

Informal Consultation on the Maidstone Borough Council Town Centre Strategy

Kent County Council Commentary

11 August 2023

Highways and Transportation

Kent County Council (hereafter referred to as the County Council), as Local Highway Authority, welcomes Maidstone Borough Council's request for input on its emerging Town Centre Strategy.

It is noted that the three missions underpinning the Strategy place an emphasis on regeneration, connectivity, and creating high-quality environments. They are therefore aligned with the County Council Strategy 2022-2026, '*Framing Kent's Future*', which includes priorities associated with levelling up communities, delivering new infrastructure and achieving Net Zero in Kent by 2050.

The County Council regards it to be entirely appropriate that transport-related matters have been placed at the forefront of the Town Centre Strategy. The inclusion of a Movement Strategy to address the specific needs of individual travel modes is welcomed.

The County Council's detailed comments on the Movement Strategy are set out below and we would welcome continued engagement and collaborative working with the Borough Council with a view to ensuring that a collective agreement is reached on the interventions that are to be taken forward.

Maidstone Town Centre Movement Strategy

Many of the transport issues that the Movement Strategy seeks to address are complex and long-standing. The County Council would ordinarily advocate an iterative approach to identifying solutions that enables a wide range of transport intervention options to be carefully considered. This is beneficial in how it provides a greater degree of transparency through demonstrating how individual solutions have been chosen as representing the most effective means of delivering the over-arching vision.

With this in mind, it is recommended that the Strategy clearly demonstrates how the proposed interventions are aligned with the over-arching vision and three missions. There is currently a lack of cohesiveness in how the Strategy jumps from a vision for the future to pre-empting solutions for the identified locations. This is particularly evident in the case of Mill Street and the A249 gyratory (H2 and H3), where the objectives underpinning the proposed interventions are not clearly defined.

There needs to be a clear translation of the vision into desired outcomes on a place-by-place basis. This is most effectively captured in the case of the river crossing at Earl Street and associated access provision to the towpath (P1, P2 and P8), where the intended outcomes are more easily understood.

If the intended outcomes are clearly articulated at the outset, it can enable a range of intervention options to be considered and developed by working together with the County Council.

In the first instance this could be achieved through expressing the vision/broad concept through illustration (impressions/sketches/drawn plans) for each of the identified locations. This could be supported by evidence of the reason for delivering an intervention at the suggested location and the challenges that would need to be overcome. For example, this could consider crash statistics for the area, vehicle speeds, land availability and funding.

The interventions included within the Strategy are, in many cases, conceptual in nature with a high degree of uncertainty regarding their deliverability. The County Council would therefore encourage further collaborative working as a means of refining the Strategy to ensure it focuses on measures with a good prospect of delivery.

It will also be important to ensure that any interventions within the town centre complement those being implemented outside of the town centre. For example, it will be beneficial to feed walking, cycling and scooter trips onto safer routes where they already exist (e.g. towpath) or can be created. Traffic related measures outside of the town centre are also likely to play an important role in diverting trips away from the town centre.

With regard to the component parts of the Movement Strategy, the County Council would wish to make the following comments:

Walking Strategy

- P1: The principle of a new river crossing suitable for use by pedestrians and cyclists is supported. The bridge would need to incorporate ramped access as part ensuring it is suitable for all users.
- P2/P3/P4: Clarification is required on how land constraints can be overcome to enable additional waiting space to be created.
- P5: The rationale for the additional crossing needs to be defined in terms of whether it is an identified desire line or crash hotspot. The impacts of an additional crossing on traffic flow will also need to be understood.
- P5/P6: Clarification is required on how land constraints can be overcome to enable footway widening to be achieved at this location.
- P7: The nature and extent of any illegal use of King Street needs to be defined, with a view to identifying what measures may be appropriate.
- P8 – It is unclear whether the public realm improvements are intended to represent the pedestrianisation of Earl Street, as referenced in item 8 on page 14 of the Group Leader presentation. Any reallocation of road space for this purpose will have implications on adjoining streets, accesses to car parking/businesses and bus routing arrangements.
- The Strategy omits any reference to the scope for removing or upgrading existing subway crossings.

Wheeling Strategy

- C1: County Road is a low traffic road. There could be more merit in expanding the connections to the King Street / Mote Road / Wat Tyler Road area by indicating in the Strategy the potential corridors for a quiet route between these locations and the County Hall / East station area. Wheeler Street would need to be incorporated into this on the map.
- C2/C3: Greater potential synergy should be explored between these two interventions. It could be premature to propose a reconfigured junction for Fairmeadow, given that a better option may be to combine the planned outcome of C2 (better access to riverside path from Fairmeadow) with the planned outcome of reduced severance of the River Medway by providing a new river crossing from Earl Street. Any new river crossing proposal would be expected to also incorporate improved access onto the riverside path.
- C4: This would need to build on the lessons learned from the temporary Active Travel Scheme, including issues with taxi rank locations.
- C5: Clarification is required on how land constraints can be overcome to enable a segregated cycle route to be achieved.
- C6: It is unclear whether there is evidence to demonstrate how cycle access from the river path to Hart Street could be impactful in increasing cycling to the West station. A better opportunity could exist through improving access from areas south of the river to the Millennium Bridge, which could be considered alongside the desired outcomes for the All Saints area.
- The Strategy should identify the primary spots across the town centre where significant new volumes of secure cycle parking could be provided.

Public Transport Strategy

- PT1: An upgrading of the bridge link to improve the quality of the route and encourage interchange between the stations is welcomed, although clarity is required on what form of improvements are envisaged.
- PT2: Clarification is required on how level access can be achieved within the land constraints.
- PT3: Clarification is required on the nature and scope of any reconfiguration, including possible impacts on existing parking and access to business premises on Station Approach.
- PT4: The Strategy needs to better illustrate the current deficiencies associated with this link and what outcomes, such as better lighting or surveillance, are sought.
- PT5: It is unclear whether the new route will be a shuttle bus service or will be woven into the overall public transport provision as part of a longer route. In view of the potential congestion delays for services as they exit St. Peters Street onto the gyratory, it may be better to reappraise this intervention as part of tackling the overall poor levels of connectivity between this area and the town centre. This should focus on reducing short distance car trips involving the retail clusters and consider longer term mobility hub solutions (e.g. e-scooters).
- Aside from PT5, the Strategy has no interventions focused on bus services or bus related infrastructure/facilities. This is a significant omission in view of the important role bus travel plays in journeys to/from the town centre.

Motor Vehicle Strategy

- H1: Clarification is required on how the gyratory could be reconfigured to provide additional space for pedestrians/cyclists, given the land constraints and pivotal network function of this key interchange.
- H2: The intended outcomes of this intervention need to be more clearly articulated to demonstrate why a new road link is an appropriate solution, given the limited footfall likely to be associated with the Carriage Museum.
 - It is noted that two designs for the link road have been devised. Both would reduce capacity on the A229 northbound from three lanes to two lanes. This is likely to worsen congestion on this corridor, with adjoining side roads also affected.
 - The alignment and capacity of the link road would be likely to increase journey times on the corridor, which could encourage road users to change routes. Longer journey times also has implications for bus operators reliant on using this corridor.
 - Both options only provide one lane for the predominant northbound traffic movement along the A229 towards the gyratory, which will influence the extent of queuing and delay.
 - Both options replace the signal-controlled exit from Mill Street onto Palace Avenue with a give-way arrangement. The availability of gaps in traffic to manoeuvre will be limited at busy periods so this is likely to have safety and capacity implications.
 - The implications of the loss of car parks would need to be understood, given the influence on routing patterns as motorists seek alternative car parking locations.
 - In Option 1, the conversion of Priory Road to one-way southbound would alter the distribution of traffic across the local network. The implications of this would need to be fully understood.
 - Option 1 results in a more convoluted set of junction turning movements for northbound A229 traffic seeking to proceed towards Palace Avenue.
 - Option 1 removes the ability for westbound Knightrider Street traffic to proceed directly onto Old College Horseway, thereby requiring a lengthy detour.
 - It is unclear what is intended by the calming of Palace Avenue/Lower Stone Street referred to in item 6 of page 18 of the Group Leaders presentation.
- H3: The existing problems and intended outcomes of this intervention need to be more clearly articulated to demonstrate why removal of the gyratory is an appropriate solution.
 - The reference to the gyratory being unnecessary appears to disregard its key network function as the interchange between the A249, A20 and King Street.
 - The ability to redevelop the Haynes Ford area and improve pedestrian/cyclist provision does not arguably necessitate removal of the gyratory.
 - There is a lack of detail on how the gyratory could be reconfigured in such a way that would avoid worsening congestion on the key corridors. The development brief indicates a single crossroads intersection, which would have less capacity than the existing gyratory arrangement.
 - The direct nature of the proposed north-south route through Haynes Ford could make it attractive for traffic moving between the A249 and A20.

- H4: Clarification is required on what additional provision can be achieved within the land constraints, having regard to the footways, crossings and 20mph speed limit already present on St. Peters Street.
- H5: It is understood that the proposed new road link is intended to provide an alternative route to Barker Road.
 - The configuration of any new junction onto Broadway could have highway safety and capacity implications on the A20 corridor.
 - It is unclear how the current parking and business access arrangements in the vicinity of West station would be accommodated.

Delivery and Servicing Strategy

- Any consolidation centre or logistics hub will require convenient access to/from the strategic highway network.

Car Parking Strategy

- The outcomes of the planned review of car parking should inform the content of the Movement Strategy.
- The Strategy should confirm how car parking provision at new developments should be in accordance with adopted parking standards.
- The proposal of Park and Stride from Mote Park should take account of how the availability of car parking within the town centre is likely to limit the attractiveness of peripheral parking locations. Further consideration is also required on how this would co-exist with major events in the park and the potential traffic implications for the surrounding residential areas.
- The referenced list of car parking interventions has not been included.

Future Mobility Strategy

- The content could be developed further to identify potential routes and parking sites overlaid on the core movement Strategy, taking into account how the Network Rail / Southeastern approach is to not allow e-scooters on services and in stations and hence catering for them in the general street environment outside stations could be considered.

Policy and Strategy Review

- The section on the Local Transport Plan should be updated to include reference to the new emerging Local Transport Plan.
- There should also be a commitment to adapt the Strategy as part of ensuring that it takes account of evolving policy at the national and Kent-wide levels.

Development Briefs

The following additional comments are made in relation to the opportunity areas:

- The traffic flow arrangements in the vicinity of Maidstone West station should be informed by the outcomes of the experimental one-way system at Barker Road/Hart Street. It is also worth noting that the County Council is seeking to implement capacity improvements at the Broadway/Barker Road junction, subject to securing the necessary funding.

- The proposals for The Mall and Sainsburys suitably seek to capitalise on the scope for improving pedestrian permeability across this area, which carries the added benefit of enhancing accessibility to the bus station. It is apparent that there would be an intensification of uses served via the existing vehicular access onto Romney Place so further work would be required to determine its suitability. Clarification is also needed on how the car parking requirements of Sainsburys will be accommodated.

In light of the above feedback, the County Council would welcome continued dialogue with the Borough Council on taking forward the content of the Strategy. This could encompass concept design reviews, modelling (VISSIM with visualisation) and engagement with the County Council's specialist teams (public transport, active travel, road safety and asset management) and other transport providers.

Public Rights of Way (PRoW)

Overall, the County Council is in support of the Strategy. However, it is disappointing that the PRoW network routes across town have little consideration within the draft material provided. The Strategy should be seen as an opportunity to achieve real change in modal shift, and by inclusion of and investment in existing routes, this change can come about. Active Travel and leisure routes are significant in contributing to improvement of public health and well-being as well as providing safe, attractive connectivity across the town centre.

In respect of the Opportunity Areas, the Lockmeadow area should include specific reference to Public Footpath KMX30 with connections to the Medway Valley Towpath and river frontage. The Strategic Aims Plan should also reference the route.

The County Council supports the riverside connectivity and upgrade (with the necessary PRoW and Access approval secured as required) as it is in keeping with recent development of and investment in the Medway Towpath project. Connections across the river are necessary as mentioned.

The County Council is also supportive of the guidance notes regarding the riverside pedestrian and cycle connections which should be within green open space. There is a need to improve direct walking and cycling route to Maidstone West station which should be considered as part of this Strategy.

In the other areas identified as Opportunity Areas, there are no recorded PRoW. However, the County Council would advise maximising green open spaces for public use and to encourage biodiversity. The County Council would also ask that the document supports the aim of securing development contributions and these must include contributions towards the PRoW network improvements.

The County Council would wish the KCC [Rights of Way Improvement Plan](#) to be included as a KCC strategic document. The Walking and Cycling Strategy 2011-2031 appears to omit the significance of the PRoW network which provides existing routes taking people from where they are to where they want to be. This is particularly the case of the Medway

Towpath recent investment, which connects to Aylesford for both commuting and leisure. Separate, off-road routes are proven to encourage behavioural change for safety and amenity reasons and should therefore be of priority and greater consideration to be given to redesignation of road space to achieve off road routes. There should also be consideration of ensuring PRow routes and other walking routes on the town outskirts link into plans for the centre to improve wider area connectivity. Routes to schools do not appear to feature and this is a serious omission, with Maidstone being the location of numerous secondary schools with pupils coming into the town from the surrounding area.

The County Council would advise that the following PRow routes of significance for town connectivity are referenced within the Strategy - Public Footpaths KMX14, KMX15, KMX16, KMX24, KMX25, KMX27, KMX30, KMX32, KMX33, KB10, KH2. An extract from the Definitive Map can be provided upon request.

Property Strategy

Movement Strategy

The County Council would recommend that there is more specific reference within the Movement Strategy to improving the linkages between the Maidstone East / Sessions end of town and the remainder of the High Street - this would help to bring the Maidstone East end of the town to be better connected with the centre of town.

Town Centre Presentation to Group Leaders

The County Council welcomes the inclusion of Sessions House and Maidstone East as potential residential led / mixed use schemes. The document references *“safeguard Sessions House as a civic asset within an upgraded setting; ensure that any redevelopment provides public/civic ground floor use”*. The County Council notes the area in front of Sessions has been shown as public realm. The County Council will need to establish the level and type of interest for the surplus space in due course.

Town Centre Strategy Opportunity Areas Development Briefs

The County Council notes that Sessions House and the Maidstone East area do not feature as one of the key project sites - with the four sites having been identified as Lockmeadow, Sainsbury's, Haynes Ford, and Maidstone riverside. The Green and Open Space Strategy action areas listed are Maidstone East and Sessions House, Centre North, Centre South, Len Valley, All Saints, Maidstone West and Riverside, and the importance of Maidstone being the county town for the future. This document references that the hard-surfaced setting for Sessions House should be softened. The County Council would therefore ask how these two documents are considered together.

Whilst Maidstone East and Sessions might not be one of the key project sites designated to take forward, the County Council recommends that it would be helpful for the potential uses to be identified as being residential led / mixed use scheme use to provide as much flexibility as possible whilst the plans develop for Sessions House.

Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS)

As Lead Local Flood Authority, the County Council supports proposals to deculvert the River Len. With regards to the Sainsbury site, the deculverting of watercourses has multiple benefits which are well documented, including:

- Providing valuable wetland / aquatic habitat, aiding fish passage and significantly adding to the visual attractions of an area.
- Offering educational and play opportunities for children, enhancing pedestrian and cycle routes and giving people a touch of the countryside and its seasons in the town.
- Restoring historic canals for amenity or for navigation by powered and unpowered boats.
- Using water in motion to mask city noise and provide an atmosphere of quiet and calm.
- Complementing other urban regeneration initiatives and bringing commercial benefits such as enhanced image for properties and up to 20% increase in land values or rents.
- Reducing maintenance and construction costs by using natural bioengineering techniques rather than concrete constructions.
- Reducing flood risk, and creating balancing ponds to help reduce flooding downstream.
- Giving a place a sense of identity, because each combination of landform, waterway, bankside buildings and bridges is unique.

(taken from [CIWEM Policy Position Statement – De-culverting of watercourses](#))

With regards to the proposals for the various green spaces and biodiversity corridors, the County Council would strongly encourage the multiple benefits these areas can provide as part of any future design considerations with regards to the management of surface water. The Lead Local Flood Authority is also actively working with Maidstone Borough Council with regards to the Design and Sustainability Development Plan Document.

Heritage Conservation

Heritage Strategy

The goal of the Strategy to “Re-Connect Beautiful, Sustainable and Historic Places” (Mission 2) – will certainly need to draw on Maidstone’s heritage to be successful. The historic buildings, archaeological sites and monuments and historic townscape provide a range of opportunities that can serve to enhance life in Maidstone. They also have vulnerabilities, however, that must be recognised if new growth is not to impact negatively on them and thereby reduce the attractiveness of Maidstone. It would have been preferable if this Strategy could have been preceded by the development of a Heritage Strategy. The goals of a Heritage Strategy are:

- To identify and describe the key themes of relevance of the heritage of the district and the heritage assets that represent them;
- To assess the role that these can play in regeneration and tourism;
- To identify both their vulnerabilities and the opportunities they provide;
- To inform site allocations within the district; and
- To support policy development.

The Borough Council would benefit from such a Strategy which would also be compliant with paragraph 190 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which requires local authorities to have a “*positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment.*” The 2020 Regulation 18 Local Plan consultation contained the goal (‘Policy ENV 1 Development affecting heritage assets’ under ‘Further work to do’ beneath paragraph 9.86) that a Heritage Assets Review and Heritage Strategy should be developed at some point in the future. This should be advanced as it would greatly support the placemaking and design work at the heart of this and future development strategies. The County Council would be happy to further discuss options for the preparation of such a Strategy.

Green Spaces

The draft Strategy rightly highlights the role of green spaces in securing the attractiveness and utility of the proposed development area and this in turn highlights the importance of Maidstone’s historic parks and gardens. If this resource is to play its full role, however, there is a clear need to ensure this approach is evidence based. At present, the main information resource for the local (as opposed to Registered) historic parks and gardens of Maidstone is the 1996 Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens (the County Council and the Kent Gardens Trust (KGT)). The Compendium needs reviewing in order to ensure that it is brought up to date and that the significance of the Borough’s gardens is properly assessed. Only then can it be used to manage and, where possible, enhance this extremely important resource. The County Council has recently been working on a number of such reviews with the KGT and we would be happy to discuss an update for Maidstone with the Borough Council.

Green and blue infrastructure

Aside from the green spaces, many of the green and blue corridors are themselves historic routes and contain nationally and locally important heritage assets. For example, during the Second World War the River Medway was the GHQ Stop-Line and still contains dozens of pillboxes and defence sites. These constitute a nationally important group of heritage assets. They may not be protected in law as protecting complexes such as this is particularly difficult and scheduling is seen as a management decision, but they need to be respected and protected as though they were statutorily protected sites (in accordance with the NPPF). Detailed surveys would be required to establish if any Second World War features survive in the Lockmeadow or Riverside areas.

Where the River Len flows into the Medway is a constructed mill pond. It is a landmark feature for Maidstone town with the reflection of the Rootes building and the industrial

historic character being highly memorable. This site is particularly sensitive archaeologically in view of its position within the historic complex of the Archbishops Palace. There may have been a mill here during the Medieval Period, forming part of the medieval palace complex, but certainly post medieval mills were sited here and the adaptation of the River Len channel for industrial use just before it enters the River Medway is of key historic importance.

The River Len is also well known for the numerous mills which utilised the healthy flow of the river during the Medieval and Post Medieval periods and perhaps earlier. This distinctive character of the River Len is of special importance within the borough and possibly makes it different to the other minor rivers flowing through Maidstone. An assessment of the heritage of the rivers in Maidstone would be a useful and informative dataset that could help develop the potential of the rivers and enable their effective management.

Placemaking Tools

Maidstone town has been shaped and influenced by a long history, the legacy of which is a strong and rich cultural heritage. In addition to an extensive and important archaeological heritage from prehistory, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Medieval and later periods, the town contains highly visible built heritage in its medieval and post-medieval buildings and road/lane layouts. A range of industries have shaped the town, including papermaking, brewing, extraction and transportation. Buildings have been constructed from local materials in the form of ragstone, clay and timber. There is therefore a rich resource to draw on when placemaking. Masterplanning will be the key stage in this. New layouts should complement existing historic settlement patterns and should be undertaken sensitively, and existing patterns should be retained as far as possible. We would hope that planners will ensure that developments respect existing settlement in terms of scale, layout and orientation so that the pre-existing historic settlement is not diminished by the new development.

Maidstone does suffer, however, from a lack of placemaking tools to achieve this. As mentioned above there is, as yet, no Heritage Strategy for Maidstone. The Extensive Urban Survey (Historic Town Survey) report for Maidstone is also now outdated (2004) and its approach has been superseded by new characterisation methods such as those deployed in the Metropolitan [Historic Landscape characterisation](#). Many of the Conservation Areas still lack appraisals. The Local List of Heritage Assets seems to have been added to little since the 1970s. These tools all have the potential to contribute to placemaking by helping integrate new development into what is already there and would have been invaluable in preparing this Strategy. The Strategy itself will take years to deliver, however, and there is certainly scope for such tools to be developed and play a role. The County Council would be happy to discuss all the above further.

Design Code

A Design Code should be prepared for each area of the town and should respond appropriately to the historic built environment of that area. This would be a very useful resource in planning future developments, for example, in highlighting the significance of particular structures and areas, identifying how these can and should be modified, and when designing replacement buildings and structures.

The industrial, vernacular and secular history of Maidstone is reflected in the architecture and materials employed in different areas of the town. This provides an incredibly rich resource for informing a Design Code. The various industries that were based in the town over the course of its history can be linked to specific locations, providing design inspiration for the scale and detail of new structures. A successful Design Code should strike a balance between being sufficiently prescriptive but retaining enough flexibility for designers and planners to come up with innovative, bespoke solutions at every scale, from large buildings to street furniture.

The drafting of a Design Code should be heritage-led and will require detailed review by conservation teams at the Borough and County Council to ensure that is appropriate and relevant to Maidstone town itself, rather than being generic and non-specific.

Several areas of the town centre are currently under-utilised, so the placemaking tools and Design Code would be well placed to address this. Some buildings, structures and areas are marred by accretions of negative significance that detract from their heritage value. The Strategy should aim to strip away the elements of negative significance to maximise the public's ability to use and appreciate the inherited built environment of the town.

The re-use of existing buildings – even relatively modern ones – should be a presumption, and a key tenet of every part of the Strategy. Within the construction sector, there is now a clear movement away from demolition due to the waste it generates, its carbon footprint and the energy it requires. In terms of existing historic assets, designated structures are generally well recorded, understood and protected. Use of the untapped and unmapped resource of undesignated heritage assets, including those locally listed structures, should be maximised in the Town Centre Strategy. This would benefit those living/working/visiting the town and would ensure the protection of these assets at the same time. Protecting undesignated heritage assets is a theme that district and borough councils are grappling with at present across the county.

Sustainable drainage schemes

Managing drainage in urban areas is particularly challenging where most surfaces are hard and natural drainage patterns have been eroded. Sustainable Drainage Schemes (SuDS) are therefore critical but these may have both direct and indirect impacts on the historic environment. Direct impacts could include damage to known heritage assets – for example, if a historic drainage ditch is widened and deepened as part of SuDS works. Alternatively, they may directly impact on unknown assets such as when SuDS works damage buried archaeological remains. Indirect impacts are when the ground conditions are changed by SuDS works, thereby impacting on heritage assets. For example, using an area for water storage, or improving an area's drainage can change the moisture level in the local environment. Archaeological remains are highly vulnerable to changing moisture levels which can accelerate the decay of organic remains and alter the chemical constituency of the soils. Historic buildings are often more vulnerable than modern buildings to flood damage to their foundations.

When SuDS are planned, it is important that the potential impact on the historic environment is fully considered and any unavoidable damage is mitigated. This is best secured by early

consideration of the local historic environment following consultation with the [Kent Historic Environment Record](#) (HER) and by taking relevant expert advice. The County Council has produced advice for SuDS and the historic environment, which has been provided to accompany this response. It provides information about the potential impact of SuDS on the historic environment, the range of mitigation measures available and how developers should proceed if their schemes are believed likely to impact on heritage assets.

Re-use of Historic Assets

Although the large-scale development proposed in the Strategy has the aim to form better connections between Maidstone's heritage assets, there is nonetheless a risk that older buildings could be demolished to be replaced by new. This risks increasing the carbon cost of development. Historic England has produced a range of [guidance](#) on the role that heritage can play in mitigating climate change and historic building adaptation. The guidance demonstrates that historic structures, settlements and landscapes can in fact be more resilient in the face of climate change, and more energy efficient than more modern structures and settlements. This could usefully be highlighted in the text as an encouragement to retain old buildings where possible.

Community heritage and cultural facilities

The developments proposed by the Strategy will probably be the largest to take place in Maidstone Town Centre for many years. They provide an outstanding opportunity for community engagement and for supporting Maidstone's cultural realm. The emerging Local Plan included the proposal to seek CIL contributions for educational and community facilities and it is hoped that these would include support for Maidstone Museum. The County Council would also draw attention to the opportunity to carry out community heritage projects aimed at researching and investigating the heritage of the development areas. This will help integrate the new residents into the town and unite the new and existing communities. This has rarely been done in an urban context and there is potential for the Borough Council to take an innovative approach here. The County Council has recently included provision for securing funds for community heritage projects in its own [guidance](#), with a costed example, and the County Council would encourage the Borough Council to do the same.

Sports and Recreation

Active Kent welcomes the use of wayfinding and is supportive of the consideration of the 20-minute neighbourhood.

Consideration would be welcomed as to how wayfinding could be used to connect each area and not just in areas like Central South in isolation.

Active Kent would also welcome consideration of connectivity to the existing sports facilities identified, and how access could be improved to these facilities.

Active Kent questions whether a Pitch Strategy review or Sports Facilities review for the borough are to be prepared and would welcome clarification as to how sport's governing bodies are to be involved.

Culture

In respect of cultural matters, the County Council broadly agrees with the drafted Strategy. It is important to create a focus for Maidstone as a flagship county town whilst also putting the wellbeing of residents and visitors at its centre. The County Council supports the concept of looking at different action and opportunity areas to create focus for a number of developments which can be realised over time.

Recognition of the value of drawing on the rich heritage of Maidstone is encouraged. Furthermore, links between the town centre, the river and its environment should be explored with opportunities for social and leisure activity as well as environmental benefits.

Creative and educational use of town centre buildings is an emerging pattern across the country and one which brings high streets and adjacent areas into more regular use and increases footfall, dwell time and spend, as well as creating opportunities for social interaction. Including external and internal spaces which can be used for event programming is an important part of this process.

The County Council welcomes the discussion with Mid Kent College for a potential partnership to develop a skills programme and pathway to creative careers at the Hazlitt and the potential for use of empty buildings for meanwhile use to include leisure and culture. Ebbsfleet Garden City is piloting an approach to co-location where leisure use sits alongside other community amenities such as GP surgeries or walk in medical centres. This may be a useful model for larger vacant properties and there may be opportunities to pilot a model for social prescribing using such a set up.

The County Council considers that the Old Post Office and Powerhub sites could be explored as creative workspace or business incubation. The South East Creative Economy Network has recently published a [strategy for developing creative workspace](#) which will provide some useful guidance for the Borough Council.

Event spaces may usefully be considered when looking at green space, public realm and pocket gardens through the inclusion of power supplies, podiums or shelter.

The County Council welcomes the principle of general uplifts in character and appearance but would like to see this carried out in a coordinated way which creates a coherence across the town and that designs and materials are relevant to the area and its history and heritage. The County Council welcomes the overall approach to providing baseline lighting considerations to cover safety, security and wayfinding and the protection of dark spaces to support environmental sustainability.