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Growth, Environment and Transport

Room 1.62
Sessions House
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Dear Alison

Maidstone Park and Ride Sites

I refer to agenda items 16 and 17 of the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee scheduled for 6th November 2018, which detail the MBC proposals for the future of the two remaining park and ride (P&R) sites at Willington Street and London Road.

The P&R sites offer a valuable and reliable service to people who may otherwise not be able to afford to access their employment in Maidstone Town Centre. There are not currently any suitable sustainable transport alternatives available for many of the users, and as such if the sites were to close then the impact this could have on congestion and air quality issues in the town centre could be substantive. As such, KCC has supported MBC in the promotion of the updated service over the summer, and in September 2018 we funded face to face surveys at each of the P&R sites to provide additional quantitative and qualitative data to feed into the report.

The survey results showed that the Park and Ride Service is highly valued by current clients. It provides a safe, reliable, cheap and convenient service. If the P&R did not exist, then 45% of the 248 people interviewed would drive into Maidstone and use the car parks (despite the cost). In addition, 20% said they would no longer come in to Maidstone and some would have to consider changing their jobs. This shows that the closure of P&R would potentially have a negative impact on the local economy as well as air quality and congestion in the town.

At last year's Examination in Public on the now adopted Local Plan, MBC placed a great deal of weight on modal shift as a means of absorbing the impact of housing growth. The supporting Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) adopted by MBC is also predicated on ambitious mode share targets for public transport use (10% of all work trips by bus by 2021 from a base of 7.3%). When set within the overall context of declining levels of bus use, it is

difficult to see how this will be successfully delivered if P&R is not part of the equation.

It is KCC's view that the P&R service is too important to be lost, however in any case, decisions should not be taken regarding the success of a scheme based on 4 months of data. This is extremely concerning, particularly as this was over the summer months (June to September) when travel behaviour is atypical due to annual leave and warmer weather. It is therefore advised that the use of the P&R is monitored at least up until the end of the agreed extension (to March 2019) before any final decisions on the future of the service is made.

In summary, KCC strongly advocates the continuation of the P&R services. If it is decided that this will be via a commercial offer, then it needs to be ensured that the cost to the customer will be competitive so that users are not left in a position whereby it is cheaper to drive in to the centre and pay to park.

I am also extremely disappointed that KCC was not given an appropriate opportunity to respond regarding the future of the park and ride sites prior to these reports being written. I would have expected to be formally consulted on this matter given the importance of modal shift for Maidstone, and the potential detriment to the Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) targets should the closures go ahead.

Yours sincerely



Barbara Cooper
Corporate Director
Growth, Environment and Transport

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