

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2021**

**Present:** Councillors Cannon, Cox, Forecast, Harper, Hinder, Naghi, Newton, Round (Chairman) and S Webb

**Also Present:** Councillor M Rose

70. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

71. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

72. URGENT ITEMS

Whilst not an urgent item, the Chair explained that Item 16 – Development of the Maidstone Town Centre Strategy would be taken after Item 14 – Local Produce and Craft Market Presentation.

73. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor M Rose was present as a Visiting Member for Item 12 – Committee Work Programme and Item 14 – Local Produce and Crafts Market Presentation.

74. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

75. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

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

**RESOLVED:** That all items be taken in public as proposed.

77. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 OCTOBER 2021

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed.

78. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

79. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

80. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

81. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Town Centre Strategy Update had not yet been reviewed by the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee, so it was possible that following consideration by that Committee and the Policy and Resources Committee, the report would be presented at this Committee again in December.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development confirmed that a presentation would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee to give an overview of the education and arts programme at Maidstone Museum.

An Outside Bodies report on Maidstone Area Arts Partnership would also be added to the Work Programme.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

82. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

83. LOCAL PRODUCE AND CRAFT MARKET - PRESENTATION

The Market Manager gave a presentation to the Committee on the status of Maidstone Markets, and challenges faced within market events. Nationally, footfall at markets had decreased by 25% on average, and there had been a reduction of 10,000 traders at markets and market events. The increase of internet sales as a proportion of total retail sales had an impact on market trading, and the UK had experienced higher percentages of online sales than the European average, which had been the case since 2014. Recent highlights were outlined, including the Elmer Farewell Weekend which saw 3600 visitors over the two days, and the number of stalls at the local produce and craft markets had doubled between June and November 2021.

In response to questions, the Market Manager confirmed that no official monitoring had been undertaken since the opening of the new food hall at Lockmeadow, with regards to footfall or spend at the market. However,

the Committee would be updated with any evidence of changes to the attendance at the market.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee's thanks be extended to the Market Manager for the informative presentation.

84. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

Item 16 – Development of the Maidstone Town Centre Strategy would be taken before Item 15 – Maidstone Museum Capital Expenditure Update.

85. DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAIDSTONE TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

The Interim Director for the Local Plan Review introduced the report and outlined the impact of changes in demand on the town centre and other town centres around the country. The development of the Town Centre Strategy was an opportunity to address these pressures and challenges and also to make the town centre more environmentally attractive and to ensure the town centre space is used effectively.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development added that there had been significant changes in town centre patterns nationally. It was critical to have strong leadership and stakeholder engagement, as well as a transformative approach to the identity of the town centre.

The Committee felt that the River Medway should play an important role in the identity of the town and provided a sense of place, as well as the wealth of heritage within the town centre. It was proposed that a focus group of Members was formed to explore transformation ideas and the identity of the town centre.

It was felt that sustainability and transportation links were key considerations as well as usable open space for residents. Cross-party agreement was vital as the strategy would take a considerable time to implement, and so would need full support by all groups.

The Interim Director for the Local Plan Review added that creating a journey through the town centre would increase dwell time which would positively impact on local businesses, and agreed the importance of creating a sense of place for town centre residents, wider borough residents and visitors to Maidstone.

**RESOLVED:** That the feedback arising from the discussion on the report be used to inform a further report to the Policy and Resources Committee with a more specific proposal on the scope and timing of the Town Centre Strategy.

Note: Councillor Forecast joined the meeting during this item.

86. MAIDSTONE MUSEUM CAPITAL EXPENDITURE UPDATE

The Museum Director introduced the report and set out the preferred option for the capital expenditure, which was to improve the British archaeology gallery utilising the generous offer of £100,000 from the William and Edith Oldham Charitable Fund, which the Maidstone Museum Foundation had been asked to match. The Kent Archaeological Society had expressed an enthusiastic interest in working in partnership on the refurbishment. A 5-year plan was being prepared for the Committee to review, which would include governance arrangements at the Museum.

Following feedback, the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development recommended that the capital expenditure should be used to develop a new archaeological gallery, and suggested further reports on the governance of the Museum and timescale in which any changes could be implemented.

In response to questions, the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development explained that legal advice had been sought to explore options for future governance of the Museum which would be presented to the Committee. The Bentlif Trust and the Brenchley Charity would be invited to contribute towards the plans for the refurbishment of the gallery.

**RESOLVED:** That

1. The preferred option to invest in a new, modern archaeological gallery with interactive digital displays, located in the Withdrawing Room be approved and a further report be presented to the Committee once draft designs have been commissioned;
2. The generous offer from the William and Edith Oldham Charitable Trust and the Maidstone Museum Foundation be acknowledged with grateful thanks, and that the Maidstone Museum Foundation be asked to raise matched funding;
3. A 5-year business plan be presented to the Committee before March 2022;
4. A report setting out the governance arrangements needed to deliver the 20-year plan be presented to the Committee; and
5. A report be brought back to the Committee in January 2022 to set out a simplistic timeline for the design and implementation of the new gallery and options for governance arrangements.

87. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30pm to 8.49pm.