

Heritage, Culture & Leisure**3 November 2015**

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

No**Maidstone's Culture & Heritage Positioning Report**

Final Decision-Maker	Heritage, Culture & Leisure Committee
Lead Head of Service	Head of Commercial & Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Dawn Hudd, Head of Commercial & Economic Development
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the Committee notes the consultant's report at Appendix I.
2. The Committee supports the next steps as outlined in this report in section 4.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all -
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough -
 - Ensuring there are good leisure and cultural attractions

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Heritage, Culture & Leisure	03/11/2015

Maidstone's Culture & Heritage Positioning Report

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Maidstone Borough Council does not currently have a Culture and Heritage Strategy and this report brings together the work that has been carried out to date to develop a strategy to compliment the Council's Strategic Plan, Economic Development Strategy, Destination Management Plan and Festivals and Events Strategy.
 - 1.2 This report comments on the Consultant's report, which was commissioned to provide a position statement and which also contains a number of recommendations that the Council may wish to consider.
-

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 It is clear that Maidstone's Cultural and Heritage assets have an important role to play in the Borough's ambitions. There are strong links with the Council's Strategic Plan, Economic Development Strategy, Destination Management Plan and Festivals and Events Strategy.
- 2.2 Culture and Heritage are strong drivers for the economy, regeneration and sense of place and in recognition of this it was been agreed that work would be undertaken to scope out and formalise the Council's approach to Culture and Heritage by the production of a Culture and Heritage Strategy.
- 2.3 In February 2015 a specialist cultural consultant was appointed to lead on this work – Nick Ewbank from Nick Ewbank Associates (NEA). NEA is an innovative consultancy firm experienced in delivering creative solutions in the fields of culture, learning, regeneration, wellbeing and social cohesion.
- 2.4 The brief and objectives set for stage one of the work were to establish the appropriate balance for a Cultural and Heritage Strategy between the following themes:
 - Cultural Heritage – understanding and interpreting Maidstone's past in order shape its future
 - Cultural Assets - maintenance, usage and development
 - Festivals and Events – overview and opportunities for enhancement
 - Supporting and Developing Maidstone's Creative Economy – artists, cultural organisations, Creative Industries – fulfilling the growth potential
 - Building Social Capital, Health and Wellbeing through Culture – encouraging and developing cultural participation
 - Cultural Place Making: Maidstone town / rural areas; connectivity; twilight economy; future opportunities; identity.
- 2.5 A period of consultation and research has taken place, during which a wide number of partners and stakeholders have been interviewed including:
 - The Leaders of the Council's five political parties, the Chair and Vice chair of Heritage, culture and Leisure Committee.

- Maidstone BC – Alison Broom, Chief Executive.
- Key Council officers from the Museum and Economic Development.
- Arts Council England, Headley Swain – South East Area Director and colleagues John McPherson and Michael Cook.
- Kent County Council, Cabinet Member for Community Services – Mike Hill and Tony Witton, Arts and Culture Service Manager.
- Chair of Maidstone Economic Business Partnership and owner of Maidstone Studios, Geoff Miles.
- Maidstone Area Arts Partnership, Kent Scott.
- Hazlitt Theatre, Natalie Moor.
- Royal Society of Arts (RSA), Jonathan Schiffers, Joanna Massie and Brian Byers.
- Francis Knight, public art consultancy.
- Nucleus Arts, Dalia Halpern-Matthews.

2.6 Two study tours were also undertaken.

2.6.1 The first of these took place on 21 July and covered the Borough's main live music venues and some key heritage assets: Mote Hall, Source Bar, Lockmeadow Leisure Centre, Carriage Museum and Kent Life.

2.6.2 The second tour was undertaken with the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) on 30 September and included: Town Hall and Jubilee Square, Hazlitt Theatre and Earl Street, Week Street, Maidstone Museum and Bently Art Gallery, Brenchley Gardens, Kent History and Library Centre, viewing of Whatman Mill, the river Medway, viewing of the Powerhub, Archbishop's Palace, All Saints Church (including William Shipley's tomb), Carriage Museum, Peugeot Building Knight Rider Street (including William Shipley's former home), Gabriel's Hill and Maidstone Museum & Bently Art Gallery.

2.7 NEA also undertook a substantial amount of desk based research including the review of existing Council strategies and policies such as the Council's:

- Strategic Plan
- Economic Development Strategy
- Destination Management Plan
- Festivals and Events Strategy
- Community Development Strategy
- Emerging Town Centre Development Programme
- Maidstone Culture and Leisure Business Plan
- Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

3. REVIEW OF THE CONSULTANT'S REPORT

3.1 The context, introduction and outcomes outlined in the report at Appendix I are considered to be a sound reflection of Maidstone's current position in terms of our Culture and Heritage offer and the objectives set out in the initial brief.

3.2 The outcomes that could be achieved from the approach outlined are:

- Re-positioning Maidstone as a regional cultural hub

- Strengthening the county town brand
- Building the tourism economy
- Attracting significant inward investment
- Creating jobs and growing the local economy
- Positively influencing future residential and commercial development projects
- Building connections across the communities of Maidstone
- Contributing to improved health and wellbeing for local people
- Building community engagement and inspiring local people to participate in creative place-shaping for the future of their town.

3.3 The four cultural and heritage themes proposed in the report are:

3.2.1 Cultural Heritage: how we make the most of the rich cultural heritage which surrounds us by improving access, enhancements and presentation.

3.2.2 Cultural Place Making: working in partnership to identify projects to develop local heritage, identity and place; cultural engagement and community engagement.

3.2.3 Cultural Assets: identifying key projects which can build on existing strengths to make a substantial and lasting difference to Maidstone's culture and heritage offer.

3.2.4 The Creative Economy: the Council and its partners foster growth of existing and new clusters of artists and creative businesses.

3.4 These four themes accurately reflect the issues raised by all those who were consulted and the references to culture and heritage in other Council documents and national guidance.

4. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

4.1 The Consultant's report makes a number of recommendations based on the four themes described at 3.2, some of which are very ambitious and would require significant resources. However, in the short term, there is much that can be done by linking the themes to existing and on-going projects and work streams.

4.1.1 Theme 1 – Cultural Heritage.

This theme can be linked to the new and on-going work around the Town Centre Development Programme. The visioning work undertaken for this process identified culture and leisure as an important theme and made reference to the creation of a cultural quarter and also recognised the importance of connectivity and public realm. This of course is relevant only to the town centre and consideration will need to be given in the future about the culture and heritage assets in the rest of the borough.

4.1.2 Theme 2 – Cultural Place Making.

Work has already commenced through collaboration with the RSA, and the study tour undertaken with them on 30 September, as part of the research they have been funded to do by Heritage Lottery looking at Heritage, identity and place.

The RSA's project aligns very well with what Maidstone is setting out to achieve and their research shows that "the idea of place (as in the character and qualities of specific places) rarely links to identity and heritage". In Maidstone's case this linkage is exactly what the town wants to explore – for example religion, rivers, roads and railways shaped the town and all continue to have major influences on it as a place; understanding these historic factors is essential if sustainable solutions are to be found to some of the town's key present day challenges such as congestion, air quality/public health and image/identity.

Maidstone has a strong link to the RSA through William Shipley one of its founders who was born here and is buried in Maidstone. We have agreed to participate in a pilot project with the RSA which is being scoped out at the moment. An update will be provided at the committee meeting.

4.1.3 Theme 3 – Cultural Assets.

We are in the process of setting up a Museums Strategic Board which will work with the Council to develop a Museums 20 year Strategic Development Plan. The future of the Carriage Museum will be considered as part of this plan and an options appraisal developed.

The potential for a new dedicated performance venue will continue to be considered through the Town Centre Development Programme.

4.1.4 Theme 4 – the Creative Economy

This sector is referenced in the Economic Development Strategy as being an important growth area. The creative industries are increasingly recognised as one of the UK's competitive strengths in the global economy. There were over 2700 jobs in the broad creative industries sector in Maidstone in 2012, representing 3.8% of employment, which is above the Kent average (3.1%) but below the national average (4.3%). Support for this sector will be developed through the EDS Action Plan section B and a pilot outreach project will be considered from the Business Terrace.

We will also work with Maidstone Area Arts Partnership to enable us to capture the views of their members.

5. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Officers recommend that the approach for further development of this work stream outlined at section 4 is approved by members.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 Extensive consultation has already taken place as outline in section 2, this has been with key stakeholders, partners, venues and people operating in the cultural sector.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 The development of Maidstone's culture and heritage offer will be taken forward as outlined at section 4.

8. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	Culture and Heritage are important in the delivery of both of the Council's corporate objectives of keeping Maidstone and attractive place for all and securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough.	Head of Commercial and Economic Development 22/10/2015
Risk Management	None	
Financial		[Section 151 Officer & Finance Team]
Staffing	None at this time.	Head of Commercial and Economic Development 22/10/2015
Legal	Much of the proposed work will require contracts to be drawn up, which will need to be issued in compliance with both the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council's Constitution. It would be of assistance if a register of proposed/possible contractual requirements could be drawn up as part of this project.	Legal Team
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	None	
Environmental/Sustainable Development	None	
Community Safety	None	
Human Rights Act	None	

Procurement	None	
Asset Management	None	

9. REPORT APPENDICES

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

- Appendix I: Maidstone Culture & Heritage Positioning Report Oct 2015

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None