

From: Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member – Environment,
Highways & Waste
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To: Environment, Highways & Waste Cabinet Committee

Date: 20 September 2012

Subject: Hadlow Road Link, Tonbridge

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

Abandonment of the proposed road scheme and surplus declaration of land and property held for the scheme that have been acquired under blight.

Recommendations:

That the proposed road scheme known as Hadlow Road Link be abandoned and no longer used for Land Charge disclosures or development control; and that land and property held for the scheme are declared surplus to highway requirements.

1. Introduction

1(1) Hadlow Road Link has been an aspiration for over 30 years. It is an expensive urban scheme that has not attracted either government or private sector development funding. The present economic climate, reduced funding and national transport policy make funding of a major scheme in a non growth area even more unlikely. The property held is deteriorating and several houses are boarded up because they are now unsuitable to be leased. This is making the area look 'run down' as well as the ongoing informal blight created by the presence of the proposal. Officers have been working with Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council on a more appropriate transport strategy that recognises that the Link Road is undeliverable and should be abandoned.

2. Financial Implications

2(1) The disposal of the land and property will realise capital receipts in an estimated range of £1.4 - £1.8m. The revenue implications will be positive as the loss of reducing rental income is offset by the avoidance of security costs and the need for significant maintenance if the properties were to be retained.

2(2) The Head of KCC Property has agreed to release £250,000 from the future capital receipts in order to help pump prime the development and implementation of priority measures identified in the revised transport strategy.

2(3) The Head of Property has also agreed that the cost of the assessment work – some £25,000 - that has been required to develop a revised transport strategy will be netted off the future capital receipts.

3. Bold Steps for Kent and Policy Framework

3(1) The removal of the blight and disposal of the land and property held will release capital assets and allow more beneficial use to be made of the land and property that together implicitly contribute to the core objective of 'Help Kent Economy to Grow'.

3(2) The scheme is identified in 'Growth without Gridlock' but progress towards meeting many of its core objectives can be more realistically achieved by a revised transport strategy.

4. Scheme Background

4(1) In the 1960's, many towns had proposals for major highway schemes and relief roads. For Tonbridge, it was for the creation of a Relief Road running in an arc from London Road around the eastern side of the town to the A21. Over the years, much of this concept was achieved in a phased and reduced form such that a route has been created from A26 Hadlow Road to the A21 at the Vauxhall interchange. The delivery of the remaining section to create a link between A25 London Road and Shipbourne Road - Hadlow Road Link – see Fig 1 - has always remained illusive. Whilst its traffic management and environmental objectives still remain valid, providing an expensive new road in a non growth area town is increasingly anachronistic. It would not satisfy the requirements or achieve any priority to secure what has become very limited Government funding for major schemes. The development framework for Tonbridge would not support the required level of private sector funding for the scheme. The time has come to accept that the Link Road cannot be delivered and to consider a more pragmatic approach to the transport strategy to reflect the current economic climate.

4(2) The scheme is defined as a single carriageway with a roundabout or more likely traffic signal controlled junction with London Road, Shipbourne Road and High Street, and creating a cross-roads signal controlled junction at Hadlow Road/Cannon Lane. The scheme is unusual in urban terms as it

would require earthworks to overcome the topography of the area and place the road in a cutting to achieve the necessary vertical alignment. Although the middle section was open in character when first planned, subsequent housing development along the corridor boundary has put it firmly into an urban context. A new estimate has not been produced but the overall project cost including works, land, utility diversions and fees would be about £10m.

5. Property Aspects

5(1) Since the scheme was first formally approved for development control and Land Charge disclosure, the County Council has been obliged to acquire many residential and commercial properties under statutory Blight. Some beneficial use has been made of these properties but over recent years this has become increasingly difficult because several of the properties require significant capital improvement rather than just basic safety and security maintenance.

5(2) The properties at the junction of London Road, Shipbourne Road and High Street were in such a poor condition that in 2007, at significant cost, they had to be demolished and the area improved and landscaped to satisfy the conservation area requirements.

5(3) Two properties on Hadlow Road are no longer in a fit state to be leased, even under guardianship arrangements, and have had to be boarded up. This follows a break-in last year and internal damage. This is inevitably leading to a run down in the appearance of the area and has recently been commented on by several residents.

5(4) In 2008, the County Council started a review of all its property assets to identify those that could realistically be released to meet funding pressures and for use in supporting wider County objectives. Properties held in Maidstone for the long standing Southern Approach Road were released and while Hadlow Road was in a similar situation, it was agreed to defer a decision to allow the Borough Council time to explore the opportunities for developer funding.

5(5) During that period no developer or other funding has been identified and indeed key developments identified in the Local Development Framework and Town Centre Area Action Plan are not conditional on the Link Road being in place.

6. Transport Strategy

6(1) The current Transport Strategy for the town centre is contained in the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan (TCAAP) adopted in 2008 as part of the Borough Council's Local Development Framework. The Transport Strategy seeks ways to improve traffic flows and pedestrian movements in the town centre and specifically ease congestion and reduce traffic levels in the High Street in order to improve general environmental conditions and address issues such as poor air quality.

6(2) KCC as highway authority engaged Jacobs to undertake a traffic assessment of the road network in and around the town centre and prepare some outline designs with costings for a range of realistic options to assist in reducing traffic levels and ease congestion in the High Street to reflect the objectives of the TCAAP. This assessment has been mindful of the poor air quality concerns at the southern end of the High Street. Pedestrianisation of the southern end of the High Street has been advocated by a local group PATHS (Pedestrian Action for Tonbridge High Street) and, whilst an understandable aspiration, the consequential affects of reassigned traffic on other roads would lead to unmanageable congestion in the wider peak periods and cannot realistically be considered as part of the strategy.

6(3) The study has concluded that the Link Road, although desirable, is not essential to the implementation of development in the TCAAP. A review of the work to date was reported to the Tonbridge & Malling Joint Transportation Board (JTB) on 11 June. However, the Board were unwilling to support abandoning the Link Road without a better understanding of the issues and rationale for prioritisation of the improvement schemes contained in the revised transport strategy.

6(4) Further work has, therefore, been done on the review of transport strategy in order to establish preferred priorities for improvement proposals. These, and the rationale for abandonment of the Link Road, were successfully discussed with local County and Borough Council Members at a meeting on 16 August as a pre-cursor to a further Report to the JTB on 24 September. A verbal update on progress will be given to the meeting

7. KCC Local Member Views

8(1) The KCC Members for Tonbridge, Alice Hohler and Christopher Smith have been advised. Their views will be reported to the meeting verbally.

8. Conclusions

8(1) Analysis identifies that the Link Road is not essential to the implementation of the development in the TCAAP. Properties held are in a poor condition and need to be sold so that the private sector can bring them into beneficial use and the capital receipts released for the wider public benefit. A revised joint transport strategy is being developed to reflect the current situation and the limited public sector that is available.

9. Recommendations

9(1) That the Cabinet Committee supports the recommendation that the proposed road scheme known as Hadlow Road Link be abandoned and no longer used for Land Charge disclosures or development control; and that land and property held for the scheme are declared surplus to highway requirements .

10. Background Documents

10(1) Draft Report to Tonbridge & Malling Joint Transport Board – 24 September 2012.

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