

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL
HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, HIGH STREET, MAIDSTONE ON
4 DECEMBER 2024**

Present: Councillor Perry (The Mayor) and
Councillors Burke, Cannon, Cleator, Coates, Conyard,
Couch, Cox, Dawes, English, Field, Forecast, Fort,
Mrs Gooch, Greenan, Harper, Harwood, Higson,
Jeffery, Jenkins-Baldock, Kehily, Khadka, McKay,
Milham, D Naghi, M Naghi, Oliver, Parfitt, Perry,
Rodwell, Round, Russell, J Sams, T Sams, Springett,
Summersgill, Sweetman, M Thompson, S Thompson,
Trzebinski, Wales, D Wilkinson and J Wilkinson

86. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barwick, Clark, Cooke, Jones, Riordan, Spooner and Wilby.

87. APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATIONS

There were no applications for dispensations.

88. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

89. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

90. TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE
BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

91. MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE BOROUGH COUNCIL
HELD ON 25 SEPTEMBER 2024

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Borough Council held on 25 September 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

92. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD ON 25 SEPTEMBER 2024

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Borough Council held on 25 September 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

93. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor, representatives of the other political groups (Councillors T Sams, English, Cleator and Harper), and Councillor Harwood paid tribute to Mrs Wendy Marlow, a former Member of the Borough Council, who passed away in August.

The Mayor advised the Council that the Mayor's Personal Assistant, Julie Webb, would be retiring at the end of December. Julie had been a marvellous support for him along with the Civic Officers, Ray and Russell. She had done a fabulous job for many Mayors over the years, and she would be missed. He wished to give his personal thanks to Julie for all her hard work and support.

The Mayor then updated the Council on recent and forthcoming engagements explaining that:

- It had been a busy time with attendance at numerous events such as the High Sheriff of Kent's Justice Service held at Rochester Cathedral; the auction of Shaun the Sheep, which raised over £250,000 for the Heart of Kent Hospice; the Sight Matters Exhibition at Maidstone Leisure Centre sponsored by the Kent Association for the Blind; the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the opening of Maidstone's Combined Court Centre; the Remembrance Day services; the licensing of the new Vicar at St Andrew's Church, Tonbridge Road; the Voices for Hospices Concert at the Mote Hall; the Maidstone Mediation AGM and the Citizens' Advice Bureau AGM; and the Maidstone Indian Community Diwali Celebrations 2024.
- Forthcoming events included the Light Up A Life Remembrance Service at The Friars and the charity Quiz Night.

The Mayor then mentioned two charity events which had been very successful; one held at the Balfour Winery, Hush Heath and the traditional Garden Party at Turkey Mill.

The Mayor concluded by thanking the Deputy Mayor for his support and by saying that he was very proud to promote the Borough and the Council and the work that it does.

94. PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

95. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS

There were no questions from Local Residents.

96. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Councillor Springett to the Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Management

Planning applications are often contentious, but conditions can be applied to mitigate impacts and make the development more acceptable. However, we rely on the planning enforcement team to deal with situations where conditions are not complied with. Residents rely on us and trust us to do this. Residents also expect us to deal with unauthorised development.

The previous administration ensured that the planning enforcement team was fully funded and fully staffed to undertake proper enforcement. Can the Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Management please confirm that this department is still fully funded and fully staffed?

The Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Management responded to the question.

Councillor Springett asked the following supplementary question of the Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Management:

As you have confirmed that this department is one short, is there any point whatsoever in putting planning conditions on any planning applications if we are intentionally and deliberately leaving this important department understaffed? I am aware that enforcement issues are not being pursued with the vigour that they were being pursued eighteen months ago. Is there any point in putting conditions on a planning application?

The Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Management responded to the question.

Councillor Russell to the Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Management

Within my ward and within your time in administration, the village of Yalding has recently been subjected to a Section 78 planning appeal for non-determination by the planning authority for an outline planning application for circa 112 houses. Following on from this the Parish Council and I made clear that this should not be allowed to happen again as this represents a failure of the Maidstone Borough Council planning authority to perform their statutory function. Just this month, the village of Yalding was once again subjected to a Section 78 planning appeal against non-determination by the planning authority for an application that concerns the former public house, The George. This will now be determined by a

planning inspector with no local knowledge of the history of the application under the system of written representations.

As the Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Management, how will you make sure that the planning department has the necessary resources and skills within it to make sure that these Section 78 appeals for non-determination do not happen within the Borough again?

The Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Management responded to the question.

Councillor Russell asked the following supplementary question of the Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Management:

That was a long answer to just say your end date is coming up, set yourself a reminder, if you are not going to get it done, may be refuse the application and let it go to appeal on that basis rather than non-determination. My question will sound like a former colleague of mine, Marion Ring. As my residents say just start by getting the bins emptied and the planning right before you do anything else. Do you agree?

The Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Management responded to the question.

Councillor Harper to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Enforcement

Would the Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Enforcement like to confirm when the expansion of Medway Street Car Park, which is provided for in the capital programme, will proceed. This is a much-needed development for a car park which is often full to capacity and has been planned for over two years.

The Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Enforcement responded to the question.

Councillor Harper asked the following supplementary question of the Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Enforcement:

The Medway Street Car Park would lend itself to a combination of car parking and Pod housing. Councillors who were here two years ago will remember the discussion around the King Street Car Park where we were looking at Zed Pods with parking underneath. Perhaps you could look into that option as that would enable us to provide both housing and car parking at that site?

The Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Enforcement responded to the question.

Councillor Trzebinski to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Enforcement

After 8 months of the new contract with Suez, despite the best efforts of our own waste management team, I am still frequently getting reports from residents of food bins not being emptied every week or being mixed with the larger waste bins. I understand that this is due to an issue with the lack of suitable collection lorries and that we have another one on order. Can the Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Enforcement please advise when the new vehicle will be delivered?

The Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Enforcement responded to the question.

Councillor Trzebinski asked the following supplementary question of the Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Enforcement:

With the Christmas period coming up and the associated extra waste, particularly food waste, can you reassure our residents that steps have or will be taken to ensure that they will be receiving an excellent waste collection service over the next few weeks?

The Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Enforcement responded to the question.

To listen to the answers to these questions, please follow this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X97ePso87jc&t=4511s>

97. CURRENT ISSUES - REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, RESPONSE OF THE GROUP LEADERS AND QUESTIONS FROM COUNCIL MEMBERS

Councillor Jeffery, the Leader of the Council, submitted his report on current issues. After Councillor Jeffery had submitted his report, Councillor Russell, the Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor English, the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Councillor Cleator, the Leader of the Labour Group, and Councillor Harper, the Leader of the Independent and Fant and Oakwood Group, responded on the issues raised.

Councillor Jeffery then responded to questions on matters relevant to his role as Leader.

98. REPORT OF THE AUDIT, GOVERNANCE AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2024 - AUDIT, GOVERNANCE AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE - ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL 2023/24

It was moved by Councillor Field, seconded by Councillor Trzebinski, that the recommendation of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee relating to the Committee's Annual Report to Council 2023/24 be approved.

RESOLVED: That the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee Annual Report to Council 2023/24, which demonstrates how the Committee discharged its duties during 2023/24, be noted.

99. REPORT OF THE LICENSING COMMITTEE HELD ON 7 NOVEMBER 2024 - GAMBLING ACT 2005 - STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY 2025-2028

It was moved by Councillor McKay, seconded by Councillor D Naghi, that the recommendation of the Licensing Committee relating to the Gambling Act 2005 Statement of Licensing Policy 2025-2028 be approved.

RESOLVED: That the Gambling Act 2005 Statement of Licensing Policy 2025-28, attached as Appendix 1 to the report of the Licensing Committee, be adopted as of 30 January 2025.

100. REPORT OF THE CABINET HELD ON 20 NOVEMBER 2024 - COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2025/26

It was moved by Councillor Jeffery, seconded by Councillor English, that the recommendation of the Cabinet relating to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/26 be approved.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council Tax Reduction Scheme be continued with the principles of the existing scheme and the percentage awards (maximum award of 80%) continue for 2025/26.
2. That grid amounts be amended in line with the DWP annual percentage increase of welfare benefits for 2025/26.

101. NOTICE OF MOTION - HOUSES OF MULTIPLE OCCUPANCY

The following motion was moved by Councillor Harper, seconded by Councillor Forecast:

The Council will be aware of the continuing problems associated with overdevelopment in the Fant area of the Fant & Oakwood Ward, as well as in the wider ME16 8 postcode.

These issues are accentuated by the ability to convert single family residential homes into Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) with no more than 6 persons under permitted development without the need for planning permission or democratic oversight. In Fant this has been a major topic of concern in the former ward for over 5/6 years.

We all too frequently see property owners and developers 'abusing' permitted development rights to extend a house to the rear and in the attic under permitted development rights and then also under permitted development rights making it a 6 bed roomed HMO with no requirement for planning control or for residents to have a democratic input.

Action to resolve this can be done. In September 2021 a motion was submitted to Council asking for an 'Article 4 direction' to remove this permitted development right. This will not prevent HMOs in the area being proposed but will make all HMOs subject to the democratic processes of seeking planning permission (large scale HMOs i.e. more than 6 persons already require planning permission). Alternatives have been suggested such as address Updated Local Plan policies, looking into Parking Standards, even involving the Valuation Office to revalue HMOs and use the extra Council Tax for projects in afflicted areas.

Nothing happens. In Fant & Oakwood Ward conversion of properties to HMOs is occurring at a rate of between 1 a month and 1 a week. The area, and other areas referred to, cannot take more of this. The character of inner urban Maidstone is changing from Residential to HMO based at a rapid rate.

There is nothing wrong with the concept of HMOs; they are a required element of housing reflecting the broken housing market. In an appropriate building with amenity space, and space for off-street car parking they can be accepted, but this is not what we see on the ground.

Residents want to see action now. The time for action is now.

This Council therefore agrees to:

- 1. Recognise that the uncontrolled development of HMOs under permitted development has had a negative impact in this densely populated and congested area, especially on grounds of sustainability and infrastructure, highlighted by problems associated with parking issues and the continuing inability of HMO conversions to demonstrate car parking provision in accordance with the Local Development Plan.*
- 2. Build a substantial evidence portfolio and subsequently impose an Article 4 direction to remove permitted development rights to convert residential properties from C3 use to C4 use and C4 use to C3 use in the ME16 8 postcode.*
- 3. Review Parking Restrictions to make them more fit for purpose and to recognise that even if people do not use them daily most households in the inner urban area have at least one car.*

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12.9.3, at the conclusion of the debate, there being no proposal to refer the matter directly to the Cabinet, the Mayor referred the motion to the Planning and Healthier Stronger Communities Policy Advisory Committee.

102. NOTICE OF MOTION - VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

The following motion was moved by Councillor Jenkins-Baldock, seconded by Councillor Greenan:

Maidstone Borough Council recognises the important and disturbing issue of violence against women and girls (VAWG) within our community. Violence against women and girls is a widespread and persistent problem, with serious consequences for those affected and the community as a whole, as it presents a barrier to safety, wellbeing and equality. It includes physical, emotional, and sexual violence, and occurs in many forms, including domestic violence, sexual assault, spiking and harassment.

Recent statistics highlight whilst there has been some improvement, there is still more work that could be done. Between November 2022 to October 2023 there were 3703 reports to the police of Violence Against Women and Girls in the Borough.

We also know that these are significantly under reported incidents with many women and girls being unlikely to come forwards or afraid to report what has happened to them.

Maidstone Borough Council is committed to ensuring that women and girls feel safe and supported in all aspects of their lives, especially in public spaces and at night. We understand the vital importance of tackling violence against women and girls as part of our broader commitment to ensuring safety and equality for all members of our community.

In light of these concerning statistics and incidents, the Council commits to the following actions:

1. Developing a Broader VAWG Strategy:

The Council will work towards developing a comprehensive strategy to tackle violence against women and girls, including the introduction of public awareness campaigns and bystander training to challenge problematic behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs. This strategy will outline concrete steps to increase the safety of women and girls in Maidstone, with a particular focus on vulnerable populations.

2. Promoting a Women's Night-Time Safety Charter:

The Council will support and promote a Women's Night-Time Safety Charter to improve the safety of women in public spaces after dark. This includes working with local businesses, especially bars, pubs, and taxi services, to commit to safer practices, including better training for staff and drivers to ensure women's safety.

3. Leveraging Licensing Tools:

We propose to explore the use of licensing tools, including taxi and bar/pub licensing, to enhance the safety of women and girls in the Borough. This includes implementing additional measures such as improved driver safety checks, the introduction of clear signage in taxis, and ensuring safe transportation options are readily available for women at night.

4. Making Women's Safety Central to Town Planning:

The safety of women and girls will be incorporated into all town planning and development discussions, ensuring that public spaces are designed with safety in mind. This includes improved lighting, more accessible public transport routes, and the creation of safe public spaces that encourage women to feel comfortable and secure in all areas of the Borough.

5. Achieving White Ribbon Accreditation:

Maidstone Borough Council will work towards becoming a White Ribbon Accredited Organisation. White Ribbon UK promotes the idea of men and boys working to end violence against women. This accreditation will demonstrate our commitment to tackling violence and abuse and fostering an inclusive culture of respect and equality in the community.

Equality Impact:

This motion aims to directly address the safety and equality of women and girls in the Borough, with a focus on providing safer environments for all women, including those from vulnerable groups, such as women of colour, LGBTQ+ women, and those with disabilities. The proposed actions will ensure that women have equal access to safety and protection, free from violence and harassment.

Conclusion:

Maidstone Borough Council is committed to ensuring that violence against women and girls is addressed with urgency and seriousness. By adopting a broader strategy, promoting a night-time safety charter, and making safety central to planning and licensing, we can create a safer environment for women and girls in our Borough. We urge all Council Members to support this motion to work together in making Maidstone a place where women and girls can thrive.

Appendix: Links and References

- 1. White Ribbon Accreditation:** [White Ribbon UK Accreditation](#)
- 2. 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence:** [UN Women - 16 Days of Activism](#)
- 3. National Policing Statement on VAWG:** [National Policing Call to Action on VAWG](#)
- 4. Manchester Women's Night-Time Safety Charter:** [Manchester City Council - Women's Night-Time Safety Charter](#)
- 5. Tonbridge and Malling's New Taxi Licence Plates for Women's Safety:** [Kent Online - Taxi Licence Plates](#)
- 6. Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council - New Signs for Taxi Service:** [New Taxi Signs](#)
- 7. Plan International UK's Data on Violence Against Women and Girls:** [Plan UK Data on VAWG](#)

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12.9.3, there being no proposal to refer the matter directly to the Cabinet, the Mayor referred

the motion to the Housing and Community Cohesion Policy Advisory Committee.

103. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL - URGENT DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE CABINET BETWEEN 2 MAY 2024 - 4 DECEMBER 2024

It was moved by Councillor Jeffery, seconded by Councillor English, and

RESOLVED: That the report setting out details of urgent decisions taken by the Cabinet between 2 May 2024 to 4 December 2024 be noted.

104. PRESENTATION OF A CERTIFICATE TO MRS CYNTHIA ROBERTSON CONFIRMING HER APPOINTMENT AS AN HONORARY ALDERMAN OF MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Mayor presented a certificate to Mrs Cynthia Robertson confirming her appointment as an Honorary Alderman of Maidstone Borough Council.

Mrs Robertson then addressed the Council and thanked Members for her appointment.

105. DURATION OF MEETING

7.15 p.m. to 9.25 p.m.