

Town Centre Strategy

Communications & Engagement Plan May 2022 – April 2023

Background:

The purpose of the communications and engagement plan for the town centre strategy is to ensure that the views of the stakeholders are understood and that there is consistent messaging with previous initiatives both of which will help guide the regeneration, development, and the provision of infrastructure. It will support the key message that Maidstone is the County Town of Kent, encourage and plan for the maximisation of town centre spaces and places, and provide ongoing support to our communities and businesses.

Town Centre Strategy scope and focus are detailed in Appendix 1 and 2 and the purpose of this document is to ensure that ongoing stakeholder engagement is integral to all of the activities that will form part of the strategy.

Aims:

A comprehensive programme of ongoing community and stakeholder engagement will be undertaken to ensure the broadest possible input and influence from across the borough and surrounding areas. This will be augmented by an equally broad visitor and investment marketing campaign designed to complement our economic development, visitor economy and inward investment work.

The key aims of the communications and engagement will be:

- To raise awareness of the project by creating proactive messaging, engagement and scheduled proactive communications as key events, milestones and changes are planned/happen in Maidstone Town Centre.
- To ensure transparency
- To provide the basis of good evidence-based decision making
- To work in partnership with local organisations and businesses
- To gain feedback from local people and people who use the town centre on what they would like to see in its future
- To gain feedback from local people who do not use the town centre in order to establish why
- To ensure a wide engagement and cross section of community involvement
- To test spatial ideas and options to see if they successfully address the community's aspirations
- To test draft proposals and plan for consultation with stakeholders and the community

Key Messages:

Communications will be key to reestablishing Maidstone as the County Town.

Through clear and targeted communications and engagement we aim to 're-crown' Maidstone as the County Town and to do this we would introduce a robust and specific communications plan to enable us to do that. We want our target audiences with repeated proactive

Town Centre Strategy

Communications & Engagement Plan May 2022 – April 2023

messaging to encourage recognition of Maidstone as a centre for living, leisure, business, investment, education and more. We would outline the benefits of Maidstone by highlighting its heritage, places and green spaces, retail and entertainment, visitor locations and promote its infrastructure, connectivity and location from both an inward investment and visitor economy perspective.

Key issues identified in the Town Centre strategy that will be reflected and focused on through the communications and engagement plan include:

- Recognising the various levels of service provision that the town centre provides to different user groups including existing 'town centre communities'
- Ensuring the reflection of heritage
- Catering for all age groups
- Maximisation of places and spaces
- Provision of employment and access to business and professional services
- Role of evening economy
- Importance of cultural events
- Potential for greater further education/higher education in the town centre
- Quality retail offer

Message taglines:

A visioning exercise will be undertaken with Senior Members early in the new municipal year to agree the taglines based on concepts such as:

- Make it Maidstone - to live, work, do business and visit
- Maidstone is the County Town of Kent
- Maidstone is Open for Business

Audiences:

Multi channelled communications approach to reach; Residents, Businesses, Councillors, Parishes, MBC staff, Community Groups, Care Homes, Doctors Surgeries and Hospitals, Schools and Colleges, Local Media, One Maidstone, Online communities, volunteer sector.

Reach using a wide variety of channels including; direct contact to residents through Maidstone Stay Connected (MBC targeted newsletters), 'Bang The Table' (digital media platform), community engagement, posters, leaflets, films with recognised and trusted spokesperson, stakeholders workshops, social media, Borough Insight, business trade press, MBC website, targeting resident groups.

Town Centre Strategy

Communications & Engagement Plan May 2022 – April 2023

Communications and engagement schedule:

Key Message / activity	Communication method	Date
Visioning Exercise Work with members to confirm the vision and create key messages and taglines to be used in the strategy	All Member workshop	June 2022
Introducing Town Centre Campaign (tagline to be agreed): Inform Councillors, Parish Councils, staff and stakeholders of the planned approach	To introduce and promote the Town Centre campaign through a variety of channels including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Member Bulletin and briefings• Parish newsletters• All Staff Webinars• Inside MBC - staff newsletter and all staff email• Stakeholder Working Groups• Individual messages to stakeholders	June 2022
Establish brand identity: Working with MBC in-house design team to create and establish a standalone brand that residents, business, stakeholders and visitors would recognise being associated with the town centre. This would be used throughout all our communications and marketing material	To be promoted and established by introducing the brand on all communications and marketing material that is distributed regarding Maidstone town centre.	July 2022

Town Centre Strategy

Communications & Engagement Plan May 2022 – April 2023

<p>– internally and externally, social media, online, printed documents – i.e. posters, advertising and signage.</p>		
<p>Branded Town Centre website:</p> <p>Create a dedicated - Town Centre focussed website that is clear and exciting.</p> <p>Setting out clear core messages, easy to navigate and setting out what Maidstone has to offer and USPs as to why people want to live, work, move to, visit, stay - spend time, and do business in.</p> <p>It would be targeted at residents, communities, stakeholders, businesses and potential people looking to visit or move to the town.</p>	<p>To be introduced and promoted through a variety of channels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email to Councillors and stakeholders • Stakeholder engagement groups • Social media community groups • Maidstone Stay Connected newsletter • Bang the Table • Use online Nextdoor Neighbour Community Groups • Social media posts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and to any Facebook Community groups • Article in Borough Insight • Article in business newsletter • Joint PR with One Maidstone • Inside MBC and staff webinars 	<p>July 2022</p>
<p>Consultation:</p> <p>Running consultation activities throughout the project to ensure that all stakeholders have an opportunity to contribute at relevant points and activities to ensure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey/questionnaire – snap • Polls – ‘Bang the Table’ • Community mapping (virtual/physical) ‘Bang the table’- • Walking workshop • Focus Groups /Open Space 	<p>To be aligned with Project and Events Plan</p>

Town Centre Strategy

Communications & Engagement Plan May 2022 – April 2023

- planning for real – technology to support Planning events (interactive workshops)
- Liaison with groups e.g. Business forum, community groups, cultural and heritage groups
- Tools to communicate
- Public/community meetings
- Road shows/stalls
- Dedicated website space
- E-bulletins/newsletter sign up
- Social media

Events Plan:

Creating a series of regular events in the town centre – opportunities to comment and give views, highlighting how vibrant, user friendly and exciting Maidstone is.

- In addition to the comms tools and channels above we would:
- Create a dedicated events calendar heavily promoted through a variety of social media channels and platforms
 - Update and issue events calendar on a quarterly basis coinciding with the seasons throughout the year
 - of social media and digital channels
 - Using all of the communications channels to create and share the new events messages
 - Create a series of posters and banners displayed throughout the town centre at various locations (lamppost banners, bus stops etc), advertising Make it Maidstone events

May 2022 (promoting summer events)
 August 2022 (promoting autumn events)
 November 2022 (promoting winter events)
 February 2023 (promoting spring events)
 *Continuing in the same pattern as above moving forward

Town Centre Strategy

Communications & Engagement Plan May 2022 – April 2023

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MBC 'Stay Connected' events newsletter • Ensure that the town centre site holds the latest information (Bang the Table) 	
<p>Public engagement events:</p> <p>Hold public and community engagement events including consultations, surveys and workshops to ensure all stakeholders have the opportunity to comment, give views and co-design, help our partners and residents understand why are we a county town and to inform us as to what they would like to see, need and want in Maidstone.</p> <p>Schedule a series of events focusing on outlying urban areas of Maidstone to encourage people to engage with MBC and feel part of the town.</p>	<p>To be promoted through a variety of channels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MBC Stay Connected events newsletter • Ensure that the town centre site holds the latest information (Bang the Table) • Social media community groups • Use online Nextdoor Neighbour Community Groups • Social media posts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and to any Facebook Community groups • Article in Borough Insight • Inside MBC and staff webinars 	<p>To initially be introduced every other month: July/August, October and December 2022 and ongoing to establish and continue building public engagement and confidence</p>
<p>Maidstone Quarters – establish and introduce areas of interest:</p> <p>Set and establish clear 'quarters' of Maidstone introducing inspirational areas and desire lines around the town centre to acknowledge and celebrate the History & Heritage, Arts & Culture,</p>	<p>To be promoted through a variety of channels including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MBC Stay Connected events newsletter • Bang the Table • Social media community groups • Use online Nextdoor Neighbour Community Groups 	<p>Autumn 2022 ongoing</p>

Town Centre Strategy

Communications & Engagement Plan May 2022 – April 2023

<p>Leisure and Lifestyle, Business in the town.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social media posts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and to any Facebook Community groups• Article in Borough Insight• Inside MBC and staff webinars	
<p>Why is Maidstone the County Town?</p> <p>Introduce a dedicated campaign focusing on and tapping into the history of Maidstone; this could initially be illustrated through as the existing heritage quarter and reintroducing it as an important part of the heritage of the county town of Kent.</p>	<p>This would be promoted through a variety of comms channels including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maidstone heritage film• Museum led guided heritage tours around the town• MBC Stay Connected events newsletter• Bang the Table• Social media community groups• Use online Nextdoor Neighbour Community Groups• Social media posts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and to any Facebook Community groups• Articles in Borough Insight• Inside MBC and staff webinars	<p>Autumn 2022 and ongoing</p>

Town Centre Strategy

Communications & Engagement Plan May 2022 – April 2023