

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE
POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 APRIL 2023

Present:

Committee Members:	Councillor Garten (Chairman) and Councillors Brice, Forecast, Fort, Harper, Hastie, Hinder, Mrs Joy and Naghi
Lead Members:	Councillors Burton (Leader of the Council) and Russell (Lead Member for Leisure and Arts)

127. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Bryant and Mrs Gooch.

128. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following Substitute Members were noted:

Councillor Brice for Councillor Bryant
Councillor Mrs Joy for Councillor Mrs Gooch

129. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

130. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members although Councillor Cleator attended the meeting as an observer.

131. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures of interest by Members or Officers.

132. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

The Chairman and Councillor Harper stated that they had been lobbied on agenda item 16 (Mote Park Kiosk).

133. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

134. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7 MARCH 2023

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed.

135. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

136. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS

There were no questions from local residents.

137. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

138. FORWARD PLAN RELATING TO THE COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

It was noted that currently there were no items in the Forward Plan relating to the Committee's terms of reference other than the four reports on the agenda.

139. BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN ANNUAL REVIEW

The Lead Member for Leisure and Arts introduced a report setting out a revised Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan following the annual review. The Lead Member explained that:

- An annual review process was stipulated as part of the Action Plan to ensure that actions were still relevant, to update on any new Government approaches or science-based targets and to scrutinise whether actions were progressing.
- At the last update of the Action Plan at the meeting of the Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee on 15 November 2022, the Leader of the Council outlined the proposed annual review process. The actions within the Action Plan would be separated into those within the Council's direct control and those it could influence. The wording would be updated to make it clearer and more concise, and the actions would be aligned to the relevant Lead Members and presented to the respective Policy Advisory Committees.
- The Committee was asked to review the actions relevant to its terms of reference (Actions 7.1 and 7.5) and recommend any additions, deletions or amendments. Once approved the revised Action Plan would be published on the Council's website and the Officers would continue to implement the actions reporting every six months on progress to the relevant Policy Advisory Committees.

In response to comments and questions:

- The Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager advised the Committee that in terms of delivering the Council's 2030 Net Zero Commitment in relation to its buildings and fleet:

Decarbonisation studies had been completed for each of the main buildings (Museum, Archbishop's Palace and Leisure Centre) within the remit of this Committee and these had provided a good indication of what might be achieved. It was now a matter of developing detailed schemes and applying

for funding. A public sector decarbonisation scheme would open in September and a bid for funding to do retrofits would be submitted although the timeline and priorities had still to be decided.

There was now a Green Fleet Strategy in place and every time a vehicle came to the end of its life, it would be upgraded to an electric vehicle alternative.

- The Leader of the Council explained that it was an action going forward to ensure that carbon cost budgeting is part of the procurement and decision-making process to reduce the Council's carbon footprint from contracts and services.

The Committee welcomed the revised Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan as a comprehensive, operational document, but recognised that there was work to be done to ensure the actions are delivered.

Having considered the actions falling within its remit, the Committee

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE EXECUTIVE: That the updated Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan be approved.

140. TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY UPDATE

Councillor David Burton, the Leader of the Council, introduced a report providing an update on the preparation of a Town Centre Strategy and setting out recommendations to be made to the Executive on the proposed seven key areas for focus, higher level spatial framework and missions that had emerged from the initial phase of analytical work. It was noted that:

- Specialist consultants had been appointed to work alongside Officers, Members and stakeholders to prepare a Member-led Town Centre Strategy. Work had begun on data collection and analysis and there had been engagement with key stakeholders including walkabouts around the town involving the most affected Ward Members. The Town Centre Strategy was for the benefit of the whole of the Borough. It was important for everyone, but High Street Ward Members and Members representing adjoining Wards had a lot to contribute.
- Town centres were changing with less retail and more leisure and residential use. The aim was to be ambitious and bold and, once finalised, the Town Centre Strategy would provide a thirty-year vision and direction for the town centre.
- The proposed seven key areas for focus, higher level spatial framework and missions would be used to inform the preparation of the draft Town Centre Strategy which, it was expected, would be ready for consultation during the Summer.

In response to comments and questions:

Ms Santini of consultants, We Made That, advised the Committee that:

- The timetable for the preparation of the Town Centre Strategy was on track. Regular meetings were taking place with the client team and there had been engagement with the Executive and other stakeholders.
- Points about considering the aspirations of local residents for high-quality services, facilities and green spaces etc. were valid and would be picked up through the preparation of the Strategy.
- Shovel ready projects should have a purpose and be in line with what the Council wanted to achieve in the town centre. The Town Centre Strategy document would help in bidding for resources and encouraging inward investment.
- An engagement plan was in place. Four deep dive workshops had been held with invited stakeholders centred around culture and arts, health and wellbeing, accessibility and transport etc. The workshops had been held at the Museum. Attendances had been lower than anticipated so one or two summits would be held with larger groups of people with the aim of building on the engagement undertaken at the end of last year. A public event was also planned to seek a range of opinions.
- Alternative venues such as the Town Hall and/or a vacant unit in The Mall would be considered in future due to the higher footfall in those areas.

The Leader of the Council explained that the initial work had been to establish the baseline, gather the facts and seek initial feedback from specific stakeholders and other interested parties. There would be opportunities going forward for Members to be involved in the engagement process.

During the discussion, it was pointed out and accepted that the Wards affected also included Bridge Ward and that some minor typographical and formatting changes were needed in relation to missions 2 and 3. The Committee supported the recommendations set out in the report subject to these changes. It was also suggested that there should be stakeholder meetings for local residents and workshops for Members.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE EXECUTIVE:

1. That the update on progress towards producing a Town Centre Strategy for Maidstone town centre be noted.
2. That subject to the minor typographical and formatting changes identified during the discussion, the proposed seven key areas for focus, higher level spatial framework and missions that have emerged from the analytical phase of work be agreed.

Note: Councillor Hastie entered the meeting during consideration of this item (7.15 p.m.). She stated that she had no disclosures of interest or of lobbying.

141. MAIDSTONE TOWN CENTRE BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT ROUND TWO

The Leader of the Council introduced a report providing an update on the One Maidstone Business Improvement District (BID) Round Two for Maidstone Town Centre and seeking endorsement of the BID.

The Leader of the Council explained that:

- A BID was a defined area in which a levy was charged on all business rate payers in addition to the business rates bill. This levy was used to deliver projects and activities that the businesses themselves had identified as being beneficial for their area.
- One Maidstone had been operating the BID for Maidstone town centre since a successful ballot to establish the BID in June 2018. The maximum period that a BID could charge a levy enabling it to operate was five years and if a BID wanted to continue it had to hold a new ballot. One Maidstone was reaching the end of its first five-year period and had requested a ballot for a second term.
- During its first term, the BID had funded a variety of different projects including town centre CCTV monitoring, enhanced town centre cleaning and events such as the Christmas trail and Christmas lights.
- The Council had 24 properties in the proposed BID levy area and would therefore have 24 votes in the BID round two ballot and pay a levy on those properties (£23,675 per annum). He would welcome the Committee's views on the way the Council should vote in the ballot and whether the Council should fund the collection of votes from businesses.

In response to comments and questions:

The Economic Development Manager advised the Committee that:

- In the first round, the Council paid for an independent courier to collect the votes at the request of the BID to encourage business owners to return their votes to be counted.
- There were 523 properties in the proposed BID levy area of which 24 were owned by the Council.

The Leader of the Council explained that it was his understanding that it was for the consortium of businesses behind the BID to set the area of ambition.

Mindful of the additional benefits the BID had brought to the town centre, the Committee supported the recommendations set out in the report including delegated authority being given to the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement to cast the Council's votes in favour of a BID round two and the sum of £5,000 being paid towards the courier costs for the ballot.

During the discussion, it was pointed out that the wards affected also included East ward and this was accepted.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE EXECUTIVE:

1. That it be noted that One Maidstone has served notice of their intention to seek a renewal ballot to the Secretary of State and Maidstone Borough Council.

2. That the BID be endorsed.
3. That delegated authority be given to the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement to cast the Council's 24 votes in favour of a BID round two.
4. That £5,000 be paid towards the courier costs for the ballot.
5. That if the ballot for a second term of the BID is successful, a new operating agreement and a baseline agreement be entered into with the BID organisation, as was undertaken for the first term of the BID.

142. MOTE PARK KIOSK

Councillor Russell, the Lead Member for Leisure and Arts, introduced a report concerning the proposed upgrading of the toilet block and kiosk in the northern section of Mote Park near to the water sports centre to provide services for park users and extend the life of the building.

It was noted that:

- The proposed layout for the refurbished block incorporated community rooms, unisex toilets with baby change facilities, changing facilities and showers/wet room. Electrical outlets could be provided to enable mobile catering to be deployed on a temporary basis without the need for generators.
- Provision of £250,000 had already been made for the project in the Capital Programme. Planning permission would be required, and pre-application planning advice was being sought on the indicative design.

In response to comments and questions:

- The Lead Member for Leisure and Arts advised the Committee that the budget included a contingency provision. The aim was to achieve best value for residents' money. She suggested that the proposed delegation to the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement relating to the submission of the relevant planning applications and the procurement process be amended to be in consultation with her as an additional safeguard.
- The Leisure Manager advised the Committee that in terms of public access to the building, the Officers had been working with the groups who used the lake and some of the facilities there already and the design had been developed with their input. It was proposed to regularise some of the licences with users of the lake and include the building. The operator of the water sports centre would be willing to look after the changing, toilet and shower facilities. Having people in and around the building would assist with the management of that area of the park.

The Leader of the Council emphasised the need to deliver a quality facility in a sensible way.

The Committee welcomed the project, considering that it would be a great asset, and supported the recommendations as amended.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE LEAD MEMBER FOR LEISURE AND ARTS:

1. That the option to proceed with the facility mix as depicted in the indicative design for Mote Park kiosk be approved.
2. That the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement be given delegated authority, in consultation with the Lead Member for Leisure and Arts, to submit relevant planning applications, lead a procurement process and invite tenders for the delivery of the works in accordance with the total project budget.
3. That after the completion of the tender process, delegated authority is given to the Head of Mid-Kent Legal Services to enter into such contracts as required to complete the contract award.

Note: During the discussion, Councillor Harper stated that he was the Chairman of the Maidstone Cycle Campaign Forum which had been in correspondence with the Lead Member for Leisure and Arts regarding a potential conflict of space in Mote Park between the ice cream van and cyclists. It was good news that once the kiosk was refurbished an external electricity supply for a catering/ice cream concession would be included as this would help address concerns about congestion.

143. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.