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Public Realm Design Guide



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Executive Summary

Maidstone Borough Council is ambitious in its aspirations for the borough, its people and the town centre. It recognises that the public realm plays a vital role in creating a sense of place with connections to local historic and cultural elements as well as providing a safe and attractive environment for the public who visit, live and work in Maidstone.

The Public Realm Design Guide sets out the council's intention to create a cohesive town centre with an integrated approach to achieving high quality public realm. It complements and builds on the improvements to date, such as Jubilee Square

and the High Street, as well as the forthcoming programme of improvements and redevelopments of major sites due to be delivered between now and 2031.

It recognises that Maidstone town centre has many urban characteristics and works as a set of interconnecting zones. The guide focuses on connectivity and upgrading the environment and takes a common sense approach to materials as well as advocating that embedded public art is a key strategy in highlighting local distinctiveness.



Introduction

Background

Maidstone Town Centre is undergoing a programme of public realm improvements and redevelopments of major sites between now and 2031. This guide was commissioned by Maidstone Borough Council and it supports the Economic Development Strategy, the Destination Management Plan and the Culture and Heritage Positioning Statement.

The emerging Local Plan for Maidstone Borough provides the following vision:

By 2031 a regenerated and sustainable Maidstone town centre will be a first class traditional town centre at the heart of the 21st Century County Town that has maintained its place as one of the premier town centres in Kent by creating a distinctive, safe and high quality place.

Maidstone Borough Council's Corporate Priorities are:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all.
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough.

Both priorities have clear links to the public realm, by:

- Creating a more coherent way of dealing with art and public realm.
- Creating a more attractive place.

Scope of the Guide

The scope of this guide relates to the public realm located within the town centre boundary of Maidstone, as defined in Policy SP4 of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2011 - 2031.

The Local Plan sets the framework for development in the Borough, outlines the Council's vision for the town centre and establishes strategic policies to deliver this vision.

Policy SP4 Maidstone town centre sets out a number of policies directly relevant to the delivery of public realm improvements in the town centre, including:

1. The regeneration of Maidstone town centre is a priority. This will be achieved by:
 - vii. The retention of the best environmental features, including the riverside, and delivery of schemes to improve the

public realm and pedestrian environment as identified in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan;

2. Development in the town centre should:

- i. Demonstrate a quality of design that responds positively to the townscape, including ensuring the conservation and enhancement of the town centre's historic fabric;
- ii. Contribute to the priority public realm and accessibility improvement schemes for the town centre identified in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

The Infrastructure Delivery Plan identifies a number of specific schemes to improve the public realm and pedestrian environment in the town centre. A number of these schemes are already being delivered, and it is anticipated that the remainder will be delivered over the course of the Local Plan period. This document can therefore guide the design and delivery of these and other public realm projects located within the town centre.



Objectives of the Design Guide

- To direct the development of accessible, sustainable, high quality redevelopment and improvement schemes that upgrade the town centre environment and public realm.
- Highlight Maidstone's industrial and historical heritage into the public realm design as a priority.
- Use a common palette of high quality materials to avoid a fragmented approach to the town centre.
- Ensure the conservation and enhancement of the town centre's historic fabric.
- Create clear boundaries and functional spaces to assist with connectivity.
- Improve pedestrian and cycle access between the town centre and the river.
- Integrate public art, as a key strategy to help animate and enhance local distinctiveness.

Research

This Guide draws upon many other reports and studies and is intended to be used in parallel with them. These include:

- The Kent County Council Design Guide.
- The Destination Management Plan.
- Town Centre Study 2010.
- Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2011 - 2031.
- Economic Development Strategy 2015-2031.
- Maidstone's Culture and Heritage Positioning Statement 2015.
- Strategic Plan 2015-2020.
- Conservation Area Appraisals.
- The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.

Status of the Guide

This Guide is recognised by Maidstone Borough Council and was approved by the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee in November 2016. It has been produced for council officers, developers, contractors and stakeholders.

Developing the Guide

This guide has been developed by consulting with key stakeholders, including Maidstone Borough Council Officers, Town Centre Ward Councillors, Maidstone Borough Councillors, Heritage, Leisure and Culture Committee, One Maidstone¹ and the Town Centre Strategic Advisory Board².



Definition of Public Realm

The public realm is defined as the public spaces between private buildings. These spaces will normally be usable by the public either explicitly or permissively and includes all exterior places that are accessible physically and visually including land in private ownership to which the public is afforded access. Other elements can include streets, pavements, squares, parks, bridges, waterfronts, landmarks and any public and civic building and facilities.

‘It is often in the spaces between buildings where human activity and social interaction take place. These spaces should be designed or adapted to respect or enhance a street’s sense of place’ Publicrealm.org

The public realm plays a vital role in the social and economic value of communities. It can provide meeting places, contemplative and resting areas, create a sense of place with connections to local historic and cultural elements as well as a safe and attractive environment for the public who visit, live and work in the borough.

‘Visitors want to enjoy the public spaces in towns’
Maidstone Destination
Management Plan 2015

This guide focuses on four aspects in the town centre: Streetscapes, Public Places, Parks & Gardens and the River.

Streetscapes definition: The visual elements of a street and open space that combine to form the street’s character; buildings, roads, pathways, street furniture and planting.

Public Places definition: Visible areas within a community setting open to the public or for public gathering.

Parks and Gardens definition: Public open spaces within a community setting for recreational use.

River definition: All land areas along the water’s edge.

Street furniture and public art are also included within the public realm and are covered in the Street Furniture Guidelines (Appendix 1) and Public Art Policy (Appendix 2).

Conservation Areas

Adopted Character Area Appraisals Supplementary Planning Documents detail the locally distinctive character of an area, and offer guidance on improving the quality of an area.

Several Conservation Areas have been designated within the town centre:

- All Saints Conservation Area.
- Maidstone Centre Conservation Area.
- Holy Trinity Conservation Area.
- Maidstone Chillington House Conservation Area.

Conservation area appraisals help preserve and enhance the conservation areas in Maidstone Town Centre.



Maidstone's History

Maidstone has a colourful history shaped by battles, revolts, witches, mad priests and later, industrialists, brewers and Victorian benefactors.

Understanding the story of Maidstone's industrial, cultural and historic heritage is an important aspect in defining the character of public realm in Maidstone town centre.

Historically, Maidstone grew up as a transport hub, where the Roman road linking Rochester with the port of Lympne crossed the confluence of the River Len and the River Medway, and where these important waterways could be forded or bridged.

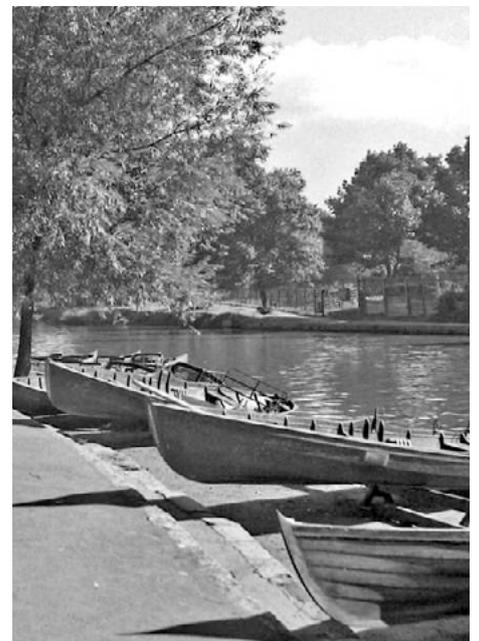
The rivers became both sources of power for milling and other industrial processes and transport conduits to London and further afield.

The Saxon village that grew up on the banks of the Medway became a prosperous medieval trading station and its historic wealth is reflected in the fine collection of heritage buildings that characterise Gabriel's Hill, Jubilee Square, Bank Street, Week Street, Earl Street and other parts of the town centre.

The cluster of Grade I listed religious buildings by the riverside is particularly notable, with the Archbishop's Palace, the Tithe Barn and All Saints Church. Completing this nationally significant complex of medieval architecture is The College of All Saints partly Grade I with the Master's House Grade II* listed.

Chillington Manor, now the Maidstone Museum and Bently Art Gallery, sits at the heart of the town and is one of the finest museums in the south east, with internationally significant collections, especially Ethnography, Japanese Decorative Arts, Ancient Egypt, Archaeology and Costume. The museum boasts among more than half a million artefacts and specimens including the only human mummy in Kent.

Key industries that have thrived in the town include: thread making, paper making, barge making, milling, distilling and brewing, all of which made use of the river. A good deal of trade also passed through the town, including corn, hops, fodder, fruit, stone and timber. The quarrying of building stone around Maidstone has always been important and continues even today.



Public Realm History

Maidstone was a recognisable town by 1200 when the High Street and market place were possibly developed. By the early 14th Century it is thought that the population of Maidstone had reached about 2,000.

Occupations recorded for the population around this time include tailors, shoemakers, skimmers/tanners, barbers and masons. The range of tradesmen suggests a thriving town catering for many of the needs of its inhabitants and of the surrounding rural hinterland. It is probable that the first bridge over the Medway from the bottom of the High Street was built sometime during the 14th Century, replacing the old crossing near All Saints' Church.

By 1446 it is known that Middle Row had been developed, infilling the central market space of the High Street. Gabriel's Hill and Wren's Cross are also first recorded by their modern names during the 15th Century. Maidstone's charter was first confirmed in 1549.

The importance of Maidstone as a trading centre increased significantly during the 17th Century. Key industries included thread making, paper making and brewing, all of which made use of the river.

Maidstone experienced significant rebuilding and new building during the 18th Century, and as a result the importance of retailing to the town increased considerably.

The town has had a right to a gaol since 1614, and the present prison was completed in 1819 and is located in the north of the town centre.

By the late eighteenth century the dominance of the river for travel was beginning to be challenged. By the 19th century, Maidstone was served by frequent coach services to London and the Medway towns. The medieval bridge at the foot of the High Street was widened in 1808 to ease traffic congestion at the sole river crossing into the town.

Maidstone West Station was opened in 1844 and Maidstone East Station in 1874.

There are two principal railway stations: Maidstone East which connects with London and Ashford; and Maidstone West which is on the Medway Valley Line.



There has been a military presence in the town since 1797, when army barracks were first built. Maidstone Barracks railway station is located on the Medway Valley Line to the north of Maidstone West Station, and was opened in 1874.

The River Medway runs through the town centre, linking Maidstone to Rochester and the Thames Gateway. The river has historically been responsible for the growth and development of Maidstone, due to its capacity to transport goods both into and out of the town.

Economic activity along the River Medway greatly expanded in the 17th Century. Several riverside industries were particularly important to the historical development of the town, including brewing, milling, distilling, and barge building.

By the late nineteenth century, industrial development occurred along both sides of the river, including timber yards, gas works and breweries.

Development continued throughout the Victorian, inter-war and post war periods and a number of office and retail developments in the town centre were completed in the

1960/70/80s. Today, the western side of the River Medway is predominantly home to recent development consisting of large retail sheds and residential apartments. Developments in the town centre include Fremlin Walk and residential apartments adjacent to Brenchley Gardens.

Tourism panels installed in 2016 throughout the town centre by Maidstone Borough Council map out a historic route including references to the town centre's role in pivotal moments of English history such as Wat Tyler and The Peasants' Revolt 1381 and The English Civil War in 1648.



Understanding Maidstone

Maidstone town centre has many urban characteristics, defined in this guidance by zones. Each zone is made up of layers of the area's cultural and industrial heritage, of which the current patterns of use are the most recent.

The characteristics, assets and features of the public realm within each zone are described with the objective of providing useful guidance within each character area, while giving design teams creative freedom based upon their own site analysis and guidance.



The Shopping Zone

Maidstone town centre is a significant shopping destination, offering a predominately outdoor, street-based shopping environment. The town centre has a good mix of retail with major, national retailers in Week Street, with a particularly concentrated offer in Fremlin Walk, the southern end of Week Street and The Mall, the town's main indoor shopping centre.

The local independent shops are principally found within the Royal Star Arcade and along Gabriel's Hill, Pudding Lane and Union Street. These shops add to the town centre's distinctiveness and complement the mainstream shopping offer.

A larger retail zone sits on the west side of the river. These units are close to the core of the town centre with routes across the river for walkers and cyclists. These routes are indirect and limit the potential for sustainable linked trips.

Character Area Guidance

Parts of the shopping zone fall within the Maidstone Centre Conservation Area, as a large number of buildings are included on the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. This defines local character and architectural interest of the area which covers Bank Street, Middle Row and the south side of the High Street between the top of Bank Street and the junction with Gabriel's Hill, Market Buildings/Earl Street area and Gabriel's Hill/Lower Stone Street.

For the purposes of this design guide the Conservation Area Appraisals for Maidstone Town Centre advise that new development will need to adhere to the established historic building lines and respects the



grain and rhythm of the existing townscape and that good quality building materials should be used, preferably those which are currently predominant. Further guidance on materials is detailed in the individual Conservation Area Appraisals.

Assets

The shopping zone is characterised by significant cultural & historic assets. These include:

- The Royal Star Arcade
- Gabriel's Hill
- The Town Hall
- Hazlitt Theatre
- Jubilee Square
- Fremlin Walk
- Market Buildings
- Rose Yard

Features

The shopping zone features a mix of chain and independent shopping with two retail malls (Fremlin Walk & The Mall), a historic market at Lockmeadow and a monthly farmers market held in Jubilee Square.

Now an exclusive shopping arcade, The Royal Star was once Maidstone's leading hotel, frequented by the gentry during the town's Georgian heyday. Princess Victoria stayed here in 1836. In 1837 on winning his first seat in Parliament as the town's M.P, Benjamin Disraeli addressed the electors from its balcony overlooking the Town Hall on the High Street.

Week Street, the main shopping street provides some notable examples of pargetted houses (no's 55-57), which date back to 1680. Pargetting, a term describing the use of external lime plaster in a decorative manner with incised or moulded surfaces. It would be carried out on new buildings as well as when old plaster began to decay.

Fremlin Walk shopping centre itself was built on the site of Fremlin brewery, owned by Ralph Fremlin, who by 1861 was Kent's largest brewer. Fremlin's connections in East India were symbolised by his trademark elephants and weathervane, examples of which are on permanent display in the shopping centre.

The Shopping Zone

Shopping Zone Opportunities

The following investment opportunities in the shopping zone can progress the aspirations of the Public Realm Design Guide.

Improvements around Maidstone East Station should help to create a new gateway and arrival/departure point for the town centre. Public realm improvements should ensure they retain and build upon Maidstone's cultural history and distinct identity. This should be reinforced through wayfinding and where possible commissioned public art which has a dual functionality. Examples include paving details, seating, drainage covers, and bollards. Street furniture should follow the Street Furniture Guidelines (Appendix 1).

Phase 3 Improvement Works to the north end of Week Street and Gabriel's Hill should contribute to the restoration of Gabriel's Hill and Lower Stone Street to its former position as one of the town's principal public areas.

Connectivity should activate and enhance the shopping zone with natural squares that form a linear

connection at junctions between: Week street and Earl Street; Union Street and Week Street; Brewer Street and Week Street.

Improvements and developments in the shopping zone should, where appropriate make visible or reference the streams and rivers on which the town centre has historically grown up.

Year round cultural and arts events should be developed within the public realm, which actively encourages opportunities for locally based artists and crafts people.

Family friendly environments that encourage people to spend more time in the town centre should be a consideration in the public realm overall.

Negatives

The streetscape is generally in need of renewal across areas that have not been redeveloped. There is a patchwork of materials where repairs and maintenance dominate the floor plane particularly along Week Street. The newly completed Jubilee Square and Lower High Street improves this palette but lacks character and identity.

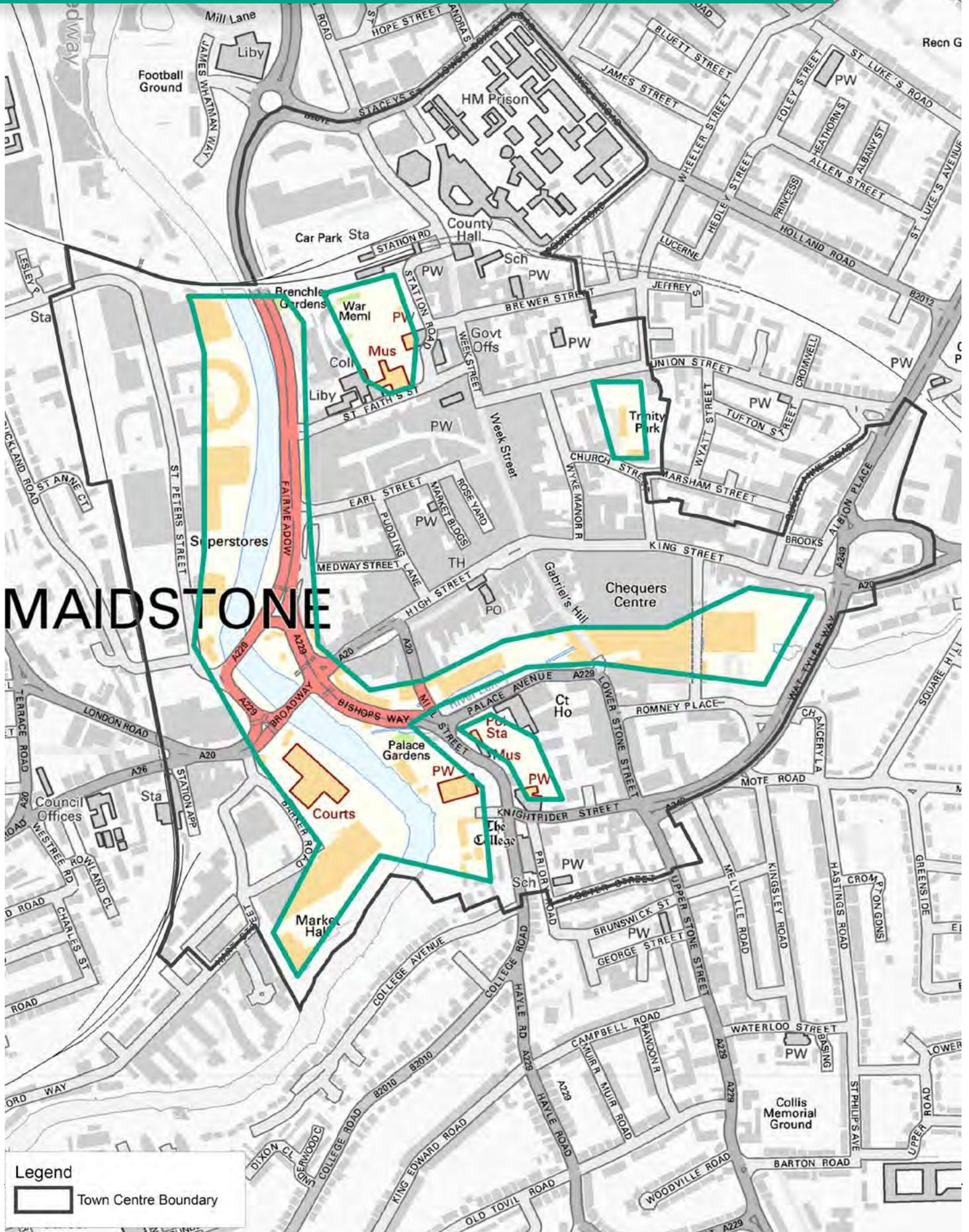
Shopping is one of the Top 3 factors influencing a visit to Maidstone (Visitor Profile, Destination Management Plan). The gyratory road system segregates the main shopping area in the town from the larger retail zone on the west side of the river. The Maidstone Bridges Improvement Scheme will help northbound traffic on the A229 to avoid the existing gyratory system. This should open up pedestrian access and help the regeneration of the western riverside.

Fremelin Walk is one of the Top 5 attractions (Destination Management Plan) for visitors to Maidstone, however the town centre is perceived as incoherent and disjointed, segregated from the river. The tourism agenda recognises the significant historic and cultural references to the town through strategically placed interpretation panels. Walking maps available at Maidstone Museum encourage people to move around the town centre.



Town Centre Boundary

River and Green Spaces



River and Green Spaces Zone

Maidstone town centre's key asset is the River Medway, a high quality green corridor that flows to the West of the historic core of the town. The River Len, a tributary of the Medway also enters from the East but is concealed below ground through most of town.

Maidstone town centre has a select number of attractive accessible green spaces. They are made up of the formal garden of Brenchley Gardens adjacent to Maidstone East Station, Trinity Gardens and a larger urban park located in the North West of the town centre, called Whatman Park. There is also a green area called the Maidstone River Park that fringes around the Archbishop's Palace and Gardens, All Saints Church, Fairmeadow and the Hermitage Millennium Amphitheatre. The River Park is a 10km walk along the River Medway from Teston Country Park through Maidstone's town centre, to Allington and Kent Life.

Character Area Guidance

The River Medway is an area of peace and tranquility, where the river corridor acts as a contrast with the urban townscape, and serves as a wildlife corridor by linking urban habitats with the countryside beyond.

Historically the influence of the River Medway is very strong to Maidstone, with its position as a port of great importance. Records show the riverside crowded with wharves and industrial premises. Most trade was with London with sailing barges carrying hops, paper, fruit, cloth, corn, leather, and wool and ragstone.

The 'hidden' River Len was used to drive numerous watermills

and now forms a large mill pond on the corner of Mill Street and Palace Avenue, which is a prominent and integral feature of the landscape of Maidstone. The River Len continues to stream into the Medway via Mill Street connecting the riverside through Palace Gardens which features mature landscaping.

The Archbishop's Palace a 13th Century building was built on land owned by the Archbishops of Canterbury from the 8th Century and sits on the banks of the River Medway.

Fairmeadow was mainly used as a livestock market. Traditional fairs continued to be held on Fairmeadow into the early 20th Century until they moved to Lockmeadow. A bowling green was laid out on the King's Meadow in 1642, and in 1699 a tree-lined and railed public walk was laid out along the river.

Brenchley Gardens is a public park of 2 hectares, laid out to the 1871 plans of landscape designer Alexander McKenzie (1830-1893). It is made up of an ornate square of open lawns, flower gardens, paved paths and a Victorian bandstand. There are two prominent monuments in the gardens, one of which is a piece of the roof of the Houses of Parliament in London, and The Cenotaph War Memorial, designed by nationally renowned architect Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944).

Assets

The river/green zone is characterised by its natural landscape features and an attractive towpath, with buildings of special architectural or historic interest.

- River Medway and River Len
- Baltic Wharf
- Whatman Park
- Brenchley Gardens
- Trinity Park
- Archbishop's Palace and Gardens
- Methodist Church, Brewer Street
- Mill Pond, Mill Street
- The Lamb Inn, Fairmeadow (renamed Cork and Cask House)

Features

The River Medway is a prominent feature that attracts a diverse range of river based activity from canoeing and rowing, a unique floating restaurant next to the Archbishops' Palace to one-hour boat trips taking in the sights along the route.

Across the river Medway is the Maidstone Bridge first built around the 14th century to give more direct access to the commercial heart of the town in the High Street than the previous crossing by ford, adjacent to All Saints Church. The current bridge was built in 1877-79 to the designs of Sir Joseph Bazalgette, engineer of the Thames Embankment and the London Sewage System, and lies slightly to the north of the original bridge. The bridge had to be widened again in 1926.

The Hermitage Millennium Amphitheatre is an outdoor venue built of brick and Kentish ragstone that sits on the banks of the river close to the Lockmeadow Millennium Bridge and the Archbishops' Palace.

Whatman Park lies at the heart of the Millennium River Park just half a mile from the town centre. It is an 18 acre site and combines a natural landscape of

woodland and wildflower meadow with adventure play areas, a treetop walk, skate park and river stage open-air performance arena. Pleasure boats can stop at Whatman Park Wharf. Artist David Annand was commissioned to produce a public art sculpture for the park. The Double Helix – the structure of DNA, is more than 60 yards long and 10 feet high.

Opportunities

The opportunity to bring the under-utilised rivers back into the heart of the town can help to progress the aspirations of the Public Realm Design Guide through the following investment opportunities to the town Centre:

Phase 3 Improvement Works to Gabriel's Hill, these public realm improvement works should reference the River Len as it enters the town centre. This should be reflected through public art such as embedded text or pattern work into the surface plane and hard landscaping.

Re-imagining of the green corridor and improving access through pedestrian and cycle way routes should enhance connectivity and provide green links to the main shopping streets and Whatman Park. Entrance points such as a new pedestrian crossing should be considered to address the lack of pedestrian access to Fremlin Walk from the west and any further proposals for the town centre.

Current public realm works being completed as part of the Maidstone Bridges Improvement Scheme will create a more desirable route for pedestrians with better crossings, continuation of the materials palette with the use of granite (as seen in the public realm schemes phase 1 & 2) and new tree planting. New finger posts directing pedestrians to the river

will also be installed on Lower High Street and the riverside of Fairmeadow.

Enhancing cycle connectivity is an important part of the River Medway Cycle Path Scheme which is currently underway. The scheme will provide a new shared use towpath, encouraging cycling and walking with direct routes for cyclists and pedestrian to access the town centre. The route itself runs from Allington Lock to Barming Bridge, and is due to be constructed late Autumn 2016.

The public realm particularly along the waterfront should reflect on the riverside's historic era through heritage preservation, respecting iconic landmarks and developing more cultural functions and character such as riverside cafes. A venue for the arts and cultural events would enhance the area.

Where a continuous route alongside the river path is unobtainable, improvement and proposals should seek to provide a pleasant, green and accessible public realm. Lighting and an improved wayfinding strategy such as green/art themed trails, information points, signage would improve a more joined up experience and create linkages to the existing green spaces and the town centre.

With the Phase 3 Improvement Works to Week Street, the use of functional public art could reference green elements with features such as living walls, tree planting and use of high quality materials to enhance the natural squares and create connected green links.

Public realm improvements around Maidstone East Station should help to create a new gateway and support and improve connectivity. The newly developed public realm should ensure they retain and build upon Maidstone's cultural

history and distinct identity. This should be reinforced through wayfinding and where possible commissioned public art.

Landscape design and management should reflect Maidstone's heritage as a green town dominated by parks, gardens and street trees and with an intimate connection to the surrounding countryside. Fairmeadow was an important site where traditional fairs were held until the early 20th Century. Wildflower planting alongside the riverside and highway verges should be coordinated in the interests of helping to establish a distinct identity. Street trees should be increased to 'green' the town centre and help to adapt to, and mitigate against, poor air quality.

Negatives

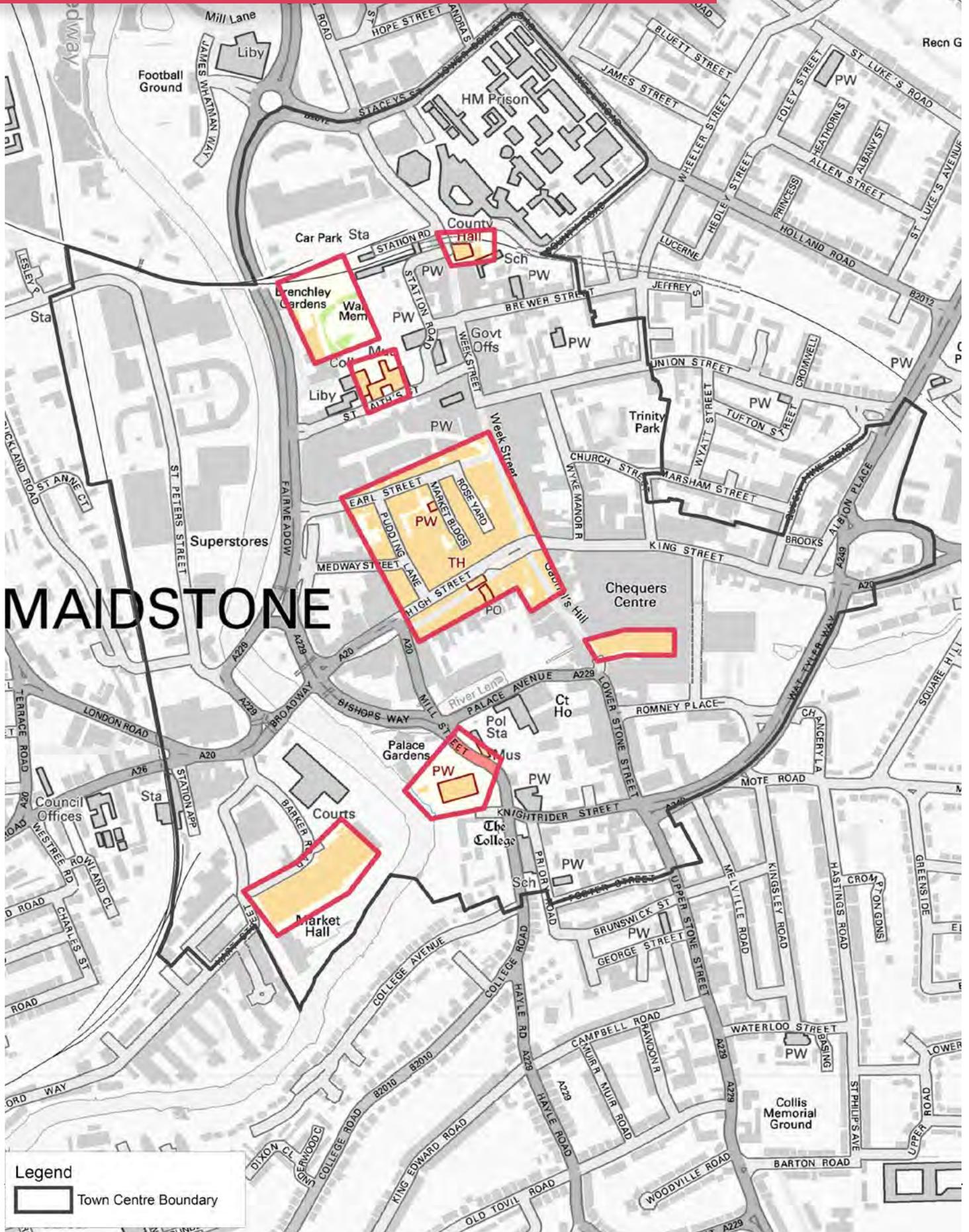
The relationship between the river Medway and the town is poor and fractured with the river often hidden or obscured. Recent developments fail to make the most of the riverside and provide an attractive setting with a number of buildings turning their back to it, creating inactive frontages.

Fairmeadow also creates a barrier between the river front and the town centre. Flooding from the River Medway has been a major issue for the lower High Street and subways have acted as conduits for the flood water to travel through, making public access prohibitive. However the gyratory public realm works will permanently fill two of the existing subways as they are no longer a desirable route for pedestrians and other non motorised users. The third subway will be fitted with a flood gate. The public realm works will provide new drainage and an improved pedestrian crossing including the continuation of granite used during Phase 1 & 2 improvement works.



Town Centre Boundary

Leisure and Culture





Leisure and Culture Zone



Maidstone town centre supports a wide range of leisure, cultural and tourist attractions. It has a high concentration of clubs and bars, restaurants and live music venues and has a reputation for a lively and safe night time economy.

The Hazlitt Theatre, the recently extended museum on St Faith's Street and the Archbishop's Palace and All Saints Church to the south, complements the offer.

Lockmeadow is the town's major leisure and entertainment complex and caters for family activities whilst Earl Street has become a particular focus for restaurants and cafés.

Character Area Guidance

The majority of the cultural and tourist facilities are based around the historic core of the town centre. The public realm features wider pavements particularly along Earl Street, which encourages the restaurants to spill onto the pavements creating a buzz of outdoor activity. Some of the more established/chain restaurants have sympathetically converted historic buildings to bring them into contemporary use. Reasonably priced accommodation supports the mix along with sports facilities such as fitness clubs, gyms, 3G football ground, river based activity and a tennis centre.

Assets

- The Hazlitt Theatre and Corn Exchange
- Bandstand & War Memorial - Brenchley Gardens
- Museums – Maidstone Museum & Bentlif Art Gallery and the Tyrwhitt Drake Museums of Carriages
- Kent History and Library Centre
- Gallagher Stadium (home to Maidstone United, and just outside town centre boundary)
- Lockmeadow Complex – cinema, bowling, restaurants and historic market

Leisure and Culture Zone

Features

The Hazlitt Theatre, formally a concert hall, was erected in 1869 and is named after William Hazlitt, born in nearby Rose Yard, who found fame as an essayist, art critic and artist.

Earl Street features significant buildings, most notably no's 31/33, a double-fronted town house owned by Andrew Broughton, Mayor of Maidstone. Broughton was Clerk to the High Court and signed the death warrant of King Charles I in 1659. When the monarchy was restored in 1660, Broughton was charged with regicide. He fled and spent the rest of his life in exile in Geneva.

No 32 Earl Street, constructed in 1882 as the Conservative Club, features over its entrance a carved head of Benjamin Disraeli, once MP for Maidstone. In 1837, the year of the Queen Victoria's accession, Disraeli was first returned to Parliament for the Borough of Maidstone and lived, as Lord Beaconsfield, to be the Queen's trusted Prime Minister.

Opportunities

Investment opportunities in the Leisure and Culture zone can progress the aspirations of the Public Realm Design Guide.

Improvement works for Phase 3 (Week Street and Gabriel's Hill) and Phase 4 (potentially

Earl Street) should activate and enhance the network of alleyways and corridors joining smaller streets to promote economic and cultural activity, improve footfall, quality of environment and connectivity. This should be in form of a pedestrian link towards the medieval complex around All Saints Church and the Rootes Building (Len House and Peugeot Garage).

Attention should also be given to Market buildings, High Street, Middle Row, Bank Street, Rose Yard and Gabriel's Hill their activation through commercial activity, public artworks and improved lighting.

The night-time economy concentrates activity on Earl Street, the north end of Week Street, High Street, and Gabriel's Hill. This zone attracts late night users leaving nightclubs and bars who use a series of quiet corridors and alleyways with reduced footfall making them more vulnerable to street crime. Public realm improvements should ensure good through visibility and activate routes with good passive surveillance.

A number of buildings in this area mark their importance with historic plaques. Further improvements in this zone should consider lighting as a way to highlight and reflect its distinct heritage and identity.

Year round cultural and arts events should make use of the improved Jubilee Square, to actively encourage leisure and culture opportunities for locally based artists and musicians.

Regeneration of the west side of the river should connect pedestrian and cycle routes back into the town centre. A new crossing should be considered to further develop the cultural offer and character. In particular a venue for the arts and cultural events would enhance the area.

Negatives

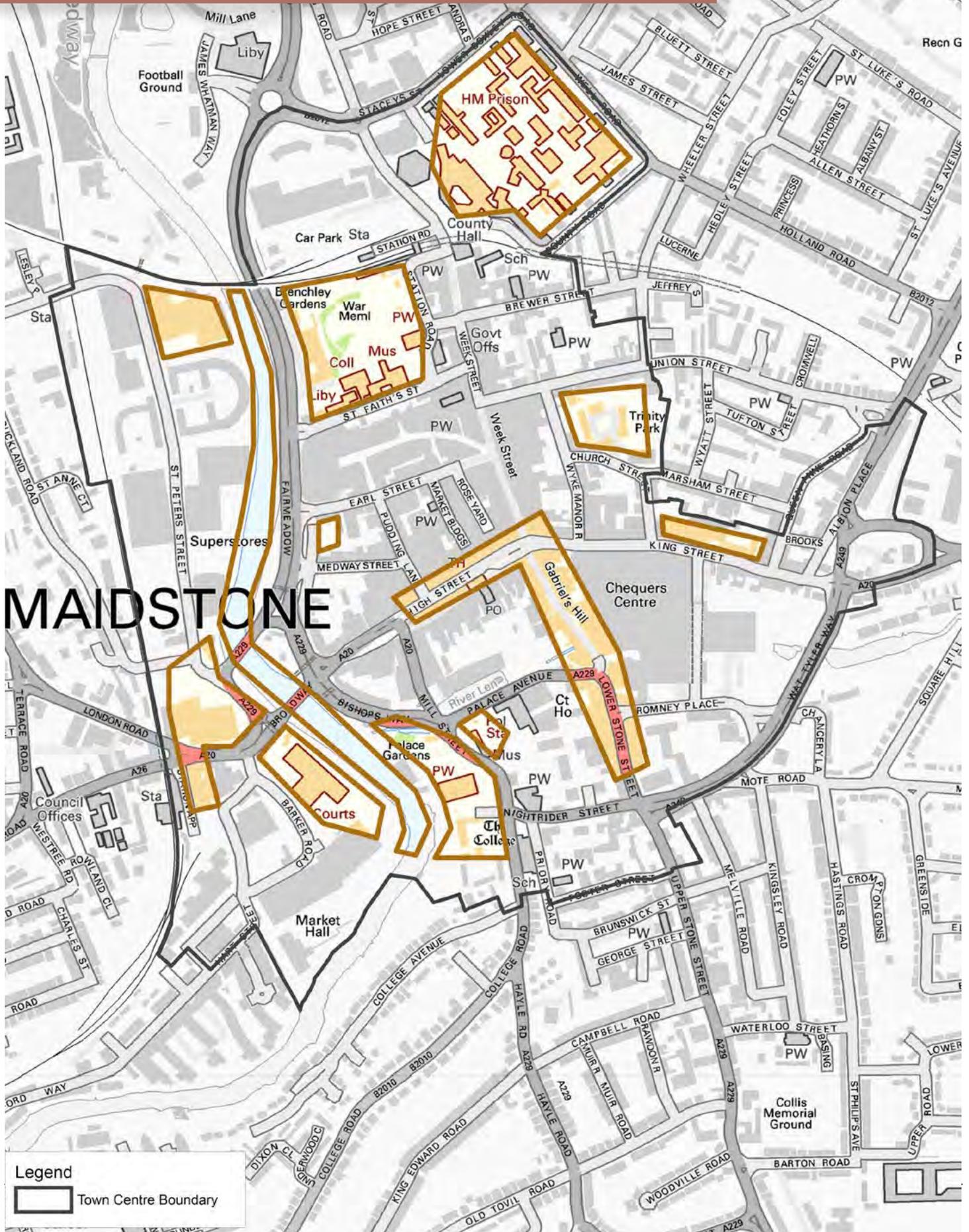
The streetscape here is generally in need of renewal, materials are fragmented with patchwork repairs and a low visual quality. Street furniture is tired and mismatched and in some places broken, there is a general need to declutter. This lack of investment is becoming noticeable in contrast to the re-landscaping of the completed areas of Jubilee Square and the High Street.

The Lockmeadow complex is located close to the core of the town centre, however routes across the river and gyratory system for walkers and cyclists are indirect and create a barrier.



Town Centre Boundary

Historic and Heritage



Historic and Heritage Zone

Maidstone's heritage and historic offer is found in its streetscapes, buildings and river corridor. It includes a collection of fine Grade II and Grade II* heritage buildings found in Gabriel's Hill, Jubilee Square, Bank Street, Week Street, Earl Street and other parts of the town centre. The Medieval Complex of Grade I listed religious buildings can be found by the riverside, most notably, with the Archbishop's Palace, the Tithe Barn, All Saints Church and the College of All Saints. A handful of Grade II listed buildings, reflect Maidstone's industrial heritage and are prime for sympathetic conversion and re-use.

Character Area Guidance

Much of the historic and heritage zone falls within the Maidstone Centre Conservation Area. Within the historic core the High Street has recently undergone regeneration (Phase 1 & 2 improvements) with Remembrance Square in the Lower High Street and Jubilee Square outside the Town Hall, in the Upper High Street. Reducing vehicle access has created a new public space that has a pedestrian-friendly environment, providing seating and tree planting and is now used for events and activities.

To the east of the town centre is Sessions Square, a large paved pedestrian friendly public space with seating and tree-lined areas. The area is dominated by County Hall a neo-Baroque Façade and home to Kent County Council head offices. Behind Sessions House is Maidstone Prison, designed by Daniel Alexander in 1810. The prison is surrounded by a large perimeter wall built from Kentish Ragstone.

The Medieval Complex consisting of the Archbishop's Palace and All Saints Church sits along the banks of the River Medway, with the Tithe Barn (Maidstone Carriage Museum)

Assets

- All Saints Church
- Medieval Complex
- Gabriel's Hill
- Lower Stone Street
- Corpus Christi Building
- Drakes
- Fairmeadow
- Trinity Church
- Brenchley Gardens
- St Faiths Church
- Maidstone Museum
- County Hall
- Maidstone Prison
- The Town Hall
- High Street
- Law Courts
- The river, its bridges and banks
- St Peter's Church
- The Baltic Wharf
- War Memorials

Features

The Nolan Statue is placed outside the former Ophthalmic Hospital, Wyke Manor Road, and honours Captain Lewis Edward Nolan, who was the first soldier killed in the Charge of the Light Brigade in 1854. Captain Nolan was Riding Master at Maidstone Cavalry Depot between 1841 and 1854 and he attended the former Holy Trinity Church.



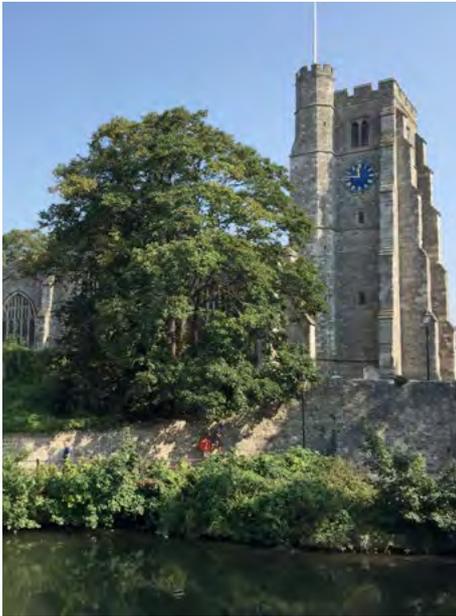
Maidstone Museum & Bentlif Art Gallery is largely housed in Chillington Manor, a fine example of the domestic architecture of the late Tudor period.

St Peter's Church, the oldest church in Maidstone established in the mid 13th century as the chapel for a hospital for pilgrims travelling to Canterbury is a fine example of the treasured history that has shaped the town.

The Town Hall a fine Georgian building dating from 1763, served many purposes as market space, magistrate's court, council chambers and gaol. In Jubilee Square the statue of a young Queen Victoria dating from 1862, stands on the site of the ancient market cross.

The Corpus Christi, is a 14th century building originally owned by the Corpus Christi Fraternity, a society of local tradesmen who regulated business, observed certain religious services and provided for elderly and infirm members. The Fraternity lasted until 1547 when it was seized by the crown during the suppression of religious guilds. The town then bought the hall and it served as Maidstone Grammar School from 1549-1871.

The two notable Grade II listed buildings in this zone are: The Baltic Wharf, a former motor vehicle factory on the west side of the river bank, is a grade II listed building built in 1917 by Wallis, Gilbert and Partners, in collaboration with Truscon, for Tilling-Stevens Ltd. It is an example of a factory designed using the Kahn Daylight System and holds historic interest as the earliest surviving building by the practice, the foremost factory architects of the inter-war period.



Len House and the Peugeot Garage (previously The Rootes motorcar showroom and workshop) was built in 1937-38 for Rootes Ltd by Howard and Souster, an architectural firm who specialised in industrial and commercial buildings and who undertook a number of commissions for Rootes. The site, adjacent to a mill pond on the River Len, had formerly been occupied by a tannery. The tannery buildings were acquired by Rootes in 1917 and were later demolished to make way for the new complex of showroom, filling station, workshops and offices. At the time of its opening in April 1938, the showroom was considered the largest and most up to date in Kent; at night 700ft of neon tubing outlined the frontage and spelled out the name 'ROOTES' on the tower above the main entrance.



Opportunities

There are the following investment opportunities in the Historic and Heritage Zone, which can progress the aspirations of the Public Realm Design Guide.

Public realm works in Gabriel's Hill as part of the Phase 3 improvement scheme should help to create attractive pedestrian links towards the medieval complex around All Saints Church and the impressive Rootes Building (Len House and Peugeot Garage) which has been listed at Grade II since 2009. Public realm improvements should ensure they retain and build upon Maidstone's cultural history and distinct identity.

Connectivity is key to improving the visitor experience and providing clear accessible pedestrian routes across the town linking the disjointed heritage offer. Commissioned public art, which has a dual functionality, should be considered. Examples include trails and themes incorporated



into paving details, seating, drainage covers, and bollards. Street furniture should follow the Maidstone colour palette of black and gold for the Heritage/Historic Zone.

Coherence of approach and design will be critical to the success of the public realm improvements at both the North end of Week Street and Maidstone East station improvement programme. This gateway into the town should establish a sense of arrival and entrance and incorporate a public art feature, seating, lighting and planting to further enhance the already pedestrian friendly environment around Sessions Square.

Public realm improvements should demonstrate a quality of design that responds positively to the townscape, including ensuring the conservation and enhancement of the town centre's historic fabric

The public realm particularly along the waterfront should reflect on the riverside's historic era through heritage preservation, respecting iconic landmarks and developing more cultural functions and character.

Negatives

Although Maidstone offers a rich history much of this is dispersed across the town centre with disjointed pedestrian access and neglected street scene.

Much of the core of the town centre is prioritised for pedestrians but in places the quality of the surfaces and street furniture have begun to deteriorate and the connections between different locations within the centre are not always clear and legible.





Overarching themes

Connectivity across the zones

Strategically located wayfinding should be used to connect the zones and historic sites giving places a clearer identity.

Public art should be used to assist in wayfinding with an artwork embedded into the hard landscaping, seating, signage or lighting. (Please refer to Public Art Policy Appendix 2)

Visual links should be made across the town through the use of greenspaces, planting, defining gateways or natural squares in the public realm.

Themed trails should assist in activating and enhancing the visitor experience.

Direct footpaths for pedestrian and cycle access should be created to connect the town centre with the existing green spaces and riverside environment.

Improved lighting should be used to highlight historic buildings as well as opening up the network of dark alleys and cut throughs between streets.

Events should be programmed in areas where people naturally gather such as Jubilee Square and Sessions Square to create interest and increase footfall.

Responding to Maidstone's heritage

Highlighting and integrating Maidstone's industrial and historic heritage into improvements and new developments should be a priority in public realm design.

They may include references to:

- Eminent people who have resided and/or worked in the borough and have had an impact on the local, national or world stage.
- Key events that have shaped Maidstone's history
- Industries that have thrived in the town and contributed to different stages of the town's development.

Maidstone's architectural and original features and assets should be respected and retained and enhanced.

Any new elements in the public realm should be bold, contemporary interventions.

Public realm proposals should reinforce emerging aspirations to

connect the town centre to the river and provide areas for more activities and animation that will encourage visitors to discover the town's heritage and culture.

Soft landscaping in the public realm should be encouraged allowing for low maintenance planting that reflects Maidstone's heritage, introducing wildflowers/meadow mixes and native trees.





Continuity and Coherence

Continuity and coherence is needed in the public realm to avoid a patchwork of approaches.

Each zone is not strictly defined through its own distinct palette of materials. Instead, new public realm must draw upon a common palette of materials to suit its locality and historic/cultural references.

Materials for all sites should be selected for their durability and functionality as well as their appearance.

Materials sourced should be readily available beyond the life of the scheme to enable maintenance, repair and replacement of damaged areas.

The Conservation Area Appraisals provides guidance on materials, which vary considerably. The zones have their own unique qualities that can be developed to help give a sense of place. Design teams should use this as a basis for their own research.

Considerations

Whilst developing the guide, stakeholders have defined some common sense principles in making the most of the public realm:

Tidy up – remove or replace broken street furniture.

Declutter – survey every piece of street furniture and remove redundant items.

Rationalise – where possible merge functions for example look at seating as a way of hiding utility boxes or combine signage and lighting.

Maintenance – refresh tired looking street furniture. Repair and maintain existing signs.

Monitoring – work with Street Cleansing and One Maidstone to encourage reporting or undertaking minor repairs as part of their role in maintaining the public realm.

Street Furniture

Maidstone town centre is identified by a palette of blue and gold as a standard colour for street furniture except in the heritage zone where black and gold is permitted.

Street furniture must be consistent in terms of materials, finish and style. Even where items are sourced from different manufacturers, they should appear to be of a similar style and look. See Street Furniture Guidelines (Appendix 1).

Street furniture can be seen as an artwork integrated into the public realm as well as being functional. Commissions should take reference to cultural and historic heritage where appropriate. Please see examples in Maidstone Borough Council's Public Art Policy (Appendix 2).

Overarching themes



Shop frontages

Shop fronts across the town centre vary in the quality of their appearance. The appearance of shop fronts should fit into their general surroundings and adhere to the conservation areas and listed buildings legal requirements and guidelines as set out by Maidstone Borough Council Planning department.

As part of public realm improvements shop fronts should ensure a sensitive choice to design and permitted use of material and colours. In addition a standard of maintenance should be adhered to and features of architectural significance should be preserved. Lively and attractive shop window displays should be encouraged.

Case Study: The Golden Boot History

The Golden Boot was founded in Maidstone in 1790. Today, seven generations on, it's still in the hands of the same family and run by father and son team Lawrence Martin, Chairman and Edward Martin, Managing Director. The original site was at Number 36 Gabriel's Hill, opposite where the present shop is now sited. In 1845 the shop moved to number 25 and then, 35 years later, following a disastrous fire at the premises of Mr Ralph's the grocers, the business was moved into the newly built premises

on the site now occupied by the present Ladies department.

In 1845 workshops in Palace Yard were opened, where some twenty craftsmen were employed making half of the stock sold in the shop. About this time, the famous 6 foot Wellington boot was mounted on the front of the building. Most shoe shops of this period had this type of sign outside, but few remain today.

Public Art in the Public Realm

Maidstone Borough Council has a Public Art Policy, which supports the view that public art can contribute to, emphasise and enhance Maidstone's unique heritage, cultural and natural assets.

Artists should actively be included in the designing of the public realm so that their contributions are meaningfully and sustainably integrated within the physical infrastructure of any improvement, development or regeneration scheme in the town centre.

Please refer to the Public Art Policy (Appendix 2) for guidance on definitions of public art, commissioning, themes and maintenance.

Case Study: The Louis Nolan Memorial

A bronze statue depicting Louis Edward Nolan on horseback forms a memorial placed outside former Ophthalmic Hospital, church Street, Maidstone. This fine example of bronze statue, black granite plaques and obelisk memorial made of Kentish Ragstone and Clipsham stone complements the palette of public realm materials within the regenerated site and the grade II listed building.

Louis Edward Nolan (4 January 1818 – 25 October 1854) was a British Army officer and cavalry tactician best known for his role in the Charge of the Light Brigade during the Crimean War. Nolan was educated in Tullin, where he was noted as an enthusiastic horseman and military theorist. His British Army career divided between Bangalor and Madras in India and the Cavalry Depot in Maidstone where he trained as a riding master.

A trusted voice on cavalry matters, Nolan was dispatched to the Middle East in the early days of the Crimean War to hunt for suitable horses. After returning, he was attached to the staff of General Richard Airey, and in this role delivered the order that led to the Charge of the Light Brigade.



Acknowledgements

Further information:

1. One Maidstone¹

One Maidstone is a Community Interest Company that is dedicated to improving the trading environment in Maidstone and in so doing enhancing the town centre for residents and visitors.

2. Maidstone Town Centre Strategic Advisory Board²

The Maidstone Town Centre Strategic Advisory Board is made up of representatives from the private and public sector. The board's role is to support partnership working, stimulate investment and bring forward development in Maidstone town centre.

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