

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE LEISURE AND PROSPERITY OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY
27 JULY 2010**

PRESENT: Councillor Paine (Chairman)
Councillors Burton, Mrs Joy, Nelson-Gracie, Pickett
and Mrs Smith

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence was received from Councillors

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

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

13. Apologies

There were no apologies.

14. Notification of Substitute Members

There were no Substitute Members.

15. Notification of Visiting Members

It was noted that Councillor English was a visiting Member with an interest on all items on the agenda.

16. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were no disclosures.

17. 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.

18. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 22 June 2010.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2010 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

19. High Street Regeneration Project:

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Greer, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Mr Paul Buchanan, the Director of Colin Buchanan and Mr John Foster, the Regeneration and Economic Development Manager to the meeting. Mr Foster emphasised that the improvements to the High Street

were being undertaken to ensure the right conditions were in place to enable economic development in the town centre. The ambition was to create a sense of place, with Maidstone being considered a town of high quality and a place people wanted to visit. The design of the high street had originated from a competition and sought to exhibit the buildings in the town centre. Officers had considered best practice of similar public realm projects across the country and had subsequently appointed the contractor at an early stage in the project to ensure any problems were addressed at an early stage.

The cost benefit analysis of the High Street Regeneration project had been commissioned to review what the improvements would mean to the Maidstone Borough. Mr Buchanan informed the Committee that he had sought to put a value on the intrinsic quality of town centres as this was often overlooked. He felt it was particularly important to ascertain a value for the quality of the public realm as it ultimately impacted on the property prices and economic development. He considered that a high quality attractive public realm was imperative in retaining existing and attracting new shoppers to an area. The amount of money spent in a town would thus increase and this would consequently drive rental values up. Mr Buchanan estimated a possible £700,000 increase per year in Maidstone. He recognised this could displace custom from one part of the town to another and therefore impact on rental values in other areas of the town had been incorporated into the cost benefit analysis.

Mr Buchanan advised the Committee that the private sector generally improved their own retail frontages to attract shoppers into their outlets as a consequence of improved public realm areas. Councillor Greer and Mr Foster had spoken to the businesses on the high street about the improvements to the public realm and the businesses had been receptive to paying for improvements to their own frontages once the work had been done. The Committee was disappointed that nothing had been put in writing to require the retailers to make these improvements and agreed that a clause be added to the Area Action Plan for the Town Centre so that any new planning applications be required to install and maintain appropriate retail frontages.

A number of Members were concerned about the potential negative impact of the removal of the temporary public urinals on the high street's environment and consequently on the public's perception of the town. Mr Foster informed the Committee that this had been considered and the impact of their removal on the environment from public urination in the high street was to be closely monitored. It had been agreed that the plumbing for the temporary urinal's would remain intact in case reinstatement was required.

The Committee queried what was being done to ensure that utility companies reinstated the new paving in the high street back to the same standard if any work was undertaken. Mr Foster informed Members that an agreement had been sought to ensure that any planned works were carried out by the utility companies prior to the laying of the new paving. This prevented utility companies from carrying out non-emergency work

for a set period of time. A standard shaped granite paving was being laid to ensure they were easy to take up and reinstate. An agreement was to be sought with the utility companies to ensure that any reinstatements met a defined standard. Furthermore, Councillor Greer informed the Committee that the Council was purchasing excess paving slabs for storage to allow for use in reinstatement work if required. The Committee agreed that a means of enforcing the reinstatement agreements with utility companies be sought. Councillor Greer informed the Committee that a sample of the granite paving was being laid to test resistance, the various coatings and the aesthetics. Furthermore, work had been undertaken to identify areas of low weight bearings likely to sink in order to prepare the ground to prevent this. The Committee agreed that a repair test be incorporated into the test to determine the viability of quality repairs and reinstatements.

A Member queried whether contingency plans had been put in place if the scheme went over budget or maintenance costs escalated. Mr Foster confirmed that costed high street plans with contingency budgets were being presented to Cabinet on 13 October 2010.

The Chairman thanked the witnesses for an informative presentation.

Resolved: That

- a) A clause be added to the Town Centre Area Action Plan to require any new planning applications to have installed, and maintain, appropriate retail frontages
- b) A means of enforcing the reinstatement agreements with utility companies be sought; and
- c) A repair test be incorporated into the sample patch test to ensure the practicality of quality repairs and reinstatements.

20. Cabinet Member for Regeneration: Plans and Priorities 2010/11.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Greer, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration to the meeting to respond to questions regarding his priorities for the 2010/11 municipal year.

In response to a question, Councillor Greer informed the Committee that the number of small businesses in Maidstone had increased and that he hoped to encourage more new businesses into Maidstone. He noted his ambition to attract more businesses with higher paid jobs to Maidstone and to raise resident's skill levels and consequently earning potential. The Committee emphasised the importance of quality design in attracting businesses to Maidstone. Furthermore, the Committee agreed that there was a requirement for further and higher education in Maidstone to raise skill levels and to attract businesses to the Borough. Members felt that the Council could do more to establish higher and further education in the Borough, noting that there was a key relationship between further and higher education and economic development.

The Committee noted Councillor Greer's priority to make further use of the river to boost Maidstone's economy and quality of life for residents. He emphasised his ambition to integrate the river with the High Street and to make the toll path useable. His vision up to 2030 included more restaurants along the river front. A Member noted the work of the Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 'making the most of the river'. As part of this review, the Committee had identified the requirement for maps depicting the ownership of the land along the river to help the Council realise the full potential of the river in Maidstone. Members noted there had been difficulties in identifying land ownership and the Committee agreed that it be further explored in order to aid the development of the river.

Members considered the diversity of Maidstone given its urban and rural economy and stressed the requirement for a holistic economic development strategy for the whole borough. The Committee felt that there was often a preoccupation with the regeneration of the town and that the rural economy had often been overlooked. Members agreed that greater priority should be given to the diversification of the rural economy. Furthermore, Members noted the success of a number of rural developments in Marden and Staplehurst. The Committee agreed that successful developments in rural areas be showcased and new developments be further encouraged. Members also agreed that developers who had developed in other borough's rural areas be encouraged to develop in Maidstone.

Councillor Greer highlighted his priority to deliver enough of the right type of new homes. He felt there was a need to be more proactive in sustainable developments, such as facilitating rain water collection and making the design of homes more adaptable to provide for families through to their old age.

The Committee thanked Councillor Greer for an informative presentation and requested a copy of the costings to date of the High Street Regeneration project and early sight of the High Street Regeneration Financials report being produced for Cabinet on 13 October 2010.

Resolved: That the Cabinet Member for Regeneration:

- a) Place greater emphasis on both further and higher education;
- b) Determines the ownership of the land along the river to aid its development and maintenance;
- c) Produces a holistic economic development strategy for the whole borough;
- d) Give greater priority to the diversification of the rural economy;
- e) Showcase and encourage developments in rural areas and encourage developers who have developed in other rural areas;
- f) Circulates costings to date of the High Street Regeneration project to the Committee and provides an early view of Cabinet's High Street Regeneration Financials report.

21. Amendment to Order of Business.

Resolved: That Agenda items 10, 'Value of Leisure and Culture Review' and 11, 'Value of Leisure and Culture Review Scoping Document' be taken together.

22. Value of Leisure and Culture Review:

The Chairman welcomed the Head of Change and Scrutiny, Angela Woodhouse to the meeting to discuss the Committee's Value of Leisure and Culture review. She explained to the Committee that a Leisure and Culture Strategy was being produced following an IDEA (now Local Government Improvement and Development) productivity review. An officer group was working on the strategy and the Committee had been asked and had subsequently agreed to contribute to this piece of work by reviewing the value of leisure and culture. Mrs Woodhouse emphasised the importance of understanding the intrinsic value of leisure and culture and considering what Maidstone would be like without each of its leisure and culture provisions. She also noted that the Council's directorates had recently been restructured and had placed the culture portfolio under one directorate.

The Committee agreed the Value and Leisure Culture review's scoping document as set out in the agenda.

Resolved: That the scoping document for the Value of Leisure and Culture Review be agreed.

23. Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture: Written Plans and Priorities for 2010/11.

The Committee considered the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture's vision statement for 2010/11. The Committee felt it was important that in future Cabinet Members be requested to submit written vision statements and be asked to attend the meeting to respond to any questions.

Members emphasised the importance of considering and improving all the Council's parks and green spaces and not to just consider Mote Park. Furthermore, the Committee also agreed to refer the following requests for clarification to the Environment and Transportation Committee for consideration:

- Clarification of what the potential for the newly improved crematorium was; and
- Clarification of the usage of allotments: Did this include turning them into another public space.

Resolved: That

- a) Cabinet Members submit written vision statements and attend the relevant scrutiny meetings to respond to any questions; and
- b) The Environment and Transportation Committee seek clarification with regard to:

- i. What the potential for the newly improved crematorium was; and
- ii. The usage of allotments and whether this included turning them into another public space.

24. Future Work Programme and the Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

The Committee considered its future work programme and noted its constitutional role in considering the Core Strategy documents. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Mrs Bell, highlighted that a Core Strategy workshop had been arranged for all Members on 23 August 2010 and encouraged the Committee to attend given its role. Furthermore she advised the Committee that two extraordinary meetings were being arranged to consider Core Strategy documents. The Committee agreed to hold an extraordinary meeting on 14 September 2010 to consider the Housing Targets and Distribution of Development and the Gypsy and Traveller Pitch Target reports in time to make recommendations to Cabinet. Mrs Bell also informed the Committee that officers had requested an extraordinary meeting on 9 November 2010 to consider the Complete Core Strategy for public consultation. Members raised concern about dates being set by other officers without consulting them and asked Mrs Bell to rearrange this meeting as a number of Members could not attend.

Mrs Bell circulated a reference from the Review of Past Reports Working Group, attached at Appendix A. The Committee agreed to consider the reference and to contact her if they wished to add any of the items to its work programme.

Resolved: That

- a) An extraordinary meeting of the Committee be held on 14 September 2010 to consider the Housing Targets and Distribution of Development and the Gypsy and Traveller Pitch Target reports to make recommendations to Cabinet;
- b) The Overview and Scrutiny Officer rearrange the proposed meeting on 9 November 2010; and
- c) Members contact the Overview and Scrutiny Officer if they wished to add any of the items suggested in the reference from the Review of Past Reports to the work programme.

25. Duration of the Meeting.

6.30pm to 8.50pm.

Maidstone Borough Council

Leisure and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 27 July 2010

Reference from the Review of Past Reports Overview and Scrutiny Working Group

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In 2007-08, Overview and Scrutiny Members agreed that a review needed to be carried out analysing the impact of those reports completed since Overview and Scrutiny's inception in 2001. This report considered all the reports produced from 2001 to 2008 to identify if any further action were required as well as the key successes.
- 1.2 Two Councillors from each Overview and Scrutiny Committee were tasked with investigating whether those reports relevant to their Committee could be formally closed (i.e. all approved recommendations had been implemented), or whether some recommendations still needed following up. Members were also seeking to identify key outcomes from the reports.
- 1.3 In 2009 a number of the completed reviews were signed off whilst some remained live issues that required further investigation. The working group agreed which reviews needed to be progressed and/or followed up and which should remain as watching briefs with updates to scrutiny committees as and when they are required.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The working group recommends the following actions for the reports reviewed relevant to the Leisure and Prosperity OSC's remit:

That the following topics be put forward to Committees in 2010-11 for follow-up and review:

- Homelessness and rough sleeping
- Listed Buildings
- Image of Maidstone Town Centre (in consultation with the Environment and Transportation Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

That the relevant scrutiny committees be asked to maintain a watching brief on:

- Housing Needs
- Lockmeadow Market
- Olympics
- Tourism

3. Relevant Extracts from the Review of Past Reports

3.1 Reviews for Follow Up and Review

3.1.1 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

"Summary

Homelessness is all too often an invisible problem; an issue where people and organisations – including local authorities – prefer to bury their heads in the sand. We, as Councillors and residents of the Borough should be proud of the way that the Housing Department and its partner agencies have sought to tackle the problem of homelessness and rough sleeping. We are particularly pleased about the Council's success in attracting funding for the proposed new hostel in Knightrider Street.

At the same time, we believe that our report has raised a number of legitimate questions about the future of the services provided by the Council in the wake of housing transfer and about the preparedness of the Housing Department to deal with the requirements of the new Homelessness Act. We look forward to receiving the response of the Cabinet Member to our recommendations."¹

Outcomes

The Cabinet Member for Housing welcomed the Committee's report and shared the Committee's concern about the use of bed and breakfast accommodation to house the homeless. Schemes to help reduce the numbers of homeless people in the Borough have now been developed and are being implemented. A homelessness partnership scheme with English Churches Housing Group will provide 30 direct access homes for single homeless people, and will include a Day Centre to be managed by Maidstone Christian Care and 6 furnished family units for the Council to use to provide emergency accommodation. A Homelessness Review was due to be completed by the Council in early spring 2003 to provide the base data to formulate Council policy.

Action Required: We have still not identified the extent of homelessness and rough sleeping in the Borough, this could be examined by the Regeneration and Sustainable communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee next year."

3.1.2 Listed Buildings

"The majority of recommendations were for Kent County Council but needs to be followed up."

3.1.3 Image of Maidstone Town Centre

"Summary

This review looked at the image of Maidstone's town centre and made a number of recommendations for improvement. The major

¹ As taken from the conclusion of the Homelessness and Rough Sleepers report

recommendation concerning the provision of public toilets was taken forward by the Environment and Leisure OSC as part of its work programme in 2008-09. The other major issues raised were congestion and displaying artwork in the town centre.

Outcomes

Concern was expressed regarding public toilets in the town centre since the review ELOSC has reviewed public conveniences in detail resulting in substantial savings and a new community toilet scheme has been introduced.

Action required: A report was promised in early 2009 together with 6 monthly updates. The next Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny committee should ask for a report and update covering mitigation of traffic congestion, the Southern Relief Road, traffic plans, and other related issues, as well as following up other areas from the report.

Please note that the terms of reference of this review incorporate the remits of both the Environment and Transportation OSC and the Leisure and Prosperity OSC and the summary above therefore largely relates to topics within the E&T remit.

3.2 Reviews for Watching Briefs

3.2.1 Housing Need

"Summary

The terms of reference for the inquiry focussed on identifying the current and projected need for housing – Council owned and privately owned, rented and owner-occupied – in the Borough. We were then keen to establish the types of property for which supply does not meet demand and to examine whether need for a given type of property differs depending on the area concerned. We then set about gathering evidence as to the ways in which housing need is addressed by both the Council and the private sector."²

Outcomes

Most of the recommendations made have now been incorporated into the new Housing Strategy and Sustainable Community Strategy.

Action Required: Housing issues remain relevant and Regeneration and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee should maintain a watching brief on the effects and outcomes from the related policies.

3.2.2 Lockmeadow Market

"Summary

² As taken from the introduction to Housing Need Report, 2003-04

The Regeneration and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee's review aimed to assess the economic impact of Lockmeadow Market and establish ways in which the Market can be reinvigorated and its appeal widened. Significant issues were felt to exist in the area of marketing, with limited knowledge (among both residents and visitors) of the Market, its opening days and its location all causing concern amongst Members. Members felt strongly that increased investment in the Market, particularly in advertising, was vital if the Market was to retain its place in Maidstone.

Outcomes

All the recommendations were agreed by the Cabinet Member with the exception of an increased marketing budget for the market. Key achievements include an extended opening time until 2.30pm and re-branding of the market. There are a number of outstanding actions which should be followed up including increased signage between the town centre and the market and the link with Town Centre Management.

Action required: Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee continue to receive updates until outstanding recommendations are implemented.

3.2.3 Olympics 2012 Working Group

"Summary

This review considered how the Borough was placed to take advantage of the Olympic Games 2012. The report considered how to improve the support given to local sports men and women as well as holding annual Olympics events.

Outcomes

The working group supported the development of a new multi-sport facility, as a result discussions were held with the Sport Maidstone consortium and potential sites were being discussed for inclusion in the LDF Core Strategy work. It was also agreed that the Council would consider holding an annual sporting event and that the provision of free or low-cost sport taster events would be explored. A link to the London 2012 volunteering site has been put on the Council's website. A Kent database for volunteers has been created. Business sponsorship of Olympians was being progressed in 2008.

Action required: A number of recommendations remain under progress and an update should be given to ELOSC so that they can identify appropriate action to ensure recommendations are achieved.

3.2.4 Tourism

"Summary

The Committee examined:

- The nature of tourism in the Maidstone Borough;

- Existing strategies and resources for marketing tourist attractions in the Borough;
- The provision of tourist information in the Borough; and
- Proposals to improve the quality and quantity of tourism in the Borough

Outcomes

Following the review a detailed tourism business plan is now in place, and 24 hour tourist information is available via maps and TIC boards.

Action required: the review can be signed-off but the issue of the location of the TIC remains a live issue.