

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE LEISURE AND PROSPERITY OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY
13 DECEMBER 2010**

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

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

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

81. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Pickett.

82. Notification of Substitute Members

It was noted that Councillor Clive English was substituting for Councillor Pickett.

83. Notification of Visiting Members

It was noted that Councillor Ash was a visiting Member, as Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture, and was interested in agenda items 8 and 9.

84. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were no disclosures.

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

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

86. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 23 November 2010

Resolved: That subject to the amendment of minute seventy seven as follows:
paragraph eight to read; 'They were now complementing each other, '
recommendation `a) Mr Lace investigates the Tunbridge Wells partnership '
and in recommendation `c) John Foster, Economic Development Manager and Roger Adley, Head of

Communications assist both Mr Lace and Ms Hare with immediate effect with marketing.'

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2010 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

87. Maidstone Market Update

The Chairman welcomed Bob Holmes, Market Manager to the meeting, and invited him to present the update to the Committee.

Mr Holmes summarised that following the meeting on 1 February 2008, the recommendations had been investigated and gave a report to the Committee on these. Mr Holmes informed the Committee that the Market continued to be held on Tuesdays and Saturdays to avoid clashing with other areas. This was aided by a charter that indicates Market days within a six mile radius. Mr Holmes had spoken to traders regarding extending the opening times however, this had not been feasible as the traders were not local and there was not enough interest to suggest this would create more use of the Market.

Mr Holmes stated that the Market held a 'buy one get one free' scheme for rent, whereby a trader would pay the first week and get the second free up to a period of six weeks. However, after this six week period they were struggling to keep the traders. Another scheme that had been implemented was to introduce a new trader that paid for eight weeks and got one week rent free. On average there were 48 traders, and prior to snow this year they had 55 traders.

In answer to a question Mr Holmes stated that the shuttle bus service to the market had improved, with an average of 286 people utilising this service on Tuesdays.

Mr Holmes stated that due to lack of funding, advertising the market had proven to be difficult. The cost and planning implications of putting a sign on the Millennium Bridge had been too expensive, however finger signs had been put in place going from the town centre towards the site via the river and a banner along the river from Tovil to the site had been on display.

In answer to a question, Mr Holmes stated that only one Council vehicle had the market advertisement and stickers were on the front of parking machines throughout the town.

The Committee enquired if there was anything else that could be done to promote the market and suggested as every resident had a wheelie bin, that a sticker be placed on this. Mr Holmes informed the Committee that this could be looked into. Members considered the use of the internet and social networking sites to advertise the market. The Committee discussed the success of markets in market towns, it was also highlighted that the indoor facilities were a contributor to the market towns success. In answer to a question, Mr Holmes informed the Committee that the traders had not shown any interest in relocating closer to town.

In answer to a question Mr Holmes informed the Committee that seasonal events were very popular for example Christmas activities and fun fair rides at the market provided by the market traders.

Mr Holmes stated that an addition of a flea market would conflict with the collectables and boot fair income from the hall. Also the Bizarre Bazaar which had ceased in the summer had not been relocated to the Market as there had been a reduced interest.

Mr Holmes informed the Committee that although he did not have the exact data to hand relating to the demographics of the Market, that it did attract lower income families with public age averaging over 65 years. In answer to a question Mr Holmes was not able to relay the turn-over for each trader.

The Committee enquired whether any interest had been received to integrate a farmers market with the Maidstone Market. Mr Holmes stated that they had approached 100 local farmer suppliers and only 5 had responded. Mr Holmes suggested that this was because previously Maidstone Market did not have a good reputation. This had improved slowly, but had taken time. Mr Holmes stated that the County Town farmers' market had now unfortunately folded in Maidstone, but there were several successful farmers markets in villages around the Borough which appeared to be successful.

In answer to a question Mr Holmes informed the Committee that the relationship between the Market and Town Centre Management had improved vastly, with regular meetings and an agreement that all future marketing literature feature the Market.

Resolved: That Mr Holmes be thanked for the information and it be recommended that:

- a) The Cabinet Member for Leisure & Culture write a press release to thank the traders for their loyalty and hard work;
- b) The Cabinet Member continue to investigate the possibility of a sign at Millennium Bridge liaising with Councillor Lusty and the findings be reported back to Members;
- c) The feasibility of various advertisement methods be looked into, including utilising Parish Notice Boards, Wheelie Bins, free papers, bus stops, and Council vehicles; and
- d) Social networking sites and internet opportunities be investigated for free advertisement.

88. Leisure & Culture Review - Mote Hall

The Chairman welcomed Jason Taylor, Parks and Open Spaces Manager to the meeting, and invited him to present the update of the refurbishment of Mote Hall to the Committee. Mr Taylor highlighted the benefits of the newly refurbished Leisure Centre in particular the facilities provided in the Mote Hall for both leisure and cultural events.

Mr Taylor informed the Committee that on 22 June 2010 a meeting was held to discuss the leisure and culture balance of the Mote Hall, and was well attended by various officials from Councillors, Maidstone Leisure Trust (MLT) and various culture groups such as Maidstone Symphony Orchestra (MSO) and Maidstone Area Arts Council (MAAC). Although there were no active Councillors on the MLT, an ex-Councillor, Mr Brian Moss was a trustee. It was discussed at that time that the seating store room would be redecorated for the performers to use during concerts, and the dance studios would be well equipped for changing and storage during performances. This was different to prior arrangements, as the previously used Invicta Hall had been transformed into a gym.

The Chairman thanked Mr Taylor for this information, and invited a member of the public Mr Richard Ashby, to join in with the discussion. Mr Ashby thanked the Chairman and informed the Committee that he was unable to communicate with Serco and this had made it difficult to ascertain costs and plan a budget around each event. Mr Taylor responded to Mr Ashby and informed the Committee that he was not aware that there were different prices for hiring of the hall for each event, however he highlighted to Mr Ashby that representatives of his body were present at the meeting with the Chairman of the MLT on 22 June 2010 and therefore they should have the correct contact details for such enquiries relating to invoicing issues. The Committee suggested that Mr Ashby's group should hold a meeting with MLT to discuss this in further detail, and the Committee should be kept informed of the progress made.

The Committee stated that whilst Mr Jon Hymus, Contract Director for Serco was thanked for continuing hard work and for taking the time to send a written response, the answer had a different tone to that of the questions put to him, and highlighted that the Committee's response should be constructive in order to progress forward. Both Mr Taylor and Cabinet Member for Leisure & Culture, Councillor Richard Ash informed the Committee that they had not been made aware of any problems regarding the communication with the culture groups and Serco, and in response to a question Mr Taylor stated that a forum was organised twice a year by Barry Reynolds, Events Manager. Members were informed that Mr Reynolds did an excellent job getting the various events in to Mote Hall when not in use as a sports hall.

In answer to a question Mr Taylor informed the Committee that Mote Hall had dual usage, which made it difficult to cater for all. The examples given were the black ceilings ideal for badminton and the concrete walls unpainted as football or basketball would mark, do not make it the ideal venue for a concert hall, regardless of the acoustics being very good. It was highlighted that the culture groups used this venue from choice, and therefore it had previously been suitable for both.

The Committee enquired into who gained the profits made from sales for such events whether it was the MLT, Serco or the Council. Mr Taylor stated that if the MLT paid for the artist, all profits went to MLT. If it was

an external group hiring the hall, then any profit made was deducted off their invoice. In response to a question Mr Taylor informed the Committee that MLT pay for 5 free-lets per year, and the Cabinet Member for Leisure & Culture decided who obtained the free-let.

Resolved: That Mr Taylor and Mr Hymus be thanked for the information and it be recommended that:

- a) The event rates at Mote Hall be circulated to Members;
- b) Membership of Maidstone Leisure Trust be circulated to Committee Members ;
- c) The minutes from the next forum meeting between the Culture groups and Serco be circulated to Members when available;
- d) A summary of the contract between MLT and Serco be circulated to Members; and
- e) That MLT be thanked for their work on the refurbishment.

89. Discussion of future work programme

The Committee considered the future work programme, and in connection to Local Development Document Advisory Group (LDDAG) and Local Development Framework (LDF) the Committee requested clarity on the demographic and transport data. The Chairman noted that focus must be on the data and the processes to collect, analyse and draw conclusions from it, not the issues around transport itself. It was noted that details such as where the data came from, what was the proposed method for conclusion and what were the practicalities of the outcomes, were scheduled to be presented to the Committee for consideration in January 2011.

The Committee concurred that the Rural Economy Review be undertaken by the Committee from February to April 2011.

Resolved: That:

- a) The demographic data and transport data be presented to the Committee to consider in January if available;
- b) The Rural Economy Review be undertaken between February and April 2011.

90. Duration of meeting

6.30pm to 8.30pm.