

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

14TH APRIL 2015

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND
COMMUNITIES**

Report prepared by Fran Wallis
Date Issued: Friday 27th March

1. TOWN CENTRE VISIONING

1.1 Key Issue for Decision

- 1.1.1 To consider whether to provide the funding to further develop the Town Centre Visioning work.

1.2 Recommendation of the Director of Regeneration and Communities

- a) That the Maidstone Town Centre masterplanning and delivery programme is progressed prior to the adoption of the draft Economic Development Strategy.
- b) That approval is given to the expenditure set out in Table 1 in paragraph 1.3.8 to enable the development and delivery of the Town Centre Visioning work.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 1.3.1 Maidstone town centre is currently facing a number of challenges including:
- a) A decline in Maidstone's retail hierarchy position relative to other areas from 33rd in 2007 to 52nd in 2013, due to a lack of investment.
 - b) Vacancy rates are higher than some competing centres.
 - c) A lack of large units and sites to attract anchor retailers.
 - d) An under-representation in the mid/upper restaurant offer.
 - e) A lack of integration across the Town Centre with other retail sites across the river.

- f) Limited prospects for office stock in the town centre due to more attractive out-of-town business parks.
 - g) Congestion in the Town Centre and questions over sustainable access.
- 1.3.2 Since the summer 2014 officers have been working with consultants, ward councillors, group leaders and members of the Cabinet to discuss the future of the town centre, the challenges it faces and how to address them. These meetings have sought to obtain a broad consensus on the key issues, and form a basis on which to engage with stakeholders outside the Council.
- 1.3.3 Five broad themes have been agreed for consultation purposes:
- i) Town Centre Living.
 - ii) Employment and Retail.
 - iii) Culture and Leisure.
 - iv) Public Realm and Connectivity.
 - v) Transport.
- 1.3.4 A draft action plan (Appendix 1) has been produced which is broken down by these themes, and will be used as a starting point for the next phase of wider stakeholder engagement work.
- 1.3.5 Items in the draft action plan have been scored for consultation purposes based on their delivery timescale (short, medium, long-term), as well as their impact and the resource required to deliver each action. These scores have then been used to prioritise actions.
- 1.3.6 When scoring each action for its 'resource requirement' it is clear that a dedicated staffing resource is essential to carry out the work, and there will need to be a budget allocation to undertake specific work to progress the actions. The next stage is to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, from key landowners and stakeholders such as Kent County Council (KCC), retailers, other businesses, voluntary groups and the public. It is proposed that a programme manager is appointed to lead on all aspects of the Town Centre work. The Council's draft action plan will be used as a starting point for these discussions.
- 1.3.7 The proposed estimated expenditure will be based on the engagement with stakeholders and the agreed action plan and is set out in Table 1 below:

1.3.8 Table 1

Description	2015/16	2016/17	Total
Programme Manager	£50,000	£50,000	£100,000

(2 year fixed term incl. on costs)			
Stakeholder engagement and production of master plan.	£30,000	0	£30,000
Site survey and feasibility work for potential key site redevelopment	£25,000	£25,000	£50,000
Total	£105,000	£75,000	£180,000

1.3.9 Consultation on the draft Economic Development Strategy (EDS) finished on 23rd January 2015. A key priority within the draft EDS was Maidstone Town Centre. It was intended to report the findings of the consultation, together with any changes proposed to the draft strategy to Cabinet on 11 February 2015. This reporting timetable aligned with the next expected consultation on the draft Local Plan, in particular the work setting out the proposed changes to the allocation policies for employment and mixed use sites in response to representations made during the previous public consultation on the draft Local Plan. However, the combined factors of the extended Committee and Cabinet decision making process on the proposed Local Plan housing sites and the number and detail of the comments received on the draft EDS has meant that the timetable for consideration has been revised. A new meeting date is being identified which will need to take account of the local election period as well as the Council's changing governance arrangements and the move to the committee system.

1.3.10 Whilst the consultation attracted a large number of submissions there was universal support for the priority to enhance the Town Centre and therefore progressing this priority in advance of considering the other representations on the draft EDS is recommended.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 The 'do nothing' option:

The alternative action is to *not* agree to fund the work to progress the town centre visioning work. This is not recommended, as the work already identified to take forward the action plan would have to be carried out by existing members of staff, whose work-time is already allocated to other projects. Without a committed resource, the

programme of work would not be effectively carried out. The work undertaken to date has already identified the need for Maidstone town centre to improve its performance as the County Town and progressing the work identified is essential.

1.4.2 Reduce the size of the project:

A second alternative is to reduce the amount of investment in the project. However as set out above, the agreed aims and objectives for Maidstone Town Centre are ambitious. It is considered essential that Maidstone continues to be a town with a growing economy.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

- 1.5.1 Agreeing to fund the town centre visioning work, and appointing a Town Centre Programme Manager will support the Council's priorities "Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all" and "Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough."

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
Consultant and programme manager unsuccessful in engaging with stakeholders	D	2	The Economic Development team already have a good relationship with many stakeholders already. By using various channels of communication we can ensure we engage with a wide range of stakeholders.

(Likelihood: A = very high; B = high; C = significant; D = low; E = very low; F = almost impossible)

(Seriousness or Impact: 1= catastrophic; 2 = critical; 3 = marginal; 4 = negligible)

1.7 Other Implications

1. Financial
2. Staffing
3. Legal
4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment
5. Environmental/Sustainable Development

X
X
X
X
X

6. Community Safety
7. Human Rights Act
8. Procurement
9. Asset Management

X

1.7.1 Financial – the proposed costs are set out in 1.3.8, and total £180,000 over two years. The Budget Strategy 2015/16 was agreed at the Full Council meeting held on 25th February 2015. It stated that the delivery of the Economic Development Strategy should be funded from the additional resources retained by the Kent Business Rates Pool. Maidstone Borough Council entered into a pooling arrangement with Kent County Council (KCC) for business rates collected in 2014/15. The memorandum of understanding with KCC states that "...by working together we intend to increase the element of business rates retained within the district based pool area and to promote business rates growth. We will use the additional resources in the pool for two purposes:

- To enhance financial resilience for each of the pool members; and
- To promote further economic growth within the district based pool area."

1.7.2 The available budget from the Business Rates Pool for 2015/16 to fund the Economic Development Strategy was set at £266,000 by Council when agreeing the budget on 27 February 2015. An amendment to the Budget for 2015/16 was included within the Council decision and this set aside £50,000 from this funding to enable survey and feasibility work to be completed on one or more areas of the town centre that would benefit from regeneration and would provide a catalyst for further regeneration activity in the town. This project is incorporated in the costs set out at 1.3.8 split over the two years.

1.7.3 Cabinet previously considered business rates growth in relation to the Kent Pool for 2014/15 and identified growth of £100,000 this has not been incorporated into the 2014/15 budget and can be utilised for economic growth. The current outturn projection for 2014/15 would suggest that this sum will be available to the Council at the end of this year and it is proposed that the resources required for 2015/16, as set out in the table at 1.3.8, be taken from 2014/15 business rates growth. This option will enable a cautious approach to the utilisation of 2015/16 growth, thus ensuring growth is delivered prior to the commitment of the additional resources it will provide.

- 1.7.4 Staffing – to deliver this project an additional staff resource will be employed as a Town Centre Programme Manager on a fixed two year contract.
- 1.7.5 Legal – legal advice and guidance will be required as part of the Town Centre work.
- 1.7.6 Equality Impact Needs Assessment – the needs of all groups will be considered as part of the Town Centre Vision work.
- 1.7.7 Environmental/Sustainable Development - the Town Centre Vision work will incorporate environmental/sustainable development.
- 1.7.8 Procurement – any procurement will be undertaken in line with the council's procurement rules.

1.8 Relevant Documents

1.8.5 Appendices

1.8.6 Appendix 1: Draft Action Plan

1.8.7 Background Documents

Town Centre Study (produced by Urban Practitioners) 2010
Maidstone Town Centre Assessment (produced by DTZ)2013

IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

Yes

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No

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If yes, this is a Key Decision because:

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Wards/Parishes affected:

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