

Council – 22 April 2022

Schedule of written responses to Members' questions not answered at the meeting

Items

7 Public questions

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Full Council 22 April 2022 – Schedule of written responses to public questions and Members' questions not answered at the meeting

Agenda reference	Question	Response
7X	<p>Alan Collins Rosell of Gillingham asked the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Rupert Turpin, the following:</p> <p>Given the COVID-19 pandemic has not yet passed and a large proportion of people have not yet been vaccinated, I am sure the Portfolio Holder will share my concern that statutory provision for virtual council meetings is not being renewed.</p> <p>One of the positives to have come out of a challenging year is the increased accessibility of council meetings, allowing people to follow proceedings online. Even before the pandemic, many local authorities allowed remote access to council meetings for residents, ensuring people who, for whatever reason, could not attend meetings in person could still see their elected representatives working for them.</p> <p>Will the Portfolio Holder, therefore, commit to ensuring live streaming of meetings continues, even beyond 21 June, so that the increased accessibility and transparency of Council meetings continues when the Council returns to physical meetings?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Mr Collins Rosell.</p> <p>All local authorities have been required, in law, to livestream meetings during the pandemic and although the legislation permitting remote meetings is due to end on 6 May, the Government has advised us to continue to livestream meetings until 21 June, which at the moment, is the date when it is hoped that all legal limits on social contact can be lifted. This matter will be kept under review pending any further Government advice.</p>

<p>7Y</p>	<p>Paul O'Neill of Chatham asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:</p> <p>The HIF consultation, New Routes to Growth, does not contain a Higham curve, enabling a service covering all of Medway. This option was present on early designs by consultants. I have sought the GRIP 2 and 3 reports, but these are unavailable.</p> <p>This also misses an opportunity for a station at Cooling to serve the surrounding residents.</p> <p>Does the Council agree that an integrated train service covering all Medway Towns is a key ingredient for an integrated transport system in Medway?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Mr O'Neill.</p> <p>You are correct, the Medway Curve was part of the original consideration for HIF, but recent rail studies have determined that levels of predicted passenger demand would not make the scheme viable.</p> <p>The HIF rail team continues to work with Network Rail and the others in the rail industry, to maximise passenger service whilst minimising costs.</p> <p>In terms of your query about the availability of the GRIP reports, the HIF team has confirmed to you that the GRIP 2 and 3 reports are not yet available as they are either not yet complete or fully signed-off.</p> <p>We absolutely do see the benefits of a rail service connecting all urban areas across Medway, and if the demand for the Medway Curve had been proven, then it would have remained part of the HIF scheme. Therefore, the HIF rail scheme's design will ensure that if demand for the Curve grows in the future, and new funding is secured, then the Curve could be back on the agenda.</p>
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<p>7Z</p>	<p>Chris Spalding of Gillingham asked the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:</p> <p>It is understood plans are in advanced stages to carry out the long awaited repairs to the road surfaces on Grain Bridge and by Grain Fire Station.</p> <p>Following another fire locally, can the Portfolio Holder confirm the road resurfacing plan includes all of Chapel Road into the Village to ensure the Fire and Rescue Service, whether locally or coming from elsewhere, does not lose vital life saving time due to the extremely poor road surface?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Mr Spalding. The Council are looking to undertake a competitive tender process this summer to repair and resurface Stoke Bridge. The Council has already started the work to consult with Network Rail who must give permission, but this is proving to be a lengthy process and has inevitably been held up by the pandemic. As a result we now anticipate not being in a position to start the works before Summer 2022.</p> <p>With regards to resurfacing, all roads in Medway are on a rolling programme of safety inspections and where defects meet the investigatory level, repairs will be undertaken. Some minor repairs were undertaken outside the fire station in early February 2021, with further minor repairs being undertaken at different sites on the road in March.</p> <p>In respect to Chapel Road, the Highways department recently assessed this road for resurfacing, and it does not currently meet criteria to be added to the resurfacing programme. The road will continue to be inspected as part of our rolling programme of safety inspections and any safety defects meeting the investigatory level will continue to be repaired.</p>
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<p>7AA</p>	<p>John Castle of Chatham asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:</p> <p>The HIF consultation, New Routes to Growth is in danger of being rushed and as a consequence may not be fit for purpose.</p> <p>The idea of putting infrastructure in place before housing is built is a good one, adopted by many countries using good design principles for house building. Consulting on the infrastructure without knowing where the housing is going to be built, undermines this principle and leads to poor outcomes.</p> <p>Does the Council agree that the consultation is being rushed ahead of the Local Plan in order to ensure that money allocated is spent, rather than taking measures to ensure sustainable development?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Mr Castle, which I will take in turn.</p> <p>Firstly, HIF allocates £14m to environmental measures, of which approximately £5m is allocated to the Cockham Community Parkland. The remaining funds will be spent on projects such as new wetlands close to the estuary and a network of other substantial green and blue spaces. I believe these schemes will deliver real long term gain for both wildlife and our communities.</p> <p>Secondly, the SSSI sites you refer to will be protected from housing, and the environmental schemes I set out will positively manage wildlife alongside sensitive recreation facilities such as new paths and cycleways. We are already working closely with Natural England, and other environmental bodies, to complete a Cumulative Ecological Impact Assessment. This document will help us plan and resource an informed approach to safeguarding protected sites both to the north and south of Hoo.</p> <p>Finally, we are willing to explore the benefits of country park designation for sites, but many key sites are already designated as a SSSI, which provides a much stronger protection.</p>
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7BB	<p>John Castle, on behalf of Medway Liberal Democrats, asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:</p> <p>Currently the HIF consultation, new Routes for Growth, contains a road running through Deangate. The environment section fails to use most of the money allocated, only committing to Cockham Community Parkland.</p> <p>Medway Liberal Democrats believe the SSSI sites North of Hoo, with the addition of Deangate, should be protected from housing and available for the increased local population to use as vital greenspace.</p> <p>Does the Council agree that the Great Wood at Chattenden, Lodge Hill and Deangate should be designated as a country park?</p>	<p>Thank you for your further question Mr Castle.</p> <p>I do not agree that the consultation is being rushed.</p> <p>The consultation responded to requests for more information on our HIF proposals and in responding to this, we have managed an extensive consultation programme. This saw engagement with parish councils, residents and statutory stakeholders. Although the HIF consultation ended on 6th April, the HIF team is still engaging with residents via Zoom meetings, and is responding to queries via futurehoo@medway.gov.uk.</p> <p>In terms of the link to housing, the proposed transport infrastructure is designed to accommodate potential growth. The link to the Local Plan is important. The Local Plan provides the strategy, the evidence and the policy to accommodate predicted potential growth. Importantly, the HIF and the Local Plan timelines continue to complement each other.</p> <p>The deadline for spend, as set by the government is 31 March 2024. This clearly informs our HIF programme.</p>
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<p>7CC</p>	<p>Andrew Millsom of Rochester asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Alan Jarrett, the following:</p> <p>The highways section of the Hoo - Routes to Good Growth document contains proposals that many who live locally, with particular reference to groups like Stop the Wainscott Flyover, consider to be weak and ineffectual. I have been informed that the consultant for the highways portion is Project Centre, part of Marston Holdings. It is a company that doesn't have significant highways case studies on its website and therefore may not have good highway experience.</p> <p>In light of the poor design quality, the ineffectual proposals and the high number of responses to consultation, will the Council commit to a further round of consultation when there are better prepared highway proposals for review?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Mr Millsom. We have confidence in the Highways consultants and the work they have completed to model, test and design the current road proposals.</p> <p>The work the consultants have undertaken has been informed by the area's environmental and topographical constraints, as well as the need to consider traffic modelling, scheme viability, cost and deliverability.</p> <p>During the previous consultation period, the HIF team, including our consultants Project Centre, supported four virtual meetings with residents. Each was 2 hours long, and residents had time to discuss the proposals and to ask questions and discuss responses.</p> <p>These meetings were constructive and beneficial, and we thank residents for way the meetings were held.</p> <p>After the meetings, residents have kindly taken time to develop their thoughts on local alternatives for phase 1 (Higham Road, on and off slips and overbridge). These are now being reviewed and a meeting will be set up with residents to discuss them further.</p> <p>It is important to remember that as our HIF proposals develop there will be further opportunities for consultation. This is key to the planning process and is something we are fully committed to.</p>
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<p>11K</p>	<p>Councillor Pendergast asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:</p> <p>In July 2019 with a merger of two local schools being proposed Council carried my motion as follows:</p> <p><i>"Following events concerning Stoke Primary School, this Council requests the Cabinet to commit to keeping rural and village schools open for the benefit of the local communities in so far as its powers allow".</i></p> <p>At the time, the merger was refused but it is now back on the table. Leigh Academies Trust 'listening exercise' for 'all relevant stakeholders' closed at midnight on 31 March 2021. It appears Medway Council had not submitted a response to the Trust by that time.</p> <p>Councillor Potter, the schools' Portfolio Holder, in an email dated 6 April 2021 stated a copy of the Council response ".will be copied to the MP and Ward Councillors this week."Nothing was received by myself.</p> <p>Does the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet intend to commit to keeping all rural schools open and if so what is actually being done to ensure this?</p> <p>The view was taken that in order to once again defeat the proposal a combined joint effort was required and to that end I</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Pendergast.</p> <p>I can confirm that the Council's policy position with reference to rural schools remains. That is, it is supportive of rural schools, and supports the Government's policy which is a presumption against closure. Accordingly, the Council does all it can within its powers to keep rural schools open as per the Council motion in July 2019.</p> <p>However, in the case of academy schools, the Council has no role as a decision-maker. This is the office of the regional schools commissioner (RSC), who will determine whether or not Stoke primary school should close, if the Leigh Academies Trust (The LA Trust) proposes to do so following its consultation.</p> <p>Medway Council was properly consulted by the Trust and responded to the consultation by the deadline date. I apologise that the response was not sent to Cllr. Pendergast. This has been rectified.</p> <p>The Portfolio lead for Education, Cllr Martin Potter, has been actively involved in discussions with the LA Trust, and Cllrs Pendergast and Filmer also met with Emma Elwin, the LA Trust's Deputy Chief Executive.</p> <p>Cllr. Potter asked a range of probing questions of the LA Trust on this matter and has secured transport provision for current pupils, and pupils who might be affected in the future up to 2033 if the proposals are approved.</p> <p>Cllr. Potter has also been active in exploring, with the Trust, other schools, academies and settings in</p>
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	<p>have sought a meeting with Councillors Filmer and Potter, at which at least one of the campaign committee would be present. There has been no meeting. In fact nothing has been heard from Councillor Potter at all.</p> <p>Councillor Filmer advised in a phone conversation last week that he and Kelly Tolhurst would "put something together", but again nothing has been forthcoming.</p> <p>I appreciate that to many of you this is just a small village school. I realise that Academies are Conservative Party policy which allows a select few to benefit from unjustified eye watering six figure salary packages at the expense of each child's education.</p> <p>However, having seen numerous disagreements with national government and policy I considered Medway Council to be different but clearly I was mistaken.</p> <p>It is disappointing that once again those in charge choose to forget about a certain part of Medway.</p>	<p>Medway about potential uses for the building that will benefit the local community if Stoke school closes. Since the land reverts, under English education law, to the Government, Cllr. Potter has been seeking confirmation (which is expected) that the land will be passed to the Council should Stoke school close.</p> <p>We cannot say whether Kelly Tolhurst made an official submission to the consultation, but we do know that she was in contact with the Trust and the Council on the matter.</p> <p>The Council is committed to providing community facilities to all areas of Medway, including the Peninsula and as part of the local plan significant infrastructure will be implemented, including new and expanding schools to meet demand in the areas where additional housing is expected.</p>
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Democratic Services

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