

# Thematic Leads' Updates

*13<sup>th</sup> November 2025*



Enabling innovative, productive  
and creative businesses

*Tudor Price & Steve Samson*



## 4. Supporting the conditions for growth – Targeting Business Support

### Current Issue

- The economic climate is difficult, especially for SMEs (90% of Kent & Medway firms employ fewer than 9 people) with rising costs, skills shortages and economic uncertainty.

### Desired Outcome

- SMEs are able to access advice and support to tackle challenges, grow and thrive.

### Recent Growth Board Activity

Since 1 April, the Growth Hub has supported 848 businesses.

- 624 businesses 1 hour support,
- 185 businesses 1-12 hours
- 39 business 12 hours+ in-depth
- 1,592 support hours provided.

### DECISION FOR KMEP TODAY

- **Help publicise KMBF funding opportunity.**

### Next Steps

Consideration being given to additional business support activity responding to intelligence from Growth Hub reporting

KCC / KICC working on Lower Thames Crossing supply chain opportunities event early 2026

### 3. Attracting and welcoming investors to Kent and Medway

#### Current Issue

- There is evidence that firms securing foreign direct investment are more productive (on average) than domestic counterparts, and that they also have a positive impact on local firms within the supply chain.
- Promoting Kent and Medway’s opportunities is important in securing external investment.

#### Desired Outcome

- Further investment into the region
- More companies moving to and expanding within Kent and Medway.

#### Recent Growth Board Activity



#### Next Steps

- Inward Investment Service in-housing
- Working with Thames Estuary Growth Board to amplify the cluster growth potential of our key strategic opportunities
- UKReiif – May 2026

## 4. Supporting the conditions for growth – Kent & Medway Business Fund

Current Issue	Desired Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Many SMEs experience challenges in securing the finance they need to support their growth ambitions, especially where they are developing new products and services.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>SMEs are supported in accessing finance, where it will lead to our objectives of a more “productive, sustainable and inclusive” economy.</li><li>Enhanced support for high-growth and core economic sectors.</li></ul>





# Securing resilient infrastructure for planned, sustainable growth

*Vince Lucas & Tom Marchant*





## 9: Maximising the benefit of international connectivity – **Return of International Rail**

### Current Issue

- Eurostar services stopped in Kent from 2006-2020. Up to 614,000 passengers used these services every year.
- No international rail services have called in Kent since the start of the pandemic.

### Desired Outcome

- Return of stopping services to Ebbsfleet International and Ashford International Railway Stations.
- A viable frequent service is required – allowing business & visitor day trips

### Recent Growth Board Activity



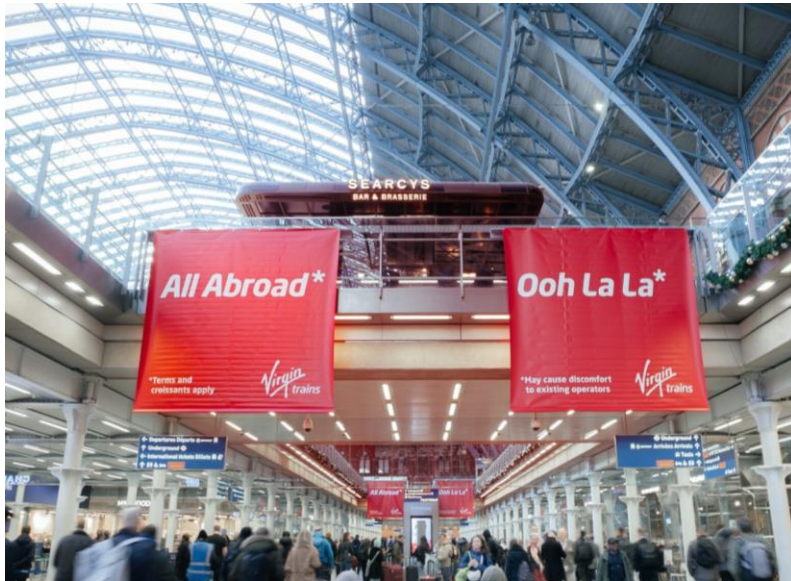
**Grow In Kent  
event - 26 Sept 25**



## 9: Maximising the benefit of international connectivity – **Return of International Rail**

### Recent Growth Board Activity

**Virgin Trains Europe (VTE) granted access to Temple Mills depot  
30 Oct 25**



**APPG with Office of Rail & Road  
12 Nov 25**



*“VTE has been clear from the beginning in its ambition to return services to Kent, as referenced by Sir Richard Branson in his Foreword to VTE’s 18 July submission to the ORR. It has also noted the degree of commercial uncertainty and operational complexity that is involved in re-establishing these stations. In that context, **VTE would like to make clear to the ORR that if either of the stations are re-opened, its services will stop in Kent**”.*

### Next Steps

- **DfT working group** (letters from 2 MPs to Rail Minister to expedite convening of group).
- **New Operator Engagement** (letters sent by KCC, ABC, DBC to VTE).
- **30th Anniversary Celebration** of Ashford International Station - Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2026 (ABC leading, with KMEP Manager support).
- **Investment Proposition development** centred around both stations (KMEP led)



## 9: Maximising the benefit of international connectivity – Lower Thames Crossing

### Current Issue

The Dartford Crossing, the only road crossing of the Thames east of London, is heavily congested and operates beyond its capacity.

Typically, it takes between 3 to 5 hours for traffic flows to return to normal after an incident at the Dartford Crossing has been cleared.

On average, there are over 300 full or partial unplanned closures each year; the average closure lasts c. 27 minutes.

### Desired Outcome

The new Lower Thames Crossing will almost double road capacity across the Thames.

It will enhance connectivity between the South East, Midlands, and North, making journeys quicker, safer, and more reliable.

By improving traffic flow and journey time reliability, the crossing is expected to unlock economic growth across the region.

### Recent Growth Board Activity

- Ongoing collaboration between LTC and Skills Bootcamps. [Engage Train Support](#), the construction training provider for Skills Bootcamps, will deliver a Construction Plant Competence Scheme (CPCS) course at LTC starting 10 November. A second course is scheduled for December.
- We will be preparing for Wave 7 Skills Bootcamps and what could be delivered at LTC, pending funding confirmation from the DfE.

### DECISION FOR KMEP TODAY

If you would like to find out more about the courses at LTC: email Lee (the MD) directly: [lee.johnson@ets-uk.training](mailto:lee.johnson@ets-uk.training)

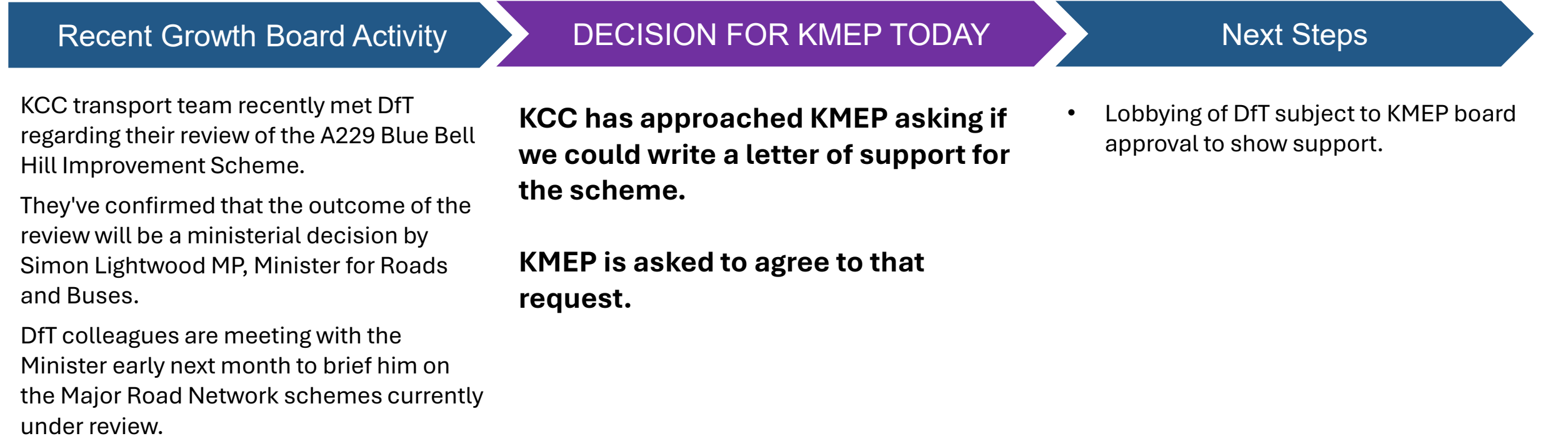
If you would like to find out more about the current Skills Bootcamps delivery, email: [izzy.pompova@kent.gov.uk](mailto:izzy.pompova@kent.gov.uk)

### Next Steps

- We continue to await an update from Government on how delivery of the project will be funded, this includes potential private financing options.
- Construction could start as early as 2026, with the new road expected to open in the early 2030s.
- KMEP secretariat to work with the KCC internal LTC group to maximise opportunities presented by the project.
- Organise LTC supply chain opportunities event for local businesses

9: Maximising the benefit of international connectivity – **A229 Blue Bell Hill Improvement Scheme**

Current Issue	Desired Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A229 Blue Bell Hill, M2 (J3) and M20 (J6) experience high volumes of traffic (73,000 vehicles a day) which results in significant congestion and road safety.</li><li>LTC &amp; future growth will generate additional traffic.</li><li>The A229 predominantly takes strategic traffic (70% of vehicles also use one or both of the motorways).</li></ul>	<p>The A229 Blue Bell Hill Improvement Scheme aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Help reduce congestion</li><li>Improve journey time reliability</li><li>Address road safety at M2 Junction 3 and M20 Junction 6.</li><li>Improve the road’s capacity to accommodate an increase in future traffic</li><li>Provide suitable routes and facilities for public transport, pedestrians, and cyclists</li></ul> <p>Proposals shown in the <a href="#">Consultation Brochure</a> and <a href="#">Scheme Plans</a></p>



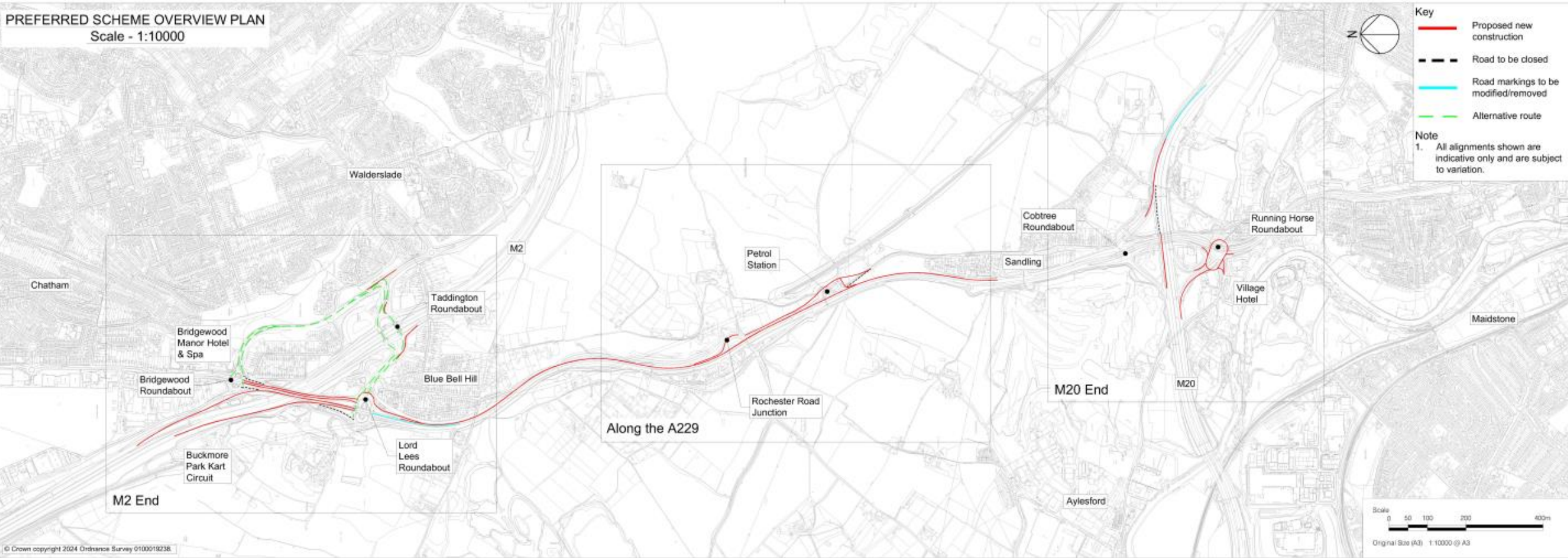
**PREFERRED SCHEME OVERVIEW PLAN**  
Scale - 1:10000



**Key**

- Proposed new construction
- Road to be closed
- Road markings to be modified/removed
- Alternative route

**Note**  
1. All alignments shown are indicative only and are subject to variation.



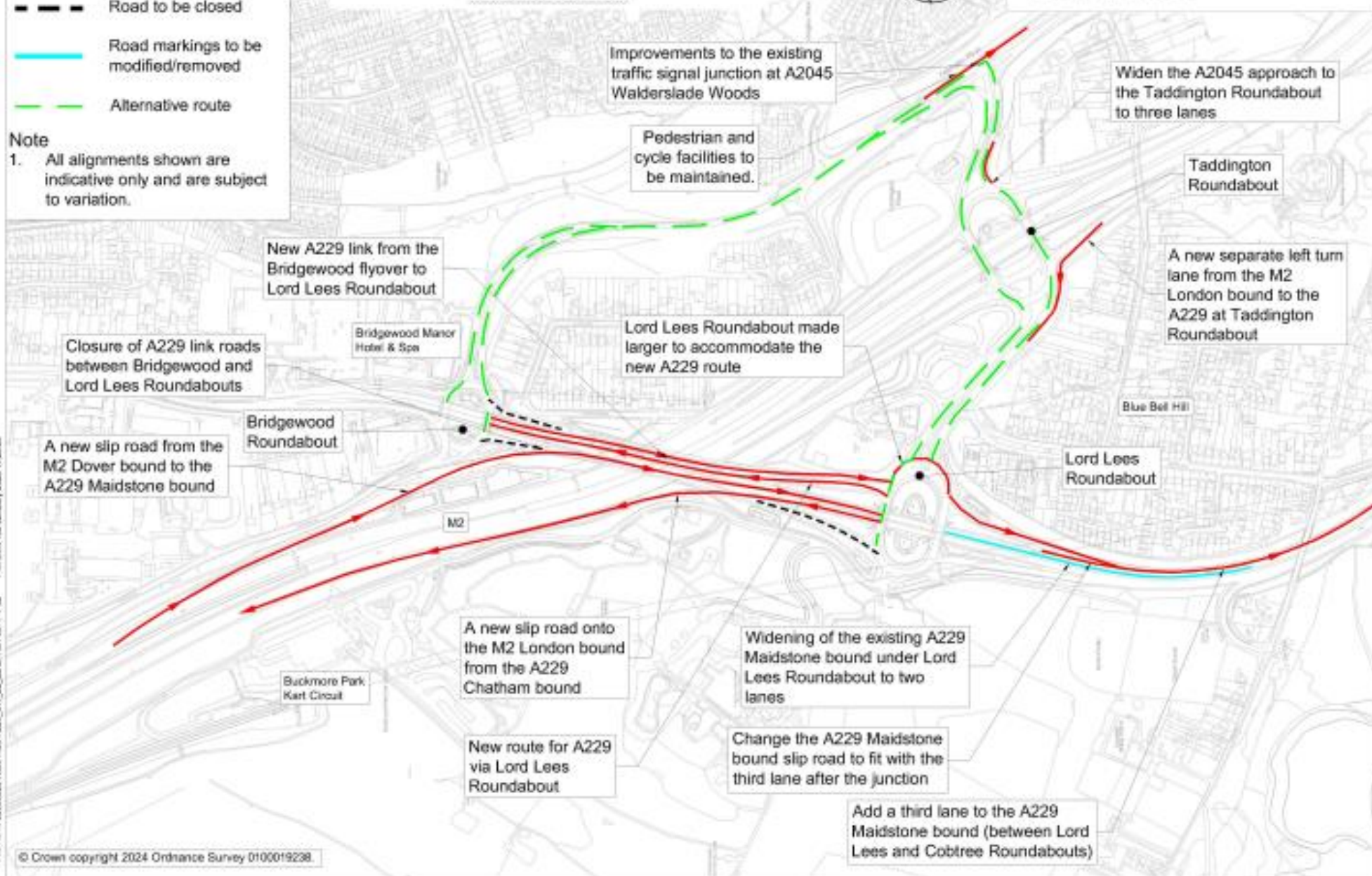


Scale - 1:5000

-  Proposed new construction
-  Road to be closed
-  Road markings to be modified/removed
-  Alternative route

1. All alignments shown are indicative only and are subject to variation.

Scale  
0 25 50 100 200m  
Original Size (A3) 1:5000 @ A3



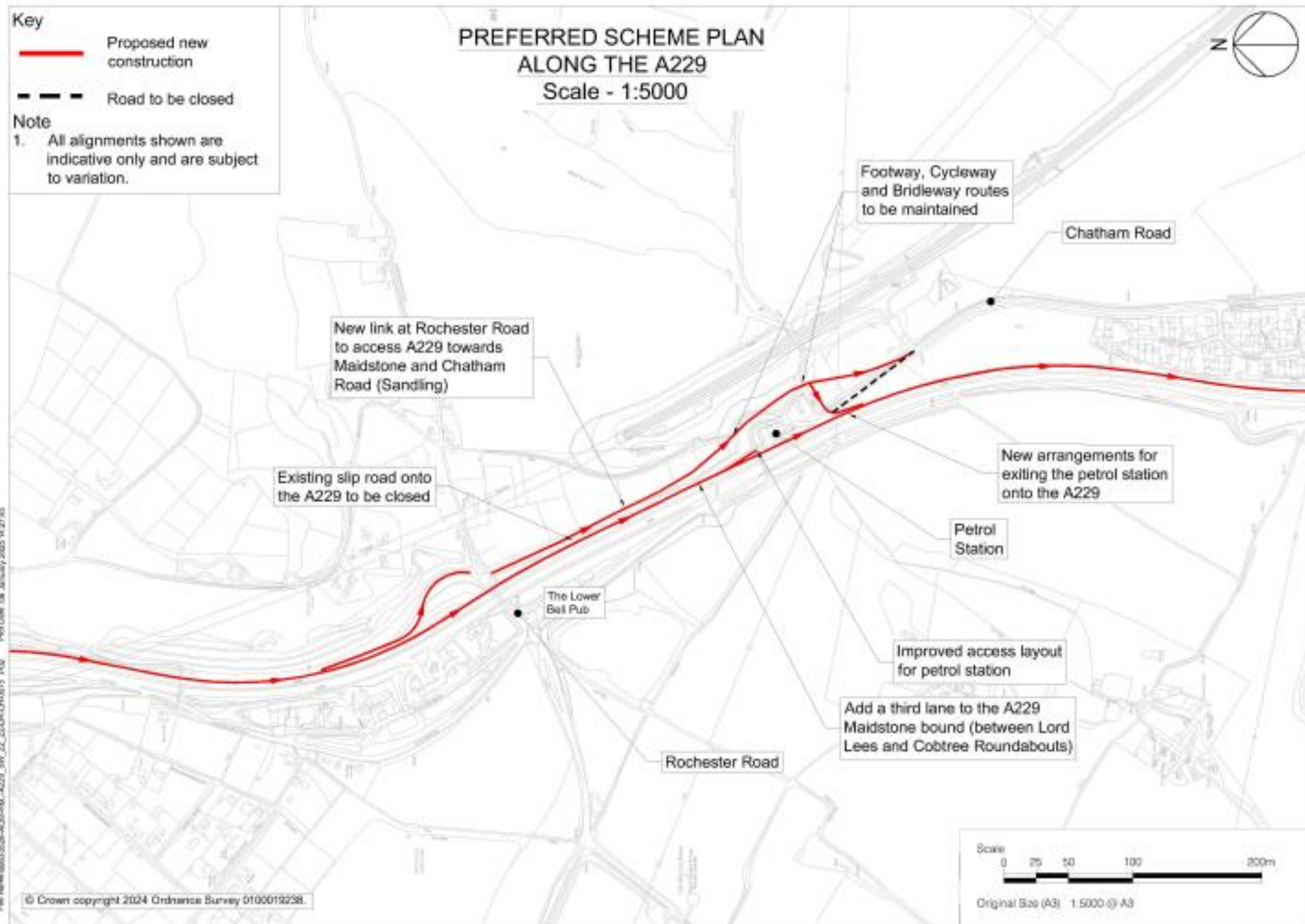
# Key

- Proposed new construction
- Road to be closed

# Note

- All alignments shown are indicative only and are subject to variation.

## PREFERRED SCHEME PLAN ALONG THE A229 Scale - 1:5000



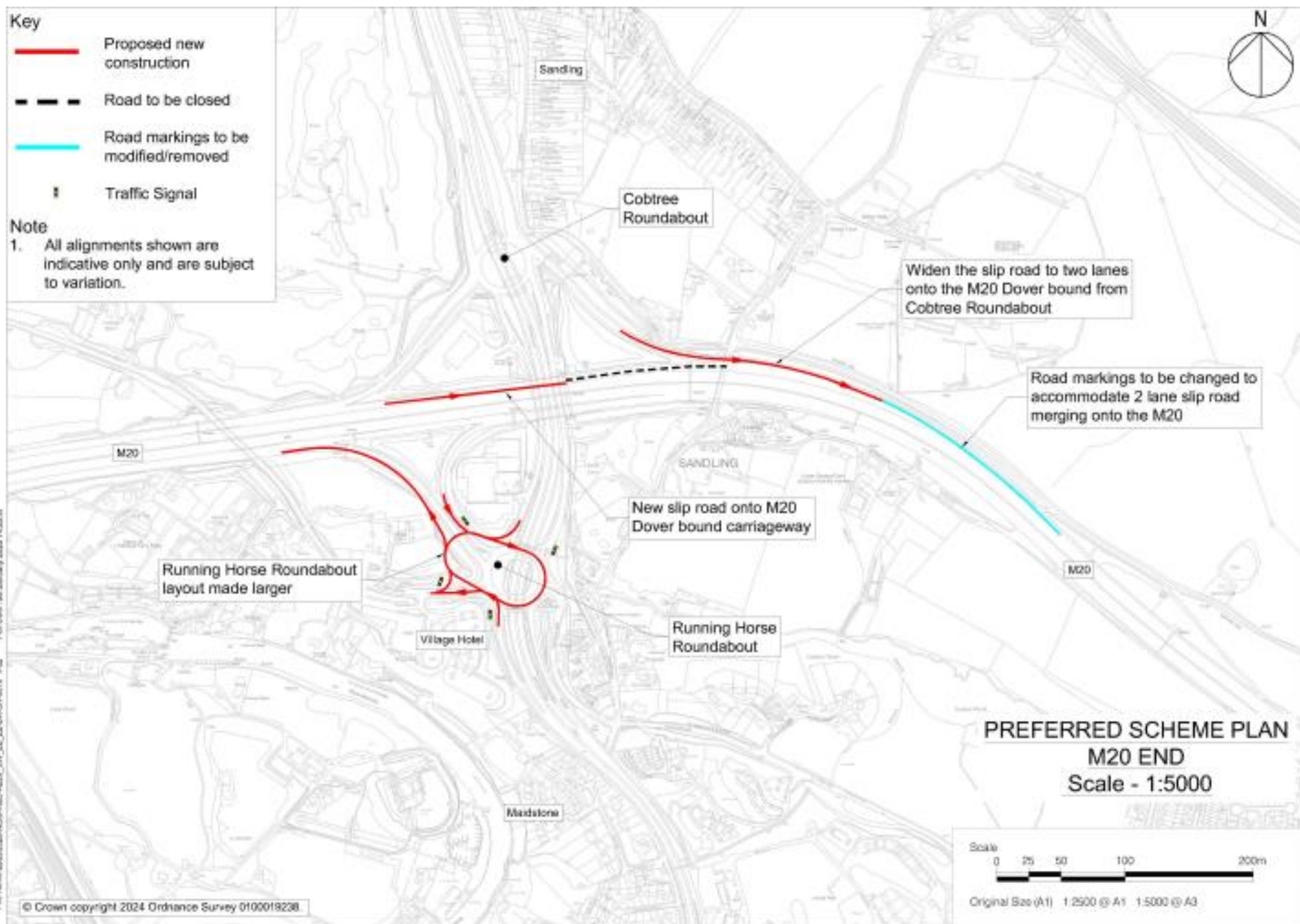


# Key

- Proposed new construction
- Road to be closed
- Road markings to be modified/removed
- Traffic Signal

# Note

- All alignments shown are indicative only and are subject to variation.





## 12: Supporting Kent and Medway’s energy potential – tRESP

### Current Issue

- The supply of energy is inhibiting some business expansion and relocation.
- Several businesses are struggling to get a UK Power Network connection to the grid.
- New technologies (e.g. electric vehicles) are rapidly becoming available. Energy infrastructure to support these technologies may not progressing at the same pace.

### Desired Outcome

- Energy supply is not a barrier to investment and expansion.
- Businesses are well-informed on the advantages of adopting new energy technologies, and the necessary infrastructure to support this adoption is in place.

### Recent Growth Board Activity

- BAB submitted a response to the Transitional Regional Energy Plan consultation.
- Port of Dover & DfDS presented on their Green Shipping Project at London International Shipping Week in Sept.
- Grain LNG reached out to KMEP, Medway Council, Kent CC, Swale BC about potential carbon capture hub and spoke model. Initial meeting took place. More discussions to follow.



### DECISION FOR KMEP TODAY

- In light of the recent tRESP consultation, does KMEP want to **launch an energy survey / undertake investigative work** to find out in more depth how the supply/demand balance is hindering business growth? Then request a meeting with the NESO?

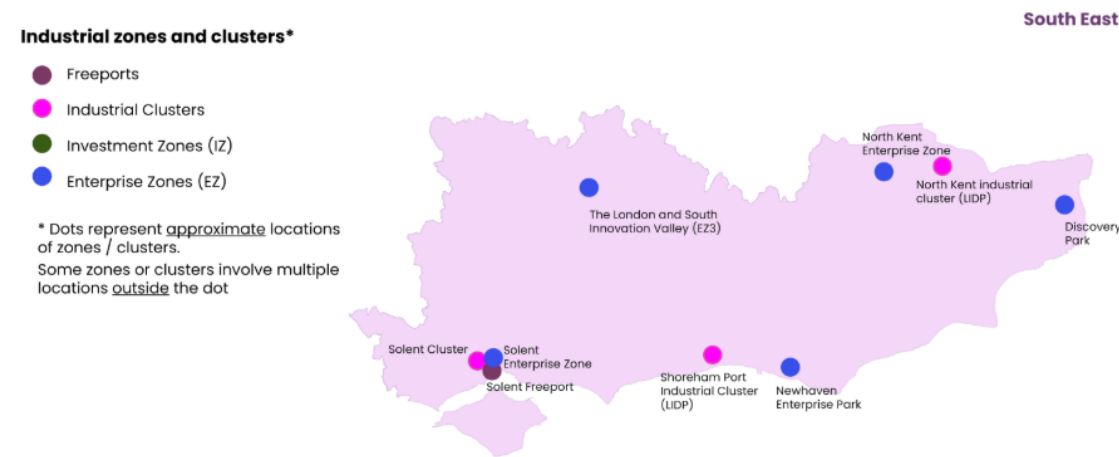
### Next Steps

- At next meeting, establish a KMEP position on what needs to be done to have secure and cheaper energy supply. Discuss market reform and energy generation.

## Issues with the consultation’s content

### 1. Incomplete and impartial information being used

The tRESP does caveat that - due to limited resources and time - there are some gaps in information, however, it states that the industrial zones across the South East are as follows:



### 2. No data on ‘industrial and commercial energy demand’ – only supply.

Industrial energy demand data is under development and will be included in the January version of Nations and Regions Context.

### 3. The connector queue (i.e. planning wait list) is not included.

tRESP does not align with the connections reform timeline, so NESO have spoken to the DNOs instead to get data – but it is not clear how that data is included in their plans – or what the connector queue looks like.

### 4. Exclusions

NESO excluded these building blocks from the tRESP pathways:

- **Offshore wind, marine and nuclear**
- **Rail electrification and industrial decarbonisation** projects within non-domestic demand

### 5. Already considering strategic infrastructure needs



The evidence base is yet to be completed – but are already starting to consult on possible strategic investment. Cart before horse...

Also, Port of Dover is missing & probably many more.

# Placing economic opportunity at the centre of community wellbeing and prosperity

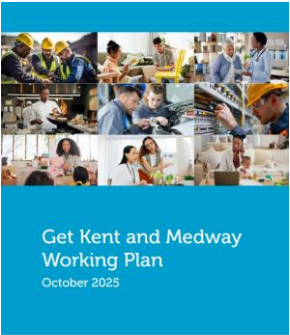
*Jeremy Whitakker*





# 14: Developing a strategic partnership for health and the economy

Current Issue	Desired Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>18.4% of K&amp;M's population was recorded as economically inactive due to ill health in 2020. By 2024 this had increased to 26% (up 7.6%).</li><li>48% of K&amp;M employers surveyed in 2023 for the LSIP said recruiting staff was problematic (19.7% said staff recruitment is a major problem).</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>More people with health conditions start, stay and succeed in work.</li><li>The percentage of K&amp;M's population that is economically inactive reduces to pre-pandemic levels.</li></ul>



Recent Growth Board Activity	DECISION FOR KMEP TODAY	Next Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Following presentation at last meeting by Shared Intelligence, the <a href="#">Get Kent and Medway Working Plan</a> has been published.</li><li>KCC/MC/ICB/JCP Meetings to develop and take forward the action plan (5 areas of focus)</li><li>Information to grow employers' confidence in recruiting people with health conditions and disabilities has been collated. A new employer-focused website is being commissioned linked to Growth Hub to host the information.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Note DWP to join the KMEP board in 2026 given importance of health &amp; employment agenda and to support governance of Get Kent &amp; Medway Working Plan (Hamera Ahmad - Service Leader for Kent and Medway.)</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>SPHE meeting on 17 November 2025 – invitations for T&amp;F groups to support action plans delivery</li><li>Share detailed action plan with partners and stakeholders highlighting lead organisations and timescales</li><li>DWP considering further rolling out employment support in KCC &amp; MC libraries (Co-location outreach).</li><li>Skills, Employment and Health summit to take place in Feb 26</li></ul>

Creating diverse, distinctive  
and vibrant places

*Miranda Chapman & Adam Bryan*



# 19. Developing Kent's Rural Economy

Current Issue	Desired Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Note the increasing importance of the Viticulture sector to the economy of Kent &amp; Medway.</li><li>• Kent has the largest planted vineyard area covering 1339 hectares. And with 120 vineyards, we are the number one producing region in the UK.</li><li>• Despite this, the profile of Kent Wine is not as effective as it could be. More promotion and support is required for the sector to reach its full potential.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The development of a comprehensive communications and marketing programme, working with the Wine Garden of England and wider stakeholders including smaller vineyards, to promote the sector and its product to national and international consumers.</li><li>• Development and promotion of a Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status for Kent wines, providing promotion which amplifies that positive aspects of obtaining this status.</li></ul>

Recent Growth Board Activity	DECISION FOR KMEP TODAY	Next Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• KCC Officers have been engaging with the Wine Garden of England and KCC Procurement colleagues to develop a specification for the communications and marketing work that will go to market in November 2025.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Note the ongoing work to promote the county's viticulture sector.</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Appoint consultants to deliver the specification over the next clear 12-month period and regularly report back to KMEP on progress and the impact of the work.</li></ul>