

**Making Maidstone More Active Consultation**

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	John Foster, Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Mike Evans, Leisure Manager
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards

**Executive Summary**

A report on the Making Maidstone More Active project, which will progress with public consultation work focusing on the borough's rural service centres.

**Purpose of Report**

Decision

**This report makes the following recommendation to this Committee:**

1. To undertake focus groups in the rural service centres

**Timetable**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee	15 February 2022

# Making Maidstone More Active Consultation

## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure</li> <li>• Safe, Clean and Green</li> <li>• Homes and Communities</li> <li>• A Thriving Place</li> </ul> <p>The Making Maidstone More Active project materially improves the Council's ability to achieve A Thriving Place.</p>	Leisure Manager
<b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heritage is Respected</li> <li>• Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced</li> <li>• Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved</li> <li>• Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected</li> </ul> <p>The Making Maidstone More Active project supports the achievement of the Health Inequalities being addressed and reduced by further tailoring the leisure service to the needs of residents.</p>	Leisure Manager
<b>Risk Management</b>	Refer to section 5 of the report.	Leisure Manager
<b>Financial</b>	The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation.	Senior Finance Manager (Client)
<b>Staffing</b>	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Head of Regeneration and

		Economic Development
<b>Legal</b>	There are no legal implications from this update report.	Team Leader, Contracts and Commissioning
<b>Privacy and Data Protection</b>	Project data is held by the Council in line with our retention schedules.	Policy and Information Team
<b>Equalities</b>	We recognise the project may have varying impacts on different communities within Maidstone. Therefore we will complete a separate equalities impact assessment as described at paragraph 4.6.	Equalities & Communities Officer
<b>Public Health</b>	We recognise that the project outcomes will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	Senior Public Health Officer
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	The project has the potential to identify projects and proposals that will have a positive impact on crime and disorder.	Leisure Manager
<b>Procurement</b>	The Council will continue to follow procurement exercises and will complete those exercises in line with financial procedure rules.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
<b>Biodiversity and Climate Change</b>	The implications of this report have been considered and there are no direct implications on biodiversity and climate change. Supporting active travel will consequently reduce the boroughs carbon emissions, the biodiversity and climate engagement strategy is being rolled out during 2022, with monthly events and campaigns, many of which align with this reports intention to encourage residence to become more active, including cycling days/months, walk to school days etc.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Making Maidstone More Active (MMMA) is the name given to the Council's sport and leisure review. It seeks to ensure:
- Physical activity and participation are used as drivers towards improved health outcomes

- The future of Maidstone Leisure Centre is maximised, from development, participation and financial points of view
  - The Council's leisure service meets the needs, wishes and behaviours of residents
  - The leisure service is attractive to visitors
  - The needs of Maidstone's growing and ageing population are met
  - Future infrastructure options are aligned to the future population forecasts
- 2.2 In summer 2021, with the Covid pandemic passing, work resumed on this project with a focus on completing the Sport England SOPG process and the future capabilities of the Maidstone Leisure Centre building. A report for discussion on the SOPG findings and initial concept ideas for Maidstone Leisure Centre were presented to this committee in December 2021.
- 2.3 The council's leisure budgets are focused entirely on Maidstone Leisure Centre and one sentiment expressed by Members is the desire to see budgets extended further to cover the borough as a whole. The future infrastructure and service needs of the borough need to be considered in conjunction with any proposals for Maidstone Leisure Centre.
- 2.4 The Playing Pitch Strategy and the Sports Facilities Strategy follow Sport England's facility mapping model. They were commissioned as part of the Local Plan Review give comprehensive baseline data on facility numbers and quality across the borough. They also give future assumptions based on expected population growth mapped against Sport England data.
- 2.5 Making Maidstone More Active will build on this work and consult with end users and residents in communities. The qualitative data collected from public consultation will complement the quantitative exercises that have already been completed and refreshed as part of the Local Plan evidence base.

### **Rural service centres**

- 2.6 Based on the reasons given in paragraph 2.3, Making Maidstone More Active will begin this work in the borough's five rural service centres of Harrietsham, Headcorn, Lenham, Marden and Staplehurst. They already have established sports clubs and community groups and will be key locations in terms of how the council can extend the leisure, sports and recreation offer more widely in the borough.
- 2.7 Through the MMMA consultation the council will:
- Confirm current levels of usage for existing facilities and map them against local and national survey data,
  - Identify issues with current facility provision and how those issues affect physical activity levels,
  - Identify improvements that can be made to existing facilities, and the impact they will have on physical activity levels in communities,

- Explore the improvements or changes that would make the biggest difference to communities,
- Discuss shared use opportunities that may be available in communities,
- Consider how new or improved facilities would be managed.

2.8 The Leisure team has been working with the Policy, Communities and Engagement team, and by using the council's focus group protocols, has identified a plan that will include:

- Face-to-face focus groups with sports clubs and community groups to be conducted in each rural service centre,
- Online focus group webinars for rural service centre residents, to be conducted after each face-to-face focus group,
- Identification of opportunity projects that can be brought forward for implementation or funding consideration.

2.9 More detail on this plan is provided in section 4.

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### **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

#### **3.1 Do nothing**

The council could choose not to complete this consultation but that would be contrary to previous expressions and desires of members of this committee and **is not recommended.**

#### **3.2 Broaden the consultation across the whole borough**

This is the overall ambition of the MMA project but is not the right recommendation at the current time. The Maidstone Leisure Centre, in conjunction with the private sector and school sites, provides sports and recreation facilities for the town centre populations. Consultation on suitability of facilities needs to be undertaken, but the priority areas are the rural service centres so the focus groups will begin there. It is envisaged that focus groups for the town centre and surrounding areas will be delivered in the future using feedback from the rural service centre focus groups. **Borough-wide focus groups are not recommended at this moment.**

#### **3.3 Undertake focus groups in the rural service centres**

This option will give community needs assessment and feedback from the five rural service centres which will enable the council to understand the priority projects for the southern areas of the borough. This knowledge will allow projects to be selected for delivery and will also provide budgetary context to any future leisure decisions at Mote Park and Maidstone Leisure Centre. **This is the recommended option.**

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#### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 The recommended option is to undertake focus groups in the five rural service centres and build on these with online focus group webinars. The initial face-to-face focus group will be open to representatives from sports clubs or community organisations within the rural service centre. Examples of these include (not exhaustively) scout or guide groups, walking groups, religious groups, schools, nurseries and other volunteer organisations.
- 4.2 The sports clubs are representative of the core sports market in each service centre. The community organisations will be representative of other organised groups who have experience of providing activities for people and knowledge of community needs.
- 4.3 Working with the Policy, Communities and Engagement team we have started work on the design of the focus group in line with the council's focus group guidance. Following acceptance of the recommendation we will arrange dates and venues for the focus groups, and use existing contacts and communications channels to recruit as many sports club and community organisation representatives as possible. We will repeat this for each of the five rural service centres.
- 4.4 The focus groups will be led by the Leisure team with support from the Policy, Communities and Engagement team and facilitator support from council colleagues and volunteers.
- 4.5 The focus groups will be used to identify what will make the biggest difference to sports clubs, informal unorganised sport and recreation and overall participation levels in the rural service centre communities. These ideas can be explored further in the online focus group webinars which will be open to residents from each service centre, whose involvement will be from the perspective of the end user or customer.
- 4.6 The equalities impact assessment will be updated to reflect this approach and to ensure that the consultation is delivered in a way that ensures it is as inclusive as possible.
- 4.7 Final feedback from each rural service centre will give priority projects that then have the potential to be delivered by the council or delivered via CIL contributions.

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#### **5. RISK**

- 5.1 Making Maidstone More Active always had community engagement as one of its key aims. Not involving communities and end users in the exploratory work on what would make the biggest difference to people's behaviours and activity levels will always bring increased risks.
- 5.2 Managing public expectations will also be key to prevent future risks of public dissatisfaction and disenfranchisement.

- 5.3 The risks have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.
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## **6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

- 6.1 The Policy, Communities and Engagement team have been consulted on the key aspects of community consultation. The leisure consultants who completed the SOPG report for Sport England have also been consulted and the recommendation in this report is in line with the wishes and direction previously expressed by members.
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## **7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

- 7.1 Officers will recommence the rural service centre focus groups using existing resources and supplementing them with temporary staffing from other council departments where available and community volunteers.
- 7.2 The council's communications team will support with a communications plan for the consultation period.
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## **8. REPORT APPENDICES**

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## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- *Making Maidstone More Active Update* – Economic, Regeneration and Leisure Committee, 16 March 2021