

REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 MARCH 2023

PETITIONS

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive
Author: Stephen Platt, Democratic Services Officer

Summary

This report advises the Committee of petitions received by the Council which fall within the remit of this Committee including a summary of the responses sent to the petition organisers by officers.

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/5702/401 - 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 The response to a petition relevant to this Committee that has been accepted by the petition organiser is set out below.

Subject of petition	Response
<p>We the undersigned petition the council to change the process of how residential parking permits are applied for in a way to save people money in the current financial crisis we are facing. I propose that once an application for a new permit has been reviewed and accepted, we should all have a printable provisional permit emailed to us for us to use while we wait for the council to print off and send us our new permits. Or better yet, abolish the posted permit altogether and permanently have us print off our new permit. I feel this would allow us to save money as I'm sure a few people have had the issue of not receiving the renewal reminder via email, only to then have to pay for both the renewal plus however many visitor permits needed to avoid getting a parking fine until the new permit arrives.</p> <p>E petition signed by 3 people.</p>	<p>We have considered this issue, and within the last 18 months all our permit application processes have been reviewed and are all now available to be applied for online, rather than a paper or postal application. This positive change has speeded up the permit application process and is currently working well.</p> <p>Your proposal to allow residents to print their own permits has been investigated and considered, but unfortunately is not an available option as all permits are printed on unique, specialised paper that is used to prevent fraud and misuse of permits. This requires a specific printer that would not be ordinarily available to residents.</p> <p>We do of course send reminder notices to permit holders 1 month before the permit expiry date, and renewal applications can also be completed online to speed up the process. My Parking Team then guarantees sending something out within 10 days.</p>
<p>We the undersigned demand that Medway Council repair the large sunken damage to</p>	<p>The defect in Berengrave Lane was first brought to our attention in November 2022, following which an inspection to assess it was undertaken. Whilst it was</p>

Subject of petition	Response
<p>Berengrave opposite the new Queens Court development.</p> <p>The depression was not there prior to the development's connection to the main sewerage line, which runs down the length of Berengrave Lane and has either been caused by further traffic to that site when the road surface was laid, or as a result of inadequate reinstatement works.</p> <p>The Council should therefore seek recompense from the developer for the necessary repair, which now not only a risk to motorists, but also risks permanently damaging the main sewer line that would cause major disruption and expense to Rainham residents.</p> <p>E petition signed by 130 people</p>	<p>determined that immediate emergency works were not required, further investigation into the cause were necessary and this was planned to take place in December, with ongoing monitoring until that time.</p> <p>Unfortunately, the weather and other works taking place in Berengrave Lane delayed our investigations, but these were programmed to take place earlier this week, on Monday 30 January. The work is being carried out under temporary two-way traffic signals and any issues found during the investigation will be repaired whilst on site. I have asked that my team follows up with you on the outcome of those works.</p> <p>Should the depression be a result of works undertaken by the utility supplier, we have robust procedures in place to recharge the costs involved.</p>
<p>We the undersigned call upon Medway Council to work with Post Office management to secure a new high street location for Rochester Post Office after Paydens Chemist announced their intention to close it in November 2023.</p> <p>This valuable resource is important to residents, businesses and visitors in Rochester.</p> <p>We ask Medway Council to consider relocation to the Tourist Information Centre or Rochester Community Hub.</p> <p>Paper petition signed by 231 people. E petition signed by 96 people.</p>	<p>We agree that local services like the Post Office are important to residents, businesses and visitors in Rochester. I have set out below the steps we have taken to date to secure a new high street location for Rochester Post Office, and the options available to us to seek to support this.</p> <p>On the news that Paydens were withdrawing their Post Office service, my team contacted Martin Roberts, Chief Retail Officer at the Post Office. We have requested a meeting to discuss how we can support the retention of post office services in Rochester and the search for a new franchise. We have also called the Post Office commercial enquiry line and submitted emails, although unfortunately, as of yet, we have had no response.</p>

Subject of petition	Response
	<p>My team has also spoken directly with Paydens. Sadly, they had little further information to share.</p> <p>At this stage the most information we have is via the Post Office website where the franchise opportunity is being advertised. The franchise model is a commercial one, and the Post Office is seeking 'a successful retailer to incorporate a Post Office Local into their existing or proposed business'. The estimated Post Office franchise fees are between the 'range of £47,250 - £52,500 per annum'. A high street retail business can register their interest, and the closing date for applications is 13 July 2023.</p> <p>We agree that Rochester Community Hub is potentially an excellent location for a new franchise, and we are open to discussions on how a commercial partnership could work in the building, either with the Post Office directly or with any potential franchisee. We will continue to reach out to the Post Office to offer our support and will update the Rochester Town Centre Forum on any progress or opportunities that arise.</p>

4. Petition Referred to this Committee

4.1 The following petition has been referred to this Committee because the petition organiser indicated that they were dissatisfied with the response received from the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive.

4.2 **Speeding and Safety Hazards - A230 Maidstone Road Chatham - The Ridgeway to A229 Junction**

4.2.1 A paper petition signed by 50 people was presented by Councillor Rupert Turpin at Full Council on 19 January 2023. The petition statement was as follows:

"We the undersigned ask for Medway Council together with Kent Police to take urgent action to reduce speeding and traffic accident frequency on the A230 Maidstone Road/Horsted Way between The Ridgeway and the A229 Junction.

This section of road [sic] is unsafe for pedestrians to cross and numerous accidents have caused widespread property damage. Hopefully the local council will take notice and put in calming measures to slow the speeding drivers down.”

4.2.2 On 1 February, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive responded as follows:

“Thank you for your petition dated 19 January 2023, requesting that action be taken by Medway Council and Kent Police to reduce speeding and traffic collisions at the A230 Maidstone Road, Chatham.

We take all concerns for road safety seriously and work to promote and improve road safety wherever possible. When looking at where road safety improvements should be made, we consider the whole of Medway and base our work around the core aim of reducing and preventing casualties on our roads. Our approach is to tackle those locations with the poorest safety records first.

Typically, we review the recent safety history of an area when investigating road safety concerns. Based on the last five years of Police records, there has been one reported collision involving injury on Maidstone Road between The Ridgeway and the A230 junction with the A229. This means there are other locations across Medway experiencing more severe, and ongoing, road safety issues. These locations will be considered first, in the interests of preventing further casualties on our roads. Unfortunately, this means we are unable to propose physical road alterations in Maidstone Road at this time. Please be assured, however, that the safety record of this location will continue to be monitored, and future road alterations are not ruled out. This includes the potential for enhanced pedestrian facilities in the vicinity of Horsted Park.

Whilst we are unable to consider this location for significant alterations, our engineers have been reviewing the existing road layout at this location in response to your concerns. This is focused on the existing road markings and signing in this area. Should this result in any changes being proposed, my team will let you know.

Lastly, whilst the Council holds no powers in relation to speed enforcement, I would like to make you aware of the Kent Police Speedwatch initiative. Speedwatch allows residents to work with the Police to visibly monitor speeds locally. This approach relies on volunteers and may be something that residents wish to consider. Kent Police would be able to provide further information in relation to this Police-led initiative.

I hope I have clearly explained the current situation following consideration of your petition for you.”

4.2.3 On 8 February, the petition organiser requested that the matter be reviewed by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The reasons for referral are as follows:

“Following my email of 8 February 2023, I am now pleased to provide reasons why the response to the petition by Medway Council (MCR) is inadequate.

The MCR centred on a single metric, recent safety history, to assess road safety risks on Maidstone Road. This metric may provide a coarse prioritisation of investment schemes across Medway but clearly isn't the only performance indicator taken into consideration to determine where improvements are justified.

Speeding enforcement is a matter for Kent Police but the risk imposed by speeding on road safety must be a consideration for Medway Council. The MCR makes no reference to multiple “speed” surveys recently carried out by Medway Council and Kent Police; specifically on this section of Maidstone Road.

The Kent Police surveys were conducted in October/November 2022 and on 4 February 2023. There may have been others. This confirms that speeding is cause for concern.

If the MCR has not considered available “speed” data then the overall risk assessment for road safety is inadequate.

On examining the local road network, there is a uniform approach to road safety and traffic management on wider roads (typically 10m) where there is an increased risk of speeding and overtaking. Typically, hatched areas and central refuge islands are employed as a solution. These also assist pedestrians to safely cross wide carriageways.

These features are widespread and present in Albemarle Road, Capstone Road, City Way, Lordswood Lane, Pattens Lane, Princes Avenue, Walderslade Road, Walderslade Woods (Peripheral Road). They are the rule rather than the exception.

As an A Classification Road of similar width, Maidstone Road is the dangerous exception.

The Ridgeway, an adjoining minor road, with much lower priority has seen past investment with the installation of multiple “speed bumps”.

This demonstrates that a wider suite of criteria are used to prioritise road safety issues. From this perspective the MCR, which solely considers recent safety history, offers an inadequate explanation as to why Maidstone Road does not warrant early investment.

Looking at Maidstone Road, there was early recognition of road safety hazards when a hatched area was introduced over virtually its whole length between the Ridgeway and A229 Junction. These markings are now barely visible having been worn away by overtaking vehicles.

Since then, traffic flows have markedly increased in parallel with vehicle speed. The result as stated in the petition is that this section of road is unsafe for pedestrians to cross. It is sub-standard and dangerous.

Pedestrian traffic crossing here is generated by the 2 bus-stops, the footpath exiting from Wilson Avenue, staff and visitors to Fort Horsted Nursing Home and the 13 businesses forming Fort Horsted Business Centre. Petitioners from Primrose Close are also affected. A significant contingent are elderly, some of whom are less mobile. They often wait in the hatched area to negotiate the crossing in 2 halves. The wide carriageway, traffic volumes, vehicle speeds and driver behaviour highlight the obvious dangers.

For petitioners living on Maidstone Road itself, speeding traffic imposes a unique hazard. In recent years, "out of control" vehicles have demolished or damaged five of the boundary walls fronting Maidstone Road. Collateral damage from flying bricks has included smashed windows and roof damage."

4.2.4 In response, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive has further commented as follows:

Thank you for your further representations in relation to this petition. I would firstly like to reiterate that all concerns for highway safety are taken seriously, and the Council works to promote and improve road safety wherever possible.

Unfortunately, the public highway always presents some level of risk to safety. Medway Council and its local road safety partners strive to reduce road safety risks for all users. We work year-round to promote road safety, provide road safety education to Medway's young people, and target higher risk road user groups.

The Council also makes alterations to the highway that promote road safety. The resource available for this purpose is not unlimited and requires us to make decisions as to where investment can be supported. To make best use of the public funding available, we recommend that resources are directed to those locations with an ongoing pattern of road casualties. This means the Council can demonstrate that it is working to reduce casualties on Medway's roads in line with our statutory responsibilities. If this approach was not taken, potentially preventable road casualties would continue. On this basis, consideration of a particular road safety matter will always include an assessment of the location's safety history.

We acknowledge that the subject of this petition is concerning for residents and the local community. Whilst prioritisation is necessary, as set out above, the Council will look to act where possible. We have therefore indicated that officers will review the road markings and signing at this location. Should this review result in any changes being proposed, we will contact the lead petitioner with further details.

The Council is grateful for the additional comments submitted by the lead petitioner. Officers would be happy to review the pedestrian movements taking place at this location, and the infrastructure available to aid their journey.

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. Actions referred to in the officer responses which are not within existing budgets, and any further activity, would require Cabinet and Council approval for budgetary additions if funding was available.
- 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 in paragraph 4 and the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive's response.

Lead Officer Contact

Steve Platt, Democratic Services Officer,
Telephone: 01634 332011 E-mail: stephen.platt@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None