

Leader's Q&A session

Held at: Zoom - to be streamed live to Youtube.

Date Monday, 14 September 2020, 6pm

1. Questions from the public

1. From Mrs M Lawes to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing, Transport and Special Projects

New measures were taken in early June to stop all BBQ's in the Coastal Park. These measures included larger bins, increased parking charges at Radnor Cliff Road and coastal parking area. There were also signs indicating to drivers to use Folkestone end of Coastal Park. Parking has been seriously reduced at Folkestone end due to the Seafront Development. This has led to serious overcrowding. People parking over resident driveways, blocking cars in on residential roads complete gridlock for months in Tram Road. Why was this decision taken to send traffic to Folkestone end when traffic already caused serious problems to residents, ruining local resident's enjoyment of the seafront?

ANSWER:

Thank you Mrs Lawes for your question.

We are aware that this summer has been exceptionally busy in all seafront locations, so the increased traffic/parking in Folkestone should not be solely attributed to the Coastal Park traffic diversion. Many other coastal towns have also reported similar challenges.

There have been traffic/parking issues on roads leading to the Coastal Park which have grown over the past few years. It is a fact that the location of the Coastal Park and nature of the roads leading to it make it difficult for cars and emergency vehicles to access/leave the facility during periods of high demand.

The Folkestone Harbour end has wider roads, and even with the seafront development, it has far more parking facilities for visitors. To further alleviate the situations, FHDC made arrangements with the Folkestone Harbour Company to open up their large car park on sunny days when

high demand for parking was expected. This helped to reduce the parking congestion on the roads.

Officers are currently working on the possible introduction of parking controls in the Tram Road area, which should help alleviate the parking difficulties local residents are experiencing. However, there will be sunny weekends when the attractions of Folkestone to outside visitors will inevitably create difficulties from time to time.

The Coastal Park, which is an exceptional asset in the district, witnessed an unprecedented amount of visitors this summer due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The council undertook a considerable amount of work to update rules, change behaviours and suitably enforce these. One of the predominant issues was the route into the coastal park via Radnor Cliff. Despite long queues people still attempted to enter and this led to a blocking off of the road. Emergency services expressed their concern and the decision was made to advertise the less well known (to visitors of the coastal park) Folkestone end car parks. Despite an increase in traffic being sent to the Folkestone end, roads are wider and more suitable to larger volumes. This coincided with working with the harbour company to open their large car parks during peak times to alleviate the numbers.

We are aware that residents of the Folkestone end did witness an increase in unacceptable behaviour. To help ease matters in the long run, we are running a public consultation regarding parking in the affected areas to ensure we do not have a repeat of this next peak season.

2. **Questions from Councillors**

1. **From Councillor Whybrow to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council**

Can you please set out the steps that are being taken to make sure that the contamination at our development sites at Ship St and Biggins Wood is properly dealt with so that the health of future residents is not put at risk?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

In 2016 Idom Mererbrook (Environmental Consultant) carried out a site appraisal with regard to the contamination at the former Gas Works and in 2017 at Biggins Wood.

Biggins Wood

Following on from the initial assessment, Idom Merebrook will be asked to carry out further assessments and ground tests in order to design the remediation strategy. This will take place once contractual agreements for

the development of the site are complete. Following the new assessment a remediation programme of works will be undertaken which will also include ecological activities to safeguard wildlife. It is anticipated that clean soil will then be used for a capping layer over the remediated ground.

The Former Gas Works, Ship Street

The environmental assessment report detailed the condition of the site and the necessary remediation works. Once this site is within FHDC ownership, a design process will begin which will rely on the 2016 assessment and develop it further to take account of the proposed design. A remediation strategy would then be developed under the supervision of an environmental specialist. The strategy is then implemented through appropriate contractors who would then remediate the site to safeguard future residents and the wider public.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Given that nobody really knows what is buried under Princes Parade, how can you be confident that there will be no risk from contamination to future residents of the proposed development there?

ANSWER:

We have done some preliminary contamination tests, and of course those remarks about Ship Street and Biggins Wood will of course apply to Princes Parade.

2. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Peall, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Regulatory Services, Waste and Building Control

The sea front development is causing a lot of concern to the residents in the area. During the hot weather we had recently, the dust in the air was stifling and when there is a breeze their homes and cars get covered in dust.

Could I ask the leader to make available, to the ward councillors, the environmental reading from the area and that FHDC ask that the councillors whose wards are affected by the site are invited to visit the site?

This development is causing a lot of concern in the Harbour area and people are concerned at the amount of dust that is getting into their property and the air quality and noise in the area. They are also concerned that this is just the beginning and that their lives are going to be made unbearable as the development makes progress.

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

The Council has been investigating the allegation of excessive dust coming from the site and Environmental Protection Specialists have been in communication with the project manager of the site to discuss this in detail. The contractors have since put in place mitigation to help reduce the levels of dust coming from the site by ensuring they are:

- regularly monitoring the site;
- using water suppression where required;
- using a water sprinkler system on the stock piles;
- reducing the height of the waste pile significantly;
- using a proposed wheel washing station for delivery lorries, when necessary; and
- Encouraging deliveries are currently being carried out from the road side.

This has been followed up by unannounced site visits by Environmental Protection Specialists who have monitored the situation, but they have not established that a statutory dust nuisance is occurring. Several complainants either failed to, or delayed in completing a dust diary to enable the officers to identify typical patterns that would identify a more appropriate time for the officers to visit the site and witness the dust issues. The investigation is, however, still open.

In terms of your request for members to visit the site, we can pass on this request to the site owners. However, with regard to the point about the reading, monitoring dust with scientific equipment is not a simple matter and it also has significant financial implications. The owners are not legally required to monitor dust in this way and therefore the council cannot order them to do so.

The normal method is to carry out regular visual risk assessments of the site regarding dust and weather conditions. Then take the appropriate mitigation, usually in the form of water suppression. We have witnessed this taking place on this site during planned and unannounced visits.

I can confirm a council officer carried out an unplanned site visit on Thursday 10th September 2020 at approximately 11.25am. The officer did not witness any unreasonable levels of dust coming from the site, but did witness water suppression taking place. The Officer left the site at 12.30pm.

The council determines the existence of a Statutory Dust Nuisance with the use of primary visual subjective evidence and not from data. We will continue to carry out unplanned site visits for the foreseeable future and act accordingly.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

3. From Councillor Meade to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing, Transport and Special Projects

I have received reports and information from local shopkeepers, in the Rendezvous Street area, that elderly residents who visit their shops are now having to park further up the town due to the introduction of mobile phone ticketing only parking, that seems to have appeared in several of the lower town car parks. This is already adversely affecting both the businesses and residents alike. Elderly residents in particular (but not in isolation) are the most likely of residents to either not have mobile phones or understand how the system works. Can you confirm whether these lower car parks such as Players Park are becoming mobile pay only as I believe this is discrimination via technology and should be resisted by this council?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

All council car parks have cash Pay & Display machines, but mobile phone/cashless parking is also available as an alternative. There are no plans at the moment to have them as 'cashless only' parking facilities. Lower Payers Park and the other car parks customers are referring to are privately owned/operated.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Is there any way that we can gently talk to the owners of the car parks to ensure that cash can continue, as it is starting to impact on business and the elderly visitors?

ANSWER:

I am sure the question can be asked, but I think you will find that operators are finding that more and more people are using electronic methods such as Ringo. We will do what we can with, no promises.

Following the meeting, the creative Foundation, who operate the Lower Payers Park were contacted and advised that there was presently no option to pay for parking by card. The machine was working and only took cash. The current machine would soon be replaced with one that allowed both cash and card payments, as well as having PaybyPhone app.

4. From Councillor Meade to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

As we are now all being encouraged by the Government to return to our workplaces, can you please advise what measures are being put into place to allow council staff to attend their place of work, albeit with self-distancing in place, to enable the residents who have no internet access, to gain

assistance and indeed when Councillors will be able to return to the Council Chambers for full Public Meetings?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

Whilst the government is encouraging people to return to their workplaces we are still in the middle of the Covid pandemic as can be demonstrated by the recent government announcements. FHDC officers have been working both effectively and efficiently remotely and there are no immediate plans to return to the office. Requests to work in the office are considered on a case by case basis and are only granted for short periods of time in exceptional circumstances. Staff surveys are being carried out to inform future decisions on this matter. We will take a view on when we can reopen the building when we can do so safely not putting any of our employees or visitors at risk.

We are taking the same approach with public meetings and we will keep the situation under review with the intention that physical meetings may resume when it is safe to do so.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

I would like to pass on my thanks to staff and officers for their excellent communication.

ANSWER:

We would all endorse this statement.

5. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee, Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Communities

What is being done to relieve the pressure on local GP services, following closures of two surgeries?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

Council officers and myself, as the Cabinet Member with responsibility for this area of work, are in regular contact with the town's GPs and the CCG to discuss access to primary care across the district.

GPs decided to close two surgeries in Folkestone in the last three years (Park Farm and Folkestone East Family Practice). Patients previously registered at those surgeries have been supported to re-register at other surgeries.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Could you give more details of the meetings taking place between the CCG and the council, and can these be opened to Councillors to attend?

ANSWER:

This is something we need to take up after this meeting, but it is something I will put forward.

Following the meeting, the following response was provided:

“At the current time the only main Health meetings going ahead are the Kent and Medway Health and Wellbeing board and the 0-25 HWBB run by KCC to which the P/H has a presence. I attend the Kent Health & Wellbeing Board and the Kent & Medway Health & Wellbeing Board

Restructures with in health at CCG level (Single Kent and Medway CCG has now been formed) ICP (Integrated Care Partnership) and PCN level (Primary Care Networks) mean local meetings are now being reconsidered.

Whilst the East Kent WHIP (Wellbeing and Health Improvement Partnership) came into being as an amalgam of the East Kent CCGs and East Kent HWBBs this work has halted due to health restructures and latterly due to Covid-19.

Instead significant work goes on with health partners on a project by project basis (examples include Otterpool Park work, Community hub work and currently the Barracks issue).

There is opportunity for the public to engage with health through patient participation groups and organisations such as Health Watch”.

6. From Councillor Keutenius to Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities

Please can we have the total amounts of funding this council has given to each of the three individual Community hubs: three Hills Folkestone, Age UK Hythe & Romney Marsh Day Centre since March of this Year?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

The Council provided funding to the three Community Hubs totalling £109,000. This was broken down as follows:

Hythe: £50,000

Folkestone: £28,000
Romney Marsh: £31,000

The community hubs provided a consistent baseline service to the community, however their set up and geographical coverage differed. The Hythe community hub provided overall support to the network of community hubs as well as some services beyond their geographical area, for instance, DBS reports and registering of volunteers.

I can also report that the government have provided Emergency Assistance Funding to [November 20](#) to continue with ongoing support to vulnerable people FHDC was allocated funds of which £10k per hub has been given (£30k). In addition a £10k allocation is given to support the volunteering effort across the hubs who are working together on this (ie £40k in total).

The hubs themselves have sought external funding (details are alluded to in the Cabinet report).

The hubs also received Sport England C-19 funds (approx. £6k Hythe and approx. £5k each Folkestone and Marsh).

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

What, if any, level of governance or scrutiny is in place to ensure the money is accounted for and spent on the right things by the hubs?

ANSWER:

That is a good point, and scrutiny is taking place. We have asked for reports on numbers of calls, particular calls, and where the funding has gone, so there are reports coming in for that.

7. From Councillor Keutenius to Councillor Prater, Cabinet member for Revenues, Benefits, Anti-Fraud and Corruption

Does the District Council hold a register of empty and unfurnished properties in the District, and if so, what % of these properties have had the long term Empty Home premium applied?

ANSWER:

Thanks you Councillor Keutenius for your question, and to Andrew Hatcher in Revenues and Benefits for his time in getting me the figures for this answer.

The Council monitors empty and unfurnished properties each month. As at 31 August 2020 the Council has 51,589 properties registered in total. Of this 1,330 were listed as empty.

As you'll know, the Councils current policy on long term empty homes is that a 100% premium is charged for properties empty 2 to 5 years, and a 200% premium for properties empty more than 5 years. From April next year a third band is introduced charging a 300% premium for properties empty more than 10 years.

Of the 1,330 properties listed as empty, 89 are being charged a premium of 100% as they have been empty for 2 -5 years, and 58 are being charged a premium of 200% as empty for 5 years or more.

Therefore around 11% of empty properties have a premium applied.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

8. From Councillor McConville to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing, Transport and Special Projects

A major issue with East Kent Housing was the inadequate collecting, holding and actioning tenants data. What processes will be in place to ensure that current data is retained, gaps in the data are filled and issue reporting can be actioned in an effective and efficient manner?

ANSWER:

Thank you Cllr McConville. As you rightly say, poor data management was a key factor in the failures identified within EKH.

Our new neighbourhood based operating model will enable a local approach to be taken with staff identified and allocated with specific areas throughout the district, developing knowledge and ownership of their patches.

As the housing service transfers back to the council, we are working to develop a new comprehensive housing management ICT system. The system will hold all information about tenant rent accounts, contact with the service and in the future, detailed stock condition information. We are also currently working to commission a stock condition survey across the council's housing stock so that we have complete information about the condition of the stock. This information will inform our future investment in the council's homes through our Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and ensure that our ongoing future programmes are properly targeted.

Until the new housing management system is available, we will continue to use the existing EKH systems for housing management & compliance. All ongoing customer information, including repair requests, complaints and other contact with the EKH, will be transferred over to the Council ahead of 1st October with the same systems in place for reporting repairs to Mears and Gas Call. EKH will also be providing the Council with a detailed stock investment plan for the current year.

We will continue to use the Northgate data base which manages most of our routine activities. From April 2021 we will be moving to an upgraded and FHDC specific Northgate System which will incorporate not just the existing systems but compliance and an enhanced asset data module.

Clearly, there are likely to be some teething issues as the new service is developed. However, I am pleased to advise that following a successful recruitment programme, almost all of the posts within the new services have been recruited.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Is there scope when this new council run system is on-line, to make available to Councillors the actionable items that will be happening in their ward, so they have better understanding when contacted by residents, and they can see action being taken on outstanding issues?

ANSWER:

We do have to be careful about data protection when talking about residents. Therefore I'd have to talk to others to ensure any information is adequately covered by data protection. We are hoping that with the new My Account, residents themselves will have a much better tracking system of their own properties.

9. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Peall, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Regulatory Services, Waste and Building Control

Will the council look at provision of bins with greater capacity where they are needed in parts of Folkestone?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

The council is very willing to look at alternative locations for bins and adding high capacity bins / bulk bins to popular locations as required. In preparation for the summer the council installed additional bulk bins in Folkestone, notably along Coronation Parade/Sunny Sands and the Coastal Park, as well at other locations along the coast. These bulk bins

were a useful addition to the existing 810 litter bins already installed across the district.

Over the course of the summer, the council, working with the contractor Veolia, added more bulk bins and increased resources to the street cleansing teams and changed rotas in order to meet the demands of the increased visitor numbers we received. However, we need to be realistic that at times with the visitor numbers we now receive it is unavoidable that the bin capacity will be put under strain. We also need to continue to hammer home the message that visitors need to dispose of their litter responsibly and if necessary take it home.

If Councillor Davison (or any other council) has any suggested locations she would like looked at I am happy to hear from her.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.