agreement to be entered into with DfT and other parties to enable that development to happen.

4.2 Legal advice is being sought from Legal Services as required.

5. Equalities implications

5.1 An initial Equalities Impact Assessment has been prepared and approved and is included in Appendix B. This will be regularly reviewed as the scheme develops and the design is progressed.

6. Other corporate implications

6.1 The construction of new highway will require ongoing maintenance and will become an additional maintenance liability to KCC. The costs of maintenance will be calculated and form part of an asset management plan going forward, which is not currently funded.

7. Governance

7.1 The recommendations include for delegation to the Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport to take further or other decisions as appropriate.

8. Conclusions

8.1 The congestions and safety of A229 Blue Bell Hill along with its key junctions, has long been a concern but proposals to date have been insufficient to make any noticeable impact. The DfT Large Local Majors funding programme offers KCC an opportunity to undertake a significant major project that addresses the issues and provides for future growth.

8.2 The DfT grant will cover 85% of the project costs with the remaining 15% being sourced from developer contributions or other external funding sources.

8.3 The scheme is at an early stage and much work needs to be done with key stakeholders and other parties to develop a preferred scheme.

8.4 It is expected that this scheme will be in place prior to the opening of Lower Thames Crossing.

8.5 This report and recommendations are to provide the relevant authorities to allow the scheme to progress.

9. Recommendation(s)

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10. Background documents

Appendix A – Proposed Record of Decision

Appendix B – [Equalities Impact Assessment](#)

Appendix C - [Option 1 Drawing number 60633526-ACM-HML-A229 SW ZZ ZZ-DR-CH-0025 P04.2](#)

Appendix D -[Option 2 Drawing number 60633526-ACM-HML-A229 SW ZZ ZZ-DR-CH-0026 P04.2](#)

Appendix E -[Consultation Brochure](#)

Appendix F - [Consultation Report](#)

11. Contact details

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