

**Medway Council**  
**Meeting of Regeneration, Culture and Environment**  
**Overview And Scrutiny Committee**

**Thursday, 12 August 2021**

**6.30pm to 8.22pm**

**Record of the meeting**

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

**Present:** Councillors: Browne, Curry, Etheridge (Chairman), Fearn (Vice-Chairman), Sylvia Griffin, Andy Stamp, Thompson and Tranter

**In Attendance:** Councillor Phil Filmer, Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services  
Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive  
Laura Caiels, Principal Lawyer - Place Team  
Ruth Du-Lieu, Assistant Director, Front Line Services  
Martin Hall, SEMS and Partnership Manager  
Catherine Smith, Planning Manager, Policy  
Ellen Wright, Democratic Services Officer

**232 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carr, Hubbard, Mahil and Williams.

During this period, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, it was informally agreed between the two political groups to run Medway Council meetings with a reduced number of participants. This was to reduce risk, comply with Government guidance and enable more efficient meetings. Therefore, the apologies given reflects that informal agreement of reduced participants.

**233 Record of Meeting**

The record of the meeting held on 10 June 2021 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**234 Chairman's announcements**

The Chairman made the following announcements:

1. He drew attention to page 61 of the agenda (Work programme) and reminded the Committee that although the Lifecycle Report on the Highways Network was in the process of being produced, as the

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Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services was in attendance at this meeting, he could be asked questions on this at this meeting.

2. He confirmed that in the light of the Planning Bill, prior to the meeting, he had held discussions with the Legal Adviser and confirmed that there would be no conflict of interest for Members in taking part in the discussions on the petition referral at this meeting.
3. He paid personal tribute to for former Vice Chairman of the Committee, Councillor Tashi Bhutia, who had recently passed away.

### **235 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances**

There were none.

### **236 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping**

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

### **237 Petitions**

#### **Discussion:**

The Committee received a report setting out petitions received by the Council which fell within the remit of this Committee, including a summary of the response sent to the petition organiser by officers.

The Committee noted that there was one petition referral to be considered at this meeting requesting the rejection of plans to build a relief road on Deangate Ridge Golf and Sports Complex.

The Committee welcomed Mr George Crozer to the meeting as the petition organiser and invited him to address the Committee:

#### **Petition calling for the rejection of plans to build a relief road on Deangate Ridge Golf and Sports Complex**

Mr Crozer referred to the background to the rejection of the Medway Local Plan by the Planning Inspectorate in 2013, and reminded the Committee that a

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substantial part of the land under administration by the Council was subject to statutory nature conservation designation including land at Chattenden Woods and Lodge Hill, which was designated for supporting a nationally important population of (red-listed) nightingales along with rare grasslands. These sites were home to a large population of nightingales and were highly regarded as a protected habitat by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). Therefore, the Council had a custodial duty to conserve and enhance the natural environment and in particular, the designated habitats and landscapes in this area.

Mr Crozer stated that until its closure in 2018, Deangate Ridge Golf and Sports Complex had been a much loved resource and outlet for the social wellbeing and interests of the local community. However, since the closure of the adjacent Lodge Hill Army Camp and its designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) it had also provided an environment that had allowed nature to thrive by providing a buffer between Chattenden Woods and Lodge Hill SSSI, and the built environment.

The RSPB had recently expressed concern that the Council appeared to be promoting a substantially smaller buffer of 150m to mitigate the effects of any proposed new housing in the area and the RSPB was concerned as to the effectiveness of any complementary mitigation measures, such as anti-predator fencing. The RSPB was of the opinion that allowing substantial numbers of new houses to be built within 400m of the boundary of the SSSI would build in a new and entirely avoidable predation issue for the foreseeable future, leaving a significant and permanent legacy for the UK's most important nightingale population.

For these and the reasons stated in the original petition, Mr Crozer requested that the Committee uphold and support the petition of the Deangate Community Partnership and recommend that the 400m minimum buffer is respected in all future planning decisions as a matter of policy.

In response, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Council was delivering its Local Plan to meet the challenging Government housing targets and local demand for homes and, in doing so, was following an approach of sustainable development providing for homes, employment, services, shops, community facilities, parks and open spaces. The Housing Investment Fund (HIF) proposals sought to bring forward the vital infrastructure required to support those new homes.

He advised that the Government housing target was fixed, and therefore the HIF would provide improvements for travel and much-needed investment before the homes were built, thus easing the pressure on existing roads and transport links.

Concerning the issue of land and, in particular, the former Deangate Ridge Golf and Sports Complex, he advised that the Local Plan would set out the decisions on land uses, and the longer-term future of the Deangate site would be explored as part of that process. The next stage of the Local Plan,

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Regulation 19 consultation, would take place over the next couple of months. He further advised that the Hoo Development Framework would inform the approach and provide a policy steer for sustainable growth and set out the principles underpinning future proposals.

The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that Deangate Golf and Sports Complex was listed as an Asset of Community Value and this status would be taken into consideration when considering its future. Officers had made contact with the Deangate Community Partnership so as to ensure there was the opportunity for the Partnership to fully participate in ongoing consultations.

On the issue of the spur/relief road, he advised that the intention of this road would be to reduce traffic on Peninsula Way and he provided an assurance that the HIF proposals were not about providing access to the Deangate site.

The Committee discussed the petition referral and the following is a summary of the main points raised during discussion:

- In the Strategic Land Assessment published in December 2019, land at Deangate had been identified for potential development and this had also been included in the consultation document published in Spring 2020 titled 'Planning for Growth on the Hoo Peninsula'. As yet, no specific further information was available as consultations were continuing with individuals and organisations to gather a significant evidence base which would take account of all relevant aspects including environmental. When published, the Local Plan would be supported by a Sustainability Appraisal setting out opportunities and constraints.

A further piece of work had also been commissioned specifically relating to environmental matters for the Peninsula taking into account the sensitivity of the area.

- It was confirmed that the fact that the Deangate Ridge Golf and Sports Complex was designated an Asset of Community Value was a material consideration and would be taken into account when considering and balancing any planning application. However, such designation was not a binding constraint against future development.
- The key purpose of the provision of the relief road was to be an alternative to enable traffic flow on the Main Road roundabout.
- The provision of a buffer could involve a wide range of alternative options including swathes, ditches, fencing, roads and other infrastructure. All options were being pulled together into a Cumulative Ecological Impact Assessment.

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- Future use of the Deangate Golf and Sports Complex site would not be impacted by the temporary use by Medway Norse and it was confirmed that the site would be considered as a mix of brownfield and greenfield land.
- It was confirmed that the vast majority of the Section 106 funding approved in 2018 for strategic recreational use, remained unspent and could be allocated for use at any site within 20 minutes drive time. However, concern was expressed that the Deangate Golf and Sports Complex had closed 3 years ago with little notice or consultation and yet the Council could not yet confirm its plans for the future of the site and it was suggested that, if possible, the Section 106 funding should be ringfenced for the provision of recreational facilities for the local community in this area as opposed to elsewhere in Medway. In response, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive advised that Section 106 funding was a matter for planning.
- The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the petition which was the subject of discussion at this meeting would also form part of the consideration of the Local Plan and officers would be engaging with the Deangate Community Partnership.

The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive stated that whilst the concerns of the community were understandable, lessons had been learnt from the previous Local Plan process and work was currently being undertaken on the production of the Local Plan so that it could come forward over the next couple of months and be considered in a comprehensive way and not piecemeal on a site by site basis.

He outlined the process by which the Local Plan along with its relevant policies and schedules would be considered by Cabinet and then by Council. Under the Regulation 19 Consultation, there would be a 6 week statutory consultation period following which the Plan would be submitted for examination which would take approximately one year.

### **Decision:**

The Committee:

- a) thanked the lead petitioner for attending the meeting and addressing the Committee on his petition and noted the various contributions put forward.
- b) noted the petition responses and appropriate officer action in paragraphs 3 and 4 of the report.

## 238 Attendance by the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services

### Discussion:

Members received an overview of progress on the areas of work within the terms of reference of this Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Frontline Services as set out below:

- Highways and Street Lighting
- Parking
- Public Transport
- Traffic Management
- Transport Strategy
- Travel Safety
- Waste collection/Recycling/Waste Disposal and Street Cleaning

The Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer responded to Members questions and comments as follows:

- **Active Travel and representation on Transport for South East** – In response to a question concerning the Council's commitment to active travel, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council had an Active Travel Plan, had introduced a number of cycle routes in Medway and was investigating options for increasing travel on buses along with a range of other initiatives.

It was confirmed that the Council was represented on Transport for South East by the Leader of the Council along with the Assistant Director Front Line Services.

- **Medway Tunnel** – In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council had maintained Medway Tunnel for several years and every opportunity was pursued to seek funding support from the Government towards these costs. He advised that capital funding had been obtained for works at the Tunnel and added that the Tunnel was an essential part of the road network in Medway and it was therefore essential that it be kept open and maintained.

The Portfolio Holder assured the Committee that in addition to obtaining the capital funding for the Tunnel, he regularly lobbied MPs for additional funds and would continue to do so.

- **Reconnect bus services operated by KCC for young people** – In response to a question as whether Medway could operate a similar bus service for young people along the lines of KCC's Reconnect, the Portfolio Holder advised that whilst budget provision was not available to offer this service, Medway offered a Youth Bus Pass. The Portfolio Holder also confirmed that the Council had been successful in obtaining government funding to encourage travel by bus but he accepted that there was a need for some bus services to operate on a more regular

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basis to and from rural parts of Medway such as Allhallows and the Isle of Grain.

- **Volkers Highways Contract - Inclusivity of employees** – The Committee acknowledged Volker Highways' community engagement initiatives and, in particular, the offer of a long term work experience placement to a young person with special educational needs between March to June 2021. Further information was requested as to whether Volker Highways had any specific programmes aimed at encouraging individuals from disadvantaged groups of the community and in particular females to help them enter the industry. In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that he was unable to supply this information but would investigate and provide an answer outside of the meeting.
- **Notification of road closures** – In response to concerns that there were occasions when road closures were undertaken without proper notification or consultation with residents, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that unfortunately, the Council had very little control over road closures undertaken by statutory bodies for emergency works but advised that he had recently discussed with the Assistant Director Front Line Services methods by which notifications of road closures to Ward Councillors and the public could be improved.
- **Highway maintenance works** - In response to a concern that sections of roads were often coned off without evidence of highway maintenance works being undertaken, the Portfolio Holder suggested that this often related to works being undertaken by statutory bodies. He advised that he was aware that this had been an issue on the Ratcliffe Highway following a water leak where a section of the road had remained coned off whilst checks were made that the leak had been repaired.
- **Highway Resilience Management** – In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder referred to the marginal overspend on the winter maintenance budget and confirmed that the Council had always made available sufficient funding to salt the roads when needed.
- **Quality of road surfaces** – In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder advised that the budget set aside to repair and maintain the road network was allocated based on a road condition survey.
- **Stencils on pavements and road surfaces** – The Portfolio Holder advised that the 2m Covid-19 social distancing stencilling on pavements and road surfaces would remain in place until such time that there was confidence that they would no longer be needed and then they would be removed.
- **No Mow May** – The Portfolio Holder advised the Committee that whilst he supported the concept of the 'No Mow May' initiative, further consideration was needed on this scheme. For instance, there were

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some areas where it was inappropriate to leave uncut growth on verges or roundabouts on highway safety grounds. In addition, in 2021, there had been prolonged periods of either rain or sun and therefore the scheme needed to be flexible to account for the variable rate of growth from season to season.

- **Street lighting** – The Committee congratulated the Portfolio Holder on progress made in upgrading provision of street lighting columns across Medway but questioned whether the new lanterns were in line with the 5G network and Electric Vehicle (EV) charging. In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that 30% had now been installed and any areas of concern should be referred to him and he would investigate.
- **EV charging** – The Portfolio Holder confirmed that Medway was working in conjunction with KCC for the provision of EV charging points and to date, 34 points had been installed in Medway. In addition, a number of private companies such as supermarkets had installed EV charging points in their car parks. Discussions were also taking place with developers to ensure that EV charging points were installed in new housing developments.

It was noted that whilst Medway had not been successful in being selected for a pilot scheme for provision of electric buses, this formed part of the Council's wider climate change programme.

It was also pointed out that new technologies around provision of electric charging points was emerging and this was constantly being reviewed concerning best practice.

- **National Highways and Public Transport Survey** – In response to a concern that the latest survey indicated a decrease in public satisfaction levels, the Portfolio Holder advised that from recent statistics that he had seen, satisfaction levels in Medway were close to the national average and therefore he requested sight of the survey referred to.
- **Street Cleansing** In response concerns that street cleansing could be improved in some areas, the Portfolio Holder advised that over the past year, some staff had been re-directed to work in other areas to provide cover due to Covid-19 staff shortages but he suggested that if Members could notify him of the specific roads/areas that were affected, he would ask officers to investigate.

Concern was expressed that in some areas, Medway Norse street collection bags were left at the roadside and this encouraged others to add further bags to the pile containing household waste.

- **Recycling** – The Portfolio Holder was congratulated on the Council's recycling collections but was asked whether more could be done to help and encourage those residents living in small flats to recycle. It was

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acknowledged that they would likely have limited storage facilities and the option of provision of community bins was suggested.

In response, the Portfolio Holder acknowledged that some residents did not have space for recycling containers other than use of clear plastic sacks and therefore these would be retained.

It was suggested that communication could be improved as to which items were recyclable.

- **Household waste** – In response to a question as to the final destination of Medway's household waste, the Portfolio Holder advised that over the past year recycling and waste collection statistics had been distorted due to the high volume of waste generated as a result of individuals being at home due to the Covid-19 pandemic. He advised that a report would soon be available detailing the final destination of Medway's waste and this would be circulated when received.

In response to another question concerning waste, the Portfolio Holder advised that he worked closely with the Waste team in looking at alternative methods of increasing recycling for a wide range of different materials and advised that the market for such materials was constantly changing and was therefore always under review.

- **Household Waste Recycling Centres** – The Committee asked whether the current pre-booking system, introduced due to the Covid-19 pandemic would continue at household waste and recycling centres. The Portfolio Holder advised that this system was working well with 70% of available slots taken up. At the current time, a resident was able to pre-book 4 visits within a 4-week period but this was due to be reviewed. He further advised that the pre-booking system had allowed the Council to control the number of visits to sites each day and enabled the Council to re-charge for use of the sites by residents of KCC.

Consideration was also being given to the possible introduction of more recycling bins at the Household Waste and Recycling Centres.

- **Overflowing waste bins** – It was suggested that in some areas, waste bins were overflowing and therefore consideration should be given to either provision of larger bins or more regular collections. In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that due to the Covid -19 pandemic over the past year, more people have been at home and using local green spaces for recreation and this had resulted in an increased use of waste bins. He agreed to ask officers to investigate the possible need to increase the capacity of some waste bins and the frequency of waste collections in areas where there were identified problems.

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### Decision:

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for attending the meeting and answering questions and:

- a) noted that the Portfolio Holder will obtain information requested from Volker Highways as to whether it has any specific programmes aimed at encouraging individuals from disadvantaged groups of the community and in particular females to help them enter the industry.
- b) noted that the Portfolio Holder has offered to further investigate the street lighting concerns identified by a Member at the meeting.
- c) noted that the Portfolio Holder will refer to the Street Works team the issue of prompt removal of cones when road works have been completed.
- d) noted that the Portfolio Holder will convey the Committee's appreciation to staff within the Waste team who have continued to work tirelessly throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to collect increased volumes of waste and re-cycling.
- e) noted that the Portfolio Holder will discuss with the Waste team the concerns expressed that in some areas, Medway Norse street collection bags were left at the roadside and this encouraged others to add further bags to the pile containing household waste.
- f) noted that a report detailing the final destination of Medway's waste would be circulated when received.
- g) noted that the Portfolio Holder has offered to investigate improved communication as to recyclable materials.
- h) noted that further information would be supplied following the review of the frequency of the pre-booking system at Household Waste and Recycling Centres.
- i) noted that the Portfolio Holder has offered to investigate areas where street cleansing could be improved if areas were notified to him.

### 239 Work programme

#### Discussion:

The Committee received and discussed its current work programme.

#### Decision:

The Committee:

- a) requested whether it was feasible for the Four Elms Hill Air Quality Management Area Action Plan to be submitted to the Committee earlier than June 2022.
- b) requested that the report on the Potential for increasing use of the River also include reference to the Kingsnorth Jetty.

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**Chairman**

**Date:**

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