

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 22 OCTOBER
2013**

Present: Councillor Barned (Chairman), and
Councillors Ash, Butler, Cox, Cuming, Naghi, Newton,
Paterson and Mrs Stockell

Also Present: Councillor Burton

36. THE COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER WHETHER ALL ITEMS ON THE AGENDA
SHOULD BE WEB-CAST

Due to technical problems the meeting was not webcast.

37. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Hogg.

Councillor Moss, who was due to attend as a witness, sent his apologies
for absence.

38. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor Butler was substituting for Councillor Hogg.

39. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor Greer attended as a witness in relation to agenda item 8 and on
behalf of Councillor Moss in relation to agenda item 9.

Councillor Burton indicated his wish to speak on agenda items 8, 9 and
10.

40. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

41. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That the items on the Agenda be taken in public as
proposed.

42. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 SEPTEMBER 2013

It was raised by a Member that under Minute Item 30, it was stated that productivity had not risen, however, the productivity charts on pages 9 and 10 of the minutes indicated an increase and that this was confusing.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to clarification on the productivity figures for Minute Item 30 and the Minute Item being amended, if required.

43. MAIDSTONE'S VISION FOR THE VISITOR ECONOMY

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Greer, Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development, to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member outlined to the Committee his vision for the visitor economy in Maidstone. He stated that tourism plays a great part for Great Britain and for Maidstone and his main focus is to improve Maidstone's image as a Market Town and as a Borough by improving the attractiveness of the offer in the town centre and the rural areas and developing more effective partnerships.

The Committee were informed of some the work done so far, which included:-

- The heritage area – including All Saints Church, the Carriage Museum and the surrounding area for which an Angel Award was won from English Heritage
- The High Street regeneration project which has enhanced the great buildings and provided a Town Square
- Improved signage
- Coach parking and drop off points in St Faith's Street, which is a more central town location

The Cabinet Member informed the Committee of his aims for the future, which included:-

- Destination Boards – replacement of these
- More signage and maps to go in Week Street, High Street as well as QR codes linking to the Visit Maidstone website.
- New tourist information brochures for around town, including at all Park & Ride sites and Maidstone East Station.
- There are three particular areas that need some attention, Gabriels Hill, Earl Street and the upper end of Week Street (from Fremlin Walk to Maidstone East). Artist impressions will be available in January to show how these areas could be improved and consultation will take place. One of these projects will be taken forward by using money from an underspend on the lower end of the High Street and S106 monies.
- To help new ventures that are starting up in the rural areas get into guide books to help maximise their profitability.
- Bring more colour to Maidstone and make it the most attractive place he possibly can

The Cabinet Member also mentioned a number of new restaurants were now opening in Maidstone, a new team room and new bars. The Hazlitt Arts Centre is now being run by Parkwood Leisure and new seating and refurbishment is planned in Spring 2014. The Visitor Information Centre at the Museum is a Finalist for a Beautiful South Award for "Tourism Information Service of the Year". The Awards will be announced in November. He informed the Committee that the new Head of Commercial and Economic Development, Dawn Hudd, starts early December and they are looking to recruit a new Culture & Leisure Manager.

In response to questions by Members, the Cabinet Member explained that:-

- Figures relating to increase in business or footfall following the regeneration of the High Street are required and the new Head of Commercial and Economic Development will be requested to compile these
- There are over 600 small businesses in Maidstone and he will engage with them to see how the Council can help them
- Kent Conference Bureau is going from strength to strength
- Carriage Museum – we do need a larger space for this and the suggestion of Kent Life is worth exploring. The idea of handing out leaflets about the carriage museum to visitors to the Maidstone Museum is very welcome
- With regard to Eric Pickles advocating free parking, yes it would encourage tourism but it must be balanced against the costs
- Noted that the map at Willington Street Park & Ride was still out of date regarding the location of the Council offices
- All areas where black tarmac has been put down is only temporary and these areas will be replaced properly as soon as possible
- Mill Street – as soon as the cross-over point is finished, Kent County Council ("KCC") will refurbish the footpaths. As part of the lower High Street regeneration, we will replace the first 20 metres of the road in Mill Street and KCC are being requested to do the remainder
- There are plans coming forward with regard to Mote Cricket Club and a further extension of the offer at Mote Park
- The report regarding the Business Hub is due at the end of October
- The King Street Car Park is nearly demolished and a surface car park should be open before Christmas. The plot will be marketed at a later date

The Cabinet Member further mentioned that he was looking to put in place an events calendar covering a 2 year period as he recognises there is an abundance of events taking place in Maidstone but a co-ordinated approach to this is required. This will be taken forward with the new Head of Commercial and Economic Development.

The Committee thanked the Cabinet Member for his update.

44. VISITOR INFORMATION & TOWN HALL FOYER

The Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development, on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, updated the Committee with regard to Visitor Information and the Town Hall Foyer.

The Cabinet Member informed the Committee that the Carousel was now in place and Voluntary Action Maidstone ("VAM") volunteers are being trained. The Visitor Information Centre ("VIC") based at the Museum keep the volunteers up-to-date.

A direct telephone line from the Town Hall to the VIC at the Museum is being looked into and opening times will be displayed outside the Town Hall, together with directions to the VIC at the Museum. A guidance sheet and list of Frequently Asked Questions will be provided to the volunteers at the Town Hall and it is hoped that the Service Level Agreement ("SLA") will be finalised by mid-November and reviewed on a quarterly basis. Once the SLA is signed, VAM will invest their own funds to provide furniture and make the space more usable and amenable to their needs.

Members were keen to express their support of VAM in the Foyer and of the work they do, but expressed concerns with regard to the SLA in relation to the opening hours not including the weekends and the level of rent and felt it was not fit for purpose and should not be signed.

The Committee thanked the Cabinet Member for updating the Committee on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and the Head of Legal Services be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee and that the Service Level Agreement is not signed before this date.

45. EVENTS REVIEW SCOPE

The Committee considered the scoping document for the Events Review proposed by the Sub Committee.

Members supported the scoping document and made the following comments:-

- It was proposed that Ken Scott be asked to represent the Town Team as a witness
- It was felt important to know what budgets were available
- Medway Council close their roads under the Town Police Clauses Act
- A blueprint of what makes a good event is required so that good advice can be given and it can be worked into our own events

RESOLVED: That the scoping document be agreed.

46. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman informed the Committee that Dawn Hudd, the new Head of Commercial and Economic Development, had been invited to attend the

January meeting and Victoria Wallace, the Managing Director of Leeds Castle, was also being invited to a future meeting.

It was raised by a Visiting Member, and endorsed by the Committee, that the Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy should be considered by the Committee as soon as possible and certainly before consideration of the Local Plan by Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the future work programme be noted; and
- b) That the Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy be considered by the Committee as soon as possible, either in November or to arrange a meeting in December.

47. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.40 p.m.