

**REPORT FOR THE
REGENERATION AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

JUNE 10TH. 2008.

Please accept my apologies for non-attendance at your meeting, but I have to go into hospital for a procedure to address the Atrial Fibrillation of my heart.

The only time within the next few months that I could have this procedure performed was on June 10th, so I had very little option with respect to re scheduling.

As you are undoubtedly minded, my Portfolio is large – covering –
Planning
Housing
Sustainability
Economic Development
Local Development Plan.

May I record my thanks to Councillor Clive English for the time he has made available to me, with bringing me ‘up to speed’ on numerous matters concerning my Portfolio.

It is not my intention to ‘re – invent the wheel’ but to build on the work done in the past.

However, I do have my own ideas to forward the Image of Maidstone which I will share with you at future meetings, should I be asked.

I have over the past few weeks started the process of meeting with Officers and Staff within these Portfolios, to ensure that I have a close working relationship with them and understand any problems they may have,

It is my consideration that Maidstone is planning led, as planning has an effect on all aspects of the Towns future – be it Structural Developments, Economy, Housing and the associated well-being of the Town.

Maidstone being the County Town of Kent should be vibrant, economically challenging and an attractive place to live, work or visit.

At this stage I will highlight the meeting that I have had.

PLANNING

I have had numerous meetings with Officers, relating to planning procedures and it is my consideration that we review the day-to-day working of Development Control and Building Control.

I do believe that the Planning Office requires an Office Manager dedicated to the day to day running of the office. This would alleviate Planning Officers from the more mundane tasks and utilising their specialities more efficiently.

I have requested that a Report be given to me by September on ‘a way forward’.

Further to the workings of Development Control, Building Control and Enforcement, I have initiated a Survey of I.T. used in these areas, as it would appear that there are areas of concern relating to the transfer and interaction of information between Departments.

Report of: Cabinet Member for Regeneration

I have requested that Officers visit other Council's, whose systems are known to be more user friendly and efficient. I will also be attending these visits, the first one being to Tunbridge Wells.

I have also requested a Report by September on this matter.

I do believe that it is paramount, if we are to offer a 1st Class Service to our Residents, that we have in place an efficient system.

With regard to Landscaping, I consider that this is a vital aspect of Planning Applications. These schemes have to be robust and indigenous to the area of the Application.

I will be looking to have a robust landscaping schemes brought to the Planning Committee, in an effort to reduce Planning Committee time. To this end we are looking to appoint another Landscaping Officer, but again, I am awaiting a Report from the Officers.

With respect to Enforcement, I do believe that we need to address Planning Conditions more vigorously, at the earliest possible time and I do believe that Development Control and Building Control have a job to perform in this area. This will reduce the number of Enforcement issues, ensure that Developers deliver what was agreed and make the process of Development smoother and more cost effective for MBC. To this end I have requested a meeting with all related Officers to action my concerns.

As a possible way forward I have proposed that an Enabling Committee be set up, as and when The Clinic Application proceeds, to monitor the progress from Day 1.

This Committee would consist of possibly four people – 2 from the Developers side and 2 from Maidstone Borough Council, to ensure delivery of all aspects of the project.

It is my intention that this Committee would meet at least once a week, to ensure procedures are being adhered to and delivery is as agreed with MBC.

I consider that Members need to have more information available, especially relating to Planning Documentation and it is my intention to have a Library within Maidstone House for Member use. I will be raising this question more widely with Councillors, in order to establish the information that would be helpful to assist Members in their day-to-day workings. May I thank Councillor Richard Ash – Cabinet Member responsible for the new offices, for making a room available, and his encouraging remarks.

It is also my intention to make available to all Planning Committee Members and Substitutes, together with Parish Council's, an Information Pack relating to Planning Documentation, which will be helpful in their decision-making.

I have discussed this with Officers and will be looking to agree an initial list of content in the near future.

Further, it is my intention to continue the good work and continued involvement of Parish Council's, which is being led by Steven Goulette and Councillor Richard Lusty.

I will keep you updated on this and any further ideas, to ensure we have a smooth working relationship between Parish Council's and MBC

Report of: Cabinet Member for Regeneration

With respect to I.T., I understand that there are some problems in being unable to download information and I have brought this to the attention of Officers, who need to address this interface problem.

Further to equipment for Parish Council's, we do have a little money to help them and they will be contacted in the near future regarding any requirements they may have for improving their efficiency.

Regarding Gypsies – I am having meetings with Officers regarding the implementation of a Policy relating to Gypsies and Travellers.

I consider that we need to further the work already implemented, to address the formation of a Policy, which will help us in the future.

As you are aware this is a very difficult and sensitive matter, involving KCC and MBC, but a matter that I intend to forward as a matter of urgency.

General.

I have had meetings with Officers to forward my ideas relating to the pedestrianisation of Lower High Street, and it is my intention that a Project Group be established and also a Lead Officer be appointed for this initiative

At the same time, within this remit, we will be looking at the wider picture of Maidstone.

HOUSING.

I have had a meeting with John Littlemore and arranged future meetings regarding all aspects contained within this Portfolio.

I will bring you up to date in the future relating to associated matters, including Maidstone Housing Trust.

SUSTAINABILITY

I have had initial meeting with Officers, mainly in the area of Construction and Life Long Living.

Further to this, I have met with KCC Head of Development Investment, Nigel Smith regarding 106 Agreements and local initiatives regarding future developments and community infrastructure.

It is my consideration that money agreed by 106 Agreements should be used in the local community, to address local needs, but as a generalisation – all applications for 106 money would be addressed on individual requirements.

This is an ongoing matter on which I will update you in the future.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

I have had meetings with John Foster with respect to Economic Development and I also attended a meeting of the local Chamber of Commerce.

I will be pursuing John's ideas at future meetings with him, and I will update you as and when I have anything to report.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Report of: Cabinet Member for Regeneration

As you are aware, this is an ongoing situation, and I will keep you informed on matters relating to this in the future, and as they develop.

I do have a meeting arranged with Professor Elaine Thomas regarding UCCA and their plans to re-locate from Oakwood Park.

Again, I will update you when information is available.

SUMMING UP.

I trust that the aforementioned gives you an idea of how I have spent the past few weeks and the way I perceive the image of Maidstone can be enhanced.

I am always happy to discuss any items with individual Members – so feel free to contact me.

Finally, should you wish to ask any questions during your meeting – please call me in Hospital on my Mobile.

(I did request a video link – but the Officers said NO!)

MALCOLM GREER.