

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND
DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 18 JUNE 2013**

PRESENT: Councillors Chittenden, Collins (Chairman),
McLoughlin, Munford, Ross, Springett, Vizzard,
Watson, de Wiggondene and Mrs Wilson

1. The Committee to consider whether all items on the agenda should be web-cast.

It was resolved that all items be web-cast.

2. Apologies.

Apologies were received from Councillors Mrs Wilson and Councillor Harwood.

3. Notification of Substitute Members.

Councillor Vizzard and Councillor Chittenden substituted for Councillor Mrs Wilson and Councillor Harwood respectively.

4. Notification of Visiting Members.

Councillor Barned, Councillor Gooch and Councillor Nelson-Gracie were present as Visiting Members with an interest in all items on the agenda.

5. Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

It was resolved that:

- a) Councillor Collins be appointed as Chairman for the municipal year 2013-14; and
- b) Councillor De Wiggondene be appointed as Vice-Chairman for the municipal year 2013-14.

6. Disclosures by Members and Officers.

There were no disclosures.

7. To consider whether all items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.

It was agreed that all items be taken in public as proposed.

8. Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development - Priorities for the Municipal Year 2013/14.

Councillor Paine, Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development gave the Committee an update on his priorities for the year.

The Cabinet Member highlighted a number of key projects in relation to the Local Plan and the Integrated Transport Strategy (Attached at **Appendix A**).

The Committee felt that the opportunity for involvement in discussions on strategic site allocations including commercial sites should be given to all Members. It was recommended to the Cabinet Member that a process be put in place to ensure all ward Councillors have an early opportunity to feed into this pre planning process.

A Member highlighted issues regarding transport serving the rural community, particularly bus services and the use of community transport such as the Kent Carrier. The need for footpaths to be accessible and maintained to ensure that bus routes could be reached was emphasised. The Cabinet Member agreed to champion this with Kent County Council.

The Committee raised questions regarding the distribution of funding from Kent County Council (KCC) to Maidstone for transport projects. The Cabinet Member informed Members that KCC had made two bids to the Local Enterprise Partnership Funding (LEP) which would be allocated to Maidstone.

In response to Members questions on the resources available to specialist planning areas such as Conversation, the Cabinet Member explained that Local Government faced continuous pressures on its resources as a result of Government spending cuts. He informed Members that there were options that he intended to investigate further to ensure specialist areas were maintained, including partnership working. In addition to this, the Committee suggested that the knowledge and skills of Parish Councils could also be utilised for this purpose.

It was resolved that:

- a) The Cabinet Member for Planning Transport and Development would champion the transport needs of rural communities with KCC, in particular:
 - Bus Services and improved use of Community transport; and
 - Maintenance of access to rural transport links i.e. footpaths;
- b) The Cabinet Member for Planning Transport and Development ensuring that a process is put in place that ensures all ward Councillors have an early opportunity to feed into the pre planning discussions on strategic site allocations, including commercial sites.

9. Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment 2012 (2013 amended version)

Deanne Cunningham, Team Leader, Heritage Landscape and Design introduced the Maidstone Character Landscape 2012 (2013 amended version). Members were advised that the purpose of the document returning to the Committee was not to review the document in its entirety but to review the recommendations made by the Spatial Planning Advisory Group and the Member proofreading group and the amendments that had been made as a result.

Mrs Cunningham informed the Committee that the document identified and described the landscape but did not make an assessment of the quality of the landscape. The document did not quantify or rank, it was a descriptive tool.

A member of the Committee commented on the structure of the document, describing it as 'fragmented'. Helen Bradbury, Consultant and Principle Planner from Jacobs explained that the document had been formulated in accordance with the same up to date guidelines used at a county and national level and also used by Maidstone's neighbouring authorities (Landscape Character Guidance for England and Scotland, Scottish natural Heritage/the countryside Agency, 2002). Ms Bradbury explained that using the same consistent approach allowed the smaller landscape character areas to piece together into larger areas, building up a hierarchy to cover a wider, landscape that would allow strategic and local decision making.

Concerns were raised by Members that this approach removed the safeguard of areas of importance like the Kent Downs as a whole. Rob Jarman, Head of Planning explained that the guidance from the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) had been followed which stated that the Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) should contain 'criteria based assessment'. This prevented the 'blanket' descriptions of landscape that some Members offered as an alternative approach.

The Committee was also concerned about the sensitivity of assessments particularly where known areas of natural beauty had been described as 'scrubland' within the document. Ms Bradbury explained that such descriptions were not intended to be derogatory and scrubland could be a major asset in terms of ecological significance.

The Committee questioned the consultation undertaken and whether Parish Councils had been involved. Mr Jarman explained that as the LCA was an evidence base and was not subject to a prescribed consultation process, however, consultation was carried out at every opportunity as documented in paragraph 1.23.10 in the agenda report. The Draft Landscape Assessment Guidelines which would be a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) would go out to full consultation which would include Parish Councils.

In response to Members questions Mr Jarman informed the Committee that the LCA was only the first step in the process. Once adopted the Landscape Area Guidelines would be produced which would address the quality issues that had been addressed by Members. He described the LCA as a 'material planning document' which would help provided a robust evidence base. The Landscape Area Guidelines would be a technical document with 'material weight'.

The Committee voted on the recommendation proposed in the report 'that the Cabinet Member for Planning, transport and Development adopts the Landscape Character Assessment 2012 (2013 amended version).'

The Committee voted in favour of the recommendation (6 in favour, 2 against with 1 abstention). Councillor Chittenden voted against the recommendation and his vote was noted as requested.

It was resolved that the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development adopts the Landscape Character Assessment 2012 (2013 amended version).

10. Work Programming 2013-14

Prior to the meeting the Committee had visited a Council department 'marketplace' and spoken to officers from Council departments relevant to it remit about important areas of work to be undertaken over the coming year.

The Committee agreed that the Local Plan should be its main focus for the year. Members stressed the importance of fully including all Substitute Members and for documents and reports to be circulated as early as possible.

The Committee also highlighted the need for a joint follow up meeting on Gypsy and Traveller Sites. The Regeneration and Economic Development and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committees had formed a joint Committee during the 2012-13 Municipal Year to examine the topic.

It was resolved that:

- a) The Local Plan and supporting documents be the focus of the Committee's Work programme for the 2013/14 Municipal Year;
- b) A follow up joint meeting be arranged to focus on Gypsy and Traveller sites;
- c) Substitute Members of the Committee should be included fully in the Committees work; and
- d) All reports and documents should be circulated to the Committee and Substitute Members as early as possible.

11. Duration of meeting

7.00 p.m. to 8.40 p.m.