

# Maidstone Community Strategy

Summary report

3 April 2009

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# Introduction

# Introduction

## Background and objectives

This report presents the findings from two discussion groups with Maidstone residents, which took place in March 2009. The purpose of the groups was to test whether the actions and objectives covered in the *Maidstone 2020* community strategy resonated with those who live there. This research follows on from previous work conducted by Ipsos MORI for the Council in 2007-8, which established residents' priorities for the future of Maidstone.

Specifically, the main objectives of the groups were to:

- establish whether *Maidstone 2020* is what Maidstone's residents would expect to see in a Community Strategy;
- find out what residents think about the summary of the Strategy and what it covers, including whether or not they feel anything is missing; and
- explore the extent to which residents are interested in being involved and the views they have about how the Council and its partners could work with the community to take the Strategy forward.

## Methodology

Ipsos MORI conducted two consecutive discussion groups with local residents on the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2009. A total of sixteen residents took part in the groups: seven in Group 1 and nine in Group 2. The characteristics of residents in each group are outlined below:

Groups	Characteristics
Group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Mix of genders</li><li>▪ Aged 40 and over</li><li>▪ C2DE</li><li>▪ From Shepway North, Shepway South, Park Wood and High Street area</li></ul>
Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Mix of genders</li><li>▪ Aged 18-44</li><li>▪ ABC1</li><li>▪ Some commuters, who work in London</li><li>▪ Mix of rural and urban areas, such as Maidstone town centre (urban) and Headcorn, Staplehurst, Marden, Lenham (rural) and Harrietsham (rural)</li></ul>

## Interpretation of qualitative data

Unlike quantitative surveys, qualitative research is not designed to provide statistically reliable data on what residents are thinking. Such research is illustrative rather than statistically reliable and, therefore, does not permit conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which something is happening.

Qualitative research is used to shed light on why people have particular views (rather than how many) and how these views relate to demographic characteristics and the experiences of those concerned. Focus group discussions enable a cross-section of local residents to participate in an informal and interactive way. They also enable researchers to test the strength of people's opinions.

Throughout the report, use is made of verbatim comments from focus group participants. Where this is the case, it is important to remember that the views expressed do not always represent the views of the groups as a whole, although normally the verbatim is representative of, at least a minority of the group and not one single person.

## Report structure

The following report analyses the findings from two discussion groups. It discusses the key themes and issues discussed by residents in relation to developing an appropriate strategy for Maidstone over the next eleven years. The main findings are divided into five core sections:

- Living in Maidstone;
- Looking to the future;
- Initial reaction to the strategy;
- “Our Objectives”; and
- Actions.

## Publication of findings

As Maidstone Borough Council engaged Ipsos MORI to provide objective and robust research, it is important to protect the Council's interests by ensuring that it is accurately reflected in any press release or publication of the findings. As part of our standard Terms and Conditions, the publication of the findings in this report is therefore subject to the advance approval of Ipsos MORI. This would only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misinterpretation of the findings.

## Acknowledgements

Ipsos MORI would like to thank Jim Boot for his help and advice in developing this project. Special thanks also go to the discussion group participants who took part in this research.

# Summary

## Summary

On the whole, residents of all ages had a lot of positive things to say about living in Maidstone. However, while younger residents were particularly enthusiastic about the lively town centre, with its variety of shops, restaurants and bars; older residents were more likely to praise the clean streets and friendly neighbourhoods. In fact, older residents tended to be more measured in their judgement of the town centre, saying that the plethora of high street chains was detrimental to the success of local independent businesses. Moreover, this group was more critical about the bars and restaurants in the town centre, feeling that most of these were not aimed at their age group.

As found in previous research and consultation with Maidstone's residents, the river was seen as an important focal point in the town. Residents thought that the river was one of Maidstone's greatest assets but also felt that it had not yet been developed to its full potential. They wanted to see more cafes and restaurants along the riverside to make the area livelier and more appealing to all age groups.

Transport, traffic congestion and parking were the most commonly discussed areas for improvement in Maidstone but maintaining the town's heritage and supporting local businesses were also important considerations.

Looking to the future, residents did not think anything would change significantly, unless the Council, its partners and local residents themselves took action. On the whole, they thought that having a strategy for Maidstone was a good idea, though some queried what could realistically be achieved in the current economic climate.

Overall, residents felt that the *Maidstone 2020* strategy described an ideal vision of Maidstone that everyone could relate to. However, many also believed that the strategy did not stand out as being unique to Maidstone and expected that the areas covered would be very similar across the country. To this end, it may be worthwhile including more borough-specific examples and tailoring the objectives so that they are explicitly linked to issues in Maidstone.

Nevertheless, residents agreed with the objectives listed and believed that achieving all of these would help to create their ideal vision of Maidstone, which they felt matched the one described in the strategy. There was also some recognition that some of these objectives were interconnected and that achieving one of these objectives would have a knock on effect on others. For example, it was thought that improving the transport systems in Maidstone would encourage more people and businesses into the area, which in turn would boost the

economy and create more job opportunities. Alternatively, making Maidstone a place where everyone can achieve their aspirations would help to encourage young people to stay in the area, which it was felt might attract employers looking for a skilled workforce.

In line with their stated areas for improvement, all residents placed developing an efficient, sustainable, integrated transport system as a top priority for the Council and its partners. This meant a number of different things to residents including: improving public transport (particularly local buses and train links with London), reviewing transport systems to direct through-traffic away from the town centre and reducing the cost of parking to encourage more people to visit Maidstone.

Other top priorities included building stronger and safer communities; developing a vibrant economy, creating prosperity and opportunities for all; developing Maidstone Borough's urban and rural homes and communities as models for 21<sup>st</sup> century quality and sustainable living; and making Maidstone borough a place where people of all ages can achieve their aspirations.

Not all residents interpreted these objectives in the same way. For example, younger residents interpreted "developing Maidstone Borough's urban and rural homes" as an intention to build more affordable homes, though this was not explicitly stated in the objective. Perhaps most noticeably, residents were unsure what was meant by "inequalities within the borough". While some thought that this referred to age and gender discrimination in the workplace, others assumed that it related to inequalities between communities in terms of local amenities and standard of living.

When reviewing the twelve key actions, some residents questioned what was, and was not, within the Council's remit. Many forgot that Council would be working in partnership with other organisations to achieve the stated objectives and as a result felt that some of the actions listed were not particularly relevant. Nevertheless, there was overall agreement that these actions reflected the priorities they had set out for Maidstone.

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Ben Marshall, Wendy Floyd

# **Main findings**

# Main findings

## Living in Maidstone

On the whole, residents spoke very favourably about Maidstone and felt that the town and surrounding area had a lot to offer. Across both groups, residents cited good restaurants, the variety of shops, friendly and safe neighbourhoods, clean streets and good parks as among the best things about living in the area. There was also unanimous agreement that the river is one of Maidstone's key selling points and all residents wanted to see more being made of this natural asset.

*I think people are generally reasonably friendly to one and other. There doesn't seem to be much animosity.*

18-44 years old, ABC1

*We go up to London to work quite a bit and a lot of the places outside London are right slums with rubbish everywhere, but if you go through Maidstone early in the morning it's all clean and cleared up.*

40+ years old, C2DE

However, some perceptions differed considerably between the different age groups. While the town's vibrant nightlife was one of the things younger residents liked most about living in Maidstone, older residents said they sometimes feel intimidated by the sheer number of young people in town on a Saturday night. Many older residents felt that there are not enough pubs aimed at their age group and expressed concern about the increasing number of fast food chains and modern bars in the town centre.

*I love it... I think it's quite a safe place, really clean, I really love the town, good shops and good nightlife for someone my age.*

18-44 years old, ABC1

*I think they need to stop giving licences for more pubs... my husband and I don't come into Maidstone on a Saturday night. There aren't really that many pubs for our age group. They're just full of young people.*

40+ years old, C2DE

Commuters also tended to be less positive about Maidstone's nightlife, but in contrast to the older residents, they wanted to see more restaurants and bars in the town centre to meet the high levels of demand.

Despite being more measured in their judgement of Maidstone's town centre, some older residents had noticed marked improvements in other areas around Maidstone, and described some of the Council's recent regeneration efforts as a resounding success.

*In the bad areas there's been a lot of improvement... There have been new residences built, you know, flats and things. They've just finished off the Bentley Road area and that's been improved terrifically.*

40+ years old, C2DE

On a less positive note, residents felt that the town's heritage was being eroded by these new developments. This issue resonated with all age groups but was a particular concern among those who had lived in Maidstone and the surrounding area all their lives. Despite seeing an increases number of shops and conveniences in the town, they felt that these were having a detrimental effect on the town's historical buildings and its museum.

*A lot of history of Maidstone I think we've lost. That probably doesn't matter to a lot of people but I think we should preserve the history of Maidstone. The older buildings, instead of knocking them down we should try and convert them into something.*

18-44 years old, ABC1

Poor transport links, traffic congestion and a lack of affordable and convenient parking were also commonly mentioned problems in Maidstone. The issues reported tended to differ according to whether or not residents worked in Maidstone. These residents tended to complain about road congestion and the lack of parking, while those who commuted to London to work were more concerned about the train links with London. Residents also felt that the buses could be improved, with many saying that they ran at irregular times, were unreliable and too expensive.

*What annoys me is the buses. They either turn up late or they don't turn up at all.*

40+ years old, C2DE

One older resident mentioned increasing and encouraging cycling as a possible solution to the road congestion, but felt that this was not a viable option at present because of the lack of safe cycle paths in the town.

While the plethora of shops in the town centre was cited as one of the best things about Maidstone, older residents also saw a downside to this. They felt that the influx of high street shops had lead to a decline in the number of independent shops in the town.

## Looking to the future

When asked what they thought Maidstone would be like in 2020, residents tended to focus on what they would like to see, rather than what they thought would actually happen. However, in many cases residents felt that their ideal vision could be achieved if the right actions were taken and the necessary funding to undertake these tasks was available.

For example, one resident wanted to see something being done with the derelict buildings in the town centre, such as the old pub by the train station. She thought that this would be an attractive proposition for national chain, given the high demand for restaurants in the town.

*I don't think the restaurants have been hit because a couple of weekends we've tried to get into restaurants and we can't get in. Obviously everyone enjoys coming to eat out in Maidstone... so it goes back to utilising space that isn't used.*

18-44 years olds, C2DE

Other residents wanted to see improved cycle lanes, better and cheaper parking for locals but also to attract more people to the town, and reduced or subsidised rent for small traders in the town centre.

However, when prompted to think about what they would expect Maidstone to be like in 2020, residents felt that nothing was likely to change significantly unless certain things are done. So, without suitable interventions, participants envisaged Maidstone in 2020 as having the same problems already discussed, such as the lack of parking, traffic congestion, poor public transport, the closure of independent shops and the failure to realise the full potential of the river.

## Initial reactions to the strategy

Residents of all ages felt that, overall, the strategy provided a perfect outline of what they would like Maidstone to be like in the future.

*It fits our imagined ideal of where we would like to live.*

40+ years old, C2DE

However, while residents agreed with the things the *Maidstone 2020* strategy focused on, many also felt that these things would be very similar across the country and that the objectives and actions planned for Maidstone did not stand out as being unique to the district.

*I think the aspirations and objectives you are trying to achieve are pretty much the same nationwide. So you could print this*

*up and put it into any town and it would be the same objectives from town to town. Everybody wants better schools, better health, better transport.*

18-44 years old, ABC1

A few residents said that the leaflet did not provide enough detail for them to comment on all aspects of the strategy and they wanted to know more about the actions that would be taken to achieve the stated objectives. However, while there was some interest in reading the full strategy document, there was also an appreciation among the younger residents that they were unlikely to get around to doing so.

### **“Our Vision”**

Looking specifically at the “Our Vision” box, residents were extremely positive about the image of Maidstone that this evoked. They felt that it described an “ideal world” scenario of Maidstone in 2020, something that all of Maidstone’s residents would like to see.

*Who wouldn't want this? It's brilliant.*

18-44 years old, ABC1

However, some residents were sceptical about whether this could all be achieved in the next eleven years. They wanted to know whether there was enough funding and resources available to implement all of the planned actions. The younger group discussed the possibility of focusing efforts on a smaller number of objectives first, rather than trying to achieve all ten at once. However, they felt Maidstone’s residents were likely to have very varied priorities, making it difficult to choose just two or three objectives that would satisfy everyone.

*You're talking about eleven years to create this utopia. It's not going to happen is it? So concentrate on two or three things that are realistic – improve the town centre, improve the houses – and concentrate on those things.*

18-44 years old, ABC1

*The problem is we're never going to agree. I'm going to want completely different things. You can see why it's got to be a huge generic thing.*

18-44 years old, ABC1

### **“Can you imagine...”**

There were mixed reactions to the “Can you imagine...” section. While some saw this as a good introduction to the strategy, others thought posing the question implied that it may not be possible to achieve the things laid out in the strategy.

*I don't like the question... It's kind of putting a negative on it before you even start.*

40+ years old, C2DE

Moreover, residents felt that some of the things mentioned in this orange box, such as schools and safety, were already very good. They stressed that the challenge would be in maintaining these high standards, rather than making improvements, and felt that the question did not make this clear.

It is interesting to note that residents in the older group assumed that the term “healthier communities” meant having a thriving community with people who are happy living there.

### **“Good, needs improving, dream, something green”**

Initially, some residents were confused by the fact that the river was mentioned in both the “good” and “dream” sections. However, this did fit with earlier discussions, in which residents had described the river as an important asset, which they felt was currently undervalued and underdeveloped.

### **“Our Objectives”**

In line with their overall assessment of the strategy, residents did not think the proposed objectives were unique to Maidstone. Nevertheless, they agreed that these were things that the Council and its partners would need to concentrate on to achieve their vision of Maidstone in 2020.

In both groups, residents queried what the term “inequalities” was referring to in objective 8. Some assumed it referred to the varying wealth and quality of life across various communities in Maidstone, while others related this to the much broader issues of age discrimination and racism in the district.

During the groups, residents were asked to choose their top three objectives. The top three choices in each group are listed below:

Group 1:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>2. Develop an efficient, sustainable, integrated transport system</li><li>3. Build stronger and safer communities</li><li>5. Make Maidstone borough a place where people of all ages – children, young people and families – can achieve their aspirations</li></ol>
Group 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Develop a vibrant economy, create prosperity and opportunities for all</li><li>2. Develop an efficient, sustainable, integrated transport system</li><li>6. Develop Maidstone Borough’s urban and rural homes and communities as models for 21<sup>st</sup> century quality and sustainable living</li></ol>

Some of these objectives were then discussed in more detail with residents:

## **Objective 2: Develop an efficient, sustainable, integrated transport system**

Developing an efficient, sustainable, integrated transport system was a top priority in both groups. Residents related this to a wide range of improvements, such as; increasing the frequency and reliability of buses, reducing the cost of parking in the town centre (particularly for local people) and improving road links in and out of the town. Young commuters also linked this objective to the need to improve Maidstone's train connections with London.

*The way I read it was they were going to try and develop the way people get in and out of town... without worry of the overcrowding in the town because of parking.*

18-44 years old, ABC1

*I chose it for railways because the railway is at breaking point already and I dread to think what it's going to be like in ten years time... I don't know what influence the Council can have on railways but that's why I chose it.*

18-44 years old, ABC1

There was agreement across both groups that meeting this objective is the responsibility of everyone in Maidstone: the Council, its partners and local residents. In particular, it was felt that if public transport was to be improved (e.g. if the buses were run at more regular times) then local residents had the responsibility to use it. Moreover, residents felt that it was their responsibility to communicate what they wanted so that any actions taken to improve the transport system were appropriately targeted to the needs of the community.

*If they were going to do it, it would be up to us to use it. Otherwise they'd be making a loss.*

18-44 years old, ABC1

*It's all very well sitting at home whinging about things... you need to write to the Council, explain the problem, explain the solution and see what happens. At least give them the option of having a go at the idea or say we can't do that because...*

40+ years old, C2DE

## **Objective 3: Build stronger and safer communities**

While this objective was rated highly in both groups, it was a greater priority for older residents, many of whom had described feeling unsafe in the town centre at night. While crime was not seen as a particular issue in Maidstone, older residents discussed the need for

CCTV cameras in areas perceived to be dangerous and felt that encouraging local people to get to know each other could also help to make communities feel safer.

This group recognised the cyclical nature of this objective. There was a strong sense that a community would become stronger if it felt safer. Residents believed that if people felt safe in their community they would be more inclined to talk to and get to know people, which in turn, would make the community safer.

*I think the community would become stronger if it was safer because people would be more inclined to go out of their four walls, which a lot of people, especially the elderly wouldn't want to do because they feel intimidated leaving their own home.*

40+ years old, C2DE

### **Objective 1: Develop a vibrant economy, create prosperity and opportunities for all**

Residents of all ages believed that many young people were being forced to move out of Maidstone because local employers did not pay salaries that were in line with house prices. Commuters strongly agreed with this point, saying that they could not afford to live in the area if they did not work in London.

*I think it's an emphasis on youngsters so they don't feel that the only way they're going to live a decent life is to move away.*

40+ years old, C2DE

Younger residents discussed the need to encourage higher paying employers into the area and thought more could be done to encourage businesses to the area. They thought that this could be done by improving transport links into the town but also appreciated that being outside of the M25 meant that Maidstone could not compete with places like Watford.

In addition to talking about jobs, residents stressed the importance of maintaining a vibrant town centre. They had noticed a number of shops closing down over the last few years and, while they accepted that this was partly a result of the current economic climate, they stressed the importance of supporting local shops and restaurants over the coming years.

### **Objective 6: Develop Maidstone Borough's urban and rural homes and communities as models for 21<sup>st</sup> century quality and sustainable living**

This objective was of particular importance to younger residents, who assumed that it also encompassed "affordable housing". In fact, only one resident pointed out that this word was not actually included in the objective. They had already discussed the disparity between house prices and salaries in Maidstone, and felt that balancing this out was vital to maintaining the vibrancy and prosperity of the town.

Young residents agreed that new developments in the town must be sustainable. They stressed that if new homes were built in an area this would have to be supported by an increase in local amenities, such as schools and hospital places.

## Actions

In relation to the actions, there was some confusion over what was and not within the Council's remit and not all residents recognised that the Council was working in partnership with other local organisations to achieve the specified actions. For example, residents were not aware that the Council was responsible for alcohol licensing so queried whether this should be on the list of actions. Some older residents also believed that actions on health and education were national issues and therefore outside of the Council's control.

A few residents also queried the necessity of some of the actions, saying that they did not see the things mentioned as particular problems in Maidstone. For example, reducing the number of deaths and injuries on the roads was not believed to be a particular problem. The need to tackle alcohol abuse and related crime was also queried by some young people.

*I don't think we have a massive problem with alcohol abuse and related crime. I live in the middle of the town centre and there's never been any trouble.*

18-44 years old, ABC1

Nevertheless, residents were extremely positive about some of the actions, with one younger resident commenting that the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 11 reflected everything they had been discussing in the group. This was met with overall agreement from the rest of the group, who felt that these actions were interlinked with the others. Older residents also tended to be more enthusiastic about these actions (and action 12).

# Appendices

# Appendices

## Discussion Guide

### Maidstone Community Strategy

#### Discussion Guide

**The main objectives of this research are to:**

- establish whether Maidstone 2020 is what Maidstone's residents would expect to see in a Community Strategy
- find out what they think about the summary of the Strategy and its coverage (incl. omissions) as a precursor to unpacking perceptions in relation to the objectives and the planned actions which underpin them
- determine whether residents consider the Strategy to be sufficiently aspirational i.e. is it ambitious enough, does its vision of the future for Maidstone accord with the vision residents have?
- explore the extent to which residents are interested in being involved and the views they have about how the Council and its partners could work with the community to take the Strategy forward.

#### ***1. Introductions and warm-up (10 mins)***

THANK PARTICIPANTS FOR COMING

INTRODUCE SELF, IPSOS MORI

ROLE OF IPSOS MORI – RESEARCH ORGANISATION, GATHER ALL OPINIONS, ALL VALID, DISAGREEMENT OK

SAY WORK BEING DONE ON BEHALF OF MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL AND PARTNERS

WHAT WE FIND WILL INFORM THE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

IDEA IS TO GAIN THE BROADEST POSSIBLE SPECTRUM OF OPINION AND IDEAS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF MAIDSTONE – DOING TWO DISCUSSION GROUPS

CONFIDENTIALITY, GET PERMISSION TO RECORD, NO DETAILED ATTRIBUTION

HOUSEKEEPING – TOILETS, FIRE EXIT, MOBILE PHONES OFF

**Can you please briefly tell us your name, where you live, how long you have lived in the Maidstone area, and whether you work/what you do.**

## 2. Present and future in Maidstone (10-15 mins)

I'd like your individual views on what is it like living here in Maidstone today?

What are the good things about Maidstone as a place to live? WRITE ON FLIPCHART. Why do you say that?

What are the bad things? WRITE ON FLIPCHART. Why do you say that?

How long have you had these views? CHECK THAT NOT SHAPED EXCLUSIVELY BY PRE-TASK

What about the future? Will things get better or not?

What are the big issues facing Maidstone now and in the future?

Let's imagine it's 2020. How do you think Maidstone will have changed?

Will it have got better or worse as a place to live and work? Why?

What would need to have happened for Maidstone to have got better as a place to live and work?

Are you confident that these things can actually happen?

## 3. The Strategy: overall (10 mins)

BRIEF PARTICIPANTS:

All local councils are required, by law, to prepare a community strategy. These strategies are supposed to set out how the local councils and other public bodies such as health, police services businesses and charities, plan to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area. Similarly, Maidstone's strategy will:

“...set out the overall direction and long-term vision for the economic, social and environmental well-being of the local area...it tells the story of the place...”

So, in telling the story of place it sets out the ambitions the Council and its partners have for the Borough of Maidstone and the specific things it plans to do to make it a better place.

The community strategy has been developed through consultation with residents, groups and businesses within Maidstone.

HAND OUT STRATEGY SUMMARY IF NECESSARY: Please can you have another look at the summary we gave you to read in advance of coming here. I'll give you a few minutes to look at it again.

REMIND PARTICIPANTS THAT IT IS A SUMMARY AND THERE IS A LONGER, MORE DETAILED DOCUMENT 'BEHIND' IT.

POINT OUT ANY MISPERCEPTIONS AROUND SERVICE DELIVERY – I.E. EDUCATION, SOCIAL SERVICES, LIBRARIES, ROAD MAINTENANCE, ETC ALL COUNTY COUNCIL, AND POLICE & HEALTH OUT OF COUNCIL'S DIRECT CONTROL. ALTHOUGH IN SOME CASES THE COUNCIL IS BEING ASKED TO TAKE A GREATER ROLE (I.E. CCTV IS FUNDED AND OPERATED BY THE BOROUGH COUNCIL)

REMIND PEOPLE THAT THE COUNCIL IS WORKING IN ALLIANCE WITH OTHER PARTNERS SUCH AS THE POLICE, COUNTY COUNCIL ETC (EXPLAIN LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP).

**Overall what did you think of the summary?**

EXPLAIN THAT GOING ON TO LOOK AT IT IN DETAIL – AFTER OVERALL VIEWS AND IMPRESSIONS AT THIS STAGE

PROBE **Why do you say that?**

**Do you think having such a strategy is a good idea? Why?**

**How do think it will be used?**

**How do you think it should be used?**

**Would you be interested in seeing the longer, more detailed strategy?**

#### 4. “Our vision” and the ‘Can you imagine...’ section (10 mins)

**Let's break it down and look at some of the specific parts of the summary. What do you think of the ‘Our vision’ box?**

**Do you think there are any problems involved in achieving this? Which parts of the vision?**

**What is most important in your view?**

**Is there anything missing?**

**Is it ambitious enough? Or too ambitious?**

**What do you think of the ‘Can you imagine...’ section at the start?**

**What about the issues called GOOD, NEEDS IMPROVING, DREAM, SOMETHING GREEN? Do you share these priorities?**

**Are these the right issues in your view? PROBE: Why do say that?**

## 5. “Our objectives” (20-25 mins)

**In the summary there is a box setting out a number of objectives. Let’s look at these. First, I would like to get your overall reaction to these:**

- 1) Develop a vibrant economy, create prosperity and opportunities for all.
- 2) Develop an efficient, sustainable, integrated transport system.
- 3) Build stronger and safer communities.
- 4) Create healthier communities and encourage more active older people
- 5) Make Maidstone borough a place where people of all ages – children, young people and families – can achieve their aspirations
- 6) Develop Maidstone borough’s urban and rural homes and communities as models for 21<sup>st</sup> century quality and sustainable living
- 7) Build a thriving sporting, creative and cultural life for all
- 8) Retain and enhance Maidstone borough’s distinctive history, landscape and character
- 9) Reduce inequalities within the borough
- 10) Establish Maidstone borough’s reputation as a place for environmental excellence and action on climate change.

**GAUGE OVERALL REACTION: What do you think of these objectives? Are they what you would expect to see?**

**Do you think these are the right objectives for the community strategy to be focusing on? Is there anything missing? Why’s it not there?**

REFER BACK TO OUTCOMES OF EARLIER DISCUSSION (BEFORE INTRODUCED SUMMARY)

**Do you think any of the objectives conflict in any way? Which ones?**

**Can I just check, is there anything you don’t understand or isn’t clear. PROMPT: sustainable, integrated, inequalities**

**Are some more/less important than others? Which?**

PROBE FOR REASONS **Why do you say that?**

NOTE – IT WILL BE IMPORTANT HERE TO GET AN IDEA NOT JUST OF THE OBJECTIVES WHICH PARTICIPANTS PRIORITISE, BUT ALSO THOSE THAT THEY DO NOT.

**If you had to complete the questionnaire which asks you to circle your three top objectives, which ones would you circle? ASK RESPONDENTS TO DO THINK ABOUT AND THEN DO THIS. TALLY ON FLIPCHART.**

**Why did you choose what you did?**

ESTABLISH WHICH 4-5 OBJECTIVES THE GROUP WANT TO PRIORITISE, AND EXPLAIN THAT WE WILL COVER THESE IN MORE DETAIL NOW AND THE OTHERS IF HAVE TIME. NOTE THAT IS MORE IMPORTANT TO COVER 4-5 IN DEPTH THAN TO COVER THEM ALL

LOOK AT GROUP'S TOP 4-5 IN TURN. FOR EACH:

**What does this objective actually mean to you?**

PROBE TO SEE IF WELL ARTICULATED IN STRATEGY. ANY CONFUSION? ANY IMPROVEMENTS?

**Why do you think it's been included in the ten?**

**How do you think this objective could be achieved – what needs to happen between now and 2020?**

**Do you think this objective will be achieved by 2020? Why, why not?**

**Who's responsible for achieving it? PROMPT: Maidstone Borough Council, Kent County Council, the Government, business, residents themselves?**

**Should local communities be involved at all?**

**What is the best way of involving local communities in achieving this?**

**Would you be interested in being involved? PROMPT: Really? How?**

## 6. "Key actions" (10-15 mins)

GIVE PARTICIPANTS ENOUGH TIME TO READ THIS SECTION OF THE SUMMARY. EXPLAIN THAT THERE IS MORE DETAIL 'BEHIND' EACH ACTION (PROVIDED IN THE FULL STRATEGY DOCUMENT) INCLUDING DETAILED POLICIES AND TARGETS SO THAT SUCCESS CAN BE MEASURED. THERE ARE ALSO MORE ACTIONS THAN LISTED HERE.

**What do you think of these actions as a group – will doing these twelve things make Maidstone a better place to live?**

**Thinking about them specifically, which, if any, do you think are good ideas?**

**Any which, if any, do you think are not good ideas?**

**Is there anything missing?**

**Does anything else need to happen?**

IF NECESSARY, REMIND PARTICIPANTS OF THEIR EARLIER VIEWS AND PRIORITIES INCLUDING WHAT THEY THOUGHT NEED TO HAPPEN FOR OBJECTIVES TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2020.

7. Summing-up (5 mins)

**What are the main things the Council and its public service partners should focus their energies, efforts and resources on to make Maidstone a better place to live and work by 2020?**

**Thinking about the draft Maidstone 2020 Strategy that you've looked at this evening, what is the most important message from this evening that you would like us to pass back to the Council?**

**Any other final comments/messages about the Maidstone 2020 strategy? Anything missing? Anything that could be done to improve it?**

THANK PARTICIPANTS AND REMIND HOW INFORMATION WILL BE USED.  
DISTRIBUTE INCENTIVES.