

Full Council – 25 September 2019
Councillor questions:

1. From Councillor J Martin to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

During previous Council meetings you have said that the proposed Otterpool Park development will attract "Green Town" status, a term I am unfamiliar with. You also announced at the last Council meeting that Otterpool Park would be Carbon Neutral. I have looked closely at the proposals on the FHDC web site and can find no mention of Green Town Status or any commitment to building a Carbon Neutral development, perhaps you can tell us what Green Town status is and how Otterpool Park will be Carbon Neutral.

ANSWER:

Otterpool Park has 'Garden Town' status following submission of a bid to the government's Garden Cities, Towns and Villages programme in June 2016. The government announced in Nov 2016 that the bid had been successful. The bid included letters of support from a wide range of representatives and organisations, including Damian Collins MP, KCC, South East Local Economic Partnership, Shepway Business Advisory Board and the Creative Foundation (now Creative Folkestone). The original guiding principles included in the proposal still form the basis of the plans for the town. Otterpool Park is also a green town in that 50% of the area will be green infrastructure. While green town is not a formal status it is more a description of the character of the place, with a range of green spaces and access to the surrounding countryside.

Regarding carbon neutrality, the draft planning policy for Otterpool Park (relevant extract below) establishes the standard for Otterpool Park and the aspiration for carbon neutrality. While this might not be possible on day one due to the high up front infrastructure cost, it is an aspiration, and discussions are taking place with innovative development companies that are marketing new technologies in energy generation and storage that can be tested here.

Extract from policy SS8 (1d):

The energy strategy shall demonstrate how the development takes a fabric-first approach, makes the maximum use of passive solar gain, as well as energy generation from the latest technologies in and on buildings and structures. All community buildings shall seek to meet zero carbon standards as exemplars, with an aspiration for the development to achieve carbon neutrality;

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Myself and Councillor Wade have had our application to the woodlands Trust approved, to receive almost 900 sapling plants to plant in our wards. Can you work with us to find sites and encourage other members to apply to the Woodland Trust to do the same?

ANSWER:

I am more than happy to endorse this. We too have been speaking to the Woodlands Trust, and when we do start work on Otterpool Park, we will plant hundreds of trees.

2. From Councillor Whybrow to Councillor Wimble, Cabinet Member for the District Economy

Can you please confirm that the planning application for Otterpool Park will not be determined until the Planning Inspector has examined the Core Strategy Review in public and the council has received his/her report?

ANSWER:

Based on our current understanding of the progress of the local plan process, the Council will not determine the application for Otterpool Park until it has received the report from the planning Inspector examining the Core Strategy Review.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Given that the Council has spent so much money on the castle, what would happen if planning permission were to be refused?

ANSWER:

That would be a decision to be made by the Council.

3. From Councillor Rolfe to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

On 1st July 2019, the Church of England launched a Digital Charter that aims to establish guidelines and boundaries for good practice when using electronic and social media. This blueprint for respectful behaviour is, I believe, relevant to every representative of any 'organisation or group' and indeed, every one of us as individuals – and it can be adopted, applied and followed whether we have faith or not. Anti-social behaviour on digital platforms undermines the very fabric of our global society. Issues such as online bullying affect all ages and sectors. Research has also shown that many people – particularly our younger generation, find it difficult to disseminate between what is true, and what is not. Hence this also aspires to combat the ever-increasing problem of 'Fake News' and its negative impacts.

Therefore, my question to you is: In recognition of the leadership role of this authority's members and officers, and the associated moral obligation to set a good example for our local residents, can this District Council consider incorporating a Digital Charter and associated guidelines based on the values contained within the Church of England's blueprint, into its Corporate Plan? This could include, but not necessarily be limited to proactively embracing the key principles outlined in the Charter: <https://www.churchofengland.org/terms-and-conditions/our-social-mediacommunity-> guidelines of truth, respect, honesty, kindness and personal accountability. Essentially advocating that we should all aim to treat others as we, ourselves, would like to be treated and

learn to present opposing views in a reasonable and fair manner without recourse to offensive or intimidating behaviour.

For your information, I believe that our local MP – Damian Collins would support such an initiative.

ANSWER:

Officers are currently updating a social media policy for Councillors. We support the values of the charter Councillor Rolfe has highlighted and will look to work up something similar in due course. We will review whether this will be incorporated into the Corporate Plan.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Linked to this, can this District Council also endorse the Government's drive to persuade social media providers of digital platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to accept that they are 'Producers' and as such should be held accountable for published content in clearly defined circumstances? This would help to ensure that these providers police their networks and have in place the necessary safeguards to protect the vulnerable. To that end would it be possible for you to send a letter on behalf of this Council evidencing such support to the Minister of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport – the Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP and copy our MP into this due to his role as Chairman of the Select Committee for DCMS? I strongly believe this to be a 'Community Safety' issue that is worth pursuing.

ANSWER:

Whilst I agree with the sentiment, I will check the procedure before writing a letter on behalf of the Council.

4. From Councillor Mrs Carey to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Can the Leader of the Council advise me what arrangements will be made for public access to Westenhanger Castle in my North Downs West Ward now that it is in the ownership of this council?

ANSWER:

Ensuring future public access to the castle is an important reason for the council acquiring Westenhanger Castle. The next step is to prepare a 30 year plan that will set out the future programme of work on the castle and the new castle park. The medieval barns have great potential for future community use, following a programme of restoration. In the short term the current lease arrangements with the events manager Idyllic Events allows the council access at certain times, so opportunities for the public to view the castle can be included in the forward plan. The council is in discussion with Idyllic about arranging an initial public open afternoon later this year.

THERE WAS NO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION.

5. From Councillor Treloar to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Given this council's decision to build on and desecrate a key heritage asset in our area – the Royal Military Canal, which is a scheduled monument – how does it propose to manage with sensitivity and respect its new acquisition, the heritage-listed Westenhanger Castle?

ANSWER:

We are not planning to build on the Canal, we are planning to build on Princes Parade. Westenhanger Castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and Listed Building due to its historic importance, therefore the castle is protected from detrimental change by rigorous planning controls. However it also needs to have a long term sustainable future and there is a strong case (supported by statutory agencies) that this could best be achieved by bringing it into public ownership as a community asset within the wider Otterpool Park project. The council is preparing a 30 year plan for the castle setting out short, medium and long term investment ration, and scoping future public access and future uses that can bring an income to allow the castle to be self-sustaining.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Prior to the purchase of the castle, did you undertake a risk assessment, and when can we expect to see this document?

ANSWER:

I will provide a comprehensive response in writing after the meeting.

6. From Councillor Dorrell to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

What is the council doing, in order to prepare for a change of Government within the next 6 months?

ANSWER:

Nothing.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

In light of the news that the Prime Minister acted unlawfully, would it not be wise to think about this?

ANSWER:

Parliament has to call for an election, but there are no signs of this happening at present.

7. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Will you make a statement on the Yellowhammer papers in relation to the impact on our district?

ANSWER:

The “Yellowhammer papers” gave the worst case scenario planning assumptions. Our council has participated fully in Brexit planning, working through the Kent Resilience Forum. Our priority is to minimise any potential impact and disruption in the delivery of council services and to ensure that our communities are prepared.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

The use of foodbanks has raised by 85% in our community since last year. There is an extreme fear around what would happen in the event of a no deal Brexit. What emergency procedures has the council got in dealing with this issue, and will you publish the business continuity plan for each council partner, as previously promised to my colleague.

ANSWER:

I will provide a structured answer after the meeting.

8. From Councillor McConville to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Now that it would be illegal for there to be a no deal Brexit what are the conditions surrounding any unspent monies allocated for preparing for this purpose?

ANSWER:

There are no conditions on any unspent monies. The central government funding provided for Brexit was paid under section 31 arrangements whereby there are no conditions on how that it spent. Clearly the government has provided this to help support any disruption which Brexit, in whatever form, may cause and we will ensure the funds are spent appropriately.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

How much money is left in the tin?

ANSWER:

I will provide a comprehensive answer after the meeting.

9. From Councillor Meade to Councillor Peall, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Regulatory Services, Waste & Building control

Given the increase in fly tipping, especially in East Folkestone ward which I believe are as a direct result of charges being initiated at the Recycling Centres, would District Council as a condition of the negotiation for the waste contract for the area, be prepared to ask for a monthly larger item pick up from

areas or indeed as happens in the London a free disposal service of three larger items such as fridges, dishwashers etc per year as I feel this would help reduce flytipping in the area.

ANSWER:

The council provides a bulky waste collection service across the district and plans to continue to offer this service in the next contract. This service is charged to the household requesting the service.

As previously discussed, this council objected to the applying charges at the KCC Household Waste Recycling Centres. It is however worth clarifying that these charges apply to the disposal of materials like ceramics, plasterboard and hard core. The HWRCs still collect domestic fridges and dishwashers disposed by residents at no charge.

Cllr Meade is correct that some London Authorities do offer a limited free collection service for bulky items but most do not. In some cases, authorities have taken the decision to charge as the result of the experience of running a free service.

A free service would be costly even if limited by the number of collections allowed per household. A free service would unfairly compete against legitimate waste carriers and the collection services offered by charities. It could also risk increased fly tipping where some residents think that they simply need to leave items on the kerbside for it to be collected. Furthermore, authorities with free services can find that this can attract fly tipping from outside the district.

A similar scheme was trialled in Dover Road, and saw people from outside of the area using the service.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

If people from outside of the district were seen using the service, why were these people not charged to allow for a free service to be offered to residents?

ANSWER:

Where we can identify such people, we will prosecute, but this would not allow us to offer a free service.

10. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Housing, Transport and Special Projects

In her most recent performance report the Chief Executive of East Kent Housing referred to getting out positive stories to help 'tackle the stigma of social housing'. Does the leader of the council agree there should be NO stigma attached to social housing and that rather it is this council and East Kent Housing which should be absolutely ashamed at the way our tenants have been let down?

ANSWER:

There is no stigma.

Our tenants have been let down recently by EKH management failings and this Council has acted swiftly from the moment we became aware that assurance was not in place. All of our tenants and leaseholders have been contacted and updated on the situation and we will continue to keep them informed. Next month this Council will be taking decisions on the future of our housing management services as the service to our tenants is a priority for this council."

The council recognises the important role that social housing plays and has shown its clear commitment by undertaking to provide 300 additional Council homes over the next 3/5 years. To date, the council has delivered 100 additional homes through its new build and acquisition programme, including homes for affordable rent and shared ownership, with further homes in the pipeline.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Do you agree that the shambles that is East Kent Housing is a disgrace, and that the Chief Executive of East Kent Housing should 'consider her position'?

ANSWER:

It is not for me to comment on individual officers. A decision on the future of the organisation is to be made in due course.

11. From Councillor McConville to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

Due to this council voting to ensure all of its buildings and operations will be carbon zero by 2030 can you outline your plan for this process in relation to Westenhanger Castle?

ANSWER:

Consideration of achieving zero carbon will need to be taken into account in the castle 30 year plan, and as part of the wider council strategy for its building stock.

THERE WAS NO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION.

12. From Councillor Meade to Councillor Peall, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Regulatory Services, Waste & Building control

What are District Council doing regarding those thoughtless dog owners who do not pick up after their dogs, thereby putting residents health at risk. I have not seen a single enforcement officer locally and the pavements in my ward can be a death trap for slips and mess in the dark hours ?

ANSWER:

The Environmental Protection Team deal with many areas of enforcement such as unauthorised encampments, stray dogs, fly-tipping, fly-posting and enforcing the dog related public safety protection orders (e.g. dogs off leads). When they get the opportunity they do carry out general patrols which includes patrolling in East Folkestone. There patrols are further supplemented by the work of the Areas Officers.

The Enforcement Team undertakes a number of other anti-dog fouling initiatives including: -

Targeted Patrols

In addition to general patrolling carry out targeted patrols of 'hot spot' and areas covered by the Dog Orders. The Officers will arrange for early and late patrols, to look at typical times that dogs may be taken for walks, taking into consideration the weather and seasonal changes. These can also be linked to other enforcement issues if they are in the same area, such as litter or fly-tipping.

Pop up events

Educational work carried out throughout the district where Enforcement Officers highlight responsible dog ownership, collect intelligence-led information from the public to use for special operations and patrols, free advice given and leaflets on all enforcement areas, as well as free gifts for those who complete a survey around responsible dog ownership.

Special events

In the autumn of last year, Enforcement Officers carried out a plain clothes operation to issue "thank you's" to responsible dog owners who picked up after their dogs and disposed of the waste correctly. This was communicated via social media to promote a positive attitude to responsible dog ownership and entered into a prize draw. This was carried out in all 13 wards where officers were patrolling in plain clothes and during each visit, no owners were found to be allowing their dogs to foul and walk away from it. This is due to be repeated again next month.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Could we ask Veolia to step up the cleaning of the pavements in the area?

ANSWER:

Please report such issues via the website. If lots of reports are received, then Veolia would be asked to go out and sort this problem out.

13. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Wimble, Cabinet Member for the District Economy

Is it right that political decisions about how to spend £2.2 million pounds of the Future High Street Fund rest solely in the hands of the leader of the council and one Corporate Director?

ANSWER:

The Leader is establishing a cross party Folkestone Town Centre subgroup of council members and the intention is that this group will be consulted on with respect to major proposals for spending the £2.2 million allocation of the Folkestone & Hythe High Street Fund to Folkestone Town Centre initiatives. However, the final decisions will be taken by the Leader and the Corporate Director for Place and Commercial.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Do you agree that with the loss of Thomas Cook and Debenhams, we are at crisis point in our High Street, and that we should give the public a forum to contribute their ideas and concerns, such as the Town Centre Working Group which has recently been formed?

ANSWER:

I will provide a response in due course.

14. From Councillor Meade to Councillor Hollingsbee, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities

Will this council be making any changes to its SWEP policy before the winter?

ANSWER

Having regard to the question you have posed at a council meeting, I can confirm that we in Housing Options have no changes proposed to the SWEP cold weather provisions for the forthcoming winter, a provision that we agreed last year will be triggered if the temperature falls below freezing for the whole of a single night, as opposed to the previous three consecutive nights of freezing and below.

We will therefore retain the ongoing provision that we have with the Salvation Army Folkestone, supported by our own Lifeline out of hours service, Sanctuary Supported Living - Homeless Outreach, the Porchlight Housing Helpline supported by Kent County Council and the Rainbow Centre who are again running the Crisis Winter Shelter in conjunction with local churches, and our focus remains upon rehousing people that are rough sleeping in the district, at least in part using our Rough Sleeper Initiative and Private Rented Sector Access Funds, being grant monies provided by central government.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Those figures need to be looked at closely. Would you join us for the Big Sleep-out on Friday?

ANSWER:

On the numbers, it is a snapshot from last night, which is carried out on a monthly basis.

I do have the sleepout in my diary, but unfortunately, I cannot make Friday night.

15. From Councillor McConville to Councillor Wimble, Cabinet Member for the District Economy

What, if any, part of the £2.2 million for the Future High Street Fund for Folkestone has already been spent and for what purpose?

ANSWER:

None of the £2.2 million of the Folkestone & Hythe District High Streets Fund has yet been spent.

THERE WAS NO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION.

16. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Peall, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Regulatory Services, Waste & Building control

Can you give an update on the re-tendering process for the waste and recycling contracts with particular reference to recycling schemes for multi-occupational flats and buildings. Does he agree that everyone should have the ability to recycle from home and will this be included in the new contract?

ANSWER:

Firstly I will give an update on the waste, recycling and street cleansing tender. The new contract will start in January 2021. The tender specification is currently being prepared with the intention to start a competitive dialogue process with potential bidders in December, with final tenders submitted and evaluated by Easter next year.

The waste and recycling contract itself does not define or restrict the ability of households to participate in the recycling scheme. This ability is often defined by the practical matters of access, availability of storage areas at a location and complexities of ownership.

However, I agree that more needs to be done in relation to flats. The district has enjoyed a steady increase in recycling levels in past few years including hitting 50% monthly recycling rate several times this year. Across Kent less than 1% of all refuse now goes to landfill. In the new contract we will be continuing the existing recycling scheme as it well understood locally and it meets the national criteria for materials collected.

Despite this progress, it will be difficult to meet future national targets without greater participation from flats. This can only be done by new multi-occupational properties designing in space and access for recycling at a planning stage and engagement with local social housing providers and our own housing stock. The Waste Team has previously met with landlords to work on promoting recycling and will be starting a project next year working with social housing providers.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

This is very close to the hearts of our residents, would you be happy to meet with residents to discuss this further?

ANSWER:

I am always keen to meet with the public about anything within my portfolio.

17. From Councillor Davison to Councillor Monk, Leader of the Council

What due diligence was undertaken in regards to members of your new cabinet, before offering them cabinet positions?

ANSWER:

This is a matter for me as Leader of the Council and not a matter for you. I would just add that you shouldn't necessarily believe all that you read.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Is it acceptable for a Councillor on Cabinet to not comply with a basic requirement of submission of election expenses, following the recent elections?

ANSWER:

This is not the right forum for this to be raised. If you provide the evidence of this to the Returning Officer, it can be followed up.