

REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 JUNE 2018

PETITIONS

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director, Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive

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Summary

To advise the Committee of any petitions received by the Council which fall within the remit of this Committee including a summary of the response sent to the petition organisers by officers.

1. Budget and policy framework

- 1.1 In summary, the Council's Petition Scheme requires the relevant Director to respond to the petition organiser, usually within 10 working days of the receipt of the petition by the Council. Overview and Scrutiny Committees are always advised of any petitions falling within their terms of reference together with the officer response. There is a right of referral of a petition for consideration by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee by the petitioners if they consider the Director's response to be inadequate. Should the Committee determine that the petition has not been dealt with adequately it may use any of its powers to deal with the matter. These powers include instigating an investigation, making recommendations to Cabinet and arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of the Council.
- 1.2 The petition scheme is set out in full in the Council's Constitution at: <http://www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/4.01%20-Council%20rules.pdf>
- 1.3 Any budget or policy framework implications will be set out in the specific petition response.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council's Constitution provides that petitions received by the Council 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.

- 2.2 Where the Director is able to fully meet the request of the petitioners a response is sent setting out the proposed action and timescales for implementation.
- 2.3 For petitions where the petition organiser is not satisfied with the response provided by the Director there is provision for the petition organiser to request that the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the steps the Council has taken, or is proposing to take, in response to the petition.

3 Completed petitions

- 3.1 A summary of the response to a petition relevant to this Committee that has been accepted by the petition organiser is set out below.

Subject of petition	Response
<p>Too many new houses being built in Medway.</p> <p>23 signatories (e-petition)</p>	<p>Medway is currently experiencing significant growth, with an increase of 10,000 people since 2012. Over the next 20 years it is expected that the population will grow from 278,500 to 330,000. There is a need to plan for this growth and all its requirements, including all types of housing to meet the needs of the growing community and also to provide the necessary services, infrastructure, schools, health centres and employment.</p> <p>The Local Plan, currently being prepared, will help shape the future growth of the area and consultation on the next stage, the Development Strategy, will run until 11 May.</p>
<p>Stop the abolition of yearly visitor parking permits.</p> <p>N.B There were four separate e-petition requests.</p> <p>902 signatories (e-petition)</p>	<p>There is no limit to the number of resident permits a household can purchase so long as vehicles are registered to the address or are business vehicles regularly taken home. Medway is one of the lowest charging authorities and would still be lower than some after a £2 increase in the cost of daily vouchers. A "Resident Support Permit" is being introduced to assist those who are vulnerable or require regular assistance.</p>
<p>The Council to look at introducing residents parking in the Rochester Maidstone Road, Valley View Road and Trevale Road area, Chatham to prevent anti-social parking.</p> <p>2 signatories (e-petition).</p>	<p>These requests will be added to the future resident schemes list and will be visited by an engineer for further investigation. Residents parking schemes are mainly considered in locations with major attractors such as railway stations, hospitals, town centres and areas affected by universities.</p>

Subject of petition	Response
<p>The Council to overturn the ban on alcoholic drinks being brought into this summer's pop concerts at Rochester Castle Gardens.</p> <p>98 signatories (e-petition)</p>	<p>There have been several incidents over recent years which have raised security concerns from stewards and police observers. No such incidents have occurred in the past 25 years at the Prom Concerts. The decision follows industry practice and was on the advice of the various safety bodies. The Council would be extremely vulnerable if it ignored this advice.</p> <p>N.B. As this matter was fully discussed by the Committee as a Member's Item at the meeting held on 28 March 2018, the lead petitioner agreed that he would not be referring the petition to the Committee.</p>
<p>The Council to support and implement restricted waiting restrictions in Cherry Tree Road, Rainham.</p> <p>14 signatories (paper petition)</p>	<p>This request will be added to the future Traffic Regulation Order schemes list and will be visited by an engineer for further investigation.</p>

4. Petitions referred to this Committee

4.1 The following petitions have been referred to this Committee because the petitioner organisers have indicated that they are dissatisfied with the response received.

4.2 Maidstone Road/Pattens Lane pedestrian access and road safety.

4.2.1 An e-petition containing 83 signatories was received by the Council on 4 April 2018. The petition statement was as follows:

'We the undersigned petition the council to Install a pedestrian crossing system at the Maidstone Road/Pattens Lane/Walderslade Road cross roads in Chatham. As there are already traffic lights at this junction it would improve safety for the children and parents, and any other resident, to have pedestrian crossing included in this current system.

Currently anyone crossing Walderslade Road or Maidstone Road to access the church or the local schools, have to do so in unsafe conditions. Due to the services that are being accessed, very young children are put at risk while having to cross the roads at short intervals when the traffic lights change. It is also unclear to pedestrians which flow of traffic is coming through the lights and difficult to navigate across the road which pushchairs and young children on foot.'

4.2.2 On 18 April, the Director, Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive responded as follows:

‘Following discussions with the Ward Members for Rochester South and Horsted last year, a study was undertaken on the crossing system. This assessed three options: the provision of controlled pedestrian crossings on all arms of the junction; the provision of controlled pedestrian crossings on the south and east arms only; and the provision of stand-alone pedestrian crossings separate from the junction. The conclusions of the study were as follows:

The provision of controlled pedestrian crossings on all arms of the junction

Under this scenario, pedestrians could cross each of the four arms of the junction under signal control. This would require all traffic to be stopped for a period of time, and vehicles from Walderslade Road turning left towards Maidstone would no longer be able to take advantage of gaps in traffic flow. As a consequence, the junction would operate over capacity, resulting in longer queues and delays for traffic. We have used junction modelling software to predict that the provision of controlled crossings at the junction would increase queues on Maidstone Road by up to 100 vehicles during the peak periods.

The provision of controlled pedestrian crossings on the south and east arms

This option would allow for traffic to move on some arms of the junction at the same time as pedestrians cross other arms. Notwithstanding this, the junction would still operate over capacity, although the disruption to traffic flow would be less than in the option outlined above. There would, however, be no controlled facilities for pedestrians crossing Maidstone Road (north) or Pattens Lane, so the benefits would be reduced. Furthermore, the existing triangular island would provide a very constrained waiting area for pedestrians converging from three directions. The provision of controlled crossing facilities under this option would increase queues on Maidstone Road by up to 80 vehicles during the peak periods.

The provision of stand-alone pedestrian crossings separate from the junction

This option would provide Puffin Crossings on Maidstone Road to the north of the junction, and on Walderslade Road in the vicinity of its junction with Park Avenue. To the north, there is already a Pelican crossing near Letchworth Avenue and no facility is proposed on Pattens Lane as traffic flows are considerably lighter. The crossings would operate independently of the junction. Evidence from a pedestrian survey suggests that a crossing on Walderslade Road would have greater use than a crossing located on Maidstone Road. Overall, however, it is possible that the numbers of pedestrians who might benefit from the introduction of these stand-alone crossings may be low, especially if there is little transfer from the established crossing points at the junction.

Whilst we acknowledge that the introduction of controlled crossing facilities at this junction would represent an improvement for pedestrians, the road safety data available to us indicates that the current design is not fundamentally

unsafe for people that use it. On this basis, and taking into consideration the impact on traffic delays and queues, we do not propose to make any alterations to the junction at the present time.'

- 4.2.3 On 3 May 2018, the petition organiser requested that the matter be reviewed by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The request stated:

'I would like to request the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the decision of my petition. The response stated that last year a study was undertaken on the junction and three options were assessed to deal with the pedestrian safety of the junction. However, I would like it assessed further as I do not think that these are the only options available. I appreciate that putting in a controlled pedestrian crossing would slow down the traffic flow, but we have to seriously consider the safety of pedestrians, the other road users! We should be encouraging people to walk journey where feasible, but this junction will not encourage anyone accessing St Stephen's Church or the local schools to walk as it is unsafe. I believe there are options that would still keep traffic flowing.

I would be more than happy to meet with officers at the junction in question to go through other alternatives.'

- 4.2.4 In response, the Director, Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive has further commented as follows:

'The options assessed in the study represent the conventional ways in which controlled pedestrian crossings could be incorporated within the existing traffic signals at the junction. As the petition organiser feels that there are other options available, which would still keep traffic flowing, officers would be happy to meet with her to discuss these. The Council's Head of Integrated Transport will be in touch with the petition organiser in order to arrange this.'

4.3 Objection to potential parking restrictions at Commodores Hard adjacent to this causeway

- 4.3.1 A petition containing 28 signatories was received by the Council on 1 May 2018. The petition statement was as follows:

'We the undersigned wish to raise formal objection to the potential parking restrictions at Commodores Head adjacent to the causeway. We view efforts to do so as the council denying river access for recreational river users.'

- 4.3.2 On 14 May, the Director, Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive responded as follows:

'Whilst your petition and comments are duly noted, unfortunately there is a high number of vehicles that are parking along this access road, rather than using the car parks that are available. The proposal for double yellow lines complements the restrictions in the car park areas of the Strand and as a Council we must treat all users of the Strand in the same way. I can confirm that a trailer can be left on the double yellow lines as long as it is completely

detached from the vehicle, the vehicle must then be parked in the Pay & Display car park areas provided just as with all other users of the Strand.

At this point I can confirm that we will be recommending to Members that the double yellow line proposals are progressed.'

4.3.3 On 21 May 2018, the petition organiser requested that the matter be reviewed by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The request stated:

'I wish to appeal the decision relating to our petition of the above on the following grounds please;

1. Insufficient notice of proposals - The notice is positioned remote from the launching area. Therefore the large majority of those using the slipway remain unaware of the proposals. I have not spoken to anyone at Commodores Hard that was.

2. Denial of river access – as custodian of the slipway we challenge the council's right to effectively deny practical river access here, further to similar obstructive parking restrictions at Gillingham Pier.

3. Planning consequences – It occurs to us that the planning consents on Gillingham riverfront for high intensity developments, without sufficient consideration for parking has inevitably created acute parking problems in this whole area. This is evidenced by the closure of one arm of the Gillingham Pier and the absurd double yellow lines now consolidating this wasteland in what might have been a wonderful opportunity for waterfront activity and subsequent tourism. This in turn moves students and resident cars to alternatives and the situation snowballs to create a waterfront wilderness due to parking restrictions. It is particularly confusing when the restrictions emanate from the office for "Regeneration" when there is no investment, simply restrictions on activities.

4. Exacerbating the problem – The most absurd aspect of the proposal is the consequential effects of effectively making slipway users park on the crown estates area at the top of the road. This will of course block the slipway regularly, which is diametrically opposed to your claimed original intention?

5. Impracticality – The decision fails to understand the needs of those using the slipway and in doing so presents a danger to leisure craft and vessels. It effectively renders the slipway useless due to the absence of any investment from the council in temporary moorings or pontoon access to facilitate their proposals. The premise of the response is to treat "all users of the Strand" consistently. How can you unite the needs of families using a playground (for which we appreciate the council has overheads) with those trying to utilise an historic slipway for launching vessels (in which the council has no investment or interest)? The diversity has no parallels and brings into sharp focus "Medway" councils lack of understanding of river users needs and the potential tourism and revenue opportunities successfully realised with greater vision, elsewhere in the country. Indeed you do not need to go far to see where Councils have invested in proper launching facilities and in turn parking specifically for launching vehicles and trailers only.

I would of course be happy to meet at your convenience to discuss the above’.

- 4.3.4 In response, the Director, Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive has further commented as follows:

‘Notices advising the public of the proposed changes were placed on all available posts, a lamp column and secured to railings along the access road to the slip way. The notices were clearly visible to all users of the slipway, vehicles utilising the launching area would have had to drive past the notices before reaching their destination.

There are no current or future plans to place any obstructions along the slip way, the proposed parking restrictions will still allow clear access to the launching site the parking restrictions will just enable the detachment of equipment / trailers from vehicles to occur in a more controlled environment. Following a meeting with Ward Members, Medway Council are now carrying out a further consultation, a thirty minute limited wait period is now being proposed as it was felt that this would provide the users of the launching area sufficient time to detach their equipment and vehicles from any trailers and then park their vehicles in the Pay & Display parking areas provided. Currently there are no controls in place on the access road and this is promoting irresponsible parking by some users of the Strand facilities.

The development at Gillingham Pier was a planning decision, due consideration was taken before any decisions were made and all conditions of the planning application process were duly implemented. The Strand area provides a high level of parking provision for all users of the facilities whether this is the park, Pool or waterfront.’

5. Risk Management

- 5.1 The Council has a clear scheme for handling petitions set out in its Constitution. This ensures consistency and clarity of process, minimising the risk of complaints about the administration of petitions.

6. Financial and Legal Implications

- 6.1 Any financial implications arising from the issues raised by the petitions are set out in the comments on the petitions.
- 6.2 Overview and Scrutiny Rule 21.1 (xiv) in the Council’s Constitution provides that the terms of reference of this Committee include the power to deal with petitions referred to the Committee under and in accordance with the Council’s petition scheme.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 The Committee is requested to note the petition response and appropriate officer action in paragraph 3 of the report.
- 7.2 The Committee is requested to consider the petition referral requests and the Director’s comments at paragraph 4 of the report.

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Appendices:

None

Background papers:

None