

Future of Leisure Provision in Maidstone

Final Decision-Maker	Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	John Foster, Acting Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Mike Evans
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

With three key strategic elements impacting on Maidstone at the same time it is important that Maidstone plans for the next 20 years of leisure provision. The Maidstone Leisure Centre contract, the forecasted population growth and the expected development in the borough make this the right time to plan how Maidstone will provide leisure opportunities to residents and visitors in the future.

This report makes the following recommendations to Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee

1. That a stakeholder engagement exercise be run to understand the feasibility of recommendations in the Sports Facilities Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy and to shape the future of sport and leisure provision in the borough.
2. That the stakeholder engagement frames future leisure plans for the borough alongside its existing commitments including the future of Maidstone Leisure Centre.
3. That the leisure centre surplus share be used to fund a fixed-term project officer post at a cost of £18,865 per annum to support the stakeholder engagement exercise.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee	5 March 2019

Future of Leisure Provision in Maidstone

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Maidstone's population is growing and ageing. Its sport and leisure needs will be changing and Maidstone Borough Council needs to ensure that what is on offer in the borough caters for residents as best it can.
- 1.2 The Sports Facilities Strategy (SFS) and Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS), both from Ploszajski Lynch Consulting Ltd and available as background papers 2 and 3, will form part of the council's evidence base for the review of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan and will inform development management decisions.

They will provide an evidence base for future budgetary needs or funding applications. Both strategies assess the quantity, quality, accessibility and availability of indoor and outdoor sports facilities and pitches in the borough and forecast needs to 2031.

Strategic Context

- 1.3 The Sports Facilities Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy reference the local and national strategies with which they share impacts and ambitions. Below are the related strategies:

- Maidstone Borough Council's Strategic Plan 2015 – 2020 (due to be replaced by the 2018 – 2045 Strategic Plan)
- Maidstone Borough Local Plan
- National Planning Policy Framework
- Kent Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Kent Sport's Strategic Framework
- Government's Sports Strategy
- Sport England Strategy

The Sports Facilities Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy provide a good evidence base for planning policy and support the strategy work of national and local partners.

Population

- 1.4 Maidstone is the most populous of the Kent districts. The 2011 census measured the population as 155,143. 107,627 people live in the town. The remainder live in the rural service centres and surrounding villages.
- 1.5 Kent County Council's Housing Led Forecasts (2018) quote the current Maidstone population as being 167,700, based on ONS 2017 mid-year estimates. The housing led forecast is an 18.3% increase 198,500 people by 2037.

- 1.6 Maidstone’s population is ageing. The population forecasts expect growth to be as per the table below:

Age category	2017 population	2037 population	Total increase	Percentage increase
Total population	167,700	198,500	30,800	18.3%
0 – 15 years	32,900	36,100	3,200	9.8%
16 – 64 years	102,800	113,600	10,800	10.5%
65+ years	32,100	48,800	16,700	52.2%

Figures taken from Kent County Council Housing Led Forecasts 2018 (Background paper 4)

- 1.7 Maidstone’s population is growing and ageing. Future leisure provision must take this in to account and be tailored to the needs of the future population as much as possible.

Health

- 1.8 The borough’s life expectancy rates are better than the national average but excess weight inequalities in the adult and child populations do need to be addressed. Sport and leisure provision are key to tackling these health inequalities.

The borough’s ageing population is likely to show increased rates of age-related diseases and illnesses. Physical activity and social prescribing are ideal counter measures to age-related conditions. Leisure provision in Maidstone will continue to deliver health-related benefits to its residents.

Sporting participation and physical activity

- 1.9 Leisure provision will continue to be important for the borough’s sporting participation levels. Regular sporting participation provides all residents with health benefits and also provides social benefits in the form of coaching and volunteering opportunities. It continues to provide a platform for people to reach their sporting potential, which for some residents is international and professional sport.

Sporting participation in the borough is above the Kent average. 77.2% of residents are described as either fairly active or active, using Sport England Active Lives measures, compared to 75.9% across the county. This leaves 22.8% of Maidstone’s adult population needing a leisure provision that persuades them to be active.

Maidstone Leisure Centre

- 1.10 The growth in population comes at a time when Maidstone Leisure Centre, the borough’s flagship sports centre, has five years left to run on its current 15-year management contract. The oldest part of the building is approximately 40 years old. The pool and reception area opened in 1991.

The condition of the leisure centre building is unknown and therefore it is not certain if a similar 15-year contract will be possible in 2024.

It is highly likely that future capital works will be required, but the extent of those is unknown at this time, as is the cost effectiveness of repairing an ageing building.

That condition survey work will need to be done as part of the re-tender process for the Maidstone Leisure Centre contract, which expires in 2024. Knowing the condition of the building sooner than that will identify what the future of Maidstone Leisure Centre looks like.

As such a pivotal piece of leisure infrastructure its future will have a large impact on Maidstone Borough Council's other plans for the borough.

The population growth, coupled with the forthcoming leisure centre contract renewal, make this a crucial time for planning how Maidstone wishes to manage its leisure provision in the next 20 years. Future plans need to reflect these two key strategic elements.

Planning for the Future of Leisure

1.11 At Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee on 4 September 2018 it was resolved:

- 1) That the Sports Facilities Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy form part of the Council's evidence base be noted and the comments on the documents be referred to Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee for consideration prior to re-engagement with key stakeholders and all Ward Councillors;
- 2) That the Committee conduct an in-depth review of Sports Provision in the Borough once the new Leisure Officer has been appointed and the draft Sports Facilities and Playing Pitch Strategies have been finalised;
- 3) That the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee are recommended to expedite the consultation with Ward Councillors on the draft Sports Facilities and Playing Pitch Strategies;
- 4) That the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee are recommended to consider the accessibility and affordability of facilities in the borough.

Working with Maidstone Borough Council's Transformation and Digital Services team and the Policy and Information Manager the leisure manager will begin work on the actions as resolved in points 1) and 2) on 4 September 2018, namely:

- Engagement with key stakeholder and all Ward Councillors
- Conduct an in-depth review of Sports Provision in the borough

These two actions have been formalised in to a list of project objectives and aspirations.

Project Objectives and Aspirations

1.12 We want to achieve:

- A vibrant sport, leisure and culture offer which is enjoyed by residents and attractive to visitors
- An improved leisure offer that contributes to increased sporting participation and physical activity levels in the borough
- Health inequalities and issues are addressed and factored in to future provision
- Facilities are fit for purpose and tailored to the needs of the borough
- Facilities provide opportunities for coaching and volunteering
- Facilities are operated in a way that maximises their use and financial performance
- Needs and issues in rural areas are considered as part of the borough-wide plan but localised challenges are understood
- Usage agreements are discussed with schools and other private facilities

1.13 We want to understand:

- Current trends in sports and leisure
- Future trends in sports and leisure, particularly from smart technology, and what can be expected for Maidstone
- Likely locations of population growth
- Saturation points of existing clubs and venues, can growth be accommodated
- Barriers to greater participation on a local level
- The appetite for investment in the leisure sector from private operators
- What the local leisure market can achieve without any council intervention
- What will help us stay on top of leisure trends in future

1.14 We want to explore:

- Future options for Maidstone Leisure Centre's next management contract
- The role of the Maidstone Leisure Trust
- How can health, physical activity and leisure work hand in hand for the benefit of everyone
- Feasibility of additional council-owned sports facilities in the borough of Maidstone
- Feasibility of large developments including sports facilities
- Feasibility for additional 3G football pitches in the borough
- How can leisure sector manage itself in Maidstone to ensure wide success and mutual benefit
- Future ways of working

1.15 The table below maps these objectives against where the answer can be explored and discovered. In some cases the answers will be available in Maidstone. For others the answers will need to be sought from further afield.

Where answers can be found in Maidstone that means the answer is not necessarily with Maidstone Borough Council. This column also includes other Maidstone-based organisations and groups.

The external partners column represents partner organisations not based in Maidstone. This includes Kent-based and nationwide partner organisations with whom we have an established relationship already.

The in industry column represents answers that would need to come from industry experts or from case studies from other local authorities. Understanding where the answers are will help decide the best way to explore and discover them.

Project objective/outcome	Where is the answer?		
	In Maidstone	External partner	In industry
Objectives resolved at 4 Sep HCL meeting			
Engagement with key stakeholder and all Ward Councillors	✓		
Conduct an in-depth review of Sports Provision in the borough	✓		
Section total	2	0	0
Things to achieve			
A vibrant sport, leisure and culture offer which is enjoyed by residents and attractive to visitors	✓	✓	
An improved leisure offer that contributes to increased sporting participation and physical activity levels in the borough	✓	✓	
Health inequalities and issues are addressed and factored in to future provision	✓	✓	
Facilities are fit for purpose and tailored to the needs of the borough	✓		
Facilities provide opportunities for coaching and volunteering	✓	✓	
Facilities are operated in a way that maximises their use and financial performance	✓	✓	
Needs and issues in rural areas are considered as part of the borough-wide plan but localised challenges are understood	✓		
Usage agreements are discussed with schools and other private facilities	✓	✓	
Section total	8	6	0

Things to understand			
Current trends in sports and leisure		✓	✓
Future trends in sports and leisure, particularly from smart technology, and what can be expected for Maidstone		✓	✓
Likely locations of population growth	✓		
Saturation points of existing clubs and venues, can growth be accommodated?	✓		
Barriers to greater participation on a local level	✓	✓	
The appetite for investment in the leisure sector from private operators		✓	✓
What the local leisure market can achieve without any council intervention	✓	✓	✓
What will help us stay on top of leisure trends in future	✓	✓	✓
Section total	5	6	5
Things we want to explore			
Future options for Maidstone Leisure Centre's next management contract		✓	✓
The role of the Maidstone Leisure Trust	✓	✓	✓
How can health, physical activity and leisure work hand in hand for the benefit of everyone		✓	✓
Feasibility of additional council-owned sports facilities in the borough	✓		
Feasibility of large developments including sports facilities	✓		
Feasibility for additional 3G football pitches in the borough	✓	✓	
How can leisure sector manage itself in Maidstone to ensure wide success and mutual benefit	✓	✓	
Future ways of working and future structures to support that	✓	✓	✓
Section total	6	6	4
Overall total	21	18	9

Stakeholder Engagement

1.16 Key to the scoping phase is engaging with key stakeholders in the borough in a way that enables them to share information, thoughts and comments.

The key groups to consult with, in no particular order and not exhaustive, include:

- Sport England
- Kent Sport
- Public Health England
- Clinical Commissioning Group
- Ward councillors
- Parish councils
- Maidstone Leisure Trust
- Council-let facilities
- Local sports bodies and leagues
- Local sports clubs with their own facilities
- Local sports clubs without their own facilities
- Private sector providers and facility operators
- Schools
- Community groups
- Charities

1.17 The Policy and Information Manager and Transformation and Digital Services Team will advise on the best way to engage with the different stakeholder groups and Ward Councillors.

The approach taken with each group will need to be tailored to the group's needs. It is important that people can engage with the process in an easy and effective way and that the process makes people feel comfortable, relaxed and enable them to make valuable contributions

The process will take approximately 18 months to complete and once people have been welcomed in to the process it will be prudent for there to be a repeat engagement mechanism for them to add further comments and follow up information at later dates.

It is anticipated the methods used to engage with stakeholders will include:

- Formal meetings and ongoing dialogues
- Attendance by key community representatives at committee meetings
- Forums in relaxed settings
- Workshops
- Open consultation comments facility

Borough-wide Approach

1.18 Key to future leisure provision is ensuring plans work for everyone as best they can.

Population growth will be borough-wide. The Local Plan identifies key development sites and leisure provision must complement the new areas of development as well as supporting population growth in existing areas.

Maidstone benefits from rural service centres and villages as well as a thriving town centre. The needs of the residents in all areas will have lots of similarities but they will also have differences. Understanding this in the scoping phase is key to the creation of effective future plans.

- 1.19 The future of leisure provision needs to include opinions and input from residents who do not currently engage in sport and leisure, which is a key driver for health and physical activity levels. The current leisure offer in Maidstone is not appealing to, or catering for, a large percentage of people. Understanding the reasons for that will help shape future provision so that it meets the needs of most people.
- 1.20 The next step in providing a successful future of leisure provision for Maidstone is to work the Sports Facilities Strategy and the Playing Pitch Strategy in to future plans for Maidstone Borough Council's leisure offer.

This builds on the two resolved actions from the 4 September HCL meeting and the other objectives, aspirations and outcomes listed in table 2. This feasibility work contains finding answers that are either in Maidstone; with a partner organisation, ranging from local to national level; or with industry experts.

The locations of those answers can be weighted when deciding options for how the stakeholder engagement can be delivered and managed.

2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

Do Nothing

- 2.1 Maidstone Borough Council does not need to do this work. It can leave leisure provision to the third sector, the private sector and allow market forces to dictate its future direction.

The Sports Facilities Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy would exist as part of the council's evidence base for the review of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan, to be adopted by Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee, and will inform development management decisions.

This option would go against the resolved action of the 4 September 2018 Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee meeting and is not recommended.

Consider the future of Maidstone Leisure Centre separately

- 2.2 Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee has the option to consider the renewal of the Maidstone Leisure Centre contract in isolation, without considering the parallel issue of future provision for a growing and ageing population.

This option would see both work strands progressed without linking them together. Decisions made in each work strand would have the potential to cause duplication, omission and financial complications.

For these reasons it is best to consider the two linked issues alongside each other and therefore managing the contractual renewal of Maidstone Leisure Centre and any capital upgrade works that would be required, without ensuring they complement the needs of the rest of the borough, is not recommended.

Use Maidstone Borough Council's surplus share from the leisure centre contract to conduct stakeholder engagement that jointly addresses options for future leisure provision and future options for Maidstone Leisure Centre.

- 2.3 This option ensures that the future of leisure provision includes the two main strategic elements affecting the borough in the medium term future, and ensures they are done in conjunction with each other so that plans and actions are complementary.

The format of the stakeholder engagement will be designed in collaboration with Maidstone Borough Council's Transformation and Digital Services Team and the Policy and Information Manager and use the weighting of information in table 2 when deciding the most appropriate way to direct funding. **This is the preferred option.**

3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 As outlined in section 1 this option ensures the two strategic elements of the Maidstone Leisure Centre contract and the borough's growing and ageing population are managed in parallel.
- 3.2 The leisure budget currently has a surplus share from the Maidstone Leisure Centre contract of approximately £44,000. It is recommended that these funds are used to support the stakeholder engagement work for a period of 18 months. There are no contractual restrictions on what the council can use its surplus share from the leisure centre operations for.

Managing Stakeholder Engagement In House

- 3.3 The objectives and outcomes in table 2 will form the basis of the stakeholder engagement. The locations of the answers show that the majority of the information required is available from organisations within the borough, or with an established partnership or relationship to Maidstone Borough Council. For this reason it is recommended that the funds are used to recruit a project officer who will co-ordinate the engagement period and schedule the meetings, workshops and visits that it will comprise.
- 3.4 The project officer would be recruited on a part-time, fixed-term basis and would be managed by the leisure manager with direction and guidance from

the Policy and Information Manager and the Digital Transformation Team. They would monitor and co-ordinate comments and submissions from community groups and organisations.

The £44,000 budget would cover the cost of a project officer, the cost of the engagement workshops and forums and allow contingency for any industry consultancy needed for outstanding project objectives for which answers are not found locally.

- 3.5 The job evaluation panel have evaluated the leisure project officer post and deemed it to be grade 7. A project officer at the top of grade 7 working 3 days per week will cost £18,865 per annum with on costs included. It will be possible to employ the project officer for 24 months to support the entire consultation period.
- 3.6 Managing the engagement in house enables Maidstone Borough Council to be flexible over the engagement period. We would be flexible to the needs of community groups and would not have a limit on the number of engagement sessions there would be. It would enable us to maintain dialogue with key stakeholders for the duration of the engagement and beyond.

The project officer, like the leisure manager, would be part of Maidstone Borough Council and by sharing an office with colleagues would be in the best position to co-ordinate work with other council departments.

- 3.7 Maidstone Borough Council has existing relationships with the national partner organisations included in paragraph 1.3. Any funding bids or joint projects which are identified as part of the stakeholder engagement work are more likely to achieve success if we have developed them together from the outset.

We want to use our own relationships and seek to establish and foster them for ourselves where we currently don't have them. A third party consultant acting on our behalf would be able to find out the information for us but would not be able to develop and report back a relationship to us in the same way.

Considering an External Consultant

- 3.8 Provision for consultancy is still included in the £44,000 budget if needed. The most likely area where some industry expertise may be needed is in mapping trends and changes expected in the leisure industry in the next 20 years.

Recognising that does not mean we are unable to find that information ourselves. We have contracts with four leisure providers who manage indoor and outdoor facilities across the country on behalf of local authorities and leisure trusts.

We can work with those organisations, while being mindful of our contractual arrangements and relationships here in Maidstone, to give insight in to trends elsewhere in the leisure industry. In addition to

discussion with our local operators, the APSE network would provide another good resource for case studies and engagement with other local authorities before needing to engage the services of an external consultant.

- 3.9 A consultation exercise with Maidstone sport and leisure stakeholders, local and national partner organisations and the leisure industry has the potential to provide answers to all of the objectives and outcomes in table 2, paragraph 1.12.

The answers would be framed against the backdrop of the Maidstone Leisure Centre contract and the borough's growing population.

If, after pursuing all those opportunities, it was felt that an external consultant would add value to the exercise there would be sufficient budget to engage one at that stage should Committee wish to pursue that option at a later date.

4. RISK

- 4.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 No previous consultation has taken place. Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee has previously resolved that this work would be completed.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 Once the recommendations have been agreed the leisure manager will need to continue work with the Transformation and Digital Services Team and the Policy and Information Manager to finalise the design of the stakeholder engagement process. This will include the order in which the groups and organisations are contacted and the chosen formats for each one.
- 6.2 The leisure project officer post can then be advertised with the project officer starting in late spring or early summer. They would be in post for 24 months.
- 6.3 The next steps timeline is summarised in the table below:

Action	Completion date
Stakeholder engagement process finalised with Transformation and Digital Services Team and Policy and Information Manager	1 May 2019
Project officer post advertised	1 April 2019
Leisure project officer in post	1 June 2019
Community consultation engagement work begins	July 2019

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve the following new strategic plan objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council leads master planning and invests in new places which are well designed • Sufficient infrastructure is planned to meet the demands of growth • A diverse range of community activities is encouraged • Community facilities and services in the right place at the right time to support communities • A vibrant leisure and culture offer, enjoyed by residents and attractive to visitors • Our town and village centres are fit for the future <p>This work will follow the council's cross cutting objective of health inequalities being addressed and reduced.</p>	Head of Service

	<p>This work will follow the aspirations of how we do things by including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community engagement and leadership • Outcome focussed commissioning and service delivery 	
Risk Management	Refer to paragraph 4 of the report	Head of Service
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepting the recommendations will demand new spending of £44,000. We plan to fund that spending as set out in section 3. 	Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager (Client)
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will deliver the recommendations using our current staffing with support from a fixed term project officer. • The identified budget also includes contingency for accessing extra expertise to deliver the recommendations, as set out in section 3. 	Head of Service
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recommendations in the report and the Sports Facilities and Playing Pitch Strategies align with the Council's general duty, under section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 as a best value authority, to make arrangements to 	Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS

	<p>secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.</p>	
Privacy and Data Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data will be held and processed in accordance with the data protection principles contained in the Data Protection Act 2018. 	<p>Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS</p>
Equalities	<p>Understanding the needs of our residents and service users will be a key consideration if the preferred option is taken forward. An EIA will be completed and an appropriate approach taken with consultation.</p>	<p>Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer</p>
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals In accepting the recommendations the Council would be fulfilling the requirements of the Health Inequalities Plan 	<p>Head of Service</p>
Crime and Disorder	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>Head of Service or Manager</p>
Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should a consultant's services be accessed at a later date this will be in accordance with the relevant procurement exercises. We will complete those exercises 	<p>Head of Service</p>

	in line with financial procedure rules.	
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

None

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers are to be made available with this report:

- Background Paper 1: Draft Sports Facilities and Playing Pitch Strategies report from Mark Egerton to Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee on 4 September 2018.
- Background Paper 2: *Sports Facilities Strategy Final Draft* from Plozajski Lynch Consulting Ltd. June 2018
- Background Paper 3: *Playing Pitch Strategy Final Draft* from Plozajski Lynch Consulting Ltd. June 2018
- Background Paper 4: Kent County Council Housing Led Forecasts Summary (October 2018)