

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Wednesday 20 October 2021
Time: 6.30 pm
Venue: Town Hall, High Street, Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Brice, Burton (Chairman), Cooke, Cox, English, Harper, Hastie, Khadka, Kimmance, Munford, Parfitt-Reid, Perry (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Ring and Round

The Chairman will assume that all Members will read the reports before attending the meeting. Officers are asked to assume the same when introducing reports.

AGENDA

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1. Apologies for Absence
2. Notification of Substitute Members
3. Urgent Items
4. Notification of Visiting Members
5. Disclosures by Members and Officers
6. Disclosures of Lobbying
7. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.
8. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 15 September 2021 1 - 11
9. Presentation of Petitions (if any)
10. Questions and answer session for members of the public (if any)
11. Questions from Members to the Chairman (if any)
12. Committee Work Programme 12 - 13
13. Appointment to the One Maidstone BID Advisory Board
14. Public Sector-Led Garden Community Update 14 - 19

Issued on Tuesday 12 October 2021

Continued Over/:

Alison Broom

Alison Broom, Chief Executive

15. Proposed Refurbishment of the Council owned Stilebridge Lane & Water Lane G&T Sites	20 - 27
16. Recovery and Renewal Action Plan	28 - 90
17. Equalities Objectives and Action Plan - Update	91 - 110
18. Archbishop's Palace - Public Consultation	111 - 118
19. Flood Risk Alleviation - Update	119 - 143

PART II

To move that the public be excluded for the items set out in Part II of the Agenda because of the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reasons specified having applied the Public Interest Test.

Head of Schedule 12 A and Brief Description

20. Minutes (Part II) of the Meeting held on 15 September 2021	Paragraph 3 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)	144 - 145
21. Exempt Appendix 1 (Item 15) - Cost comparison table.	Paragraph 3 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)	146

INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC

In order to ask a question at this meeting, please call **01622 602899** or email committee@maidstone.gov.uk by 5p.m. one clear working day before the meeting (i.e. by 5 p.m. Monday 18 October 2021). You will need to provide the full text in writing.

If your question is accepted, you will be provided with instructions as to how you can access the meeting.

In order to make a statement in relation to an item on the agenda, please call **01622 602899** or email committee@maidstone.gov.uk by 5 p.m. one clear working day before the meeting (i.e. by 5 p.m. on Monday 18 October 2021). You will need to tell us which agenda item you wish to speak on.

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MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2021

Present: Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Burton (Chairman), Cox, Harper, Hastie, Joy, Kimmance, Munford, Parfitt-Reid, Perry, Purle, Mrs Ring, Round, R Webb and S Webb

Also Present: Councillor J Sams

59. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Brice, Cooke, English and Khadka.

60. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

The following members were present as substitute members:

- Councillor Purle for Councillor Brice
- Councillor S Webb for Councillor Cooke
- Councillor R Webb for Councillor English
- Councillor Joy for Councillor Khadka

61. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items, however an additional nomination form relating to Item 14 – Appointment of Deputy Armed Forces Champion – Kent and Medway Civilian-Military Partnership Board had been received and would be considered during the item.

62. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

Councillor J Sams was present as a Visiting Member for Item 11 – Questions from Members to the Chairman.

Note: Councillor Mrs Blackmore joined the meeting at 6.35 p.m.

63. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

Councillor Hastie disclosed a Pecuniary Interest in Item 19 – Disposal of land at Staceys Street and Item 20 – Property Acquisition and intended to leave the meeting before the items' consideration.

Councillor Munford stated that he would withdraw from the meeting during the consideration of Item 14 – Appointment of the Deputy Armed

Forces Champion – Kent and Medway Civilian-Military Partnership Board, due to his position as the Interim Deputy Armed Forces Champion.

Councillor Harper disclosed an Other Significant Interest (OSI) in relation to Item 16 – Recovery and Renewal Actions, Appendix B – Financial Inclusion Strategy, due to his position as the Council’s representative with the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Councillor S Webb disclosed an OSI in relation to Item 19 – Disposal of land at Staceys Street and Item 20 – Property Acquisition and withdrew from the meeting for both items.

64. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Burton, Harper, Hastie, Joy, Kimmance, Munford, Parfitt-Reid, Perry, Purle, Mrs Ring, Round and R Webb had been lobbied on Item 15 – Public Sector-Led Garden Community Update.

65. EXEMPT INFORMATION

RESOLVED: That the following items be taken in private due to the possible disclosure of exempt information:

- Item 18 – Minutes (Part II) of the Meeting held on 29 July 2021
- Item 19 – Disposal of Land at Staceys Street Maidstone
- Item 20 – Property Acquisition

66. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 JULY 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 July 2021 (Parts I and II) be agreed as a correct record and signed.

67. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

68. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were three questions from members of the public.

Question from Mr Steve Heeley to the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee

'At July's P&R committee meeting, you responded to my public question regarding the progress on options agreements with the 8 principal landowners at Heathlands informing me that negotiations were progressing positively and that landowners were 'willing'. The earlier June P&R report confirmed that option agreements were due to be signed in 'the next few weeks'. Tonight's update report makes no mention of the progress with options agreements. Can you confirm if they have now been signed by all 8 principal landowners?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

Mr Heeley asked the following supplementary question:

'Can you confirm when you expect to get those 8 options agreements signed please?'

The Chairman responded to the supplementary question.

Question from Ms Kate Hammond to the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee

'The 24th March 2021 report on Heathlands stated that it was 'probable that all 18 landowners that had previously requested that their landholdings be removed from the proposal can be obliged'. 6 months later these landowners still have not heard from this Council. When will you be obliging them?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

Ms Hammond asked the following supplementary question:

'You've never had the right to include their land in the first place without their permission. Will you be offering an apology on behalf of Maidstone Borough Council for the distress caused?'

The Chairman responded to the supplementary question.

Question from Ms Gail Duff to the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee

'Can you please confirm how much money, including officer time, has been spent by Maidstone Council and Homes England on this council-led garden community project up to 15 September 2021?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

Ms Duff asked the following supplementary question:

'In order to increase greater transparency and openness on the project would you consider, on behalf of residents, asking officers to include the total spend to date in each further update report to this Committee?'

The Chairman responded to the supplementary question.

The full responses were recorded on the webcast and made available to view on the Maidstone Borough Council website. The question-and-answer session took place between minutes 10:40 to 16:05 of the recording.

To access the webcast, please use the link below:

[Policy and Resources Committee - 15 September 2021 - YouTube](#)

69. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were two questions from Members to the Chairman

Question from Councillor J Sams to the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee

'Tonight's report on Heathlands states that the final submission to the Local Planning Authority was made at the end of last month. Lenham's residents have been asking for sight of this submission for over 6 months.

Will you make the submission available publicly immediately and without any further delay?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

Councillor J Sams asked the following supplementary question:

'Can I ask whether you and the Committee Members have seen this submission?'

The Chairman responded to the supplementary question.

Question from Councillor J Sams to the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee

'Can the Chair confirm which Members have seen the Commissioning Prospectus from Homes England, published 15 July 2021?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

Councillor J Sams asked the following supplementary question:

'Considering the weight that is put on Homes England joint working at every single meeting, why hasn't this prospectus been sent out to Members?'

The Chairman responded to the supplementary question.

The full responses were recorded on the webcast and made available to view on the Maidstone Borough Council website. The question-and-answer session took place between minutes 16:12 to 19:30 of the recording.

To access the webcast, please use the link below:

[Policy and Resources Committee - 15 September 2021 - YouTube](#)

70. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement stated that a report on the flood resilience work being undertaken would be presented to the Committee at its October 2021 meeting.

RESOLVED: That the amended Committee Work Programme be noted.

71. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

Councillor Perry introduced the report, which outlined the remit of, and recent actions undertaken by, the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board (UMIDB).

Particular attention was drawn to the consideration given to merging the UMIDB with the Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board and the future office accommodation. The former was unlikely due to the fundamental difference in the Boards' remits.

Councillor Harper endorsed the updated provided, as the Council's additional representative on the UMIDB.

The Committee expressed their thanks for the update provided.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

72. APPOINTMENT OF THE DEPUTY ARMED FORCES CHAMPION - KENT AND MEDWAY CIVILIAN-MILITARY PARTNERSHIP BOARD

The Democratic Services Officer stated that in July 2021 the Committee had appointed Councillor Munford as the Interim Deputy Armed Forces Champion.

The position had since been advertised to all Councillors in accordance with the Outside Bodies Vacancy Protocol. An additional nomination from Councillor Naghi had been received and distributed to the Committee.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Munford be elected as the Deputy Armed Forces Champion.

Note: Councillor Munford left the meeting at 6.58 p.m. and returned at 7 p.m.

73. PUBLIC SECTOR-LED GARDEN COMMUNITY UPDATE

Prior to the report's introduction Ms Kate Hammond addressed the Committee on behalf of the Save Our Heathlands Action Group.

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report, reiterating the Council's continued work with Homes England. The options agreements between Homes England and the principal landowners would be signed imminently.

A further submission to the Local Planning Authority had been submitted that included further information on the increased employment opportunities, possibility of a secondary school, business case for a railway station and plans for the long-term management of the community site, as part of the proposal.

If the proposal continued to be included within the Local Plan Review an engagement programme and the second stage of work on the business case for the railway station would be commissioned.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

74. RECOVERY AND RENEWAL ACTIONS

The Chief Executive introduced the report and referenced the Committee's previous consideration of the proposed recovery and renewal projects in July 2021, during which the Council's other Service Committees were requested to review the proposed actions within their respective remits. The feedback received would be presented to the Committee in October 2021.

The application of the 'Build Back Better' principles to the Council's actions moving forward were reiterated, with the projects within the Committees remit shown in Appendix A to the report.

In referencing Appendix B, the important work undertaken by the Revenues and Benefits team to maximise financial inclusion was highlighted. For example, 7,000 residents within the borough were found to be eligible for an income-based tariff with Southeast Water, with data matching from the latter enabling 4,000 of those residents to be informed of their eligibility. A total of £146,000 had been saved so far, with a total expected saving of £680,000 collectively for those residents.

The importance of the specialist advice surrounding debt reduction was reiterated, particularly as 20% of the referrals received by the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) originated from the Council. The CAB had lost an income stream of £53,00 due to a change in commissioning arrangements by the Money and Pensions Service and the Committee were asked to consider providing short-term funding to enable the CAB to continue providing its services, whilst seeking a long-term financial solution. The Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the Council and the CAB was up for review and there had been significant changes since its original implementation, such as the creation of a protocol between the two parties in reducing debt and changes to the Council's Housing Service.

In referencing Appendix C, the importance of the Town Centre Strategy in light of the economic and buildings class use changes being experienced was highlighted. The importance of identifying key sites within the Town Centre, preparatory work and building upon the previous 'opportunity sites' work was highlighted. A significant level of investment into the strategy and delivery plan was required.

The Committee expressed support for the debt reduction work undertaken and for a continued, but reviewed, partnership with the CAB. The importance of practical as well as financial assistance was highlighted and the Chief Executive stated that Councillors would be provided with a list of organisations to direct residents to if required.

The Committee championed a Town Centre Strategy that fully supported the future business and growth needs of the Town Centre as the County Town of Kent, in conjunction with the Local Plan Review. The future adaptability of the work proposed as part of the Strategy, such as contributing to a Development Plan Document if required, was supported.

The Strategy required significant financial resources which could be delivered in-part through the £860,000 in grant funding provided, from the Council's underspend from 2020-2021 or a combination of both of those and other funding streams. The income and economic growth that could be generated from a strong Strategy was noted in the context of the proposed cost.

In response to questions on the funding allocated for the 'Way We Work' project within Appendix A, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement confirmed that using some of the £860,000 funding provided would allow the council to deliver the organisational change required without having to rely on its revenue budget.

In moving forward, the uses and benefits of performance monitoring through data analytics was highlighted, particularly in considering the funding required for the projects shown within Appendix A to the report.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Committees broad support for the actions proposed as set out in the papers be noted, with the clear expectation of measurable outputs; and
2. A meeting be arranged between the relevant officers and the Citizens Advice Bureau to review the existing SLA in consultation with the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman.

Note: Councillor Harper left the meeting between 8.06 p.m. to 8.08 p.m. whilst the Committee voted on the item.

75. 1ST QUARTER FINANCE, PERFORMANCE & RISK MONITORING REPORT 2021/22

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced the financial update, stating that the projected revenue underspend for 2021-22 was £144,000.

Capital spending remained low, however the previously agreed refurbishment of the Gypsy and Traveller Sites in Stilebridge Lane and Water Lane had risen substantially in cost. Subsequently, the Committee were asked to consider transferring the additional funding required from the Affordable Homes Programme, which was likely to have an underspend by the end of the current financial year.

The Corporate Insight, Communities and Governance Manager introduced the performance update. There had been a technical issue that had

prevented the presentation of the 'Way we Work' Key Performance Indicator's (KPI) performance, but the data would be provided to the Committee when available.

The 'Percentage of Non-Domestic Rates Collected' had missed its target by 3%, due to the easing of lockdown restrictions and the termination of the business grants support schemes. Three KPIs across the Council's Service Committees had missed the respective targets by more than 10%, including the 'Percentage of youths unemployed' however this had fallen for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Deputy Head of Audit introduced the risk management update and stated that the annual corporate risk workshop had taken place with the Wider Leadership Team which included horizon scanning for future risks, with a focus on possible external threats. If realised, these threats could be included within the corporate risk register using the existing risk management approach.

There four new risks to the corporate risk register were outlined, with the Corporate Leadership Team to continue its work to further assess the risks.

The operational risks were highlighted, as work to improve the intelligence, strategy and reporting of the risks was ongoing, following the full refresh that had taken place in the fourth quarter of the 2020-21 financial year.

In relation to questions, the Director of Regeneration and Place confirmed that Maidstone Property Holdings (MPH) Ltd now possessed 89 housing units and that further information, such as the percentage of rent arrears, could be provided in future reports. The Corporate Insight, Communities and Governance Manager stated that a dashboard had been created to help the Planning Enforcement Team improve their real-time data monitoring.

The Committee felt that insufficient information had been provided on the Gypsy and Traveller Sites Refurbishment, particularly on the schemes' increased cost. The Director of Regeneration and Place confirmed that the project's scope had increased since its previous consideration by the Communities, Housing and Environment (CHE) Committee and that the existing issues within the construction industry had led to the submission of significantly higher value tenders than expected.

Kent County Council (KCC) currently managed the two sites, which included 35 pitches, and whilst there was an in-principal agreement that the sites would be transferred to KCC after the required works had taken place, no formal agreement had been reached. The Monitoring Officer reiterated the Council's obligations as the landlord to carry out the necessary works to the betterment of the residents.

It was felt that the issue should be further considered by the CHE Committee before a decision was made.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 1, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted;
2. The Capital position at the end of Quarter 1, be noted;
3. The Gypsy & Traveller Sites Refurbishment Scheme be referred back to the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee, with its recommendations reported to the Committee at its next meeting to make the decision of allocating the funds;
4. The write-off of £34,956.95 in uncollectable business rates debt, be approved;
5. The Performance position as at Quarter 1, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted; and
6. The Risk Update, attached as Appendix 3 to the report, be noted.

Note: Councillors Hastie and Parfitt-Reid left the meeting after the conclusion of the item, at 8.55 p.m.

76. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING**

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business because of the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reasons specified, having applied the public interest test:

Head of Schedule 12A and Brief Description

Disposal of Land at Staceys Street Maidstone	Paragraph 3 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)
Property Acquisition	Paragraph 3 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

77. **MINUTES (PART II) OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 JULY 2021**

RESOLVED: That the item be considered alongside Item 8 – Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 July 2021.

78. DISPOSAL OF LAND AT STACEYS STREET MAIDSTONE

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced the report, reiterating that the issue had previously been considered by the Committee in March 2021.

The Council had been approached to sell a portion of land with the sale price and further information previously requested outlined.

RESOLVED: That

1. The land be declared surplus to Council requirements;
2. The Director of Finance and Business Improvement be granted delegated authority to authorise the negotiation and completion of the transfer of the land and to receive a capital receipt of an agreed amount in consideration of the transfer of the land.
3. The Head of Mid-Kent Legal Partnership be authorised to negotiate and complete all necessary deeds and agreements arising from or ancillary to the transfer of the land.

79. PROPERTY ACQUISITION

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report and outlined the risks associated with the proposal.

The Committee supported the proposal due to the perceived positive impacts that would be generated for the local area.

RESOLVED: That

1. The purchase of the proposed site be agreed on the terms referred to in recommendations 2 and 3;
2. Delegated authority be granted to the Director of Finance and Business Improvement to:
 - a. Finalise the negotiations for MBC to acquire the site for the agreed price, with that figure to be finalised by the Section151 Officer;
 - b. Finalise the negotiations for MBC to acquire the freehold for the site for up to the agreed price, but with the price to be set by an external valuation pre-exchange of contracts.
3. Delegated authority be given to the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development to:
 - a. Submit a planning application to extend the temporary consent for the short-term holding strategy for a further three years;

- b. Procure and appoint a suitably qualified architect, employers' agent and planning consultant and then in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee, submit a planning application at a maximum agreed cost for the preferred scheme as detailed in the report;
 - c. Bring forward a detailed project delivery and investment plan (prior to the developments commencement) to be approved by the Committee; and
4. The Head of Mid-Kent Legal be given delegated authority to complete the purchase of the site on terms as agreed by the Director of Finance and Business Improvement and to negotiate and complete all necessary agreements, deeds and documents arising from or ancillary to the planning application and to the purchases of the properties and to appoint external solicitors to deal with the same if considered necessary.

80. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 9.20 p.m.

2021/22 WORK PROGRAMME

	Committee	Month	Origin	CLT to clear	Lead	Report Author
Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2021-22	P&R	24-Nov-21	Governance	Yes	Sheila Coburn	Sheila Coburn
Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23-2026/27	P&R	24-Nov-21	Governance	Yes	Mark Green	Ellie Dunnet
Q2 Budget, Performance and Risk Monitoring 2021/22	P&R	24-Nov-21	Officer Update	No	Mark Green	Ellie Dunnet
Granada House Update	P&R	24-Nov-21	Officer Update		William Cornall	Andrew Connors
Public Sector Led Garden Community Update	P&R	24-Nov-21	Officer Update		William Cornall	William Cornall
Update Report on Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan	P&R	15-Dec-21	Officer Update	Yes	Georgia Hawkes	TBC
Fees and Charges 2021/22	P&R	15-Dec-21	Governance	No	Mark Green	Ellie Dunnet
MTFS Update	P&R	15-Dec-21	Governance	No	Mark Green	Ellie Dunnet
Public Sector Led Garden Community Update	P&R	15-Dec-21	Officer Update	Yes	William Cornall	William Cornall
Collection Fund adjustment 2021/22 and Council Tax Base 2022/23	P&R	19-Jan-22	Governance	No	Mark Green	Ellie Dunnet
Medium Term Financial Strategy - Capital Programme 2022/23 - 2026/27	P&R	19-Jan-22	Governance	Yes	Mark Green	Ellie Dunnet
Medium Term Financial Strategy & Budget Proposals 2022/23 - 2026/27	P&R	19-Jan-22	Governance	Yes	Mark Green	Ellie Dunnet
Public Sector Led Garden Community Update	P&R	19-Jan-22	Officer Update	Yes	William Cornall	William Cornall
Public Sector Led Garden Community Update	P&R	09-Feb-22	Officer Update	Yes	William Cornall	William Cornall
Medium Term Financial Strategy & Budget Proposals 2022/23 - Final	P&R	09-Feb-22	Governance	No	Mark Green	Ellie Dunnet

2021/22 WORK PROGRAMME

	Committee	Month	Origin	CLT to clear	Lead	Report Author
Q3 Budget, Performance and Risk Monitoring 2021/22	P&R	09-Feb-22	Officer Update	No	Mark Green	Ellie Dunnet
Public Sector Led Garden Community Update	P&R	23-Mar-22	Officer Update	Yes	William Cornall	William Cornall
Public Sector Led Garden Community Update	P&R	20-Apr-22	Officer Update	Yes	William Cornall	William Cornall
Recovery and Renewal Strategy Update	P&R	20-Apr-22	Officer Update	Yes	Alison Broom	Angela Woodhouse
Digital Strategy	P&R	TBC	Strategy Update	Yes	Georgia Hawkes	Gary Hunter
Asset Management Strategy	P&R	TBC	Strategy Update	Yes	Mark Green	Georgia Hawkes
Commissioning and Procurement Strategy	P&R	TBC	Strategy Update	Yes	Mark Green	Georgia Hawkes

Agenda Item 14

POLICY AND RESOURCES 20 OCTOBER 2021 COMMITTEE

PUBLIC SECTOR-LED GARDEN COMMUNITY UPDATE

Final Decision-Maker	Policy & Resources Committee
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration & Place
Report Author	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration & Place
Wards affected	All, but in particular Harrietsham & Lenham and Headcorn Wards.
Classification	Public

Executive Summary

The proposal was last considered by this Committee on 15th September 2021. The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the progress of the Heathlands Garden Community proposition. As in the case of previous reports to this Committee, the contents of this report relate to the Council's position as a potential property owner/developer and not as Local Planning Authority (LPA).

Purpose of Report

To provide this Committee with an update on progress with respect to the Heathlands Garden Community proposition.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That this Committee notes the report.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Policy and Resources Committee	20 th October 2021

PUBLIC SECTOR-LED GARDEN COMMUNITY UPDATE

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>Continuing with the development of the Heathlands Garden Community proposition will materially improve the Council’s ability to achieve all the corporate priorities.</p>	Director of Regeneration & Place
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The Heathlands Garden Community proposition supports the achievement of all the cross-cutting objectives.</p> <p>Through delivering much needed homes to include 40% affordable housing. The emerging masterplan is landscape led with up to 50% of the total proposed as green space. Led by the ambitions set out in the Strategic Plan the Council can ensure that the design principles of development where it is the master planner reflect the commitment to reduce health inequalities amongst other things.</p>	Director of Regeneration & Place

Risk Management	See section 4.	Director of Regeneration & Place
Financial	Investment in the Garden Community forms part of the Council's five-year capital programme and budgetary provision exists for the expenditure described in the report and the plans outlined here. Spend to date on the project by the Council is £538,000.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Director of Regeneration & Place
Legal	There are no legal implications arising from this report as it is for noting only.	Principal Solicitor – Commercial
Privacy and Data Protection	No impact identified	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	An Equalities Impact Assessment will be completed if the proposal forms part of the draft spatial strategy of the Local Plan Review at Regulation 19 stage.	Equalities and Corporate Policy
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals more broadly. However, the period of uncertainty whilst the opportunity is being explored could negatively affect local residents.	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	The recommendation will not have a negative impact on Crime and Disorder.	Head of Service or Manager
Procurement	N/A.	Head of Service & Section 151 Officer
Biodiversity	The revised masterplan brief seeks a biodiversity net gain within the area defined by the proposed redline.	Head of Policy Communications & Governance

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council is pursuing this project as it is consistent with its Strategic Plan priority of “embracing growth and enabling infrastructure” and the desired outcomes within it:
- The Council leads master planning and invests in new places which are well designed.
 - Key employment sites are delivered.
 - Housing need is met including affordable housing.
 - Sufficient infrastructure is planned to meet the demands of growth.
- 2.2 This report updates this Committee concerning progress since September 2021 in respect of the following areas:
- Homes England (HE) partnership
 - Promotion of Heathlands through the Local Plan Review (LPR)
- 2.3 **Homes England (HE) Partnership.** HE has reported that all the option agreements, now in their final form for each landowner, were issued during the week commencing 4th October. The landowner’s agents have subsequently commenced the process of reviewing the final versions with each landowner in person prior to signing. It is envisaged that the majority of these agreements will have been entered into by the end of this month.
- 2.4 The initial community engagement work, led by “We Are Fabrick”, comprising an exhibition style briefing and some field survey work will have been undertaken by mid-December. The necessary preparatory work is complete, pending the finalisation of a venue and dates. As soon as these are confirmed Ward and Parish Councillors will be notified, and the event itself will be promoted more widely.
- 2.5 The Council and HE have also started the process of preparing a (Town) Planning Strategy document, for Heathlands. This is a requirement of the Collaboration Agreement and will inform how both parties will work together to secure planning permission if Heathlands is eventually “allocated” within the Maidstone Local Plan Review. It is envisaged this document will come forward for endorsement by this Committee in quarter 4 of the current financial year.
- 2.6 **Promotion of Heathlands through the Local Plan Review.** The LPA requested additional information (to that submitted in March 2021) to assist in its assessment of the Heathlands proposition. HE and the Council made this final submission during the week commencing 30th August 2021.
- 2.7 Subsequently, the Strategic Planning & Infrastructure Committee, and then in turn Full Council, have agreed that the next iteration of the Local Plan Review, which still includes Heathlands, will go out to the next stage of public consultation later this Autumn. In terms of the ongoing promotion of Heathlands, this is a hugely positive milestone to have achieved.

- 2.8 The full submission to the LPA, including the framework masterplan document / brochure and the supporting reports have now been published into the public domain (by the LPA).
- 2.9 In terms of the railway station proposal, and the strategic outline business case for it, further work for the next level of detail will now be instructed given that the scheme remains in the Local Plan Review. Fee proposals for this next stage of work have already been invited by Homes England.
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3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 This report is for noting.
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4. RISK

- 4.1 When this proposal was presented to this Committee in September 2019, the likely risks were set out as follows:
- At risk consultancy expenditure.
 - A period of uncertainty for the community affected.
 - Possible negative perceptions of a broader role for the Council in the context of acting as master developer.
 - Maintaining cohesion amongst the landowner group.
- 4.2 These risks have to some degree crystallised and largely remain. However, the level of cohesion amongst what is a now a smaller core landowner group, remains strong.
- 4.3 Further risks that have since been added and remain are:
- Terms cannot be agreed with the principal landowners.
 - Challenge from individuals or organisations that oppose the principle and/or the specific details of the Council's public sector-led garden community.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 Nothing further to report.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 The next steps will be:
- Homes England to enter into the finalised option agreements with the principal landowners.
 - Homes England and the Council to undertake the public engagement work (acting as land promoters), with "We Are Fabrick".
 - Homes England and the Council to prepare the (Town) Planning Strategy.
 - Continue to develop the proposal to respond to public engagement feedback received either through the LPA's consultation or our own engagement work and to prepare to defend the proposal at the Examination in Public.

- Appoint an external consultant team to further develop the outline strategic business case for the delivery of the new railway station / halt.
-

7. REPORT APPENDICES

7.1 None

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 None.

Agenda Item 15

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

20 October 2021

Proposed refurbishment of the Council owned Stilebridge Lane and Water Lane G&T Sites

Final Decision-Maker	Policy & Resources Committee
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration & Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration & Place
Classification	Public with one private appendix. The information contained within this report is considered exempt under the following paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972:- Paragraph 3 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person.
Wards affected	Water Lane – Headcorn Ward Stilebridge - Marden & Yalding

Executive Summary

The two mobile home sites owned by Maidstone Borough Council and managed by Kent County Council (KCC), Water Lane and Stilebridge require significant investment. The budget in the capital programme for this project is £1m but this needs to be increased to allow for an increased project scope and the construction cost impacts brought about by the pandemic and Brexit.

The matter was discussed by this Committee on 15th September 2021, and it was agreed to refer the decision, in principle, to the Communities Housing & Environment Committee (CHE), which duly happened on 5th October 2021, and CHE confirmed that it wanted the project to go ahead with the revised costings. Accordingly, the purpose of this report is to request that this Committee makes the requisite funds available.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. To increase the budget for this project within the capital programme from £1m to £1.9m as per the request from the Communities Housing & Environment Committee, with the balance coming from the affordable housing capital expenditure budget.

Timetable	
<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Date</i>
Community, Housing & Environment Committee	5 October 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	20 October 2021

Proposed refurbishment of the Council owned Stilebridge Lane and Water Lane G&T Sites

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The proposals support the Homes and Community priority and the outcome "Existing housing is safe, desirable and promotes good health and well-being"</p> <p>Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve the above outcome. The reasons other choices will be less effective is set out in Section 2.</p>	Director of Regeneration & Place
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The report supports the achievements of the cross-cutting objectives by providing much needed improvements to the Council owned G&T sites.</p>	Director of Regeneration & Place
Risk Management	Already covered in the risk section.	Director of Regeneration & Place
Financial	The increased scope of the project requires that the sum allowed for in the capital programme be increased from £1m to £1.9m, with the excess being funded from slippage within the affordable housing allocation for 2021/22.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	We will need access to external expertise to deliver the works.	Director of Regeneration & Place
Legal	The Council has a general power of competence pursuant to Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 which enables it to do	Team Leader, Contentious, and

	<p>anything that individuals generally may do.</p> <p>The Local Government Act 1972 (LGA 1972) section 111(1) empowers a local authority to do anything (whether or not involving the expenditure, borrowing or lending of money or the acquisition or disposal of any property or rights) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of any of their functions. Acting on the recommendations is within the Council's powers as set out in the above statutory provisions.</p> <p>The procurement processes referred to in this report should be in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contract Regulations 2015. All necessary legal documentation arising from the recommendations in this report should be approved by Legal Services before completion.</p>	Commissioning, Legal Team
Privacy and Data Protection	There is no direct impact resulting from the recommendations in the report.	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	An equalities impact assessment will be completed to consider the impact of the programme on protected characteristics and will outline any mitigating measures taken.	Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	Poor housing and amenity facilities have detrimental impacts on health and wellbeing. The refurbishment programme will address the current poor conditions on both sites.	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	The recommendation will have no negative impact on Crime and Disorder.	Director of Regeneration & Place
Procurement	All procurement activities necessary to deliver the project have already been undertaken.	Director of Regeneration & Place & Section 151 Officer
Biodiversity and Climate Change	There are no implications on biodiversity and climate change.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Officer

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 The Council owns two public mobile homes sites:

- Water Lane (in the Headcorn Ward) consisting of 14 plots (plus 7 semi-detached amenity blocks).
- Stilebridge (in the Marden & Yalding Ward) consisting of 18 plots (plus 8 semi-detached amenity blocks).

2.2 Both of the sites are managed by KCC and there is an aspiration that the ownership of the sites will eventually transfer to KCC once the sites have been refurbished. This matter was considered by the Corporate Leadership Team in June 2019, resulting in a decision to this effect. Only limited investment has been made on these sites for many years, meaning that significant expenditure is now required to bring the sites up to a modern standard.

2.3 During late 2019, a firm of Building Surveyors were appointed to establish the scope, nature and cost of the works required to address the situation. This building survey, finalised in Jan 2020, identified a number of areas where considerable investment in the sites was required.

2.4 The Corporate Leadership Team considered a report from the Head of Housing & Community Services on 5th February 2020, that included reference to these surveys and gave an in-principle investment decision (£0.9m of works). This figure was increased to £1m to allow for contractor's prelims, overheads, profit and client professional fees and this sum was then included in the 20/21 capital programme that was approved by the Policy & Resources Committee.

2.5 At this time, any improvements to the foul drainage of the sites were out of scope of the project. This is because this area of work was being investigated by the Council's Housing team. It was known that there was investment required in the foul drainage of both sites, but these investigations and requisite works were understood to be in train.

2.6 Following the CLT decision, a surveying firm, FFT, were procured and appointed (March 2020) to deliver the reinvestment project, through the following disciplines: building surveying, design, project management, quantity surveying and contract administration. The client brief at this stage was to bring about the following improvements at the sites:

- To provide a separate metered electricity supply to each plot and amenity unit, to enable the resident to choose their utility provider and for the Council to achieve full recovery.
- To provide a separate metered water supply to each plot and amenity unit, to enable the resident to choose their utility provider and for the Council to achieve full recovery.
- To fully replace or refurbish each amenity block.
- To make improvements to the road surfaces, surface water drainage and signage of the sites.

- 2.7 Following their appointment, FFT commissioned detailed site surveys, to include topographical and Mechanical & Engineering surveys and developed the investment options and potential specifications. It then became apparent that the scope of FFT should be increased to include the design and delivery of improved foul drainage solutions to both sites too as these two areas of works could not be delivered independently. Consequently, the Housing Team were stood down. In mid-2020, the scheme budget was recast accordingly and the detailed designs and specifications developed.
- 2.8 The foul drainage works needed at Stilebridge have proved not to be quite so onerous, but at Water Lane, there is a need to replace the rising main sewer and all the associated connections, to include a run of circa 50m. The scope of the works was also increased to include improvements to the roads and hard landscaping too. By this time, the surveys indicated that more extensive works would be required against most cost lines and that there would also be cost pressures brought about by the impacts of Brexit and the pandemic, which are now being felt across the construction sector.
- 2.9 The budgets allowed for the replacement of the amenity blocks at Water Lane and refurbishment at Stilebridge. In terms, of Water Lane, FFT initially advised that these could be renewed with factory-built pod units at an advantageous cost, but subsequent soft market testing showed that would not be possible, and that this solution would be no more cost efficient than traditional construction, so it was decided to proceed with the latter.
- 2.10 The next stage was to secure Planning consent for the proposed works, and this was secured for both sites in January and March 2021 respectively.
- 2.11 In terms of procurement the possibility of using a sector-wide framework was considered but dismissed. It was decided to pursue an unrestricted single stage tender process, via the Kent Business Portal, which is simply an eTendering platform and is the vehicle by which all the Council's opportunities are advertised. This project was also advertised on the Contracts Finder website, which is managed by central Government and gives us UK wide exposure to ensure that we can attract as much interest and competition as possible. Our first tender in early Spring 2021 resulted in the following:
- 38 Expressions of Interest
 - 28 Failed to respond
 - 9 Opted out of the process
 - 1 submission was received, well in excess of the recast budget
- 2.12 It was decided that this did not provide value for the Council, as the quoted figure was in excess of the 2020 budget estimate. The Council therefore undertook a second tender process in late Spring 2021, with the following results:
- 23 Expressions of Interest
 - 12 Failed to respond

- 7 Opted out of the process
- 4 submissions were received, with the preferred bid being reflective of the revised costs proposed to the Policy & Resources Committee.

2.13 FFT have also commented that they have noted a significant increase in material costs as supply chains have been severely affected since Brexit and the pandemic, and contractors are now including added costs for risk in relation to time as many projects are overrunning. However, these adverse cost impacts were correctly foreseen and allowed for within the 2020 budget.

2.14 In conclusion, around 30% of the cost increase from the sum allocated in the capital programme budget relates to broadening the scope of the works to include remedying the longstanding foul drainage issues to the sites, most notably Water Lane, and the balance is because of rising cost pressures being experienced in the contracting / tendering market, which are undoubtedly sector wide issues. More generally the specification became more comprehensive once the need for this was evidenced by the findings of the detailed surveys.

2.15 The table provided in **Exempt Appendix 1** shows the starting budget approved in 2019, the revised budget prepared mid-2020, and the preferred bid pricing. The preferred bid figure is inclusive of all value engineering opportunities that have been explored by the professional team.

2.16 The Communities Housing & Environment Committee considered a similar report to this on 5th October, and endorsed the project, inclusive of the increased costings, to this Committee.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 **Option 1.** The Council could decide to do nothing, but this is not recommended as the Council would then not meet its landlord obligations in respect of maintaining the sites to an appropriate standard.

3.2 **Option 2.** The Council could decide to choose to undertake some of the work as outlined. However, taking this approach will only delay inevitable work, and the Council would again still fall short of its landlord obligations in the intervening period.

3.3 **Option 3.** The Council could decide to undertake all the work as outlined in this report for a total cost of £1.9m inclusive of professional fees and request that the Policy & Resources transfer £0.9m of monies allocated from the affordable homes capital budget, to this project, to bridge the shortfall.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 **Option 3** is recommended. This will address the condition shortfalls identified and provide residents with the facilities that a modern public-

owned, mobile homes site should provide. This is also the preferred option of the Communities Housing & Environment Committee.

5. RISK

5.1 The following risks and mitigations have been identified:

Risk	Mitigation
Performance of contractors	Officers and Employers Agent will pro-actively manage suppliers and update the project team on status of supply chain procurement and performance. The risk of cost overruns has also been managed by procuring detailed condition surveys at the pre contract stage.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 The Policy & Resources Committee requested that CHE consider the project and revised costs in more detail, which they did on the 5th October 2021.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 The agreed programme of works will be communicated to the KCC Team managing both sites and to the residents. Due to the scale of the works required, there will inevitably be some disruption to residents.
- 7.2 A site visit with the selected contractor will take place before any works onsite commence. This will be discussed with KCC prior to the visit.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Exempt Appendix 1: Cost comparison table.
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

Agenda Item 16

Policy and Resources Committee

20 October 2021

Recovery and Renewal Action Plan

Final Decision-Maker	Policy and Resources Committee
Lead Head of Service	Alison Broom Chief Executive
Lead Officer and Report Author	Angela Woodhouse Head of Policy Communications and Governance Anna Collier Corporate Insight, Communities and Governance Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

This report details proposed strategy and actions for recovery and renewal from the COVID-19 public health emergency. The actions presented in **Appendix A** of this report have been developed following Councillor and Officer input, including briefings, workshops and, formal debate across committees. The cost of the Action Plan is included at **Appendix B**.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

Approve the Recovery and Renewal Action Plan at Appendix A and associated costs set out at Appendix B.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Policy and Resources Committee	23 June 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	21 July 2021
Communities, Housing and Environment Committee	31 August 2021
Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee	14 September 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	15 September 2021
Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee	21 September 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	20 October 2021 and 6-monthly for 24 months

Recovery and Renewal Action Plan

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>The actions recommended align with the Council's ambitions set out in our strategic plan including the areas of focus agreed by Full Council in February 2021 for 2021-26</p>	Head of Policy Communications and Governance
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The Action Plan is cross-cutting and will have a positive impact on the Council's cross cutting objectives and in particular that deprivation is reduced and social mobility is improved</p>	Head of Policy Communications and Governance
Risk Management	The Action Plan has been put in place to mitigate the risks arising from impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to our economy and communities and the Council.	Head of Policy Communications and Governance
Financial	<p>In addition to the un-ringfenced grant, the Government has announced the £56 million 'Welcome Back Fund', Maidstone's allocation from this fund is £153,551.</p> <p>Several ringfenced and other grants will continue support specific activities related to the Council's COVID-19 response. These</p>	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team

	<p>include the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), from which Maidstone has been allocated £222,043 for 2021-22, in addition to £371,103 devolved from Kent County Council during 2020/21, Test and Trace Grants and New Burdens funding.</p> <p>However, as part of the local government financial settlement for 2021/22 councils across the country received additional resources for addressing COVID-19 and its effects. This was reported to the Policy and Resources Committee on 10 February 2021 where it was noted that Maidstone’s share of the un-ringfenced grant was £860,000.</p> <p>The Council also has access to other funding streams which may be used to support certain activities linked to recovery planning. These include s106 funding for town centre planning, and income retained through the Kent Business Rates Pool which can be used for activities which support economic development more widely.</p> <p>Costs are set out in Appendix B</p>	
Staffing	Staffing implications have been set out in the Action Plan where additional staffing resources are needed to deliver the projects.	Head of Policy Communications and Governance
Legal	<p>The Council has a general power of competence under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything an individual can do provided it is not prohibited by other legislation.</p> <p>The Local Government Act 1972, section 111(1) also empowers a local authority to do anything (whether involving the expenditure, borrowing or lending of money or the acquisition or disposal of any property or rights) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions. The</p>	Legal Team

	<p>recommendation and the proposals in this report regarding recovery and renewal from the COVID-19 pandemic are arrangements that can be undertaken under the above legislation.</p> <p>The Council will also be obliged to comply with relevant legislation, such as the Coronavirus Act 2020, related regulations, the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 and such other updated legislation required to address the continuing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the recovery proposals being considered by the Council as part of the "Build Back Better" agenda.</p>	
Privacy and Data Protection	Some of the projects may require data protection impact assessments if they involve new activities and/or personal data. These will be completed prior to activities commencing.	Corporate Insight, Communities and Governance Team
Equalities	Some projects may need an EQIA, these will be completed prior to activities commencing.	Corporate Insight, Communities and Governance Team
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	The report includes actions that may have a positive impact in terms of crime and disorder with actions on community responsibility, resilience and levelling up	Head Policy Communications and Governance
Procurement	On accepting the recommendations, the Council will then follow procurement exercises for those projects where it is required. Responsible Officers will complete those exercises in line with financial procedure rules.	Head Policy Communications and Governance
Biodiversity and Climate Change	The Committee has identified that the green agenda is important in its approval of the build back better principles, the actions will support the Council's Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy,	Head Policy Communications and Governance

	particularly those set out within The Way We Work theme.	
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 This report brings together the work that has been carried out over a significant number of meetings, workshops and briefing sessions into an Action Plan for Recovery and Renewal.

2.2 The Action Plan at **Appendix A** has been developed for Recovery and Renewal with the following themes:

- Vibrant Economy
- Community Resilience
- The Way We Work
- Responding to Increased Demands

The plan includes Committee responsibility, senior officer responsibility and at **Appendix B** the resources required. The Action Plan has been kept as succinct as possible with detailed descriptions of each action set out in paragraph 2.10.

2.3 As identified in the plan Service Committees will have responsibility for matters that fall within their terms of reference. Policy and Resources Committee will have strategic oversight and progress will be reported every six months to this Committee.

2.4 It should be noted that the Council has existing responsibilities in relation to responding the pandemic and if further surges occur this may result in an increased demand on support for those affected by COVID-19. The Action Plan is such that not all work will commence at the same time, nor will it require the total resource to be allocated and spent immediately. As such if further resources were required to respond to the pandemic, actions and spending could be paused and adjusted and reported to this Committee to ensure the Council remains in a state of readiness to respond.

2.5 The Recovery and Renewal Action Plan at **Appendix A** includes the Council's version of the Build Back Better principles following discussion at Councillor workshops and meetings of this Committee, the links to these principles have been identified in the Action Plan.

Feedback from Service Committees

Communities Housing and Environment Committee

2.6 Members were happy to recommend the actions presented but concern was raised that smaller organisations may not meet the eligibility criteria to apply for funding through the Community Resilience fund. There were also concerns that smaller organisations would be unable to easily receive funding due to their structure. Options are now being researched by the Corporate Insight, Communities and Governance team and guidance will be

updated accordingly. Members also raised that bids should be considered by way of a self-selected panel taken from the Committee Members. This will be updated in the draft guidance at **Appendix F**.

Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee

2.7 The Committee were supportive of the actions presented. Following a presentation on the MidKent College Skills Hub proposal they recommended that the funding available for the scheme be doubled with the additional funding to be drawn down following successful performance. The Corporate Insight, Communities and Governance team will work with MidKent College and the Head of Economic Regeneration to develop and agree indicators to measure success. An additional project was also considered and proposed for inclusion by the Committee. The Maidstone Riverside Lights project which would be a memorial designed to reduce anti-social behaviour and help connect Lockmeadow, Archbishops Palace and the Town Centre was considered and supported by the Committee. As the Committee have requested further information on the plan and the project can be funded from the capital programme this has not been included in the Recovery and Renewal Action Plan. A request was made to ensure outcomes are clearly identified for the whole range of projects/actions. This has been reflected in a new "what will success look like" section in **Appendix A**.

- 2.8 The Committee made the following specific recommendations: That they
- a) Support the Community and Skills Hub proposal from MidKent College, and recommend to Policy and Resources Committee that £60,000 be allocated to the project subject to a review taking place at four months;
 - b) Endorse the support of the Visitor Economy including retail, hospitality and leisure sectors following the impacts of the pandemic to assist with the return of business as usual;
 - c) Endorse the action to invest in industrial and warehouse premises to help de-risk new employment sites coming forward as this will support the Economic Development Strategy Priority 1 - Open for Business;
 - d) Endorse the capacity to develop projects and bids for bidding through technical support for the levelling up fund; and
 - e) Support the initial concept of the Maidstone Riverside Light Walk to improve links between Archbishops Palace, Lockmeadow and the Town Centre, and recommend to the Policy & Resources Committee that this concept be developed and brought back to this Committee at their meeting on 14 December 2021.

Policy and Resources Committee

2.9 Policy and Resources Committee were supportive of the actions presented. The Committee considered additional information on the Town Centre Strategy, Financial Inclusion and projects identified under The Way We Work. During debate a request was made to review the proposed level of funding for The Way We Work with a view to reduce this and direct more

resources for projects with direct impact on service and policy delivery. Following this feedback the action for expanding technology solutions to enable new ways of working has been removed as this represents existing work already planned for. A decision was also made to review the funding and support arrangements for the Citizens Advice Bureau due to the funding withdrawal by the Money Advice Service. It was identified that any funding remaining after allocation to the projects identified should be invested to support the development of the Town Centre Strategy the amount allocated to this has been increased as a result. It was recognised that the Recovery and Renewal Fund would not be sufficient to fund all the costs of developing this strategy and that funding would also be drawn from S106 agreements, funding already allocated for a project on Sense of Place with the balance to be drawn from other resources with options for years 2 and 3 of the strategy work to be considered through the 2022/3 onwards and Medium Term Financial Strategy process.

2.10 The Committee made the following recommendations:

- a. The Committees broad support for the actions proposed as set out in the papers be noted, with the clear expectation of measurable outputs; and
- b. A meeting be arranged between the relevant officers and the Citizens Advice Bureau to review the existing SLA in consultation with the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman.

Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee

2.11 Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee noted the actions with no concerns raised; the additional resources requested for Planning were recognised as important allowing for greater resilience and the Committee expressed their support.

2.10 Detailed Description of the Actions for Recovery and Renewal

Vibrant Economy

- **MidKent College Skills Hub** - Mid Kent College is proposing a town centre venue to provide accessible training, careers advice, and employability support for all residents, but particularly young people in an informal environment in partnership with others such as the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP), and the Youth Steering Group, see **Appendix E**. As a pilot project its design and implementation would be monitored as part of a proposed new Anchor Institution Partnership. The hub will link job opportunities with local people through a collaborative approach to skills, training, education, and employment.
- **Invest in industrial and warehouse premises to help de-risk new employment sites coming forward** – Having business ready premises is identified as an action under the priority “Open for Business” within the new Economic Development Strategy and also has synergy with the actions in the Strategic Plan. The Business

terrace and Innovation Centre are excellent examples of where the Council has invested to create facilities in support of start-up and expanding small and medium enterprises. We will endeavour to identify similar projects for capital investment; this will not require revenue resources from the Recovery and Renewal Fund

- **Transform the Town Centre through the development and delivery of a Town Centre Strategy** - A background report to the Town Centre Strategy is attached at **Appendix D**
- **Vibrant Visitor Economy** - project aims to support the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors return to a more sustainable business by boosting the Council's capacity through digital marketing/social media to attract consumers to attend events, visit our towns and villages and, attractions and stay in the Borough. Competition to capture the staycation market will be intense over the next 12 months
- **Capacity to develop projects and bid** - it has been identified that the Council needs to increase the capacity to develop projects and bid for funding to ensure we maximise any opportunities for external funding and support.

Resilient Communities

- **Establish Community Compact** – Establish working arrangements with the Voluntary and Community Sector as agreed by the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee in November 2020.
- **Support and Encourage Volunteering in the Borough** - A joint project with the Voluntary and Community Sector to develop a system/approach/support to enable and encourage volunteering. This will then be supported through changes to the Service Level Agreement with Involve.
- **Online Community Participation** – Create community participation through an involvement space online for real time/dynamic interaction with the public. Online system supply and license to use.
- **Equip Trinity Foyer to be a Community Hub** - Supply and fit of IT and office equipment to create a hub which will allow training and meetings and other services to be provided.
- **Love Where You Live and Get Involved** - Community environmental projects to encourage a sense of civic pride across communities; meeting a desire not only to live in a clean and attractive place but also to actively contribute to transforming, enhancing and maintaining those spaces. Funding at this scale would enable work with up to 8 local groups, providing support to enable them to set up and get going.

- **Financial Inclusion Strategy and Actions** - The Strategy at **Appendix C** has been developed building on previous decisions for example with respect to debt recovery procedures and support for low-income households and linked financial inclusion projects already in place. The strategy contains an action plan for financial inclusion with 4 workstreams. To deliver this plan successfully there is a need to employ a dedicated resource (additional post grade 7-8) to focus on the agenda and ease some of the pressures on the team. The need for a strategy and to define our approach to financial inclusion has been heightened because of the low levels of financial resilience in the Borough following austerity, welfare reform, fuel price increases and then the impact of the pandemic which has increased the support needed for our most vulnerable residents. If we successfully deliver the strategy over the next five years, we will have achieved:
 - A coordinated approach across the Council, voluntary sector and key partners to address the underlying causes and impacts of poverty
 - A data led approach to identify and target coordinated support to residents in financial crisis or at risk of moving into financial crisis
 - A reduction in the number of households living in fuel, water, or food poverty
 - A reduction in the number of households at risk of eviction or struggling with Council Tax debt because of financial difficulties
 - Increased awareness and take up of mainstream financial services amongst low income households
 - An increase in available income for those on the lowest income within the borough by ensuring they receive the benefits they are entitled to

- **Community Resilience Fund** - set out in **Appendix F** has been proposed following the successful Winter Funding Grant whereby small and large voluntary and community sector groups were able to bid for money to run initiatives to keep vulnerable people warm and fed. The themes for the fund have been identified because of our survey of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) earlier this year, which shows a significant change in demand for services in relation to Mental Health and Isolation and Loneliness. This was also evidenced in our resident survey carried out in 2020 on the impact of the pandemic. The Fund will provide one-off money of between £500-£5000 to support projects run by the VCS that benefit the residents of Maidstone centred on mitigating the impact of the pandemic. A draft scheme structure and application process has been designed (at **Appendix F**) which incorporates best practice from local authorities across the country and is mindful of our recent learning with the Winter Funding Grant; the scheme should be kept as simple as possible to maximise uptake.

The Way We Work

- **Ensure staff have the right equipment (office and home) to enable new ways of working** - The Council has an existing ICT replacement strategy to provide for the upgrade and/or replacement of desktop equipment on a rolling programme. The budget that already exists will be focussed on ensuring that people have the right equipment and resources for new ways of working.
- **Embedding new ways of working and ensuring the office is fit for purpose** - Increased staff capacity in Transformation for one year to enable the introduction of new policies, procedures, practices to support new ways of working and reduce future running costs - £50,000. IT have identified £25,000 for consultancy and £15,000 in support for the roll out of Microsoft 365. As this is associated with a capital project the cost will be allocated to the capital programme.
- **Increase HR capacity to facilitate agile working and new ways of working** - The objective of the culture change programme will be to review the work undertaken in this area and to gain feedback from our employees on organisational culture, to change and develop the council to meet future workforce requirements.

Responding to Increased Demands Arising from COVID-19

- **Business Grant Distribution** – Over £62.6 million of grants were distributed to businesses in the Maidstone borough by the Finance, Economic Development and Revenues teams. There were a number of grants made available by the Government and managed by local authorities. Several grants ran concurrently, and it was crucial these grants were delivered swiftly. Staff were re-deployed from different areas within the Council to help the teams.
- **Revenues and Benefits Citizens Advice Post** – Getting customers to engage with the Revenues team when they are in financial difficulty is extremely challenging as customers can be suspicious of the support offered. Council Tax arrears are often an indicator of further debt so we have partnered with Maidstone Citizens Advice, a trusted agency, to refer cases to them where we believe a customer may be in need to debt advice. We have funded Citizens Advice for one year starting from August 2021 to enable them to provide debt advisors to take on this work. We advise the customer we will be passing their contact details to Citizens Advice who will contact them. Although it is early days, Citizens Advice has managed to contact customers and are in the process of helping customers to claim all the benefits they are entitled to and find ways to get as many customers out of debt as they can.

- **Revenues and Benefits Financial Inclusion Officer** – A Financial Inclusion Officer post was created within our existing resources by reallocating staffing resource. The purpose of this post is to:
 - i) Identify and target those households in financial crisis or at risk of going into financial crisis by signposting customers to get help or to award reductions in the amount of Council Tax to pay where we are able
 - ii) Manage Breathing Space which the Government brought in on 4 May 2021, on behalf of the Council by being the single point of contact for debt agencies where a customer has entered Breathing Space. This person contacts other areas in the Council to identify any debts outstanding, collates them together and then passes details onto the Insolvency Service
 - iii) Actively look to identify and contact Council Tax Support customers in Council Tax arrears to offer further support. This post has grown since its inception which is why there is a need for an additional post to be brought in to ensure those customers who need help really get help.

- **Planning Development Control fixed term post** - During the pandemic Development Control's workload has increased especially for householder applications; it is difficult to say with confidence that this is a temporary effect but anecdotally this is a response to home improvement and in some cases creating a better home working environment. Fee income doesn't cover the additional costs. The resource identified here would enable a short-term response to the pressure, if this proves to be a longer-term trend in demand it can be identified and addressed in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

- **Planning Enforcement fixed term post** - Request for an additional short-term post until March 2022 as enforcement activity has risen during the pandemic. Live enforcement cases in April 2020 standing at 219 and the end of April figures for 2021 standing at 379, an increase of 73% over the April 2020 figures. The resource identified here would enable a short-term response to the pressure, if this proves to be a longer term trend in demand it can be identified and addressed in the Medium Term Financial Strategy

- **Increased capacity in Heritage and Landscape** - Proposals are for a Heritage Officer and an Arboriculture Officer for a short, fixed term period. This will help address the increase in the volume of work. Tree applications have increased by 10% on the previous year. Alongside this, due to the recently identified need for all MBC Tree Preservation Orders to be reported to Planning Committee, case workload has increased significantly. The number of 5-day notices has risen from less than 4 per month to 20 per month. A Large volume of TPO requests and many customer inquiries.

- **Increased capacity within Data Analytics to provide support for recovery and renewal projects** - In March 2020 the Council advanced plans to explore the development of performance dashboards to enable monitoring of service performance and COVID-19 cases within the borough throughout the pandemic. Following successful delivery as a proof of concept, a programme of dashboard development across the authority has been produced and started and seven dashboards have already been developed. These are for:
 - Community Safety
 - Customer Services
 - Development Control
 - Information Management
 - Planning Enforcement
 - Street Cleansing
 - Waste Crime

The performance dashboards have proved a significant benefit for these services, enabling them to swiftly monitor performance, identify trends and plan service delivery across the team, without spending officer time producing reports and undertaking analysis. They also enhance strategic oversight by the Corporate Leadership Team. The development of dashboards can be technically complicated and time consuming. Therefore, additional resource is required to invest in order to deliver the programme for the benefit of other teams as well as shape new dashboards for Members and customers.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 There are three options available to the Committee:

- i. **Approve the Action Plan and costs at Appendices A and B with a six monthly reporting process**
The Recovery and Renewal Action Plan has been developed collaboratively with Councillors through an iterative process including comment and input from all Service Committees, it builds on the Council's previous work on response, renewal and recovery and the work carried out to refocus our Strategic Plan.
- ii. **Amend and Approve the Action Plan and costs at Appendices A and B, with a six monthly reporting process**
The plan has been developed through an iterative process and can be further refined, developed and changed in accordance as deemed appropriate by the Committee
- iii. **Do not approve the plan or defer for further work**
The Committee could in effect decide to take no action, there is however a significant amount of funding to be utilised for Recovery and Renewal and to do nothing or delay the actions further would

mean this resource is not utilised in a timely way and the Council could not as easily take advantage of the opportunities and mitigate the impact as a result of COVID-19.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Recovery and Renewal Action Plan has been developed collaboratively with Councillors through an iterative process, it builds on the Council's previous work on response, renewal and recovery and the work carried out to refocus our Strategic Plan. The Committee is recommended to approve the Action Plan for delivery.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 The COVID-19 Pandemic has had a severe and long-lasting impact on the lives of Maidstone communities and businesses, not responding and effectively planning for recovery and renewal will increase the risk to our communities and businesses as well as the Council. The Council's corporate risk register contains risks relating to the pandemic. The actions proposed will mitigate the risks.
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6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 As well as consultation with Councillors through the Member COVID-19 recovery consultative forum, reports were received on a regular basis by Policy and Resources Committee in 2020 and 2021:

- 24 June 2020: Response to COVID-19 Public Health Emergency approach to recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic
- 16 September 2020: Strategic Plan Review – Update on Priority Milestones
- 20 January 2021: Strategic Plan – Proposed Areas for Focus 2021-2026 and Key Performance Indicators for COVID-19 Recovery
- 10 February 2021: Strategic Plan Refresh

On 9 June 2021 a virtual briefing was held for Members where information was provided on the impact to date of the pandemic, and stimulated discussion on what 'Build Back Better' would mean for Maidstone, this was followed by a discussion paper on 23 June 2021 and a workshop with the Service Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs. All of this feedback has been

taken into account in the development of the actions for recovery and renewal.

- 6.2 A report was taken to Policy and Resources on 21 July 2021 where the projects and actions for recovery and renewal were agreed for the purpose of engagement with the Service Committees.
- 6.3 All four Service Committees have been consulted on actions which fall within their remit and their feedback has been fed into the final Action Plan presented with this report. As a result of the feedback from Committees a number of amendments have been made to the Plan including an increase in funding for the project with MidKent College and the addition of a new section to the Action Plan to show what success will look like focused on outcomes.
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7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 Once the final action plan has been agreed work will commence, each Committee will be updated on the progress of the actions within their remit every 6 months. Policy and Resources Committee will receive an update on the full Action Plan.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: Recovery and Renewal Action Plan
 - Appendix B: Action Plan costs
 - Appendix C: Financial Inclusion Strategy
 - Appendix D: Town Centre Strategy
 - Appendix E: MidKent Community Skills Hub Proposal
 - Appendix F: Draft Community Resilience Fund, Overview, Application Form and Score Sheet
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

24 June 2020: Response to Covid19 Public Health Emergency
<http://app07:9080/documents/s71373/Maidstone%20Councils%20Response%20to%20Covid19%20Pandemic.pdf>

24 June 2020: Approach to recovery from the Covid19 Pandemic
<http://app07:9080/documents/s71374/Maidstone%20Councils%20approach%20to%20Recovery%20from%20the%20Covid19%20Pandemic.pdf>

16 September 2020: Strategic Plan Review – Update on Priority Milestones
<http://app07:9080/documents/s72419/Strategic%20Plan%20Review%20-%20Update%20on%20Priority%20Milestones.pdf>

20 January 2021: Strategic Plan – Proposed Areas for Focus 2021-2026 and Key Performance Indicators for Covid-19 Recovery
<http://app07:9080/documents/s74258/Strategic%20Plan%20%20Proposed%20Areas%20for%20Focus%2020212026%20and%20KPIs%20for%20Covid19%20Recovery.pdf>

10 February 2021: Strategic Plan Refresh
<http://app07:9080/documents/s75590/Strategic%20Plan%20Refresh.pdf>

23 June 2021: Recovery and Renewal Discussion Paper
<http://app07:9080/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=577&MId=4624&Ver=4>

21 July 2021: Recovery and Renewal Actions Report to Policy and Resources
<http://10.201.64.164/documents/s77897/Recovery%20and%20Renewal%20Actions.pdf>

31 August 2021: Recovery and Renewal Actions Report to Community Housing and Environment Committee
<http://app07:9080/documents/s78285/Recovery%20and%20Renewal%20Actions.pdf>

14 September 2021: Recovery and Renewal Actions Report to Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee
<http://app07:9080/documents/s78470/Recovery%20and%20Renewal%20Actions.pdf>

15 September 2021: Recovery and Renewal Actions Report to Policy and Resources Committee
<http://app07:9080/documents/s78501/Recovery%20and%20Renewal%20Actions.pdf>

21 September 2021: Recovery and Renewal Actions Report to Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee
<http://app07:9080/documents/s78640/Recovery%20and%20Renewal%20Actions.pdf>

Build Back Better – A Borough that Works for Everyone
Recovery and Renewal Action Plan

Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 has had a significant effect on the Borough's economy, communities, the way we work and our resources. This plan sets out our action plan for recovery and renewal and the principles on which the actions have been based aligned to the national levelling up agenda.

The impact of the pandemic is still unfolding as economic disruption continues. The impact on individual sectors has varied significantly reflecting the extent to which lockdown measures and restrictions have forced some industries to temporarily shut down. Hospitality, recreation and retail and those that supply these sectors have been amongst those hardest hit, however they have also driven much of the job growth recorded in the Borough over recent years and remain locally significant.

The contribution of our communities in response to the COVID19 pandemic has been remarkable and we are truly grateful for everyone who has come together in response to the pandemic.

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There can be no doubt that the pandemic has had a negative impact on our most vulnerable residents and we believe as support is withdrawn, we will see a further increase in need and households in crisis. Universal Credit claimants have increased in Maidstone borough by 142% since the start of the pandemic.

As we move out of response into recovery and then renewal we want to work with our communities, the community and voluntary sector including parish councils and anchor institutions to focus on building resilience, avoiding duplication, improving communication and identification of common goals, improving and making best use of our community infrastructure and empowering our communities to help themselves.

In terms of the way we work the pandemic has been a major game changer for the pace of digitalisation and will remain a key component of the new normal. There are major implications for the way we work and how our residents live and work in the borough and how we interact with both residents and businesses. Whilst of benefit to many the changes have also heightened challenges such as digital exclusion for some people. Environmental awareness has also been significantly raised, and therefore government policy is now focused on green recovery. These factors give the opportunity to accelerate Maidstone's ambitions in terms of clean growth, sustainable travel and natural capital.

Build Back Better Principles

Levelling up – Work should be focussed on communities and individuals who are most vulnerable. Projects that relate to levelling up should be based on geographical locations of communities and not limited by ward boundaries. Levelling Up provides a renewed focus on improving people’s life chances and a healthy recovery including addressing inequalities already present that have been accentuated by the pandemic e.g., for health and wealth/financial precariousness.

Community Resilience – Continuing to build relationships with Parishes, the Community and Voluntary Sector and carry out projects to enable people to help themselves and support the community and voluntary sector.

Build back Greener – Ensuring our actions support the Council’s ambitions for biodiversity and climate change as set out in our Biodiversity and Climate Change Plan.

Building back Faster – Whilst the Council supports the notion of ensuring we run an efficient and effective planning service as seen by the planned investment in the planning service in our action plan, development should be well planned and appropriate for the Borough.

Maidstone’s Open for Business – As the business capital of Kent to be a borough that is supportive of existing business and welcomes inward investment. This is congruent with our new Economic Development Strategy which has a priority to be Open for Business, maximising our economic role at the heart of Kent and a strong public sector base to create a positive and entrepreneurial environment in which businesses can grow and thrive. We want to maximise the unique opportunities presented by being part of the North Kent Enterprise Zone and having the Kent Medical Campus in our borough.

Think Local - using our role as a facilitator and connector in the Borough to ensure our local economy is well supported. For example, work with the Anchor Institutions in our borough on training, skills and recruitment for local people and spending locally when procuring services wherever possible

The Way We Work – e.g. capturing and sustaining the experience and benefits of the pandemic for agile working

Recovery and Renewal Action Plan

A Vibrant Economy

Action	Target start and end	What Does Success Look Like	Committee and Senior Responsible Officer	Principles
<p>MidKent College Skills Hub</p>	<p>September 2021 - (project planning with MKC to identify end)</p>	<p>Provision of a town centre venue to provide accessible training, careers advice, and employability support for all residents.</p> <p>Courses delivered to a range of participants including book-keeping and computerised accounting, skills development online courses, essential digital skills, certified work skills programmes, food hygiene and employability workshops and support. Courses delivered to a range of participants including book-keeping and computerised accounting, skills development online courses, essential digital skills, certified work skills programmes, food hygiene and employability workshops and support. With space for</p>	<p>ERL/ John Foster</p>	<p>Maidstone's Open for Business</p>

		ten participants to be physically present in the hub it is envisaged that 208 people would be able to take advantage of the hub for courses and support over 26 weeks. KPIS unemployment, youth unemployment		
Invest in industrial and warehouse premises to help de risk new employment sites coming forward	September 2021 and going	Projects are identified to invest in and Maidstone is seen and delivers its promise of being open for business, businesses can expand and locate to the Borough.	P&R/John Foster	Maidstone's Open for business
Transform the Town Centre through the development and delivery of a town centre strategy.	September 2021 and going	Town Centre Strategy in place by 1 March 2023, projects may begin prior to this. Maidstone town centre becomes a centre of excellence for urban sustainability with a strong focus around arts, culture, leisure and visitor economy creating a place where people want to live, feel safe and which prides itself upon being a town centre which is relevant to all of the Borough's residents and to which all of the borough's residents can relate. KPIs: Town Centre Footfall, Town Centre vacancy rates NEW:	P&R/Phil Coyne	Cross Cutting

		resident satisfaction survey results		
Vibrant Visitor Economy	July 2021 to July 2023	Maidstone has an enhanced arts and culture offer with increased visitors to key attractions and an increase in footfall in the town centre. See KPIs	ERL/John Foster	Maidstone's Open for Business/ Levelling Up/ Community resilience
Capacity to develop projects and bids to take advantage of new funding opportunities	September 2021 to September 2025	Successful bids and projects completed that meet our priorities.	P&R/John Foster	Cross Cutting

Resilient Communities

Action	Target start and end	What does Success look like	Committee and Senior Responsible Officer	Principles
Establish Community Compact	May 2021 – ongoing	Partnership in place between the community and voluntary sector and the council. Joint projects completed and greater resilience	CHE/Angela Woodhouse	Community Resilience
Support and Encourage Volunteering in the Borough.	June 2021-October 2022	Increase in the number of volunteers, volunteering in the Borough and as a consequence more community initiatives delivered. Work with involve to develop an indicator	CHE/Angela Woodhouse	Community Resilience
Online Community Participation	September 2021	Online tool in place and used to successfully engage with the public on projects and initiatives.	P&R/Anna Collier	Community Resilience
Equip Trinity Foyer to be a Community Hub	June 2021 – October 2021	New community hub delivered for all housing and related support services in Trinity Foyer	CHE/John Littlemore	Community Resilience
Love Where You Live and Get Involved.	September 2021-2023	8 community environmental projects delivered. Civic Pride increased as measured by the Resident’s Survey. Baseline the number of participants in the project.	CHE/Jen Stevens	Community Resilience Building Back Greener
Financial Inclusion Strategy and Actions		The number and value of unclaimed benefits that residents are supported to claim	P&R/Steve McGuinness	Levelling Up

		<p>A reduction in the number of households in financial crisis or at risk of moving into crisis</p> <p>Increased take up of debt advice services by households with problem debt</p> <p>A reduction in the number of households identified as being in a repeated pattern of Council Tax debt</p> <p>The number of low-income households supported with energy efficiency measures</p> <p>The number of low-income households supported to access a more appropriate tariff</p>		
Community Resilience Fund	October 2021 – October 2024	30 projects delivered by a variety of community and voluntary sector groups and organisations.	CHE/Angela Woodhouse	Community Resilience

The Way We Work

The Way We Work				
Action	Target start and end	What does Success Look like	Committee and Senior Responsible Officer	Principles

Ensure staff have the right equipment (office and home) to enable new ways of working	October 2021	Staff able to effectively work anywhere	P&R/Steve McGuiness	New Ways of Working
Embedding new ways of working and ensuring the office is fit for purpose	October 2023	Flexible office space that supports the new ways of working with the right technology and facilities.	P&R/Georgia Hawkes	New Ways of Working
Increase HR capacity to facilitate agile working and new ways of working	October 2021-October 2022	Better understanding from staff on impact of changes to organisation culture Actions taken to meet future workforce requirements.	P&R/Bal Sandher	New Ways of Working

Responding to Increased Demands Arising from COVID-19

Action	Target Start and end date	What does success look like	Committee and Senior Responsible Officer	Principles
Business Grant Distribution	ongoing	Maidstone continues to be the business capital of Kent	ERL/Steve McGuiness	Maidstone's Open for Business
Revenues and Benefits – Citizens Advice Maidstone Post	August 2021	Residents with debt problems are assisted to maximise income, reduce debt by claiming the benefits they are entitled to	ERL/Steve McGuiness	Levelling Up
Planning Development Control fixed term post	ASAP	Backlog resolved and staff able to meet demands on the service	SPI/William Cornall	Building back better

Planning Enforcement fixed term post	ASAP – March 2022	Backlog resolved and staff able to meet demands on the service	SPI/William Cornall	Building back better
Increased capacity in Heritage and Landscape	ASAP	Backlog resolved and staff able to meet demands on the service	SPI/William Cornall	Building back better
Increased capacity within Data Analytics to provide support for recovery and renewal projects	July 2022-July 2023	18 dashboards in place by 2023.	P&R/Angela Woodhouse	Cross cutting

Key Performance Indicators

Indicator	Reported to Committee	Reason for Monitoring	Level/comparison	What would recovery look like?
ECONOMY				
Unemployment	Quarterly	Economic impact for MBC residents	Kent/SE and GB comparisons	When rates hit March 20 percentage: 2.2%
Youth unemployment	Quarterly	Economic impact for particularly vulnerable MBC residents	Kent/SE and GB comparisons	When rates hit March 20 percentage: 3.7%
Town Centre Footfall	Quarterly	Key measure of town centre and overall MBC economy	Compare with previous month and previous years month.	When footfall figures close on pre covid19 levels
Town Centre vacancy rates	Quarterly	Key measure of town centre and overall MBC economy	Maidstone and National average (collected by One Maidstone)	When figures close on pre-covid19 levels
House prices and sales volumes	Quarterly	Key measure of MBC economy and the construction sector	Maidstone and SE	When figures close on pre-covid19 levels
Number of Business Grants awarded to closed businesses	Quarterly	Indication of businesses that will be at risk		When businesses that qualify have been awarded the grant and no more applications are coming in.
COMMUNITY				
Homelessness prevention – prevention duty ended as applicant	Quarterly	Key measure of the availability of	Same month in 2019	When figures close on pre-covid19 levels

has suitable accommodation		accommodation/success at prevention		
Number of households in temporary accommodation (excluding rough sleepers)	Quarterly	Key measure of cumulative need	Same month in 2019	When figures close on pre-covid19 levels
Number of households newly in temporary accommodation broken down by main reason (excluding rough sleepers)	Quarterly	Key measure of pressure within the housing system including loss of tenancy and home ownership	Same month in 2019	When figures close on pre-covid19 levels
Number of rough sleepers in temporary accommodation	Quarterly	Key measure of pressure within the housing system	Same month in 2019	When figures close on pre-covid19 levels
Number of rough sleepers newly engaged	Quarterly	Key measure of the cumulative impacts of economic and other change for our most vulnerable residents	Same month in 2019	When figures close on pre-covid19 levels
Reports of Anti-social behaviour	Quarterly	Indicator of community experience of the impacts of lockdown and other restrictions	Same month in 2019	When figures close on pre-covid19 levels
Reports of noise nuisance	Quarterly	Indicator of community experience of the impacts of lockdown and other restrictions	Same month in 2019	When figures close on pre-covid19 levels
Number of Community Protection warnings and notices	Quarterly	Measure of the council's response to ASB	Same month in 2019	When figures close on pre-covid19 levels

Reports of Domestic Abuse	Quarterly	Relevant measure of risk to vulnerable residents	Same month in 2019	When figures close on pre-covid19 levels
Number of new Council Tax Support (CTS) applications received	Quarterly	Indicative of trends in households in financial difficulty	Same month in 2019	When figures close on pre-covid19 levels
Number of live CTS cases	Quarterly	Indicative of cumulative level of households in financial difficulty	Same month in 2019	When figures close on pre-covid19 levels
CHE decisions on 3rd November for Community Resilience implemented	Quarterly	Indicative of further improvement in partnership working with the voluntary and community sector and parish councils		Implementation of Committee decisions completed
COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL POSITION				
Council Tax collection – percentage in year collection Reduction in cash received compared to this time last year	Quarterly	Measure of financial resources available to MBC	2020/21 budget	When collection returns to projection for 2020/21
Business Rates collection – percentage in year collection	Quarterly	Measure of financial resources available to MBC	2020/21 budget	When collection returns to projection for 2020/21
Council's collection of other income – percentage in year collection	Quarterly	Measure of financial resources available to MBC	2020/21 budget	When collection returns to projection for 2020/21
THE WAY WE WORK – Building on the opportunities and risks created/accentuated by covid19				
Office footprint	Bi annual	Aim to reduce permanently by end of 2023/4	Current floorspace at Maidstone House	New smaller accommodation footprint achieved
Cost of office accommodation	Quarterly	Aim to reduce permanently by end of 2023/4	Current floorspace at Maidstone House	New smaller accommodation footprint achieved

Office running costs (post, print, utilities)	Biannual	Aim to reduce systematically through different ways of working and carbon reduction initiatives	2019/20 running costs	Running costs reduced
Travel costs	Quarterly	Aim to reduce systematically through different ways of working and carbon reduction initiatives	2019/20 travel costs	Mileage costs reduced
Review of contract provisions and Business Continuity for very significant change in circumstances including change in law, force majeure	Annually	Protection for MBC and our customers where outsourced services fail, are no longer fit for purpose or affordable	Existing Business Continuity Plans	Business Continuity Plans updated and exercised

Appendix B: Recovery and Renewal Action Plan Costs

A Vibrant Economy		
Action	Cost	Funding Source
MidKent College Skills Hub	£60,000	Recovery fund
Invest in industrial and warehouse premises to help de risk new employment sites coming forward	To be confirmed in the Capital Programme	Capital Programme
Develop and deliver a town centre strategy (year 1 costs)	£175,680	Recovery fund
Vibrant Visitor Economy	£32,000	Business Rates Pool
Capacity to develop projects and bids to take advantage of new funding opportunities	£45,000	Recovery fund
Total from Recovery Fund	£280,680	
Total from Capital Programme	TBC	
Total from Business Rates Pool	£32,000	

Appendix B: Recovery and Renewal Action Plan Costs

Resilient Communities		
Action	Cost	Funding Source
Establish Community Compact	Built into staffing resource for community hub	Contain Outbreak Management Fund
Support and Encourage Volunteering in the Borough.	£25,000	Recovery Fund
Online Community Participation	£15,000	Recovery Fund
Equip Trinity Foyer to be a Community Hub	£30,000	Recovery Fund
Love Where You Live and Get Involved.	£35,000	Recovery Fund
Financial Inclusion Strategy and Actions	£34,320	Recovery Fund
Community Resilience Fund	£150,000	Recovery Fund
Total from Recovery Fund	£289,320	

Appendix B: Recovery and Renewal Action Plan Costs

The Way We Work		
Action	Cost	Funding Source
Ensure staff have the right equipment (office and home) to enable new ways of working	IT equipment replacement programme part of existing budgets	Capital Programme
Embedding new ways of working and ensuring the office is fit for purpose	£50,000	Recovery Fund
	£40,000	Capital Programme
Increase HR capacity to facilitate agile working and new ways of working	£50,000	Recovery Fund
Total from Recovery and Renewal Fund	£100,000	
Total Capital Programme	£40,000	

Appendix B: Recovery and Renewal Action Plan Costs

Responding to Increased Demands Arising from COVID-19		
Action	Cost	Funding Source
Business Grant Distribution	£30,000	New Burdens Funding
Revenues and Benefits – post funded with Citizens Advice	£18,000	Contain Outbreak Management Fund
Planning Development Control Additional Post	£35,000	Recovery Fund
Planning Enforcement Additional Post	£35,000	Recovery Fund
Increased capacity in Heritage and Landscape	£70,000	Recovery Fund
Increase capacity within Data Analytics to provide support for recovery and renewal projects	£50,000	Recovery Fund
Total from Recovery Fund	£190,000	
Total From Contain Outbreak Management fund	£18,000	
Total from New Burdens Funding	£30,000	

Appendix B: Recovery and Renewal Action Plan Costs

Total Funding	
Recovery Fund	£860,000
Contain Outbreak Management Fund	£18,000
New Burdens Funding	£30,000
Business Rates Retention	£32,000
Capital Programme	£40,000
Total Spend across the action plan	£980,000

Maidstone Borough Council Financial Inclusion Strategy 2021-2026

Introduction

This document sets out Maidstone Borough Council's strategy for financial inclusion which is underpinned by the vision and cross cutting themes set out within its Strategic Plan.

Our Vision is for a vibrant, prosperous, urban and rural community at the heart of Kent where everyone can realise their potential.

We want a borough that works for everyone so a cross cutting objective for all our work is to create a place where deprivation is reduced and social mobility is improved and health inequalities are addressed and reduced.

The Financial Inclusion Strategy comprises this document and the financial inclusion action plan, appended to this document. The action plan details the activities that will be undertaken to achieve the aims of this strategy together with the lead officer from the Council and key partners to its delivery.

The strategy covers the period July 2021 to July 2026 and will be refreshed annually to ensure the outcomes from the action plan continue to meet the Council's priorities.

A summary of the different poverty metrics and their definitions is provided at the end of this document.

Appendix C

What is financial inclusion

Financial inclusion is the process which ensures a person's income is maximized to ensure that they can meet their basic living costs, support is provided to help ensure their outgoings are controlled and they can exercise informed choices through access to basic financial services. Without this, people are often described as financially excluded. People who are financially excluded are often those in poverty or experiencing disadvantage and as a result might:

- Struggle to meet normal living costs such as their fuel bills
- Struggle to budget, manage money and plan for the future
- Experience difficulties with problem debt
- Experience difficulties with rent arrears and homelessness
- Experience difficulties in accessing mainstream financial services
- Experience worse health and educational outcomes

As the impact of financial exclusion falls more heavily on low-income households, this strategy seeks to ensure sufficient support is provided to these households to maximise their income. This will be achieved through a number of means and will include supporting people of working age to access employment, and in overcoming barriers to work.

Why do we need a financial inclusion strategy?

National context

There can be little doubt about the importance of financial inclusion at this time. The financial environment was already difficult for many before the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic on our society took hold. There are now millions more people facing economic hardship due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The crisis has laid bare the existing weaknesses, vulnerabilities and structural inequalities that cause detriment for people in our communities.

Appendix C



Rising costs of living in relation to basic needs such as fuel and food, together with higher housing costs are exacerbating the problems of vulnerable residents and pushing others currently at the 'tipping point' into potential difficulties.

Around four million UK households are in the grip of fuel poverty, unable to afford to heat their homes to the temperature needed to keep warm and healthy. Cold homes can cause or worsen a range of serious health conditions such as heart attacks, strokes, bronchitis, and asthma. Each year around 10,000 people die due to living in a cold home. Fuel poverty can also have a significant impact on mental health and is a known risk factor for suicide.

The national unemployment rate for January to March, when most of the restrictions were still in place was 4.8%. Most economists expect the unemployment rate to rise to 5.5% later this year as furlough ends before the number starts to fall.

In April 2021 there were 2.6 million people seeking either Jobseeker's Allowance or Universal Credit because they were "searching for work". This compares with 1.4 million in March 2020, before the pandemic began to take effect.

It's estimated that 1.6 million pensioners live in poverty, whilst latest annual Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) 'take-up' figures show that over a million pensioner households are missing out on Pension Credit (worth up to £1600pa or £32pw) which they are entitled to receive.

Appendix C

As a means-tested, tax-free benefit for pensioners that would open the door to many other potential benefits including:

- A free TV licence (if also over-75)
- Free NHS dental treatment, help with the cost of glasses/travel to hospital
- A Cold Weather Payment during periods of prolonged cold weather

Local context

Low levels of financial resilience following the period of austerity and welfare reform combined with the impacts locally of the pandemic have led to an increasing need for support among some of the borough's most vulnerable residents.

Unemployment across the borough has risen from 2.1% (2185) in January 2020 to 5.2% (5445) in April 2021 but this masks the more severe impact felt by people who live in more deprived wards where unemployment is as high as 9.8%.

The corresponding increase in the housing benefit and Council Tax support administered by the Council means that 9,599 households (including 6318 children) are now receiving support with 3550 of those households (2670 children) now living below the poverty line.

4300 households are estimated to be in fuel poverty and 330 households are in food poverty, reflected in the increased presence and usage of food banks by many low-income households.

Whilst the Citizens Advice Bureau has seen reduced demand for debt and other forms of advice throughout the pandemic, primarily due to the temporary restrictions in place on court action, the Council can evidence through analysis of Council Tax debt that the number of households falling into arrears number and level of those arrears are building.

8400 households have fallen behind with their Council Tax payments in the last year, with 836 households on a low income and receipt of Council Tax support in arrears.

Appendix C

What we aim to achieve

If we successfully deliver this strategy over the next five years, we will have achieved:

- A coordinated approach across the Council, voluntary sector and key partners to address the underlying causes and impacts of poverty
- A data led approach to identify and target coordinated support to residents in financial crisis or at risk of moving into financial crisis
- A reduction in the number of households living in fuel, water or food poverty
- A reduction in the number of households at risk of eviction or struggling with Council Tax debt because of financial difficulties
- Increased awareness and take up of mainstream financial services amongst low income households
- An increase in the income for those on the lowest income within the borough by ensuring they receive the benefits they are entitled to

Where are we now?

We are by no means starting from scratch. To create a focus and better coordinate activity in the area of financial inclusion the Council has already created a working group, chaired by the Chief Executive to bring together staff working across the organisation (Housing, Revenues and Benefits, Policy and Information) and external partners (Citizens Advice Bureau and Involve) that support low-income households.

Having introduced new systems to make better use of its data, primarily using housing benefit and Council Tax support data we are now able to better identify and understand those households most affected by changes in the welfare system, those at risk or in financial crisis due to a disparity between their income and expenses and where opportunities exist for interventions to improve the position for those households.

This and a greater focus on households at risk of financial crisis as a result of the pandemic has already led to work in a number of areas.

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Pension Credit – the Council was able to identify 77 pensioner households that were living below the minimum income threshold provided by Pension Credit. Working with the Pension Service the Council contacted those households and is supported them in making an application for Pension Credit with 31 households having already been awarded the additional support with an average increase in household income of £36 per week.

Free school meals – The Council are able to identify 2,232 households (4,694 children) with entitlement to free school meals. With low take up rates reported nationally we have started a project to match data with Kent County Council to better understand local take up rates and target support to families currently missing out. The wider aim of the project will be to make better use of data to ensure that whatever route low-income households take for support, housing benefit, Council Tax support or free school meals - that the systems work together to maximise support.

Disability Allowances – The Council has analyzed its housing benefit data to identify where residents with a disability may have had a change in their circumstances which would provide for a higher level of housing benefit and Council Tax support. Making proactive contact with those households the Council has awarded an additional £155,000 in housing benefit and Council Tax support, with an ongoing average increase in individual household income of £1,500pa.

Water - The Council is working with South East Water and using data already held to help low-income households to reduce their water costs by accessing the Social Tariff. The Social Tariff is awarded to customers who have household income of under £16,385. We are able to identify those cases from our benefits data and have set up the sharing agreement to securely pass name/address of those cases to South East Water. New cases that come onto our system that meet that criteria will be automatically notified to South East Water on a monthly basis.

On receipt of notification from us, South East Water will automatically apply the Social Tariff without any application needing to be made and will notify the customer. The Social Tariff caps freshwater charges at a certain amount per year and in addition gives a 25% or 50% discount on wastewater charges.

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Homelessness Prevention – through data analysis the Council can identify those households at greatest risk of homelessness and make proactive contact to provide tailored advice on income maximisation, budget management and make referral for specialist support.

Assisting those in Council Tax arrears – a dedicated Financial Inclusion Officer within the Council Tax team assists households in financial difficulty on an individual basis ensures customers are in receipt of the correct benefits and refers for debt advice where appropriate

Vision, Principles and Approach to delivery

Vision

Our vision is for a vibrant, prosperous, urban and rural community at the heart of Kent where everyone can realise their potential. Reducing deprivation, health inequalities and improving social mobility are recognised as key to its delivery.

Whilst this strategy will play an important part in that delivery, it's recognised that success will also be dependent on a strong local economy and communities with the skills and knowledge to reach their potential. This strategy therefore forms part of framework of strategies which include the council's Economic Development, Housing & Homelessness and Digital Strategies.

This strategy will focus activity around four workstreams:

[Workstream 1](#): Maximising income - through identifying and targeting coordinated support to residents in financial crisis or at risk of moving into financial crisis

[Workstream 2](#): Debt- ensuring that residents experiencing problem debt receive appropriate and timely advice and support.

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[Workstream 3](#): Fuel and water poverty - supporting residents to lower their energy and other household costs.

[Workstream 4](#): Financial skills and services - supporting residents to gain the necessary skills and access to basic financial services to better manage their money.

Workstream 1: Incomes are maximised and households in crisis or at risk of crisis are protected

The complexity of the welfare system and mix of different agencies involved in providing support is recognized as one of the many challenges facing low income households. Whilst the introduction of Universal Credit aims to improve that, many households fail to claim support available and suffer unnecessary hardship as a result.

With low income households being less resilient when faced with other financial challenges this puts them at greater risk of homelessness, spiraling debt or an inability to meet basic living costs.

Initial focus and actions for this workstream include:

- Work with key partners to share data and best practice with the aim of making the systems and process of claiming support clear and easy to navigate
- Run a series of campaigns to target the take up of unclaimed benefits amongst low income households
- Provide and promote the tools necessary for residents to check and claim the full range of support available to them.
- Identify and target discretionary support and specialist advice to households at risk of moving into a crisis.

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Workstream 2: Ensuring that residents experiencing problem debt receive appropriate and timely advice and support

The presence of unmanaged 'problem' debt impacts on the health and wellbeing of families and communities, often leading a cycle of debt or progressive court action from which it's difficult to break free.

This is evident within the collection of Council Tax where many low-income households follow a pattern of repeated arrears, with the additional burden for the individual and Council of court action and fees.

Initial focus and actions for this workstream include:

- Work with key partners to share data and best practice with the aim of identifying and supporting residents experiencing problem debt
- Benchmark current practices against the recently published Debt Management Vulnerability Toolkit aimed at ensure proven best-practice tools are deployed to support to individuals in vulnerable circumstances
- Improving the referral process across partner agencies and take up of specialist debt advice
- Amending the Council's debt recovery processes to support those identified as experiencing a repeated pattern of problem debt
- The targeted use of Discretionary Housing Payments and Exceptional Hardship Payments to support those identified as experiencing a repeated pattern of problem debt

Workstream 3: Fuel Poverty

Fuel poverty can be driven by a combination of low income, high energy costs and poor energy efficiency within the home. The impacts include poor

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health outcomes, added financial pressures and an adverse environmental impact.

With workstream 1 to target income maximisation, this workstream focuses on energy costs and efficiency,

Initial focus and actions for this workstream include:

- Matching of energy efficiency data and low-income household data to target property improvements based on property and household need
 - Promotion of national and sector-based schemes to increase the take up of energy efficiency measures amongst low-income households
 - Working with utility providers to promote appropriate tariffs and support available to low income households
 - Identify and support households to change to the most appropriate supplier/tariff
-

Workstream 4: Supporting residents to gain access to basic financial services

Access to basic financial services is key in terms of receiving payments through employment or the welfare systems, being able to access affordable credit through mainstream lenders and accessing the full range of goods and services available online.

Whilst significant progress has been made in reducing the number of people without at least a basic bank account, this remains an issue for many low-income vulnerable households.

Initial focus and actions for this workstream include:

- Understanding and removing the barriers to residents accessing a basic bank account and wider financial services

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- Working with and promoting the aims of Kent Savers Credit Union and other ethical lenders
 - Support trading standards and other partners in educating residents on the risks of illegal money lenders
 - Promotion of budgeting and money advice services / tools.
-

How we'll measure progress and success

When designing and delivering change, it is important to recognise what success looks like. We will measure success in terms of the measures set out below

- The number and value of unclaimed benefits that residents are supported to claim
- A reduction in the number of households in financial crisis or at risk of moving into crisis
- Increased take up of debt advice services by households with problem debt
- A reduction in the number of households identified as being in a repeated pattern of Council Tax debt
- The number of low-income households supported with energy efficiency measures
- The number of low-income households supported to access a more appropriate tariff

Poverty metrics

Relative poverty

This metric developed by The Social Metrics Commission, an independent and non-partisan organisation dedicated to helping policy makers and the public understand and take action to tackle poverty defines a household as

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being in relative poverty if their total resources available are less than 60% of median income equivalised for their household composition.

Food poverty

The Minimum Income Standard (MIS) provides a minimum acceptable level of food expenditure based on household composition. Households are categorised as being in food poverty if their residual income after priority costs is less than the minimum income standard (MIS) of food expenditure, based on the number of occupants in the household.

Fuel poverty

Households are categorised as being in fuel poverty if their income is already below the relative poverty line, or if fuel expenditure at the median UK level would bring their income below the relative poverty line.

Water poverty

Households are categorised as being in water poverty if their estimated water costs account for 3% or more of their disposable income.

Appendix D: Maidstone Town Centre Strategy

Introduction

Maidstone Town Centre is the Social and Economic Heart of the Borough, providing employment, leisure, retail and business/professional service facilities for communities throughout the Borough and beyond as part of its role as the County Town of Kent. The Town Centre and the wider urban area are also home to a very significant residential population. However, in recent years like many others around the country, the Town Centre has witnessed some decline because of changes in retailing patterns, a shift in the nature of demand for offices, competition for inward investment from other locations, viability challenges in the delivery of new housing and difficulty in ensuring that important infrastructure keeps pace with the needs of resident communities, businesses and visitors. Again, in common with many other areas, these issues have been exacerbated over the last 18 months by the impact of the COVID19 Pandemic.

To continue the Council's work in securing the early recovery of the Town Centre, and to prepare a programme for longer term regeneration and renaissance, it is now proposed that the Council should take the lead role in the preparation of a comprehensive and ambitious Town Centre Strategy. This strategy would be focused around a 30-year vision to attract and embed new investment in jobs, infrastructure, housing, leisure and culture within a framework which will seek to establish Maidstone as model of urban sustainability.

The Town Centre Strategy will be based around a number of key projects, including those with the scope to bring about social, economic and environmental transformation, and will be designed to reflect the Council's long-term aspirations for the Town Centre. The delivery plan will comprise a multi-faceted and multi-agency programme of works designed to achieve this. The work will be underpinned by core principles which reflect the vision for a contemporary County Town sustaining its position as the Business Capital of Kent and at the heart of both the county and Maidstone borough enabling vibrant and prosperous urban and rural communities where everyone can realise their potential and fulfil their aspirations.

The Strategy will help to guide investment, regeneration, development, provision of infrastructure, the use of our town centre spaces and, in the short/medium term the provision of support to town centre communities in responding to the impact of the COVID19 pandemic and a post Brexit economy. This work will also seek to manage potential change resulting from the relaxation of planning rules around the transition of business premises between uses.

Central to the approach will be the reinvention and renaissance of Maidstone Town Centre as a centre of excellence for urban sustainability with a strong focus around arts, culture, leisure and visitor economy, creating a place where people want to live, feel safe, and which prides itself upon being a town centre which is relevant to all of the borough's residents and to which all of the borough's residents can relate.

Scope of Strategy

The scope of the strategy will include:

- The reaffirmation of Maidstone as the county town of Kent through physical regeneration and new infrastructure, cultural renaissance and the further development of diverse and high-quality employment, retail and leisure opportunities.
- Consideration of future land / building uses and the achievement of high-quality and sustainable design that respects and celebrates Maidstone's heritage, whilst improving the quality and character of the town, its green and blue infrastructure, and its permeability and functionality.
- Cross-cutting principles to ensure that the town centre is resilient to the effects of climate change and is a flagship of the Council's aspiration to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.
- A phased approach which continues to build upon current post pandemic recovery work, but also identifies short-, medium- and long-term projects and interventions, including those around key factors such as environment and community safety.
- Integration of the Council's commitments to a Maidstone Borough that works for everyone and incorporates reduction in deprivation and health inequalities and improvement in social mobility.
- Ensuring the town centre and the wider urban area can continue to play a significant role in meeting the borough's housing need through the enablement of development and investment, together with support for the delivery of quality homes across the housing market to develop sustainable communities.
- Implementing emerging borough wide policies for inclusive growth which aim to tackle education and skills differentials across all sectors of the community to ensure that local residents are equipped to compete for employment and training opportunities resulting from investment and reinvestment.
- Considering how Maidstone could become a "smart town" by bringing together the use of new and emergent technologies and data capture techniques in tackling a range of issues ranging from traffic and air quality, to the efficient use of buildings and spaces and the ability of all partners to reach target audiences more easily.

What will the strategy include?

The strategy will comprise a number of interrelated, interdependent and complementary workstreams:

- Production of a Master Plan to guide future development of the town centre and investment in infrastructure
- A site assembly and implementation framework designed to assist strategic acquisitions by the Council and other partners, together with relocation strategies to ensure that existing jobs and investment are protected.
- Drawing on the Maidstone borough Integrated Transport Strategy development of a detailed transport movement and infrastructure plan designed to facilitate the well-managed movement of traffic with minimum impact on pedestrian safety and air quality, together with safe and legible pedestrian routes throughout the town centre, attractive public transport options and cycle routes based on logical desire lines with business cases for key infrastructure elements.
- An economic development and visitor economy plan based around the current economic development strategy and seeking to secure reinvestment from existing stakeholders in the town, and the provision of opportunities for new investment in diversifying Maidstone's visitor offer through development in arts, culture, events and leisure opportunities.
- A sustainable town plan designed to ensure that all aspects of the town's transport system, built and natural/semi-natural environments, make a positive contribution to the achievement of the boroughs 2030 carbon neutrality target.
- A housing and community plan to ensure that the town's housing stock is of a good standard and of a sufficiently broad nature in terms of both type and tenure to provide for existing and future residents.
- A smart town plan to ensure that technology and data capture is harnessed in the context of the easy movement of vehicles and public transport, improvements in air quality, and the ability of the business community and other stakeholders to maximise dwell time and spend capture in the town centre.
- A proactive approach to inward investment based around the identification of investors, developers and end-users in order to ensure the realisation of the overall strategy.
- A marketing and communications strategy designed to manage community business and stakeholder engagement in the process, whilst simultaneously marketing the town to investors, developers, occupiers and visitors.

At the appropriate point, consideration will be given to the preparation of a new Development Plan Document (DPD) if it is felt that this is necessary to enable the more efficient delivery of key projects or other elements of the Strategy. Equally, and dependent upon the timing and content of new guidance anticipated around the national planning system, it may be more appropriate for the Town Centre to provide a key focus for the Borough's first Local Plan prepared under the new system.

Political Leadership

It is proposed that the Policy and Resources Committee should take the lead role in terms of political oversight of the strategy and that post May 2022 executive political leadership will be provided by the Cabinet.

It is also proposed that this should be supported through an officer project board, chaired by the Chief Executive, and with the operational lead taken by the Interim Director for the Local Plan Review. The Board would comprise the workstream leads for the various activities.

Stakeholder Engagement and Management

It is proposed that as an early action work begins with elected members in the formation of a multi-agency Town Centre Partnership Board to work alongside the Council in coordinating the strategy.

It is also proposed that at both developmental and implementation stages, the strategy will include a comprehensive programme of community and stakeholder engagement in order to ensure the broadest possible input and influence from across the borough.

Resources Needed

Town Centre Strategy	21/22	22/23	23/24
Stage 1 – establishing vision and scoping of Issues, options challenges – establishing what our town centre strategy needs to address	20	50	0
Stage 2 - finding the way forward/solutions producing a credible draft masterplan for consultation and adoption	20	200	0
Stage 3 – consultation and adoption		15	
Stage 4 – initial period of delivery	15	60	70
Staff Resource (excluding establishment)	65	115	115
TOTAL	120	440	185

The approach set out here does not include the creation of a Development Plan Document. To do so now or at a point in the future would require

resources to update the technical evidence base and to fund the statutory processes required for plan adoption. With respect to the evidence base the Town Centre Strategy would partly meet this requirement with the spatial aspects feeding into a future Local Plan; there would be additional requirements for example to update housing, employment and transport evidence to varying degrees. It is difficult to estimate the cost of this in a vacuum from the remainder of work being required for the Local Plan itself; the cost of a town centre housing market assessment for example is estimated at £20k. Employment and transport work has been incorporated into the proposition for the town centre strategy and may need to be updated. The cost of the necessary statutory assessments prior to examination including for habitat regulations and sustainability appraisal would, at current costs, be in the region of £60k. The costs of examination would be in the region of £115k.

Resources supply

Resources Available

Source	Amount £'000
Sense of Place Project	22
S106s	270
Total	292
Shortfall	453

Potential sources for the balance

- Recovery and Renewal un-ringfenced resources
- Underspend from 2020/21

Appendix E

MidKent Community and Skills Hub Proposal

Purpose – The aim of the Community and Skills Hub would be to engage with NEETS (not in employment, education, or training), or people at risk of becoming NEET, unemployed adults, and school leavers to secure positive progression for these groups. Currently there is not a ‘one stop shop’ where vulnerable people can easily access information and advice regarding finances, housing, benefits, education, or health so we seek to address this by working collaboratively with partners in the area to bring a range of support together under one roof for these groups of people.

Partners –

We have approached a range of partners who deliver careers advice, benefits advice, education opportunities, housing and health advice and proposed that partners are able to have desk space at the hub on a rostered basis. They would be able to advertise their regular slot and offer pre-booked or drop-in sessions for people who are not currently able to access the service, and people for whom the location is easier to get to.

We would look to involve our own students to integrate into the community, particularly Early Years and Catering students to engage with young parents. This could potentially lead to adults being able to attend training for short periods with their children, removing a barrier to training and increasing integration into the community and helping potential loneliness that can be faced by young parents, particularly if lone parenting.

We would also hope to engage local employees with vacancies to offer Sector Based Work Academy Programmes and recruitment days to improve employment in the local areas. These programmes are designed to offer targeted pre-employment training which is tailored to a specific vacancy, with the offer of work experience and an interview or the position tied in.

Delivery – We have several courses we would be able to offer, and the selection below is not exhaustive. We would develop our offering according to need and demand. Examples of potential training options are below.

Bookkeeping and computerised accounting (in conjunction with SAGE) – From Level 1 to Level 3 these are ideal for adults wishing to go self-employed and work particularly well for parents who want to find flexible work.

Skills Development Online Courses – A variety of Level 2 qualifications targeted towards various sectors including Customer Service, Health Care, Childcare and Digital Skills, can be offered with PC’s available for people for whom digital poverty is a barrier to learning. These would be aimed at adults who are wishing to upskill to enter employment or to retrain.

Essential Digital Skills – Beginners, and Intermediate level courses to support essential digital skill development for employability and day to day living. Covers computer basics, keeping safe, making purchases, researching information, word and excel.

Certificated Work Skills Programmes

Aimed at young people who are not in employment to develop skills for seeking employment and keeping safe. Qualifications cover Alcohol and Drug Misuse Awareness, Citizenship, Developing Skills for Gaining Employment, Managing Money, Understanding Self and Others and Confidence and Self-Esteem amongst other things. These courses are designed to be flexible in content according to the needs of the delegates.

Appendix E

Food Hygiene –

A one-day course at L2 which will support people entering the Hospitality industry as part of sector-based work academies which will seek to address the lack of hospitality applications for the current vacancies.

Employability –

We would work with the NCS to offer regular career workshops with CV, job searching and interview support.

Funding –

Where possible we will draw down funding from our AEB (Adult Education Budget) budget allocation. Additional funding will be required for staffing the hub and for non-eligible participants as below.

Activity	Project Cost	In Kind - Covered by College	In Kind - Covered by Council
Project Officer - 6 months FTC @25K plus 25% on costs	15625		
Laptops x 10	3000	7000	
Furnishing - 14 x desks			2000
Projector and screen plus whiteboard	2500		
Advertising	4000		
Costs for training courses who are not eligible for funding @£300 per person	6000		
Stationery		2000	
Total	31125	7000	2000

Key Assumptions –

The shop is available for a period of 6 continuous months.

The venue is suitable for a training course for 10 x delegates with a reception area / separate area for appointments with partners

The space is fully serviced with business rates, heating, electricity included

The area can be secured

We can access the free Wi-Fi offered by The Mall.

(Draft)

Community Resilience Fund

Introduction

The purpose of the Community Resilience Fund is to help voluntary and community sector organisations respond to, survive, and recover from the impact of COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven an unprecedented challenge for us all. Many pressures and difficulties have been experienced by individuals, families, and organisations in Maidstone and the longer-term impact is yet to be seen.

A survey conducted of the Voluntary and Community Sector in 2021 identified that there were two areas strongly identified as having a change in demand for services, with more demand in relation to Mental Health and Isolation and Loneliness. These areas of need were also strongly identified through our work with Parish Councils and Community and Voluntary Groups as part of the Community Hub.

The Community Resilience Fund offers a one-off support payment for projects that benefit the residents of Maidstone, centred on the impact of the pandemic and for the purpose of the recovery in the coming months. The fund will be promoted widely to the Voluntary and Community Sector. Any scheme approved will be subject to monitoring through Service Level Agreements.

Eligible projects could include but are not limited to:

- Befriending schemes to tackle loneliness
- Youth groups providing recreation opportunities for young people
- Grassroots sports clubs who need funding to purchase kit and equipment for children to encourage increased fitness and mental wellbeing
- Support schemes targeting residents whose mental health has suffered because of loneliness or isolation due to the pandemic
- Schemes to support employability schemes for residents that have faced unemployment caused by the pandemic
- Projects designed to encourage residents to access nature for exercise and wellbeing.

Who Can Apply?

This fund is open to voluntary and community sector organisations based in Maidstone or predominantly serving Maidstone communities and residents.

Below is a list of the types of eligible organisations and you must be able to tick one of these.

- Voluntary and community organisations
- Registered charities
- Social enterprises
- Group of organisations if they are led by a voluntary and community organisations or social enterprise
- Statutory bodies (including Parish or Community Councils)
- Community interest companies (with two or more directors).

***Eligible organisations must have:**

- An eligible bank account i.e., not a private company and not a private individual's bank account
- Adequate policies and procedures in place to meet due diligence requirements and safe practices including, but not limited to safeguarding, health and safety, financial management

How much money can you bid for?

Bids are invited for amounts from £500 to £5000

Eligible expenditure

The grant can fund:

- staff salaries
- project activities
- running costs
- small-scale refurbishment
- equipment
- organisational development

How to Apply

An application form is available here:

Online form

Paper version

Please submit completed application to VCSliaison@maidstone.gov.uk

How Will Successful Bids Be Selected?

Each eligible application will be assessed by the Head of Policy, Communications and Governance, Head of Housing and Communities in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee and marked against the following criteria

- Does the project support mental health, social isolation, or inclusion? (out of 10)
- Local need and community benefit (out of 10)
- Is the support required in response to the pandemic? (out of 10)

All grant applicants will be notified by email as to whether their application has been successful. There is no appeals process, but written feedback will be provided on request.

Application Form

Contact Details

First person's contact details

Full name	
Telephone number	
Email	
Role in organisation	

Second Person's Contact details

Please provide a second contact in case you are unavailable – this must be somebody from the same organisation as the first person listed above.

Full name	
Telephone number	
Email	
Role in organisation	

About your group or organisation

Please select your type of organisation.

If successful we may ask you to provide evidence such as a governing document which must be valid at the time of application or constitution.

Registered, exempt or excepted charity	
Charitable incorporated organisation (CIO)	
CIC limited by guarantee <i>(and have charitable objectives)</i>	
Charitable company (limited by guarantee)	
Community benefit society (Bencom)	
Constituted community group	
Faith group, where the activity is not promoting religion	

Please supply any relevant registration or reference numbers.	
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Briefly summarise the Maidstone communities of identity or geography that your partnership usually works with. For example:

- a. "our youth partnership works with young people in Tovil to provide youth and play services"
- b. "our network supports vulnerable adults across the Maidstone borough"
- c. "our partnership works with those affected by loneliness in the town centre"

Word count: 250 words

What difference does your partnership/collaboration/network make to the health and wellbeing of residents? Please give examples:

Word count: 250 words

Your Proposal

1. Context - Give an overview of the main issues affecting the organisation in delivering this kind of work? You should include the main issues the communities you work with are facing and where there may be barriers or strengths you wish to build upon with your proposal.

Word Count: 350 words

2. Response – Summarise your proposal – what do you want to do?

Word Count: 350 words

3a. Impact - How will this proposal build the resilience of your organisation? Please also include any wider positive impact on VCSE organisations that aren't directly involved but do the same kind of work.

Word Count: 250 words

3b. Impact - How will this proposal directly benefit the health and wellbeing of local Maidstone Residents.

Word Count: 250 words

3c. Impact - How will you monitor and assess the impact of your proposal? Please include details of any performance targets and indicators and proposed methodologies.

Word Count: 250 words

Score Matrix

Organisation	Project	Amount Requested	Does the project Mental Health, Social Isolation or Loneliness? (out of 10)	Local need and community benefit (out of 10)	Is the support required in response to the pandemic? (out of 10)	Total Score

Policy and Resources Committee	20 October 2021
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Equalities Objectives and Action Plan – Update

Final Decision-Maker	Policy and Resources Committee
Lead Head of Service	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Lead Officer and Report Author	Anna Collier, Corporate Insight, Communities and Governance Orla Sweeney, Senior Policy and Communities Officer
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the current Equalities Objectives and Action Plan. The action plan was revised in 2020 in response to COVID-19 and the challenges faced in tackling disadvantage in Maidstone.

This report is for discussion and noting.

Purpose of Report

To note the progress update to be taken to Committee.

This report makes the following recommendations:

1. To note the progress on the Equalities Objectives and Action Plan update at appendix 1 to the report.

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
CLT	5 October 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	20 October 2021

Equalities Objectives and Action Plan – Update

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council’s ability to achieve all 4 strategic priorities.</p>	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is Respected <p>The report recommendations support the achievements of ‘Heritage is Respected’, ‘Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced’ and ‘Deprivation and Social Mobility are Improved’ cross cutting objectives by proposing actions which support their delivery.</p>	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Risk Management	Please refer to paragraph 5.1 in the report.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Financial	All of the proposals set out in the recommendations are within approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance

Legal	Accepting the recommendations will fulfil the Council's duties under the Public Sector Equalities Duty. Failure to accept the recommendations without agreeing suitable alternatives may place the Council in breach of Equality Act 2010.	Legal Team
Privacy and Data Protection	Accepting the recommendations will increase the volume of data held by the Council. We will process data in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.	Corporate Insight, Communications and Governance Team
Equalities	Reviewing and reporting on the progress of the Equalities Objectives and Action Plan.	Equalities and Communities Officer
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	No impact identified.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Procurement	No impact identified.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Equalities Policy was approved by Committee in 2017, setting out the Council's commitments under the Equalities Act 2010 and the way in which it will fulfil the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Objectives and Action Plan are monitored, reviewed, and reported on, on an annual basis. There have been no recent legislative changes, therefore the Policy does not require review.
- 2.2 The objectives and action plan that support delivery of the Policy were reviewed in 2020. Greater context was provided on the Council's responsibilities and the actions were aligned with the roles and objectives in 2020. This approach provides greater transparency for how the Council meets its Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 2.3 The Council has three clear roles which frame the objectives: Community Leader, Employer and Service Provider.

- 2.4 The framework helps to provide transparency and understanding on the Council's approach. It is important that staff understand how the work that they do contributes to the delivery of these objectives and in relation to the organisational aims set out in the Strategic Plan.
- 2.5 The actions detailed in the action plan reflect current workstreams or areas where development was required in services across the Council.
- 2.6 The actions have been closely monitored over the course of the past year and this report (and appendix) provide an update on what has been achieved.
- 2.7 The way in which the Council supports and engages with its communities has strengthened in the past year. The Council's Recovery and Renewal Strategy underpins this commitment and includes a specific Communities workstream to be delivered. It is important that this Strategy is referenced with the action plan.

Update on actions

- 2.8 COVID-19 restrictions have impacted the way in which we deliver our services and engage with residents. Whilst significant progress has been made against the actions set, there are areas that require renewed focus and improvement. A complete update on all actions can be found at appendix 1.
- 2.9 The Council has adapted well to the challenges of the last year and a commitment can be seen across all three roles and objectives. It is important that it remains focused on understanding the needs of its communities to be in a position to respond to their needs.
- 2.10 The Council's response to the pandemic has led to a strengthening of its relationships with the Community and Voluntary Sector and with Parish Councils. There has been extensive public and staff consultation during the past year, some of which has been business as usual but there has also been an increased need to understand the impact of the pandemic on its communities, businesses and staff to inform decision making. Positive progress has been made and this includes:
 - The Development of a Community Group Repository which has facilitated wider engagement with Communities.
 - Creation of a single point of contact for Community Groups and Parishes at the Council. This offer includes a dedicated email address for the Voluntary and Community Sector and Parish Councils.
 - The provision of funding via the Winter Grants Scheme, administered by the Community Hub.

- There were a total of 23 consultations completed in 2020/21; 14 were external resident or stakeholder surveys and 9 were internal staff or Member surveys. There have been 15 consultations for 2021/22 to date.
- Support for staff working at home has adapted with learning and development delivered online. This has included regular sessions focused on mental health and well-being. This is in addition to the Employment Assistance Programme and Mental Health First Aiders already in place.
- Rough Sleeping initiative implemented to provide mental health outreach provided by the Housing team. The scheme has been a success and has been extended to March 2022.
- Access to Services Member Review. Members have had 6 meetings covering the Website Accessibility, Online Services, Digital Inclusion and Communication and Engagement. The review is at a learning and evidence gathering stage, however a number recommendations have already been made to support digital accessibility via the Council's website and vulnerable groups affected by digital inclusion. These included recommendations to support Councillors' understanding and use of digital services, a digital process on the website for users to report issues or seek assistance and advice with online accessibility, a review of the Community Group Repository provided by Involve and an agreed process to review and maintain the repository on quarterly basis to ensure it is fit for purpose and a commitment by the group to support Digital Inclusion as workstreams develop in this area. This includes the reuse of ICT equipment to support the digitally excluded. An [update report](#) was taken to CHE Committee in April 2021.

2.11 The past year has been challenging and the Council's resources have been stretched with Officers having to support other service areas in order to respond to the needs of residents and businesses. It was not only the Council that was affected, partner organisations and the Community and Voluntary Sector were also impacted heavily. There are therefore areas within the action plan which are less developed. This is reflected in the action plan. Progress is noted in Appendix 1 but where it has not been feasible, the planned actions for the coming months are highlighted in the column 'next steps'. This includes:

- Compassionate Borough Status. The Council agreed to work with Heart of Kent Hospice on a legacy to the Elmer trail. This has been delayed by a year. Work on this project has recently restarted with Council Officers working with the Hospice to form a steering group for the project. In the interim the Heart of Kent Hospice and Council recognised the achievements of the Community via the Compassionate Maidstone Awards.
- An Equalities Officer Group has been formed to create join up across key areas through shared learning and the development of shared resources. The scope of the group has been limited as work around public engagement and events has not been possible and are areas where its expertise are valued.

- A shared diversity calendar aligning events from services across the Council is planned but work has not been completed.

Looking Forward

- 2.12 The Council's commitment to the Armed Force Covenant is referenced within the Action Plan. The Equalities Armed Forces Bill 2021 is likely to bring changes that will need to be reflected in work on the Equalities Impact Assessments and guidance. It is recommended that due regard to this is embedded in current progress including the EqIA. Progress will be noted as part the action plan monitoring.
- 2.13 Further changes to the Equalities Objectives and Action Plan are not recommended as whilst some progress has been made the actions, the workstreams remain relevant and ongoing.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 Note the Equalities Objectives and Action Plan and continue to monitor the actions set to enable the organisation to continue to improve on the way in which it fulfils the Public Sector Equalities Duty.
- 3.2 Do nothing. This course of action is not recommended because it has a statutory duty under the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 3.3 Revise the Equalities Objectives and Action Plan. This course of action is not recommended because actions and supporting recommendations remain relevant and ongoing.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To note the progress made on objectives and actions as detailed in Appendix 1.

5. RISK

- 5.1 The Council has a statutory responsibility under the Public Sector Equality Duty to report its progress on annual basis. The Equalities Objectives and Action Plan were agreed by Committee in 2020. No changes are recommended.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 None.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 The action plan will continue to be monitored by the Equalities and Communities Officer.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Progress Update on the actions included in the Equalities Objective and Action Plan 2017-21
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As a Community Leader
Objective
To lead by example, to ensure every individual resident is connected and supported.

Agreed Actions	Progress	Issues & Next steps
<p>We will work with the Heart of Kent Hospice, Kent County Council, local businesses, community and faith groups to achieve Compassionate Borough Status.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report taken and agreed by Committee (January 2020). • Compassionate Maidstone Awards (Communication and Marketing team) delivered jointly by MBC and HoK – October 2020 and October 2021. • Officers from Policy, Communities and Engagement team and Communication and Marketing team began work with HoK on an agreed action plan to achieve Compassionate Borough Status. • Communication and Marketing team have designed all the marketing materials including webpage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work paused due to HoK’s responsibilities to patients during pandemic. • Officers from Policy, Communities and Engagement team and Communication and Marketing team resumed work with HoK. Event planned for 2022.
<p>We will take an evidence-based approach to leading recovery in Maidstone including a specific work stream on communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resident COVID-19 Recovery Survey was open from July to October 2020. It had 1453 responses. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The results to this consultation have informed the Council’s recovery work. The Recovery and Renewal Strategy has been developed and agreed by Committee. This includes a Communities workstream. • Data insight work undertaken by the Information and Analytics team has included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creation of dashboards to monitor service demand vs staff absence during COVID-19. ○ Dashboard created to monitor activity in Community hub and understand location of clinically extremely vulnerable residents. ○ Data reports produced for organisation focused on economy (unemployment rates, vacant retail premises and footfall in Town Centre) and Communities (employment, benefits, Council Tax and Housing demand). 	
<p>We will seek to build on the relationships we have developed with our communities as a result of the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repository of Community Groups been developed. 	

<p>recent pandemic. We will communicate, engage with, and disseminate information to support and engage our wider communities including through the local Parish Councils and voluntary groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be updated on a quarterly basis in conjunction with Involve (Kent). • Monthly newsletters produced and sent to Parishes and Ward Councillors. • Inboxes and single point of contact set up for Parishes and Community Groups. • Community pages on website under development. • Direct consultation undertaken with Community Groups Quarterly Parish Liaison meetings held. • Joint MBC/Involve Community and Volunteering event held online for Community Groups in July 2021. • A Community Compact has been developed setting out how organisations will work together for the benefit of the Community. 	
<p>We will undertake a review of consultation and engagement activities to ensure that they maximise resident participation and are representative of Maidstone’s demographic.</p>	<p>Full demographic analysis is produced for the majority of public consultation. This, alongside the borough profile provides an understanding of the makeup of our residents and businesses and areas where response rates are unrepresentative.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement activities have been limited due to the pandemic. • Opportunities have been maximised through joined up working between

		<p>the Consultation and Comms and Marketing teams.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social Media, Posters, Leaflets and the use of QR codes have been maximised to reach a wider audience.• Under 35 age group identified as a group where engagement is low.• New Consultation and engagement software is trialled, offering more varied and accessible opportunities to maximise participation.• Equalities Officer Group will be utilised to identify gaps and maximise opportunities and identify areas of focus.
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<p>We will appoint an internal Equalities Group to lead and provide join-up across Council services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equalities Officer Group formed and meets on a quarterly basis. The group includes representatives from HR, Museums/Leisure Services, Communications, Civic Services/Mayoralty and Policy/Communities. • The group have identified a number of useful shared resources. A team site has been created for shared resources which includes an annual diversity calendar which details events from across the Council to create a coordinated approach and support the promotion of diversity and inclusion in the borough. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group includes key services areas. • Opportunities for focus have been limited during the pandemic.
<p>We will support and promote diversity and inclusion in the borough through our communications and events – with a focus on our seldom-heard communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Policy, Communities and Engagement team and Communications team meet on a monthly basis to plan, monitor and review Public Consultation and wider Equalities Officer Group formed. • Creation of a Community Panel at Museum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for public, face to face engagement has been limited during the pandemic.
<p>We will audit and appraise historical assets within the borough of Maidstone.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museum collections have been appraised and work undertaken 	

	<p>with donors to understand the links to the past. There are no connections with slave owning families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has been identified that the Museum’s world collection does not currently include ‘lived experience’. Work will be undertaken with communities to reflect this. • A Community Panel to support to advise on exhibitions from the perspective of minority groups is under development. 	
<p>We will support our serving and veteran communities through our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant with training/guidance provided to staff across all services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armed Forces Member Champions appointed for 2021/22 – Councillor Purle and Councillor Munford. • Training scheduled for Autumn 2021 for Armed Forces Champions and Mayor by the Kent County Council Civilian-Military Liaison Adviser and Military Expert to strengthen understanding and create resilience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armed Forces Bill 2021 will strengthen the legislative basis of the Armed Forces Covenant to help ensure that those who serve, or have served, and their families are treated with fairness and respect in the communities they serve. The Council’s Armed Forces Officer Champion will work with services to ensure update training and guidance is provided as the Bill progresses.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will include changes to the EqIA process.
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As an Employer
Objective
<p>To lead a diverse and inclusive workforce that is reflective of the borough of Maidstone where residents and colleagues feel safe, confident, and empowered to challenge and bring about change.</p>

Agreed Actions	Progress	Issues and next steps
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<p>We will undertake a regular Staff Survey so that the organisation can identify where it needs to change and adapt.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff Survey was completed in January/February 2020 and will be repeated every two years. There were 356 respondents to the last survey. • Additionally, in the past year, the Policy, Communities and Engagement team have run the following surveys: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff work location, August 2020. Assessment of working from home during the pandemic to inform working from home policies. This had a 77% response rate. 	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID staff wellbeing. The survey was run twice. In April 2020 with 242 responses and in May/June 2021 it was repeated with 297 responses. 	
We will undertake a self-assessment as an Inclusive Employer.	External schemes have been reviewed by HR and Policy teams.	An options report will be prepared for Corporate Leadership Team to consider in the best choice for the organisation.
We will look after the mental health of our staff and recognise when this offer needs to change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA) have been trained in teams across the Council. MHFA are provided with annual training and support. • The Employee Assistance Programme is a free service available to all staff. Details can be accessed via the Intranet. • 18-month programme of bite sized Health and Wellbeing courses and events have been developed and delivered online by HR to support staff during the pandemic. • Annual well-being week activities adapted to reflect current need and delivered online. 	
We will provide training and support to staff so they can recognise and manage unacceptable behaviours.	A HR Team Talk 'A respectful workplace for all' was delivered by Managers.	Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion training to be developed to reflect the needs of the organisation. Timetabled for 2021/22.

<p>We will enable staff to understand and respond to the mental health needs of residents, particularly after challenging life events.</p>		<p>Training delayed due to pandemic. Heart of Kent Hospice, Compassionate Neighbours Training to be delivered as part of Compassionate Borough Status.</p>
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As a Service Provider

Objective

To deliver inclusive services in accordance with Council's values.

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Agreed Actions	Progress	Issues and next steps
<p>We will review and identify our policies where we consider Equalities impacts and identify how we can improve outcomes through revisions to policy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Council Strategies and Policies have been mapped and those with equalities impacts identified. • The Policy, Communities and Engagement team will continue to work with officers across the Council, providing support and guidance through the 	

	<p>development of Equalities Impact Assessments and devising consultation exercises that provide an evidence base to underpin policy development.</p>	
<p>We will appoint an Equalities Group to lead and provide join-up across Council services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equalities Group meets on a quarterly basis. The group includes representatives from HR, Museums/Leisure Services, Communications, Civic Services/Mayoralty and Policy/Communities. • The group have identified a number of useful shared resources. A team site has been created for shared resources which includes an annual diversity calendar that details events from across the Council to create a coordinated approach and support the promotion of diversity and inclusion in the borough. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group includes key services areas. • Opportunities for focus have been limited during the pandemic.
<p>We will work with the community through consultation processes, increasing our offer of focus group and participatory methods to increase engagement with seldom-heard groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 consultations completed for 2020/21, 14 of which were public – resident/stakeholder. • 15 consultation have been completed or are underway so far in 2021/22. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pandemic has limited face to face participation. • Policy, Communities and Engagement team exploring new methods for engagement including more accessible

		Consultation and Engagement software, the use of Community panels and through work with Community Groups.
We will work collaboratively with the Museum and its programme of events to promote diversity and inclusion and strengthen ties to seldom-heard communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museums Director is a lead officer on the Equalities Officer Group which is facilitating join up between Consultation, Communication and the Museum. • Museums Director briefed group on progress of Community Panel. 	Opportunities for collaborative work has not been possible but structure in place to facilitate this going forward.
<p>We will undertake a Councillor-led Access to Services Review which will assess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Inclusion and website accessibility • Enabling communication • Our buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members have held 6 meetings. • Review at a learning and evidence gathering stage. • Meetings have included panels of internal officers as well as external organisation. • The review is at a learning and evidence gathering stage, however a number of recommendations have already been made to support digital accessibility via the Council’s website and vulnerable groups affected by digital inclusion. These included recommendations to support Councillors’ understanding and use of digital services, a digital process on the website for users to report issues or seek assistance and advice with online accessibility, a review 	

	<p>of the Community Group Repository provided by Involve and an agreed process to review and maintain the repository on quarterly basis to ensure it is fit for purpose and a commitment by the group to support Digital Inclusion as workstreams develop in this area. This includes the reuse of ICT equipment to support the digitally excluded.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An interim update report was taken to CHE Committee in April 2021 to inform the Committee on the panel's undertakings and emerging recommendations. 	
<p>We will work in partnership to deliver the Rough Sleeping initiative delivery plan to provide mental health outreach.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team has been in situ since September 2020 and will be looking to extend until March 2022. • Approximately 360 clients have been supported/are still being supported by the initiative. 	
<p>We will review Equalities Impact Assessment processes.</p>		<p>Equalities Impact Assessment process will be revised to reflect forthcoming legislative changes to responsibilities in Armed Forces Bill 2021.</p>
<p>We will develop processes to ensure Social Value is a core consideration of our decision making.</p>		<p>The Procurement Strategy and processes are being revised to include Social Value. This work</p>

Appendix 1 Equalities Actions Update

		is scheduled to be completed by March 2022.
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POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

20 October 2021

Archbishop's Palace – Public Consultation

Final Decision-Maker	Policy and Resources Committee
Lead Head of Service	Mark Green – Director of Finance and Business Improvement
Lead Officer and Report Author	Alexa Kersting-Woods – Leisure Property Manager Deborah Turner – Corporate Property
Classification	Public
Wards affected	High Street

Executive Summary

The Archbishop's Palace is currently let to Kent County Council. Possession and responsibility will return to Maidstone Borough Council in 2022. To ensure that the property can continue to be maintained and protected in the future, new uses need to be considered that are both economically viable and are aligned with the overall development of the surrounding area, within the context of the Council's priority of Thriving Place and the emerging Town Centre Strategy.

This report sets out the results to date of a public consultation on potential future uses of the Palace.

Purpose of Report

For noting.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. The outcomes of the consultation are noted.
2. It is further noted that officers will incorporate the results of the consultation when inviting Expressions of Interest from developers and consultants to carry out the stage 1 project work at Archbishop Palace.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Review of Public Consultation Results	31st October 2021
Invitations for Expression of Interest	November 2021
Analysis of EOIs and recommended use	January 2022

Policy and Resources Committee for decision to enter into Exclusivity Agreement with preferred consultant	January 2022
Exclusivity Agreement	February 2022

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p><i>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure</i> • <i>Safe, Clean and Green</i> • <i>Homes and Communities</i> • <i>A Thriving Place</i> <p>The project described in this report supports the Council's Strategic Plan objectives, most notably A Thriving Place.</p>	Director of Finance and Business Improvement
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p><i>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Heritage is Respected</i> • <i>Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced</i> • <i>Deprivation is reduced and Social Mobility is Improved</i> • <i>Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected</i> <p>The report recommendations support the achievements of the cross-cutting objectives by respecting the heritage of the existing building with sensitive design and addressing environmental sustainability by upgrade works to improve the use and condition of the building.</p>	Director of Finance and Business Improvement
Risk Management	Already covered in the risk section.	Director of Finance and Business Improvement
Financial	The initial feasibility studies have been undertaken from the Financial Sustainability Fund PID. Once a scheme is identified the financial impact of that scheme can be fully considered. The running costs of the building are currently £250k per annum which are at present paid for by the tenant.	Director of Finance and Business Improvement

Staffing	We will need access to extra external expertise to deliver the recommendations.	Director of Finance and Business Improvement
Legal	Acting on the recommendations is within the Council's powers as set out in local authority legislation (including the general power of competence under the Localism Act 2011) and the Council's Constitution.	Team Leader Contracts and Commissioning
Privacy and Data Protection	No implications	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	An EqIA will be carried out as part of the project along with public consultation.	Senior Policy and Engagement Officer.
Public Health	No implications	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	No implications	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Procurement	<p>The Council will follow the procurement exercises for Expressions of Interest and follow up with an Exclusivity Agreement.</p> <p>On accepting the recommendations, the Council will then follow procurement exercises to appoint the necessary Consultant to facilitate the delivery of the project. We will complete those exercises in line with financial procedure rules and applicable public contracts regulations and principles if required.</p>	Head of Service & Section 151 Officer
Biodiversity & Climate Change	The proposed developments at the Archbishop's Palace provide an opportunity to help ensure that the Council's objectives for carbon emissions from its own estate are met.	Head of Service & Section 151 Officer

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Archbishop's Palace is one of a group of medieval buildings of great historical significance, including All Saints Church and the Archbishop's Tithe Barn and Stables (now the Carriage Museum). The Council has owned the Archbishop's Palace since 1904.
- 2.2 The Archbishop's Palace was let in November 2005 to Kent County Council (KCC) for use as a Registry Office and Coroners Court. The lease to KCC expired 31st October 2020 but KCC have held over under the existing lease and remain in occupation. The intention is for KCC to vacate the building in September 2022 at which point responsibility for the property will pass back to Maidstone Borough Council.
- 2.3 The Archbishop's Palace is a Grade 1 Listed Building and as a result of this requires sensitive and specific care and maintenance. The current annual running costs are in the region of £250,000 per annum. From September 2022 the Council will become responsible for all costs associated with holding, securing, protecting and running of the building. The Palace is a valuable property asset which will greatly contribute to create a Thriving Place for the town centre.
- 2.4 With the pending return of the building to the Council, a feasibility report to consider future uses of the building, was commissioned in 2019 with the following objectives:
- Respect the historic fabric of the building
 - Bring the building promptly back into active use
 - Any proposed use should be economically viable
 - Develop linkages to the property with the surrounding area, particularly the River Medway, Lockmeadow and the Town Centre

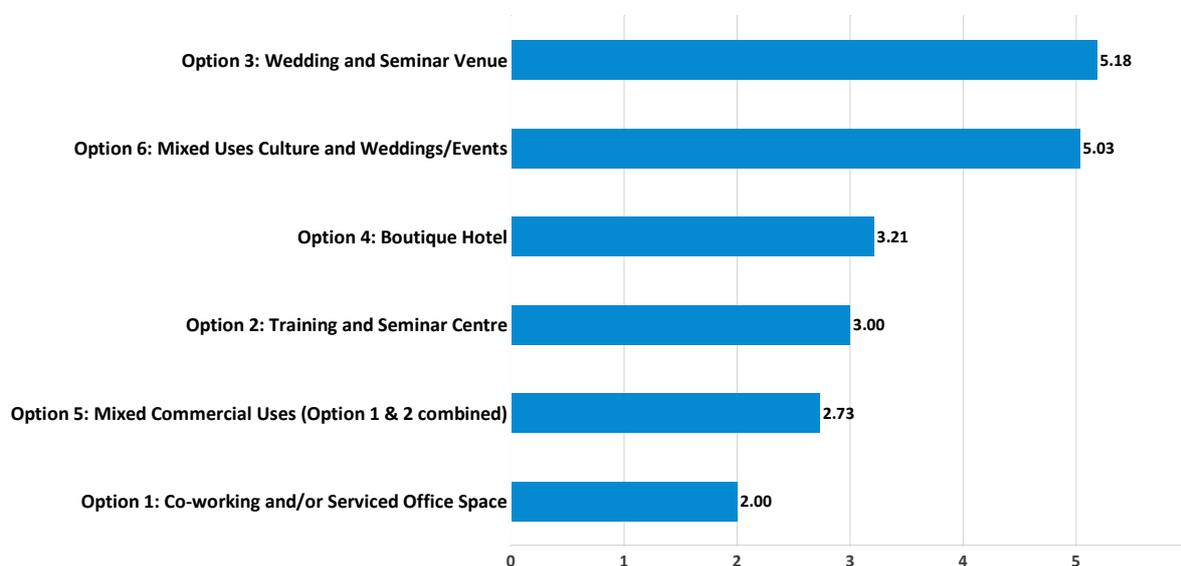
The scope of the report was to investigate the potential for alternative uses to suit existing internal and external spaces, to consider the existing town centre and heritage setting, to provide plans demonstrating potential layouts and a high-level scope of works from which initial costings could be developed. The outcomes were presented to Members at a briefing held on 20th February 2020 at the Town Hall and subsequently in a report to this Committee on 21st July 2021.

- 2.5 The Report identified four possible uses and provided a brief commentary on the viability of those uses, the uses being:
1. Co-Working and/or Serviced Office Space
 2. Training and Seminar Centre
 3. Wedding and Seminar Venue
 4. Boutique Hotel

A further two options were added at the meeting of Policy & Resources Committee on 21st July 2021, as follows:

5. Commercial Mixed Use
6. Mixed Use Culture and Weddings.

- 2.6 An online public consultation has been carried out on these options, via the Council’s website, our survey group, and social media. This has been complemented by posters and flyers containing the QR code link to the survey placed in various locations including Lockmeadow, Maidstone Market, Museum and places of worship including Maidstone Mosque. Whilst the focus of the survey has been on the options set out above, participants were given the opportunity to offer alternative proposals, as well as to comment on the options specified.
- 2.7 The consultation has attracted considerable interest and publicity, and 2,110 responses had been received as of 11th October 2021.
- 2.8 Survey results as of 7th October were as follows:



To assess the data, a weighted average has been used. The programmes placed first received five points and the programmes ranked last were given 1 point. These were then added together and divided by the number of respondents to give a weighted average.

- 2.9 An update on the results will be provided at the meeting.
- 2.10 In addition to the ranking of options, respondents were able to provide comments. Points that emerged strongly from the comments were as follows:
- A desire to maintain the Palace as a building with public access
 - A general fondness for the building
 - People want their children to get married where they did
 - The palace should be available for a range of functions
 - Issues with parking
 - The building should not cost public money to run
 - There are already empty offices in the town so there is no need to provide offices here
 - Suggestions for alternative use include a restaurant/ coffee shop.

- 2.11 The next step is to invite Expressions of Interest from consultants who are qualified and experienced to develop a scope of works and/or change of use scheme with financial feasibility for the Palace, with reference to the Council's scope based on the previous feasibility report and guided by the consultation results.
- 2.12 The Expression of Interest (EOI) would require consultants to justify their preferred proposed use of the Palace, a financial assessment, their source of funding, their previous experience of heritage properties, evidence of similar projects/case studies, proposed timescales, methodologies and any proposed partnership arrangements.
- 2.13 Upon receipt of the EOIs, officers will evaluate responses and recommend a preferred consultant to take forward a proposed scheme for the Palace. By entering into an Exclusivity Agreement with a preferred expert consultant, the Council can obtain the best flexibility to explore options with planners and English Heritage and develop a scheme that meets the objective of being economically viable whilst protecting the heritage of the building.
- 2.14 It should be noted that, as part of the Council's wider Town Centre Strategy, the potential for the overall development of the surrounding area to form a Heritage Quarter will be considered and funding opportunities explored. Any development of the Archbishop's Palace will be aligned with the emerging Town Centre Strategy, and opportunities created by this Strategy to expand the scope of work on the Archbishop's Palace (eg by including the Norman Undercroft) will be explored.

Proposed Schedule of Events

- 2.15 The proposed schedule of events for the project is given in the table below. The dates should be regarded as indicative at this stage as the Council may need to extend and /or amend the timetable as necessary.

Activity	Finish Date
Review of Public Consultation	November 2021
Prepare EOI documentation	November 2021
EOI period	December 2021
Review of EOI Returns	January 2022
P&R Committee for Decision	January 2022
Exclusivity Period	Feb 2022 – July 2022
MBC possession	Sept/October 2022
Submit Planning	Sept/Oct 2022
Enter into Contract for Works	Nov 2022

- 2.16 Pre-application planning advice meetings will also need to be arranged in order to discuss planning policies and understand design and information requirements, and how this might affect proposals.

3. RISKS

- 3.1 Empty Building - By commencing the consideration of alternative uses of the premises now, we are reducing the likelihood of the building standing empty when it is returned to MBC from KCC. If the building stood empty it would lead to running costs to keep it safe and secure, it would deteriorate more quickly and there is a risk of reputational damage to the Council to permit a building of its importance to stand empty.
 - 3.2 Maintenance and Management Costs - Any decisions as to the future of the building will affect the management and maintenance of the building both in terms of regime, cost and staff. There is a risk of escalating costs, of potentially increased security risk and expertise in the preservation of historic buildings.
 - 3.3 Expertise and Resources - The project is likely to require additional expertise and resource from outside of the in-house team. Historic sites require particular attention when considering any form of alteration and/or development.
 - 3.4 Communication – Engagement with stakeholders is key to ensure that the best option for the Council and its Strategic Plan Objectives are met.
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4. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 4.1 The next step will be for the EOI to be advertised. Upon analysis of the EOI results, a recommendation for a preferred use will be brought to Policy and Resources Committee in Jan 2022 to enable an Exclusivity Agreement to be entered into.
 - 4.2 The Exclusivity Agreement would be entered into to enable steady progress with the project to ensure there is little or no period when the Palace is empty after September/October 2022.
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5. REPORT APPENDICES

None

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

**POLICY AND RESOURCES
COMMITTEE**

20th October 2021

FLOOD RISK ALLEVIATION - UPDATE

Final Decision-Maker	Policy & Resources Committee
Lead Director	Director of Finance & Business Improvement
Lead Officer and Report Author	Director of Finance & Business Improvement
Classification	Public
Wards affected	High Street, Coxheath & Hunton, Headcorn, Marden & Yalding, Staplehurst

Executive Summary

Maidstone Borough Council works with other agencies as part of the Medway Flood Partnership to address flood risk in the Medway catchment area above Allington Lock. This report provides an update on work carried out over the past six months and details of future plans. It also includes a request for funding for a Natural Flood Management scheme, to be funded from the Council's Flood Action Plan capital budget.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That progress be noted with flood management initiatives delivered by Maidstone Borough Council as part of the Medway Flood Partnership.
2. That £13,352 be allocated for the Natural Flood Management scheme described in paragraph 2.17 and Appendix B subject to confirmation of match funding.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Policy & Resources Committee	20 October 2021

FLOOD RISK ALLEVIATION - UPDATE

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The decision will support all four strategic plan objectives by reducing flood risk, but in particular supports the strategic priority of making the borough safe, clean and green.	Director of Finance & Business Improvement
Cross Cutting Objectives	The report recommendations support the objective of respecting biodiversity and environmental sustainability.	Director of Finance & Business Improvement
Risk Management	See paragraph 5.1.	Director of Finance & Business Improvement
Financial	The Council has a capital budget of £950,000 to fund the Flood Action Plan projects described in this report.	Director of Finance & Business Improvement
Staffing	Staffing support for flood risk alleviation and community resilience is provided by the Head of Transformation and Property and her team.	Director of Finance & Business Improvement
Legal	<p>The initiatives to manage flood risk detailed in this report as proposed by the Medway Flood Partnership will enable the Council to continue to discharge its statutory duties to include the responsibilities outlined below.</p> <p>The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 gives the Environment Agency (EA) a strategic overview of the management of flood and coastal erosion risk. It also gives upper tier local authorities, responsibility for preparing and putting in place strategies for managing flood risk from groundwater, surface water and ordinary watercourses in their areas.</p> <p>Kent County Council as the lead local flood authority has the responsibilities referred to above.</p>	Legal Team

	<p>In addition, Maidstone Council is a risk management authority and can carry out flood risk management works on minor watercourses, working with Lead Local Flood Authorities and others, including through taking decisions on development in their area which ensure that risks are effectively managed.</p> <p>The public authorities with responsibility for flood risk management are obliged to have regard to the EA's National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England and KCC's strategy when taking action to tackle flooding in their area.</p> <p>All risk management public authorities have a duty to co-operate with each other and to share data. to deliver flood risk management better to the benefit of their communities.</p> <p>The recommendations in this report are in accordance with the statutory obligations and the requirement for co-operation between the public authorities when discharging their functions under the 2010 Act.</p> <p>The recommendations also fall within the Policy and Resources functions, which includes (1) risk management strategy; (2) emergency and resilience planning.</p>	
Privacy and Data Protection	Data collected as part of projects described in this report, e.g., data about individual households affected by flooding, is processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act.	Policy and Information Manager
Equalities	An EqIA will be carried out as appropriate for each individual project.	Equalities and Communities Officer
Public Health	The report recommendations support the public health agenda by reducing the risk of individuals being affected by flooding.	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	Flood risk has an impact on community safety generally. The measures outlined in the report will help to achieve increased community resilience and	Director of Finance & Business Improvement

	reduce the risk to health and safety during incidences of flooding.	
Procurement	Council and statutory procurement requirements will be met in relation to all procurement and commissioning carried out as part of flood risk management work.	Director of Finance & Business Improvement
Biodiversity and Climate Change	Section 5 of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan has direct implications on the subject of this report. Namely that long term adaptation policy to the flooding impacts which are projected to increase due to climate change must be considered for both public awareness and long-term resilience building. This report sets out the actions taken for 'natural flood management' and building 'community resilience' which are in keeping with the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan objectives.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Background

- 2.1 Maidstone Borough is at the heart of the Medway catchment area. The rivers Beult, Teise and Medway join at Yalding and flow through Maidstone towards the Thames Estuary. This brings a significant risk of flooding, as was seen in the floods of winter 2013/14. Recognising that a collective approach is needed to address these risks, the Medway Flood Partnership was established in 2017. It brings together a range of organisations concerned with flood risk management and reduction in the Medway catchment area upstream of Allington Lock, including not only the Environment Agency (EA) and the principal local authorities but also a whole range of other relevant bodies.
- 2.2 More recently, heavy summer rainfall has given rise to flash flood events in the borough. Managing this risk is also an important part of the flood risk alleviation agenda. Recent events are described below together with some of the measures being taken in response.
- 2.3 This report describes the work being carried out under the three headings used by the Medway Flood Partnership, namely:
- capital investment and maintenance
 - natural flood management
 - community resilience.

Capital investment and maintenance

- 2.4 Following the floods of winter 2013/14, extensive work was carried out to investigate the feasibility of large scale engineering solutions to flood risk.

The only large scale capital scheme in the overall Medway Flood Partnership programme is the expansion of the Leigh Flood Storage Area in Tonbridge & Malling. A local public inquiry was held into this scheme in April/May 2021, following which the Secretary of State has decided to accept the Inspector's recommendation to confirm the scheme. Other capital investment and maintenance work has been on a smaller scale, focused on local flood risk. The two projects within Maidstone Council's capital programme are described below.

Medway Street Flood Barrier

- 2.5 Maidstone Council has developed a scheme to manage flood risk in the area of Medway Street, Maidstone. The scheme was originally conceived as part of the Bridges Gyratory Scheme. Prior to construction of this scheme, there had been flooding in the Lower High Street area, which was attributed to the flow of water through the subways beneath the A229. As a consequence, the two subways either side of the High Street were blocked up. The Medway Street subway, which also acts as a conduit for flood water to reach the lower High Street area, was kept open as it was considered important to retain pedestrian access to the riverside. However, this led to a residual flood risk, which it is now proposed to address by means of a glass flood barrier in place of the existing pedestrian barrier opposite Drakes, with additional returns constructed to contain flood water.
- 2.6 Development of the scheme has unfortunately been much delayed, in spite of agreement in principle in 2017 by KCC and the Council to go ahead with it and the availability of funding. Recent discussions with KCC have focused around the following issues:
- Confirmation that the scheme as designed is the optimum solution
 - Need for a commuted sum for ongoing maintenance and operation.
- 2.7 Further consideration of the scheme and external consultation confirms that the proposed scheme is the most effective means of addressing the flood risk identified. The need for the scheme has meanwhile been reinforced by more recent experience with flood events.
- 2.8 A commuted sum would be payable to KCC if the flood barrier were to be handed over by MBC, and KCC were to maintain it. Given the relatively low level of maintenance required, and MBC's existing experience of responding to flood events locally, it is now proposed that the flood barrier remains as an MBC asset and this council takes responsibility for it. An assessment will be undertaken of the likely ongoing costs and risks involved before making a final commitment.
- 2.9 Work is now ongoing on commissioning the scheme, including the appointment of an Employer's Agent for the works.

Mote Park Lake

- 2.10 Following the mandatory 10 year review under the Reservoirs Act 1975 of the Mote Park Lake reservoir in 2014, the Council received recommendations for measures in the interests of safety. The measures advised that the spillway

capacity of the lake be increased to reduce risk of failure of the dam due to overtopping, to as low as reasonably practicable.

- 2.11 Accordingly, works were carried out last year comprising a 50m wide auxiliary spillway, an abutment formed with grass covered articulated concrete blocks and a wave wall. A certificate under Section 10(6) of the Reservoirs Act 1975 was issued by a member of the All Reservoirs Panel on 20th December 2020 which has been accepted by the Environment Agency, ensuring that the Council's legal obligations for the works have been discharged.
- 2.12 A final element in the works, concerning the sluice gates, was due to commence in October 2021. An update will be provided at this evening's meeting.

Maintenance

- 2.13 Maintaining watercourses, drains and sewers is essential to minimise the risk of flooding. Kent County Council is the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) for the area and has the prime responsibility for co-ordinating this work. Maidstone Borough Council works closely with the relevant officers at KCC to identify and address problems in our borough. We hold a small budget of £30,000 per annum which allows us to carry out drainage works and maintenance works to ordinary watercourses. Normally these works would be the responsibility of the landowner, but in some situations it is more cost-effective to fund the work ourselves rather than relying on enforcement action.

Natural Flood Management

- 2.14 Natural Flood Management (NFM) is the alteration, restoration or use of landscape features to reduce flood risk to properties. There are a wide range of techniques used including small 'leaky dams', new hedgerows, river bank restoration, targeted tree planting and techniques to hold water temporarily on land to 'slow the flow', reduce and delay flood peaks and store more water away from homes. As well as helping to reduce flood risk, NFM techniques also provide wider social and environmental benefits by improving the environment and wildlife for people to enjoy.
- 2.15 Following a report to Policy and Resources Committee in October 2018, it was agreed to provide £25,000 for an NFM scheme, carried out by the South East Rivers Trust (SERT), to manage flood risk along the Hogg Stream (also known as School Stream) in Headcorn. SERT engaged with landowners in the area and obtained agreement to install NFM structures to help mitigate flooding downstream. Specifically, a flood storage pond has been created and a number of Leaky Woody Structures have been installed. Details of the completed scheme are set out in Appendix A.
- 2.16 The Committee gave approval to contribute a further £50,000 at its meeting on 24th March 2021 to the following projects:
- Completion of the School Stream project
 - Working with landowners to deliver a climate-resilient River Beult catchment

- Holistic water management around poly-tunnels.

2.17 Funding is now sought for another NFM scheme, described in Appendix B. This involves the development of a 2.2 hectare wetland on unproductive farmland that lies South of Carpenters Lane in Staplehurst. Total projected costs are £59,785. The Environment Agency is funding the majority of the costs, but there is a funding shortfall of £13,352. It is recommended that the Council provides the balancing amount of funding to enable this scheme to go ahead.

Community Resilience

2.18 The summer of 2021 has been notable for a number of incidents of flash flooding, which have tested community resilience. Three in particular are worth noting. They were due to run off from fields and roads and were short lived but intense (between 1-2 hours).

- Yalding – 4 properties affected
- Ulcombe – around 20 properties affected
- Staplehurst.

2.19 The impact was in the form of damage to building and property. Recovery activities carried out by the council included dealing with requests for sandbags from Staplehurst and Ulcombe after the flooding. Although we delivered the sandbags as requested, we did reiterate the fact that sandbags are more effective as a preventive measure.

2.20 Following the incidents, we have provided advice and guidance to Ulcombe Parish to enable them to get started on preparing their community flood plan. We have also shared dates for volunteer Flood Warden training sessions coming up in October and November 2021.

2.21 In the recent MBC parish newsletter, we have reminded parishes of the need to have community emergency and flood plans. We shared the contact details for our emergency planning team who will be happy to help and guide them in the process of creating the plans.

2.22 Looking forward to the winter, the following preparations are being undertaken:

- Sandbag levels checked and sufficient for the winter period if needed
- Team briefing for staff with roles within the council's emergency plan scheduled for October and November. This is to bring staff volunteers up to date on emergency response guidelines and prepare everyone for potential flooding incidents over the winter months.
- Welfare centre directory updated – we have been in touch with the locations to check availability and suitability of the venues in addition to updating contact details.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 **Option 1:** To continue to work with the EA and other partners as part of the Medway Flood Partnership and to utilise the Flood Action Plan capital budget for schemes that meet the objectives of the Partnership and the Council's own investment criteria.
- 3.2 **Option 2:** To remain as a member of the Medway Flood Partnership but not commit any funding for flood risk management.
-

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The preferred option is Option 1 as this is the most likely option to deliver reductions in flood risk and is affordable in the context of the Council's medium term financial strategy.
-

5. RISK

- 5.1 This report deals with the broad risk to the community posed by flooding. Risks associated with projects described in the report are addressed at the level of the individual project.
-

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 Progress on flood risk management work is reported to Policy and Resources Committee. The Council also maintains regular contact with representatives of the local community, including parish councillors, in relation to flooding issues.
-

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 The Council will continue to work with the Medway Flood Partnership in implementing the actions described in the report.
-

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

Appendix A: South East Rivers Trust report: Natural Flood Management on the School Stream

Appendix B: Proposed Natural Flood Management Scheme

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

Natural Flood Management (NFM) on the School Stream

Working with natural processes to slow the flow and store water to reduce flood risk across the south east.

The School Stream

The School Stream is a tributary of the River Beult in Kent. The catchment's clay geology leave it highly susceptible to flashy floods, impacting the downstream village of Headcorn.

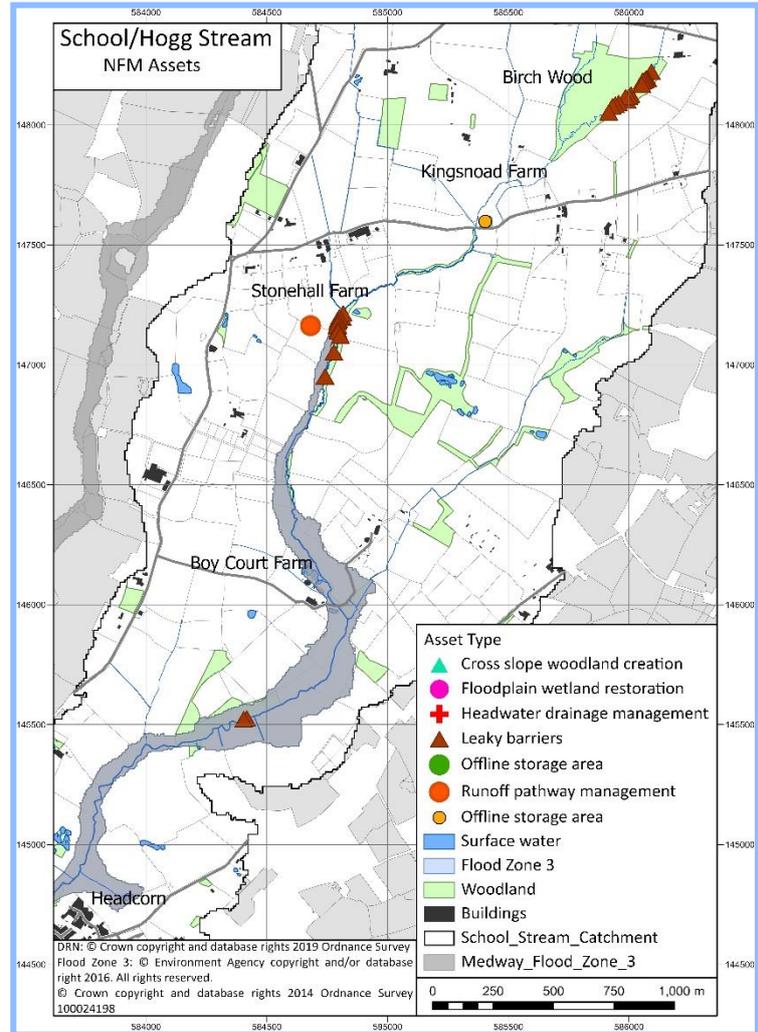
Aim

To work with local landowners and apply Natural Flood Management (NFM) on a sub-catchment scale to alleviate flood risk at Headcorn.

Natural Flood Management

NFM uses natural materials to slow the flow of water, reducing the chance of flash flooding, as well as increasing water storage throughout the landscape.

Using a combination of topography modelling, site visits and local consultation, SERT identified parts of the catchment where NFM could work best and designed a range of practical and effective measures.



Funders & Supporters

Natural Flood Management Measures

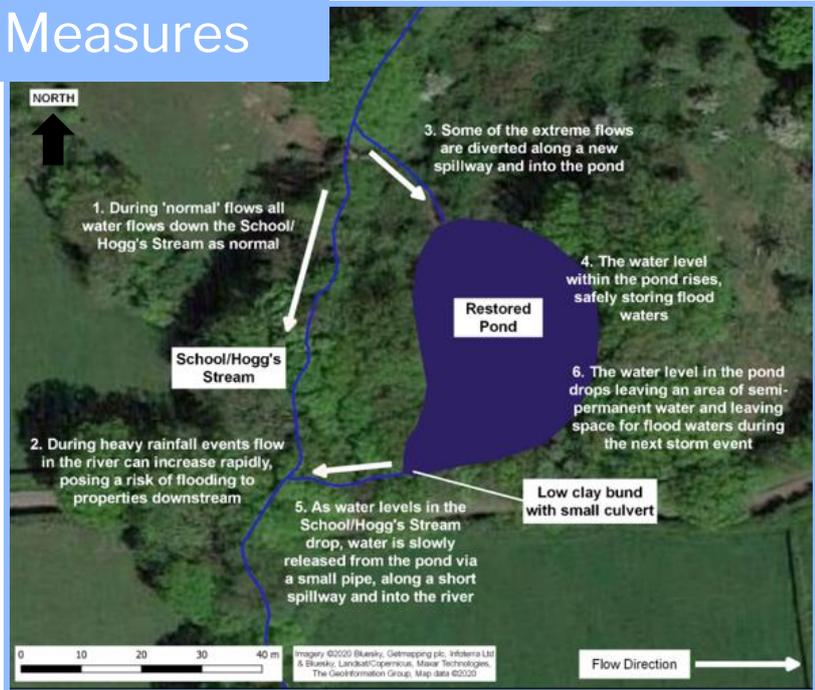
Flood Storage: Kingsnood Pond

SERT designed and constructed an offline pond in the headwaters of the catchment, providing 600m³ of flood storage.

The pond provides multiple benefits.

Diverting water through the pond allows sediment to settle out of the water, improving the quality of water entering the School Stream downstream.

Pond habitats significantly increase biodiversity, supporting a variety of aquatic plants and animals, contributing to the wider freshwater ecosystem.



Kingsnood Pond in action – storing flood waters from the School Stream.



Leaky Woody Structures (LWS)

SERT installed over 25 LWS in the School Stream catchment. Due to the powerful flows during flood events, the LWS were designed and constructed to withstand all flow conditions. Large (10m+), locally-sourced tree trunks were used. The structures were adapted to fit the contours of the river banks.

These LWS hold back water in the upper catchment, slowing the flow of the river and reducing the flood risk at Headcorn.

The structures have **multiple benefits**. Holding and retaining water in the wet woodland increases this threatened habitat's **resilience to climate change**. The structures also collect large volumes of silt and debris from the stream, **improving water quality**.

Proposals for the Staplehurst (NFM) Wetland Creation (Highwood Meadows) Scheme



Project proposals for the Staplehurst (NFM) wetland creation (Highwood Meadows) scheme.

Mark Gallant- Senior Partnership Officer (Kent Countryside Management Partnerships/Kent County Council)

Introduction

The **Staplehurst (NFM) Wetland Creation (Highwood Meadows) scheme** involves the development of a 2.2 -hectare wetland on unproductive farmland that lies South of Carpenters Lane in Staplehurst.

A wetland creation scheme on this site would have multiply benefits in that it would assist in alleviating flood risk in the surrounding area whilst also providing valuable additional wetland habitat for biodiversity and recreational activities such as bird watching.

Background

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) highlights 'taking action to reduce the risk of harm from flooding, including greater use of natural flood solutions.

The Medway Flood Action Plan, published November 2017, identifies **Natural Flood Management (NFM)** as a key theme to manage or reduce the risk and impacts of flooding to benefit properties upstream of Allington Lock.

NFM is the alteration, restoration or use of landscape features to reduce flood risk to properties.

There are a wide range of techniques used in NFM including small 'leaky dams', new hedgerows, riverbank restoration, targeted tree planting and wetland creation to hold water temporarily on land to 'slow the flow', reduce and delay flood peaks and store more water away from homes.

As well as helping to reduce flood risk, NFM techniques also provide wider social and environmental benefits by improving our environment and wildlife for people to enjoy.

Kent's Countryside Management Partnership's have been working in partnership with the **Environment Agency** and **KCC's Flood & Water Management Team** to deliver a range of Natural Flood Management Projects throughout the county of Kent.

Background continued

The **Staplehurst Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP)** (Final Report January 2017 -Kent County Council) identifies the Staplehurst catchments as being of significant risk of flooding.

According to the SWMP, the majority of these reported flood events are likely to occur in the winter months and it is highly probable that the Staplehurst catchment is prone to longer duration rainfall events.

However, the report also indicates that the Staplehurst catchments are also sensitive to short intensive rainfall events due to the underlying geology and urbanised imperious areas.

Evidence indicates that the intensity of these short intensive rainfall events is likely to increase significantly in future years because of increases in atmospheric temperatures which are occurring as a consequence of climate change.

The SWMP indicates that it is highly likely that the catchments within Staplehurst may be more sensitive to short intense rainfall events during periods when there are elevated main river levels.

Elevated main river levels. would exacerbate the surface water flooding as the excess surface water is unable to be cleared from the surface water drainage network.

Therefore, flooding within Staplehurst may be because of the inability to discharge excess surface water during main river flood events.

Recent flooding in the Staplehurst catchment is likely to have occurred because of a combination of surface water and sewer flooding as the drainage network within Staplehurst became overloaded with surface water.

This may have also been exacerbated by the elevated main river levels in the River Beult as the peak flood volumes would have prevented excess surface water from being passed through the drainage network (such as the Overbridge Farm Stream) within Staplehurst.

The **Staplehurst (NFM) wetland creation (Highwood Meadows) scheme** aims to assist in alleviating flood risk in the Staplehurst catchments by diverting excess water from the Overbridge Farm Stream during peak flows and safety storing it in the newly created 2.2-hectare wetland.

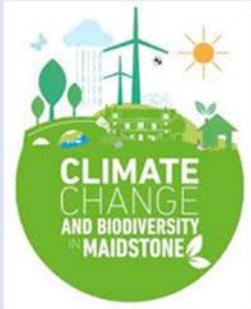
The Staplehurst (NFM) wetland creation (Highwood Meadows) scheme

Summary of benefits –

- Wetlands such as the one proposed in the **Staplehurst (NFM) wetland creation (Highwood Meadows) scheme** function as natural sponges that trap and slowly release surface water, rain, snowmelt, groundwater, and flood waters.
- Trees, root mats and other wetland vegetation planted within the wetland also slow the speed of flood waters and distribute them more slowly over the floodplain. This combined water storage provides a braking action that lowers flood heights and reduces erosion.
- Wetlands within and downstream of urban areas and housing developments are particularly valuable, counteracting the greatly increased rate and volume of surface- water runoff from pavement and buildings.
- Restoring water bodies such as streams to their natural floodplains provide flood risk reduction benefits by slowing runoff and storing flood water, but it also has direct benefits to plants, invertebrates, birds, and animals which live on the banks, riparian, and floodplain zones.
- Other benefits include – Restoration of natural processes, including erosion and deposition
- Improvements to the aesthetic value of the landscape and improvements to its recreational value benefits local communities that can enjoy the wildlife attracted to these newly created wetland features.
- Wetland creation also Increases the potential for removal of fine silt from river and ditch systems – this increase water clarity which in turn benefits ecology.

The **Staplehurst (NFM) wetland creation (Highwood Meadows)** scheme also supports **Climate Change and Biodiversity in Maidstone**

- Implement a plan to increase tree cover by at least 46 hectares

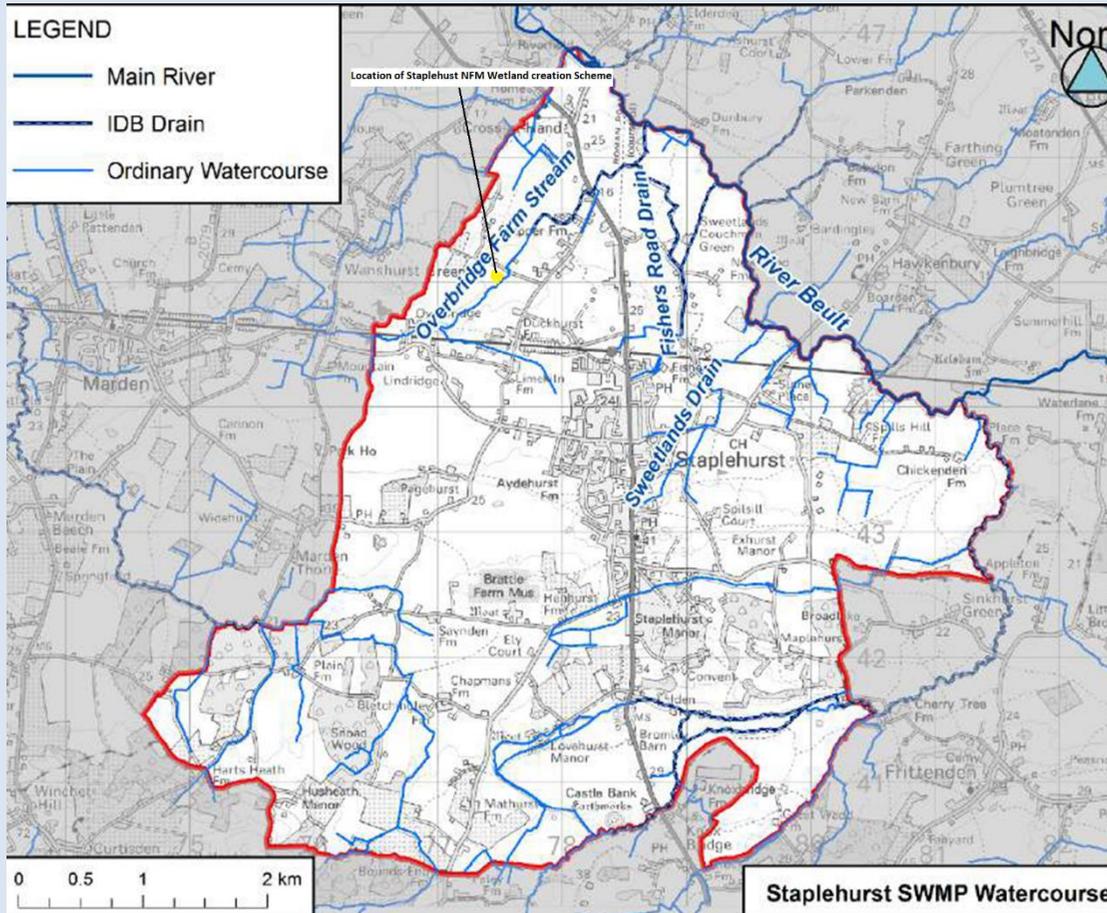


- Deliver at least one new wetland project each year
- Work with partners to implement a Nature Recovery Strategy
- Work with local landowners to deliver landscape scale biodiversity initiatives
- Assess potential of our land for enhancing biodiversity including allowing community groups to manage it to enhance biodiversity

The Overbridge Farm Stream

The Staplehurst (NFM) wetland creation (Highwood Meadows) scheme is focused on a watercourse identified in the Staplehurst Surface Water Management Plan (Final Report KCC January 2017) as the **Overbridge Farm Stream**.

The Overbridge Farm Stream is a tributary of the River Beult, the water course rises from land south of Marden village [the Howland Road area], before flowing in a North Easterly direction across farmland. The stream joins the River Beult at Cross at Hand (Grid ref- TQ 578685 146265).



Staplehurst (NFM) wetland creation (Highwood Meadows) scheme Project outline

Project Coordinator – Mark Gallant, Senior Partnership Officer (Kent`s Country Management Partnership) (mark.gallant@kent.gov.uk)

Project Designer – Dr. Matthew Simpson P.W.S Director and President Society of Wetland Scientists Europe (matthew@35percent.co.uk)

Primary funder – The Environment Agency Mason, (lesley.mason@environment-agency.gov.uk).

Landowners – Lou & Richard Carpenter (richard.lou.carpenter@gmail.com)

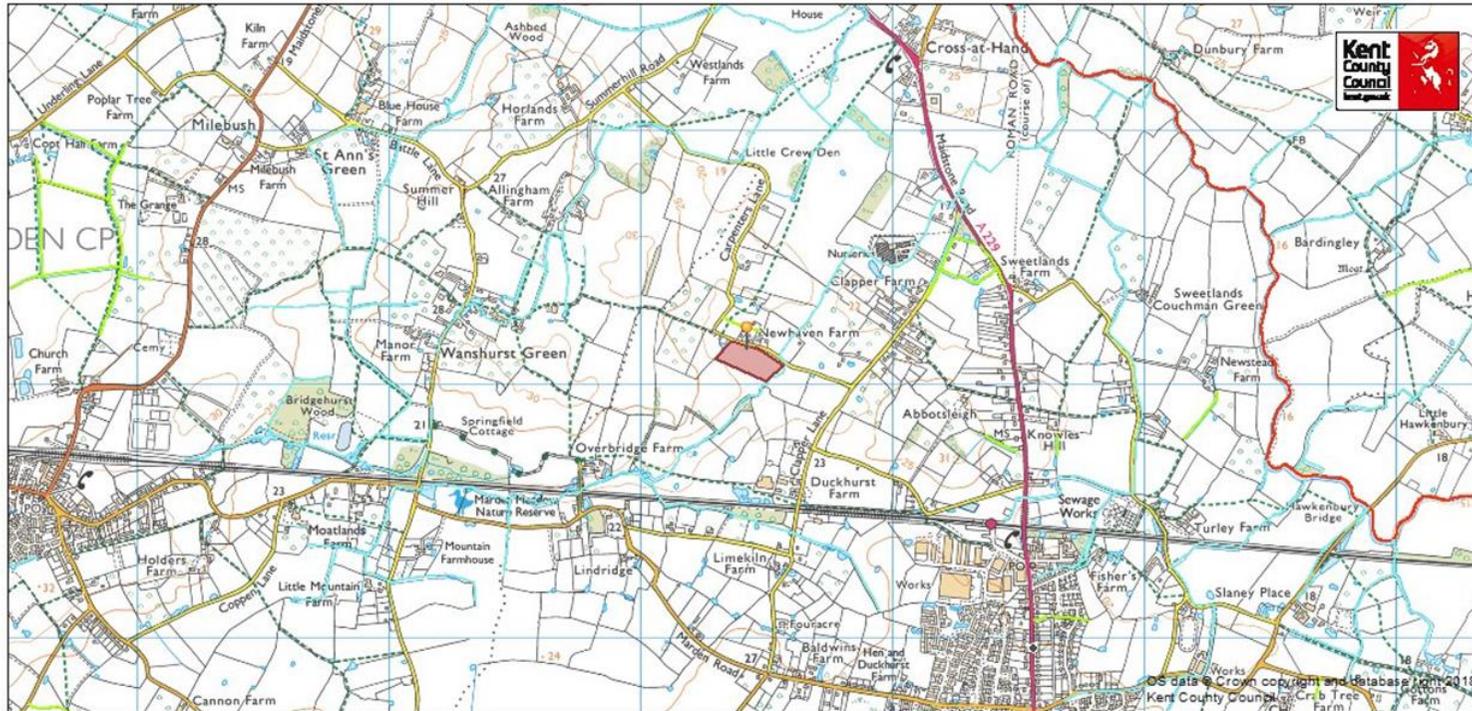
Address (nearest location) – Hound Hurst Barn, Grave Lane, Staplehurst, Tonbridge, TN12 0JP

Grid reference – TQ 577408 145071

Size of project – Approx. 2.2 hectares

Large scale map showing the location of the Carpenters Lane Proposed NFM Wetland Scheme.

Location of Carpenters Lane NFM Wetland site



- Drains Offline
- Drains**
- FRM Indicative Main River
- Other Rivers
- Undefined

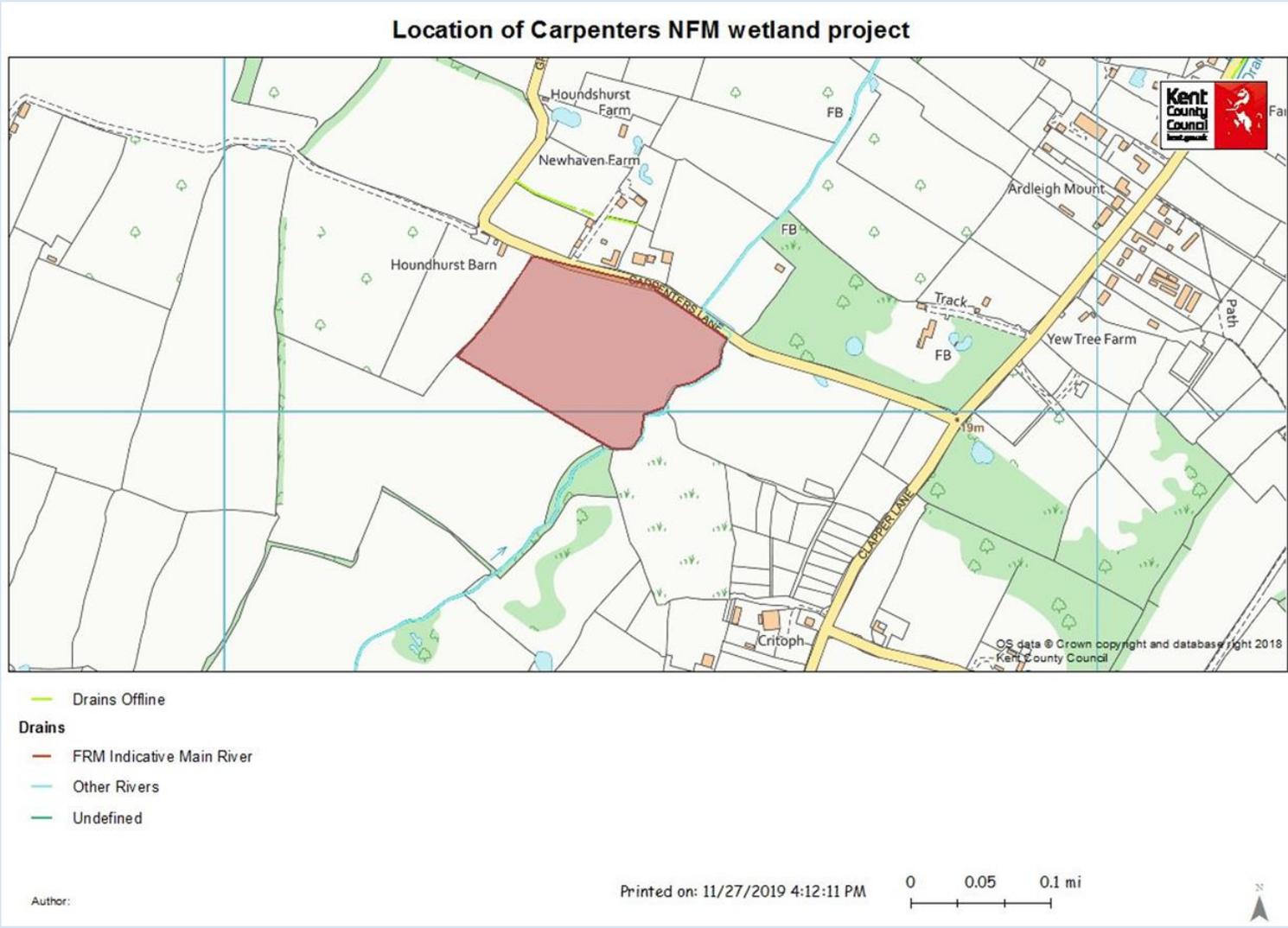
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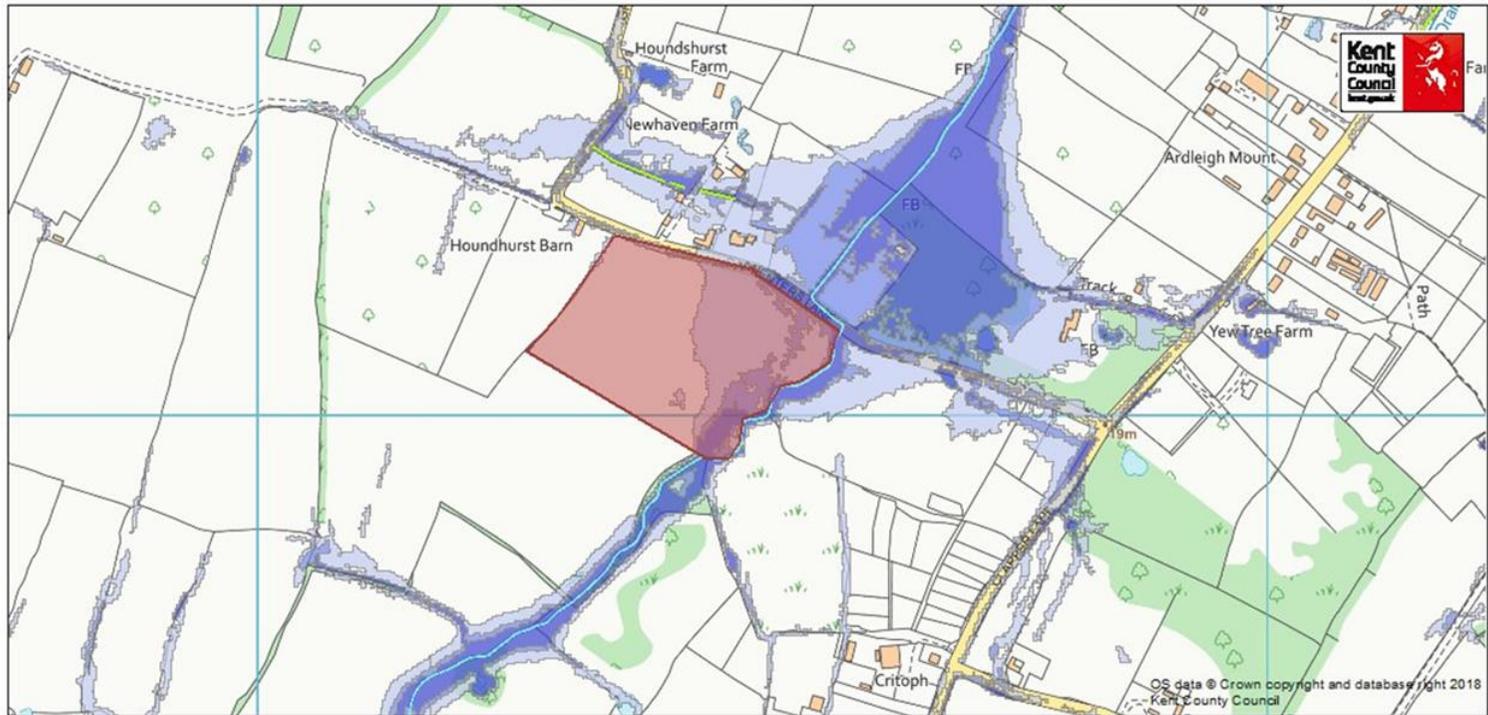


Map showing the location of the Carpenters Lane Proposed NFM Wetland Scheme.



Surface water flood map for the Carpenters Lane Wetland NFM Scheme

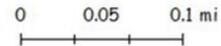
Surface water flood map for Carpenters NFM wetland project



- | | |
|---|--|
|  Drains Offline | Flood Map for Surface Water |
| Drains |  High |
|  FRM Indicative Main River |  Medium |
|  Other Rivers |  Low |
|  Undefined | |

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Staplehurst (NFM) wetland creation (Highwood Meadows) scheme Project outline cont.

The **Staplehurst (NFM) Wetland Creation (Highwood Meadows) Scheme** comprises of a series of online interconnected wetland features and habitats (scrapes, ephemeral ponds/pools, reedbeds, swales) excavated at different levels to accommodate differing amounts of water depending on the season and frequency of high intensity local rainfall events. (See general arrangements draft design created by Dr Matt Simpson).

A robust leaky dam structure will be constructed in the existing channel of the Overbridge Stream, this intervention would be designed to allow fish passage and low flows to pass beneath it unrestricted during normal conditions.

During peak flows, the structure would be designed to impound the flow, encouraging excess flood water to be diverted from the Overbridge Stream via a swale inlet and stored in the wetland area.

This 2.2 -hectare wetland area will be created at different levels and designed to incorporate a variety of different habitats (including scrapes, reedbed etc.) that would suit different species at different time of the year, whilst also providing the opportunity for flood storage.

A protective bund would be created around the perimeter of the wetland to protect neighbouring properties in Grave Lane from flooding and prevent water from flowing backwards in to surrounding arable fields.

This simple bund would be created using spoil from the creation of the main wetland area and sow with an appropriate wildflower seed mix and planted with native tree species.

The landowners Lou and Richard Carpenter are supportive of the project as the field is currently too waterlogged to be economically farmed as part of an arable rotation. (Current designation of field – Improved grassland – Arable & Horticultural (Kent Habitat Survey 2012))

In terms of flood alleviation, the project would allow for the storage of a considerable amount of water (Approx. 3,700 cubic metres, dependent on final design) and assist in reducing peak flows in the Overbridge Stream as it flows Northeast towards to the River Beult.

The scheme would also improve the throughput of water through the east of Marden village, and encourage flows away from the Hen & Duckhurst scheme.

Budget and associated costs-

Environment Agency funding - £46,398

Kent Countryside Management Partnerships (in kind volunteer contribution) - £2,400

Costs to date –

Item	Supplier	Associated costs
Environmental/Ecological reports	Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre	£280
Topographical survey	Canterbury City Council – Consultative Engineering dept.	£1,914
Wetland design	Dr Matt Simpson	£3,602
Reptile survey	Kent Countryside Management Partnerships	£198.80
Reptile survey materials (roofing felt)	Kent Countryside Management Partnerships	£40.00
Project coordinator	Kent Countryside Management Partnerships	£500
Total of spend to date -		£6,534.80
Remaining funds available		£39,863.20

Projected project costs

Item	Supplier	Associated costs
Planning permission fees etc.	Maidstone B.C.	£2,500
Community engagement events etc.	Kent Countryside Management Partnerships	£750
Additional input by Dr Matt Simpson	Dr Matt Simpson	£1,500
Coordination of planning permission	Kent Countryside Management Partnerships	£1,000
Ground works – excavation of wetlands (excavating, shaping & compacting for main wetland features, excavating for swales, earth bund construction & shaping, • Transport & welfare)	Costing`s based on a quote received from Hugh Pearl (land drainage) engineering Ltd	£40,000
Delivery project management	Kent Countryside Management Partnerships	£1,250

Materials for construction of leaky dam	Torryhill Fencing	£1,500
Design for leaky dam	Kent Countryside Management Partnerships	£500
Delivery of leaky dam construction	SWS Countryside	£2,500
Trees, sundries and wildflower seed	Emorsgate seeds etc.	£3,000
Planting and sowing of seed etc.	Kent Countryside Management Partnerships	£750
Reeds and marginal aquatic plants	British Flora	£2,000
Delivery of reed planting etc	Kent Countryside Management Partnerships	£500
Incidental materials	Various	£2,000
Projected costs		£53,250
Additional funding required to manage shortfall in project costs		£13,352

Agenda Item 20

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

Agenda Item 21

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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