

**REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
7 JULY 2009**

PETITIONS

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

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Summary

This report advises the Committee of the petitions presented to the Mayor at Council meetings including a summary of officer's response to the petitioners.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 The constitution provides that petitions presented at Council meetings relating to matters within the remit of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be referred immediately to the relevant Director for consideration at officer level.

2. Background

2.1 Where the Director is able to fully meet the request of the petitioners a response is sent of the proposed action and timescales for implementation. The petition organiser may request to refer the matter to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee if s/he is not satisfied with the answer and has given reasons for their dissatisfaction.

2.2 For petitions where the Director is unable to meet the request of petitioners or where there are a range of alternative responses the petition will be referred to the next relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee for discussion.

3. Petitions

3.1 A summary of responses relevant to this Committee that have passed the ten day deadline for a request for referral to the Committee and are therefore seen as acceptable to the petitioners are set out below.

Subject of petition	Council Date Presented by	Response
Request for a parking bay between 49 and 55 Chilham Road	16 April 2009	<p>Funding for improvement schemes is limited and, in the main, comes direct from central Government to be spent for specific purposes. Our main source of funds for improvements to the highways is the Local Transport Plan (LTP). There are a number of objectives within that plan, road safety, traffic signals, public transport, improving the flow of traffic for example. Priority for new projects is given to those that will help us to achieve these objectives.</p> <p>The LTP does not have objectives that relate to the building of more parking spaces. Additional parking is not a priority and there is no budget provision for it. In the longer term, the intention is to make it easier to use modes of transport other than the car as it's the only way to reduce the increasing demand on space.</p>
Opposing any plans for the construction of an airport in the Thames Estuary.	16 April 2009	<p>A report on whether a site in the estuary is feasible is currently being produced for the Mayor of London and was expected at the end of March. Unfortunately this is not yet available. The Director for Regeneration, Community and Culture has requested details of the publication date and has been advised he will receive a reply within 20 working days. He will respond to the petitioner again when he is received further information.</p>
Opposition to the introduction of double yellow lines on the lower section of the Gravesend Rd, Strood.	16 April 2009	<p>The petition will be included in the objection report and the Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture has delegated authority to consider any valid objections received to the traffic regulation order advertised.</p>
Request for the alleyway between Ordnance Street, Pagitt Street, Hayman Street and Corkwell Street to be cleared.	16 April 2009	<p>The following are public alleyways and are included in the street cleansing contract to be cleansed every four weeks, on a Wednesday (week three). The most recent cleanse would have been on 22 April 2009 (at the time of the letter): -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pagitt Street to school field Pagitt Street to Rochester Street Haymen Street to Corkwell Street Corkwrell Street to Gladstone Road

		<p>These have been inspected and found the cleansing to be to an acceptable condition.</p> <p>The alleyway running from Haymen Street to Corkwell Street, parallel to Ordnance Street, is a private, gated alleyway and is not the Council's responsibility to cleanse or maintain. The gates are secured and padlocked. The cleansing and maintenance of this alleyway falls to those residents who benefit from its use. The Council can offer assistance with waste disposal and equipment if the residents wish to carry out a community clean up of the waste and vegetation to restore this alleyway to an acceptable standard.</p>
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4 Petitions referred to this committee

- 4.1 The following petition has been referred to the committee for consideration as the lead petitioner has indicated that she was dis-satisfied with the response received.
- 4.2 The petition was presented to Council on 16 April 2009 by Councillor Shaw and worded as follows:

“Maidstone Road Sports Ground (Chatham)

We the residents believe this to be an essential community resource and therefore wish Medway Council to continue to maintain this facility and the existing services it provides but also to invest in improvements to the site for the future benefit of our community/children.”

- 4.3 The petition was submitted with a covering letter which is attached at Appendix A.
- 4.4 The Assistant Director for Customer First, Leisure, Culture and Democracy and Governance, responded to the petition and the letter is attached at Appendix B.
- 4.5 A number of supporters to the petition have submitted comments, which are attached at Appendix C. There will be colour versions of the photographs available at the meeting, if necessary.

5 Director's Comments

Petition Background

- 5.1.1 The Maidstone Road Sports Ground petition requests the reinstatement of the Park Attendant and improvements to the Sports Ground, specifically toilets, seats and benches and provision of youth facilities (basketball). The petition has been signed by 239 signatories.

- 5.1.2 Since receipt of the petition extensive dialogue has taken place between greenspace officers and the lead petitioner to address the issues raised in the petition. In addition, two site meetings involving the lead petitioner and other park users who signed the petition have taken place.
- 5.1.3 Through this dialogue, further issues have been raised around creating a 5-a-side area on the grass tennis courts, refurbishment of the closed pavilion, community events exploring a potential concession agreement for Maidstone Road Sports Ground and issues of anti-social behaviour.

5.2 Director's Comments

- 5.2.1 The Park Attendant position for Maidstone Road Sports Ground was provided through the grounds maintenance contract and directly employed by Quadron Services Limited. The main functions of the post were collection of tennis income from the hard and grass tennis courts and undertaking minor park cleaning functions.
- 5.2.2 The Park Attendant position was removed from the start of this financial year (April 2009) following complaints from customers and concerns expressed by Quadron around capability.
- 5.2.3 A key consideration in the removal of the post was the low level of income that was being achieved from the Tennis Court Lettings – this was less than £1,840 in the last financial year (2008/09), against a contract cost for provision of the Park Attendant function of £31,000 per annum. Given the complaints relating to the service and the financial position of the Council paying excessively for minor levels of income, the Assistant Director Customer First, Leisure, Culture, Democracy and Governance took the decision to offer tennis to the community for free and to reinvest the savings from the post into grass cutting throughout the grounds maintenance contract.
- 5.2.4 As a result of the removal of the Park Attendant post, tennis is free at Maidstone Road Sports Ground and park cleansing is undertaken as part of the grounds maintenance contract, via dedicated cleansing teams. In addition, the Sports Ground is on the Urban Ranger Inspection Schedule for three visits a week (once at weekends) and is also inspected five times a week by the Community Safety Team.
- 5.2.5 Whilst there were initial performance shortfalls in the standards of cleaning and issues with non-opening of the tennis courts following the removal of the Park Attendant position, these have now been addressed and park inspections indicate that the park is being maintained to high standards. To date there have been no major issues of anti-social behaviour within the Sports Ground that have required enforcement activity by the Safer Community Team.

5.2.6 In relation to the other areas of the petition around improvements to the facilities at Maidstone Road Sports Ground, greenspace officers have agreed the following courses of action with local residents:

a) Pavilion and Toilet Block

The existing pavilion and toilet block at Maidstone Road Sports Ground is in a poor condition and is currently closed since it requires extensive repair work. Following receipt of the petition, greenspace officers have commissioned a condition survey of the Pavilion and Toilet Block to identify if it is viable to refurbish the building and the costs for refurbishment.

If the building can be refurbished, a bid will need to be made for capital funding and or an external grant aid application, since it is unlikely that the costs could be met from existing greenspace revenue provision for pavilion maintenance (the budgetary provision for pavilion maintenance is £60,000). In addition, revenue provision would need to be identified from existing budgets to meet cleaning costs for the toilets. If the building cannot be refurbished it will need to be demolished to prevent further deterioration.

b) Seats and Benches

An order has been placed to install four seats into Maidstone Road Sports Ground and a further meeting is planned with the Lead Petitioner to agree where these seats will be located.

c) Youth Facilities

A consultation exercise will be undertaken over the summer period by greenspace officers over plans to change the grass tennis courts into a five a side area to meet demand for youth facilities. Subject to no adverse objections, the costs for providing 5-a-side goals, pitch markings and ongoing pitch maintenance can be met from savings through no longer providing grass tennis courts at Maidstone Road Sports Ground.

Further consideration will need to be given over meeting demand for basketball provision within Maidstone Road Sports Ground and it is proposed that this is developed through further consultation as a second phase to the proposed five a side area.

d) Community Events

Currently Greenspaces provide community events through the annual "What's on Guide" and opportunities for providing community events at Maidstone Road Sports Ground will be developed for inclusion into the 2010 guide. In addition, opportunities for Sports Development work will be explored with the 2012 Team.

e) Concession Agreement

Greenspace officers have agreed to explore a soft market testing exercise to ascertain if there is any market interest in a concession agreement for Maidstone Road Sports Ground, either as part of the Pavilion and Toilet Block refurbishment proposals or a mobile (ice cream) concession. As part of this market testing exercise and conditional on the outcome of the condition survey for the Pavilion and Toilet Block, a maintenance agreement for toilet cleaning would be explored.

6 Financial and Legal Implications

6.1 Any financial and/or legal implications arising from the issues raised by the petitions are set out in the comments on the petitions.

7 Recommendation

7.1 Members are requested to:

- (a) note the petition responses and appropriate officer action in paragraph 3 of the report;
- (b) consider the petition referral and note the action taken by officers in paragraph 5 of the report.

Background papers

None

Contact for further details:

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