

Public Questions and responses from the meeting of Cabinet on
18 November 2025

(Relating to Agenda Item No.11, Lidsing Supplementary Planning
Document)

Question A – Matthew Croft, of Chatham, submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry:

“What are the specific matters of transport, environment and infrastructure services that Medway should speak up for to ensure Maidstone produce a really robust SPD that will mitigate harms and benefit Medway as much as the new development?”

In response, Councillor Curry said that the Council's response to the Lidsing Supplementary Planning Document consultation would seek effective mitigation for the impacts of the plan development on Medway. The specific matters in the response included transport, where Medway Council was seeking early delivery of the new connection to the M2 junction 4, wider transport improvements for local roads and bus services, walking and cycling. All these improvements would help address the impacts on Medway's transport.

In relation to environmental matters, the Council was seeking resilient corridors for nature, linking the Kent Downs National Landscape with Darland Banks nature reserve and the country park at Capstone. Sustainable drainage and flood risk measures were important in designing development to address landscape impacts, including the setting of the Kent Downs, the historic environment, and protecting ancient woodland. Medway also wanted to see extensive tree planting.

Regarding infrastructure services, the Council supported delivery of new services as Lidsing grew, but most residents would be using services in Medway. Medway was seeking developer contributions to enhance services such as schools, health facilities, sports and leisure, green spaces, libraries, and community facilities to account for the additional demands from the new development. This included the development of a new secondary school to the south of Medway.

No supplementary question was asked as Matthew Croft was not present.

Question B – Milo O'Connor, of Medway Green Party, asked the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:

“I would like to ask about how the Council is working to ensure that this connection to Lidsing and Medway is delivered early in the development process so that the local road network in Medway is not overwhelmed by the building of Phase 1 of Lidsing.

In essence, how will you deal with the development's potential impacts on Medway residents, including nearby residents of Hempstead and Lordswood, who rely on the local road network for essential commutes and local services?”

In response, Councillor Curry said that the Council had been meeting with local members of the community and with Maidstone Borough Council for over a year to secure as much as possible in terms of the infrastructure required for this development. This engagement aimed to ensure effective timely mitigation of the impacts on Medway. Transport impacts on local roads in Medway were recognised as key concerns. The Maidstone Local Plan Review Strategic Allocation policy for Lidsing and the Maidstone Infrastructure Delivery Plan recognised the need to mitigate impacts on the local road network. The cumulative impacts of planned and proposed growth in both Maidstone and Medway would be assessed to secure the delivery of connection to the M2 junction 4 and a wider package of sustainable transport measures, such as improvements to bus services, walking and cycling.

Medway was also engaging with Kent County Council as the neighbouring local highways authority and with National Highways in securing the appropriate mitigations on the strategic road network. M2 Junction 4 junction was fundamentally important to the development of Lidsing and to new developments which were coming forward at Gibraltar Farm and East Hill. There was a need to ensure that the junction would be able to cope with the volume of traffic expected.

Milo O'Connor asked the following supplementary question:

"Would you consider making supplementary roads, for example, through Rochester e.g City Way, or through Stockbury to get to Sittingbourne, like little diversions to stop the potential blockages? The road is going to create a lot of noise pollution and dust and soil erosion and potential oil spills and that could hinder the surrounding area of Capstone Park. I was wondering if there are plans in place to mitigate these impacts on local wildlife and protected species like badgers?"

Councillor Curry said it was unlikely that there would be development of new roads although there was one new piece of road due to be developed in relation to the East Hill development. The development of new roads was very expensive and new small roads did not solve the problem of congestion in the long term. The primary aim, therefore, was around sustainable transport and active travel. Medway would be insisting that developments were bus friendly so that people did not need to travel by car, thereby minimising the number of new car journeys and reducing traffic jams and congestion. This would also help to address air pollution issues.

The Capstone Valley was fundamentally important to wildlife as a biodiversity corridor, which was key to the sustainability of the habitats and species there. The Council had plans to keep that in place to ensure that both Capstone and Darland Banks remained connected to the North Downs.

Question C – Matthew Broadley, of Chatham, asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

"With reference to the Lidsing Agenda item, there is growing anger with the chipping away of the "Green lung" of Medway, including the Capstone Valley.

With the upcoming local democracy review, how can we ensure that decisions such as this are being made by those who are most affected?"

In response, Councillor Maple conceded that Lidsing was one topic where politicians dealing with the matter, both in Medway and Maidstone, wished they were not in the position that they were. From a Medway perspective, that was largely because it had not had a new local plan for more than 20 years. Because it did not have the five year land supply or up to date Local Plan, Medway was more vulnerable to the chipping away of the green lung. This was why the Council was looking to ensure that Medway had a Local Plan ahead of Local Government Reorganisation. Without it, a future north Kent unitary authority would be planning for Medway based on a Local Plan which was more than 20 years old, which was not acceptable. There would need to be conversations about what local representation would look like.

Matthew Broadley asked the following supplementary question:

"Can you give some kind of idea about how likely it is that the boundary of the new unitary authority will be extended to the M2 so that developments such as Lidsing going forwards come under the decision making authority of Medway Council, who are going to be most affected? Is this reorganisation likely to enable us to move those boundaries down?"

Councillor Maple said that Medway Council would not exist at this point and neither would Maidstone Borough Council or Kent County Council. The Secretary of State would be responsible for determining future local government boundaries. Should Medway's proposed option of 4D be taken forward, that did use the M2 motorway as the boundary. There were a number of other options which used existing council boundaries.

Councillor Maple said he did not support the Kent County Council proposed option which would establish a single council covering Kent and Medway and did not consider it to be compliant with the rules set out by the Government. He stated that any option besides 4D would result in a bizarre situation where different bits of water or halves of roads were the responsibility of different councils. one of the reasons Medway's option took into account boundaries like motorways was to bring communities together.

Public Questions

Question D – Pauline Davis, of Chatham, submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Paterson:

"I work at a very busy NHS dental clinic. We are in the heart of Chatham, there is huge concern about rough sleepers, drug takers and sex workers in our car park. We have to clean up bodily waste and dirty needles, used condoms and filthy clothes and are subjected to vile behaviour. I am 72 years old and have worked in dentistry from 1969 and I cannot understand the lack of support we receive.

Who is responsible for helping us? The police are not interested, and it would be a massive waste of resources to call an ambulance, when there is clearly a drug-related incident.

We know where the drug dealers are but seem powerless to have any assistance to stop this vile behaviour.

Chatham was a town of great pride and now....”

In response, Councillor Paterson said that Chatham faced significant challenges and that nobody should have to endure the sort of behaviour Pauline Davis had witnessed. It was minority of individuals who were responsible for the vast majority of problems and those who were proud of where they lived could play a part in ensuring Chatham would have a bright future as well as a glorious past.

Councillor Paterson referenced a recent depressing article knocking Chatham that had appeared on the Daily Express website. Recent innovations, such as the Chatham Ambassador Scheme and significant new residential development and grassroots community work were helping to turn the tide. This would not be easy but it started with law-abiding citizens taking a stand. He urged the questioner to continue to report crimes so that resources could be targeted where needed the most. The Council’s Community Safety Team would welcome the opportunity to discuss the issues being experienced and if she e-mailed with details, the Community Safety Manager would contact her directly to discuss the issues raised and potential measures which could be put in place to counter these problems.

The community Safety Team worked closely with internal and external partners. The issue raised was likely to require a multi-agency response which would include the Community Safety Team, the Rough Sleeper Initiative Team, Public Health, Kent Police, Forward Trust, and possibly the Council’s CCTV contractor.

The Council’s Community Safety Manager held regular meetings with a police inspector from Medway Police Station and would be able to raise the issues highlighted directly with the inspector.

No supplementary question was asked as Pauline Davis was not present.

Question E – Ralph Allison, of Twydall, submitted the following to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple:

“On 21st October 2025, Cabinet agreed to approve Councillor Maple's proposed flag flying policy, including a plan to fly the "progress pride" flag for the entirety of "pride month". This flag is not automatically permitted under planning law, so Council was required to seek planning consent, which it subsequently approved for itself, in order to fly it.

The diversity impact assessment to accompany the proposal, signed off by Bhupinder Gill (Assistant Director, Legal & Governance), failed to fully consider the protected characteristics that might be impacted by the policy, specifically it completely ignored the protected characteristic of sex. It also highlighted how "flags

can become symbols of political ideologies or movements, which may not be universally supported" and also that "flying certain flags may be seen as taking sides, leading to public backlash or division".

The "progress pride" flag has been adopted by an ideological movement that seeks to impinge on the rights of women. It is the flag of a movement which has damaged many young peoples' bodies beyond repair. It is the flag wielded by masked men who shout down women who dare to assemble to speak out about violence against women and girls.

I wonder why the Council Leader then seeks to festoon Council properties with such a divisive flag.

And given that the Council Leader at the beginning of November said, on the subject of the Council removing Union Flags from street furniture, that the Union Flag has "become a sign of division and intolerance" which is now a clear case of double standards in my view.

Therefore, will the Leader of the Council withdraw the policy and its associated diversity impact assessment until both can be reviewed and made lawful?"

Councillor Maple said that he had absolute confidence in any advice, guidance and support given to the Council by the Assistant Director, Legal and Governance.

Councillor Maple was proud that the Council flew a number of flags. In the coming week it would be flying the Transgender Day of Remembrance flag and the White Ribbon Flag, ensuring that the Council stood up for those parts of the community with often not heard voices. Medway was for everyone and therefore the policy would not be withdrawn.

No supplementary question was asked as Ralph Allison was not present

Question F – Katrina Crowhurst, of Gillingham, asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

"After spending time reading all the tags on the shoes at every pair tells a story national movement, you spent time talking to us parents and volunteers, we appreciate that, thank you. I came home and wondered how you might have been impacted after reading some of the stories.

It is clear complete improvement is needed and that improvement needs to begin now. So, with that in mind, As the Leader of the Council I ask you how you plan to move forward with SEN support and education in Medway?"

In response, Councillor Maple thanked the questioner and everyone who had given their time to make sure the voices of young people were able to be heard in a really powerful way, this was part of a national message to councils and to government.

Councillor Maple considered that the conversations and the messages on the shoes had been incredibly powerful and had made him reflect on what the Council and the

Government needed to do in response to the issue. It was clear that changes to the system could not wait. He paid tribute to his Cabinet colleague, Councillor Coombs, who was leading on this work for the Cabinet and preparing for the forthcoming national SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) reforms, the White paper for which had not yet been published. This was likely to bring significant national and local changes to how SEND services were delivered.

It was recognised that the uncertainty was creating anxiety for parents, children, families and professionals. Councillor Maple offered reassurance that the Council would continue to work through the transition to whatever that new way of working looked like. Schools were working on a new Ofsted inspection framework which rightly placed a greater emphasis on inclusion and making sure that the right outcomes were achieved for all children and young people. That meant there would be a lot of change in schools as they continued to develop.

Councill officers at Medway had been driving improvements, including trying to reduce delays in assessments, which had been too long. Medway was now in line with the national average but there was still more work to be done. The Council was building and developing specialist resources, adding more than 330 additional places in the last three years across special schools and resource provisions with the aim of creating a further 435 specialist places before 2030.

Inclusion was being strengthened as well as targeted funding to schools, piloting different ways of working, outreach services delivered by two local school trusts to support schools to build on classroom strategies around pupils and driving that whole school learning to build knowledge, skills, confidence, as well as supporting workforce development. There was a need to ensure that professionals had the training and skills required. The provision of training to schools free of charge was really important.

The views of parents, carers and children and young people were fundamental to ensuring that any changes that made to the system locally or nationally were implemented successfully. This feedback would be received via the excellent Medway Parent and Carer and Forum and directly from parents and carers.

Following publication of the White Paper, Medway would publish clear milestones and report on progress to ensure that everyone would know what to expect.

Katrina Crowhurst asked the following supplementary question:

“How are you going to make schools and the local authority accountable? At the moment, they're currently able to get away with ignoring the laws regarding criteria for needs assessment and reasonable adjustments for special educational needs.”

Councillor Maple said that there would be reforms in the system and it was recognised that there was more work to do. It was important to listen directly to families and professionals and through the Parent and Carer Forum and to ensure that all parts of the system, education, health and care were playing their part.

Member Questions and responses from the meeting of Cabinet on 18 November 2025

Question G – Councillor Lawrence submitted the following to the Portfolio Holder of Education, Councillor Coombs:

“Could the Portfolio Holder advise on the number of referrals to the Council for Persistent Absence? In giving her answer can she:

1. Cover the period September 2023 to July 2025.
2. Split the data between Primary School and Secondary School children.
3. Advise the percentage of cases that resulted in a fine.
4. The number of “repeat offenders”.
5. The number of cases that remain open and ongoing.”

In response, Councillor Coombs said that good school attendance was really important for safeguarding and for educational outcomes. The Department for Education set an expectation of 96% attendance. Medway shared that ambition and worked closely with schools to promote regular attendance. Persistent absence was defined as missing 10% or more of school sessions and severe persistent absence was missing 50% or more. Both were serious concerns, every school had a dedicated local authority attendance officer to monitor attendance and support families.

Where cases were complex, for example, those involving social care or if the child or young person had medical needs, penalty notices would not be issued. The focus in these cases was on support and interventions as required under section 444 of the Education Act.

In 2023/24, there had been 1,223 school attendance referrals. In 2024/25 this fell sharply to 35 following new Department for Education guidance which required schools to show evidence of support measures having been put in place before they could seek enforcement. Since these statutory changes, the focus had shifted from enforcement to early intervention, which had led to marked improvements.

The majority of referrals came from secondary schools. At legal panel stage, only 16 primary cases were considered in 23/24 and 18 in 24/25. In 2023/24, 29% of cases resulted in a fine. In 24/25, this rose to 41% of cases due to cases considered being more robust following the changes in the DFE guidance. There were a small number of repeat offenders, mainly families with multiple children, these were closely monitored. There were only a small number of active cases due to ongoing support or pending legal outcomes. It was also important to recognise that the great majority of penalty notices were due to children being removed from school to go on holiday.