

Cabinet Information Bulletin



Fran Wilson — Leader of the Council

It is the start of another year, the time when individuals make New Year Resolutions. The Borough Council is no different in that we too make our own resolutions. They are our Plans and Strategies. Through them we must ensure that the Performance Targets we set or agree through the Kent Partnership and with Central Government (called National Indicators) are both challenging and truly measure our progress towards achieving a Borough in which we all enjoy living.

None are more challenging than finding a way, in this increasingly crowded Borough, to reduce our carbon footprint and it seems likely, that at least two of the National Indicators, which will be agreed as part of the Local Area Agreement, will deal with this and other climate change issues.

As the Borough's Climate Change Champion I have been working hard with officers and other cabinet members, particularly Cllr Harwood, to ensure we are not merely paying lip-service to the subject but are looking for, and implementing practical solutions. For example, in conjunction with the Town Centre Management and business community we have now set 31st March 2009 as the date by which Maidstone town centre will become plastic bag free.

Reducing our carbon footprint is not

something the Borough can do alone and it is vital that other agencies join with us. The Local Strategic Partnership already has two successful groups contained within it, the Safer Maidstone Partnership which deals with crime and antisocial behaviour and the Health Action Team, set up last autumn to tackle such issues as obesity and substance abuse. The Climate Change Partnership now joins those two and recently held its first meeting with participants drawn from the Borough, County Council, voluntary and business communities. It has set itself a challenging target "to stabilise the boroughs emissions at 60 per cent below 1990 levels by 2025 and achieve climate change resilience."

The Maidstone Climate Change Partnership will get together with key officers from the borough and county council to map out how to achieve these ambitious targets at a breakfast meeting in February (date to be notified).

We also need to engage residents and keep the community informed. With this in mind there will be a bi-monthly 'green page' in the Downs Mail alternating with the Borough News.

It is particularly important that everyone can have input into the Local Strategic Partnerships plans and strategies as we move forward and so we will shortly be introducing a new online forum where everyone can keep abreast of everything to do with the LSP and linked groups.

Special points of interest:

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Tony Harwood — Environment

Food Safety

Did you know that Maidstone Council make 650 Food Safety inspections including some 1,000 individual visits to food businesses in the Borough in a year? Our dedicated team of just 5 food safety specialists are one of the Council's best kept secrets, who behind the scenes work hard to ensure that our food is kept free of contamination and harmful micro-organisms. This sustained high level of activity ensures that the majority of local businesses reach and maintain compliance with the food safety laws and are in receipt of up to date information and advice. In the last year, as part of an initiative funded by the Food Standards Agency, officers have been involved with "Safer Food Better Business". This is a public-private partnership project which has helped at least 120 businesses to achieve good food safety standards.

A new initiative in the form of "Scores on the Doors" has been launched. Maidstone is part of a pilot for the Food Standards Agency which includes 33 London Boroughs, 3 other Kent authorities and another in Sussex. This scheme is about giving consumers informed choices based on food safety information and recognises food businesses that strive to achieve the highest standards in providing clean safe food. An authority with a high level of good and excellent rated premises is not just good for our health but good for business.

The team don't just visit and inspect they also respond to at least 1,000

service enquiries a year which range from simple advice to complaints about premises and food which are all investigated. They also undertake food sampling as part of local, regional, national and European programmes, all geared to monitoring the safety of the food we consume. Communicable diseases are also investigated, in partnership with the Kent Health Protection Unit, by the team. On the education front the team give talks to local schools on food issues. In addition to this Food Hygiene courses are run in partnership with a local contractor which helps around 150 local businesses a year.

Overall the food safety team make significant contribution to the health of the local community, whilst supporting and advising the local food businesses who form a key component of the Borough's economy.

"Safety in Action"

Environmental Health organises "Safety in Action" which is an interactive learning exercise for about 1,200 year six school children over two weeks in June every year at Invicta Park Barracks. The scenarios are varied and last year included Bus Safety, Road Safety, Railway Safety, Fire Safety, Electrical Safety, First Aid, Drug Awareness, Stranger Danger, Community Safety and Environmental Awareness. The last two scenarios have significant input from the wider council and the Environmental Health Team and Environmental Enforcement in particular.

This is an effective and cost effective method of reaching a large number of children just before they progress to

Secondary schools and it equips them with the practical life skills and knowledge to help them become responsible and safe junior citizens. This programme has been organised by a multi-agency partnership task force and has run for the last 15 years and is part of the Councils commitment to public health and that "every child matters".

The task force are now planning "Safety in Action 2008"

Pro-active Pollution Team and Planning Applications

The Pro-active Pollution Team provide another invaluable but too often unsung service to local residents through providing advice on planning applications where there is, or could be, an environmental health issue involved. Investigations of site contamination, air pollution and noise are just a few of the important areas where the teams professional input is required.

The team's investigations and advice ensure that both people and the wider environment are afforded as far protection as is possible through use of the planning process in and around an application site. This advice is just as relevant whether a large or small-scale application is under consideration. Advice is usually delivered in the form of observations based on site visits and/or informed opinions framed as recommendations, which may be to grant or refuse the application subject to any relevant conditions and informatives which ensure that good practice is followed.

Fellow Planning Committee members are probably most aware of the team through the regular attendance by

the Pollution Team Leader at planning meetings, where he is available to answer member's queries concerning applications in which he or his team have been involved.

The number of planning applications commented on by the Pro-active Pollution Team has risen from some three hundred in 2003 to over eight hundred last year, reflecting changes in local and national planning policy and other influences such as increasing traffic levels.

Get involved in Maidstone's biggest ever Spring Clean

In last autumn's Clean Sweep campaign local residents and community groups, supported by Maidstone Borough Council, took practical action to tackle litter fly tipping in their home patches. The success of this initiative was recognised at a reception in December at the Town Hall where I pledged to establish another even bigger and better event in the spring. The focus of last years launch event was the out-of-the-way town centre nooks and crannies where litter can so easily accumulate. This year's event will be launched within and focus on our beautiful but too-often mistreated and despoiled local countryside and green spaces.

If you or a local community group want to get involved and make a real difference to the cleanliness and safety of our Borough in the forthcoming Big Spring Clean please sign-up by contacting Alison Sollis on 01622 602281. I will personally seek to get out and help on as many of your Big Spring Clean events as I possibly can over the course of the springtime.





Peter Hooper — Corporate Services

Office Move

The move to the new offices is still on course for June and Members have now had the opportunity to view the furniture and layout that is being proposed for staff.

Arrangements for a temporary reception have been agreed with the Mall Corporation moving into premises previously occupied by Abacus. These premises are very close to Maidstone House. The reception will move to the new building on King Street as soon as that part of the project is completed.

The temporary accommodation is being provided by the Mall Corporation at no cost to the Council.

Four Yearly Elections?

I promised earlier in the year that I would bring this to Council as soon as it became clear what our options are. I now hope to be able to place a report before Council at the meeting in April. So that Councillors can debate the different options available to the Council with regard to local governance.



Clive English — Regeneration

Housing

Having begun this year with concerns about the delivery of the Housing Capital Programme and Private Sectors Grants it is a genuine pleasure to see the success that has been achieved by Housing Officers. The grants programme will be fully delivered and the Housing Capital Programme and the wider delivery of affordable housing will exceed the targets set. The Council will exceed its target for provision of 480 affordable housing units by 1st April 2008, and will exceed its target of 200 directly funded units set at transfer with a year to spare. The only questions are by how much. There is, of course, no room for complacency and I and the Housing Officers are determined to pursue

all appropriate opportunities. In this respect it is pleasing to note that 27 units have been provided with 12 more to come under the First Time Buyers Initiative and that the Council has adopted the Empty Homes Strategy.

We are also hoping to bring forward the Choice based lettings programme which will aim to provide greater choice and transparency in housing lettings and which also potentially offers certain operational advantages.

Planning Policy

The continuing saga of KIG has required the postponement of any re-consultation on the Core Strategy. I and the Planning Policy Officers are therefore continuing to take the opportunities to progress other

Clive English – Cont'd. / ...

urgently required planning policy work. Progress has been made with the Section 106 SPD, which has just been to Overview and Scrutiny. Work is also ongoing on implementing the Growth Point, Infrastructure and High Street Regeneration projects. In addition the opportunity has been taken to speed up work on preparation of Conservation Area Appraisals, with 2 more due to be published for public consultation. These being Boughton Monchelsea Green and Ashford Road, Maidstone. In addition work to update our outdated guidance on Residential extensions will shortly be commissioned. This will be of great assistance to Development Control, Planning Committee members, Councillors in general, Parishes and the general public.

I will be examining the programme further in the near future to try to ensure that we use our resources

effectively and do not lose any opportunities.

Enforcement

As part of the focus on continuing to improve the Enforcement service a seminar with Parishes has been arranged with Kalc (formerly KAPC) on 4th February to enhance Parishes' understanding of the system and to explore any issues.

Boxley Warren

I will shortly be designating Boxley Warren as a Local Nature Reserve, something which i am sure everyone will welcome. This still leaves Maidstone far short of the numbers in some other nearby districts and it is to be hoped that we will aim to improve on this substantially in years to come.

Mike FitzGerald – Community Services

New for 2008

Some of the good things coming out of our community partnership working:

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Maidstone Health Walks

Gentle short walks between half an hour and an hour, at your own pace, friendly safe, free and open to all ages and abilities.

Walks from Mote Park Café every Tuesday meet 10.20 am set off 10.30 am and Walks in and around the Town Centre every Thursday meet 11.50 am set off 12.00 noon. Walking the way to health is a choosing health programme initiative being promoted

by Maidstone Borough Council and West Kent Primary Care Trust and organised by BTCV. For more detail contact Tim Hills Health Walk co-ordinator, email t.hills@btcv.org.uk

Youth Forum Team Building Weekend

A development training and team building weekend has been organised with KCC for our new youth forum leaders and cabinet. The trip to Halls Green in Hadlow (not far), an outdoor activity centre and will be from Friday 22nd February to Sunday 24th February. The cost is being



Mike Fitzgerald – Community Services

covered by the KCC youth participation budget and events include raft building, canoeing, tree jumping etc.

Maidstone Museum Youth Project

This project will take place between now and April and involves young people making a podcast for other young people to use in the museum. The podcast will be on a theme of their choice, they will write a story board, script, direct the action,

conduct the interviews and make recordings to produce the podcast which will then be available to download as an audio guide from the Museums website and at a download station in the museum for other young people to enjoy when they visit.

The grant for this comes from Museum Libraries and Archives and a proportion of the money is being used to buy recording and editing equipment to enable the beginning of a whole podcast series.

Maidstone Carers Tai Chi Class

This is being held every Wednesday from 12-1 pm at the Maidstone Community Centre, Marsham Street from the 18th January.

If you know someone who cares for a family member or friend and would be interested in meeting other carers come along and join this friendly group in Tai Chi- Call Christine 01622 685276

New Wheelchair Basketball Club Comes to Maidstone!

Maidstone Borough Council has been working closely with the Kent Sports Development Unit and the Astor of Hever School Sports Partnership to develop a Maidstone Wheelchair Basketball Club.

The club is now running every Saturday from 3pm for 2 hours at the Astor of Hever Sports Centre, Maidstone. The club is primarily for wheelchair users with upper body coordination, but non-disabled players are welcome. The hope is that the Club will join the Great Britain Wheelchair Basketball Association League and participate competitively.

Adult Education - Local Champions

We are working closely with Kent Adult Education Services (KAES) and hoping to identify local champions in your ward or parish who will bring together a group of people who wish to learn new skills for fun, pleasure or personal development and fulfilment.

There will be the charges to reflect the cost of the staff and administration that KAES will be responsible for but we will work with the Champions to minimise the costs of accommodation and bring fresh opportunities to your residents.

I will be holding a meeting to take this forward and explain the opportunities.

Mike FitzGerald — Cont'd. / ...

Improve your English

- A new opportunity being offered with external funding

Classes start every Monday from 14th January for Parents and Children from 1.15 pm to 3.15 pm at Archbishop Courtenay School. *Only £1.00 per session call Tracey 01622 754666*

Maidstone Young Families

- **Social Support Groups**

Tiny Toes

Monday 2.00 - 4.00 pm

at Park Wood Plus Healthy Living Centre

Mini Munchkins

Thursday 10.30 am - 12.30 pm at St

Hilary Hall, Mangravet Avenue

Little Rascalls

Wednesday 12.30 pm - 2.30 pm Manna

Christian Centre Brewer Street

For more information email

KamaMckenzieUK@aol.com

Street Pastors

The launch of the Street Pastors in Maidstone to which representatives from Maps partners, Kent Police, Maidstone Borough Council and other Churches were invited took place at The Life Church Brewer Street on Wednesday the 16th January.

Street Pastors is an attempt by the churches to be a positive presence and a help to those who use our town during the night time. There are already several schemes running around the country and more information about Street Pastors can be found at <http://www.streetpastors.org.uk>

Kent Village of the Year

Competition 2008 — Action with Communities in Rural Kent

Sarah Pascoe has taken over as the volunteer co-ordinator role for this Annual Competition and I believe it is important to encourage our rural communities to take part in this nationally acclaimed event. This year there will be four new categories being launched People, Environment, Business and Communication. Information packs are now available and details can be found at www.ruralkent.org.uk

Night Hoops

The ever popular Night Hoops, Basketball tournament continues to grow, with over 100 young players attending the event on a regular basis. Tom Connors from Street Ball Extreme attended the event on Sunday 9th December, where he once again impressed the young people with some of his moves. Better still this time he came armed with copies of his new DVD, which includes footage of Tom and the young people shooting hoops, recorded the last time he came down to the event. More Night Hoops are planned for Sunday 3rd February 2008 and Sunday 9th March 2008. At a cost of £2.00 per play (squads of up to 9 players). Age 13+





Mike FitzGerald – Cont'd. / ...

Youth Sport Achievement Awards 2007

With over 80 nominations now in and the winners chosen we will once again we will be recognising all of the sporting achievements of the young people and clubs in the Borough of Maidstone in the annual award ceremony run by the Sports, Play and Youth Development Team at Maidstone Borough Council the event will be held on Friday 25th January 2008 at Maidstone Leisure Centre.



Dan Daley – Leisure and Culture

More Culture than Leisure this month!

First, Albert Goodwin. (1845-1932)
"Albert who?"

If that is your immediate response, then now is the time to 'get with it'. Albert Goodwin, born, brought up and educated in Maidstone, was one of England's finest watercolourists of the 19th/20th Centuries. He lived a long life travelling the world painting landscapes and views of everyday life. He was born in Boxley Road. Now recognised as a painter of renown in the footsteps of Turner, Bonington and Ruskin, his work is now fetching enormous sums at auction. We own the largest collection under one roof in the Maidstone Museum. Please take the time to go and see the superb exhibition of his work which is **on display at the Museum Gallery until March 23rd.**

Work is now underway to convert the Exchange into the Artists' Quarter we have talked about for so long.

When finished in the late Spring there will be new event space with rehearsal rooms, space for artists to work in and new gallery opportunities for display.

Coupled with this will be a new consolidated approach to sales at the Hazlitt to promote all of the musical events which are such a feature of Maidstone life.

We are trying to get all of the producers of music to combine their efforts under the heading of 'Maidstone Music' so that we can gain a greater audience for all of their events. Maidstone is the home to much music right across the spectrum - from Jazz to Janocek, Busker to Beethoven - and we must make the most of the great talents of the many performers we have in the Borough. This is the Council's contribution to this aspiration.

Gurkha Engineer Tribute. You will be aware that we are arranging for a Statue to be created as a tribute to

Dan Daley – Cont'd. / ...

celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the founding of the Queen's Royal Gurkhas in September. Work is well in hand and the sculptor hopes to have designs ready for late February in order that we can get the public subscription appeal ready for launch in April. The public Appeal is being overseen by the Maidstone Trust and it is hoped that Members and the many other organisations will respond generously to what is being seen as a timely tribute to this loyal band of men who have such a close connection with the Borough.

Maidstone Marker. You may very well ask, 'Where is it?'. The answer is, 'back on the drawing board' - essential redesign work has been found to be necessary so that certain safety features to satisfy Highway technical requirements can be incorporated before it can be erected. It WILL come and probably in a slightly different place – but more of this later.

We have commissioned a report from Consultants for an updated Economic and Tourism Strategy for Maidstone. This is due for return by the end of March.



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