

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE REGENERATION AND SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON TUESDAY 11 MARCH 2008**

PRESENT: Councillors Moriarty (Chairman), Batt, Greer, Mrs Marshall, Nelson-Gracie, Thick, Warner and Yates.

APOLOGIES: Councillor Chittenden.

110. Web-Casting

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

111. Notification of Substitute Members

It was noted that Councillor Warner was substituting for Councillor Chittenden.

112. Notification of Visiting Members

It was noted that Councillor Garland was a visiting Member who wished to speak on Agenda Item 8 – Programme of Infrastructure Delivery 2006-2026.

113. Disclosures by Members and Officers

There were no disclosures.

114. Exempt Items

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

115. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2008 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

116. Programme of Infrastructure Delivery 2006-2026

The Chairman welcomed the Economic Development Manager, John Foster to the meeting. The Committee was advised that Communities and Local Government (CLG) had awarded Maidstone and other New Growth Points significantly less grant than that bid for and therefore Maidstone's proposed New Growth Point projects

needed to be prioritised. The grant awarded by CLG was not ring fenced or project specific and it had been agreed by Cabinet that Mr Foster's suggested criteria to enable the prioritisation of projects be used. Several proposed projects required initial design work, consultation and planning and Maidstone had therefore bid for more money for 2008/09 than the subsequent years. A further £273 million was available from CLG to increase New Growth Point grants where sufficiently strong cases were made. A strong evidence-based case would be provided by Maidstone Borough Council, however it would be imprudent to expect and rely on an increased grant.

The Committee considered the potential Town Centre pedestrianisation and street scene enhancement and agreed that the correct quality of furniture and lighting had to be achieved. What was unique, attractive and a draw to visitors to Maidstone needed to be balanced with a consideration of the short- and long-term costs. A Member noted that a Scrutiny working group on the Town Centre pedestrianisation had been created and advised the Committee to contact the group with suggestions. Mr Foster advised that Traders had been involved in the design of the Town Centre and that public sector investment had acted as a catalyst to achieve private sector investment in other towns across the country.

A Member queried why Table 1 of the report showed that a Langley Park Farm Park and Ride site would have a less positive impact on Maidstone than the project on the existing Newnham Park Park and Ride site. Mr Foster explained that the project on the Newnham Park Park and Ride site would have the dual benefit of increasing the size of the existing site as well as releasing employment land. The appropriateness of the Langley Park Farm Park and Ride site was discussed and the Committee was advised that there were no alternative sites available and the site was able to accommodate 400 parked cars. Members also considered the existing Park and Ride Sites and were advised that the instruction to place a bid for the A229 Park and Ride Site had been made by the Corporate Management Team. The Committee requested confirmation of the timescale of the procurement of this site. Mr Foster clarified that supporting origin and destination survey work had not been undertaken but recognised that the Park and Ride Best Value Review would address this. Members requested further information on the implementation of the previous Park and Ride Best Value Review.

The Committee was advised that Maidstone Borough Council was working in conjunction with other Government Agencies to deliver the Growth Point work, such as with the Environmental Agency and Natural England on the Green Infrastructure Strategy and Integrated Water Strategy. Mr Foster explained that although these were not required in the core strategy, they were considered worthwhile by Central Government. Mr Foster clarified that the

Maidstone Integrated Water Strategy project looked to work together with the Environment Agency and water agencies to achieve a holistic approach. The supply, demand and use of water, waste water management and the quality of water would be addressed together with the long term planning required to cater for and enable Maidstone's growth. It was highlighted that Ashford had conducted a similar project with success.

Mr Foster advised that the limited grant meant that the Council could not contribute to the Library and History Centre, despite this being a desirable project for sustainable communities. Kent County Council had the lead responsibility for this project and had placed a Heritage Lottery Fund bid to enable the project to go ahead. A Councillor queried why other leisure projects had not been considered and was informed that CLG had focused on housing and sustainability rather than leisure services.

Resolved: That

- a) Confirmation of the timescale of the procurement of the A229 Park and Ride site be circulated; and
- b) The implementation of the previous Park and Ride Best Value Review be investigated.

117. Memorial Safety

The Chairman welcomed the Director of Operations, Alison Broom, the Environmental Services Manager, Malcolm Wells and the Facility Management Officer, Tim Jefferson to the meeting. Ms Broom advised the Committee that progress was ongoing to ensure the safety of memorials in Maidstone Cemetery, however work would not begin on memorials in closed churchyards until this was complete. The estimated completion date of all testing and associated reinstatements was March 2009. Members were informed that the recommendation within the Overview and Scrutiny "Memorial Safety" Report, to produce and publicise a list of memorials that had failed safety tests, had not been implemented due to pressures of other work and that all known grave owners had been contacted directly.

The Committee noted that the grave owner held the exclusive right to the grave and the right to determine who else could be buried there, and was also the person responsible for its upkeep. There were approximately 17,000 Owners of Graves in Maidstone. The Local Government Ombudsman stressed the importance of contacting the owner of Graves individually where a memorial failed a safety test. However, difficulties had arisen as the onus was on the grave owner and the grave owner's family to advise when the owner either moves address or dies. There are no other procedures in place to ensure the maintenance of up to date records. Members were advised that it would be difficult to determine which Mason to

contact for each memorial in order to request historic contact details.

A Councillor requested an accurate cost estimate for the work to be carried out in closed churchyards but was advised that it was impractical to do so as the exact number of memorials in the Cemetery was unclear. Records only recorded the number of burials, rather than the number of memorials and site visits were consequently required to determine the number of memorials and their stability. The exact number of memorials in the closed churchyards was known, however, it could not be determined whether any reinstatement work was necessary prior to individual assessment as there was a wide variety of memorials which required different methods of reinstatement. An accurate cost projection therefore could not be produced prior to individual assessment.

Members were advised that the headstones that had failed tests were initially laid down to reduce risk until reinstatement work was carried out. This had been the case for many of the older grave stones. The Committee was advised that the existence of conservation orders in any of the graveyards was unknown and Members recommended this be researched.

Mr Wells explained to the Committee that memorials were constructed to a specific industry standard. However, the recent large volume of work had been required due to the non-delivery of inspections in previous years. A five year rolling programme of inspections would commence following the completion of current assessments and failure rates were expected to fall to less than one per cent compared to the current 42% failure rate. The five year rolling programme was considered by the industry to be good practice. Members suggested that the rolling programme be reduced to seven or eight years to reduce costs, however resolved that the potential increase in risk may lead to the increased insurance costs. Members requested that the implications to insurance be researched.

Mr Jefferson advised the Committee that, dependant on the length of the grave lease, the re-use of graves or use of un-used burial space had been considered in the United Kingdom. A Member queried whether attempts had been made to follow a number of European Countries to remove bodies and was advised that it was not necessary in Maidstone as over the last ten years there has been a demand of 150-160 burials per year and 11,000 grave spaces were currently available.

Members noted that the report raised concerns with regard to young people using cemeteries as play areas. Mr Jefferson advised the Committee that posters had been produced by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management and given to schools to discourage young people from playing in Cemeteries, but no further

work had since taken place. The Committee agreed that further action should be taken to educate young people to stop playing in cemeteries.

Members were advised that 3300 of the existing 16,000 memorials in Maidstone Cemetery still required testing. The hard work that had been undertaken to progress the memorial safety work thus far was recognised and the Committee congratulated the team. The Committee resolved to review the progress of the Memorial safety work in 6 months time.

Resolved: That

- a) Further work be undertaken to discourage young people from playing in cemeteries;
- b) Research be undertaken to establish whether any conservation orders existed in Maidstone cemeteries;
- c) Research be conducted on the implications to the cost of insurance in reducing the rolling programme of inspections to 7-8 years;
- d) An update on the Memorial Safety work be received in 6 months; and
- e) The Memorial Safety team be congratulated on their progress.

118. Future Work Programme

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Mrs Bell informed the Committee that the Cabinet Members for Regeneration and Environment would be in attendance at the next meeting of the Committee to discuss their progress over the Municipal Year 2007-08.

Resolved: That the future work programme be noted.

119. Duration of the Meeting

6:30 p.m. to 8:55 p.m.