

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL
DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 25 JUNE 2013**

PRESENT: Councillor Barned (Chairman)
Councillors Cox, Cuming, Hogg, Naghi, Newton,
Mrs Parvin, Paterson and Mrs Stockell

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

It was resolved: That all items on the agenda be webcast.

2. Apologies.

There were no apologies.

3. Notification of Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

4. Notification of Visiting Members

Councillor Ash attended as a visiting Member with an interest in the whole agenda.

5. Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman

Councillor Barned was nominated for Chairman, seconded by Councillor Mrs Stockell and was voted in as Chairman for 2013-14. Councillor Mrs Stockell and Councillor Mrs Paterson were nominated for vice-chairman and Councillor Mrs Stockell won the vote. However; the Committee were advised by Officers that Overview and Scrutiny procedure rules state that Committee chairman and vice-chairman must come from different political parties. The Committee voted again and Councillor Paterson was elected vice-chairman.

It was resolved that:

- a) Councillor Barned be appointed as Chairman for the municipal year 2013-14; and
- b) Councillor Mrs Patterson be appointed as Vice-Chairman for the municipal year 2013-14.

6. Disclosures by Members and Officers

There were no disclosures.

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

It was agreed that all items be taken in public as proposed.

8. Cabinet Member for Economic & Commercial Development - Priorities for Municipal Year 2013/14

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Greer, Cabinet member for Economic and Commercial Development to the meeting. Councillor Greer informed the Committee of his priorities for the year which included the following areas:

- High Street phase 2
- Kent Institute of Medicine and Surgery (KIMS) phases 1 & 2
- Improvements to Gabriels Hill
- Possible pedestrianisation of Earl Street
- Enabling development at Wrens Cross
- Working with Kent County Council (KCC) on putting an innovation centre in the old Post Office building.

In response to a question about air pollution levels at Wren's Cross the Cabinet member confirmed that the Carpet Store would be demolished to open up the site, but that there were no plans to widen the road. It was noted that Cllr Greer intended to put in some trees in at the bottom of Gabriel's Hill which would impact on the view up Stone Street towards Wren's Cross.

Cllr Greer confirmed that the intention was to resurface Gabriel's hill to match the High Street and that KCC had agreed funding of £50,000 to drive improvement in the area at the bottom of Gabriel's hill, by the bingo hall.

The Cabinet Member told the Committee that he was also in discussion Haynes Ford about moving to a larger site and that he had been to London to see the agents for the land at Maidstone East. The Committee noted that site needed an anchor store or another enabler such as housing and that the Cabinet Member was actively chasing opportunities.

The Committee asked what the purpose of the innovation centre was, Cllr Greer responded that it this would be delivered jointly with KCC and expected to open in July. The Centre was for start-up business and would allow individuals and smaller starter businesses office space in the town centre. This would give them better connectivity and had the potential to promote collaborated working. The Centre would offer hot desks and larger spaces for small start-up businesses. It was noted that an artists impression of how the space will look were available and the Officer was going to circulate the images to the Committee.

The Committee thanked Councillor Greer for his update.

It was resolved that:

a) The Cabinet Member Update be noted.

9. Work Programming 2013/14

Prior to the meeting the Committee had visited a Council department 'marketplace' and had spoken to officers from Council departments relevant to its remit about important areas of work to be undertaken over the coming year.

The Committee put their suggestions for work topics, based on these discussions, in a suggestion box to be considered at the meeting alongside topics suggested by officers, councillors, parish councillors and residents in a call for evidence via email, social media, Voluntary Action Maidstone and local community publications.

The Committee considered all the suggestions put forward and selected the following topics for its 2013/14 Work Programme:

- Following up Rural Economy Review undertaken in 2010/11.
- Following up on the Visitor Information Centre Review undertaken in 2012/13.
- Designation of Detling Airfield as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Events and Cultural Activity Strategy – looking at how to attract more visitors to the borough
- Update on the future of the Market

The Committee agreed that their main review for the 2013-14 municipal year would be Event and Cultural Activities with a focus on increasing visitors to the borough.

Members requested research on if the designation of Detling Airfield as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) could be changed.

It was recommended that:

a) The following topics be included in the Committee's work Programme for 2013-14:

- Rural Economy Review 2010/11 Update on recommendations;
- Visitor Information Centre Review 2012/13 Update on recommendations;
- Maidstone Market; and
- Events and Culture Activities.

- b) That the Officer undertake some research around designation of AONB.