

Cabinet Information Bulletin



Fran Wilson — Leader of the Council

We are now halfway through the municipal year, a time to pause and reflect on the progress made thus far. I have had detailed one to one discussions with each cabinet member and, as you will read in their individual reports, real progress has been made on our top priorities.

It is always inevitable that some plans have to be revised. The most obvious of these is the impact the Kent International Gateway planning application has had upon the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework. I would like to add my assurances to those of Cllr Clive English that the Borough has obtained the services of the very best professionals in their respective fields to advise our own very experienced planning officers on all aspects of this KIG planning application.

Much of my time is spent working with our colleagues across many organisations and public services to ensure, with them, that we retain joined-up thinking and concentrate on achieving 'outcomes' rather than indulging in a ceaseless round of talking shops.

Work is in progress with our partners to re-energize the Local Strategic Partnership. Discussions are underway to have a small number of sub-partnerships each with a clear set of targets which will relate well to those targets set and co-ordinated countywide through the Local Area Agreement II and that are also important to the communities of this Borough. One of these groups, the CDRP, has been established for some time and the effectiveness of its work is well known.

Elsewhere in this Bulletin, Cllr Mike Fitzgerald writes about the second grouping, The Health Action Team. The remaining groups will deal with Skills and Economy, Local Development and Transport, Adult Services, Children's Trust, Sustainability/Climate Change issues and finally Culture, Leisure and Sport. Clearly to work effectively there must be cross fertilization between groups on specific targets and the quarterly meeting of the full Local Strategic Partnership will retain the overview and co-ordinating role. It is also my firm intention to ensure that elected members are kept fully informed and involved and my hope that the Borough's Scrutiny Committees will play their part in holding the Local Strategic Partnership to account.

Climate Change is no longer a theoretical exercise. Its effects, whether an individual believes them to be man-made or part of the natural cycle of the world, are already with us. We made a promise to our children that Maidstone Borough Council will be carbon neutral by 2010. To achieve this we need everyone at the council to be fully aware of, and signed up to, the sustainability agenda. It was therefore very pleasing to see so many unit managers find the time within their busy workday to attend a full morning Sustainability/climate change work shop and to follow this up at the staff forum.

I would also like to acknowledge my thanks to The Town Centre Management and other businesses within the town, whose members have indicated that they wish to work closely with us on moving towards a carbon neutral town. No-one underestimates the challenge this presents given our geographical location and the consequent transportation issues.

Special points of interest:

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I also recently hosted a meeting with the business community at the Russell Hotel. It was an opportunity to listen carefully to their views and concerns and their opportunity to question me about this administration's aspirations. Our business colleagues are vitally important since it is they who create so much of the wealth of the Borough. This meeting was particularly opportune since we are just about to start preparing the new economic strategy.

Finally it is that time of year when we start to formulate the detailed budget proposals for the next municipal year 2008/09. A budget simulator is now available on line at our website on the home page. At the time of writing this had only been available for a few days yet we had already received over 200 responses. It is an interesting way for individuals to have their say while at the same time informing these respondents about the effects of their choices. I do urge anyone who has not already done so to register their views.

Tony Harwood — Environment



A Challenge to Get Involved in Maidstone's Biggest Ever Clean Sweep

I write to deliver a challenge to all Maidstone Borough Council staff and councillors to get involved in our biggest ever Clean Sweep campaign, which was launched on the 30th October and will be running for six weeks until 11th December. Litter-pickers, gloves, black sacks and high visibility waistcoats are available from Alison Sollis on tel. 01622 602281 and don't forget to let Alison know where your collected rubbish will be left so that it can be swiftly removed. The Clean sweep campaign is much more than a publicity stunt as significant quantities of rubbish can be removed by volunteers and the character of an area transformed for the better.



Evidence of this effectiveness was clear from the launch event on Tuesday 30th October when Maidstone Council officers and councillors very ably assisted by the Meadow View Group cleared litter and fly tipping from in and around our town centre water-courses. Scores of sacks of litter were collected, alongside the usual suspect shopping trolleys and other bulky rubbish. Clean sweeps are effective in reaching the nooks and crannies which do not feature on standard cleansing rounds and they

can really make a difference for the better.

Other local groups already pledging to hold clean up events during the six week campaign include East Farleigh, Headcorn, Boughton Monchelsea, Boxley and Teston Parish Councils, Ringlestone and Park Wood Community Associations, as well as Hunton, Leeds and Broomfield and East Farleigh Primary Schools alongside many others. If they are not already involved please try and get your local residents associations, parish councils, pubs, amenity societies, political parties, clubs or schools involved. Working together we can really make a positive change in our town, villages and countryside.

The six week clean-sweep is to be complimented by a stepped-up enforcement regime to tackle the litter louts and fly tippers who cause the problem in the first place.

Bredhurst Woodlands Summit

On 12th November Maidstone Borough Council will be hosting a summit of key agencies to deliver a strategy to safeguard the beautiful ancient woodlands of Bredhurst. This complex of woodland and scrub has suffered appallingly over the years through its close proximity to the major urban conurbation of the Medway

Towns with fly tipping, car dumping, off-road activity, vandalism, theft and arson. The summit was designed to ensure a positive focus on the area and true commitments and partnership between all interested agencies to tackle these problems.

I am very keen that further multi-agency summits are staged to tackle other areas of beautiful but abused countryside with the lovely but heavily fly-tipped Fairbourne Woods (between Ulcombe and Hollingbourne) the next site for concerted action.



Dan Daley – Leisure and Culture

What's On in Maidstone

I hope that you all actually take time to read the brochures which are being produced to alert you to 'what's on in Maidstone'. The recent publication of the winter events at the Museum shows a fascinating range of events and exhibitions to suit most tastes and all ages. The Museum is going from strength to strength and all associated with it now look forward with eagerness to the promise of even better things from the planned extension.

There is so much happening on a regular basis in Maidstone that there should never be any time to be bored! There is literally a club for every interest waiting to be discovered.

The Hazlitt Youth Theatre production of the musical 'Working' was spectacular - and if you missed it, you missed a real treat. We should be very proud of the talents of our young people - this production celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Youth Theatre which these days has about 160 members.

I have issued a paper concerning the future of the Sailing Club which suggests a way in which the Club can continue to operate within Mote Park.

I have also hopefully now finally settled the arguments that raged over the placement of extra equipment on Weaving Heath in Grove Green. After continued consultation with stakeholders, I hope that the

compromise reached will gain acceptance and give the young people of Grove Green the equipment they have been waiting for.

Playground improvements throughout the Borough are proceeding according to plan and the new layout at Giddyhorn Lane is about to be built early in the New Year.

Disability Sports

The Sports, Play and Youth Development Team have been working closely with Bower Grove School to write funding applications to increase the sporting opportunities for disabled young people in Maidstone. The team has worked closely with 7 young people and have applied for funding from the Youth Opportunities Fund. Initially the money will be used to set up a Multi Sports Club, as well as other sports initiatives which young people would like to see in Maidstone. The young people spent their time completing a power point presentation, cutting and sticking pictures and drawing diagrams on what they would like their sports club to be called, what sports they would like to do and who would be welcome to the club. Everyone is now waiting to see the result of the application!

New Sports Development Officer

The Sports, Play and Youth Development Team have a new Sports Development Officer with over 70 people applying for the post. Successful candidate Vikki Soles will start her new role on the 1st November.



Vikki Soles

Maidstone — Music Capital of Kent

We are keen to promote the Musical tradition in Maidstone by becoming the catalyst for the myriad of music interests. Maidstone has so much to offer across the spectrum of music and we are determined to make the most of

this. There really is no reason why Maidstone should not confirm its claim to be the Magical Music Capital of Kent. We have some of the finest groups and ensembles - whether it be jazz or classical or choral, quartets or full orchestra - Maidstone does have it all and we should celebrate it! Maidstone's cultural offer is really second to none - let's make a song and dance about it!

Peter Hooper — Corporate Services



New Gateway and Offices

Construction and refurbishment works on our new Gateway and offices is progressing well and we are on target for opening in June 2008.

The refurbishment works to floors eight, nine and ten of Maidstone House are now complete and will be handed over following the testing of the plumbing, air conditioning and heating etc. Work in Maidstone House is now concentrated on Floor five, the link to the Gateway.

Work on the Gateway is now making an impression on the Maidstone skyline with steelwork visible high above the new hoarding which clearly announces our move to the heart of the County Town.

The Gateway will provide a comprehensive range of services never before available at one place. It will be home to all of our services and those of KCC and many other voluntary and community service providers such as the CAB.

The Gateway has been welcomed by visitors to our receptions. During Customer Service Week seven out of ten said that the new location was right for them.

New Website

Recent national statistics suggest that over 61% of all households now have

access to the internet and approximately 45% of all adults use it every day. There is no doubt that it is an integral part our lives, be it for work or leisure and as we strive to become ever more efficient and meet the growing demand for 24 x 7 online services, the Council's digital shop window becomes ever more important.

I felt that the Council's web site needed updating to compete with the best of government and commercial web sites. There will be a soft launch of the re-vamped site www.digitalmaidstone.co.uk on 7th November, there will be a press launch on 14th November.

The new site will have a host of new features:

- New icons and more pictures
- A rolling news wire
- Much simpler navigation
- Improved architecture and menus
- Streamlined content
- Improved search
- Improved accessibility with advanced facilities for the visually impaired
- A new A-Z

It all adds up to make the site much easier to use and find correct information.

On top of this we will be launching E-billing.

But this is only stage 1, and the IT and Communications teams that have worked very hard on the new site are already looking at a phase 2 which will include a new map based interface for local services such as refuse and recycling.

Clive English – Regeneration

Planning Policy

Whilst it is unfortunate that circumstances have delayed the Core Strategy of the LDF, I am pleased that the opportunity has been taken to progress in other areas of work necessary to evolve an appropriate and comprehensive planning policy framework. This includes a large range of work, from the ongoing pilot Area Character Assessments, through work on Supplementary Planning Documents and masterplanning for the High Street Regeneration Project. Of particular note is the work that has been taking place on the new SPD on Planning Obligations which should be proceeding to Cabinet shortly. It is also very pleasing that after some years of failing to get to grips with Conservation Area Appraisals significant progress is now being made, with several appraisals currently either under way, or about to commence. In addition progress is finally being made with the keenly awaited work on Gypsy housing needs.

I have also instructed officers to consider carefully and to bring forward proposals to fill some of the policy gaps that regularly cause problems at Development Control level. These are basically issues relating to the Councils lack of standards and guidance for matters such as extensions, developments on corner sites, garden sizes and similar bread and butter issues. In addition, considerable attention is being brought to bear within Development Control to strengthen procedures with a stress on securing improvements in priority areas such as sustainable construction and open space.

Enforcement

I am pleased to see that the priority placed on improving the performance of Enforcement is producing results and the officers in this section should be

congratulated. The backlog of cases is continuing to fall and the introduction of new explanatory materials should further assist public and member understanding of the processes involved.

Economic Development

The current priority within this area is developing the new Economic Strategy. Work is also ongoing on improving the Boroughs support for small Businesses.

Housing

I was delighted to receive the Audit Commission findings regarding local authority performance nationwide for the year 2006/7, which ranked our housing service as the highest improving service in the country (1st out of 354). Congratulations to all concerned. Part of the reason for transferring the management of the housing stock in 2004 was to enable the Council to concentrate on its strategic housing role and we are clearly achieving results. For example we have achieved the government target to reduce the use of temporary accommodation for all households by 50 per cent 3 years before the 2010 target. In addition we are making significant contributions to delivering affordable housing. As a direct result families threatened with homelessness are waiting less time than a year ago.

Cabinet recently approved a revised capital programme of £15.8 million to provide a range of new quality affordable housing(362 units) in partnership with various Registered Social Landlords by 2010/11. There have so far been 61 completions this year and it should be at least 199 by year end. The Council will exceed the 200 new affordable homes target agreed at sock transfer with a year to spare with 225 forecast by April 2008.



Clive English – Cont'd. / ...

The Council has also levered in external funding for private sector housing in partnership with other Kent authorities and CEN, with a grant of £200,000 plus for work on energy efficiency and reducing fuel poverty. The Kent CEEF project was one of 50 selected nationwide out of 200 bids and

it will reduce carbon emissions via energy efficiency measures and education. It will enhance economic self sufficiency and social well being by tackling the factors contributing to fuel poverty.



Mike FitzGerald – Community Services

Health

One of my Priorities was the setting up of the Health Action Team and I am pleased to report that this is now in place. The group have already met twice and have also presented at the Local Strategic Partnership seminar on health.

Limited funding has been allocated from the Primary Care Trust Choosing Health programme for us to deliver a range of options to tackle some of the public health priorities identified in their Strategy for Public Health in Kent - promoting health lifestyles - and this includes improving mental health and well being and sexual health and to reduce substance misuse, obesity and smoking

The options being developed also meet some of the community safety targets and will be promoted and run jointly. Full details of the programme will be available after the meeting this month of the Health Action Team.

Supporting this we have also held the inaugural meeting of the Older People's Forum which attracted some 60 people and we are looking at the feed back from those present next week and this will influence the programme for the next meeting early next year.

Community Safety

First let me thank Matt Roberts for his contribution to the work of the community safety team during his time at the council. Matt has moved to Dartford as their

Community Safety Officer. This I am sure is an important career move for him.

It is good to report a real improvement in the crime figures which show that there has been a 7.7% overall reduction in all crime for the period April to September compared with last year. This is encouraging news for our community safety team, the police and all the partners.

CCTV

The CCTV control room is widely acknowledged as being an example of effective practice and is involved in about 160 arrests per month. In addition the mobile CCTV cameras are deployed throughout the borough to 'hotspot' locations to help reduce anti social behaviour.

Stuart Moaby is the specially employed PCSO who deploys the cameras using the MBC purchased cherry picker and this CCTV operation is also recognised as an example of effective practice.

Operational Controller

Richard Wingate who was formally the town centre sergeant recently joined the Community Safety Team as Operational Controller and is drawing together the inter-departmental response to environmental crime as well as co-ordinating the anti social behaviour response. One of the first initiatives has been to draw together a group to look at crime in the town centre and the night

Mike FitzGerald – Community Services

time economy issues around Lockmeadow and developing the river walk in Maidstone.

CDRP Reform

The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership reforms include the setting up of a Kent Community Safety Board. The Board are tasked with agreeing a terms of reference and will be the final voice in allocating funding. The guidance tells us the county group, which include district and borough cabinet members should act as an effective coordinating body, to ensure there is a strong voice for district level priorities and interests on other partnerships such as the Local Criminal Justice Board and the Local Strategic Partnership. This is particularly important when agreeing Local Authority Agreement targets to ensure these reflect district level plans. We wait and see!

Peace One Day



Night Hoops

Night Hoops gets even bigger with some 200 young players attending the event. With more Night Hoops due to place on Sunday 9th December 2007, Sunday 3rd February and Sunday 9th March 2008. At a cost of £2.00 per play (squads of up to 9 players). Age 13+

Peace One Day

Peace One Day took place on Saturday 15th September at Whatman Park. A huge 8ft high wooden graffiti board reading "PEACE" was extremely popular, the young people loved it!



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