

CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

VISION FOR PORTFOLIO

PRIORITIES & PLANS 2008/09

As Cabinet Member for Environment, my priorities and plans for the year ahead are to work towards delivering good quality and cost effective services to the residents of the borough; to drive real improvements in the environmental issues that people really care about. In achieving this, I will work to ensure alignment to the six key themes that the council has already adopted in its strategic plan:

- A healthy environment
- Sustainable communities
- Prosperity
- Lifelong learning
- Quality living
- Quality decent homes that people can afford

Highways

Many aspects associated with the provision of highways lie with Kent County Council and the Highways Agency. However, I am concerned with those issues surrounding road safety; figures for casualties on Maidstone's roads are on the increase and this is an issue that now requires resources from KCC.

I will seek the strategic highway improvements we need in Maidstone over the coming year through the Joint Transportation Board (JTB) and will also work, through this channel, on tackling the increasing congestion in the town and the borough to help improve the quality of life for all residents of Maidstone in the years to come.

Public Transport

Transportation has an affect on how the borough will flourish and remain attractive for living in and accessing. The one key tool we have at our disposal to tackle rising congestion in the town centre is our Park and Ride service. Park and Ride is still heavily subsidised by the council and for the long term survival of the scheme this cannot be allowed to continue. However, I am committed that Park and Ride is, and will remain, the central feature for tackling congestion in the town and surrounding borough.

Consequently, we will begin a 'Master Planning' exercise for the development of a strategic approach to the long term provision of Park & Ride; developing a programmed implementation of sites, on a business case approach, to cater for projected growth in population, housing and car usage over the life-cycle of Growth Point status. This will bring to an end the ad-hoc approach that historically has been taken to Park & Ride. It will also assist in reducing and ultimately eliminating the heavy subsidisation of the past. This will ensure its long-term survival and viability.

In the short-term, we are currently reviewing the Park and Ride service contracts currently in place and will shortly be entering a tender procedure to ensure the service proposition still remains competitive and represents 'best value'.

Improving the quality of lives and prosperity of ALL in the borough is a key priority of this administration. To this end, we have remained steadfast in our commitment made at the budget meeting on 27th February, that we will retain a travel assistance scheme for the disabled and their carers within the borough to mitigate the effects of the removal of the voucher scheme when the national bus pass was introduced in April.

Work on this proposal started on day one under this administration and a scheme operated under a grant aid approach with a third sector appears the most efficient and viable scheme to run, and I expect to see a report on this by the beginning of July. I anticipate that this scheme will be in operation by August/September of this year.

Parking

I want our pay and display car parks and on-street parking to remain competitive with other providers in the town centre and other shopping centres in Kent so that we continue to attract people to the borough and town centre and to ensure it continues to thrive and be an attractive place to visit and shop.

With increasing levels of congestion and car ownership, we have to be mindful of the environmental impact and sustainability that comes with such increases and I will work to ensure our on-street parking provision and restrictions in the borough continue to address this, whilst also recognising the continued need to promote Maidstone as a great place to work and live.

Conclusion

I will work to deliver real and tangible improvements within my environment portfolio during the coming year with continued focus on the themes of the council's strategic plan and this administrations vision to achieve a vibrant, prosperous and dynamic borough. It is particularly important that we create a sustainable and environmentally conscious borough when taking into account the effects of growth point and planning over the next twenty years.