

Council 29 July 2015 - Questions submitted by Members

Question No.	Question from:	Question:	Question to:	Service area:
1	Cllr Alan Horton	What is being done in Swale to overcome the shortfall in the Health and Social Care workforce?	Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Health	Amber Christou/ Housing
<p>Response: SBC are acutely aware of the workforce and skills shortages in health and social care and the threat that this poses to such services now and in the future. Members and Officers are working closely with KCC and the local CCGs through the Health and Wellbeing Board. We are actively supporting our partners to develop educational and vocational training and qualifications in Health and Social Care in conjunction with Swale schools, in order to ensure that as many young people as possible are able to access these programmes and take up employment in this area. Other initiatives national and locally are being developed to overcome the problem, and we will also support these wherever possible.</p>				
2	Cllr Roger Truelove	Are there any plans to invest in improved facilities at Church Milton Country Park?	Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs	Lyn Newton/ Economy and Communities
<p>Response: The Council is currently in early discussions with a local community organisation in Milton Regis about how and if it might be possible to work with the Council and other partners to provide an enhanced level of community support, and in particular to provide a range of new services and facilities to country park users. The organisation has asked that discussions remain confidential at this stage so that the scope of the project can be established and agreed by partners before any detailed work is undertaken. Subject to agreement and permissions then investment could be made in the immediate area of the Country Park. Officers have been working closely with agents representing Fletcher Challenge and Forest Industries regarding their planning application at Kemsley, which abuts the country park; this could bring infrastructure improvements to the Park by extending the existing footpath network, the provision of a car park, and heritage interpretation supported by a programme of education outreach in local primary schools.</p>				
3	Cllr Ben Stokes	Can the Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Heritage and Culture, please agree to a review of the Local Engagement Forums and Rural Forum?	Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage	Emma Wiggins/ Head of Economy & Communities

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<p>Response: I welcome a review of the Local Engagement Forums and Rural Forum. The terms of reference (ToR) for the Policy Development Review Committee (PDR) allows it to consider reviews of existing Council policy when referred by a Cabinet member or by resolution of Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee or Full Council. I shall therefore formally request that a review is placed as an item on the forward plan of PDR to be considered in 2015/16. As these forums are part of the Council's constitution, any proposals that PDR make involving a change to the ToR of the LEFS and/or Rural Forum would need to go through General Purposes Committee for recommendation to full Council.</p>				
4	Cllr Ghlin Whelan	As the provision of a seven screen cinema seems to be such a prominent part of the Sittingbourne Town Centre regeneration can the portfolio holder please advise the identity of the provider and give some idea as to time scale as to when the Complex and services are to be in place.	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	Pete Raine/ Regeneration
<p>Response: You are right to say that the cinema is an essential part of the Town centre regeneration scheme – indeed it has always been seen as the leisure anchor to the development, which will attract restaurants and complement the retail and residential elements of the scheme. Discussions are at advanced stage with three cinema operators whose names must be kept commercially confidential until an agreement is finalised. We expect Heads of Terms to be agreed before the end of August, and the name of the operator will be released as soon as possible after that. Once that has been achieved, construction work should start in the spring of 2016, and we anticipate that the cinema will be operating by the end of 2017.</p>				
5	Cllr Ghlin Whelan	<p>One of my residents has recently been advised that, even as a blue badge holder shortly having to undergo another operation in hospital, her application for a Disabled Parking Bay cannot even be considered for at least another three months as there is nothing in the budget to provide even the paint that is required!</p> <p>Is this really how the present administration looks to help those least well off in our communities and what is the portfolio holder doing to rectify the situation?</p>	Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs	Dave Thomas/ Head of Commissioning and Customer Services
<p>Response: We have received an increased number of applications for disabled parking bays in recent months, which has put pressure on the modest budget and staffing resource dealing with this service. However, we have now identified sufficient budget to clear the current backlog and these will be processed as quickly as possible.</p>				

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Further work is required to identify sufficient budget to meet the increased demand anticipated in future, which reflects Swale's demographics and the higher number of disabled residents now living in the Borough.				
6	Cllr Mick Galvin	<p>On the 2 June 2015, at the Sheppey Local Engagement Forum, the audience were informed that the 2,000 houses (Queenborough & Rushenden Master Plan) planned for the brownfield site at Queenborough has now been downsized to 1,180 (Policy Context) houses.</p> <p>Will the 820 houses taken out of this development now be built in other parts of Sheppey, and what will become of the land that the 820 houses were to be built on?</p>	Cabinet Member for Planning	James Freeman/ Planning
<p>Response: As was reported to the Local Development Framework Panel Meeting on 2 March 2015, a Masterplan Addendum has been produced to provide a refresh of the adopted Masterplan. This was to reflect changing economic conditions and lack of market interest which has resulted in slow progress in the current and planned delivery of the Queenborough and Rushenden regeneration proposals, as well as other material changes such as changes in land ownership. The number of residential units has been reduced from 2,000 to 1,180, which reflects a move away from high density flatted units which are now not seen as viable or deliverable in the local housing market, and which are of a dwelling type which does not meet local needs.</p> <p>The densities applied to development have been revised to now be more in keeping with the local context. Potential still exists, however, for greater densities adjacent to the Creek, and this also reflects the generally more "tight" urban grain of Queenborough. The former ISTIL Mill and Thomsett Way sites have now also been included for potential residential development due to the closure of the employment uses previously located there. The whole site area will still be built on, just at a lower density than previously envisaged.</p> <p>The 820 dwellings which will not now be provided at Queenborough and Rushenden have been allowed for on other sites across the Borough to enable the Council to meet its objectively assessed need for housing. The submitted Local Plan, Bearing Fruits 2031, which is due for Examination in Public in the autumn, has already done this. Should the Local Plan Inspector disagree with the overall Borough housing target, or the way in which it is provided for, she may recommend modifications to the Local Plan, details of which we would expect in early 2016.</p>				
7	Cllr Roger Truelove	What's your view on the Living Wage these days?	Leader	Nick Vickers/ Finance

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<p>Response: In 2013 this Council quite rightly decided that it could not support proposals to introduce the Living Wage, in part because of the direct cost to the Council but also because of the knock on impact on our suppliers. I strongly believe that was the right decision.</p> <p>Since then the UK economy has grown strongly, and the people of this country have decided to put their faith in a Conservative Government, and the first Conservative budget since 1996 to me shows just how wise they have been in doing so. The Chancellor of the Exchequer's objectives of reducing dependency on benefits and rewarding those who want to work and will therefore benefit from the increase in the living wage is absolutely right, and some six million people will benefit from it. Further, the action taken by the Chancellor to reduce corporation tax and increase employment allowances will help companies to deal with the impact on their cost base.</p> <p>Improving living standards and creating better job opportunities all come from growing the economy and creating wealth, rather than borrowing more money as the last Labour Government, and indeed the Greek Government, seem to think.</p>				
8	Cllr Paul Fleming	What steps have been taken by Swale Borough Council since the signing of the Community Covenant last year?	Deputy Leader	David Clifford/ Policy and Performance
<p>Response: The Council's first action after the signing was to amend its Housing Allocations Policy to ensure that military-connected families in the Borough were given preference when considering housing need. Following this, SBC has been working to understand the extent of military-connected families in the Borough. While there are no bases in Swale, it is likely that there are a number of serving or former personnel who should be able to benefit from the Covenant.</p> <p>With this in mind, work has also been undertaken to raise the profile of the military community, and awareness of the Covenant, among frontline council staff. In particular, this has included making managers aware of the recent landmark Ombudsman ruling criticising a local authority for breaching its own armed forces covenant.</p> <p>The Council has therefore worked with KCC and other Kent partners to support events such as the annual Kent and Medway Civilian Military Covenant Conference, and has been active in the distribution of information, including the Kent Armed Forces Survey, which was publicised via the intranet, SBC website, Twitter, Facebook, VCS organisations, members' despatch letter, and the Public Services Board.</p>				
9	Cllr Harrison	Can the Cabinet Member for Planning explain why it took 7 months to bring the Gladmans application for 580 houses off Swanstree Avenue to the Planning Committee?	Cabinet Member for Planning	James Freeman/ Planning Services

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<p>Response: The decision on an application of this scale needs to be based on sound information about the impact the development would have on the local environment and community. In order to ensure the Planning Committee have the information they need to make a decision, which may subsequently be challenged, experts need to be commissioned to prepare in-depth reports, including a landscape appraisal, to rebut the submission made by the applicant. This application affects a Special Landscape Area (SLA), and the visual impact of this development was considered to be a significant material planning consideration. The landscape experts were commissioned in late February this year, and the consultants visited the site on 19 and 26 March 2015, which subsequently led to the production of their report in mid-April. On 24 April 15 the developer lodged an appeal with the Planning Inspectorate against the Council's failure to determine the application within 13 weeks. However, this was only made valid on 19 June 2015.</p> <p>It should also be noted that, despite officers chasing responses, several consultees took time to make their views known on the application, such as Kent Archaeology Unit who submitted their views on 20 April 2015, Kent Highways who submitted their views on 24 April 2015, and Highways England whose comments were only recently received.</p> <p>With the need for officers to thoroughly assess the significant quantity of technical documents that were submitted with the original application submission, the external consultants landscape appraisal, the late consultation responses, and the knowledge that the Committee report would need to also address matters that the appellant was raising in their appeal documents, officers produced the in-depth Committee report for the July meeting.</p> <p>The Planning Committee, at its meeting on 23 July, resolved that they would have refused the planning application for the following reasons:</p> <p><i>“(1)The proposed development, due to its location, scale and form, will not represent sustainable development as it fails to seek positive improvements across the three dimensions as required by paragraphs 7-9 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012. Furthermore, notwithstanding the lack of availability of a 5-year supply of housing land, in accordance with paragraph 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012, the proposals do not achieve the presumption in favour of sustainable development as the adverse impacts of development would significantly and demonstrably outweigh any benefits as a result of:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="188 1166 2047 1273"><i>(i) the likely significant adverse impacts on the landscape character, quality and value (including the contribution made by tranquillity and the amenity value of accessible countryside close to the urban area) of a designated local landscape area, as well as on the visual amenity enjoyed by users of the local public rights of way network;</i> <li data-bbox="188 1289 2047 1396"><i>(ii) due to the topography and sensitive nature of the landscape, the development would result in a poor design that fails to appropriately respond to/take the opportunities for improving the character and quality of the area and the way it functions as required by para 64 of the NPPF;</i> 				

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		<p>(iii) <i>the significant, permanent and unnecessary loss of best and most versatile agricultural land (including its economic and other benefits);</i></p> <p>(iv) <i>the failure to provide information to determine and address the mitigation necessary to avoid likely significant effects upon Special Protection Areas contrary to Article 4 of the EC Birds Directive;</i></p> <p>(v) <i>the site lies within the swale Mineral Safeguarding Area for brickearth and is not within an allocated site for development. The applicant has failed to demonstrate that potential sterilisation of this land and the loss of the wider economic benefits is acceptable;</i></p> <p>(vi) <i>air pollution from vehicle emissions, particularly nitrogen dioxide, resulting in cumulative air pollution levels that would be inconsistent with the local air quality action plans for the Canterbury Road AQMA, the St Paul's Street AQMA and the Ospringe Street AQMA;</i></p> <p>(vii) <i>poor walking routes to the town centre with no footways at junctions, dangerous cycle route to the town centre and infrequent bus service; and</i></p> <p>(viii) <i>the submitted transport assessment is inadequate, making unlikely assumptions on the likely trip generations of the proposed accesses to the site. As such, there are concerns that these assumptions are flawed and the assessment inaccurate. As such, the proposal would result in harm to highway safety and convenience, contrary to policies E1 and T1 of the Swale Borough Local Plan 2008 and emerging Development Plan policy DM6.</i></p> <p><i>As a result, the proposals do not accord with the National Planning Policy Framework, being contrary to policies set out in paragraphs 14, 17, 64, 109, 112, 113, 117-119 and 142 - 144, nor with the Development Plan, being contrary to policies SP1, SP2, SH1, TG1, E1, E6, E7, E9, E12, E19 and H2 of the Swale Borough Local Plan 2008, together with guidelines of the Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal 2011 SPD. The proposals are also contrary to emerging Development Plan policies ST1, ST3, ST5, CP2, CP4, CP7, DM24, DM25, DM28 and DM31 of Bearing Fruits 2031: The Swale Borough Local Plan April 2015, together with policies CSM5 and DM7 of the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2013-2031."</i></p> <p>These reasons for refusal will be the focus of the planning appeal inquiry to be held in early 2016, the date of which is yet to be finalised.</p>		
10	Cllr Harrison	Can the Cabinet Member for Environmental Services inform Members of the figures for recycling for 2013/14 and 2014/15?	Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs	Dave Thomas/ Commissioning and Customer Contact

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<p>Response: The audited figures from Waste Dataflow confirm that for 2013/14, 34.25% of collected materials were recycled, and that this increased to 40.34% in 2014/15.</p>				
11	Cllr Andy Booth	<p>Would the Cabinet Member like to offer his weight behind the following issue and explain how he and his colleagues can apply appropriate pressure to KCC Highways Services to make a difference to the pedal-cyclists on the Isle of Sheppey.</p> <p>Each and every day, hundreds of cyclists traverse the route between Cowstead Corner (the junction between A249 and A2500) and the destinations of Eastchurch, Warden and Leysdown. They literally take their life in their own hands travelling along the only recognised road joining these locations. Currently there is NO provision for a cycle path or separate lane along this route - making it treacherous and potentially fatal.</p> <p>There is growing concern from not only cyclists but also other road users that a catastrophe is imminent as there has been a spate of minor accidents and collisions already. We are approaching the summer holidays and road usage is only going to escalate, concentrating the amount of traffic and multiplying the risks. I urge the Cabinet to bring their full weight into this situation and actively promote the plight of cyclists on Sheppey to obtain a suitable route system that affords a degree of protection for them.</p>	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	Dave Thomas/ Commissioning and Customer Contact
<p>Response: A feasibility study commissioned through the Sheppey Tourism Alliance into the construction of a link between Leysdown and Eastchurch was funded by a local county member and undertaken by Sustrans in 2013. The study recommends a number of minor improvements to the existing highway, as well as an option for an off-road route between urban areas. A bid to the Local Transport Package for 2016/17 was not successful, but will be re-submitted for the next round later this year.</p>				

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<p>At the Swale Joint Transportation Board, Members were advised that the scheme has been included in the draft Swale Transportation Strategy.</p> <p>Sustrans are mindful of the timetable for these key decisions and are continuing their discussions with Sheppey landowners, as well as agreeing engineering support from KCC to investigate suitable path design including establishing the location of utilities in the area.</p> <p>I am happy to make representation to KCC to ensure that the work outlined is given a high level of priority within key decision making, and that an update report is provided to me which I will be happy to share.</p>				