

## Public Questions

### **Question A – Amy Palumbo, of Chatham, asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Paterson, the following:**

"Given the state of the roads around Medway, does the Council feel that spending £11,500 of the highways fund removing flags from around Medway was perhaps the wrong decision and the lives of Medway residents would be better served spending that money fixing potholes?"

In response to the question, Councillor Paterson said that the flags removed had been illegally attached and that they had breached the Highways Act 1980. The Council had the legal power and responsibility to remove them. It was also important to act because they had been part of a campaign led nationally by neo-Nazis. The flags had been put up locally by a handful of known criminals, therefore Councillor Paterson did not consider it was a bad decision to have stood up to fascists, to call out far right thugs and to stand shoulder to shoulder with the decent law-abiding members of the community who the campaign had sought to intimidate by hijacking a flag which belonged to everyone.

The fact that these individuals, despite being repeatedly warned that flags attached to public property would be removed, continued with their actions, confirmed that they were not concerned about costing taxpayers money. These were selfish and unnecessary acts which resulted in a clean-up bill, those responsible deserved the condemnation of the entire community.

Councillor Paterson had received messages of support for the action taken from residents across Medway and he was proud that Medway had sent an unambiguous message to these bullies. In some other Council areas, where flags remained, this was testament to the failure of less enlightened local authorities to stand up for the tolerant and inclusive values of the decent majority of British people.

The one off operational cost of the clean-up was in no way responsible for potholes that had been caused by decades of cost cutting and short termism. The flag removal operation had not prevented a single pothole from being filled as the flag removal had been funded from a part of the highway's budget allocated for street lighting maintenance and safety-related tasks. This funding could not simply be redirected into carriageway repairs.

In addition to substantial works completed over the past few weeks on a number of Medway roads, Councillor Paterson had recently signed off on the draft programme of resurfacing for the 2026/27 financial year. This would be carried out alongside continuing reactive work to address problems which had materialised during winter and which could be fixed as the weather improved.

He said he rejected the whack-a-mole approach of predecessors which had prioritised short term fixes over longer term repairs which delivered better value for taxpayer money. Potholes were not new or unique to Medway and there should be suspicion of the ulterior motives of those who suggested otherwise. The cost of removing the flags had been a small price to pay for standing up to fascists.

Amy Palumbo asked the following supplementary question

“With the planned events to go on the 16 May, after the events that happened back in September of last year and all the flags that went up, we're expecting another event to happen in May. How do you plan to manage if this happens once again with the flags?”

Councillor Paterson said that he was not aware of the event referred to but that if there was information that people were planning to break the law this should be passed on the authorities. If there was a repeat of the disgraceful conduct seen previously, it would be dealt with in exactly the same way as before. Councillor Maple clarified that flags attached to lamp posts were in breach of Section 132 of the 1980 Highways Act.

**Question B – Daniel Cantrell, of Chatham, had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Paterson:**

"If and when road traffic violations have been found, investigated and fined, how will the Council ensure that they vigorously impose the road traffic laws to provide safety and use for all?"

In the questioner's absence, Councillor Paterson said that enforcement of road traffic laws was the responsibility of the Police. However, in recent years, Medway Council had taken over the enforcement of certain moving traffic offences. This took pressure off overstretched police resources and provided consistency of enforcement through the use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras, standing up for the majority of law abiding motorists while punishing road users whose actions inconvenienced and endangered other road users.

The Council's priority was to make roads safe and accessible for everyone including drivers, pedestrians, cyclists and vulnerable road users. Enforcement would continue to protect road users and support safer communities. Where traffic contraventions were identified, appropriate Penalty Charge Notices were issued in accordance with traffic regulations. Enforcement was applied consistently and robustly, including areas where safety risks were highest.

The team worked closely with the Police, parking enforcement and traffic management colleagues to monitor problem locations, respond to complaints, used data-led intelligence to target repeat offences and out also considered how repeat offences could be addressed through design.

**Question C – Trish Marchant, of Gillingham, asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Paterson, the following:**

"The Council's proposal for school streets around Kings Prep includes roads such as King Edward Road and part of St Margaret's Street that currently have free unrestricted parking. If the proposal is implemented it will remove access to that parking for Medway Residents that use it for work etc as it will prevent them parking there as they will not be able to use it during the school street time restraints.

Has the Council considered the impact of this on the wider public? It could be considered to be introducing parking restrictions by stealth. I hope that the Council will listen to the many residents who are worried about the spill over of traffic to other local streets.”

In response to the question, Councillor Paterson said that School Streets was an extremely time-limited intervention, which operated on the simple premise that fewer vehicle movements outside school gates at the start and end of the school day made the road a safer and more pleasant environment for everyone.

To achieve this aim, vehicles that did not have a good reason to use the relevant roads were prohibited from doing so during the scheme operating time. This also made life easier for residents, school staff and Blue Badge holders. No exception was made for those whose only reason to be in a School Street during the hours of operation was to get a free parking spot, while children were making their way to and from school on foot.

School Streets schemes aimed to improve safety for children and families travelling to and from school, reduce congestion at peak times and support healthier and more sustainable travel. Schemes were only in operation during term time for short periods at the start and end of the school day. Outside those times, all parking and access remained unchanged. Those who valued free parking above all other priorities should either arrive earlier or park elsewhere.

In developing all School Streets proposals, the Council had considered the potential impacts on surrounding streets, including displacement of parking, as well as the need to intervene where the current parking regulations and selfish behaviour was causing real problems for all road users.

In relation to King's Prep proposal, consultation had recently finished and officers were reviewing representations received. This feedback would help the Council to understand any issues that could arise and whether further changes to the design were needed.

There had been no attempt to restrict parking but for any proposed traffic restriction, it was likely that some people would be inconvenienced. School Streets helped to improve air quality and was part of a wider package of road safety interventions that had resulted in a 40% overall reduction in childhood casualties in Medway. Councillor Paterson considered that the small inconvenience that School Streets caused was a reasonable price to pay.

Trish Marchant asked the following supplementary question:

“There are many schools around Medway where you can't introduce any sorts of School Streets or similar restricted time zones because those roads are main roads. Would the Council consider bringing in 20 mile per hour speed limits in those areas, not just outside schools or near schools, but also on the main routes that children take to and from those schools, the ones that the 80% of kids who go on foot to school. Is there any thought about bringing in some sort of speed limits, not across the whole of Medway, but in those areas that are most particularly used by school children?”

Councillor Paterson said that this was something that he was agreeable to in principle and that the practical application of it would be looked at. He referred to limits of 15 miles an hour that had been introduced on school streets in New York City and while that would not be necessarily appropriate or practical for Medway it was an issue that deserved careful consideration. On some streets around schools, the issue was not necessarily speeding but rather that congestion was preventing speeding from happening. Councillor Paterson concluded that he was open to any contributions or petitions in relation to specific sites.

**Question D – Elizabeth Kebbell, of Chatham, had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Councillor Louwella Prenter:**

"What concrete steps are being taken this year to improve energy efficiency in Medway's housing stock? Your answer should include how the progress will be measured and reported publicly."

In the questioner's absence, Councillor Prenter said that the Council was delivering a targeted and practical capital works programme to improve the energy efficiency of Medway's council housing, with a particular focus on homes that are currently below an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C.

The Council was progressing a range of actions, including:

- Quick win improvements, such as installing LED lighting, upgrading loft insulation, and replacing windows and doors that have reached the end of their lifecycle.
- Updating the void standard, so that when council homes became empty and were prepared for new tenants, they would be brought up to a higher energy efficiency level, including improved insulation and energy saving fittings.
- Replacing around 350 older boilers with modern, more efficient models, which would lower energy use and support improved EPC ratings. New EPC assessments were being undertaken on approximately 10% of stock, using the in house HRA Retrofit Coordinator.
- Ensuring all roof replacement works included the installation of loft insulation to current standards.
- Delivering major refurbishment at the St Albans Estate, where outdated glazing was being replaced with modern, energy efficient units. Because the flats had extensive glazed areas, this work would deliver significant improvements to overall energy performance.

Progress would be measured through updated Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings after works were completed, supported by regular performance tracking through the housing asset management system. This would be reported publicly through the Council's Annual Housing Performance report, as well as through housing publications, such as the Housing Matters newsletter.

**Question E – Vivienne Parker, of Chatham, asked the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, the following:**

"Would it be possible for the Council to put up a street sign on the footpath running alongside Hempstead Valley Drive and meeting Hempstead Valley drive near to the

Chapel Lane housing development, marked on Google Earth as being Chapel Lane and place an orientation board alongside that footpath depicting the Lidsing Chapel as the site of the old medieval chapel demolished in the 1880's, which is right next to Chapel Lane.”

In response to the question, Councillor Curry said that it was always valuable to recognise and celebrate historic sites within Medway and the proposal was a thoughtful way of highlighting the heritage of the area. Acknowledging places such as the former Lidsing Chapel helped preserve the story of the local landscape and ensured that important elements of the past would not be forgotten by future generations.

Councillor Curry agreed that providing heritage interpretation along this route could enrich the experience of residents and visitors and deepen public understanding of the site's history. Liaison would take place with the relevant Council teams, including heritage and public realm services, to explore the feasibility of installing an information board and to understand the potential costs involved. Once this information was available, an updated would be provided.

The Council was now bringing forward plans to reorganise and recognise local heritage features within the planning system. The Council website highlighted the Heritage Place project with a map and opportunity for people to add their own nominations for inclusion in a local heritage assets list.

Vivienne Parker asked the following supplementary question:

“In the last known pictures of the Lidsing Chapel, dating from the 1880's, it shows a tombstone right by the front door, which would imply that there is a Christian burial on the site. I was wondering whether indeed the Council would be prepared to preserve that area of woodland as a mark of respect to the dead?”

Councillor Curry said that while this was not something he was aware of, he was happy to include it when looking into the history of the site. With regards to burial sites, there should be a detailed record of it with the Council's archives or with the Church of England. More research would be required.

**Question F – Neil Davies, of Chatham, asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:**

"Given the public consultation has now concluded, what early indication does the Council have on the public's views on the LGR proposals? In giving his response, the Leader is asked to comment on how they compare to those of the Council, of central government in areas that have already had their plans agreed, whether an election in 2027 is still therefore scheduled to take place and whether that will likely be for the new LGR North Kent Authority."

In response to the question, Councillor Maple said that the consultation referred to was a Government consultation so all responses had gone to the Government and the Council had not yet received feedback from Government.

There continued to be regular Member and officer meetings on the matter and Councillor Maple thanked the officers present at Cabinet who had been at the forefront of those meetings. There were a range of opinions with colleagues in

Ashford and Canterbury being supportive of Option 4D. It was unfortunate that the MP for that area had not been aware. Councillor Maple would write to her to set this out.

It was anticipated that the Government would communicate its decision to the Council before the parliamentary summer recess.

From announcements already made and examples, the principal of not using existing boundaries had come forward. That gave Councillor Maple confidence that option 4D had a good strong opportunity to be looked at and it could be seen in Sussex the direction in which the Government had gone.

It was particularly disappointing that indications from the Leader of the Essex County Council suggested that there could be a legal challenge. Councillor Maple had made the commitment, which he made again, that whatever the outcome of the process, Medway Council would not legally challenge it.

For the majority of the time, the 14 councils in Kent and Medway had worked collaboratively and collectively. While they did not agree on everything, even in relation to the expression of interest around devolution, where there was a clear divide that had primarily been because of the process for local government reorganisation. Councillor Maple was hopeful that at the end of the process in the summer there would be a return to all 14 councils working collectively and collaboratively for the best interests of the 1.9 million people.

It had been made clear that when the Structural Change Audit (SCO) was placed that any elections at that point would only be for the new councils. This would mean that there would not be elections for 12 of the 14 councils, which would have been due next year. There would then be a shadow period of 10 months where the current councils would continue with the four new councils becoming statutory bodies on 1 April 2028.

Neil Davies asked the following supplementary question:

“Just to clarify, if a shadow election takes place, they would not take control of the Council until 2028?”

Councillor Maple said it was very clear that the 12 current councils that would be due for elections would not have those elections but there would be elections for the new councils. The 12 councils, plus Kent County Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, who had not been due to have elections in 2027, would all continue until 31 March 2028, following which the new councils would take effect on 1 April.

There was some guidance about how this relationship would work but it was clear that it would be business as usual for the 14 existing councils, and that the year would be about building the new councils ready for delivery. There would be a period of time, during which services would need to coalesce but on 1 April 2028 the existing councils would cease to exist with the four new councils taking over at this point.