

**COUNCIL**  
**23 JANUARY 2020**  
**PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

Report from: Neil Davies, Chief Executive

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**Summary**

To set out the public questions received for this meeting.

**1. Background**

1.1 Section 8.3 of the Council Rules, as laid out in the Council's Constitution, sets out the rules for the receipt of public questions as follows:

- At any one meeting no person or organisation may submit more than one question. Members of the public who have not submitted questions before will be given priority over those who have. Any questions that have not been answered at the meeting within the time limits will be answered in writing after the meeting.

1.2 Section 8.6 of the Council Rules sets out the procedure to be followed at the meeting as follows:

- The Mayor will invite the questioner to put the question to the member named. The person to whom the question has been put will normally answer the question verbally after the question has been put. The time allowed for answers to each question at Council meetings shall not exceed three minutes. If a questioner who has submitted a question is unable to be present, the question will be answered in writing after the meeting. There is no provision for supplementary questions.

1.3 The questions received for this meeting are set out below in the order they were received, allowing for the rules above.

## Public questions

- 8A Rachael Noxon of Strood will ask the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:**

Will the Portfolio Holder explain how it feels it necessary to support biodiversity and acknowledge the wishes of the public, by stopping using herbicides in children's play areas and around trees, but not in the rest of our greenspaces and facilities and which are also homes to wildlife, and recreational places for children and pets?

- 8B Graham Colley of Rochester will ask the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:**

Most car journeys are short and, in many cases, could be replaced by bicycle journeys. Good for the environment and health of the individual. However, potential cyclists are concerned about cycling safety. London Boroughs have made massive strides to improve cycle routes and safety.

Would the Council please detail its cycle policy, including what has been achieved over the last 12 months, its aims over the next one, three and five years and what adjustments have been made with the advent of electrically assisted bikes?

- 8C Peter Alexander of Street Fuel Ltd will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:**

Does the Leader of the Council accept that given the commitments given by Peel L&P when it obtained planning approval for the Chatham Waters site in 2013 to provide the necessary investment in the Docks through the release of the Chatham Waters site have not been forthcoming, the inclusion of Chatham Docks (SLAA 2018 site 824) as a mixed-use redevelopment site in MLP 2037 provides Peel L&P with a justification to renege on its commitments under the Chatham Water planning approval?

- 8D Phil Taylor of ArcelorMittal Kent Wire will ask the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:**

Given that the inclusion of Chatham Port as a mixed-use redevelopment site in the New Medway Plan would directly threaten 800-full-time skilled jobs and more than 16 apprentices and the idea that Chatham Docks could simply move to Sheerness shows a complete lack of understanding of port activities at Chatham Docks, how will Medway Council ensure that it plans for employment land within the New Local Plan guarantees that all the businesses at Chatham Docks will be able to remain in Medway and in doing so whether the 600,000 sqm of additional employment land identified in the latest version of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) is appropriate for the operators at Chatham Docks and whether these

figures take account for the loss of 284,000 sqm employment space that would be lost at Chatham Docks?

**8E Gary Rosewell of Total Ship Services Ltd will ask the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:**

Port capacity and capabilities is already stretched and to lose Chatham Docks would be an irreversible decision. If its protection is removed by Medway Council and a Developer with little or no interest in the local community is allowed to wipe away centuries of port and naval traditions this will be lost to the Medway Towns forever.

Would Medway Council agree that the importance of its Climate Emergency Initiative will be impossible to achieve if the water traffic from Chatham Docks and along the River Medway will have to move onto roads with the effect of increased CO2 emissions and if it agrees this is the case, how will Medway Council give due consideration to the impact Chatham Docks has provided and will continue to provide to significant infrastructure projects, such as Crossrail, Thames Tideway and the upcoming Lower Thames Crossing and Silvertown Town Tunnel?

**8F John Spencer of GPS Marine Contractors Ltd will ask the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:**

GPS Marine has produced a report which I would ask that Councillors read (via our website - <https://gpsmarine.co.uk/>), which sets out the key benefits that can be readily secured simply by moving freight off the road and onto rivers. These already considerable benefits will be increased massively as soon as vessels start to use biofuels and introduce emissions reduction technologies. The first steps towards these changes are already being made.

The South East is extremely well placed to take advantage of the benefits that water freight brings, but the opportunity to take advantage of such benefits will be lost for ever if facilities such as Chatham Dock are continually lost to residential development.

The Council declared a climate emergency last year, keeping Chatham Docks open would be a firm step towards doing something about the climate emergency. Promoting the use of Chatham for intra port freight would be a second step and the Council using the dock area for its waste and refuse services and shipping waste by barge to the incineration facility would constitute a real step change in terms of the Council's environmental credentials.

Chatham Dock is an irreplaceable strategic asset in terms of water freight and water freight derived benefits. In London such assets are protected under the "Protected Wharves Scheme" and are being brought back into use as quickly as planning allows.

I believe that for all the reasons alluded to, the Council should consider adopting such a scheme in the case of Chatham Docks.

I also believe that that water freight brings significant benefits in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving curbside air quality, reducing traffic congestion, reducing road wear and reducing HGV related road traffic accidents.

I would also state that Council should be doing more to promote the use of the river Medway for freight traffic – starting with its own domestic and commercial waste.

GPS Marine operates the largest fleet of tugs and barges on the Thames and Medway and currently provides employment for 126 people. The closure of Chatham Dock would lead to losing all but one of the ship repair facilities on the river Medway. GPS Marine uses EAPL and Stick-Mig Welding Ltd, both of which are based at Chatham, to do most of the steelwork repairs on its fleet of 70 vessels. If it becomes impossible to repair the fleet without leaving the Thames and Medway, it is conceivable that it will become impossible to operate the fleet. This would put hundreds of thousands of truck movements back onto the roads annually and cause thousands of tonnes more carbon to be emitted into the atmosphere as stated in GPS Marine's report.

Therefore, is the Council's concern in relation to climate change sufficiently robust to cause it to act to prevent Chatham Docks closing and maintain the area's ability to use its natural assets to deliver the benefits of reduced greenhouse gas emissions, improved air quality, reduced traffic congestion, reduced road wear and reduced HGV related road traffic accidents?

**8G Kate Belmonte of Gillingham will ask the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:**

With the declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019 and the immense threat we and many other species face, why is the newly formed Climate Change Member Advisory Group meeting just once every 4 months for 90 minutes?

**8H Daniel Belmonte of Gillingham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Gulvin, the following:**

How will the Council use its procurement power to respond to the climate & biodiversity crisis?

**8I Marilyn Stone of Rainham will ask the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:**

I would like to ask on behalf of all Medway Green Party members if you are able to provide an update on the work you are doing around the climate emergency.

**8J Catriona Jamieson of Rochester will ask the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:**

We are aware that the final draft Local Plan will be completed in the summer 2020. Have you read the Green Party's response to the consultation and are you able to comment?

**8K Kate Belmonte, on behalf of Extinction Rebellion Medway, will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:**

Should we see the forecasted 2 degree rise in global temperatures by 2050 what plans do the Council have for the potential flooding of large areas of Medway, and how would this influence the placement of new building developments?

**8L Julian Quinton of Chatham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor Turpin, the following:**

Could the Portfolio Holder please tell me how and when the public are to be consulted over the savings of £406K by cutting front line services and what the impact these cuts will have on the local area and local residents?

**8M Paul Watkinson of PDMR Ltd will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:**

The notion that Chatham Docks 'is not financially viable' is fantasy. The Docks have suffered from a lack of investment by Peel L&P over the last two decades, despite during this time the tenants in addition to the rents paid, have also seen the services charges increase. These service charges are supposed to fund the upkeep and maintenance of the site. Peel L&P has created the illusion of a run-down, financially unviable asset, in order to convince Medway Council that the only solution is to redevelop the site for luxury housing.

Would the Council agree that:

Sheerness or Thamesport is not suitable for the existing tenants because;

- A) The road network in and out of Sheerness / Thamesport cannot cope with a further 400-600 vehicle movements;

- B) The quayside at Sheerness / Thamesport has an 8mtr tidal movement that is wholly unsuitable for the coastal vessels using Chatham Docks or for the vital ship repair works undertaken in Chatham Docks;
- C) The cost of relocating the businesses in Chatham Docks will put many of them out of business.

Kingsnorth is not suitable for tenants because;

- A) There is not suitable quayside. The existing jetty is c.400mtrs long and in poor condition and is not designed to handle general cargos or capable of being used for ship repairs;
- B) Medway Council has already informed tenants in Chatham Docks that there is now insufficient space on this site to accommodate the business needs of the specialist Companies in Chatham Docks?

**8N James Chespy of Gillingham will ask the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:**

Will Councillor Doe withdraw his disgraceful remarks made about Jess Glynne in relation to the loss of revenue coming from her having to cancel due to ill health her concert at Rochester Castle?

**8O Vivienne Parker of Chatham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:**

What is the Council doing to reduce household waste and encourage recycling?

**8P John Castle of Chatham will ask the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:**

The Climate Change Emergency demands action from all actors including local authorities.

There is a national target of reducing emissions by 80% before 2050. Medway has an opportunity to become a leader and set an example. Other authorities are adopting targets for reducing emissions, for example Sevenoaks has a Zero Carbon initiative.

Will the Council set a target of being carbon zero for its estates, properties and business by 2030?

**8Q Martin Rose of Rainham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:**

Debenhams on Chatham High Street is, sadly, due to close imminently. Its size, shape and location may make it an unattractive prospect for retail investment, particularly in the current unpredictable environment for business.

The primary concern is that it will go the way of the other local buildings such as the Theatre Royal, Rochester Post Office and Britton Farm in Gillingham, remaining derelict for a long time, leading to a cycle of further decline in the eastern end of Chatham High Street. This well-connected site could offer the community a great deal, providing new housing, educational or health care facilities.

With this in mind, what is the Council doing to ensure the future use of the Debenhams site serves the needs of the community and in providing a response can the Portfolio Holder confirm whether the Council will work with developers to change its planning designation to residential or other uses to avoid a cycle of decline on the High Street?

**8R Paul O'Neill of Chatham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:**

It's good to see Gillingham FC not at the bottom of the league but it seems Medway Council is when it comes to provision of electric car charging points. Electric vehicle adoption is one way to achieve multiple goals in Medway. First, air pollution is high in some parts of Medway. Enabling fast adoption of cleaner vehicles in Medway would help to reduce car emissions. Gillingham now ranks 4th on the most polluted towns according to WHO figures. The Office for Low Emission Vehicles offers grants for the adoption of electric car charging points, so additional funding is available to achieve national targets. For example Southwark are putting charging points on lampposts.

Will Medway Council put in place measures to provide good quality coverage of electric car charging points before 2030?

**8S Bryan Fowler of Chatham will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:**

Medway Council is proposing to abolish geographically, locally based Community Wardens as part of making savings of £406,000 to Front Line Services. Why are these cuts of funding being made?

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**Appendices**

None

**Background papers**

Council Rules, Constitution (Part 1, Chapter 4):