

Council – 7 October 2021

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

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Date: 29 October 2021

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Agenda Reference	Question	Response
7C	<p>Dr. Charles of Rochester submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer:</p> <p>When will the Council take action regarding the excessive congestion across Strood/Rochester bridge? The journey from the Esplanade is taking anywhere from 30 minutes and I hate to think of the amount of pollution being caused as a result.</p> <p>I would like to know what will be done and when?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Dr Charles. This is one of the busiest roads in Medway and has always carried a large volume of traffic during the peak hours, as it provides a strategic link between Rochester, Chatham and Strood. Whilst there are currently no plans to make any physical changes to the bridge, my Engineers are planning to review the operation of the traffic signals between Star Hill and Rochester Bridge, to make sure they operate as efficiently as possible. We will also continue to promote the use of different modes of travel, particularly given the proximity of Rochester Station and the frequent bus services that operate along this corridor.</p>
7F	<p>Stuart Bourne of Rainham submitted the following question to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe:</p> <p>Like many other residents, I have noticed that the demolition of Splashes hasn't taken place despite approval being granted at the beginning of June. And without any detailed updates from the Council on what is happening, there's lots of negative speculation on what is happening and whether it'll be ready by 2022 as promised.</p> <p>Please can you me tell me when the demolition is scheduled to take place and what is the exact timetable for the rest of the project?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Mr Bourne.</p> <p>We have contracted a company to undertake the demolition works required to remove the existing Splashes facility. As part of this process, UK Power Networks (UKPN) have recently identified a transformer which needs to be relocated. Demolition works cannot proceed until the transformers are removed, and this has to be done by UKPN. Whilst unfortunate, this will not delay the overall programme, as our Demolition contractors are ready to mobilise once we have the confirmed date. We are planning to appoint consultants to develop the design for the new building in early November. We will, of course, ensure we keep local residents and interested parties up to date with developments at the relevant points, as I am sure you would agree, this is a superb development for Medway and is very much part of our Child-Friendly City ambitions.</p>

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7M	<p>Catriona Jamieson on behalf of Medway Green Party submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty:</p> <p>Medway Green Party are wondering if you agree with the quote below from the RSPB who are clearly not convinced that fences will prevent cat roaming and that cat covenants are enforceable.</p> <p>"We have been consistent in our advice to Medway Council that a 400m buffer is the only secure and sustainable way to safeguard the nightingale population at the Chattenden Woods & Lodge Hill SSSI. We do not believe that lesser distances are consistent with the evidence based on cat roaming distances, and we remain unconvinced of the efficacy of alternative mitigation measures such as fencing or cat covenants. We believe that building substantial numbers of new houses within less than 400m of the boundary of the SSSI will create a significant and permanent predation problem for the UK's most important population of nightingales - a problem that can and should be avoided."</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Ms Jamieson.</p> <p>We do understand the importance of the SSSI, particularly for nightingales and appreciate your point about 400m and cat predation. This is why as part of HIF and the Local Plan work we have commissioned a Cumulative Ecological Impact Assessment for Hoo and are working with Natural England on the findings of that, specifically following the requirements for avoid, mitigate, compensate. While we recognise that with Lodge Hill there is the triple fencing that exists to the former MoD area, that in itself is not sufficient. Through the CEIA and discussions with Natural England we are considering a package of measures that will provide the equivalent of the protection that would be achieved through a 400m buffer.</p>

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10F	<p>Councillor Paterson submitted the following question to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe:</p> <p>In view of the recent shock announcement of the closure of the Huguenot Museum in Rochester, what action has the administration taken to ensure that this key cultural, historic and educational institution, which was featured in the recent tour of diplomats who visited Medway, remains open in Medway?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Paterson.</p> <p>The news of this temporary closure is indeed very disappointing, especially as this is the only Museum in the country dedicated to the story of the Huguenots. We have been in regular contact with the Director of the Huguenot Museum and offered support to try to keep the Museum open. We have also been in discussion with the Relationships Manager for Museums at Arts Council England to see how they could provide support for the Museum.</p> <p>This closure is, as far as we know, a temporary closure to allow the Trustees of the Huguenot Museum to review its operational management and develop a sustainable business model for the future, with the aim of reopening in Spring 2022. We have offered our support in this endeavour.</p>
10H	<p>Councillor Curry submitted the following question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett:</p> <p>The Leader of Council may recall that when he was held to account at the Business Support Oversight and Scrutiny Committee on the 1st July he expressed a degree of cynicism around the ability of his party to deliver sustainable transport for Medway.</p> <p>He was not impressed by our efforts to encourage more cycling even though this has</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Curry and for teeing my response up so nicely for me. I listened back to what I said, so I could be sure and what my actual wording was is as follows: “we choose as a country and as a unitary area to focus most of our transport on the car don’t we? We can’t ignore that, we’ve got to try and wean people off the car, but it’ll be a long time before I’m weaned off mine, I can tell you”. If you hadn’t taken the statement I made out of context, you can see that I do say we’ve got to try and wean people off the car, but as you know, cars will eventually all be electric based, so maybe it’s not about weaning people off the car but making the car more environmentally friendly- which is already in the works and we are committed to supporting that. For example, we have successfully secured government funding of £85k from the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles, covering 75% of the capital costs linked to the installation of 34 EV charge</p>

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	<p>increased greatly during the pandemic. May I quote a remark of his on this evening,</p> <p>“We are a car-based country.....it will be a long time till I’m weaned off mine, I can tell you!”</p> <p>How long will it take for the Leader for this Council to show some real leadership and go electric?</p>	<p>points within three of the Council’s public car parks:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Rochester Multistorey x 20 Station Road, Rainham x 10 Commercial Road, Strood x 4</p> <p>This Council has collaborated with EV charging point suppliers, Connected Kerb, whereby the project is very close to completion and will launch this month. We are also working with consultants Cenex and Field Dynamics to develop an EV strategy which will be completed over the coming weeks and as a result we have linked up with the Business Intelligence Team, with a Power BI dashboard having been generated to coordinate our EV survey results, with over 260 responses having been received to date. The survey remains live on the council website, so anybody that wishes to provide feedback, please do so. We are also working with KCC as part of an EV District Network Project which aims to provide a consistent network of EV chargers across Kent & Medway. This will involve approximately 30 public car park locations within Medway and around 150 countywide, operating to a 12-year concessionary contract. Site feasibility studies are currently in progress. We have even hosted a public EV exhibition event in Rochester on the 25th September following a request from the Council’s Climate Change Advisory Board. The event was well attended by approximately 1,000 members of the public and served as an opportunity to highlight some of the progress being made in this area and build confidence within the growing EV market, so to say that we aren’t committed to going electric is baseless and not rooted in fact. I would suggest you do your research in future and not twist my words, before implying I don’t support going electric and am not making any effort to do so.</p>

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101	<p>Councillor Osborne submitted the following question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett:</p> <p>I want to ask the Leader of the Council whether he has the full confidence of the Medway Conservative Group in light of the fact that 14 colleagues, including Cabinet members, are voicing concerns around his personal leadership around the forthcoming Local Plan proposals. If he could send a message to his 14 rebellious and mutinous colleagues what would this be?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Osborne. Firstly, I would like to say this has been stirred up by the MP for Rochester and Strood going to the House of Commons and misrepresenting about the facts. It's also astonishing to me, that she was a Minister in the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government when the housing numbers were approved for Medway, under the current standard methodology and she did nothing about it. That is the exact reason we are in the situation we are in, so I wanted to make that abundantly clear to start with and this issue should be taken up with her.</p> <p>My message to anybody who criticises or moves against the Local Plan is quite simple. We need to have a Local Plan in place, it is necessity and we have a time limit. Otherwise we will not have a say in our Local Plan as the government will appoint a commissioner to decide for us. What needs to be made perfectly clear to everyone in this camp, is that this is not the final plan yet. Tonight we planned to bring the DRAFT to Full Council to get approval to move to the consultation stage of the plan. This is where members and the public will be able to offer their viewpoints in a constructive way and then these will be considered carefully against the criteria and a decision will be made on any adjustments. We also made a recommendation at Cabinet on 28th September that following the consultation phase, the Local Plan would be taken to the relevant overview and scrutiny committee as part of the approval process. There is a defined process for these matters and that has to be followed to the letter, otherwise the Local Plan will fail when it goes to the inspector.</p> <p>There will of course always be those who think they know best. All of us have been elected under a Conservative banner and</p>

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		<p>owe our positions to the work this Administration has done over the years.</p> <p>I have a message to all. That is that the Conservatives have won six consecutive elections, while Labour has lost six consecutive elections. Instead of obsessing about my position as Leader perhaps Cllr Osbourne should be looking at the position of the Leader of the Labour Group for his repeated failure at the ballot box.</p>
10J	<p>Councillor Mahil submitted the following question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett:</p> <p>The Leader of the Council will have seen the recent reports about the campaign to designate Chatham Docks as an employment hub for Medway and instead of being changed to housing. He has lost the argument with the local MP, his own back bench and with the Medway community as whole. Will he please see sense and not destroy the jobs and businesses at the Docks?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Mahil. I don't know quite how many times I have to make this point, quite frankly all it tells me is that the Labour Group claim to want to listen, but never do, so I suppose I'm going to have to repeat myself. The decision of Peel L&P from 2016 to close Chatham Docks in 2025 is not with us as a Council, we do not own that land. This is a private landowner, who has decided this is not a viable business for them anymore, therefore, the decision to withdraw in 2025 rests with them. Furthermore, I am going to make no such promises when there is no finalised Local Plan in place and there won't be for some time yet. The Local Plan is just a draft at this stage and you are making an assumption on its outcome based on supposition instead of facts. We, at Medway Council, will welcome feedback during the eventual consultation phase of the Local Plan process over the coming months. Although you, Cllr Mahil, seem to be under the impression that everything is concrete and decided and there's no consultation phase and no room for adjustment, but this is a falsehood perpetuated by the Labour Group, which clearly does not understand that there is a process with these things that has to be followed.</p> <p>With regard to the MP, I believe if you have nothing positive to say about someone then it is best to say nothing.</p>

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		<p>The Medway community as a whole has not yet had a say in this matter, and you and others are denying them that say.</p> <p>There is not a shred of evidence that there will be any job losses as a result of any proposed changes at Chatham Docks, but that of course remains a matter between Peel and its tenants.</p>
10K	<p>Councillor Hubbard submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty:</p> <p>Over two years has passed since the council effectively walked away from its unfinished Strood Waterfront regeneration development. And there is a promise of no more progress on the horizon. Visitors arriving by train are given a bird's eye view of the two shabby abandoned sites, the former Civic Centre site and Canal Road's Strood Riverside, either side of the railway line at Rochester Bridge. Not exactly the welcome to the City of Culture most would want to see.</p> <p>The Council will be aware of the unsightly and dominating large pile of gravel on the former Civic Centre site, that still needs be to removed. Strood Riverside is a derelict</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Hubbard.</p> <p>We will be reviewing further options for the Strood Waterfront sites in Spring 2022. We decided this course of action following the procurement exercise for a development partner for the Civic Centre site, which was stopped in March 2020 as it was not achieving our requirements.</p> <p>We do not have funding available to provide grass coverage, or to then maintain it. There is the risk, if it was unmaintained, that ecologically significant species could inhabit the area preventing future development or at the very least incurring the significant cost of relocating them elsewhere.</p> <p>As a result of our constant encouragement of Network Rail, the link road into Strood Station's forecourt is now with their legal team for consideration, and we look forward to programming the works for completion once agreements have been finalised.</p> <p>These sites will continue to be significant for Medway's regeneration and transformation and will be brought forward at the appropriate time. In addition, as I am sure Councillor Hubbard will be delighted to see, we have re-opened the river walk around the Civic Centre site for residents to enjoy.</p>

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	<p>dust bowl and health hazard. It is obvious that the Council should seed the area with grasses to ensure that the dust is stabilised and rooted rather than being constantly blown into homes of neighbouring residents.</p> <p>The Road to Nowhere, the Council's expensive new Station Approach, is two years old. The Council needs to urgently agree a programme of works, with Network Rail, to link the road into Strood Station's forecourt. That programme of works includes the removal of the current Station Approach and making good its junction with Canal Road.</p> <p>Can the Portfolio Holder clarify whether any progress has been made with any of the above issues relating to the Strood Waterfront regeneration development?</p>	
10L	<p>Councillor Browne submitted the following question to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe:</p> <p>It has been two years since Medway declared a climate emergency</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Browne.</p> <p>Climate Change is included in the Council Plan for 2021/22. It fits under the priority of 'Making Medway a place to be proud of', with the main outcome being a 'Clean and Green Environment'. The objectives are to work with partners and the public to minimise emissions of greenhouse gases and to reduce Medway's contribution to climate change to net zero by 2050.</p>

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	<p>thanks to the successful campaign by the Medway Labour and Co-op group. At the recent Rainham Eco Hub awards it was clear that there is a huge amount of support in the community for action on air pollution, biodiversity, and sustainable development.</p> <p>The new Climate Change Action Plan has as one of its key targets to:</p> <p><i>“Ensure that climate change is incorporated and embedded into the refreshed Council Plan and all other relevant council policies, strategies, plans and contracts.”</i></p> <p>The timescale for this target is <i>“Do it now”</i></p> <p>Can the Portfolio Holder tell us if this has now happened?</p>	<p>The Climate team has been working with senior managers, directorates and teams to encourage everyone to include climate action in their service plans and named project leads have been allocated to each action in the plan.</p> <p>Ensuring that climate change is embedded into all council policies, strategies and plans will be ongoing, however, work has already started to address this in the drafting of, for example, policies within the new Local Plan and the School Place Planning Strategy.</p>
10M	<p>Councillor Adeoye submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services – Lead Member, Councillor Mrs Josie Iles:</p> <p>Given the concern raised at the Children and Young People Committee meeting on 29th July by Cllr Curry,</p>	<p>Thank you for your question. Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people’s experiences of significant harm beyond their families and therefore cannot be applied potentially. It is recognised that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse, which would feature in contextual safeguarding assessments.</p> <p>As there is no defined test for the suitability of a location with regard to</p>

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	<p>what progress has been made in assessing the potential contextual safeguarding issues at the proposed Russell House foyer?</p>	<p>contextual safeguarding, namely as there are no current residents. Council officers have been working to develop an analysis of the proposal for a Foyer. Whilst the Council can provide an overview of demographics and statistical trends in the area, the success and safety of any tenants accommodated by a Foyer will largely depend on the support offered by the landlord.</p> <p>The Council has received assurance from the landlord, who as we've heard already operate two Foyers in Medway, that they remain keen to work closely with all agencies to ensure successful operation of the Foyer. As well as making sure that any safeguarding risks are appropriately considered and managed.</p>
10N	<p>Councillor Cooper submitted the following question to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe:</p> <p>I went to the UB40 concert quite recently. The music was brilliant but selling bottles of wine for £24.00 each was not - it was a rip off. Those who bought wine discarded the bottles leaving them as a potential hazard. Adding insult to injury the bars were packed and were short staffed so subsequently long queues formed. Although the Castle Concerts are now run independently, situations like this still damage the reputation of the Council.</p>	<p>Thank you for your question, Councillor Cooper.</p> <p>As you rightly say in your question, the Rochester Castle Concerts are now produced by an independent promoter, removing the Council from any financial risk, as agreed at Cabinet in December 2019. As such, the admissions policy and bar prices are set by the promoters, together with the management of the bars and their queues.</p> <p>We have a very good working relationship with the promoters, and they have learned many lessons in their first year of delivering these concerts and I will feed back your views when planning begins for the concerts in 2022.</p>

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	<p>Will the Deputy Leader work with the promoter to review the sales and services at the Castle Concerts to achieve fairer prices and a better service in future recognising that many people would want to see the return to the policy allowing concert goers to take their own food and drink in?</p>	
100	<p>Councillor Bowler submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer:</p> <p>The Medway Bus Service Improvement Plan 2021-26 has now been published in draft form.</p> <p>The plan covers several issues around the delivery of public transport based upon an understanding of Medway that is clearly flawed. It states that:</p> <p><i>“Medway is primarily an urban area with a small rural hinterland....”</i></p> <p>In reality, over half of Medway is countryside with a terrible bus service!</p> <p>The Plan also states that:</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Cllr Bowler.</p> <p>The Council’s Climate Change Action Plan sets out how we will work to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and deliver improvements in air quality. There are specific actions relating to buses, and these confirm our commitment to facilitating the use of Ultra Low Emission Vehicles on bus routes in Medway. These ambitions closely align with the Council’s emerging Bus Service Improvement Plan, which is due to be published by 31 October 2021.</p> <p>We have no direct control over the vehicles that commercial companies operate. In partnership with our local bus operators, however, we will develop a strategy that seeks to improve fleets wherever possible, incorporating new vehicles with lower emission Euro 6 engines and electric buses. Our action plan also commits us to identifying the necessary funding opportunities to deliver this, which we hope will be forthcoming as part of the Government’s National Bus Strategy.</p>

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	<p><i>“Air quality in the area is not so poor that immediate action is required, according to the annual report 2020”</i></p> <p>This statement is inaccurate as there are clearly major air pollution issues in Medway as identified in the Air Quality Action Plan 2015 that require immediate action. These areas are designated as Central Medway AQMA, Pier Road, Gillingham AQMA and High Street, Rainham AQMA.</p> <p>I would also add Luton Road into this along with Four Elms Hill! The Bus Plan states that:</p> <p><i>“The average age from figures supplied by the operators is 11.7 years, with individual fleets ranging from 9.7 years to 14.2 years. This compares to a national figure of 8.8 years, for non-metropolitan areas of England (Source: DfT Bus Statistics Table 0605)”</i></p> <p>Can the Portfolio Holder please put the replacement of buses at the top of the climate change and transport agenda including an assurance that these will be new ULEVs and EVs and not simply cheap second-hand</p>	

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	vehicles brought from other parts of the country?	
10P	<p>Councillor Khan submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services – Lead Member, Councillor Mrs Josie Iles:</p> <p>A key driver of Medway's improvement journey from 2019's Ofsted 'Inadequate' judgement is building a stable Children's Services workforce. Given the continuing challenges in attracting permanent social workers to Medway, what new initiatives is the Portfolio Holder intending to implement?</p>	<p>Thank you for your question. Building a stable Children’s Social Care workforce continues to be a key driver and enabler of improvement in our services for children and young people in Medway. This is matched against a national shortage of social workers, and challenges in competing for scarce resources with neighbouring local authorities and locum agencies.</p> <p>Our Workforce Development team have been working hard with the service to implement a number of initiatives to address this challenge.</p> <p>We have a comprehensive workforce development programme to support our staff to develop their careers in Medway and are doing further work to identify aspirations and support staff and managers to prepare for the next steps in their career.</p> <p>Our Principal Social Worker now runs a weekly staff wellbeing group, to support all Children’s Services staff and managers following the impact of the Covid-19 restrictions on their mental health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Social media is being utilised along with professional publications to promote Medway as a great place to live and work.</p> <p>We have used information from exit interviews to better understand why staff choose to leave and are using this information in our recruitment initiatives. Positive feedback from these has been that the majority of staff who leave do so for personal reasons and would recommend Medway to other colleagues and may return to Medway in the future.</p>

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		<p>Officers regularly benchmark roles against neighbouring authorities and strive to remain competitive in the market which we know is currently challenging.</p> <p>Staying put interviews are being held by the Principal Social Worker as part of our retention strategy. These help us learn what motivates individuals and where they would like to see improvement. The benefit of these is that it provides us with an opportunity to address factors, where possible, before an individual reaches a decision to find another role outside of the organisation.</p> <p>Looking forward we will be introducing....</p> <p>A 'Golden Hello' payment to attract new social workers to areas where there is the highest level of vacancies. Based on current data this will apply to Children's Social Work Teams and Assessment only.</p> <p>An internal transfer policy to facilitate transfers across the service and help retain skills within Medway.</p>
10Q	<p>Councillor Van Dyke submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty:</p> <p>At its meeting on 2 September 2021, the Planning Committee approved the two Manor Farm Development Planning Applications MC/21/0302 and MC/21/0303. At the meeting concerns were raised about:</p>	<p>Thank you for your question Councillor Van Dyke.</p> <p>As you quite rightly say, the application for Manor Farm, for the school, barn and residential was carefully considered at a special meeting of the Planning Committee on 2 September. At that meeting there was a full presentation from the Head of Planning, carefully explaining the application and summing up all the material planning considerations before setting out the recommendation. After a number of ward Councillors, including yourself, had spoken there was then a lengthy and comprehensive debate over a large number of issues, including those you raise, with responses from officers, before the Committee voted to approve the application.</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The steps the Council intends to undertake to mitigate the impact of the works at Manor Farm on residents in Parsonage Lane generally, because of the 'temporary' use of Parsonage Lane for 'an undefined period' for access to the site and the barn/wedding venue. • The preventive and/or remedial action to be undertaken to ensure that personal injury and/or damage to property arising from dust, vehicle fumes, unacceptable noise pollution and or excessive vibration, ensuring that Parsonage Lane residents do not suffer similarly to the ongoing experiences of residents of Commissioners Road and environs during the raising of ground level works in the Commissioners 	<p>The scheme will deliver a new secondary school in Frindsbury serving an existing need and was the only acceptable location for a school within the catchment area. To have sited it outside catchment area would have generated even more traffic. The proposals for the barn will secure the future for a grade 1 Listed Barn of National importance.</p> <p>I understand your concerns for the residents of Parsonage Lane. As a result, the applicants will need to submit a Construction and Environmental Management Plan to demonstrate how they will limit and mitigate impact during the construction period for all the various aspects of the proposal. This will be very carefully considered by officers in both the planning and environmental health sections.</p> <p>I will happily agree to facilitate meetings during the construction process between the site management team, officers and ward Councillors to discuss any issues arising from construction that cause concern to local residents and work with the contractors to minimise this. Any concerns residents have – and it is hoped they will be few – can be articulated through their ward Councillors and addressed at these meetings.</p> <p>The applicants also need to submit a timetable for the temporary period for use of Parsonage Lane in relation to the operation of the wedding venue. I am confident that the period will be limited, as looking at the timetable for the filling of the quarry and the likely timetable for the works to the barn, there should not be a requirement to use Parsonage Lane for a lengthy period.</p> <p>I will ask officers to make sure that ward Councillors are informed when the details are submitted in relation to these issues.</p>

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	<p>Road Pit housing development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The monitoring the Council intends to employ to carefully record use of Parsonage Lane, assessing levels of use by non-residents and works vehicles and consult with residents, with a view to determining appropriate mitigation of effect. <p>Can the Portfolio Holder clarify whether any progress has been made with any of the above issues relating to the Manor Farm Development?</p>	

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