

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**PLANNING, INFRASTRUCTURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY
ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 7 DECEMBER 2023

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors Blackmore (Chairman), Cleator, Conyard, English, Mrs Grigg, Jones, McKenna, Spooner and Trzebinski
Cabinet Members:	Councillor Paul Cooper (Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development)

84. APOLOGIES OF ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kimmance.

85. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor English was present as Substitute Member for Councillor Kimmance.

86. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman stated that she had accepted an urgent update to Item 10 - Fees and Charges 2024/25, which contributed to the item's consideration.

87. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

88. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

89. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

90. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public, unless any Member of the Committee wishes to discuss Item 15 - Exempt Appendix to Item 14 - Statement of Common Ground - Lower Thames Crossing in which case the Committee would enter into closed session due to the possible disclosure of exempt information, for the reason specified having applied the public interest test.

91. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 NOVEMBER 2023

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed.

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

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan relating to the Committee's Terms of Reference be noted.

93. FEES AND CHARGES 2024/25

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development introduced the report, highlighting the urgent update provided which clarified that a fee increase had been wrongly attributed to Sandling Road Car Park and updated development control fees as these had not been set when the report was published.

The Cabinet Member stated that the proposed fees and charges would increase income relating to the Committee's remit by £250,000, representing a 4.6% increase in budget figures. There were currently no changes proposed to any car parking charges, as these were set at a level reflecting demand and intended to attract visitors to the town centre. Building Control and planning fees had increased in accordance with central government changes, with the latter increasing by 35% for major applications and 25% for all others.

In response to questions, the Cabinet Member stated that he was happy with the planning re-application fee set, with the pre-application increase due to the fee not having been increased in previous years. It was stated that the increase to some of the planning fees arose from being re-grouped into new charging groups, as opposed to increased fees.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That

1. The contents of the report, be noted;
2. The Fees & Charges policy, as detailed in Appendix B to the report, be noted; and
3. The Cabinet be recommended to approve the Fees & Charges as detailed in Appendix A to the report.

94. TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY UPDATE

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and stated that Group Leaders and the Town Centre Users Group had been consulted on the developing Town Centre Strategy (the Strategy). A draft Strategy was not yet ready for public consultation, as further evidence and data was required to support the Strategy's development. The Committee was asked to consider the proposed 'Next Steps' within section 3 of the report, with the Leader stating that he thought the transport and movement review should be realistic, as opposed to a wide-ranging review of the urban traffic control system.

The Committee raised a number of points on the Strategy's aims and contents, and in response the Leader stated that:

- The Lighting and Greening Strategy reports would be presented in January 2024, and were being supported by time-limited UK Shared Prosperity Funding. Additional funding could be provided by allocating the funds

designated for Creative Maker Spaces should it not be needed after further research and/or was not ready;

- A comprehensive review of town centre parking was expected, and would include assessing the viability of building properties with and without parking facilities and the impact of future technology alongside parallel streams of work such as the Integrated Transport Strategy Review;
- The Residents Survey questions looked to increase the Council's understanding of rural residents' visits to the town centre, with the town centre needing something different to increase visitor demand to the area. As an example, the Leisure and Hospitality offering was changing, with further research required.
- The demand for retail space was reducing, with the Council to consider options in response. It was stated that sites such as Bluewater were popular as they acted to serve the demand for the wider area, with a good transport system in place to support visitors in return; and
- Actions were being taken to improve town centre safety, including through local policing and One Maidstone. As a district authority, the Council was not able to intervene in the provision of police and health services but could act on aspects such as lighting and encouraging partner organisations to improve their service provision. It was important to talk about the positive aspects of the borough.

In response to the comments made, the Chief Executive stated that:

- The car parking strategy review would require a fundamental review of how the Council manages demand and supply and would involve a range of stakeholders to include residential and business parking;
- There was demand for a Creative Maker Space, with further research required into its placement and if and how the Council would promote the activity. There was a direct line of communication between the Council and Kent County Council on the matter;
- The 'Next Steps' suggested would include obtaining contemporary data to support the Council in looking ahead as part of the Strategy, and define what success would look like. Engagement from Members was important, with Members being community leaders;
- The council had worked closely with Kent Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner, having secured funding to support community safety initiatives which had led to significant improvements, although work would continue. A Crime Survey was conducted every few years, which directed the resources available to tackle the issues present;
- Members would be consulted on creating high quality town centre living, which would include discussing what they wished to achieve and what was viable, supported by case studies;
- Strategy and policy had a role in place making, with the example given of Jubilee Square whereby the Council's intervention had contributed to the site's

regeneration and resilience following Covid-19, to highlight the role the Council would have;

- Members had a role in promoting the positive aspects of Maidstone, through being Community Leaders.

During the discussion the Leader and the Chief Executive emphasised the Strategy's longevity in considering what actions to take, the level of appetite the Council should show in supporting and promoting change and the need to diversify the town centre's offering to maximise its viability into the future. The Head of Spatial Planning and Economic Development confirmed that an engagement strategy would be developed, to engage with Members and the Community across different age groups to obtain as many views as possible in drafting the Strategy to 2050.

Several Committee Members expressed concerns that whilst ambitious and aspirational, the report did not outline how the Council would achieve the ambitions set out and that the Strategy may not be achievable overall. References were made to matters such as maximising the river and improving community and traffic infrastructure as examples. Overall, support was expressed for recommending that the Cabinet approve the next steps of the Strategy's development.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That

1. The update report be noted; and
2. The next steps set out in Section 3 of the Report for the development of the Maidstone Town Centre Strategy, be approved.

Note: Councillor Grigg requested that her dissent with recommendation 1 be noted.

95. **KENT CYCLING AND WALKING INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN**

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development introduced the report and stated that Kent County Council would be adopting the Kent Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (the Plan). The Plan would be used primarily to support investment into walking and cycling across a 10-year period but would be a living document subject to regular review. The routes included in the consultation were outlined with it noted that the Maidstone Cycle Campaign Forum were also being consulted on the proposed response at appendix 1 to the report.

The Committee expressed support for the proposed response and suggested amendments, including that; Headcorn should be included as a rural service area and that the R14-02 proposal was unfeasible due to the section's poor maintenance and existing road space available, in part due to the current parking facilities and possible disruption to residents.

It was also noted that there was poor maintenance on the Medway towpath route, with some Members highlighting that the existing cycle paths and ways should be better maintained generally and expressing concern as to the practicality of a

proposed route in the Local Plan Review between Maidstone town centre and Lidsing Garden Community.

The Cabinet Member agreed to include the points raised in the consultation response relating to the proposed consultation route but suggested that Members should contact the relevant County Member or the Environmental Agency for overgrown vegetation along the Medway towpath.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET MEMBER: That the response to the consultation at Appendix 1 of the report be approved, including the Committee's additional comments.

96. MARDEN CONSERVATION APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development introduced the report and stated that the local ward Members had been consulted on the matter, item and their comments fed back to the team to inform the report.

The Committee expressed support for the proposal.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET MEMBER: That

1. The Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for Marden Conservation Area, attached at appendix 1 to the report, be approved for public consultation; and
2. Delegated powers be given to the Head of Development Management to undertake the necessary statutory requirements to undertake public consultation for the Marden Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.

97. STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND - LOWER THAMES CROSSING

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development introduced the report and advised that the decision was classified as urgent, with the call-in period having been waived by the Overview and Scrutiny Chairman and the Mayor to enable a response to the consultation to be submitted within the timeframe.

The Statement of Common Ground had been delayed whilst the Council waited for a response from National Highways on the Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) contained within the exempt appendix. The Cabinet Member wished to submit the SoCG, as a separate SoCG had been circulated by National Highways which the Council had not subscribed to.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET MEMBER: That the draft Statement of Common Ground on the Lower Thames Crossing between Maidstone Borough Council and National Highways, attached at Exempt Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

98. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.14 p.m.