

## **REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**14 JUNE 2018**

### **MEMBER'S ITEM: CO-ORDINATED APPROACH FOR INITIATIVES AND PROJECTS IN ROCHESTER**

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director Regeneration, Culture  
Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief  
Executive

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#### **Summary**

This report sets out a response to an issue, raised by Councillor Paterson, concerning projects in and around Rochester and a request for provision to be made for bringing local stakeholders together to consider a proactive, co-ordinated strategy to safeguard historic buildings and secure the long-term economic success of Rochester.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 Under Medway Constitution Overview and Scrutiny rules (Chapter 4, Part 5, Paragraph 9.1) Councillor Paterson has requested that an item on this matter is included on the agenda for this meeting.

#### **2. Reason for Urgency**

2.1 Under the Overview and Scrutiny rules in Medway Council's Constitution (Chapter 4, Part 5, Paragraph 9.1) Councillor Paterson has requested the addition of this Member's item to the agenda for this meeting. The Constitution requires a Member's item to be added to the next available agenda, having regard to the Access to Information Rules

2.2 As the request for this Member's item was received on 25 May 2018, just preceding a Bank Holiday weekend and the half-term week, it was not possible to finalise the report in time for despatch with the main agenda. Under Section 100B of the Local Government Act 1972, the Committee may

consider the report, even though it has not been open to public inspection for five clear days before the meeting, as long as the Chairman is satisfied the item should be considered as urgent business by reason of special circumstances, which must be specified in the minutes. On this occasion the Chairman has confirmed he is satisfied that the report should be considered as an urgent item, as the next meeting of the Committee is not until 23 August 2018, which would involve a delay in scrutiny and discussion of the matters raised by Councillor Paterson on behalf of local residents.

### **3. The Issue**

3.1. Councillor Paterson has requested that an item be placed on the agenda and the reasons are set out as follows:

3.2 'In recent months it has become apparent that a number of issues affecting Historic Rochester are being considered in isolation.

'Preserving our heritage and promoting tourism are integral to the success of Rochester. We therefore need a co-ordinated, joined-up approach so that projects including but not restricted to the relocation of the coach park, the Corporation Street hotel development, short and long stay parking, the loss of the last bank on the High Street and the last on-street free-to-use ATM, the proposed sale of the Conservancy Board Building, renovations to the Guildhall Museum, the Visitor Information Centre lease, the use of Eastgate House and the future of the Corn Exchange can be discussed in the round.

'Those who live and work here, as well as frequent visitors to Rochester, are concerned that recent decision-making appears to lack strategic vision. They, like me, are keen to ensure that Medway Council has a proactive, co-ordinated strategy to safeguard our historic buildings and secure the long-term economic success of the City.

'I would therefore ask the Committee to recommend that provision is made for bringing local stakeholders together, again including - but not restricted to - members from all political groups representing Rochester as well as representatives of the City of Rochester Society, the Town Centre Forum, the Cathedral, the Rochester Bridge Wardens Trust, the King's School, Friends of the Vines etc.'

### **4. Director's Comments**

4.1 Medway Council has long recognised the importance of preserving and promoting Medway's rich heritage and tourism by working closely with partners to deliver significant social and economic benefits for residents, businesses and organisations. Medway attracts 4.6m visitors each year and tourism supports 6000 jobs and brings in approximately £313m to the local economy.

4.2 It is inaccurate to suggest that Medway's decision-making appears to lack strategic vision. Medway not only has a very strong strategic vision for its heritage and tourism, but has developed and implemented a comprehensive range of strategies over the years through close partnership working.

- 4.3 The current Medway Cultural Strategy (2014-19) was developed by the independently-chaired Medway Cultural Partnership, which includes a diverse range of partner organisations, such as the Arts Council, Canterbury Christchurch University, English Heritage, The Historic Dockyard Chatham, Huguenot Museum, Ideas Test, King's Rochester, MidKent College, Nucleus Arts, Royal Engineers Museum, Rochester Cathedral, University for the Creative Arts, University of Greenwich and the University of Kent. The Cultural Partnership is currently developing plans for the new Cultural Strategy with the review being led by representatives from partner organisations.
- 4.4 Sitting alongside the Cultural Strategy is the visitor-focused Destination Management Plan. This has been developed through extensive consultation with local partners to provide a vision for how best to market Medway's burgeoning tourism economy through the implementation of tangible aims and objectives.
- 4.5 The tourism economy is further supported through the Medway Tourism Association. This is an independently-chaired group supported by the Council, with representatives from more than 50 Medway tourism-related businesses and organisations.
- 4.6 These all form part of the Council's wider place-making agenda, overseen by the multi-partner Place Making Board, which launched its exciting vision on 7 June, presented by Cllr Jarrett and attended by Members from across the Council. The Board includes representatives from Visit Kent, MHS homes, North Kent Enterprise Zone, Locate in Kent, The KM Group, King's School, Countryside Properties, Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust, University of Greenwich, University of Kent and MidKent College.
- 4.7 The Council's heritage and tourism team has close links with local groups, such as the Rochester Town Forum and engages closely with Friends Groups including Friends of Eastgate House, Friends of the Guildhall Museum and Brook Pumping Station, and Friends of Medway Archives.
- 4.8 The Council also consults extensively on issues affecting residents and businesses, such as the Local Plan, Rochester Riverside and coach park consultations and the Corporation Street development brief and planning applications, as they arise. For example, the current Local Plan consultation running between 16 March and 25 June includes a Heritage policy review, which will result in a Heritage strategy output. So far, approximately 9,000 people have attended. Rochester Riverside included two consultation events on 16 September 2016 and 16 May 2017, which were attended by 290 people. The Rochester Riverside coach park consultation was undertaken on 2 May 2018, attended by 100 people.
- 4.9 Medway is also widely recognised for its extensive free festivals and events programme put on across Medway for the residents of Medway and beyond. In particular, events held this year in Rochester include:

May – Sweeps Festival – 3 days  
June - Dickens Festival – 2 days  
July – Castle Concerts – 5 days  
July – Medway Mile – 1 day  
August – Medieval Merriment – 2 days  
September – RE Corp Memorial – 1 day  
November – Remembrance Parade – 1 day  
November – Christmas Lights Switch On – 1 day  
November /December – Rochester Christmas Market – 8 days  
December – Dickensian Christmas – 2 days.

- 4.10 In addition to these highly-valued community events, the recent strategic Medway Place-making launch highlighted the attractive benefits of Medway, which are promoted by local partners, such as King’s School, Chatham Historic Dockyard, Copper Rivet and Mid Kent College. The collective heritage and tourism offer and strong partnerships Medway has engendered, makes it a place people are proud of. The current and future heritage and tourism strategies and engagement will ensure Medway is a great place to live, work, learn and, in particular, visit.
- 4.11 At Budget Setting Council on 23 February 2017, the Leader advised the Council of the review of our heritage and tourism offer in Rochester which he had triggered, which he again highlighted at Budget Setting Council on 22 February 2018. This full review of Council-run heritage assets in Rochester helped to inform decision-making and ties in to Medway’s strategic approach. The need for further investment in the Guildhall and the Corn Exchange have flowed from this work and has led to a consideration to offer for sale the Conservancy Building as a means of releasing capital for reinvestment. Medway is a city in all but name and through working in partnership to a strategic approach, will secure the recognition it deserves.

## **5. Risk Management, Financial and Legal Implications**

- 5.1 There are no direct known risks, financial or legal implications arising from this report.

## **6. Recommendation**

- 6.1 The Committee is requested to consider the Member’s Item.

### **Lead officer contact**

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### **Appendices**

None

### **Background Papers**

None