

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE REGENERATION AND SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 27 APRIL 2010**

PRESENT: Councillor Sherreard (Chairman)
Councillors Beerling, FitzGerald, Paine, Thick, Lusty
and Vizzard

102. The Committee to consider whether all items on the agenda should be web-cast.

Resolved: That all items on the agenda be web-cast.

103. Apologies.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nelson-Gracie.

104. Notification of Substitute Members.

It was noted that Councillor Lusty was substituting for Councillor Nelson-Gracie.

105. Notification of Visiting Members.

There were none.

106. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

Councillor Beerling declared a personal interest in agenda item 12, "Draft Disabled Facilities Grant Report", as he had received a gift of a tankard from Golding Homes.

107. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.

Resolved: That all items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

108. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 23 February 2010.

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 February be amended so that the fifth sentence on page three began "The Committee *queried why such* importance had been placed ..."

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2010 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendment to minute N^o 99: "The

Committee *queried why such* importance had been placed on opportunities with UCA”.

109. Cabinet Member for Environment - Update on Progress 2009 - 10:

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Wooding, to the meeting and requested a brief statement on the progress he had made in his portfolio during the municipal year 2009/10. Councillor Wooding highlighted that the previous year had been difficult financially as they had made efficiency savings, however progress had been made in all areas of his portfolio and discussed the following with the Committee:

Parking

- Changes to residents parking arrangements had resulted in improved parking availability during the day with a 20% decrease in on street parking during the day, benefiting both residents and businesses. Residents had been surveyed and had informed the Council that they were finding it easier to park in the day time but that there continued to be overnight parking problems. However, this would only be eased by issue of 24 hour parking permits, and this move was unpopular with residents;
- The improved parking services system provided registered keepers with a photograph of the parking infringement online. It was anticipated that this would result in significant savings in processing appeals. Real time information was also made available to bailiffs to ensure they had the most up to date information when acting for the Council;
- In response to a question, Councillor Wooding stated the revenue from Sunday parking fees varied between £1,800 and £2,700 per day. Members agreed to receive an update on the relationship between Sunday parking revenue and the level of trade in the Town be investigated;

Public Transport

- The new park and ride contract had enabled the 2009 -10 budget to be reduced from £450,000 to £225,000. The numbers using the scheme had reduced by 14% as a result of the recession, so the Council had set aside £425,000 to fund the service in 2010 – 11. Kent County Council (KCC) had agreed to provide some funding for the service from April 2010.
- Members were concerned at the continuing costs of the Park and Ride scheme and agreed that the Cabinet Member should discuss the Park and Ridge marketing strategy with officers to encourage town centre users to use the service. Furthermore, Members notes that there was a lack of road signage to the Willington Street Park and Ride site and asked that this be improved;
- The Cabinet Member for Environment was investigating how Park and Ride fitted into the Local Development strategy to ensure that it met future needs. An integrated transport strategy, which

considered town centre and out of town parking, was expected to be completed by the end of 2010-11. The Committee requested an update be provided to the Committee in 2010/11;

Concessionary Fares

- Funding for concessionary fares would be reviewed for 2011 – 12.
- KCC were responsible for the national bus pass scheme from 2011 - 12. Councillor Wooding did not anticipate a change in service, but noted that the funds would be transferred from the Council to KCC as a result. Furthermore, the Council currently accepted concessionary fare passes on Park and Ride buses and therefore KCC would have to pay the Council for these journeys;

Road Safety

- There were three accident hotspots in the Borough out of a total of ten in Kent. In response to a Committee recommendation, the Cabinet had considered arranging an annual road safety day to highlight the risks. Cost had been a concern when most of the responsibility for road safety lay with other bodies such as KCC. The Committee did not feel there were significant costs and requested that the Cabinet Member for Environment update the Committee on the response of partners on leading an annual event in Maidstone.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Wooding for his hard work in the year and wished him well for the future.

Resolved: That the Cabinet Member for Environment:

- a) Discuss and improve the Park and Ride marketing strategy with officers;
- b) Improve the road signage to the Willington Street Park and Ride scheme; and
- c) Update the Committee on the following in 2010 – 11:
 - i. Sunday car parking revenue and the level of trade in the town centre
 - ii. The integrated transport strategy
 - iii. The progress of Kent County Council's response to an annual road safety day

110. Cabinet Member for Regeneration - Update on Progress 2009 - 10:

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Councillor Greer, to the meeting to discuss progress on Regeneration of the Borough. Councillor Greer gave Members an update on his portfolio and Members questioned him as follows:

High Street

- Design of the next phase of the High Street regeneration project should be completed by the end of September 2010. Work would

start by the end of 2010 and last 45 weeks. It would include measures to assist those with disabilities, such as low kerbs and reduced street furniture. KCC had agreed to contribute £600,000 towards the project;

- An independent report on the project would be available soon to show the real benefits to the town, including additional jobs and economic benefits;
- Officers and Town Centre Management planned to liaise with local businesses to minimise disruption to trade during the work programme;

Partnership with HeatSeekers

- Half of the houses in Maidstone Borough had been surveyed by thermal imaging cameras; the rest would be surveyed in the colder months of 2010/11;
- The analysis of the surveyed properties was being made available in May 2010. HeatSeekers [an insulation contractor] was asked to advise the owner of the building where insulation could be improved and of any grants available. Work could commence during the summer;
- The average annual saving on a three-bedroom house was expected to be £260 with a reduction of 1400 Kg in carbon dioxide emissions;

Developer Committees

- The developers committee formed to oversee the building of the running track at Sutton Valence had been a success. The committee included Members from Maidstone Borough Council, Parish Councillors and some residents. The Contractor for the running track had provided a weekly programme of work and a 24 hour telephone number to enable residents to raise concerns about the work should there be a problem. The implementation of this had avoided problems during construction and had consequently avoided possible costly enforcement action;
- Councillor Greer said he would like a legal basis for all local developments to be overseen in this way, and was in discussion with officers to investigate this;

Planning Policy, Development and Building Control

- A total of 695 affordable houses had been built in the last two years;
- In response to a question Councillor Greer confirmed a developer had avoided a planning obligation in to provide affordable housing as the Council had been unable to maintain the obligation due to the drop in property prices impacting on the profitability of the plan. He explained that the use of a legal charter was under consideration with officers for larger developments and he hoped that in time this could be applied to all developments to make the obligations legally binding. The Committee agreed to receive

confirmation of the number of Section 106 Agreements that had been removed as a result of re-application;

- The housing needs survey had identified that by 2026 the Borough would need more than twice the number of new homes previously identified. Members were concerned that this would be difficult to achieve, particularly as landowners were not selling their land in the current financial climate;
- During the current down turn in the economy, the number of planning applications received had reduced and consequently the number of planning officers had also been reduced and re-employed in other areas, such as Enforcement;
- The number outstanding of enforcements was under 200, compared to 500 in 2008;
- Work on the Enforcement policy had been completed and put in place;

Gypsies and Travellers

- Councillor Greer stated that officers were working on a Development Plan Document to address Gypsy issues;
- There was a need for sites to be more widely available across the Borough. Councillor Greer had asked Officers to look for suitable areas;
- Several landowners had successfully appealed against providing privately owned areas;
- Until the Council established a policy on the provision of gypsy sites, specifically a new public site, appeals by private owners were likely to succeed;

Park Wood

- In response to a question, Councillor Greer agreed there was a need for regeneration of the Park Wood area. Officers were in discussion with two large investment companies regarding the possibility of a public private partnership arrangement to maximise the potential value of this area in the future. Ideas included relocating some businesses to a dedicated car sales area and opening up the area to retailers. The Committee requested an update in 2010-11 on the progress of regenerating the Park Wood site;

Local Development Document Advisory Group

- A Member questioned the need for the Local Development Document Advisory Group. It was felt that advisory groups had no power and recommendations had been rejected by Officers. The Committee considered that it may be more appropriate for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to carry out the role of advisory group and agreed that the role of advisory committees should be reviewed and the merit of Overview and Scrutiny undertaking this role be considered;

Other

- Members questioned what steps were being taken to regenerate the rural economy. Councillor Greer suggested this was an area the Committee might consider for its future work programme;
- Members queried what work was being undertaken to fill empty shop windows and Councillor Greer agreed to discuss this issue with the Economic Development Manager;

The Chairman thanked Councillor Greer for his work on his portfolio and his interaction with the Committee over the last two years.

Resolved: That the Cabinet Member for Regeneration:

- a) Addresses the issues of empty shop windows in the town centre with officers;
- b) Reviews the role of advisory committees such as the Local Development Document Advisory Group and considers the merit of the role being undertaken by Overview and Scrutiny Committees;
- c) Update the Committee on the number of Section 106 Agreements that had been removed as a result of re-application; and
- d) Update the Committee in 2010-11 on the progress of regenerating the Park Wood site.

111. Gypsy and Traveller Sites.

Members discussed the written update on Gypsy and Traveller Sites. In answer to questions the Chairman explained that the officer had not been requested to attend as there was little to add to the written report.

Resolved: That the report be noted and a further update on the provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites be given in 2010-11

112. Draft Junk Mail Report.

The Overview & Scrutiny Officer, Esther Bell, circulated the draft report. A Member said two residents had complained about the use of Council resources on this matter. Members highlighted that the review had been carried out as a result of a number of resident's complaints to them about receiving junk mail and asking whether there was anything the Council could do to address the issue.

Resolved: That the draft report be approved.

113. Draft Disabled Facilities Grants Report.

The draft report was circulated by the Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Esther Bell, for Committee approval. The Committee agreed to review the report and submit any amendments or comments to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer by 4 May 2010. Furthermore, the Committee agreed that

the final report be approved by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman following any changes proposed by Members.

Resolved: That the Committee submit comments on the draft report to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer by 4 May 2010 and that the final report incorporating the suggested changes be approved by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

114. Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2010 - 11.

The Chairman asked for ideas for the future work programme. Members suggested the following items for consideration:

- Transition town status including the possibility of a Sustainable Maidstone Group
- Delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy
- The Council's marketing strategy
- Regeneration of the rural economy
- Park & Ride, Walk & Ride and Rail & Ride

The Chairman thanked Members of the Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Esther Bell, for their hard work over the year.

Resolved: That the following items be suggested for the 2010-11 work programme:

- Transition town status
- Delivery of the sustainable Community Strategy
- Council's marketing strategy
- Regeneration of the rural economy
- Park & Ride, Walk & Ride and Rail & Ride

115. Duration of the Meeting

6.30 p.m. to 8:52 p.m.