

Maidstone Town Mail

...another initiative from Town Centre Management



*Welcome to our
January 2011
newsletter*

***The safety and
security of our
town could be
under threat.***

Maidstone Borough Council is considering moving the CCTV Control Room to a location remote from Maidstone and one which will also have a responsibility for overseeing the operation of CCTV cameras in a number of other towns. Should this move happen, the directors of Maidstone Town Centre Management believe it would have serious implications for the safe and secure environment currently enjoyed in Maidstone. This is not just about our town centre. This decision would affect all parts of our town and neighbouring villages where CCTV cameras are located and managed by the Maidstone CCTV Control Room personnel.

We are producing this special newsletter to explain our opposition to the move and in the hope of persuading you to support us in our efforts to keep this valuable and proven service in the heart of our town, where it belongs.

Keep Monitoring in Maidstone



Maidstone Town Centre Management is fighting plans to move CCTV monitoring away from the town.

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It fears the proposal to relocate the CCTV control to a new regional hub in Medway would jeopardise safety by losing the local knowledge of the current operators and reducing the monitoring focus on Maidstone.

Medway Council approached Maidstone Borough Council some months ago with the suggestion that Maidstone's CCTV control room should move from the Town Hall to a centre in Strood where monitoring for all five Medway Towns and for the borough of Swale already take place.

The partnership arrangement would save Maidstone Borough Council about £65,000 per year. The council is currently investigating the proposal and will consult with stakeholders

before Cllr John A Wilson, cabinet member for community services, makes his decision.

But Maidstone Town Centre Management is vehemently opposed to the move. It held an extraordinary board meeting in December at which directors expressed their "dismay" at the proposal which, they said, would "adversely impact upon safety and security in our town".

Company Secretary Graeme Wyles said: "Over the past few years an effective partnership has been created between the Maidstone CCTV Control Room personnel, the Police and Midsafe - the mobile radio service operated by Maidstone Town Centre Management and used day and night by around 150 businesses throughout the town.

"This partnership has been wholly focussed on Maidstone security and used the local knowledge of the

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CCTV operators to the full in handling any issues in our town. The proactive work initiated by the CCTV Control Room staff has also alerted the Police to many situations before they have been able to develop. Throughout, the Maidsafe mobile radio capability has ensured an immediacy in communication among businesses in the town which is the envy of many towns in the South.



"The CCTV operators and Police working together, supported by our Maidsafe mobile radio service has, in our opinion, brought a unique approach to security in our town and created the safe and secure environment we experience in Maidstone – day and night."

He added: "In the opinion of the Directors of Maidstone Town Centre Management the relocation of the CCTV Control Room to a site not only located remotely from Maidstone but also responsible for the management and operation of the CCTV systems in a number of towns will adversely impact the safety and security of folk in our town.

"The cost constraints under which the borough council must currently operate are understood. That said, we believe the safety and security of all in our town is paramount. We believe the retention of the CCTV Control Room in Maidstone is central to this.

"We look forward to working with the borough council and remain hopeful that a way forward can be found to retain the CCTV Control Room in Maidstone."

Does locally monitored CCTV work?

One nationally – and indeed internationally – renowned success of the Maidstone CCTV partnership came about during a sledgehammer attack on the Fraser Hart Jewellery store in Fremlin Walk in February 2008 when raiders grabbed £30,000 worth of Rolex watches.



The fruit and veg stall traders in Earl Street saw the first hammer blow being struck against the shop window and instantly contacted the CCTV Control Room at the Town Hall via their MaidSafe radio.

Police were called and the CCTV camera were instantly trained on the building and caught every move

made by the raiders – following their get away attempts and their arrest just minutes later.

Town Centre Manager Bill Moss said: "They sent live footage through to police HQ so they could follow everything that was going on CCTV.

"It was great team work between members of MaidSafe, the CCTV



CCTV locations

The CCTV system does not operate solely in the town centre. CCTV cameras are sited throughout the borough and monitored from the Control Room in the Town Hall.

Areas covered in addition to the town centre are: Headcorn; Staplehurst; Barming; Maidstone Hospital; Tovil;

Mangravel; Shepway; Park Wood; Senacre; Vinters Park; Park and Ride car parks; Mote Park; the Millennium Park; Lockmeadow.

There are currently 116 fixed cameras and 23 mobile cameras. The service operates 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. The CCTV Control Room averages 179 arrests per month.





Implications of the move

We believe moving the CCTV Control Room to Medway would have serious implications for the safety and security of people throughout the borough.

Operating and managing the CCTV cameras from a remote location which is also responsible for the monitoring of other towns' CCTV operations will inevitably and significantly reduce the Maidstone-centric focus currently provided.

It is unlikely that existing CCTV operators will relocate to the new operational site and, therefore, the local knowledge is lost.

Police response times will, inevitably, be impacted.

The relationship between the CCTV operators, the Police and businesses through our MaidSafe service, currently serving Maidstone so effectively, is destroyed.

"We couldn't have got the offenders as quickly without the cameras."

Control Room and the police and that's what we want to preserve. I've no doubt that the fact that the Control Room was in the centre of town and the operators knew the town well, helped them to help the police."

Former Maidstone Borough Commander, Chief Inspector David Pascoe, told BBC South East's Politics Show last year:

"We couldn't have got the offenders as quickly without the cameras."

"It saved hours and hours of police work trying to track them down."

"CCTV is tremendously useful to us."

In fact, Maidstone police attribute 170 arrests a month directly to CCTV.

Three men appeared at Maidstone Crown Court in October 2008 in connection with the Fraser Hart raid and were each jailed for their part in it.

The CCTV images have been

uploaded to YouTube and a number of other websites where they have been viewed thousands of times.

To see them go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZxhHnNbGyw "http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZxhHnNbGyw"



Is there an alternative to the Medway move?

We believe there is...

The Directors of Maidstone Town Centre Management Ltd look forward to participating in the promised consultation process. Furthermore, our Directors believe that an alternative way forward could be to explore the retention of a CCTV Control Room in

Maidstone – albeit provided by a third party.

It is hoped that the consultation process can facilitate discussion in regard to this latter option and, perhaps, move forward to invite formal tenders for such provision.

Pastors and Urban Blue

Volunteers who help keep the streets of Maidstone safe for late night revellers at the weekends are backing the campaign to keep the CCTV Control Room in Maidstone.

Both Maidstone Street Pastors and members of the Urban Blue Bus team say the presence of the CCTV team in the town gives them the confidence to carry out their work, which is acknowledged to have helped make the town a safe place to socialise in.

The street pastors have a team of about six volunteers on the streets every Saturday night between 10pm and 4am offering practical and pastoral support to people out enjoying themselves in the town – often avoiding the need to call the police out.

Coordinator Graham Tanner said it was important that clubbers perceived the pastors as being “one step removed from the established authorities”.

“For these same reasons we don’t carry a radio and are generally reliant on the knowledge that we are watched by a CCTV centre that know and understand the work that we do.

Indeed, our current failsafe is a direct line to CCTV, whereby we can ask the cameras to cover us before we engage in a situation. That way, we can utilise the expertise of the controllers to decide whether the police are required to assist.

“The removal of a locally based service will lead to our volunteers feeling at much greater risk, either perceptually or in reality and may impact on our current operations in the town.”

Similarly, volunteers on the Urban Blue Bus, which provides minor medical treatment and a safe haven for clubbers in need of help, feel confident knowing the CCTV team is at hand.

Team leader Robert Garner said in a letter to the Kent Messenger: “We deal with all sorts of situations, mainly administering first aid. We rely heavily on the expert knowledge of the CCTV operators. When our volunteers leave the bus to deal with an emergency they need to be sure that they are being monitored. If this facility was moved out of the town it would dilute the service and I would not feel confident in allowing the volunteers to leave the bus to deal with emergencies. Currently 80 per cent of the situations our volunteers deal with are away from the bus.”

Town Centre Manager Bill Moss said the volunteers were not only enhancing the town centre but also saving public money. Over New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day alone, Urban Blue Bus volunteers offered minor medical treatment which saved 13 ambulance call outs. Throughout 2010 they avoided the need for 157 ambulance call outs, saving the ambulance service £235,500.

But he warned that moving the CCTV



Control Room to Medway would damage the service.

He said: “If the volunteers have to go out of the bus on their own to an incident they rely on the CCTV to keep an eye on them. They give the Control Room a call and ask them to follow them on camera. It’s their security blanket and without that reassurance I fear many of the volunteers would think twice about their involvement.”

How you can help

If you share Maidstone Town Centre Management’s belief that relocating the CCTV control from Maidstone Town Hall to Medway would have an adverse effect on our town and its surrounding villages, please join our campaign to keep it here.

Send your views to **Cllr John A Wilson**, Maidstone Borough Council’s cabinet member for community services, telephone **01622 720989** or email **JohnAWilson@maidstone.gov.uk**

You can also contact **John Littlemore**, the council’s Head of Housing & Community Safety, telephone **01622 602207**, or email **johnlittlemore@maidstone.gov.uk**

