

Public Questions

Question A – Judith Northwood-Boorman, of Rochester, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Property, Councillor Khan, the following:

Medway Labour has been a leading voice for some time in various campaigns to protect the Medway Towns from over-development, including “Save Capstone Valley” and “Save Chatham Docks”. These campaigns were often against proposals that would result in a change of use for areas, whether that be farmland to housing, or business use to housing.

I note that a worrying trend has emerged of Medway Labour now supporting developments that they historically opposed publicly. In the interests of openness and honesty, will the Portfolio Holder confirm what campaigns, that Labour has supported historically, they have u-turned on now that they hold the keys to the Council?

Question B – Emma Wade, of Rochester, will ask the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Murray, the following:

As I was a single mum, I have often contacted Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) for advice on matters to do with housing, benefits, and advice on domestic abuse related issues.

I recently called for support and was told that they are no longer funded. I believe this is a vital service.

I work for the NHS and regularly advise my patients to contact CAB for help with the cost of living, relationship support and work-related matters.

My patients are vulnerable and I’m unsure where I can direct them for help in the future. At a time when we are all facing a difficult future, it is a much-needed service.

What steps are Medway Council putting in place to ensure that the interruptions to service provision are minimised and clearly communicated to the community at large, because clearly it has been insufficient up to now.

Question C – Doug Bray of Chatham, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration Councillor Curry, the following:

Unless I am mistaken, the public register of planned resurfacing works is published online at the following address:

https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200249/roadworks_in_medway/526/roadwork_schemes/3

It is proving to be hazardous to drive around the Medway Towns. A glance at any of our community social media groups shows that public infrastructure is crumbling around us.

I recognise that this is not an issue that suddenly materialised since May 2023 and it is something that Medway Labour frequently attacked the Medway Tories about.

Further, Labour nationally have failed to commit to providing the necessary funding for the Potholes Fund and are being noncommittal about increasing funding to local councils.

Given Medway Labour have proposed the introduction of 20mph zones across areas of Medway, is it your intention to avoid the cost of enforcement by simply allowing the roads to deteriorate to such an extent that residents are unable to travel above 20 mph without causing significant damage to their vehicle?

Question D – Fouzieh Ahmed, of Gillingham, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture and Leisure, Councillor Mahil, the following:

The Muslim community has seen a huge increase in Islamophobia over the last six months.

It is disappointing then to hear that the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Harinder Mahil, has not attended any of the Iftars during the holy month of Ramadan. Nor have Vince Maple (in his capacity as the Leader of the Council) or Nina Gurung (in her capacity as the Mayor of Medway).

There have been countless opportunities, from the Taste of Ramadan events, to any of the Iftars that are held every night.

Can the Member confirm if there is a reason why they have chosen not to join the Muslim community during this most holy of months?

Question E – Alan Stockey, of Rainham, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration Councillor Curry, the following:

As we approach the anniversary of the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs funded Anti-idling Project in Rainham, led by the University of Kent's psychology department, I would like to know what is being done by the Council to move forward the promising early results of the awareness raising signage to improve driver behaviour (and reduce air pollution) not just in Rainham, but also more widely across Medway's Air Quality Management Areas and at locations of temporary traffic lights.

Question F – Trish Marchant, of Gillingham, will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

A Citizens' Assembly is a representative group of citizens who are selected at random from the population to learn about, deliberate upon, and make recommendations in relation to a particular issue or set of issues.

Will Medway Council consider convening Citizens' Assemblies to address issues of major interest to the community, particularly with items which may cause controversy, such as the Red Route scheme, where the consultation identified a majority of respondents were against the scheme?

Question G – Jeremy Spyby-Stearson, of Chatham, will ask the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Murray, the following:

Medway Greens remain appalled at the decision to cut core funding to Medway Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), an independent, impartial voice that the residents of Medway rely on.

Whilst Medway Greens accept that budgetary cuts are required, we believe that services provided by Medway CAB are essential for vulnerable members of the public, and must remain independent and impartial, to retain the trust of the community.

As a lay resident, I have concerns about the impartiality of Medway CAB now that Medway Labour control the council, given that the Director of Medway CAB, Dan McDonald, is a Labour Councillor.

These concerns were exacerbated in the last few weeks. In the original statement published, Medway CAB identified that the cause of their plight was the removal of their core funding by Medway Council. After the Medway Greens made an intervention, this statement was amended and the blame was put at the feet of the national Tory government, raising alarm bells over the influence that Medway Labour Party has over the leadership and communications of this respected and essential local service.

Can the Portfolio Holder please identify how she intends to reassure the residents of Medway that the independence of the council advisory service will be maintained if the subject of the grievance is with the Council? This is a significant and troubling conflict of interest that has alarmed residents across Medway.

Question H – Matthew Broadley, of Chatham, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

Medway Labour, and yourself directly, have been actively campaigning against the closure of Chatham Docks for a few years. This campaign contributed to the previous Council Leader, Alan Jarrett, ultimately deciding to step down and not seek re-election in the local elections of 2023.

Further, the campaign was supported nationally by Labour leader, Keir Starmer. Yet when reviewing the map of “Urban Regeneration Sites” we see the whole of the Chatham Docks included in plans for urban regeneration and a change of use. The area south of St Mary’s Island (around the new Asda) has already been re-purposed for residential use, specifically high-rise residential apartments.

On September 4th 2023, the BBC published an article titled “Council will not rule out dock housing development”, where Deputy Leader, Teresa Murray seems to have announced that Medway Labour had abandoned the “Protect Chatham Docks” campaign.

It seems clear that Medway Labour, and Keir Starmer’s, support for the campaign to “Protect Chatham Docks” has been abandoned now that it is no longer a campaign tool to undermine the previous administration, something supporters of the campaign have now woken up to.

To further insult the campaign, Medway Labour have recently been parading around the Towns celebrating the 400th anniversary of Chatham Docks, Docks that were closed by Margaret Thatcher. The national leadership of Labour now celebrate the achievements of Margaret Thatcher and how she changed society, she certainly changed Medway, by tearing the heart out of our employment and cultural heritage. Something that Medway Labour seem eager to continue.

The Medway Green Party notes that the Basin3 proposal does not appear to address the loss of jobs for people already employed in the area and refers to attracting “high-value jobs in target growth sectors” and is vague when it makes a claim of “potentially tripling current job numbers on the site”.

The collapse of Innovation Park Medway illustrates the risk of such projects, which aimed to bring in employment in similar “target growth sectors”.

What guarantees have Medway Labour sought about protecting the docks and the 1,440 people employed directly or through local supply chains, particularly given the risks if Basin3 goes the way of Innovation Park Medway?

Question 1 – Kate Belmonte, of Gillingham, will ask the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

In August 2023 at the height of last summer’s heatwave, concerns were raised with the Planning Department over the lack of maintenance of trees and hedging planted in the Linden Homes estate in Rainham. Further investigation and a site audit by Vistry Group determined that a lack of maintenance was evident and that the site had been underplanted against original plans. Frustratingly, promises to rectify noted issues by the end of the 2023/24 planting season have not been delivered upon and many dead trees and hedges still remain.

What is the Council doing to enforce Vistry Group’s obligations?