

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 20 APRIL 2021

Present: Councillors Cox, Fort, Mrs Gooch, Harper (Chairman), Hinder, Lewins, Purle, Round and Webb

Also Present: Councillors Clark and Perry

256. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

257. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

258. URGENT ITEMS

While there were no urgent items, the Chairman reminded Members that an additional document had been provided which detailed updates to Appendix 1 to Item 17 – Draft Economic Development Strategy.

259. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor Brian Clark was present as a Visiting Member for Item 14 – Member Agenda Item Request from Cllr Brian Clark – Consideration of a Pump Tract Facility in the Borough.

Councillor Perry was present as a Visiting Member for Item 17 – Draft Economic Development Strategy.

260. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Councillor Harper disclosed that he was the Chair of the Maidstone Cycle Campaign Forum in relation to Item 14 – Member Agenda Item Request from Cllr Brian Clark – Consideration of a Pump Track Facility in the Borough and that he was a Board Trustee for Maidstone Museum Foundation. The Council's Monitoring Officer had granted Councillor Harper a dispensation for Item 16 – Maidstone Museum Capital Expenditure Options.

Councillor Mrs Gooch disclosed membership to Maidstone Museum Foundation in relation to Item 16 – Maidstone Museum Capital Expenditure Options.

261. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillor Fort had been lobbied on Item 15 – Parkwood Leisure Contract Variation.

Councillor Round had been lobbied on Item 17 – Draft Economic Development Strategy.

262. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

263. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 MARCH 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed at a later date.

264. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

265. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

266. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

267. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development explained that the Economic Development Strategy would be delayed to 14 September 2021, to allow for the public consultation results to be reviewed.

It was requested that an item be added to the work programme for June 2021 to inform the Committee of the performance of the town centre following the lockdown period.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

268. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no Reports of Outside Bodies.

269. MEMBER AGENDA ITEM REQUEST FROM CLLR BRIAN CLARK -
CONSIDERATION OF A PUMP TRACK FACILITY IN THE BOROUGH

Mr Duncan Edwards addressed the Committee on behalf of the Maidstone Cycle Campaign Forum and described a pump track facility.

Councillor Brian Clark introduced the report and referenced the potential procurement of a cycle hire operator within the Borough that would be considered by the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee in the near future. The target age group for the pump track would be 14-23 years and could have positive effects on levels of antisocial behaviour by giving the target group an appropriate active outlet, as well as potential mental health benefits.

RESOLVED: That Officers be requested to bring a report back to a future meeting of the Committee to provide further information on the proposed location, research into other similar facilities, funding opportunities that could be available and the feasibility of linking the proposal to Making Maidstone More Active.

270. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

Item 17 – Draft Economic Development Strategy would be taken before Item 15 – Parkwood Leisure Contract Variation, in order for the Economics Director at Lichfields to present a report to the Committee.

271. DRAFT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Regeneration and Economic Development Manager introduced the report, reiterating that the draft Economic Development Strategy (EDS) was designed to be a high-level document.

Ms Lucie Bailey, Economics Director at Lichfields, gave a presentation to summarise the proposed EDS, as contained in Appendix 1 to the report, with an emphasis on the five strategic priorities: open for business; a greener, more productive economy; a thriving rural economy; inclusive growth; and destination Maidstone town centre.

The next step would be to update the draft EDS according to Member feedback, followed by an eight-week public consultation to begin in mid-May 2021. The results of the consultation would be reviewed with the final EDS presented to the Committee in September 2021.

It was felt that Maidstone’s centrality between other attractions should be included within the strategy, and the links made with businesses through the administration of Covid-19 grants should be used to encourage businesses to feedback on the draft EDS.

In response to questions, Ms Bailey explained that the strategy could be used as a hook to begin conversations with other partners where collaboration would be required to achieve the ambitions set out, for example development of infrastructure in rural areas. It was acknowledged that the housing allocation sites used as examples within priority 2 could be made less specific.

The Regeneration and Economic Development Manager confirmed that the businesses that had chosen to receive communications from the Council would be made aware of the public consultation.

In response to questions, the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development confirmed that the Regulation 19 public consultation would begin in September 2021, after the EDS had been reviewed.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development updated the Committee on two new funding programmes which correspond with actions within the draft EDS: the UK Community Renewal Fund and the Levelling Up Fund. The first was a revenue fund focussing on skills and employment, business support, and communities and place, and work was being undertaken with the college to create a town centre base to target those furthest from the labour market. The Chamber of Commerce business support scheme was also explained, which was considering the introduction of a green audit to identify opportunities and signpost businesses to appropriate sources of funding.

The Levelling Up Fund was a capital fund allowing bids up to £20 million per MP Constituency area, however the deadlines were often short. Therefore it was recommended to have projects ready for when new funding becomes available in order to submit within the deadline.

RESOLVED: That

1. The comments on the draft Economic Development Strategy be noted and the five priorities endorsed;
2. The public consultation programme for the revision of the draft Economic Development Strategy following the local elections in May 2021 be approved;
3. The draft Economic Development Strategy be reviewed to reflect feedback from the public consultation;
4. The completed Economic Development Strategy and five year action plan be presented to the Committee in September 2021 for full adoption; and
5. The work on applications to the renewal and levelling up funds being undertaken by Officers be noted and endorsed.

Note: Councillor Hinder left the meeting during this item.

272. PARKWOOD LEISURE CONTRACT VARIATION

The Leisure Manager introduced the report and updated the Committee on the activities resuming at the Hazlitt Arts Centre. In line with the easing of restrictions, community activities had resumed including dance and youth theatre and shows were returning to the theatre from June 2021, although ticket sales had been slow. Challenges to the theatre industry including the furloughing of staff had led to a decrease in the availability of shows, but September 2021 would see the return of a busy programme

of events. The request for the contract to be varied would give flexibility to the venue while moving towards recovery from the impact of Covid-19.

Parkwood Leisure had been successful in their bid to the Culture Recovery Fund, having been awarded £620,000 for its four theatres.

The Committee felt that the variation of the contract would aid in the recovery of the Hazlitt Arts Centre and in consolidating the good relationship with Parkwood Leisure.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Council enters into a Deed of Variation with Parkwood Leisure, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, with the Hazlitt Arts Centre services contract varied for the period up to 30 September 2021; and
2. The Council pays no additional contract sum to Parkwood Leisure for the delivery of the varied services contract.

273. MAIDSTONE MUSEUM CAPITAL EXPENDITURE OPTIONS

The Chair of Maidstone Museums Foundation, Mark Baker, addressed the Committee.

The Museums Director introduced the report, following the report presented to the Committee in November 2020 which outlined a revenue savings target with respect to Maidstone Museum. It was proposed that the best use of the existing capital expenditure of £389,000 be considered to develop existing spaces, address accessibility and reduce net revenue costs.

Of the four options outlined in the report option 3, the refurbishment of a display gallery, was recommended. It was proposed that the British Archaeological Gallery be renewed in partnership with the Kent Archaeological Society, who own many of the display pieces at the Museum. It was explained that this would deliver against the museum's 20-year plan, telling the story of Maidstone, and would aim to engage community groups in the construction and design of the gallery, taking into account the lowered capacity of museum staff.

In response to questions, the Museums Director confirmed that consultation had taken place with Maidstone Museum Foundation, and the proposals would be compatible with future developments should additional funding be achieved. It was considered unlikely that the amount needed for transformation of the whole museum would be gained, but the recommended option would be in line with the 20-year plan.

Concerns were expressed regarding the lack of feedback within the report from Maidstone Museum Foundation and Kent Archaeological Society, which the Committee felt was important to consider.

RESOLVED: That the item be deferred until further consultation has taken place with key stakeholders.

274. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30p.m. to 8.50p.m.