

Notice of Motion - Maidstone Cycle Campaign Forum

Notice of the following motion has been given by Councillor Harper, seconded by Councillor Adkinson:

Maidstone Council has previously agreed to work in partnership with Maidstone Cycle Campaign Forum (MCCF). This is also reflected in the adopted Local Plan and Walking and Cycling Strategy. However, the Planning Department has continually failed to follow Council policy and does not work with MCCF. Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) today instructs Officers across all departments to implement MBC policy with respect to working in partnership with MCCF, and to that end will in March 2021 organise a round table of MBC Officers, MBC Chairs and Vice-Chairs, and Representatives of MCCF to agree new working protocols to ensure proper partnership working takes place in future.

Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) has an adopted Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) and a Walking & Cycling Strategy (W&CS) in place, both of which reference that a greater and safer uptake of cycling within the borough would be beneficial on several levels.

The W&CS itself contains several desired actions and outcomes, but one that is particularly pertinent is as follows:

Action C5: Support the Maidstone Cycle Campaign Forum as a group to promote the cycling cause in the borough; in order to ensure the Walking and Cycling Strategy and the Integrated Transport Strategy provide a coherent strategy for the promotion of Active Travel in the borough.

Prior to the pandemic there had been ad hoc meetings between MBC's Planning Officers and Members of the MCCF.

The MCCF do submit representations in respect of some Planning applications, which Planning Officers do take due regard of. Furthermore, Kent County Council (KCC) acting as the Highway Authority, does through the pre-application process give design advice in respect of all transport matters as they relate to scheme proposals, to include the provision and betterment of cycling infrastructure too.

To bolster the delivery of the ITS more broadly, MBC and KCC do co-fund a shared Transport Planning Officer, and this role has generated some very positive progress in respect of all transport matters. This new post has been instrumental in accessing COVID-19 recovery monies from central government to instal the temporary cycle lanes in King Street, and the micro green spaces in Earl Street too. Furthermore, the outcome is awaited for a further bid to government for monies to fund adult cycling training and refresher courses for borough residents too.

Also, MBC's Strategic Planning & Infrastructure (SPI) Committee has been awarded £60k from the MBC Business Rates Retention Pilot Scheme for investment in cycling infrastructure. A report on this matter will come to SPI in the coming months setting out different options as to how these monies could be

invested. MCCF will be consulted for their views on this investment too and these will be referenced within the report. Indeed, one of the emerging options for this investment is the provision of infrastructure to support a cycle hire scheme.

To conclude MBC does have a track record of working positively with MCCF and there are obvious examples of success in more recent times. However, it should be noted that in respect of Planning applications, especially in the urban area, transport matters are often of high importance and scrutiny, and not just in relation to cycling. I.e., the space available for all infrastructure is both fixed and limited and there is usually competition for it from; greenspace (to include hedgerows and trees), cycling infrastructure, walking infrastructure, public transport, and conventional road space too, so invariably compromises need to be made.

However, decision makers perhaps would benefit from a more clearly defined travel hierarchy to aid the decision-making process in the allocation of what space is available. Both the ITS and W&CS are being refreshed as part of the ongoing Local Plan Review and so there is potential to establish this hierarchy within these documents. Furthermore, the Manual for Streets and the NPPF do set a clear hierarchy nonetheless.

To conclude, it would be possible to establish half-yearly meetings between key officers within MBC's Planning Service and the MCCF and this might be one of the actions that is decided upon at the proposed round table event were it to go ahead.