

Medway Council
Meeting of Regeneration, Community and Culture
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 7 April 2015

6.30pm to 9.20pm

Record of the meeting

Subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of this committee

Present: Councillors: Carr (Chairman), Griffin, Adrian Gulvin (Vice-Chairman), Hubbard, Juby, Osborne, Stamp and Turpin

Substitutes: Councillors:
Maple (Substitute for Griffiths)
Rodberg (Substitute for Irvine)
Royle (Substitute for Bright)
Wildey (Substitute for Mackinlay)

In Attendance: Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture
James Bilsland, Assistant Head of Legal - Place
David Dodd, Principal Engineer
Stephen Gaimster, Assistant Director, Housing and Regeneration
Andy McGrath, Assistant Director, Front Line Services
Chris Rogers, Assistant Engineer
Ellen Wright, Democratic Services Officer

922 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 29 January 2015 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

923 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bright, Griffiths, Irvine and Mackinlay.

924 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

925 Declarations of interests and whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other interests

Councillor Wildey advised the Committee that although the petition relating to the replacement of barriers to woods in Fowey Close was located in his Ward, following advice from the Legal Adviser he would not be speaking on this matter as the Council was now in Purdah.

Councillor Maple sought advice on this issue as he wished to speak on a petition which was located within his Ward.

The Legal Advisor clarified that the advice given to Councillor Wildey was that it may not be appropriate for him to offer to meet with residents to discuss the issue during the pre-election period.

926 Petitions

Discussion:

The Committee received a report setting out information on petitions received which were relevant to this Committee.

The Committee noted those petitions where the lead petitioner had been satisfied with the Director's response. A typing correction was noted in respect of the spelling of Holcombe Road within the report.

Referring to the petition relating to retention of the gate at the end of Sandling Way, St Mary's Island, Chatham, the Chairman informed the Committee that following a meeting with the St Mary's Island Residents Association on 25 February 2015, it had been agreed that the road would remain closed when the highway was adopted and that a low wall would be built where the gates were at present. The gates would then be mounted on the low wall so reducing maintenance liability in future years.

The Committee was advised that six petitioners had requested that their petitions be referred to this meeting for consideration on the following issues:

- a) Speed of vehicles travelling along Watling Street, Strood
- b) The proposed shared use bay installation for York Avenue, Gillingham
- c) Resurfacing of New Road, Chatham to help reduce excessive tyre on road noise
- d) Improving access to the River Medway at the Strand, Gillingham
- e) Adoption of Florence Street, Strood
- f) The replacement of barriers to woods in Fowey Close, Lordswood, Chatham.

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Each of the lead petitioners for the six petitions were welcomed to the Committee and invited to address the Committee on their individual petitions.

Speed of vehicles travelling along Watling Street, Strood

The lead petitioner, Mr Batts thanked the Committee for allowing him to attend the meeting. He expressed his disappointment at the outcome of the survey of the speed of traffic travelling along Watling Street in Strood and stated that in his opinion the proposal to enhance the existing 40mph speed signage and the introduction of 40 roundel road markings on the carriageway did not go far enough to resolve the issue of speeding traffic on this road.

He outlined residents' concerns and drew attention to the use of this road by pedestrians, including pupils of the nearby Strood Academy. He referred to the nearby Rede Court Road and questioned how traffic on this road could be limited to 30mph whilst a 40mph speed restriction was to be retained in Watling Street.

In response, the Assistant Engineer advised upon the appropriateness of the speed limit for Watling Street having regard to the width and alignment of the road. He stated that consideration could be given to the use of interactive signs in this road. The Assistant Director Front Line Services confirmed that both pedestrians and cyclists were separated from the carriageway on sections of Watling Street and that there were a number of signal controlled crossings along the road where school children could cross the road safely. He advised the Committee that this was a significant arterial route into Medway with a good safety record and therefore, rather than reduce the speed limit, increased level of enforcement was considered the preferred option.

Members discussed the petition and the Officer's response and some Members expressed concern that a traffic survey undertaken in October 2011 indicated that between the hours of 7 – 8am, when school children would be travelling or walking to school, eastbound speeds had shown an 85%ile above 55mph. Therefore, this was considered justification to reduce the speed restriction on this road to 30mph. It was also drawn to the Committee's attention that this road was used by pupils of Gordon and St Nicholas Primary Schools.

It was proposed that the Committee recommend to the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services that he consider introducing a 30mph speed limit with necessary traffic measures and signs warning motorists not to exceed the 30mph limit but this was not supported by the Committee.

Members also acknowledged the importance of enforcement of speed limits and the need to ensure that the Police were aware that this was a Medway road that could benefit from referral to the Kent Camera Partnership.

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The proposed shared use bay installation for York Avenue, Gillingham

The lead petitioner, Ms Baker thanked the Committee for inviting her to attend the meeting.

She outlined her concerns as to the number of vehicles using York Avenue to access other roads and expressed concern that the introduction of shared use bays in York Avenue will not ease traffic congestion in the area. She advised that both Windmill Road and York Avenue were too narrow for cars to pass when vehicles were parked on both sides of the road and with more cars parked, spaces in which cars could pull over would be reduced and lead to increased congestion and possible damage to residents' vehicles. Congestion also hindered emergency vehicles accessing the hospital.

She expressed concern that Council planning had been a major reason for the increase in traffic along Rock Avenue as the erection of the new bus station and closure of Medway Street to vehicles other than buses and taxis forced traffic up Chatham Hill to access Medway Hospital via Rock Avenue.

Insufficient car parking spaces in Windmill Road, Frederick Road and other adjoining roads also meant that residents relied upon car parking spaces in York Avenue.

Ms Baker also referred to a previous scheme where parking meters had been installed in Windmill Road but had subsequently been removed and referred to the increased parking provision made available at Medway Hospital for patients and visitors.

The Director for Regeneration, Community and Culture circulated copies of photographs taken at 3pm on the day of the meeting and confirmed that this had shown that there were in the region of 80 free parking bays available. He stated that this was not untypical from weekday surveys that had been undertaken. The shared use bay area was to be located on the hospital side of the road only where there were no residential properties. He confirmed that residents continue to be permitted to park in the shared use bays and that the original scheme had been reduced from 7 days a week to Monday – Friday 10am – 5pm. It was also proposed that the scheme would be reviewed after 6 months of operation.

Members discussed the issues raised and reference was made to the signage to Medway Hospital. It was considered that it may be necessary to increase signage making it clear that the Hospital can be accessed from Marlborough Road.

It was also suggested that consideration be given to removing Bank Holidays from the proposed scheme.

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Resurfacing of New Road, Chatham to help reduce excessive tyre on road noise

The lead petitioner, Mr Carolan thanked the Committee for inviting him to speak on his petition.

He outlined the difficulty that residents of New Road were having in that over the past few years, there had been an increase in the level of traffic using this road, especially when Medway Tunnel was closed and the noise from tyres on the road surface was affecting residents' ability to sleep through the night. He referred to a number of testimonials that he had received supporting this view and expressed concern that the noise was affecting the quality of life and potentially the value of properties and many residents had resorted to sleeping in back bedrooms to escape the noise disturbance.

The Principal Engineer confirmed that the last time the road had been resurfaced was in 2002/03. Full lane width patching works to the south side of the road was due to be undertaken in 2015/16 and this would cover areas of minor defects and provide a smoother surface, thus reducing road noise problems. It was pointed out that there were other factors to be taken into account such as manhole covers or potholes which also created noise as vehicles travelled over them.

Members discussed the issue and the Officer's response and it was noted that Officers would be undertaking noise testing as part of the resurfacing work. It was suggested that when this is carried out, such tests also be undertaken from within residential homes if residents were willing to co-operate.

Improving access to the River Medway at the Strand, Gillingham

The lead petitioner, Mr Peen thanked the Committee for inviting him to address the Committee.

He circulated photographs of the Commodore Hard Causeway and expressed concern that the Causeway was not in good condition as it contained a number of potholes and some of the edging had broken away making it difficult to identify the edge of the Causeway. This made it difficult for access with trailers and from which to launch boats. He referred to a condition survey undertaken in 2011 and stated that he would like to know the results of that survey.

He referred to the number of users of the Causeway and the importance of the river and requested that repairs be undertaken so as to enhance the access and use of the river at The Strand

The Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture circulated photographs of Commodore Hard and advised that the condition survey undertaken in 2011 had confirmed that the Causeway was in sound condition. He advised that the Causeway suffered from silting as it was submerged under water twice a day. However, periodic dredging was undertaken and was last carried out in 2014. The photographs indicated that it required dredging again, so this would be

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undertaken in 2015. When dredging took place, any loose paving slabs would be reset and potholes would be fixed.

The Director confirmed that to undertake major repairs to the Causeway would cost in the region of £130,000. This funding was not currently available within the Council's budgets.

Members discussed the petition noting the importance of the river and the level of usage of the Commodore Hard Causeway and the various funding options that could be pursued such as the Members' Priority Fund or funding from Section 106 developer contributions.

Adoption of Florence Street, Strood

The lead petitioner, Mr Payne thanked the Committee for inviting him to attend the meeting.

He advised the Committee that Florence Street was originally laid down in 1875 and whilst originally adequate for horse and cart, bicycle and pedestrian access, it was made up of rubble and absorbent subsoil. Therefore, by virtue of the porous nature of the road material, he was concerned that the road presented a health and safety issue. In addition, the road contained many trip hazards and the gullies did not function as they were not level with the street. For this reason, he was asking the Council to adopt the street so that it could be surfaced and maintained by the Council.

The Assistant Director Front Line Services confirmed that whilst the Council had responsibilities for Health and Safety under the Health and Safety at Work Act, this did not cover private roads. He confirmed that Florence Street was not in the Council's ownership but that the owners of properties abutting the street had ownership of the roadway. Home owners would therefore have been aware of their responsibilities for the maintenance and upkeep of the access to their homes when purchasing their properties. He also confirmed that any funding received from Central Government for highway works would not cover works to private streets.

Members discussed the petition noting that this road served 16 terraced houses. Discussion ensued as to whether the residents of Florence Street could be eligible for discount on their Council Tax taking into account that the Council did not maintain the road. However, it was pointed out that residents of Florence Street had access to all other Council services.

The Director for Regeneration, Community and Culture confirmed that residents could undertake to fund works required to bring the road up to a standard whereby the Council could consider its adoption at a future date. However, should any works undertaken not be to the required standard, the Council would not adopt the road.

It was recognised that there was likely to be a number of local authorities across the country that had similar streets in their areas that were historically

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unadopted. Therefore, it was suggested that an approach be made to the Local Government Association seeking information as to how this issue was handled in other areas.

The replacement of barriers to woods in Fowey Close, Lordswood, Chatham.

The lead petitioner, Mr Stringer thanked the Committee for inviting him to attend the meeting.

He outlined the basis of his petition and the reason for asking the Council to consider replacing the gates to the woods at Fowey Close, primarily to prevent access by motorcyclists who used the woods thus causing noise disturbance to the residents living in the Close and also to prevent burglars having a quick access route away from residential properties.

The Assistant Director Front Line Services confirmed that the Council had a duty under the Equalities Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments to allow disabled users to have access to use Council facilities but he suggested that he visit the site with the lead petitioner to assess whether there was any possible solutions that could be considered. In the meantime, the area would be referred to the Kent Police for inclusion on the list of areas where bikes are a nuisance to local residents.

Decisions:

- a) The Committee noted the petition responses and appropriate officer actions as set out in paragraph 3 of the report; and
- b) The Committee thanked each lead petitioner for attending the meeting and agreed the following actions:

Speed of vehicles travelling along Watling Street, Strood

- i) That Officers be requested to look at the design features that could be improved for pedestrians and the possible provision of permanent speed indication signs in Watling Street, Strood; and
- ii) The Kent and Medway Camera Partnership be approached with a request that Watling Street, Strood be included on the programme for traffic speed enforcement

The proposed shared use bay installation for York Avenue, Gillingham

- i) That the shared use bay scheme proceed as planned on the basis that a review be undertaken after 6 months of operation with the outcome of the review being reported back to this Committee and the lead petitioner being invited to attend the meeting;
- ii) Officers investigate the current direction signage to Medway Hospital having regard to the concerns expressed; and
- iii) Further discussions be undertaken with Medway NHS Foundation Trust regarding options for further parking provision

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Resurfacing of New Road, Chatham to help reduce excessive tyre on road noise

Officers be requested to undertake noise tests before and after the planned resurfacing of a section of the South side of New Road is undertaken

Improving access to the River Medway at the Strand, Gillingham

Officers be requested to investigate potential sources of funding for maintenance works to the Commodore Hard Causeway at the Strand, Gillingham, including the possible use of Section 106 funding.

Adoption of Florence Street, Strood

- i) The Director approach the Local Government Association and seek information as to how other local authorities deal with the issue of unadopted roads in their areas and in particular historic unadopted roads; and.
- ii) A report be submitted to a future meeting on how adopted roads have been adopted in Medway in the recent past.

The replacement of barriers to woods in Fowey Close, Lordswood, Chatham.

It be noted that the Assistant Director Front Line Services will refer the site to the Kent Police Motorcycle Team and in the meantime, will meet with the lead petitioner to discuss whether there are possible options available to reduce access of motorcycles into the woods and a report be submitted to the next meeting on the outcome.

927 Council Plan 2014/15 Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring Report

Discussion:

The Committee received a copy of the Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring report.

The Committee noted the following:

- PH11 and PH12 - Drug and alcohol abuse – Turning Point was operating successfully and Members were encouraged to visit.
- The Growing Places Fund referred to at paragraph 5.9 was due to be repaid within 7 years.
- Whilst complaints, referred to at paragraph 6.6 was a matter for the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the increased level of complaints in Quarter 2 was considered to be as a result of inclement weather affecting one event.
- Works to the café and dance studio referred to at paragraph 5.4 were almost complete

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- Bungalows referred to at paragraph 5.10 of the report were now complete and residents had moved in.
- Queries on the Citizen Panel Tracker were a matter for the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee but the Director for Regeneration, Community and Culture offered to provide a written response to Councillor Griffin.
- The Assistant Director Front Line Services agreed to provide a response direct to Councillor Stamp in respect of the timescale for works to Livingstone Circus

Decision:

The Quarter 3 2014/15 performance against the Key Measures of Success used to monitor progress against the Council Plan 2013/15 was noted.

928 Chatham Waterfront Update

Discussion:

The Committee received a report providing an update on the acquisition of land interests at Chatham Waterfront and was advised that this was a matter that was considered by Cabinet on 10 March 2015.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

929 Member's item - Closure of Tesco's Store in Chatham

Discussion:

In the absence of Councillor Griffiths, Councillor Maple addressed the Committee on the impact of the closure of Tesco Store in Chatham.

He referred to the number of staff employed at the Tesco store, many of whom had been there since the store first opened and noted the efforts to help those individuals that had lost their jobs. He expressed concern that those residents living within the vicinity of the store, a high percentage of whom did not own cars, had lost their local supermarket facility therefore, the closure of the store had had a major impact on the local community.

He referred to the site generally, including the adjacent store and the car park area.

The Assistant Director Regeneration and Housing advised the Committee that Officers had been proactive in meeting with both Tesco and a prospective purchaser of Tesco's property interest in the site. He confirmed that the prospective purchaser intended to seek a new tenant for the former Tesco Store and to progress the redevelopment of the site. He agreed to keep Members updated as discussions progressed.

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The Assistant Director Front Line Services confirmed that the car park would remain open and that he would be attending an operational meeting on this issue in the week commencing 13 April.

Decisions:

- a) The report be noted;
- b) Council Officers continue to liaise with Tesco and provide support where possible and appropriate to minimise the disruption to the town centre's offer. This will include Property and Planning Teams and where necessary employment support through JCP in conjunction with Employ Medway; and
- c) Should a new user not be found within 6 months a report be submitted to the Committee on future options for the whole site.

930 Work Programme

Discussion:

The Committee considered its work programme.

Decision:

The current work programme be noted and it be noted that as a result of decisions at this meeting, the following items will be added to the work programme:

1. A report on the shared use bay in York Avenue after 6 months of operation of the scheme;
2. A report on how adopted roads have been adopted in Medway in the recent past;
3. A report to meeting on 18 June 2015 on the outcome of the meeting between the Assistant Director Front Line Services with the lead petitioner in Fowey Close regarding the possible provision of a replacement barrier to the woods to deter motorcycles.
4. Should a new user not be found within 6 months for the Tesco store in Chatham, a report be submitted on future options for the whole site.

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Chairman

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