

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

**21 JANUARY 2020**

### **PETITIONS**

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

Author: Steve Platt, Democratic Services Officer

#### **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.

The Committee is also requested to consider the petition referral request.

#### **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:

<https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/2657/401 - council rules>

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 petitions relevant to this Committee that have been accepted by the petition organisers are set out below.

Subject of petition	Summary of response
<p>We the undersigned petition the Council to be achieving a scheme of parking control that addresses the many and varied circumstances from street to street within the new proposed CPZ. The current proposals are based on several assumptions which are not evidence based.</p> <p>26 signatures (e-petition)</p> <p>143 signatures (paper petition)</p>	<p>Following consideration of the petition and responses received from the public consultation which was recently carried out with residents and businesses within the area, no changes will now be made.</p>
<p>We the undersigned petition the council to Instruct Highways to implement a range of vehicle speed and traffic volume studies on Dargets Road, due to the excessive unnecessary use caused by avoiding traffic calming on Lordswood Lane and Princes Avenue. Introduce appropriate pedestrian crossings, speed and junction management, traffic calming measures and signage to reduce traffic volumes and discourage speeding to protect pedestrian safety.</p> <p>21 signatures (e-petition)</p>	<p>In the last three years one slight injury collision has been recorded on Dargets Road. There are other locations that are currently suffering poorer ongoing road safety problems and the Council's approach is to tackle those locations with the poorest safety records first. This does not mean that the Council waits for collisions before action is taken. Rather those locations that are already suffering safety problems are targeted as a priority. The safety record of this location will continue to be monitored.</p> <p>At Dargets Road a School Crossing Patrol Officer helps facilitate school travel movements to and from Walderslade Primary School. Four Walking Bus routes have been launched and other travel related safety training</p>

Subject of petition	Summary of response
	<p>delivered.</p> <p>A traffic and speed survey has recently been undertaken at Dargets Road and any appropriate steps will be taken once the results have been reviewed.</p>

#### 4. Petition Referred to this Committee

4.1 The following petition was referred to this Committee because the petition organiser indicated that they were dissatisfied with the response received from the Director, Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive.

#### 4.2 Traffic Flow in Strood

4.3 A paper petition containing 13 signatures and a further 33 entries without signatures was presented by Cllr Hubbard on behalf of the petition organiser at full Council on 10 October 2019. The petition statement was as follows:

'We the undersigned petition Medway Council to undertake a review of traffic flow travelling through 'central' Strood. Year on year the number of vehicles 'rat running' through the streets bordered by A2 (London Road) and the A228 (Gun Lane & Frindsbury Road), to avoid town centre traffic, has increased to well above tolerable levels.

Back in the early 90's the then Rochester upon Medway City Council undertook a public consultation which resulted in the installation of traffic calming features that can be found on Weston Road, Bryant Road, Gordon Road, Jersey Road, Cromer Road and Brompton Lane. Those measures helped lower traffic volumes in the short term and still moderate traffic speeds today.

We ask the council to install a 20mph traffic zone in 'central' Strood streets. We believe that a lower speed zone will deter a proportion of the 'rat running'; as well as making the streets safer for pedestrians. We ask the council to consider introducing one-way streets and partial permanent road closure to break up 'rat running' routes.

We strongly request that as part of Medway Council's review of the Strood North Control Parking Zone (CZP) that consideration be given to managing traffic flow within the extended CPZ.'

4.4 A covering letter by the petition organiser included the following statement:

'Interestingly without any prompting from myself and quite isolated from others who had made the same comment there was a general feeling that if they turned Gun Lane into a two way road for the full length and made it possible to turn right into London Road at the Gun Lane cross road as well as a right turn into North Street then the whole situation would be resolved. The problem

concerning the road width could be resolved by acquiring the derelict land at the corner of North Street and making use of the small verge at the corner with the High Street.'

- 4.5 On 18 October 2019, the Director, Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive responded as follows:

'Unfortunately, high levels of traffic are not isolated to Weston Road. Many town centre roads are now subject to a high number of vehicle movements, due to the increase in new car users and the car being the predominant form of transportation for most people. All data we have indicates these numbers will increase further in the years to come.

With regard to your proposal for changes on Gun Lane, our initial feeling is that with Gun Lane and the A2/High Street already close to capacity at peak times, adding additional traffic to this corridor will lead to increased congestion; effectively moving the issue from Weston Road to Gun Lane. With Gun Lane thus congested at peak times, drivers will again look to alternative routes, Weston Road possibly being one of them. We have requested our Traffic Management Team examine the proposal further. This is likely to take some additional time, but the team will contact you further in due course.

Tackling wider traffic issues in Strood Town Centre, I am pleased to confirm that the Local Growth Fund (LGF) Strood Town Centre project is nearing completion. As well as improving the public realm in the town centre, the project aimed to improve journey times through the area. Full details of the scheme can be found here – <https://www.medway.gov.uk/yournewstrood>. It has been noted that there has been an increase in traffic congestion across 2019 in Strood whilst the works have been carried out. This may have led to an increase in traffic in the area of Western Road during certain periods, and we thank you for your patience while the town centre works are carried out. We anticipated the works being fully completed by March 2020.

On the wider issues of increasing car use, the Integrated Transport Service continue to work on the promotion and support of more sustainable transport options. This includes supporting the Medway Car Share scheme, undertaking schemes to improve bus facilities across Medway, and the recent completion of the LGF Cycle Action Plan ([https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200177/regeneration/677/medway\\_cycle\\_plan](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200177/regeneration/677/medway_cycle_plan)). Achieving a shift away from car use and to more sustainable transport use will be key to tackling congestion in the long term, as junction adjustments and amendments to the existing road layout will only go part way to addressing the issue if current levels of car use continue.

I thank you again for contacting us to raise this issue and for taking the time to speak to your neighbours on Weston Road.'

- 4.6 On 27 October 2019, the petition organiser requested that the matter be reviewed by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The request stated:

'We are not happy with the response we have received concerning the traffic flow through the side street of Strood.

We fully understand that there have been issues with traffic flow whilst the High Street and adjoin roads have been worked on to improve their appearance and traffic flow, however we are afraid that this has led to Weston Road (in particular) becoming a standard by-pass for traffic wishing to avoid central Strood. On occasions we have become the default A2. We feel that drivers having now learned the rat run route it can only continue to get worse even after the road works have been completed.

Having analysed the letter there was very little of it which actually explained why our petition had been turned down for consideration. Out of 42 lines only 8 of them were directly concerned with the rat running along the side street in the area north of the High Street. The rest referred to public transport plans, projected traffic increases over coming years and extended work on the High Street. In effect the response could be read as 'put up and shut up'.

The letter referred to the Traffic Management Team contacting me some time in the future but it was a passing remark with no further detail of what that contact might involve. Will we be asked for our opinion or will it be a case of they do the thinking and we are told to sit still and listen.

The letter refers to continuing growth of vehicle movements and that they are predicted to increase in years to come. Our argument is that this will mean that our side street can only become used increasingly by drivers wishing to avoid the traffic jams. The council knows it is going to happen on roads which were never intended for this sort of use but are seemingly quite happy for it to happen.

There has been no road development in central Strood since the late 1960s when Commercial Road was built and the road leading to the bridge was widened into dual carriageway. The traffic has increased substantially since then, despite the construction of the Wainscott bypass. The central Strood road system is much as it was in Roman times i.e A2 is Roman, Cuxton Road, Gun Lane and Frindsbury Road are possibly pre Roman as they follow the ancient river bank. The side streets were built for residential use in the Victorian and Edwardian period with no idea of the weight of traffic the town will have to endure in the future.

Central Strood needs more than a set of large balls and some pretty bits in order to accommodate the extra traffic resulting from the large number of cars which will be generated by the new river side developments in Rochester and Strood. There is a real need for a more efficient road system over and above that which is being built at the moment. The density of supermarkets in Strood has made it weekly shop central and that has generated a large number of extra vehicles. There are four schools with in this area (Gordon Junior school, Gordon Infants school, St Nicholas' Infants school - soon to be expanded beyond the infants stage - and St Mary' s (All Faiths) Junior School) this in itself produces heavy traffic late afternoon and early morning.

We can see that the present arrangements will continue where our cars are constantly being damaged by badly driven vehicles which back into our cars or try to pass an on-coming car and scrape the sides of our cars. The

screaming road rages and even knife-pullings (there was one incidence of this during this last year) can only get worse.

I wish for our petition to be reviewed and considered properly and some form of constructive discussion to take place where the problem can be looked at in more depth than just an 8 line response.'

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

'The Council understands the concerns about a perceived increase in traffic passing through the residential streets to the north of the A2. Unfortunately, no traffic survey data for this area is available and therefore it is difficult to determine the extent to which traffic levels have increased in recent years. It is also difficult to determine the origin and destination of the vehicles travelling through the area. Northbound vehicles may be using these streets to avoid the A2 High Street and North Street; alternatively, a number could be making local trips within what is a substantial residential area.

Officers acknowledge that traffic travelling through the older residential streets can cause some amenity and safety issues for residents, particularly as many properties in these areas do not have off-street car parking. Weston Road is subject to traffic calming, however, and the absence of reported crashes indicates that this has been successful in encouraging appropriate driving.

The layout of the streets to the north of the A2 is permeable: it allows vehicles to disperse in a number of different directions and provides a series of alternative routes between the A2 and Cliffe Road to the north. Reducing the number of available routes through the introduction of one-way streets or partial permanent road closures would divert traffic on to other streets, which may have a more significant impact.

In summary, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that the level of traffic using residential streets to the north of the A2 is unacceptable in terms of highway capacity or road safety. Whilst it is possible that vehicles use these residential streets to avoid the town centre, this has some wider benefit for traffic in Strood; dispersing vehicle trips more widely in urban areas is encouraged as it can have a positive impact on congestion and air quality. Notwithstanding this, the Council will continue to monitor this area as the town centre works near completion and some of the positive impacts for journey times are realised.'

## **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 will be taken into account as part of the review of these matters.

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. Recommendations**

7.1 The Committee is requested to note the petition responses and appropriate officer action in paragraph 3 of the report.

7.2 The Committee is requested to consider the petition referral request and the Director's response in paragraph 4 of the report.

### **Lead officer contact:**

Steve Platt, Democratic Services Officer, (01634) 332011

[stephen.platt@medway.gov.uk](mailto:stephen.platt@medway.gov.uk)

### **Appendices:**

None

### **Background papers:**

None