

**REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**13 JUNE 2019**

**MEMBER'S ITEM: STROOD DEVELOPMENT WORKS**

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

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**Summary**

This report sets out responses to issues raised by Councillor Hubbard, concerning the impact of the Regeneration in Strood, both the Strood Waterfront Project and Strood Town Centre Project.

**1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 Under Medway's Constitution Overview and Scrutiny rules (Chapter 4, Part 5, Paragraph 9.1) Councillor Hubbard has requested that an item is included on the agenda for this meeting.

**2. The Issue**

2.1. Councillor Hubbard has requested that an item be placed on the agenda and the reasons are set out as follows:

“The council website on Regeneration in Strood clearly demonstrates that the Council sees the Strood Waterfront and the town centre projects as a single matter. [https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200177/regeneration/462/regeneration\\_in\\_strood/1](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200177/regeneration/462/regeneration_in_strood/1)

During the run up to, and since, the recent local elections concerns have been raised by Strood residents about the council's poor decision making and actions in relation to delivery of its regeneration plan for Strood.

The first three matters of concern relate to Strood Waterfront Project's near year-long works, started with the moving of services last Summer and currently relate to the raising of Canal Road/Station Approach and the large area of adjacent land by some 2 metres, with complete disregard of:

- 1) the health and wellbeing of residents (Kingswear Gardens, Canal Rd, Cranmere Court, Wingrove Drive, Commissioners Rd) affected by extreme levels of dust & long hours of noise pollution.
- 2) the health and wellbeing of business employees, in particular the first business units on Commissioners Rd and the Riverside Tavern, from dust & noise pollution.
- 3) the business health of the Riverside Tavern, involving an almost total cut off from the Public House's established clientele and any passing trade.

The following two issues of concern relate to Strood Town Centre Project:

- 4) the year-long road works and closures, coming to head on Saturday, 11 May, when traffic on the town centre's south side was at a complete standstill/ gridlock for in excess of 2 hours.

Why were the lessons learnt during the 6-week long closure of Strood's Darnley Arch back in 2014 not applied? Why, on that day, was there seemingly a total lack of council representatives or the contractors' representatives on the ground, directing traffic?

- 5) the unnecessary roadworks. The early roadworks were on Gun Lane getting it ready for that road and Cuxton Rd (A228) to become a two way through road. This proposal had been quietly dropped and thus Cuxton Rd would remain one way and Gun Lane would remain one way at the North Street junction. What was the cost of those works – road & pavement alterations and new pedestrian central reservations?

The outdated map of works is still on the website:  
[https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/2811/map\\_of\\_strood\\_regeneration\\_phases](https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/2811/map_of_strood_regeneration_phases)

The final concern relates to the Strood Waterfront Project:

- 6) the total disregard to the residents of Kingswear Gardens/Canal Rd Estate, i.e. that the council's adopted development brief for Strood Waterfront shows the estate as a development site - the demolition of their homes and replacement housing for others.

This issue was highlighted at the meeting of Council on 25 April 2019 with the following Labour Group amendment to a report on Strood Waterfront – Former Civic Centre:

*‘Medway Council will conduct meaningful consultation with residents of Kingswear Gardens and Moat and Orbit Housing Association, and ensure they are properly informed, before future plans for Kingswear Gardens are finalised.’*”

- 2.2 In response to questions from Conservative Members relating to the validity of the amendment, the Mayor ruled it out, following advice from the Chief Legal Officer that the amendment was not relevant to the business contained in the report, as required by Council Rule 11.3.1”.

[https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/2877/appendix\\_1\\_-\\_strood\\_development\\_brief](https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/2877/appendix_1_-_strood_development_brief)

- 2.3 At the request of Councillor Hubbard, Mr V Haywood will be in attendance at the meeting to outline the concerns of local residents.

### **3 Director’s comments**

- 3.1 “The council website on Regeneration in Strood clearly demonstrates that the Council sees the Strood Waterfront and the town centre projects as a single matter’. [https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200177/regeneration/462/regeneration\\_in\\_strood/1](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200177/regeneration/462/regeneration_in_strood/1)

These Strood projects form part of the wider programme for the regeneration of Strood, subsequently the 2 projects are shown together on the Strood section of the webpage.

- 3.2 In response to the first three items relating to the Strood Waterfront Project, the flood defences project involves large amounts of earthworks that require large plant and compacting equipment. Once the works are complete, the sites will be transformed into an area of prime, high quality residential led mixed use development with the potential for premium housing, offering views of Rochester Castle and Rochester Cathedral and access to the River Medway.

As part of the planning application for the flood works, the works contactor submitted a Contractors Environmental Management Plan which sets out how dust will be controlled during the course of the works to protect air quality, and how noise and vibration levels will be minimised to avoid impact on residents and wildlife; this was approved by the Environmental Health Officer.

The noise and vibration levels have been monitored throughout the duration of the project to ensure works remain within the national guidelines. Noise and vibration levels have never exceeded the specified limits, but the team has stopped work on occasions when residents raised concerns. On occasion when dust could become an issue, for example during particularly windy conditions, work has stopped and the area has been sprayed with water from bowsers that are kept on site.

The permitted working hours as agreed in the planning application are 7.30am – 6.00pm, Monday to Friday, and 7:30am-12pm Saturday.

The contractor and Medway Council have sent regular communications to local residents and businesses during the construction period, detailing the forthcoming activities and what could be expected; this team is available for local people to talk to in person or by phone at the works compound on the former Civic Centre site in Strood.

The Riverside Tavern was first approached in 2016 and advised of the forthcoming flood defence works, and subsequent plans for housing development on the site, known as Strood Riverside, on Canal Road. With the Tavern's approval, Medway investigated purchasing the property, but an agreement was not reached and plans for the works continued with the Tavern remaining.

The Riverside Tavern has stayed open with access maintained for the duration of the project. The Tavern was advised during the design and planning phases that there would be significant disruption in the area, including road closures, as Canal Road was to be realigned, a new 2m sheet pile wall was to be built and the land raised by 2m. The phasing of the works ensured that their access was not blocked at any time. Officers also advised the Tavern on how they could apply to the Valuation Office for hardship relief for business rates.

The team delivering the works has taken significant measures to assist the Tavern since work began in 2018, including creating temporary parking areas for the Tavern's customers as the project progressed. New permanent parking solutions are being delivered for the Tavern's customers adjacent to their premises, and parking provision on the new Canal Road will still be used by the public and the Tavern's customers as previously. Traffic management provided signage advising customers and vehicles of diversions and declaring the Tavern open for business as usual; Canal Road is a no-through road, and as such there is no passing trade. Assistance has also been offered to assist with the Tavern's refuse collections.

- 3.3 In response to item 4 relating to the Strood Town Centre project, works to improve Strood Town Centre commenced in February 2018, focusing on the transformation of Commercial Road car park and market space. Further works have included a larger, more accessible island on Commercial Road/High Street and alterations to Commercial Road/Knight Road to improve traffic flow. Works were deliberately reduced across the whole of the area to minimise disruption during the Christmas shopping period and restrictions placed on the contractor in the New Year resulted in the majority of work being undertaken overnight. Recently, sections of the carriageway in the High Street have been reduced to allow kerb realignment works to be carried out safely in preparation for the resurfacing works. Pedestrian access was maintained at all times. It is anticipated that work will be completed by the end of September 2019 as scheduled.

Works started on 10 May to remove the existing block paving in the carriageway on the High Street and replace with asphalt. In order to undertake these works safely, the High Street was closed to traffic from 8pm

Friday 10 May to 5:30am Monday 13 May, with further weekend closures scheduled. Ahead of the first weekend closure an extensive communication plan was established and rolled out to ensure businesses and residents within Strood town centre were aware in advance of the planned closures and diversions, and also to advise that businesses would be open as usual during the closure period.

This communication included:

- VMS signs positioned at key locations across Medway from w/e 26 April
- Letters distributed on 9 April to all town centre businesses inviting them to attend a drop in session at Strood Community Hub on the evening of 30 April between 15:30 and 17:30.
- 41,000 leaflets (copy attached at Appendix 1) delivered to residents and businesses across Strood in the run up to the closures taking place.
- c.6000 leaflets deposited week commencing 6 May at key retail sites and leisure destinations in the town centre and petrol stations across Medway.
- Additional FAQ sheets were distributed to residents and businesses in the town centre and on Gun Lane and Cuxton Road, providing access details.
- Key businesses in Strood town centre were visited by an officer from Medway Council to confirm that they were aware of the closures and how they may impact access for deliveries over the weekend.
- Adverts placed in the Messenger, providing details of the closure extent and proposed diversion routes.

During the first weekend closure, significant congestion was experienced on Saturday 11 May due to the volume of traffic accessing the diversion route. Key diversion signs were also knocked over, which added to the confusion and congestion. The site team addressed the issue with signage by a regular traffic management patrol, whilst the Contractor also re-organised work in order to open up North Street and Cuxton Road to traffic as early as possible, all of which assisted in alleviating the pressure. Temporary signals were also manned on Commercial Road during the closure period and operatives directed traffic where necessary.

Following an assessment of the impact on traffic during the closure period, changes were made to the London bound diversion route during the most recent weekend closure (17 - 20 May) by keeping Cuxton Road open to traffic turning left (London bound) at the High Street/London Road junction **during the peak daytime (6am to 8pm) traffic periods only**. Additional signage was also implemented across the diversion routes.

Officers involved with the Darnley Arch scheme were also present for the latest Strood scheme and their experience on how to best carry out the work and the associated problems were evaluated at planning stages with the Contractor and with Medway's Traffic Management Team.

In response to item 5 relating to the Strood Town Centre project, improvements to Gun Lane, including the construction of two new pedestrian islands with dropped kerbs and tactile paving, were introduced to improve

pedestrian safety and accessibility along this section of Gun Lane. Other works carried out to the islands, resurfacing and revised traffic signal specifications formed an integral part of the scheme irrespective of the subsequent decision to retain the status quo to both Cuxton Road and Gun Lane.

The overall risk and potential issues arising from the introduction of two-way working in Cuxton Road and the remaining sections of Gun Lane were considered to outweigh the perceived benefits from the scheme and it is accepted that this has not yet been widely communicated to residents or businesses in Strood. It is the Project Team's intent, once the main Strood closures are completed, to distribute further scheme material which confirms the revised proposals. It is considered that by delaying the distribution of this additional material until after the closures have taken place, it will not dilute the important and key information on the programme of the road closures.

Concerning the outdated map of works still on the website; a link to a map showing the Strood Town Centre proposals remains on there as a high level indication of the proposed improvements. The webpage also advises that more information is available at Strood Community Hub. From August 2018 - May 2019, large scale detailed design drawings of the proposed improvements have been on display at the hub for the public to view. This has recently been updated to include information about the road closures and diversions.

Information on the website is being updated regularly to reflect the Strood road closure impacts and as indicated, once the closures have passed, this project information will be updated to reflect the revised proposals that have now been confirmed as progressing to completion.

- 3.4 Finally, in response to the concerns raised about redevelopment of Kingswear Gardens on Canal Road, Kingswear Gardens is part of the area known as Strood Waterfront and is owned by Moat and Orbit Housing Associations. The other 2 sites on the Waterfront are the adjacent Strood Riverside on Canal Road and the former Civic Centre site, both of which are owned by Medway Council.

Medway Council has been in discussions with Moat and Orbit for several years and all parties are keen for the comprehensive regeneration of the whole waterfront site, not least because Kingswear Gardens alone could deliver an additional 300, much-needed homes. Therefore the Strood Waterfront Development Brief and Illustrative masterplan included the Kingswear Gardens site, in agreement with all 3 parties.

All residents were consulted as part of the development of the masterplan and many attended the 2 public events held in Strood Community Hub in January 2018. Numerous comments about the masterplan were from Kingswear Gardens residents, and Medway's officers explained clearly that the illustrative masterplan is an aspiration, showing how the whole area could be redeveloped, but at this stage there are no immediate plans to progress this.

Following the consultation, all Kingswear residents were each sent a letter, which clearly stated that there are no immediate plans for the regeneration of Kingswear Gardens. Any concerns that have since been raised by residents to Medway Council and Moat and Orbit Housing Associations have been answered with the same response, as the situation has not changed. Any future plans for development will see all Kingswear Gardens residents consulted.

The flood defence works have progressed on the adjacent Riverside and former Civic Centre sites, and are due to be complete by July 2019.

#### 4 Risk Management

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Action to avoid or mitigate risk</b>	<b>Risk rating</b>
Environmental	Ensure good environmental practice is followed on the construction site	Monitor the Construction Environmental Plan throughout the construction phase and implement suppression measures as required	Low
Operational	Take appropriate measures to ensure minimal disruption to the public during construction works phase	Produce phasing plans and risk assessment method statements to minimise impact to the public; maintain open communications	Low
Reputational	Moat and Orbit Housing Associations' potential redevelopment of Kingswear Gardens and displacement of residents	Medway will work with the housing associations, to ensure that all local residents and businesses will be consulted as part of the planning process should any development plans be pursued	Low

#### 5. Financial and Legal Implications

- 5.1 The above mentioned programme of works have been incorporated within existing Capital & Revenue Schemes and there is no additional expenditure resulting from these.

#### 6. Recommendations

- 6.1 The Committee is requested to note the responses to the items above.

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**Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Leaflet – Strood Road Closures

**Background Papers**

None