

COUNCIL

20 JANUARY 2022

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

2. Public Questions

2.1. **Question A – Giovanni Nasillo of Gillingham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment, Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships Councillor Rodney Chambers OBE, the following:**

Gillingham is almost forgotten about in the Council's 2035 regeneration document, there is a lack of vibrancy in the High Street that the Council says it hopes to maintain. Councillors should look at Gillingham on the Nextdoor social media site.

Why is the Council treating Gillingham residents with such contempt?

2.2. **Question B - Keith Slucock of Halling will ask the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:**

In response to the above proposals the Kent Downs AONB unit sent Medway Council a detailed and strongly worded objection.

Yet, at the planning meeting held on 8th December, it was clear that few of the most significant objections raised by the Kent Downs AONB unit had been considered by Medway Council's Planning Department, whose head spoke passionately in favour of approval of the proposal.

Noting the exceptional circumstances and public interest (as required by Paragraph 177 of the NPPC), the legal clarification of the agricultural building status and that the Council's Planning department has so strongly recommend approval of the winery development, can the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation please clearly state why the Planning Department has rejected the majority of concerns raised by the Kent Downs AONB unit?

2.3. **Question C - Jonathan Pearce of Gillingham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:**

On the evening of 10 January, I arrived home at 21:25hrs and was unable to park in my street and despite 5 minutes of driving around adjacent streets there were no spaces, so I left my car on a single yellow. Walking back to my house I noted that there were at least 4 vehicles, the majority of which were work vans, without permits, parked in residential bays.

I got a parking ticket at 21:51hrs, however none of the vehicles without permits were fined, and these vehicles were the reason I had to park illegally. Please could I ask that parking be enforced properly!

I also believe 10pm is far too late for restrictions, I would suggest 8pm is late enough, (Victoria Street is 6pm) and it is unsafe for elderly and vulnerable people walking to find spaces.

2.4. **Question D – Sarah Manuel of Rochester will ask the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:**

How do the Council intend on dealing with the short fall in waste capacity from 2028 onwards in light of the extra housing proposed for Medway?

2.5. **Question E – Bill McLennan of Rochester will ask the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:**

The Town and Country Planning Act 1932 was enshrined into law in 1933. The Act principally sought to rid the UK of its slum housing by introducing

uniform planning guidance and regulation which promoted a healthy living environment for all.

In accordance with the government directive at the time, the City of Rochester Council tasked their surveyor William Law to produce a draft Town Planning Scheme No1.

The draft Planning Scheme No1 received Housing ministerial approval in 1935 and was officially adopted by Rochester Council May 1936.

The Council Planning Scheme No1 and latterly No2 identify areas designated for housing, business use and general amenities in the Medway area. The plans detail roads, pathways, passages and housing estate layouts specific to thousands of homes built across the towns during the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's.

The plans detail tens of miles of passages to the rear of thousands of Medway properties as an amenity for local residents. Collectively these four feet wide passages total a significant amount of land the boundaries of which have been respected by abutting property owners for decades.

In recent years Medway Council under its Gating Policy has paid for many of the passageway entrances to be secured. However, it has failed to direct on the retention and protection of the passages themselves.

Many of the passages are now unused and overgrown due to their natural soil surface. However, despite the passages today being compromising for human traffic they play an important role spawning a host of local flora and fauna acting as an environmental amenity.

Mother Nature in her wonderful way has repurposed many of the overgrown passages into an array of wildlife sanctuaries and habitats. The natural vegetation, decaying leaves and carbon capturing soil provides vital bio diversity for grubs and insects at the bottom of nature's food chain supporting a host of animals from Toads, Frogs, Hedgehogs, Butterflies, solitary Bees, small nesting birds and the like.

The neglected passages not only provide shelter and food for wildlife but vital contiguous corridors for small animals such as hedgehogs through the urban landscape invisible to residents who have fenced their gardens to their entitlement and estate planning scheme.

Unlike respectful home owners of the past, possibly emboldened by the Council Gating Policy restricting access, a new generation of residents view the passageways as an opportunity to profit by incorporating them as part of their own property, unlawfully fencing, clearing, excavating, concreting, and building across the amenity, desecrating Mother Nature's years of excellent work.

Similar to our protected country roadside hedgerows small overgrown tracks of land play an important part in the cycle of life.

Should local residents wish to use the passageways, the clearance of debris or natural growth is often deemed to be at their own expense and not a Council responsibility. However, an alteration to the amenity boundary, changes to designated land use and modification to estate structure and layout prescribed and in accordance with an adopted Council planning scheme is unlawful without local planning authority approval.

Today's Town and Country Planning act supports environmental action in combating climate change however small.

Medway Council's initiative, "Action on Climate Change" has been well received by residents. The retention and protection of the overgrown natural soil passages is within the Council's legal jurisdiction and will combat climate change.

Can you please state Medway Council's view or policy on the retention and protection of these important passages not simply for local residents but as a benefit to our natural environment, wildlife and wellbeing as a whole?

2.6. Question F – Vivienne Parker of Chatham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:

What is the Council going to do about the building on the corner of Marlborough Road and Gillingham High Street which is made of asbestos, is dangerous and is now falling down?

2.7. Question G – Stuart Bourne of Rainham will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jarrett, the following:

Last summer saw large areas of Medway's grass verges and parks uncut and long, which not only led to Medway being untidy but also dangerous to drive in. Councillor Jarrett blamed this on the poor organisation of the No Mow May scheme and threatened to end this vital programme set up to protect our dwindling bee population. Yet in a Medway Norse update to the Cabinet on the 19th October 2021, their green space team said they have 20% less staff and this is what 'led to delays in grass cutting this spring and summer.'

I trust Councillor Jarrett is going to apologise to Medway Council staff for blaming their poor organising of No Mow May, and what is he doing to ensure Medway Norse has a full complement of staff by the summer?

2.8. Question H – John Castle of Chatham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:

The draft Local Plan published before the meeting in October 2021 allocated 3,625 homes to site B.8, currently the commercial dockyard Chatham Docks, which is the same as the number published by Peel L&P in December 2021.

Setting aside that the site is best used in its current allocation for employment as a viable Dockyard, the site is not particularly large and the number of homes allocated is considerable. The density of building looks unreasonable for such a location without a significant number of high rise buildings, which require large footings which limits the feasible density of housing in the location.

Does the council believe this density of housing is viable in the location?

2.9. Question I – Paul O’Neill of Chatham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Gulvin, the following:

As part of the landmark Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Bill, new laws will introduce a new criminal offence where a person resides or intends to reside on any public or private land without permission. The Government has made it clear that only a minority of travellers are causing problems, such as through abusive behaviour and extensive litter and waste at illegal sites. The vast majority of the travelling community are decent law-abiding people and we must ensure that there are legal sites available for travellers.

Behind Aldi on the Gillingham Business Park is a 1.4 hectare derelict car park site which has no residential properties nearby and could be used for both temporary and settled traveller plots.

Is the Council prepared to turn the above site into a traveller site?

2.10. Question J – Chris Spalding of Gillingham will ask the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation, Councillor Chitty, the following:

At the Cabinet meeting in September when the draft Local Plan was unanimously approved for publication, with Councillor Potter stating he was happy to support the recommendation, because "without it, it is a road to ruin", you were at great pains to stress the need for compliance stating:

“The reason I am pushing about complying with government requirements, the first thing the Inspector will do is measure Government requirements and what this authority has done to comply and I have to say with absolute honesty if we had missed out on one of those compliances it would fall at the first hurdle and we cannot allow that to happen.”

There can be no doubt about the emphasis you placed on the compliance requirement because you confirmed:

“Compliance has to be the key word. And we have actually employed people to check and double check to ensure that that compliance is fully understood.”

How much did this checking and double checking cost the people of Medway? I hope we got our money back because they clearly did not do their job properly.

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Appendices

None.

Background papers

None