

Council – 26 July 2023

Councillor Questions and answers:

1. From Councillor Cooper to Councillor Jim Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

With the proposed forthcoming boundary changes can the District Council use this opportunity to change its name from Folkestone and Hythe District Council to Folkestone, Hythe and Romney Marsh District Council to make it abundantly clear it serves and is inclusive of all residents of the District?

ANSWER:

Thank you, Councillor Cooper, for your excellent question. Indeed, I was considering, as the Ward Councillor for Hythe, that Hythe, Folkestone, and Romney Marsh District Council has a certain ring about it!!! (Joking!)

I was very attached to the historic name of Shepway. I am told by officers that the last name change from Shepway to Folkestone and Hythe District Council was driven by a lack of geographical recognition for the place name. Essentially, no one outside the District knew where Shepway was. The cost of that name change cost over £10,000 and if we change the name again it is likely to be over £15,000.

I am happy to join a debate on a name change, if the majority of Councillors wish this to happen.

I think the underlying point in your question is to give Romney Marsh the recognition it deserves as part of FHDC and I share that objective with you. The people of the Marsh have felt, for too long, that they are overlooked by the Council and I hope to change that perception, I am very willing to work with you and other Councillors from the Marsh to make this Council more Romney Marsh inclusive.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

2. From Councillor Wimble to Councillor Holgate, Cabinet Member for Place Plan, Heritage, Tourism and District Economy

I would like to inquire about the rumours circulating regarding the potential scrapping of the Folkestone Airshow next year. Is it true that the current administration is considering this action based on concerns about the event's compatibility with their green credentials, given the carbon footprint associated with thousands of people attending and whether the economic benefits to the local community justify its continuation?

ANSWER:

Thanks for your question Councillor Wimble.

The Folkestone Air Display will be held on the 20th of August this year and is largely funded from the Councils' General Fund revenue budget. To date there have been no discussions or proposals put forward by the Administration as to the future of this or other events funded by the Council. All events or activities of this nature are subject to the Councils' annual budget setting process which will start in the autumn and at that point we will begin to consider the future of the event.

Any decisions made will be taken against the £4.5m deficit inherited from the previous administration.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

3. From Councillor Wimble to Councillor Jim Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

Can you provide the residents of Romney Marsh with a concrete timeline regarding the commencement of construction for the new swimming pool at Martello Lakes? It has been over five years since the promise was made in your campaign pledges, which included building a larger, more functional pool on land that could be purchased for a mere £1. The anticipation in the community is palpable, and we all look forward to the potential benefits this facility could bring to the district.

ANSWER:

Thank you, Councillor Wimble, for your excellent question. The swimming pool proposal at Martello Lakes has received much support over the years including support from Sport England. You will recall however that support was withdrawn when the Council decided to build the pool at Prince's Parade. Sports England withdrew their support because they felt that sports and leisure facilities are in short supply on the Marsh and the pool was better located at Martello Lakes.

I have always campaigned for the pool to be located at Martello Lakes, I do not recall suggesting that a larger or more functional pool could be provided, indeed I cannot recall ever promising anything because I have never before been in a position to influence the location of the pool. I can confirm that I have asked officers to investigate if the possibility of locating the pool at Martello Lakes is still possible and after some extensive research, I am happy to confirm that the site is still available to the Council for £1.00 as you so rightly state.

With regard to a timeline and so many other unknowns, I cannot confirm anything except if the £4.5M that has been wasted on the Prince's Parade

pool, had been spent building a pool on its original site at Martello Lakes, it would be full of happy smiling children this evening.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

I am worried that the current pool, in 2 years, will be 50 years old and is proving to be a huge money pit in order to keep it running. Does the council plan to keep putting sticking plasters on the situation in order to keep the Hythe pool running?

ANSWER:

I can confirm that Hythe pool will be maintained, but you are right, there will come a point when future maintenance is impossible. Myself and Councillor Speakman visited the pool last week, and were impressed by the dedication and commitment of staff to keep the staff running. It's more attributable to their efforts that the pool has been kept open. All I can say is watch this space, we are hoping to make active progress on this, and I'm hoping to update you in a while.

4. **From Councillor Wimble to Councillor J Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy**

Regarding the proposed construction of a new nuclear plant at Dungeness, which enjoys support from the majority of people in the Romney Marsh, I would like to inquire about the position of the council. Former Green Party leader Cllr Leslie Whybrow expressed opposition to the project, citing concerns over nuclear waste. Is this view shared by the current Green Administration? If so, how does the council plan to compensate for the £50 million-plus contribution to the district economy from the Magnox and EDF plants?

ANSWER:

Thank you, Councillor Wimble, for another excellent question. Apologies in advance, but there is much to say about this, and I thank you for the opportunity. There is currently a government competition to provide suitable sites for 10 small modular reactors nationally. The small modular reactors will generate carbon free energy, but they also generate nuclear waste. I don't think there is a single person in the whole country who is not concerned about the management of nuclear waste, its de-fuelling, its transportation and its storage for over 500 years. So, I share ex-Councillor Whybrow's concerns about nuclear waste.

The Green Party's position is very clear: "Nuclear power, coal and incineration of waste will be phased out". The question we all have to wrestle with is how quickly can we phase out damaging power generation, while at the same time, providing the power to peoples homes and industry? Clearly, we can only save our planet by phasing out fossil fuels immediately, but we have to

be careful, that in our switch to zero carbon power generation, we do not give future generations a major problem to solve with nuclear waste.

I think the first thing to say is that Dungeness was ranked 16th out of 16 sites considered for a new nuclear plant a few years ago. This was largely because the proposed plant would have encroached into an area of Special Scientific Interest.

The Government's current competition is for sites able to accommodate this new, innovative technology of small modular reactors. The operators of Dungeness, the French company EDF, are keen to put their site forward as one of the possible 10 sites in the country to accommodate small modular reactors. The site for the small modular reactor will not encroach on the site of Special Scientific Interest.

I had the pleasure of meeting Andrew Bowie, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Nuclear and Networks at Dungeness recently. I was able to tell the Minister that the power station is the only large scale provider of highly paid professional engineering jobs in the District. I was also able to tell him that the majority of the people of Romney Marsh, are not only "nuclear tolerant" but are enthusiastic nuclear supporters.

We also discussed the increasing electricity demand from the Port of Dover and the Port's future need for Hydrogen, which is an easily harnessed by product of power generation from small modular reactors. We discussed the ease of connection to the national grid, which is a distinct advantage for Dungeness, because the infrastructure is all in place.

For me, the prospect of providing 500 well paid professional long term jobs in one of our most deprived areas, to produce carbon free energy and possibly large scale hydrogen is attractive, but this must be weighed against the undeniable risks of nuclear power generation. I am on a steep learning curve, I am talking to everyone involved, I have visited Dungeness twice recently and I have been impressed with the people I have met and the culture of safety I have observed but that investment is safety and the culture of safety that has been developed at Dungeness is because nuclear generation is so potentially dangerous. The nuclear waste issue remains unresolved in my mind.

This Administration's position is very clear, we are committed to working with stakeholders to explore any new technology initiative that has the potential to ensure that a significant number of well-paid jobs are created in the Romney Marsh area which will grow the local economy and provide new career opportunities for young people, and that is exactly what I am doing.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

The people who voted for this administration, do they want a party that goes with their national guidelines, or do they want a maverick party that go against what the green party stand for?

ANSWER:

You'll have to ask them.

5. **From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Speakman, Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations**

Whilst I support the principle of "No Mow May", could I ask that an exception is made for the New Romney Cemetery? The basis for this request is that as an older cemetery with many grave edgings and grave ornaments that have been laid on the ground for safety reasons, the long grass increases the risk of a fall, due to these unseen tripping hazards. This is a particular problem for residents with mobility issues and those who are vision impaired.

ANSWER:

Thank you Cllr Thomas for your question. The Council does not actually participate in 'no mow May'. With over 2 million square meters of grass to cut across the district, if we were to leave all of the grass for a month it would have severe consequences for the rest of the growing season. We do however have many areas across our open spaces and parks that are managed for biodiversity.

With regards to the grass cutting in New Romney and the other cemeteries and closed churchyards the grass cutting at the start of the season was particularly challenging this year. There were high levels of rainfall and warm temperatures causing the grass to grow at a very fast rate. The grounds maintenance team has been struggling to recruit seasonal operatives this year which has had an effect on the resource levels of the team. These factors led to the grass being longer than we would have liked during May. I'm pleased to tell you that the team are now back on top of the grass cutting and the cemeteries are back to looking how they should.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

In terms of the access to the cemetery, not just in New Romney, but others as well, can the New Romney Cemetery gate latch be replaced with one that is easier for older residents and those with disabilities to manage (as this the only gate into the cemetery)? This should also be viewed with regard to Disabled access to the cemetery and the amendment of the FHDC Cemetery Policy, to allow Blue Badge Holders to take their vehicles to the roundabout at the top of the cemeteries.

ANSWER:

Thank you Cllr Thomas for your supplementary question. Officers will take a look at the gate and see what can be done. The gate hinges have just been replaced which might make the opening and closing easier.

With regards to the cemetery policy and allowing blue badge holders to park on the roundabout at the top of the cemetery, I have asked officers to consider this. There is no designated parking within the cemetery. As an older cemetery it was only designed for vehicles belonging to undertakers and maintenance vehicles for access purposes. The roadways are narrow and if multiple vehicles are parked at the same time it can make it very difficult for maintenance vehicles to access the cemetery. The cemetery regulations do state that; 'Vehicular access may be permitted for disabled visitors by prior arrangement with, and at the discretion of, the Cemeteries Office.' I would suggest that anyone who requires vehicular access to the cemetery makes contact with the cemeteries office who will be able to assist.

6. **From Councillor Thomas to Councillor P Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Transport, Regulatory Services and Building Control**

In the last few months, there have been three significant car accidents at the junction of the High Street and Ashford Road in New Romney. There are over two hundred new homes built or being built on Ashford Road and the traffic at this junction is increasing significantly. One major contributor to these accidents is the inconsiderate (and unlawful) parking on single yellow lines between this junction and the High Street shops, which severely restricts the vision of drivers entering the High Street. Can Parking Enforcement be directed to take a zero tolerance approach to parking offences in this area, and increase the frequency of patrols, particularly at peak times when the local school traffic is at its highest?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question, Cllr Thomas.

I understand that this junction has been a source of concern for some years and that the development along this stretch of Ashford Road has aggravated the situation here. I can assure you that there will be frequent and stringent enforcement patrols in this area particularly during peak times. It is worth mentioning however, that loading and unloading is allowed on yellow lines so vehicles actively engaged in such activities will continue to be permitted to do so.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Can a more restrictive parking design be applied to this junction, in line with that proposed by New Romney Town Council in their Parish Highway Improvement Plan, which already has the support of Kent County Council and the local KCC Member and could we engage the services of the FHDC specialist for to support these changes?

ANSWER:

We are aware of New Romney Town Council's Highway Improvement Plan. Kent County Council as the highway authority are responsible for safety

restrictions, but our officers are liaising with the county council to establish the scope for further restrictions in the area and will ensure district council's continue this liaison. As mentioned, vehicles delivering to businesses on the High Street do tend to park on the yellow lines. Therefore, officers are looking into the possibility of introducing loading restrictions in parts of the High Street and Ashford Road where temporarily parked vehicles can cause an obstruction or hazard.

7. From Councillor Alan Martin to Councillor Jim Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

~~Following the recent presentation by Matthew Pardo, of EDF Energy, to Councillors at Dungeness on 7th July, the creation of Great British Nuclear and support from the Energy Minister following his visit to Dungeness on 17th July, can the Leader confirm that the Council will fully engage with KCC and support the case for SMRs at Dungeness?~~

Councillor A Martin indicated that the extensive and positive response the Leader had given to question 4 had answered his question, and reiterated that for those on the Marsh, this was an important topic and they wished to support the Leader in any way they could.

ANSWER:

Whatever my personal views are on nuclear power generation, I am under a duty as Leader of the council to pursue any opportunity that will provide 500 well paid engineering jobs in this district. There are bridges to cross and things to consider but I would be failing in my duty if I did not take every opportunity to try and secure those jobs.

8. From Councillor David Godfrey to Councillor Jim Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy

Further to the Leaders proclamation that Princes Parade is 'Saved' at the Annual Council meeting on 24th May, he has announced the extension of planning permission and quite properly expressed caution over the swift removal of hoardings, Now that he has had time to fully absorb the implications of completely abandoning the Princess Parade project and loss of an asset worth more than £20,000,000 to the residents of the whole of the District can he categorically confirm that no development will take place on PP?

ANSWER:

Thank you, Councillor Godfrey, for your question, as you know this is a topic close to my heart and I am grateful, as ever, for the opportunity to discuss the Prince's Parade Project. Having spent so many years, being ignored, as a Fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, offering an expert opinion that the project was not viable, I do find it flattering that so many

people analyse my every word I now speak on the Prince's Parade Project as a lay person.

This administration inherited the Prince's Parade Project which had been "paused". The contractor, BAM had ceased work and had removed their site set up: portacabins, offices, storage etc. There was no work taking place and the site was inactive. The construction of the project, including the proposed swimming pool, which I agree, may have had an asset value of £20M was going to cost £50M to construct. If I can be accredited with saving, not only Prince's Parade but also saving this Council £30M, I will gladly accept the accolade!

The current work on Princes Parade as approved by Cabinet, is to undertake an environmental report to ascertain the work that needs to be completed to enable the hoarding to be removed. When this work is completed and it is confirmed that it is safe to take the hoarding down and replace it with a lower level fence, there will be public consultation to consider the possible options for the site, this will allow the public to share their views on the future use of Prince's Parade.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

9. From Councillor Cooper to Councillor P Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Transport, Regulatory Services and Building Control

Residents are concerned the Fire Hydrant in Aspen Close, St Mary's Bay is being obstructed by inconsiderate parking and making it difficult for large delivery, refuge vehicles and residents to access their properties, never mind turn round. Its an accident waiting to happen, and given Kent County Council have refused to paint any yellow lines due to the lack of crash data. Would she please, use her discretion to enable double yellow lines be installed at this location as soon as is possible?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question, Cllr Cooper and for alerting me to the parking issues in Aspen Close.

As mentioned in my answer to Cllr Thomas, safety restrictions are the responsibility of the highway authority, Kent County Council. FHDC is responsible for controlled parking zones (CPZs) and will deal with safety restrictions within them. We will highlight the Aspen Close issues with KCC. Unfortunately, we cannot decide on the schemes KCC chooses to implement.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

10. **From Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee to Councillor J Martin, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy**

At the recent Personnel Committee the Chief Executive listed the priorities of your administration in addition to maintaining the delivery of front line services. With budget pressures and time constraints on moving to a Committee system of governance by next May, can you assure me that the Health and well being of staff will not be compromised ?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question, Councillor Hollingsbee, which is very relevant. The Council is currently projecting a £4.5M deficit for 24/25 which this administration has inherited, so our budget pressure has little to do with the move to a committee system.

Your question, quite rightly focuses on the health and well-being of our staff, all 461 of them. We as a Council are very lucky to have such a committed and dedicated group of individuals who choose to work for us in delivering front line services to the people who we serve. Their health and well being is my highest priority because if we lose their dedication and commitment, we, the Council, will fail.

The Chief HR Officer just recently reported to Personnel Committee on a wealth of health and wellbeing initiatives which are part of the People Strategy. These include running internal sessions on health & wellbeing, managing stress, personal resilience, mindfulness, financial wellbeing, menopause awareness and men's mental health, with bespoke sessions for teams such as Customer Services and Grounds Maintenance.

In addition, all staff (and councillors) have access to the F&H Rewards online platform which has a large section dedicated to health & wellbeing.

We also have a team of 35 trained Mental Health First Aiders who are available for staff to access across the council.

Councillors may already be aware of the Kent & Medway's Health Workplaces Award – In October 2022 we received the bronze level award and this was increased to the gold award from March 2023.

The HR & OD team constantly review and increase the wellbeing provision here at the council and ensure that elements such as vicarious trauma support that was identified during the Customer Service Excellence re-accreditation is implemented to provide appropriate support to relevant groups of staff.

I can therefore categorically state that the health and well-being of our staff will not be compromised.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

11 From Councillor Keen to Councillor Speakman, Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations

In view of the economic climate and the fact that FHDC are under financial pressure, could we not look to freezing the Beach Hut Project in favour of services supplied to the residents of the district?

ANSWER:

Thank you Cllr Keen for your question.

The Coast Drive Coastal Destination Project is being delivered for a number of reasons. It will provide a brand new facility on the Marsh, providing beach huts, a boardwalk for all inclusive access to the beach, a classroom and teaching facilities for water sports clubs and a café/kiosk concession, as well as a changing places toilet facility. This will help to increase tourism on the Marsh and generate income to the council and neighbouring businesses. The revenue income from the rental of the beach huts, car parking, the café/kiosk concession and rent from the water sports businesses will be used by the council to help alleviate the financial pressures and fund essential services to residents.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Can you advise what percentage of those beach huts will be earmarked for residents of New Romney and the Marsh and Folkestone, and can that be set in the minutes as said and acted on?

ANSWER:

Regrettably, I don't have this information to hand, but I will find out and report back to you.

After the meeting, the following response was provided:

"The beach hut terms and conditions agreed by Cabinet state that 85% of beach hut tenants must reside within the district and 15% can reside outside of the district.

Out of the 108 Folkestone beach huts that are currently let, 98 are let to tenants within the district and 10 are let to tenants outside of the district".

12. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Prater, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for finance and governance

Can we please have some clarity around how much gross and net revenue we as a council make from the Parking Enforcement service?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question Nicola.

Sadly, there is no simple answer. On and off street parking enforcement has both has income you can't quantify, and income you can't quantify. There are many costs outside of just the cost of wardens.

So for income there is clearly fine income, (the amount you have issued tickets for) but also without parking enforcement, fewer people would pay for their parking. The act of enforcement encourages people to pay to make sure they are not going to get a fine. However you can't quantify that income. You also can't quantify the benefit of enforcement to stop vehicles blocking roads with obstructive parking for instance.

The aim of parking enforcement is not to maximise income, but to improve traffic management for the benefit of the community.

The QUANTIFIABLE benefit of parking enforcement is fines issued, but there are many more unquantifiable ones.

The costs of parking enforcement are not just traffic wardens, but all the lines, signs, machines, servicing, other staff time, fine collection, cash collection and more. Traffic wardens are a part of that, but not even the biggest part of enforcement costs.

In bald terms, £870,160 was spent on parking enforcement, including some of the parking services direct costs, in the last year. That is not just the direct cost of wardens.

Fines income alone totalled £569,808, but the income from charges and permits was much more than that again.

The parking accounts are published annually on the council's website at <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-transparency/parking-accounts> (which is catchy!) with much detail than even I could give you this evening.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

13. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Shoob, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

With recent publicity around rat infested council properties in the district why are we charging our tenants for pest control?

ANSWER:

Unfortunately, common pests, such as fleas, rats, mice, ants, wasps, etc. are a part of everyday life and can cause distress in all types of dwellings. The reasons why someone may have a problem with pests in their home are varied and not usually as a result of any problems with the house or flat itself. As such, it is Council procedure that it is the responsibility of the tenant or resident to deal with pests in their own home.

In regard to reports of pests in council owned and managed properties where property maintenance issues are a contributing factor – such as missing brickwork for example that may be allowing access for rodents, then the council as landlord will make any necessary repairs as part of our normal repairing obligations.

Where the communal areas – of a block of flats– are infested with pests, or where problems in the communal areas may be a contributing factor to pests in individual properties, then the council housing landlord service will carry out any necessary treatments or works. In a recent example of this in Folkestone, the landlord service has arranged for bait boxes to be laid in the communal areas, and is carrying out some groundworks to prevent rodents entering the building via the sewerage system. Advice has been given to all tenants on best ways to avoid attracting pests such as rats and mice.

The council website gives advice and recommends residents to utilise the services of our preferred supplier AGS Pest Control who offer all residents of Folkestone & Hythe District reduced rates.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Where our tenants, especially those in council properties, are on low incomes and benefits, can there be some mean tested way of dealing with it? It is the poorest families in our district who will suffer as they do not have the money to pay for pest control.

ANSWER:

As mentioned, there is the pest control company which offers reduced rates to residents, but I'm happy to discuss, if you have budget ideas about how we can fund a subsidy. If it is a problem in people homes, it is unfortunately the responsibility of the tenant or owner.

14. From Councillor Keen to Councillor Shoob, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

How many families that are on the housing register have been accommodated out of the district, and how many families have been placed in B&B's in the last 12 months?

ANSWER:

The Council does not accommodate people from our housing list outside the district. The list contains the households who are looking to access Council

and housing association homes in the district. With approximately 1540 households on the housing list at present, some households may themselves choose to move into the private rented sector, including homes in other districts, rather than wait on the housing list.

During 2022/23, 92 households were accommodated in B and B type accommodation whilst long-term homes were identified for them. The use of B and B type accommodation by the Council is reported as part of the Council's quarterly performance process and the Council only uses this form of accommodation in emergency situations.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

None.

15. From Councillor Chapman to Councillor P Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Transport, Regulatory Services and Building Control

The number one issue that residents in Folkestone Harbour ward raise with me is the issue of parking. Could the council increase the presence of its civil enforcement officers to deter the inconsiderate parking which is affecting people's enjoyment of their homes? Additionally, can be more be done to deter the pavements from being blocked in Harbour ward because parents with pushchairs, the elderly and those with mobility issues are being forced to walk into the road and traffic simple to go about their business?

ANSWER:

Many thanks for your question Cllr Chapman.

The council is aware of the parking problems experienced by residents in Folkestone Harbour and has already increased patrols there. Two officers now patrol this locality regularly throughout the day. A consultation has just started on amending the existing traffic regulation order (TRO) to introduce further restrictions on The Stade and Fishmarket. The proposed loading restrictions will ban waiting and loading on existing yellow lines. In addition, blue badge holders will not be permitted to park on areas with a loading ban and in the proposed loading bays, which should further ease the situation for residents.

To your next point, there is no blanket ban on pavement parking outside London, so restrictions have to be applied locally through a TRO. The Department for Transport is considering overhauling the rules to bring the rest of the country in line with the capital and we have brought pressure on them to do so. Unfortunately, there has been little progress so far.

Our current footway ban TRO does include some of the roads within the Harbour Ward, so we have instructed officers to ensure enforcement action is taken on vehicles seen parked in breach of the Order. Please alert me if there are roads with pavement parking problems so I can let the council's highway

engineer know. He will then carry out an assessment and if satisfied that restrictions are necessary, will make recommendations to the council's Joint Transportation Board.

Finally I'm aware that parking is an ongoing issue right across the district. Councillors should feel free to raise issues with me as they occur rather than waiting for the next full council.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

The time limit for Councillor questions expired prior to a supplementary question being asked.