

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT**

Decision Made: 03 September 2010

**Park and Ride and Park and Sail**

**Issue for Decision**

That Maidstone Borough Council will not financially support the Park and Sail operation and will use the balance of its budget to promote and deliver Park and Ride.

**Decision Made**

That the operation of Park and Sail at Christmas is no longer financially supported by the Council and that the balance of the Park and Sail budget is used to promote and deliver Park and Ride.

**Reasons for Decision**

Park and Sail

Park and Sail commenced operation over twenty years ago and was intended to provide additional car parking capacity on busy Saturdays prior to Christmas. It operates between Maidstone (Undercliff) and the Malta Inn. In recent years the service has only operated on six Saturdays as agreed with the Museum of Kent Life to avoid clashes with their events when the car park is not available.

The cost of the operation includes hire of the boat, mooring fees, publicity, and erection of traffic signs, publicity and payments to the Museum of Kent Life for use of their car park and toilets. A small payment is also made to Arriva for the provision of stand by buses in the late afternoon to cover the last two journeys from the town – to avoid passengers being stranded if the boat reaches capacity.

In the event of bad weather or high river levels the boat is not able to operate but all costs except the boat hire still have to be met. In 2009 the service could not operate on two weeks due to flooding and on another snowfall depressed demand;-

14 <sup>th</sup> November	- cancelled (flooding)
21 <sup>st</sup> November	- 109 passengers (Revenue £265.00)
28 <sup>th</sup> November	- 198 passengers (Revenue £480.00)
5 <sup>th</sup> December	- cancelled (flooding)
12 <sup>th</sup> December	- 306 passengers (Revenue £736.00)

19<sup>th</sup> December - 69 passengers (Revenue £173.00) (heavy snow)

Fares income only met the cost of the boat hire on the 12<sup>th</sup> December. The overall cost of Park and Sail for the 2009/10 financial year was £2,568.99. Although the amount of financial subsidy has varied it has operated at a loss each year it has been provided. It is estimated that the net cost will rise to £2,860 in this financial year, dependant on the days the boat service is able to operate.

If the council ceases to fund the operation of the overall service it would still be possible for the current boat operator, or another, to decide to provide some form of service between the town centre and the Malta Inn, on a commercial basis if they choose to do so, as they do in the summer period.

### Park and Ride

Even on the busier Saturdays that Park and Sail was in operation in 2009 the Park and Ride car parks all had spare capacity. A similar situation is likely to occur in 2010. Therefore should Park and Sail not be operated it is expected that the demand could be accommodated on the Park and Ride service.

As a result of the economic recession demand for Park and Ride has decreased over the last eighteen months. To try and stimulate growth a number of initiatives have been undertaken in recent months to promote the service, including the production of 10,000 leaflets for distribution to hotels, camping sites etc over a 6 month period. Additional road signs have also been erected directing customers to the Willington Street site.

The publicity budget for Park and Ride in 2010/11 is £6,500. A significant proportion of this has already been spent or committed on the above initiatives and also to support specific town centre and independent retailer promotions. The remainder would normally be directed at promoting Park and Ride during the busier Christmas period.

Local media is becoming increasingly resistant to provide free comment and reporting of Park and Ride events unless advertising is also taken out with them. This can cost between £250 and £1,000 per advert depending on the publication. There are other opportunities to publicise and promote Park and Ride but these generally require funding. This includes further direct targeting of visitors to the town, advertising in the main shopping centres, approaches to local businesses and further improvements in road signing.

There is a need to support the provision of enhanced frequencies (additional bus or buses) on the Park and Ride bus service on the busiest shopping days around Christmas to cater for both the additional demand and help service reliability at times of heavy traffic congestion and delay. Normally the service is enhanced this way on the Saturdays immediately prior to Christmas (this is identified as an additional requirement and cost within the contract). In 2009 there was however also an unexpectedly high demand for travel on the mid week shopping days immediately after

Christmas, and the service was subject to some disruption and delay at that time due to higher than usual traffic flows.

If funding at a level that reflects the net cost of the Park and Sail service is used to support Park and Ride, it would enable the additional promotion of the Park and Ride service (£1,500) and enhance the service in the busier shopping days immediately after Christmas (£1,360) in this financial year. In future years, this sum should be examined as a budget saving.

### **Alternatives considered and why rejected**

Whilst Park and Sail was originally introduced to provide additional alternative town centre parking during a busy period, its usage no longer justifies the council paying for the service. Continuing its operation would require an ongoing subsidy. The actual revenue and final costs are also subject to adverse river and weather conditions.

Using the budget to further promote and deliver Park and Ride should help to increase revenue and reduce the overall subsidy to the service.

### **Background Papers**

None

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Head of Change and Scrutiny by: <b>10 September 2010</b>
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