

From: Derek Murphy, Cabinet Member for Economic Development
Simon Jones, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport Directorate

To: Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee
14 May 2024

Subject: **District Visits Programme**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Paper: None

Future Pathway of Paper: None

Electoral Division: All

Summary: This report outlines the outcome of the recent visit to Maidstone district as part of this programme and key issues raised during the visit as well as potential future visits.

Recommendation: The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report and make any recommendations to the Cabinet Member on the future visits programme.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In 2017 Members of this Cabinet Committee agreed that officers arrange a programme of informal visits to Kent districts. The objective was to provide an opportunity for Cabinet Committee Members to gain an understanding of the economic development, regeneration, community and infrastructure opportunities and challenges within each of the Kent districts.
- 1.2 This report outlines the programme of future visits to Kent districts in 2024 and a proposed new formalised internal monitoring process for key issues raised during these visits.

2. The visit to Maidstone

- 2.1 The details of the visit are summarised in Appendix 1 of this report.
- 2.2 The key priorities for Maidstone Borough Council are:

1. Employment Land developments such as:

- Maidstone Innovation Centre,
- Woodcut Farm (LOC8)
- Former Sygenta Works (Yalding Enterprise Park)

2. The adoption of the proposed Local Plan with key features being:

- Plan for long term sustainable growth
- Coordinated delivery of new homes & jobs to support population growth

3. Economic Vision: By 2030 Maidstone will excel as the 'Business Capital of Kent' via five strategic priorities:

- Open for business
- Greener more productive economy
- A thriving rural economy
- Inclusive growth
- Destination Maidstone

4. Borough wide improvements via UK Prosperity Fund and Rural Prosperity Fund:

- Maidstone Town Centre: lift the tone of the town centre to make it a thriving place for projects and events.
- Rural areas within the borough by supporting and improving community infrastructure

4. Housing provision via:

- 1,000 Affordable Homes Programme
- MBC Housing working with Golding Homes
- 10year plan to build 1000 homes directly as a £200m investment.

2.3 The main asks of KCC from the visit were:

- KCC to confirm the future of the Adult Education Centre. KCC to advise MBC that the service formerly at St Faiths Centre has now moved to Oakwood House.
- Continue to work in partnership with KCC on key buildings such as Oakwood House and also Sessions House as a heritage anchor building.
- Further One Public Estate opportunities – new developments for disabled/elderly via joint ventures.
- Joint funding bids/opportunity for Joint Venture with KCC on downsizing for older people
- Leveraging CIL & S106: sites for new uses in the town centre and cooperation with KCC to ensure KCC 106 CIL money is spent.

2.4 These asks are to be reported at the next available meetings of:

- Growth & Communities Divisional Management Team
- Highways & Transportation Divisional Management Team

to determine a response to Maidstone Borough Council and escalated, if required to Growth, Environment & Transportation Corporate Management Team for a response.

The initial response will be provided at the next meeting of the Growth, Economic Development & Communities Cabinet Committee meeting.

2.5 An overview of the borough and the itinerary for the visit and are provided as Appendices 2 and 3 respectively.

2.6 The numbers of Members attending this visit was low. There were 19 confirmed attendees ahead of the visit with 6 attending on the day.

3. Programme of Further Visits

- 3.1 Further Member visits to Kent districts are being arranged in collaboration with district and borough officers. The format for each visit involves a day-long tour of the principal economic development, regeneration, community and infrastructure within each district. The content of each visit is principally determined by the district council, but key county council initiatives or aspects may also be included.
- 3.2 The visits programme for 2024 is being planned to include visits to Gravesham, Dartford and Swale.
- 3.3 The Committee has in the past visited Swale, Ashford, Folkestone and Hythe, Dover, Dartford, Tunbridge Wells, Gravesham, Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling, Sevenoaks and Thanet as well as the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation.
- 3.4 These visits will be continued for a new cycle following Committee's recommendation to the Cabinet Member.
- 3.5 As agreed by the Committee, should places be available, invitations are extended to the Chair and Members of the Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee, the Cabinet Member and Deputy Cabinet Member for Community & Regulatory Services and then all Members.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The cost of coach hire is approximately £525 per visit. The visits facilitate closer partnership working between the County Council and the District Councils and are a very cost-effective way of connecting key decision makers across the different authorities.

5. Recommendation

Recommendation: The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report and make any recommendations to the Cabinet Member on the future visits programme.

6. Contact details

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