

Maidstone Approach Improvement Project

Final Decision-Maker	Communities, Housing and Environment Committee
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration and Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	Jennifer Shepherd, Head of Environment and Public Realm
Classification	Public
Wards affected	Bearsted, Boxley, Shepway North and High Street

Executive Summary

The Maidstone Approach Improvement Project is an initiative to pilot improvements to the street scene and landscaping on a key arterial route. The Ashford Road from Willington Street to Kings Street was chosen as the initial pilot as it offers the greatest opportunity including open spaces, street furniture and range of landownership. With a budget of £74,000 from the Business Rates Retention Pilot, a range of actions and concepts have been identified. These were presented to the Committee in October and this report now seeks approval for the final designs.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. To approve the installation of a new heritage-style 'Welcome to Maidstone' sign on the A20 with the words "The County Town of Kent"; and
2. To approve four installations to celebrate the heritage and history of Maidstone, specifically an Iguanodon silhouette, bicycle silhouettes, hop frame and planting as well as Go Green Go Wild inspired tree carving; and
3. To approve the concept of a townscape silhouette attached to safety railings, pending further operational exploration.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Communities, Housing and Environment Committee	Tuesday 12 November 2019

Maidstone Approach Improvement Project

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The key objective of this project is to improve the appearance of one of Maidstone’s arterial routes. The improvements are designed to contribute to achieving two of the Council’s Strategic Priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Safe, Clean and Green</i> • <i>A Thriving Place</i> 	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The proposed plans consider the heritage of the Borough through highlighting key areas the Borough and County are known for including being the Garden of England.</p> <p>The landscaping designs focus on enhancing biodiversity which allowing visitors and residents to understand the importance of this. The project will incorporate the Go Green Go Wild initiative into its designs.</p> <p>The report supports the achievements of the Heritage and Biodiversity cross cutting objectives.</p>	Head of Environment and public Realm
Risk Management	This has been included in section 5.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Financial	<p>The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation.</p> <p>The Policy and Resources Committee have already approved a budget of £74,000 from the Business Rates Retention Pilot to fund this project.</p>	Finance Manager
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Head of Environment and Public Realm

Legal	<p>Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 gives local authorities in England a general power of competence to do anything that individuals may do. The general power applies to things that an individual may do even though they are in nature, extent or otherwise unlike anything the Council may do apart from Section 1. The proposed Improvement Project is in exercise of the general power. Although Section 2 of the Act sets boundaries to the general power, the proposals fall within those boundaries.</p> <p>Any necessary agreements or contracts entered into as a result of the proposals must be in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. Agreements and contracts should be in a form approved by the Legal Services Manager and should identify key activities and outputs so that performance can be properly and regularly monitored.</p> <p>The Communities, Housing and Environment Committee are responsible for ensuring that the Council delivers its strategic objectives with regard to Communities, Housing and the Environment including the Safe, Clean and Green objective. As such it is for the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee to approve the proposals.</p>	Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS
Privacy and Data Protection	There are no specific privacy or data protection issues to address.	Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS
Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Public Health	<p>A key feature of the proposals is to increase walking and cycling on this route into the Town Centre.</p> <p>We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.</p>	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Crime and Disorder	There will be no impact.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Procurement	The purchase of all equipment and supplies	Head of

	required for the project will be carried out according to the Procurement Rules.	Environment and Public Realm
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In June 2019, the Policy and Resources Committee approved a budget of £74,000 from the Business Rates Retention Pilot to fund improvements to one of Maidstone's arterial routes – Ashford Road (Willington Street to Kings Street).
- 1.2 The Maidstone Approach Improvement Project will incorporate street scene and landscaping improvements to deliver a number of objectives:
- Improve the visual appearance of the Ashford Road for visitors to Maidstone
 - Support the Council's Strategic Objectives for **A Thriving Place** and a **Safe, Clean and Green** environment
 - Highlighting the heritage of the Borough
 - Enhancing biodiversity along one of Maidstone's busy arterial routes
 - Encouraging walking and cycling into the Town Centre
- 1.3 Initial discussions have been held with Kent Highways and Soft Estates who are supportive of the proposals. The proposals have also been shared with Turkey Mill's estate management who are also very supportive and are now considering making improvements to their entrance onto the A20.
- 1.4 The following key actions have been identified:
- Deep clean – removal of detritus from along Mote Park wall
 - Cut back of vegetation and removal of self-sown saplings growing along the wall
 - New bus shelter at junction with New Cut Road
 - New bollards
 - Improved appearance of railings
 - Planting of bulbs to increase colour
 - Shaping of wild areas to enhance biodiversity and enable habitat development
 - Planting of new trees

- New signage including heritage board and “Welcome to Maidstone” sign
 - New street name plates
 - Creation of heritage features with interpretation board
 - Repainting streetlights
- 1.5 Regrettably despite every effort to engage with Network Rail, they have failed to support the project in any way. This included enabling Council operatives to work on their land between Mote Park wall and their security fence. Therefore, the only area along this route which will not be improved will be the railway bridge by Square Hill Road and vegetation on their land.
- 1.6 A presentation was given to the Committee in October 2019 to discuss the proposals and gain any feedback regarding the heritage installations and signage. The Committee provided positive feedback on the proposals and supported the scheme.
- 1.7 The Committee is now asked to approve the following aspects of the scheme:
- Heritage-style ‘Welcome to Maidstone’ sign
 - Iguanodon silhouette
 - Bicycle silhouettes
 - Ornamental frame with hops
 - Go Green Go Wild inspired tree carvings
 - Townscape railing silhouettes

Heritage-style ‘Welcome to Maidstone’ sign

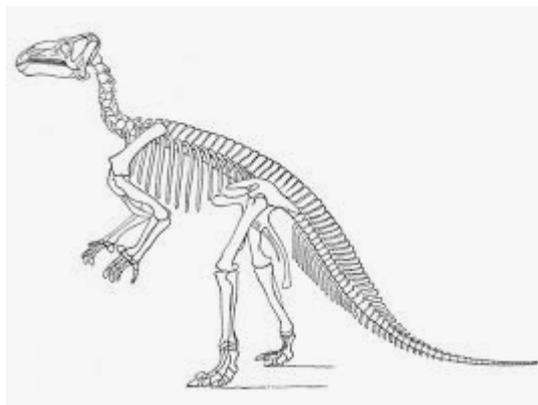
- 1.8 It is recommended that a heritage-style sign is used along the route in the vicinity of Turkey Mill. After discussion at Committee last month, the following design has been created which would be in Maidstone Blue in line with the lamp columns and bollards along the route.

- 1.9 It is recommended that the wording is changed to say, "The County Town of Kent".



Iguanodon and Bicycle Silhouettes

- 1.10 Around the new bus shelter at the junction of New Cut Road, coloured grasses are being planted to introduce colour. Given the interest in Maidstone's Iguanodon which appears on the crest, it is recommended that in conjunction with Maidstone Museum, an Iguanodon skeleton silhouette is installed in front of Mote Park wall. This will be accompanied by an interpretation board which will outline the history and promote Maidstone Museum.



- 1.11 It is anticipated that creating a point of interest by the bus stop more local residents may be encouraged to travel into Town through this route.
- 1.12 In addition, New Cut Road is the start of a cycle path that leads into the Town Centre. To raise awareness of this, it is recommended that silhouettes of three bicycles are installed alongside the path.

Ornamental frame with hops

1.13 As the Garden of England, Kent's farming heritage should be celebrated. A number of blossoming fruit trees and Kent Cobnut trees are to be planted in a scalloped area opposite Turkey Mill. Currently this area is covered in bramble and nettles and whilst this provides a biodiverse habitat, it is not necessarily understood or appreciated by those walking, cycling or driving past.

1.14 Therefore, a mown strip and scalloped edges will provide a more visually appealing area and is likely to increase biodiversity along the edges where habitats blend.

1.15 As well as planting fruiting trees, it is recommended that a 'hop frame' is created. A frame which was previously located in Week Street will be reused and hops planted up it as reference to both our farming and beer-making heritage. This will be supported by an interpretation board.

Go Green Go Wild inspired tree carvings

1.16 *Go Green Go Wild* is becoming a recognised symbol of Maidstone's drive to enhance biodiversity. Therefore, it is recommended that this is incorporated into the Maidstone Approach Improvement Project. A wildflower meadow will be sown at the junction of Willington Street along with a large 'bug hotel' like the design below.



1.17 To create greater visual impact and interest in the initiative, it is recommended that *Go Green Go Wild* inspired chainsaw carvings are incorporated into the designs for the A20.

1.18 Between Turkey Mill and New Cut Road there are two tall tree stumps. It is recommended that these are carved with Kentish flora and fauna reliefs such as insects and leaves, whilst retaining the structure and integrity of the original tree.

Railings

1.19 There are 102 railings along the route and although essential for road safety, they are not particularly attractive. Unfortunately, it would be very expensive to replace all the railings or have them painted. Therefore, alternative options have been explored and a prototype of a townscape

silhouette has been produced, see image below. These would be attached to every third railing to improve their visual appearance whilst retaining their safety requirement. There is still some further work needed to confirm this proposal is achievable however it is recommended that the Committee approve the concept, pending further operational exploration.



1.20 Following the suggestion from the Committee in October, a sign along Mote Park wall at the entrance opposite Weaving Street will be installed to promote the park.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 The Committee could agree to approve the recommendations set out in the report, specifically

- The installation of a new heritage-style 'Welcome to Maidstone' sign on the A20 with the words "The County Town of Kent"; and
- Four installations to celebrate the heritage and history of Maidstone, specifically an Iguanodon silhouette, bicycle silhouettes, hop frame and planting as well as Go Green Go Wild inspired tree carving; and
- The concept of a townscape silhouette attached to safety railings, pending further operational exploration.

3.2 This would enable the project to be completed with points of interest and deliver its original objectives to contribute to a *Thriving Place*.

3.3 However, despite the Committee's support at October's meeting, they could decide not to approve the heritage aspects of the design. This will result in the overall affect of the improvements being less impactful and will not deliver the additional benefits of the scheme such as promoting cycling or highlighting the Borough's heritage and history.

3.4 Alternatively, the Committee could propose other ideas to be incorporated into the design, however given the progress of the project, this could significantly affect the budget or not be deliverable.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 It is recommended that the Committee approve the recommendations set out in 3.1 as these were presented at the previous month's meeting and were widely supported. They will also add further interest and impact in the landscaping and street scene improvements currently being implemented.

The proposals have also gained support from Kent County Council and the Estate Management at Turkey Mill.

5. RISK

5.1 The key risks associated with the proposals are:

- Public perception of the heritage features
- Safety of new installations

5.2 There is always a risk with such heritage features that public opinion will be subjective. However, the features proposed are low cost and will each provide wider added benefits such as promoting the Museum, enhancing biodiversity and encourage healthier lifestyles through walking and cycling.

5.3 Safety has been at the forefront of all the work being undertaken along the route and full approval will be gained from Kent Highways prior to installation. They have been actively engaged through the process and have already carried out a safety audit of the road. Therefore, the risk to safety is exceptionally low and their condition will be monitored regularly as part of the street cleansing service.

5.4 Therefore, the two risks are within the Council's risk appetite and will be monitored throughout the remainder of the project.

5.5 There is no significant risk to the Council of not implementing the recommendations however the full positive impact of the improvements will not be delivered without these features.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 The proposals were presented to the Committee last month and received unanimous support.

6.2 The Chair of the Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group has also been engaged with regard to the improvements along the A20 and their impact on biodiversity.

6.3 Positive feedback has also been received from the Estate Management at Turkey Mill, Kent Highways and Kent Soft Estates.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 If the recommendations are approved, work will commence on the final design and production of the silhouettes with installation planned for early next year.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

None

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None