

**Agenda Item No:** 11

**Report To:** Joint Transportation Board

**Date:** 14<sup>th</sup> September 2010

**Report Title:** Park and Ride Site: Update on Design, Layout and Planning Application

**Report Author:** Tim Reynolds (KHS Project Manager)



<b>Summary:</b>	A report for information highlighting the work progressed to date on the development of the Drovers Park and Ride site and identifying the issues tackled and the solutions being carried forward ahead of a formal public consultation exercise in early October 2010.
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**Key Decision:** NO

**Affected Wards:** All, but more specifically Ashford Town Centre Wards

**Recommendations:** **The Executive be asked to:- Note the progress made with this proposal and comment to officers either at or after the JTB meeting**

**Policy Overview:** The need for a high quality public transport system anchored by park and ride sites is a key plank in the Transport and Car Parking Strategies for Ashford's Growth. Policy CS15 of the LDF Core Strategy states that the council will seek the early introduction of Park and Ride schemes. Park and Ride will also support the Ashford Town Centre Area Action Plan policy TC22 (car parking).

**Financial Implications:** GAF3 is funding the scheme preparation work as far as the application for planning permission and major scheme bid submission to the Department for Transport...

**Risk Assessment** N/A at this planning application stage.  
A full risk assessment has been undertaken as part of the business case work

**Equalities Impact Assessment** As part of the planning application more detailed work on Environmental Impact Assessments, Traffic Impacts and Travel Plans / Use and Access of the site will be completed.

**Other Material Implications:** None at this planning stage

**Exemption Clauses:** N/A

**Background Papers:** On site layout plan to be supplied at the Joint Transportation Board meeting by way of a handout.

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## **Report Title: Park and Ride**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To update members of the Joint Transportation Board of the progress made with the proposed Drovers Park and Ride site in light of recent work carried out for the planning application process.
2. To let members of the Joint Transportation Board comment on the proposed plans and layout drawings as well as outline technical information in advance of the public consultation that is required as part of the planning application process.

### **Issue to be Decided**

3. Members will be aware of the work to provide a business case and major scheme bid to government for funding the SmartLink and Park and Ride scheme. The business case work has been completed in draft but following advice from the Department of Transport the major scheme bid has been held pending the outcome of the government's spending review and further advice as to the bidding procedure. The Executive need to approve the business case prior to the bid being made by Kent County Council who are clients and will be operators of the scheme. This report is not about approving the business case for the scheme. This will be the subject of a later report to the Executive.
4. No decisions are required at this stage, however, feedback on the plans and technical specifications reported would be valued prior to the public consultation exercise.

### **Background**

5. The need for 3 new Park and Ride sites is an integral part of the transport and car parking strategies that support Ashford's Growth. Drovers Park and Ride is the first of three Park and Ride sites planned for the Ashford urban area. The sites at Drovers, Waterbrook and Chilmington will be connected to the town centre and international railway station by the proposed SmartLink Bus Rapid Transit system.
6. In essence a Park and Ride network is a very efficient way of conveying large numbers of people, turning up at a generally near constant rate, into a congested and / or restricted central area.
7. By holding back cars at the urban edge that are being used for trips entailing predominantly longer stays at the centre, a Park and Ride network can stop a large quantity of non-essential trips being made on central roads, enabling a more pleasant and vibrant centre free from the rigors of congested traffic and with enough capacity to ensure essential trips through town are unhindered.

8. Ashford's Park and Ride network is planned to be delivered in three phases. Drovers is scheduled to open between 2013 and 2015 depending on funding and business case, Waterbrook from about 2016 and Chilmington Green from about 2018 onwards though most likely post 2021.
9. Drovers Park and Ride will be an integral part of the first phase of SmartLink. It will comprise a site of circa 750-800 parking spaces that may be built out in two phases depending on expected demand at the time of build (linked to development levels within the town centre).
10. The site will house a facilities building including a covered waiting room area, manned information point, SmartLink staff facilities, toilets and refreshment vending machines. In addition to the waiting room area there will be external covered waiting areas, seating and real time bus information gantries.
11. The site will cater for up to three SmartLink vehicles at any one time in addition to providing a stopping location for longer distance bus and coach services.
12. Accommodation will be made for motorcycles and bicycles and the site will be sympathetically landscaped and secured by the provision of Close Circuit Television monitoring.
13. Access to and from the site for SmartLink buses will be either via the site access ramp to / from Fougères Way (featuring a northbound bus lane) or via the dedicated bus-way and running lanes through the new Drovers Roundabout and onto dedicated bus lanes and bus-ways on Templer Way.
14. All other traffic will enter and exit the site via the exit ramp from Fougères Way. This ramp will also be used to provide access to and from the development proposed in the south east corner of the site on a 2.6 acre plot.
15. Although the site for the Park and Ride, along with the plots of land necessary for the improvement of Drovers roundabout have now been purchased by Kent County Council using GAF3, the land transfer agreement requires certain undertakings by Kent County Council to assist the delivery of the commercial development scheme alongside, in particular obligations to provide environmental and transport impact appraisals and suitable surface water drainage system and ecological mitigation works. (A separate planning application made to Ashford Borough Council by the developer of this land is expected in the near future).
16. Outline design work has been largely completed for the proposed site and an estimated build cost of c£7.25 million has been calculated. This cost includes construction of the access ramp, installation of traffic signals at the junction with Fougères Way and facilities building, as well as works to provide complicated foul and surface water drainage systems and works required to satisfy the ecological issues that surround the site.
17. In terms of ecology the scheme will need to satisfy some potentially onerous requirements being close to The Warren nature reserve.. To the west of the site The Warren houses Great Crested Newt breeding ponds and as such the land proposed for the Park and Ride site is within a 250 metre radius of these

ponds and therefore within the recommended foraging zones expected for Great Crested Newts and other species. The site boundaries and open meadowland areas also provide foraging ground for several species of bat and badgers known to be present.

- 18 In order to mitigate the effects of the site on these species an area of grassland to the north of Warren Lane and bounded by the M20 Junction 9 has been identified. This land is owned by the Highways Agency and work is progressing to gain access to upgrade the land and ultimately purchase it from the Highways Agency. In principle the Highways Agency have agreed for the land to be used for ecology mitigation and outline drawings of the site enhancements are currently being considered by Natural England and Kent Wildlife Trust.
- 19 This land effectively provides a 1 to 1 replacement of the land lost to the Park and Ride site and further negotiations may be required to provide a financial contribution towards establishing additional mitigation land between the Warren, and Hothfield Common in order to satisfy planning obligations.
- 20 To the north of the site lies an area of semi-wet grass land with complicated hydrological patterns that can also be seasonal. The land on which the proposed Park and Ride site will be built naturally falls towards this area of grass land and as such currently drains onto this sensitive and ecologically rich land. The Park and Ride site design must therefore cater for this run off and provide a system of drainage that recreates that lost by the construction on the site. A range of systems have been reviewed by the project team with significant input from Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council officers.
21. The chosen scheme provides options for two swales to receive run off water from both direct surface run off (from the bus-ways linking Drovers Roundabout to the bus terminal area) and attenuated run off from the main car parking deck. This latter attenuation will be achieved by using 'permeable' paving solutions and a certain amount of 'storage within the system'. This will allow water to percolate and be cleansed before reaching the swale to the northern edge of the site where the water will then flow through the soil to the semi-wet grasslands.
22. This best replicates the current situation and the idea has been agreed in principle at recent design workshop by The Environment Agency, Natural England, Kent Wildlife Trust and Ashford Borough Council officers.
23. The site will feature significant landscaping to the eastern boundary, building on the new landscaping put in place by the Fougères Way widening scheme. The existing hedgerows to the north and west of the site will be retained and gapped up accordingly with a new gated access provided between the swale and ecological buffer zone to the north of the site and the semi-wet grass land area. This gate is to allow for access to the swale and ecological buffer zone as the car parking deck will be fenced off from the area and will stand 50 cm higher than the level of the swale.

24. Proposals to manage the northern swale (which will remain largely dry) include periodic grazing by livestock and Kent Wildlife Trust are keen to manage this ongoing process.
25. Landscaping within the site will be focused on allowing visibility across the car park area to aid the safety and security of users of the site and the operation of Close Circuit Television systems.
26. The site will be lit as required during operational hours and a lighting strategy being developed by the project team will ensure that light spill is eliminated onto the Warren and that zoned lighting is created to allow nocturnal species to move across the site and forage as required.
27. A gated access from the site to Warren Lane will be provided. This is for emergency access and egress only but could also provide useful pedestrian access from the site to the Warren and ultimately the Park and Ride car park could provide a safer car park option for the Warren, enabling the current lane to be made more pedestrian friendly and returned to a more natural state. Work will continue on this aspect with Kent Wildlife Trust as the development moves forward.
28. The operation of the Park and Ride site is expected to be in line with that of the SmartLink system and this is notionally envisaged to be 7am to 11pm. However, consideration will be given to limiting the hours of Park and Ride operation in the evening to around 9pm at the latest.
29. Current plans are to allow free parking and charge for bus use to and from the site. This is a common practice at a number of sites in the United Kingdom and the off bus ticketing systems planned for SmartLink will allow a range of ticket options to be offered, in particular to those travelling as a group in a single car.
30. The site will be linked to the town centre by a SmartLink service operating every 10 minutes during the main period of daily operation. Anticipated journey times from the site to the town centre are 8 minutes and to the international railway station 12 minutes.
31. The site will be operated and maintained by Kent County Council and the proposed planning application will be submitted to planning officers at Kent County Council with Ashford Borough Council, amongst others, being a statutory consultee as part of the planning application process.

## **Risk Assessment**

32. N/A at this planning stage.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

33. Full DDA requirements for disabled badge holder car parking and accessibility to the facilities building are incorporated in the designs.

## **Other Options Considered**

34. A number of design and layout options have been considered for the Park and Ride site. Having regard for the obligations of the land transfer agreement, the provision of shared access arrangements with the proposed commercial site development alongside and the complicated drainage and ecological issues, the current design for the proposed Park and Ride site is considered to be a suitable arrangement. This layout has also been informed by a design workshop of interested bodies recently.

## **Consultation**

35. Public Consultation on scheme plans and operation is scheduled for early October, via an exhibition of the scheme proposals across two days at the County Square shopping centre in October (exact date to be confirmed).
36. Broad consultation on the concepts behind Park and Ride and the placement of the Drovers site as the first of three to cover the Ashford area as part of the SmartLink network has already taken place at several transport wide public consultation exhibitions at both County Square (in June 2010) and the Ashford International Hotel (in November 2009).

## **Implications Assessment**

37. The proposed Park and Ride scheme is being submitted to Kent County Council for planning approval only at this stage. The approved Car Parking Strategy recommends a Park and Ride site at Drovers as having a capacity of up to 1000 cars in order to support the full growth area targets to 2031. Having considered the constraints of the site as outlined above, including the issues arising from the land transfer agreement, together with the abolition of growth targets in Regional Special Strategies, the proposal to provide 750-800 car parking spaces at Drovers Park and ride is considered to be suitable for many years to come. The car parking strategy will now be amended accordingly.
38. There are no other immediate implications for the Council arising at this stage.

## **Handling**

39. The report is for information and comment at this stage.

## **Conclusion**

40. Design and preparation work for the SmartLink and Park and Ride scheme has been undertaken over the past few years using the growth area funding.. The processes required for a successful planning application for the proposed Drovers Park and Ride site are underway and that significant work and progress has been achieved.
41. In particular the design team have had to balance some very critical and opposing issues, such as ecology, capacity, drainage and landscaping in

order to deliver a popular, functional and sustainable site. The current designs reflect this work and the forthcoming public consultation will seek further views before the final planning application is submitted later this year.

### **Portfolio Holder's Views**

42. Councillor Paul Clokie and County Councillor Nick Chard are being briefed on the scheme at a Transport Steering Group meeting on 9 September 2010. Any further views will be reported verbally.

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