

Cabinet Information Bulletin



Christopher Garland — Leader of the Council

In this first bulletin of the new administration it is important that members are made fully aware of the strategic direction that the leader and cabinet will be taking over the next municipal year. I lay before members in this bulletin that approach. This is an evolving approach but the essence of the direction is economic regeneration and prosperity.

1. Introduction - Strategic Approach and Themes

I take as the starting point for my cabinet's approach to the next year the 6 themes that the council has already adopted in its strategic plan namely:

- A healthy environment
- Sustainable Communities
- Prosperity
- Lifelong learning
- Quality Living
- Quality Decent Homes that People can afford

These are themes that the previous Conservative administration under Eric Hotson pursued and ones that the current Conservative administration will continue.

These themes cannot be achieved in isolation from one another and must be pulled together. We cannot have prosperity without the requisite skills

set in our communities, and we cannot have sustainable communities without prosperity. Equally, we cannot have quality living without prosperity and a healthy environment. All these areas are required to be delivered and acted upon in order to achieve a vibrant, prosperous, dynamic and quality driven town and borough.

In addition, we cannot achieve this alone and we must work with effective partners, be they specific groupings dealing with specific tasks (such as Locate in Kent) or neighbouring local authorities and our own County Council. To this end, we must build effective partnership working and not partnership working for its own 'tick box' sake. The vehicle for this is the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

However, in order to begin one must have a starting point and that starting point must be economic prosperity - quality jobs and economic skills sets are the lynchpin, which will help deliver the rest of the themes and priorities.

Statistics demonstrate all too clearly that failure to engender the right environment for prosperity - whether it be for individuals or businesses or indeed towns - leads to lack of health, poor quality living, poor environment, poor housing and rising crime.

Special points of interest:

- Crime figures reduced – Pg 6
- Recycling – Phase 2 and 3
- New Members Library – Pg 11

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The council has accepted, cross party, the need for growth point status - now we must balance this acceptance of housing numbers with business generation and up-skilling of the indigenous workforce.

2. Achieving Economic Prosperity

Maidstone has a distinct comparative advantage to most other towns in Kent with our retail offering and this must be maintained. However, in order to achieve *prosperity* and reduce outward flows of commuters to London and elsewhere we must become a beacon of opportunity to other tertiary businesses that can provide a higher Gross Value Added (GVA) to the borough.

This will be achieved by the following:

- Encouraging iconic economic projects into the borough, such as the Kent Clinic and associated ancillary services.
- Continuing to welcome into the borough outside businesses that will add value and raise average wages in the borough, such as Eclipse Park.
- Using the LSP and County Council to investigate and action plans for the skilling of the workforce and improvement to the statutory provision of education in the borough.
- Engendering an environment where indigenous small businesses can grow and foster a long term ability to survive and remain resilient in a challenging economic environment through support of small business 'incubator' units.
- Working closely with Kent Invicta Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses to deepen encourage better links

between businesses in the borough.

- Enhance the importance and activity of Maidstone's Economic Forum and to widen its membership to ensure greater participation from the wider business community and use this as a vehicle to deliver a Core Strategy that will balance up the housing numbers accepted by the council

- Develop the economic aspects of the Core Strategy, in conjunction with partners and business forums and wider consultations, in a sensitive and pragmatic manner for economic development.

- Ensure that the emerging Core Strategy accepts and lays down policies for the correct balancing of housing numbers and business growth.

- An acceptance that the borough council and its partners cannot 'buck the market' but can create an environment where the market will wish to operate.

Monitor internally economic indices, such as average wages, to ensure that we travel in the right direction.

Whilst I am clear that economic prosperity is the engine room for the delivery of the council's other priorities we must protect the nature and environment of our town and borough. ***Economic Prosperity strategies that do not protect and secure the rural and environmental charm and character of the borough will lead to the reverse of what we are trying to achieve.***

Emphasis, through the Core Strategy, the planning system and widening of Area Character Assessments, will be given to ensuring we maintain our historic reputation that comes with our market town, our status as the County Town, and the beauty of the

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surrounding countryside. Equally though we need an economy where people can continue to live and enjoy what Maidstone as a borough has to offer.

3. Transport

Transportation has an affect on how the borough will flourish and remain attractive for living in and accessing.

We have direct influence only over one tool for tackling congestion and that is Park & Ride. All other aspects of transport and road provision are with Kent County Council and the Highways Agency.

Park & Ride is still heavily subsidised by the council and for the long term survival of the scheme this cannot be allowed to continue. However, I am clear that Park & Ride is and will be a central feature for tackling congestion in the town and borough.

We will therefore:

Begin a 'Master Planning' exercise for the development of a strategic approach to the long term provision of Park & Ride; developing a programmed implementation of sites, on a business case approach, to cater for projected growth in population, housing and car usage over the life-cycle of Growth Point status. This will bring to an end the ad-hoc approach that historically has been taken to Park & Ride. It will also assist in reducing and ultimately eliminating the heavy subsidisation of the past. This will ensure its long-term survival and viability.

4. External Affairs & Joint Working

In the preamble to this document, I mentioned that it was not possible for the council to work in isolation and will need to embrace and work with other key effective partners. The principal forum for this will be the Local Strategic partnership and work has already started in turning this into a more robust thematically focused group and I will continue to build upon this as its importance increases over time as it becomes the likely vehicle for government funding. The LSP is central in assisting the borough council on working towards the six themes it has outlined. We cannot, by ourselves, achieve our aims and objectives.

We are currently seeking agreement to joint working practices with Swale, Tunbridge Wells and Ashford Boroughs but the overriding priority for me is to agree only where clear benefits can be accrued by Maidstone Borough without detriment to current provision of services - then there is merit in joint working.

5. Provision of Council Core Services and Finance

I am clear that despite the governments emphasis on council's being 'Place Shapers' the public expect the provision of certain core services at a level that they deem acceptable and appropriate.

The new waste collection regime will continue to be rolled out and I am adamant that the maintenance of weekly collection of residual waste and the fortnightly collection of recyclables currently remains the most appropriate system when





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balancing the need for increased recycling rates with reputational integrity of the council.

Cost savings can be made once the roll out has been completed and I am certain that the additional financial burden resulting from this new system as opposed to the so-called 'Alternate weekly Collection' method needs to be mitigated where possible. This includes considering the possibility of Saturday collections and, perhaps, joint working initiatives. Savings need to be made and will be made where appropriate.

The Conservative administration, in the face of real cuts in grants from central government, is well aware of the need to maintain council tax rates at a comparatively low level. I am clear that the council, as before, must pursue a policy of value for money in everything we do, balancing this with the need to provide core services at a level deemed acceptable by the public. Savings to the detriment of core services is not acceptable and savings must be sought through better working practice and joint working where it can be proved there are real service and financial benefits from doing so.

6. Improving Facilities in the Borough

It is also my cabinet's plan to enhance the leisure and cultural offering of the town and borough. This will be achieved by:

- Enhancing and improving the Mote Park Leisure Centre by using the market to buy in to the leisure centre and invest the required capital needed to bring the leisure centre not only up

to date but fit for purpose for the next 20 years.

- Explore options for a concert hall in Maidstone that can rival any similar offering in Kent.
- Greater use of public art in the town centre and major urban and rural centres to raise the profile of the town and borough.

Growth Point status and housing must be combined with leisure and cultural improvements, along with good quality economic development. Failure to do so will engender a 'drab' and cramped town and borough and this must not be allowed to occur.

Conclusion

The worst evil that can confront any authority is to preside over a declining town and borough, with increasing housing numbers and population, for therein lays an ever-declining circle of an inability to deliver on the other priorities that the council has set itself along with the human misery that results from declining economic prosperity.

Therefore, the 'golden thread' of this administration is to deliver, with our partners and through the Local Strategic Partnership, an agenda of quality economic development, a proper transport strategy through Park & Ride and provision of quality jobs and skills together with the protection, enhancement of rural and environmental assets. Only this can ensure that the themes of affordable housing, quality living and a healthy environment, together with tackling deprivation, can be delivered.

Marion Ring – Community Services

With the considerable changes that are to occur as a result of growth point, the likely increase in population and economic regeneration in the borough it is essential that the council sets a community services agenda to pull communities together so that the changes that will occur will be positive and harmonious changes. My portfolio will play a big part in shaping the borough over the next twenty years.

I have established my priorities as: crime and disorder reduction, reducing the fear of crime, effective parish working and relations and raising the skills level of our indigenous workforce so that all who wish to do so can participate in the economic prosperity of the borough.

In addition to this we must preserve and enhance the existing parishes of our rural and urban communities and devolve as much decision making to them as is practicable. Where new urban parishes are likely to occur and be effective then the council has a responsibility to assist in bringing this about.

I have established, within these priorities, those areas which we can have a direct influence on and those areas where we must work with partners to influence and promote. Having established this it is clear that good effective partnership working is required and I have been establishing a good rapport and working relationship over the past weeks with our key partners and will be setting out over the coming months how the priorities I have identified will be achieved in partnership working.

The skills agenda has been highlighted as one of the key components and requisites for sustainable economic growth and prosperity in the borough and we need to drive forward as a matter of urgency, in conjunction with KCC and the business community, the skills agenda.

Current Developments

Community Safety Qualifications

The Community Safety Team have been working in conjunction with Kent Police and City and Guilds to develop a programme to accredit all of the community safety practitioners with Level 3 NVQ in Community Justice: Community Safety and Crime Reduction.

Peter Cackett, the Anti-Social Behaviour Officer was the first member of the team to have successfully awarded the standard with the remainder currently completing the programme in the next few weeks.

David Hewetson, Community Safety Co-ordinator being accredited as an A1 Assessor - joining Richard Wingett who is already an A1 Assessor, Richard having formerly trained and assessed police officers and PCSOs in Maidstone.

The Community Safety Unit is believed to be one of the first in the country to have adopted this approach to developing staff competencies, measured against rigorous community safety and crime reduction performance criteria.





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Continued Good Performance on Crime Reduction

There was an overall reduction of **10% in KCVS Crime** in the full year figures for 2007/2008, when compared to the 2005/2006 baseline.

- **Criminal Damage** - down 11.5% from 2748 to 2433
- **Theft from Motor Vehicle** - down 9.2% from 836 to 759
- **Other Wounding** - down 10.2% from 1538 to 1381
- **Vehicle Interference** - down 26.4% from 193 to 142
- **Theft From the Person** - down 20.6% from 160 to 127
- **Other Theft** - down 4.6% from 1623 to 1549.

When compared to the same period 2006/2007, the reduction was even more dramatic with a reduction of 13.3%

The good performance continues for the 'all crime' types for the rolling year up to May 2008 with a 13.7% reduction against the previous year. With particularly good performance on vehicle crime, which has seen a 25.8% reduction; much of the good work is attributed to Neighbourhood Policing, directed police operations and partnership working.

However, despite this overall good performance there are still issues in individual wards such where crime is not being reduced - this must be a priority to tackle these individual wards and I will be working very closely with the police to come up with the reasons why this is and how these issues can be tackled on an individual ward basis with a targeted plan of

action.

Parish Clerk Training

On 2 June I chaired two lively training sessions for Parish Clerks on how the concurrent functions arrangements operate within the Borough. There was also a presentation on sources of alternative external funding for projects in parishes, including Awards for All and the Community Spaces programme. I was very pleased by the high level of interest shown by the Parishes in this training. In total 30 Parishes were represented.

On-Line Disabled Shoppers' Guide to Maidstone

There has been an initial scoping meeting to get this underway. We are using **Disability Go**, a social enterprise which is the national market leader, to develop this guide for us. There will be further consultations with the disabled community before work on the guide begins in the Autumn; we intend to have the guide launched by the end of the year. The guide will enable disabled people to find out information regarding the accessibility of the shops and facilities they want to use before visiting the town centre. It will help disabled visitors to Maidstone to plan their visit more effectively and, by showing what is available, serve as an encouragement for them to shop here.

Disability Focus Group

I have chaired the first meeting of the Disability Focus Group this municipal year. I found it very helpful to listen to the views of the disabled

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community on a number of disability issues in the Borough where the Council may be able to help, and I brought from the meeting several action points which I will progress.



Richard Ash — Corporate Services

It has been quite a hectic period getting my head around all the sections of the Corporate Services portfolio. It will be a steep learning curve.

I have met with Alison Broom (Director of Operations) and David Edwards (Director of Change and Support Services), together with Alasdair Robertson (Business Manager, Operations) and Neil Harris (Democratic Services) by way of a briefing document.

I need to speak to many others and to get to know the teams working in the various sections of Corporate Services.

I have formulated my priorities which will be revealed to the members of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 July 2008.

My two decisions so far have been to give permission for one room in Maidstone House to be given over to a Members Library and this Friday (13 June) the Complaints Department will close down early as they move over the weekend.

The sheet regarding various items that Overview and Scrutiny Committees look at in relation to the various Cabinet Members has been revised so that it accords with the portfolios of the current Cabinet Members.





Mark Wooding — Environment

As Cabinet Member for Environment, my priorities and plans for the year ahead are to work towards delivering good quality and cost effective services to the residents of the borough; to drive real improvements in the environmental issues that people really care about. In achieving this, I will work to ensure alignment to the six key themes that the council has already adopted in its strategic plan:

- A healthy environment
- Sustainable communities
- Prosperity
- Lifelong learning
- Quality living
- Quality decent homes that people can afford

Highways

Many aspects associated with the provision of highways lie with Kent County Council and the Highways Agency. However, I am concerned with those issues surrounding road safety; figures for casualties on Maidstone's roads are on the increase and this is an issue that now requires resources from KCC.

I will seek the strategic highway improvements we need in Maidstone over the coming year through the Joint Transportation Board (JTB) and will also work, through this channel, on tackling the increasing congestion in the town and the borough to help improve the quality of life for all residents of Maidstone in the years to come.

Public Transport

Transportation has an affect on how the borough will flourish and remain attractive for living in and accessing. The one key tool we have at our disposal to tackle rising congestion in the town centre is our Park and Ride service. Park and Ride is still heavily subsidised by the council and for the long term survival of the scheme this cannot be allowed to continue. However, I

am committed that Park and Ride is, and will remain, the central feature for tackling congestion in the town and surrounding borough.

Consequently, we will begin a 'Master Planning' exercise for the development of a strategic approach to the long term provision of Park & Ride; developing a programmed implementation of sites, on a business case approach, to cater for projected growth in population, housing and car usage over the life-cycle of Growth Point status. This will bring to an end the ad-hoc approach that historically has been taken to Park & Ride. It will also assist in reducing and ultimately eliminating the heavy subsidisation of the past. This will ensure its long-term survival and viability.

In the short-term, we are currently reviewing the Park and Ride service contracts currently in place and will shortly be entering a tender procedure to ensure the service proposition still remains competitive and represents 'best value'.

Improving the quality of lives and prosperity of ALL in the borough is a key priority of this administration. To this end, we have remained steadfast in our commitment made at the budget meeting on 27th February, that we will retain a travel assistance scheme for the disabled and their carers within the borough to mitigate the effects of the removal of the voucher scheme when the national bus pass was introduced in April.

Work on this proposal started on day one under this administration and a scheme operated under a grant aid approach with a third sector appears the most efficient and viable scheme to run, and I expect to see a report on this by the beginning of July. I anticipate that this scheme will be in operation by August/September of this year.

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Parking

I want our pay and display car parks and on-street parking to remain competitive with other providers in the town centre and other shopping centres in Kent so that we continue to attract people to the borough and town centre and to ensure it continues to thrive and be an attractive place to visit and shop.

With increasing levels of congestion and car ownership, we have to be mindful of the environmental impact and sustainability that comes with such increases and I will work to ensure our on-street parking provision and restrictions in the borough continue to address this, whilst also recognising the continued need to promote Maidstone as a great place to work and live.

Waste Collection

I am clear that despite the governments emphasis on council's being 'Place Shapers' the public expect the provision of certain core services at a level that they deem acceptable and appropriate. The council needs to meet challenging targets for recycling and waste minimisation going forward and I will work towards meeting these targets.

Phase two and three of the new waste collection strategy will continue to be rolled out and I am adamant that the maintenance of a weekly collection of residual waste and the fortnightly collection of recyclables currently remains the most appropriate system when balancing the need for increased recycling rates with the reputation and integrity of the council.

However, the financial and environmental sustainability of the scheme will have to be reviewed once the roll out has been completed and I am certain that the additional financial burden resulting from this new system as opposed to the so-called 'Alternate weekly Collection' method needs to be mitigated where possible. This includes considering the possibility of

Saturday collections and, perhaps, joint working initiatives through the Kent Waste Partnership (KWP) and KCC in the creation of new options for improvements in the disposal of waste.

I also believe it is time to review our arrangements with the freighter service to ensure this continues to be a cost effective and environmentally sustainable option for the disposal of household waste and that we strive to improve our recycling rates through this service.

Savings need to be made and will be made where appropriate.

Cleansing

I will continue to work on promoting our 'Clean and Tidy Borough' and ensure the provision and operation of cleansing services for the borough and council buildings are achieving the right standards and meeting the necessary criteria. Officers will be compiling a report during the course of this year in relation to the condition of litter bins across the borough, many of which are now in a poor condition, highlighting those in need of replacement and the potential costs involved.

I will also ensure we maintain our focus on enforcement and will continue supporting the issuing of fixed penalty notices for those who are intent on littering across the borough.

Public Conveniences

One of the key recommendations from the Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee's 'Image of Maidstone' report at the very end of the last municipal year was improving the town centre's public conveniences. Many of our public conveniences are in desperate need of refurbishment and I have instructed officers to carry out work investigating which of our conveniences are in most need of being



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upgraded and potential cost implications. Whilst it is unlikely that a significant programme of investment can be undertaken this year due to budgetary constraints, it will be essential that a capital investment programme is put in place going forward.

Environmental Health

Work will continue throughout this year with on-going environmental health initiatives, such as the successful 'Scores on the Doors' and Air Quality Management and I have asked officers to continue working in these areas, seeking continual improvements and have asked to be kept updated on progress throughout the year.

Climate Change

The impacts of climate change are of great importance to me and this Conservative administration and I am disappointed that since it was agreed in 2005 that this council will be carbon neutral by 2010, that we have not made greater progress towards achieving this challenging target.

Managing the effects of climate change will require a two-pronged approach of adaptation; taking effective steps to increase our resilience to the impacts of climate change, and mitigation; the

decarbonisation of our environment. The new LAA has six indicators on climate change focussing on the reduction of CO₂ emissions, both as a council, and the wider borough.

Officers are currently working up a 'carbon-neutral' proposal, defining exactly what we mean by carbon neutral as a council, how we can achieve this and what the potential cost implications would be to help us deliver it. I am expecting an initial report to come to me in July with the final report ready by September. A further report will come to me later in the year which will identify possible measures to address the effects of climate change for a borough as a whole. To this cause, this administration remains firmly committed.

Conclusion

I will work to deliver real and tangible improvements within my environment portfolio during the coming year with continued focus on the themes of the council's strategic plan and this administrations vision to achieve a vibrant, prosperous and dynamic borough. It is particularly important that we create a sustainable and environmentally conscious borough when taking into account the effects of growth point and planning over the next twenty years.



Malcolm Greer – Regeneration

During the past few weeks I have been on a rapid learning curve relating to the contents of my Portfolio. Housing.

As you are aware, this is a large and exciting, but also a demanding, task.

My Portfolio incorporates -
Local Development Plan
Planning
Economic Development and Business
Community
Sustainability

To this end I have had meetings with Officers and Line Managers relating to all of the aforementioned.

My aim is to enhance the position of Maidstone as the County Town of Kent. I intend to achieve this by attracting prestigious business to the Town through our Economic Development and by enhancing our town infrastructure.

Malcolm Greer — Regeneration

I believe that we should encourage art and culture in a more positive manner, which will enhance our visitor attraction and our vibrant nightlife.

Further, I am minded of the Historic Character of Maidstone and I will ensure that this is not eroded in my desire to modernise the Town.

I would like to make Maidstone an attractive place for residents, visitors and business alike.

To help in the planning process, I have started work on improving the consultation process with Parish Council's and have discussed this with Officers. Further, I have requested a Draft Document on improving and making the process more transparent and efficient. This should be with me in the next four weeks.

I have already started working with Development and Planning Control plus Enforcement, to improve the efficiency and working of these Departments. It is my intention to make their Departments more cost effective, transparent and to offer a better public service.

I have therefore requested a number of Reports from Officers relating to these matters, to be delivered to me by September 2008.

Further, I have looked at the I.T. Interface between these Departments and likewise have requested a Report be brought to me in September 2008 regarding the updating of equipment and therefore ensuring a better and more efficient Interface between Departments.

To aid Planning Committee Members and Substitutes, plus Parish Councils, I will be issuing an Information Pack that will contain Policy information etc. to help in their decisions. To this end I have

requested that Rob Jarman initiates an initial list for discussion.

With regard to the availability of information, it is my intention to have a Library within Maidstone House, in order to help Members in their decision-making. This will be an ongoing process that has been facilitated by Richard Ash making a room available. I will be consulting with Members on the basis of information they would like to see housed there.

It is my belief that if Members have access to Policy Information it will alleviate, to some degree, the call-in of many Planning Applications, which are costly to bring to Committee.

Regarding the pedestrianisation of Lower High Street, and further to the Working Party Report, I have requested that an Officer be made available to work with me on this project.

It is my vision that over the next 5/10 years, we will be able to encompass the river within the 'grand scheme'.

I have also requested Officers to work with me on a detailed analysis of roads etc within Maidstone Town Centre, to detail works required to make it a more user friendly and attractive area for residents, visitors and business, including the disabled. This should also enhance the business economic development within Maidstone.

Some of the people I have consulted with over the past few weeks include Developers, the Chamber of Commerce, KCC Highways and the head of KCC Development Investment. These will be ongoing discussions.

In conclusion, it is my wish to make Maidstone a County Town to be proud of, with a vibrant day and night life but also attracting both visitors and those wishing to invest in the Town, all leading to an improved economy.





Brian Moss — Leisure and Culture

My predecessor Cllr Dan Daley kept me up to date with his actions on a portfolio where we were in general agreement on what it was hoped to achieve for Maidstone and its residents.

There are a number of matters which were started over a year ago and for a host of reasons have not yet been concluded. It is my aim to address these matters and seek early conclusions.

The Maidstone Marker - the erection of this prominent piece of art work has been delayed, firstly because of siting problems and secondly because the structure had design faults which could have caused problems in heavy winds. These have now been resolved and it is hoped to erect the structure within the next two months.

Athletics Track - The Athletics track a joint venture between the council, Maidstone Athletics Club and Sutton Valence School is now progressing and will be dealt with by the planning committee later this month. I am a strong supporter of this project in that it will provide athletes and young people of Maidstone with superb training facilities. The involvement of Sutton Valence School who are putting in a very large financial contribution and are keen to involve other schools, clubs and Maidstone's youth is making this project a viable long term facility.

Hazlitt Arts Centre - The conversions to the Exchange has been completed and the project launched at the beginning of May. The project does not end there; it will need ongoing advertising support and the attraction of quality arts - both visual and performing - to make it an ongoing success. I am ambitious that this cultural activity succeeds in the long term and provides a facility for all ages and interests.

Maidstone Museum and Bently Art Gallery - The east wing project is progressing well and all being well will be completed for opening in July 2010. There is the small matter of raising £1.6 million which together with the £2.0 million from

the Lottery fund and £400,000 from our capital budget will finance the project. We have taken on a fundraising consultant with considerable experience and I am confident that we will raise the finance needed and hopefully in excess of our target. The importance of this project cannot be emphasised enough, when completed it will put Maidstone well and truly on the map as a visitor venue of excellence.

Mote Park - The consultant's paper on the future improvements to the park is now out for consultation. The report, I believe, is a good compromise between retaining the essential character of the park and improving facilities and its attraction for the public. We are fortunate to have such a prominent open space within the town and now hope that the consultants report when finally approved will attract the grant funding necessary for the parks future.

Direct Labour - The maintenance of parks, gardens and open spaces is now done by our own direct labour force. I intend to review their staffing, supervision and level of expertise to ensure that this department gives best value. It really does have the potential to improve the appearance of many aspects of the borough; I want to ensure it meets a high standard.

Weaving Heath - Whilst this project has proceeded over the past year I am now happy to report that the extra piece of wet land by the roundabout at the top of new cut is being purchased by the council. This will complete a green area of importance within the borough.

The **Sports, Play and Youth Development Team** continues to provide a full range of activities. They have been busy over the past month and below is a flavour of some activities.

Schools Tag Rugby Festival

As part of our programme of schools festivals the development team organized the Schools Tag Rugby Festival in partnership with the Astor of Hever School Sport Partnership recently. The aim

Brian Moss — Leisure and Culture

of the festival is to increase participation in healthy activity and to introduce children to the sport with the hope that they will continue into their teens and adulthood. A record number of teams took part, with Sandling Primary School the eventual winners.

Night Hoops

Night Hoops is one of our most successful initiatives, designed to be young person led, offering the opportunity for them to get involved with organizing aspects of the event. All young people are fully involved in the decisions made to develop the event. The event on 25th May attracted 6 teams and after 3 hours of basketball, 'Monstars' walked away the winners.

Skiing and snowboarding trip

In order to increase young people's participation in healthy activity (sport) a series of camps and trips is organized each year each year.

On Wednesday 16th April 2008, a full mini bus of young people was taken to the Chatham Ski Slopes where they all took part in Skiing & Snowboarding coaching.

Maidstone United football camp for disabled children and young people.

The team is committed to working with partners to increase the number of opportunities for disabled children and young people to participate in healthy activity (sport). This initiative forms part of a programme planned for the year, following a successful bid to the Youth Opportunities Fund recently (£8500).

Please send your comments and ideas for future Newsletters to:
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General

Few areas within the leisure and culture portfolio are statutory obligations of the council however my view is that they are of premier importance in making the borough an attractive place to live, work and set up business. They are crucial to the prosperity of the town and we neglect them at our peril.

Arts development, where grant funding has ceased, tourism which brings considerable benefits to the borough, the market as an attraction, allotments so necessary now that we have too many flats without gardens are all within my portfolio and will receive my attention over the coming months.

