

Defining moment for the Hoo Peninsula

Some of our readers might have recently received a glossy consultation leaflet from Medway Council concerning its latest attempt to 'transform' the Hoo Peninsula.

The leaflet was titled 'Hoo - New Routes to Good Growth'.

The document provided an overview of Medway Council's key objectives, particularly proposals affecting Chattenden, High Halstow and Hoo, although Allhallows, Grain, St. Mary Hoo and Stoke will also be impacted.

The proposals outlined in the leaflet are part of Medway Council's efforts to produce a coherent local plan for the Medway Towns (this is Medway Council's third attempt) and includes an allocation to build a staggering 12,000 more homes on the Hoo Peninsula.

Before any building can be allowed to commence, and the local landscape is forever changed, Medway Council must deliver the infrastructure to facilitate tens of thousands of new residents.

Medway Council's proposals represent the most dramatic population change on the Hoo Peninsula since the building of power stations and heavy industry at Kingsnorth and Grain - between the 1950s and the 1970s - when many villages and communities, particularly Allhallows, Grain, High Halstow and Hoo, more than doubled in size to accommodate thousands of relocated workers (from around the country).

What happened in the past is especially stark when comparing the population data from the censuses of 1951 and 1971. The 1951 census shows: Allhallows (369), Grain (542), High Halstow (401) and Hoo

(2,487) - compared with the 1971 census: Allhallows (1,130), Grain (1,470), High Halstow (1,025) and Hoo (7,725).

Some of our readers have told us that they are concerned about why Medway Council appears to be targeting greenfield sites on the Hoo Peninsula when there are, arguably, more sustainable alternative greenfield sites around Rainham and Capstone Valley - some residents even suggesting political motivation.

The Hoo Peninsula is represented by six ward councillors in two wards (Peninsula and Strood Rural). Four of the six councillors are members of the controlling group (Conservative Party).

Developing greenfield sites around Rainham and Capstone Valley would affect residents of seven wards (Rainham South, Rainham North, Rainham Central, Lordswood & Captstone, Hempstead & Wigmore, Princes Park and Walderslade) represented by 16 ward councillors. All 16 are members of the controlling group (Conservative Party).

Medway Council's 'Future Medway - Development Strategy Consultation' document states that developing the Hoo Peninsula could remove the possibility of developing sites in Capstone Valley and north of Rainham.

Medway Council's ambitions are being bolstered by £170m government (taxpayer) funding (Housing Infrastructure Fund) to build new infrastructure, including a new road linking the A289 to the A228, improving junctions along Peninsula Way and attempting to reintroduce a long-closed passenger railway service. There'll also be provision for new public open

spaces, footpaths, cycleways, bridleways and designated areas for wildlife.

Despite many years of likely upheaval and disruption, as well as losing local landscape, Medway Council's own business case economic appraisal on its proposed infrastructure improvements appears to show a negative overall impact once the 12,000 new homes have been taken into account.

Medway Council's current consultation will end on 8th March. Find out more by visiting: medway.gov.uk/futurehoo.

The local plan for the Medway Towns is set to be published this spring and will be followed by a formal consultation.

It will then be submitted to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rt. Hon. Robert Jenrick MP) who will appoint an Independent Examiner to judge the merits of the plan and decide the outcome.

If you don't want to take part in the consultation but want to share your views with your local councillors, their contact details are on page 34.

Due to the government (taxpayer) funding (Housing Infrastructure Fund), you can also contact Kelly Tolhurst (MP for Rochester & Strood) and tell her what you think. Write to: Kelly Tolhurst MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or email: kelly.tolhurst.mp@parliament.uk

Kelly is currently a minister in the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government and reports to the Rt. Hon. Robert Jenrick MP.



Park proposal is only part of the story

Many residents from around the Hoo Peninsula, particularly those in Chattenden and Hoo, have contacted the Village Voices Community Magazine to say that they feel bamboozled by the recent rush of Medway Council consultations and planning applications concerning the future of the Hoo Peninsula.

In our article last month (Defining Moment for the Hoo Peninsula) we referred to Medway Council's 'Hoo - New Routes to Good Growth' (Housing Infrastructure Fund - HIF) consultation currently taking place. This consultation ends on 7th March and includes proposals to facilitate the building of 12,000 more homes on the Hoo Peninsula, including a new road link (read more about this on the opposite page), a new public open space (Cockham Community Park - located between Chattenden and Hoo) and reintroducing a long-closed passenger railway service.

Despite the HIF consultation running until 7th March, Medway Council appears to have put 'the cart before the horse' by submitting planning application MC/20/3264 (on 21st December 2020) to commence implementing Cockham Community Park - potentially overlooking whatever happens during the current 'Hoo - New Routes to Good Growth' consultation.

Introducing a new community park seems like a good idea, but there's more to Medway Council's ambitions than simply creating a new park. It would cost in the region of £4.5m of government (taxpayer) funding - from a pot of £170m intended to fund infrastructure improvements to facilitate large-scale housing development on the Hoo Peninsula.

Planning application MC/20/3264 doesn't appear to mention anything about the park's likely dependency on building more than 1,500 homes on agricultural land situated around the proposed park (stretching from Church Farm Close in Hoo to Toad Hall Crescent in Chattenden) - a consequence being that centuries of heritage will be destroyed when Chattenden and Hoo are physically joined together - separated by a minuscule 'green buffer' of just 82 metres.

The park could eventually be handed over to a private company or organisation to run and there's a possibility that any proposed neighbouring dwellings would have to pay an ongoing 'service charge' for the management and maintenance of the park.

Although the formal consultation period for Medway Council's planning application (MC/20/3264) expired on 5th February 2021 - the local planning authority is obliged to continue accepting representations until the application is decided. To submit feedback about this application, write to: Planning Control, Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, ME4 4TR (quoting the reference number). You can also visit Medway Council's website (medway.gov.uk) where you should navigate to the Planning section and 'search for an application'. Enter the reference number (MC/20/3264) and you'll be able to explore the relevant documentation. The proposed park straddles the Medway Council wards of Peninsula and Strood Rural. If you want to share your views with your ward councillors - contact details can be found on page 34. Due to the government (taxpayer) HIF funding, you could also try contacting Kelly Tolhurst MP (Rochester and Strood) and tell her what you think (contact details on the opposite page).

Wainscott residents raging about new road



The A289 (near Higham Road) where the proposed slip roads and overbridge will be built.

Residents in Wainscott are raging with anger about Medway Council's proposals to build a new junction on the A289 Hasted Road (including two new slip roads and an overbridge) to support a new route linking to the Hoo Peninsula - destroying country lanes and agricultural land, as well as increasing the level of traffic and pollution in the locality.

The new junction would include creating two slip roads - with the east-bound slip joining Higham Road and the west-bound slip joining the A289 using an overbridge - running only metres away from existing dwellings on Grant Road and Leigh Road.



Islingham Farm Road.

The east-bound slip road joining Higham Road from the A289 would follow a route along Islingham Farm Road, up Woodfield Way to the Kitchener Road roundabout, through part of the old Chattenden barracks site (on a newly created road), through a former recreation ground and across Chattenden Lane - slicing north Chattenden into two (near the junction with Swinton Avenue). The route would then cut through what is currently agricultural land to join the A228 Peninsula Way at the Main Road (Hoo) roundabout. The plans also show that a new spur road would be created (before joining the A228) leading through agricultural land and a section of the former Deangate golf course - subsequently joining Peninsula Way, with another roundabout, further along.

Local Wainscott residents Sharron Atkins and Debbie Hu have produced and delivered hundreds of leaflets to other local residents - encouraging them to oppose the plans by objecting to Medway Council's proposals.

The controversial proposals are part of Medway Council's ambitions to implement infrastructure for large-scale housing development on the Hoo Peninsula - known as the 'Hoo - New Routes to Good Growth' (Housing Infrastructure Fund - HIF) consultation.

If you'd like to take part in this consultation - you'll find all the relevant documentation on Medway Council's website (medway.gov.uk/futurehoo), or phone 07970 322897 to request a paper copy (if you're not online). The consultation ends on 7th March 2021.

If you don't want to take part in the consultation but want to share your views with your ward councillors - contact details can be found on page 34. Due to the government (taxpayer) HIF funding, you could also try contacting Kelly Tolhurst MP (Rochester and Strood) and tell her what you think. Write to: Kelly Tolhurst MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or email: kelly.tolhurst.mp@parliament.uk

More time to have your say about controversial road plans

Against a backdrop of fierce opposition from many Wainscott residents concerning Medway Council's proposals to create a new junction on the A289 Hasted Road, including two new slip roads and an overbridge, Medway Council has extended the deadline for its public consultation to 6th April 2021 (from 7th March).

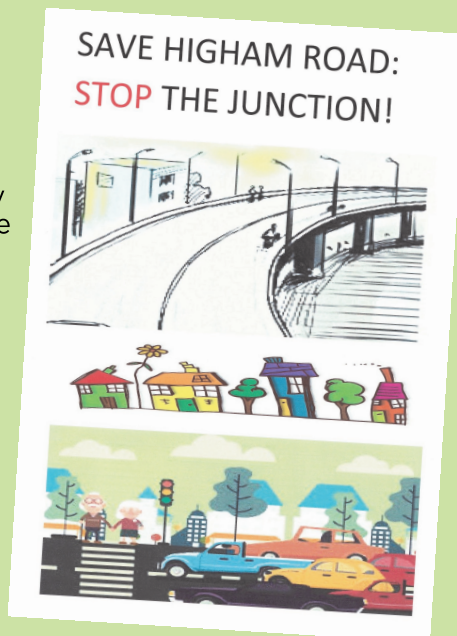
Medway Council told Village Voices Publishing that the deadline had been extended because some households in the Wainscott area didn't receive a consultation leaflet during the distribution period in December 2020. Council officials have confirmed that the leaflet had since been delivered to the affected residents.

As outlined in last month's Village Voices Community Magazine, the controversial plans are part of Medway Council's ambitions to implement infrastructure for large-scale housing development, of around 12,000 new homes, on the Hoo Peninsula - known as the 'Hoo - New Routes to Good Growth' (Housing Infrastructure Fund - HIF) consultation.

Some residents in Wainscott have been delivering their own leaflets and posters (pictured right) objecting to the proposals. They've also organised an online petition (on Medway Council's website) demanding that the controversial plans are dropped. Visit Medway Council's website to sign the petition. You should navigate to the petition section and search for 'Stop Wainscott HIF Phase'.

If you haven't yet been able to take part in this important consultation - you'll find all the relevant documentation online (medway.gov.uk/futurehoo). If you don't have internet access phone Medway Council on 07970 322897 to request a paper copy.

If you'd like to share your views with your ward councillors - their contact details can be found on page 34. Due to the government (taxpayer) HIF funding, you can also try contacting Kelly Tolhurst MP (Rochester and Strood) and tell her what you think. Write to: Kelly Tolhurst MP, House of Commons, London, SW1 0AA or email: kelly.tolhurst.mp@parliament.uk



Uncertain future for Stoke Primary

A proposal to merge Stoke Primary Academy and Allhallows Primary Academy is back on the table - just 19 months after Lord Agnew (the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System) rejected similar plans proposed by the Leigh Academies Trust, which runs both.

A public outcry from the local community ensued in June and July 2019 when the previous consultation took place. Villagers marched from Stoke to Allhallows in opposition to the proposals and to highlight the inadequacy of Allhallows Road and Stoke Road. This is the only directly route linking the two villages, but it doesn't have any footpath provision.

33 children currently attend Stoke Primary and 170 attend Allhallows Primary.

Leigh Academies Trust revealed its new merger proposals earlier this month - claiming that the number of children attending Stoke Primary is set to continue falling, as only six families selected Stoke Primary as a first choice for Reception last September.

The Leigh Academies Trust consultation will involve discussions with parents, carers and relevant stakeholders - with any changes to take effect in September 2021.

Exploratory work begins on A289 before consultation ends

Residents in Wainscott received just five days notice from Medway Council last month to close lanes on the A289 Hasted Road for four to five weeks (from 15th March) - to undertake exploratory ground investigation surveys for proposed changes to the highway - part of the Medway Council's controversial 'New Routes to Good Growth' (Housing Infrastructure Fund - HIF) project.

In what many of our readers have described as a classic case of 'putting the cart before the horse', Medway Council didn't even wait for its own HIF consultation with local residents to end (on 6th April) before moving in!

Highways England told Village Voices Publishing that local authorities tend to work to their own rules, but that the notice period required for implementing closures is normally mirrored by the amount of time a lane is being closed for. For example, 10 days notice is usually given to lane closures of between four and 10 days. 90 days notice is usually given for closures of more than 10 days.

We don't know why Medway Council only gave local residents five days written notice for works lasting up to five weeks, but it appears that the work only took a week or two to complete anyway!



Restaurant owner bids farewell to village and gives the gift of food

The owner of an Indian restaurant in Higham generously donated 300 delicious meals to frontline Covid-19 vaccination workers and local charities on 28th February as part of his farewell gift to the local community.

Shiraz Miah, owner of the Anisa Restaurant, was supported by local volunteers, who dispatched his delicious Indian cuisine to hardworking staff at The Woodville vaccination centre in Gravesend, as well as to staff and volunteers at local charities Club AUsome and The Ellenor Hospice.

Shiraz is no stranger to supporting the local community. Back in July 2020 we reported that his Anisa Restaurant donated 200 meals a week during periods of the first lockdown to hospitals (local NHS), care homes, key workers, volunteers, as well as to those who were shielding.

Although the Anisa Restaurant, on Gravesend Road in Higham, has now closed, Shiraz is hoping to return soon, but to bigger premises.



Overview of Medway Council's plans to 'transform' the Hoo Peninsula

Despite Medway Council having so far undertaken two consultations on the Hoo Peninsula and neighbouring communities (there's been three if you live in Hoo and Chattenden) many of our readers are feeling confused, exacerbated and somewhat bamboozled by the controversial proposals.

The three consultations (listed at the bottom of this page) came about as a result of Medway Council successfully bidding for £170m of government (taxpayer) funding from the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) to implement the 'necessary infrastructure' to facilitate the building of up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula. The project is known as 'New Routes to Good Growth'.

Medway Council's infrastructure plans include creating a new route on and off the Hoo Peninsula with a junction on the A289 Hasted Road and two slip roads - with the east-bound slip joining Higham Road and the west-bound slip joining the A289 using an overbridge - running only metres away from existing dwellings on Grant Road and Leigh Road.

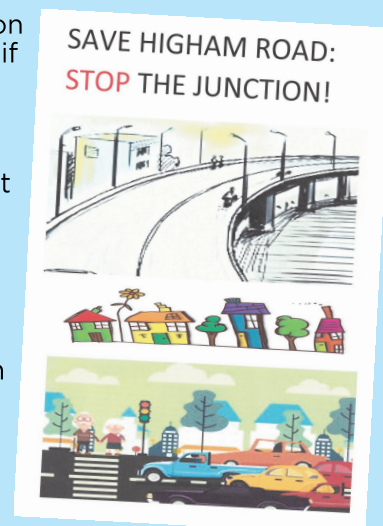
The east-bound slip road joining Higham Road from the A289 would follow a route along Islingham Farm Road, up Woodfield Way to the Kitchener Road roundabout, through part of the old Chattenden barracks site (on a newly created road), through a former recreation ground and across Chattenden Lane - slicing north Chattenden into two (near the junction with Swinton Avenue). The route would then cut through what is currently agricultural land to join the A228 Peninsula Way at the Main Road (Hoo) roundabout. The plans also show that a new spur road would be created (before joining the A228) leading through agricultural land and a section of the former Deangate golf course - subsequently joining Peninsula Way, with another roundabout, further along.

Although more detailed development plans will not be confirmed until Medway Council's draft Local Plan is published, information has already been made available outlining potential sites and the proposed number of new homes to be built in specific communities - part of a document called the 'Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA)', published in 2019. Because of the HIF project, the number of houses potentially allocated to each community, as outlined in the SLAA, is stated as follows: Hoo (8,110), Chattenden (1,118), High Halstow (819) and Allhallows (490). Other communities are not currently allocated any housing under the HIF project.

This massive increase in housing, population and vehicle movements will clearly have a huge impact on local facilities and services - even once the infrastructure proposals have been delivered. Regardless of whether a village or community has been designated any HIF housing, or if the number is small, every community on the Hoo Peninsula, and surrounding area, will be affected in some way - particularly all those who need to travel along the A228.

There are concerns that the HIF funding and proposed infrastructure improvements will not be sufficient to mitigate such a massive increase in housing. In fact, a section of Medway Council's own business case, evaluating the impact of the proposals from a highways perspective, includes data tables appearing to show that travel time, economic efficiency, noise from local traffic, local air quality, greenhouse gasses and the number of accidents are all predicted to get worse compared with today - even with the proposed new infrastructure in place.

HIF related consultations so far carried out by Medway Council include 'Planning for growth on the Hoo Peninsula' (March to May 2020), 'Hoo - New Routes to Good Growth' (January to April 2021) and, in Hoo and Chattenden, a consultation called 'Cockham Community Parkland' (July to September 2020).



Plot thickens as MP disses HIF!

Despite having supported Medway Council's initial 'expression of interest' (submitted to government in 2017) backing Medway Council's efforts to apply for £170m of government (taxpayer) funding to implement infrastructure improvements to facilitate the building of up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula - local MP Kelly Tolhurst has now said that she has "little confidence" in Medway Council being able to deliver its 'New Routes to Good Growth' (Housing Infrastructure Fund - HIF) proposals in time or to budget and no longer supports the project in its current state.

The news will come as a major blow to Medway Council as the HIF project is assumed to be a key part of the local authority's emerging Local Plan. It isn't yet clear whether Medway Council will now scrap its HIF project altogether.

Kelly Tolhurst's shock announcement, made in a communication to some residents on 1st April, stopped short of expressly coming out against the building of up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula, and implementing the necessary infrastructure, but promised to ensure that the concerns of local residents would be heard by government ministers. Ms Tolhurst also accused Medway Council of progressing the HIF project "without the involvement of the community".



Kelly Tolhurst MP.

If you'd like to have your say on Medway Council's 'New Routes to Good Growth' (HIF) project, contact Kelly Tolhurst MP and tell her what you think. Write to: Kelly Tolhurst MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or email: kelly.tolhurst.mp@parliament.uk

As well as contacting Kelly Tolhurst, many local residents have also signed petitions. The Stop The Wainscott Flyover group started a petition on Medway Council's website called 'Stop Wainscott HIF Phase' - it attracted more than 700 signatures and was submitted on 9th April. The Deangate Community Partnership launched a petition on its website called 'Save Deangate' - at the time of going to print more than 3,000 people had signed it. The We Object To Cockham Community Parkland group set up a petition on the change.org website called 'We Object To Cockham Community Parkland' - this had been signed by more than 175 people at the time of going to print.

Following Medway Council's 'expression of interest' submission in 2017 (to government), the local authority was then permitted to formally submit a bid and business case, which it did in March 2019. Although the government announced that Medway Council had successfully bid for the £170m of taxpayer funding in November 2019, the funding will not be released until after Medway Council has submitted its draft Local Plan to the Secretary of State - for independent examination. We understand that Medway Council was intending to publish its draft Local Plan later this year, although the timetable has previously been delayed due to setbacks.

At a meeting of Medway Council's controlling cabinet on 5th February 2019, held to sanction the submitting of Medway Council's HIF bid to government (this happened in March 2019), it was confirmed that failure to successfully obtain the £170m of funding, for infrastructure improvements, would restrict housing growth on the Hoo Peninsula to approximately no more than 1,000 dwellings (as at February 2019). Modelling carried out to review the capacity of existing infrastructure showed that growth on the Hoo Peninsula is limited and required "major infrastructure improvements" for any additional housing.

In other HIF related news, despite having already completed three consultations, Medway Council posted a job vacancy on the same day as Kelly Tolhurst's shock announcement (on 1st April) for a 'Head of HIF & Regeneration' post. At this stage we have no idea if this is a new post or if someone held the post previously. The job profile lists 'Deangate' as a 'key physical regeneration project'.

Council leader contradicts his own HIF cabinet report

The leader of Medway Council, Cllr. Alan Jarrett, appeared to contradict his own cabinet report about Medway Council's Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) project (known as 'New Routes to Good Growth') in a series of baffling remarks he made at an open meeting of Medway Councillors on 22nd April.

Cllr. Jarrett left some onlookers scratching their heads when he warned residents of the Hoo Peninsula, particularly those who oppose Medway Council's plans, that developers would press ahead with building more than 10,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula regardless of the proposed £170m of taxpayer funded infrastructure improvements.

However, Cllr. Jarrett's comments appear to contradict an official report agreed at Medway Council's controlling cabinet on 5th February 2019. This meeting sanctioned the submitting of Medway Council's HIF bid to government (this happened the following month) to apply for the £170m of funding to implement the 'necessary infrastructure' to facilitate the building of up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula. The report confirmed that failure to successfully obtain the funding would restrict housing growth (on the Hoo Peninsula) to approximately no more than 1,000 dwellings (as at February 2019). It also referred to modelling carried out to review the capacity of existing infrastructure. This showed that growth (on the Hoo Peninsula) is limited and would require 'major infrastructure improvements' for any additional housing.

Cllr. Jarrett represents Lordswood and Capstone ward, in Chatham. He has vigorously objected to any large-scale house building in his own ward, or near it, particularly within the Capstone Valley area.

Although the government announced that Medway Council had successfully bid for the £170m of taxpayer funding in November 2019, the funding won't be released until at least after Medway Council has submitted its draft Local Plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination.

Many local residents feel that Medway Council's process for allocating future house building, as part of its proposed Local Plan, disproportionately targets the Hoo Peninsula, particularly Peninsula ward, in favour of protecting greenfield sites in and around Rainham and the Capstone Valley - areas represented by 16 members of Medway Council's controlling group (Conservative Party). Many of our readers now believe that the work to develop a Local Plan for the Medway Towns, and the Hoo Peninsula, would be better placed in the hands of government officials, who may approach the task without the influence of 'local politics'.

If you'd like to have your say about Medway Council's 'New Routes to Good Growth' (HIF) project, contact Kelly Tolhurst MP and tell her what you think. Write to: Kelly Tolhurst MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or email: kelly.tolhurst.mp@parliament.uk

Alternatively, write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick MP, and tell him what you think. Write to: Robert Jenrick MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or email: robert.jenrick.mp@parliament.uk



Battle rages on to save Deangate

Members of the Deangate Community Partnership, a local campaign group, met Medway Council officials on 22nd April to discuss the future of the former Deangate Golf Course, located between Hoo and High Halstow.

Medway Council closed this much-loved facility in April 2018. At some point in 2019 Medway Norse, Medway Council's contractor, was granted permission to use part of the site.

At its recent meeting with Medway Council, the Deangate Community Partnership sought to establish Medway Council's intentions and assess the potential for community involvement.

As part of its work to produce a Local Plan, Medway Council earmarked Deangate for around 750 homes.

The former golf course has become a haven for dog walkers. In fact, local residents have adopted it as 'Hoo Country Park'.

The Deangate Community Partnership successfully registered the site as an Asset of Community Value in 2018.

Kelly Tolhurst MP recently signed a petition calling on Medway Council to scrap proposals to build a relief road through part of Deangate and to protect it as a country park.

HIF project at 'significant risk of failing'

At a meeting of Medway Council's cabinet on 4th May it was agreed to add the delivery of the council's Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) project (known as 'New Routes to Good Growth') to the local authority's 'Strategic Risk Register'.

The register showed that council officials had concluded that plans to 'transform the Hoo Peninsula' are at 'significant risk of failing' because its proposed infrastructure may 'not fully create the sustainable community that it aims to', 'it may not be possible to deliver all the required improvements within the £170m budget' and 'delays to the programme may be caused at various stages for each of the delivery streams, which could potentially lead to slippage beyond the delivery deadline (of 2024)'.

Although the government announced that Medway Council had successfully bid for £170m of taxpayer funding in November 2019 (via government agency Homes England), allowing Medway Council to implement the 'necessary infrastructure' to facilitate the building of up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula, the funding won't be released at least until after the local authority has submitted its draft Local Plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination.

As part of a rigorous reporting process, Homes England is monitoring Medway Council's progress on delivering its plans by the end of the funding period in 2024.

Back in April, we reported that local MP Kelly Tolhurst had 'little confidence' in Medway Council being able to deliver its HIF proposals in time or to budget and that she no longer supported the project, in its current state.

The 'Strategic Risk Register' confirmed that if any element of the council's HIF proposals is not delivered within the funding period or within the £170m budget, the entire HIF project could fail - causing 'reputational damage to both the council and Homes England'.

During Medway Council's cabinet meeting on 4th May, it was also confirmed that consultants had been appointed to 'identify potential cost savings' and to 'audit current designs and review the budget at each stage', but no detail was given about specific changes to its plans and the subsequent impact on the Hoo Peninsula community.

If you'd like to have your say about Medway Council's controversial 'New Routes to Good Growth' (HIF) project, contact Kelly Tolhurst MP and tell her what you think. Write to: Kelly Tolhurst MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or email: kelly.tolhurst.mp@parliament.uk

Alternatively, write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick MP, and tell him what you think. Write to: Robert Jenrick MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or email: robert.jenrick.mp@parliament.uk

As a result of significant opposition from residents in Wainscott, regarding a proposed junction (and flyover) on the A289/Hasted Road in Wainscott, Village Voices Publishing understands that council officials are now looking at alternative designs of the road scheme and will apparently publish its findings in due course.

Members of Medway Council's cabinet: Leader - Cllr. Alan Jarrett (Lordswood and Capstone ward), Deputy Leader - Cllr. Howard Doe (Rainham South ward), Cllr. David Brake (Walderslade ward), Cllr. Rupert Turpin (Rochester South and Horsted ward), Cllr. Josie Iles (Strood South ward), Cllr. Martin Potter (Rainham North ward), Cllr. Phil Filmer (Peninsula ward), Cllr. Rodney Chambers OBE (Hempstead and Wigmore ward), Cllr. Jane Chitty (Strood North ward) and Cllr. Adrian Gulvin (Walderslade ward).

Deangate campaign group to submit parliamentary petition

Having submitted a petition to Medway Council earlier this year calling for the former Deangate golf course, in Hoo, to be protected as a country park, the Deangate Community Partnership has now persuaded local MP Kelly Tolhurst to present a parliamentary petition to the House of Commons on 21st July.



The former Deangate golf course is generally known as 'Hoo Country Park' by local residents.

The new petition relates to key aspects of Medway Council's controversial 'Hoo - New Routes to Good Growth' (Housing Infrastructure Fund - HIF) project - created to implement the 'necessary infrastructure' to build up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula.

Although stopping short of calling for the entire HIF project to be scrapped, including the proposed allocation of thousands of new homes, the petition calls on the government to reject Medway Council's current road scheme. The petition also calls for the former golf course to be utilised as a country park.

The road plans include a new junction on the A289 Hasted Road - consisting of a slip road and flyover to and from Higham Road in Wainscott, a 'relief' road through Chattenden to the A228, plus a spur road through a section of the former golf course.

The petition is a physical document and sheets can be obtained by contacting George Crozer on 07711 432598 or Ron Sands on 07784 103447.

Signed petition sheets must be returned to George Crozer by 5pm on 16th July 2021.

Support group for carers

Not-for-profit organisation Carers First provides free help and support to those who look after and care for a family member or friend, including advice on improving the quality of life for those who care and help with applying for benefits (for carers and those being cared for).

Carers First operates from an office in Strood and provide regular advice and support to carers, including running a monthly carers support group and helpline.

If you'd like to find out more, or to request a brochure, phone 0300 303 1555 or email: hello@carersfirst.org.uk



Church with Dickens link welcomes back theatre group

After a long period of not being able to stage live performances - a theatre group is set to return to an historic local church, where the daughter of the novelist Charles Dickens was married in 1860.

'This Is My Theatre Group' will return to St. Mary's Church in Lower Higham on Tuesday 31st August, at 6pm, to perform Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic story 'The Secret Garden'.

The story centres around Mary who, returning from India following the death of her parents, is sent to live with her uncle on his estate in the Yorkshire moors. Mary discovers friendship with housemaid Martha and Ben the gardener, but life for all those on the estate changes when she discovers a secret garden - thanks to a friendly Robin.

Tickets are £15 (£12 for under 16s) available online (thisismytheatre.com) or, if you don't have online access, contact the Friends of St. Mary's Church on 07762 054688.

St. Mary's Church is in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust - supported by the Friends of St. Mary's.

Senior councillor suggests that 'a local MP' is misleading the public!

A member of Medway Council's controlling cabinet has suggested that 'a local MP' is spreading misleading information about Medway Council's plans to 'transform the Hoo Peninsula'.

Speaking at a meeting of Medway Council's cabinet on 13th July, Strood North ward councillor Jane Chitty, who is also Medway Council's 'Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation', made the remarks in a short speech concerning the council's progress with developing its Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) project (known as 'Hoo - New Routes to Good Growth').



Cllr. Jane Chitty.

Cllr. Alan Jarrett.

Cllr. Phil Filmer.

Essentially, Cllr. Chitty claimed that 'a local MP' appeared to be misleading the public by advising them that the proposed allocation of up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula would not go ahead if the HIF project is scrapped or fails.

Cllr. Chitty didn't divulge the name of the MP she was referring to but, as far as Village Voices Publishing is aware, the only MP who has withdrawn support for the current HIF project is the MP for Rochester and Strood, Kelly Tolhurst.

Similarly to comments made by the leader of Medway Council (Cllr. Alan Jarrett) at an open meeting on 22nd April (reported in the May edition of the Village Voices Community Magazine), Cllr. Chitty also contradicted an official report agreed by Medway Council's cabinet at a meeting on 5th February 2019. This meeting sanctioned the submission of Medway Council's HIF bid to government agency Homes England (this happened the following month) to apply for the £170m of government (taxpayer) funding to implement what it believes is the 'necessary infrastructure' to facilitate the building of up to 12,000 more homes on the Hoo Peninsula. The report confirmed that failure to successfully obtain the funding would restrict housing growth (on the Hoo Peninsula) to approximately no more than 1,000 dwellings (as at February 2019). It also referred to modelling carried out to review the capacity of existing infrastructure. This showed that growth (on the Hoo Peninsula) is limited and would require 'major infrastructure improvements' for any additional housing.

Incidentally, Cllr. Jarrett repeated his contradictory statements from 22nd April at the recent cabinet meeting on 13th July.

Peninsula ward councillor Phil Filmer, who is Medway Council's 'Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services', was in attendance at the meeting on 13th July.

Our readers, and residents from across the Hoo Peninsula community, will no doubt be feeling confused by the contradictory information emanating from Medway Council's cabinet.

Are residents supposed to believe the statements included in an official report agreed by Medway Council's cabinet on 5th February 2019, or should residents believe the contradictory statements made by both Cllr. Jarrett on 22nd April and 13th July and by Cllr. Chitty on 13th July - when these councillors claimed that developers would press ahead with building the thousands of houses on the Hoo Peninsula regardless of the HIF project?

The statements made by Cllr. Jarrett and Cllr. Chitty seem incompatible with the report agreed by Medway Council's own cabinet on 5th February 2019, after which a bid was submitted to government agency Homes England for £170m of taxpayer funding.

On behalf of our readers, consisting of many thousands of worried residents, we call on our local MP Kelly Tolhurst, who receives this publication, to urgently liaise with Homes England to investigate this situation.

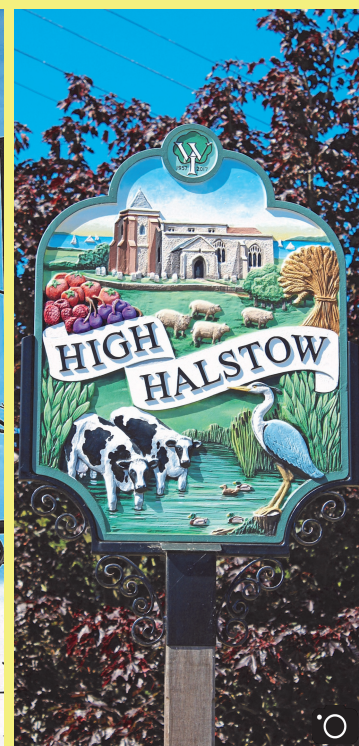
‘No confidence in Medway Council’

Two Parish Councils on the Hoo Peninsula battle with Medway Council over ‘unfair’ and ‘disproportionate’ plans

Two parish councils on the Hoo Peninsula have declared ‘no confidence’ in Medway Council, as a result of the authority’s controversial plans to facilitate the building of up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula.

Members of High Halstow and Hoo St. Werburgh (includes Chattenden and Hoo) parish councils held meetings last month and delivered their verdicts - signalling what could be the most significant backlash from the Hoo Peninsula since Medway Council attempted to earmark Lodge Hill in Chattenden as the site for a 5,000-home new town, which failed in 2013.

Medway Council’s latest plans include a project called ‘Hoo - New Routes to Good Growth’ (Housing Infrastructure Fund - HIF), funded by £170m of government (taxpayer) funding, part of Medway Council’s efforts to produce a coherent Local Plan for the Medway Towns (this will be the third attempt) and includes an allocation to build a staggering 12,000 more homes on the Hoo Peninsula.



Medway Council’s initial bid for taxpayer funding was supported by Gillingham and Rainham MP Rehman Chishti, Chatham and Aylesford MP Tracey Crouch and Rochester and Strood MP Kelly Tolhurst, although Ms Tolhurst has since withdrawn her support for the current project.

Before any building can be allowed to commence, and the local landscape is forever changed, Medway Council must deliver the infrastructure it believes is necessary to facilitate tens of thousands of new residents.

Medway Council’s proposals represent the most dramatic population change on the Hoo Peninsula since the building of power stations and heavy industry at Kingsnorth and Grain - between the 1950s and the 1970s - when many villages and communities, particularly Allhallows, Grain, High Halstow and Hoo, more than doubled in size to accommodate thousands of relocated workers (from around the country).

Many local residents feel that the process used by Medway Council for allocating future house building, as part of its proposed Local Plan, disproportionately targets the Hoo Peninsula, particularly Peninsula ward, in favour of protecting greenfield sites in and around Rainham and the Capstone Valley - areas represented by, or are neighboured by, 16 members of Medway Council’s controlling group (Conservative Party). Many of our readers now believe that the work to develop a Local Plan for the Medway Towns, and the Hoo Peninsula, would be better placed in the hands of independent government officials, who should approach the task fairly and without the influence of local politics.



ViVo

out and about

OUR KERBSIDE MEANDERINGS



ALLHALLOWS: On a recent visit to Slough Fort, ViVo was pleased to see young volunteer Daniela Holgado (Dany). ViVo first met Dany back in April 2017 when she was busy raising money for a charitable cause (called 'Ready, Steady...Read') by selling homemade cupcakes and lemonade on her driveway, with her mum Catharina. Dany now actively volunteers at Slough Fort and her knowledge of the attraction is very impressive!



ALLHALLOWS: ViVo was delighted to see this photo of Daisy meeting the 'Big Momma Koala' cuddly toy for dogs - won in our competition back in July. Fabulous!



HOO PENINSULA: Many of our readers have told us that they feel that the 'project' known as 'Medway Unitary Authority' (Medway Council - formed in 1998) was a bad idea from the outset and has disadvantaged those residing north of the River Medway, particularly those in Strood and on the Hoo Peninsula. As a result of Medway Council's controversial plans to 'transform the Hoo Peninsula', enthusiastically led by a large gang of 'local politicians' from the Gillingham, Rainham and Chatham areas, there's now much debate locally about Strood and the Hoo Peninsula separating from Medway Council to form a new district council, within Kent County Council. ViVo has noticed that folk are showing their defiance of Medway Council by hoisting and displaying the historic flag of Kent in gardens and premises. The flag pictured above is outside Hoo Village Institute.



Share your local news by getting in touch with ViVo (contact details on page three).

CHATHAM: ViVo was perplexed to hear comments made by Cllr. Alan Jarrett, the leader of Medway Council, at a meeting of his controlling cabinet on 24th August. In a somewhat whimsical ramble about Medway Council's controversial plans to 'transform the Hoo Peninsula', Cllr. Jarrett expressed his frustration at those who oppose his plans. ViVo hopes it isn't necessary to remind Cllr. Jarrett that we live in a democracy - where it's completely normal and healthy for people (and communities) to have opposing views, ideas and aspirations. If Cllr. Jarrett, of Chatham, feels that his actions and controversial plans are beyond criticism and opposition - perhaps he's in the wrong job?!





ViVo

out and about

OUR KERBSIDE MEANDERINGS

PARLIAMENT: Local MP Kelly Tolhurst gave a somewhat barnstorming speech in the House of Commons on 16th September, mainly about the possible closure of Chatham Docks, when she took a swipe at Medway Council and its proposed draft Local Plan (read more about this on page six). Kelly referenced the fact that, even though the Medway Council area covers three parliamentary constituencies (Gillingham and Rainham, Chatham and Aylesford and Rochester and Strood), Medway Council is proposing for nearly two-thirds of its total housing target (28,259) to be allocated within the Rochester and Strood constituency, particularly on the Hoo Peninsula. ViVo was interested to see our local MP tackling Medway Council's controversial plans - not least because many of our readers feel that Medway Council's proposals are unfair, disproportionate and politically motivated.



HOO: There are nearly 10 litter bins in and around the centre of Hoo and it sometimes seems odd that some people manage to avoid using them! However, ViVo noticed that some people had been using them enthusiastically in early September, but Medway Council hadn't emptied them! This resulted in overflowing litter - blowing around Hoo Village Square for weeks! ViVo understands that Medway Council contractors are supposed to visit Hoo every day to empty the bins and undertake a brief litter pick. If you spot any service failings like this - get in touch with ViVo (contact details on page three) and share your photos. You could also try contacting your ward councillors to complain and demand action (contact details on page 38).

CLIFFE: Salt Lane has joined a list of prestigious locations around Kent where road signs have been 'fly-stickered' with images of black cats. The mysterious moggy stickers have reportedly been spotted in the village of Wye, the seafront at Ramsgate, outside Kent and Canterbury Hospital, as well as near Sittingbourne and Ashford, and now Salt Lane! ViVo welcomes news of any other locations where the mystery black cats have been seen.



Share your local news by getting in touch with ViVo (contact details on page three).

HIGHAM: Higham Little Book Box, a book sharing initiative, is back in operation following an unfortunate accident on 9th September - when it was hit by a lorry and damaged. The box was repaired and back sharing books on 19th September. Resembling a red and white house, the box was installed back in May, outside Higham Village Club, on Parsonage Lane, and allows villagers to borrow (or keep) books whenever passing.



EVERYWHERE: We're fast approaching that time of year when some organisations decide to undertake consultations or release news they hope will go unnoticed and, quite often, when some housing developers submit planning applications to local planning authorities - possibly hoping that residents will be far too busy (with Christmas and other festivities) to notice! Keep your eyes open everyone!



MP questions the fairness of controversial draft Local Plan

Ahead of Medway Council publishing its controversial draft Local Plan for consultation later this month, local MP Kelly Tolhurst last month has hit out at the local authority and questioned its methodology for how it has allocated areas for future housing development.

During a speech in parliament on 16th September regarding the potential closure of Chatham docks, in favour of re-allocating the brownfield site for housing development (around 3,600 flats), Ms Tolhurst spoke at length about the need to maintain the docks - to protect around 800 jobs in a range of manufacturing, maintenance and technical specialities.

The proposed closure is being spearheaded by dock owner Peel L&P and is supported by the leader of Medway Council, Cllr. Alan Jarrett (Lordswood and Capstone ward representative).

During her parliamentary speech, Ms Tolhurst referenced the fact that, even though the Medway Council area covers three parliamentary constituencies (Gillingham and Rainham, Chatham and Aylesford and Rochester and Strood), Medway Council is proposing (in its draft Local Plan) for nearly two-thirds of its total housing target to be allocated within the Rochester and Strood constituency, predominantly on the Hoo Peninsula.

Medway Council's housing target of 28,259 new homes (up to the period 2037) was described by Ms Tolhurst in her speech as an 'undeliverable target for such a small geographical area'.

With regards to the thousands of flats proposed for Chatham docks, should it close as a commercial facility, Ms Tolhurst advised, rather alarmingly, that she had been informed by Medway Council that 'if it is unable to build those flats on the docks, it would need to build them elsewhere on another site within the Rochester and Strood constituency' - seemingly dismissing other potential development sites across the whole of the Medway Towns, including significant available sites in Capstone (a part of Chatham) and Rainham.

Many local residents feel that the process used by Medway Council for allocating future house building, as part of its work to produce a draft Local Plan, disproportionately targets the Hoo Peninsula, especially Peninsula ward, in favour of protecting greenfield sites in and around Rainham and Capstone - areas represented by, or are neighboured by, 16 members of Medway Council's controlling group (Conservative Party). Many of our readers believe that the ongoing work to implement a Local Plan for the Medway Towns, and the Hoo Peninsula, would be better placed in the hands of independent government officials, who should approach the task fairly and without the influence of local politics.

In related news - during a Medway Council cabinet meeting on 28th September, Cllr. Howard Doe (Deputy Leader and Rainham South ward representative), who has been seen by some 'local political commentators' as being one of the brighter members of the cabinet, exclaimed: 'We've heard things like the Capstone Valley going under the hammer and so on and that's not going to happen as far as I'm concerned and I'm sure the leader (Cllr. Alan Jarrett) will agree with me'. Cllr. Doe's remarks, seen by some as evidence of bias, could prove difficult for Medway Council when it seeks government approval, by an independent examiner, of its draft Local Plan. Officials from the local authority will need to convince the examiner that Medway Council has fairly and objectively assessed and included all potential development sites across the whole of the Medway Towns.



Kelly Tolhurst MP.



Cllr. Alan Jarrett.

Local Plan public consultation delayed

Just a day before the political leadership at Medway Council was due to seek the approval of its elected councillors, from all political persuasions and none, to commence a public consultation on its draft Local Plan - the subject was withdrawn from a crucial meeting - thus preventing elected members from having their say and further delaying the consultation.

The consultation was due to commence at the end of last month and would have included Medway Council's controversial HIF (Housing Infrastructure Fund) project proposals to facilitate the building of up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula.

As we reported last month, local MP Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood constituency) recently gave a speech in Parliament in which she hit out at the local authority by questioning its methodology for how it has allocated areas for future housing development.



Kelly Tolhurst MP.

Although a discussion on the draft Local Plan didn't take place at the full council meeting of councillors on 7th October, as originally intended, some items of paperwork were published and subsequently scrutinised by councillors outside of the formal meeting. Many of them, like many residents on the Hoo Peninsula, were shocked to discover that officials hadn't completed crucial documentation and evidence, including: The 'Sustainability Appraisal', the 'Strategic Environmental Assessment' and the 'Habitats Regulation Assessment'.

Officials at Medway Council have advised that the draft Local Plan item was originally placed on the meeting agenda (of 7th October) so that members could give 'in-principle' approval and that the missing documentation and evidence would be completed at a later date, but before the commencement of the public consultation.

Our readers will be feeling troubled and concerned to learn that, it would appear, conclusions have been reached, such as allocating the building of 12,000 new homes on the Hoo Peninsula, without first having completed the full range of documentation, including evidence and justification, to support the draft Local Plan. Some of our readers have even suggested that Medway Council's proposals look as though someone at the local authority has simply decided to 'dump' huge levels of housing development allocations on the Hoo Peninsula - to avoid placing those allocations in other parts of the Medway Towns, such as areas in Rainham and Capstone.

Residents from across the Hoo Peninsula community are now rightly asking questions about how and why Medway Council sought, and was subsequently successful (subject to conditions), in being awarded £170m of government (taxpayer) funding from Homes England (HIF funding) - when it now transpires that it hadn't completed crucial assessments to score, compare and determine the best and most sustainable locations and scenarios for housing development.

This latest episode will only serve to heighten the feeling, already felt by many Hoo Peninsula residents, that Medway Council appears incapable of delivering a fair, objective and transparent Local Plan.

Many of our readers believe that the ongoing work to implement a Local Plan for the Medway Towns, and the Hoo Peninsula, would be better placed in the hands of independent government officials, who should approach the task fairly, professionally and without the influence of local politics.

Residents will undoubtedly be writing to our local MP Kelly Tolhurst, at the earliest opportunity, demanding urgent government intervention. If you'd like to have your say, contact Kelly Tolhurst MP and tell her what you think. Write to: Kelly Tolhurst MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or email: kelly.tolhurst.mp@parliament.uk

You can also contact the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, Michael Gove MP, and tell him what you think. Write to: Michael Gove MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or email: michael.gove.mp@parliament.uk

Christmas lights competition in Stoke

A local Parish Council is this year organising its first Christmas lights competition.

Children from the parish will judge the competition - in a vote taking place between 17th and 19th December. Three £50 shopping voucher prizes and a trophy will be awarded in each area of Stoke (Lower, Middle and Upper).

To read the competition rules, and to make sure your child takes part in the vote, contact Stoke Parish Council (contact details on page three) or take a look at village noticeboards.



Lights in Middle Stoke last year.



Don't spend Christmas alone

Residents from across the Hoo Peninsula community who may be set to spend Christmas Day alone are being invited to attend a special celebration at High Halstow Village Hall.

Arranged by Hoo Peninsula Cares CIC (better known as 'wHoo Cares'), the Christmas Day event, taking place from 1pm to around 3.15pm, will include a delicious festive lunch, fun, games, entertainment, a visit by Santa (and his elves) plus The Queen's Christmas Speech.

So, whether you're set to spend Christmas Day alone, or perhaps you can no longer manage cooking a Christmas dinner, don't hesitate - pick up the phone and contact wHoo Cares on 01634 272138 or email: christmas@whoo cares.org.uk

There's no charge for the Christmas meal and transport can be provided.

Although the lunch event is supported by staff and an enthusiastic team of volunteers from wHoo Cares and the Friends of wHoo Cares - more volunteers are needed to ensure the smooth running of this important annual celebration. Use the contact details above to find out more about volunteering.

Tell us what you think

As we edge closer to a New Year, 2022, the Village Voices Community Magazine is asking you, our readers, to tell us your civic hopes and aspirations for the year ahead.

Aside from the hundreds of general communications submitted to Village Voices Publishing HQ each month - we're keen to explore the most important civic issues currently being raised by local residents.

Many of our readers, who are passionate about the Hoo Peninsula, frequently tell us that they feel frustrated about the way our area is governed (this applies to the Medway Council part of our distribution area). Readers tell us that they also feel misrepresented, belittled and ignored within the Medway Towns. And, there's a growing sense, in our postbag at least, that many residents from across the Hoo Peninsula want our area to break free from the Medway Unitary Authority (Medway Council).

Only recently, a group of well-intentioned residents were erroneously branded 'rebels' by a certain element of 'local media', albeit the organisation concerned is insignificant on the Hoo Peninsula. The only reason for such behaviour must be that the said organisation has greater interests, and possibly influence, within the communities of Rainham, Gillingham and Chatham.

Throughout 2021 in particular, the team at Village Voices Publishing has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with our readers, residents from across the Hoo Peninsula community, to articulate the details of Medway Council's controversial, and somewhat divisive, plans for our area and to amplify the significant concerns and opposition raised by residents.

So, in asking you, our readers, for your thoughts, ideas and aspirations - we ask you to give particular attention to how we can improve the identities of local communities on the Hoo Peninsula (and the Hoo Peninsula as a whole), ideas for celebrating our environmental credentials, history, heritage and culture and, in terms of local governance, what should be done to improve and strengthen our democratic processes - not only in our local communities but, perhaps, to embolden the mutual relationship we have with our nearest local towns, such as Strood and Rochester.

We look forward to receiving your letters and emails - our contact details are on page three.



ViVo

out and about

OUR KERBSIDE MEANDERINGS

CLIFFE: ViVo was delighted to visit Cliffe Community Hub Café recently. The café was launched on 22nd September and allows those attending to enjoy a good natter, make new friends or meet up with old ones! Future sessions of the café will take place on Wednesday 15th December (a Christmas themed event) and Wednesday 12th January, both from 10am to 1pm, at Cliffe Memorial Hall (Church Street, ME3 7PU). All are welcome. Coffee, tea and cake is available for a small charge. As attendance grows, and as the months progress, more varied activities will be planned, so the input of those attending is welcomed (and encouraged). If you'd like to find out more about Cliffe Community Hub Café, or if you struggle with transport and require some assistance, phone Anita Saunders on 01634 221718, Mary Hooper on 01634 255299 or Janet Keates on 01634 222412. See the two Cliffe Memorial Hall Management Committee diary dates on page 34,



Better Services - Value for Money

NO CAPSTONE VALLEY DEVELOPMENT!

With the news that Natural England have decided to confirm the SSSI at Lodge Hill, triggering a re-writing of the Council's Core Strategy, Medway Conservatives will be working hard to prevent developers carving up and concreting over the idyllic Capstone Valley by ensuring that no housing allocation is written into the new strategy.

Local ward Councillors, Rodney and Diane Chambers, Alan Jarrett, David Wildey and Wendy Purdy (below) said: "We have successfully fought before to keep Capstone Valley green and will do so again. Any developer who thinks that they can develop on this most beautiful part of Medway needs to think again as we will be doing everything we can to prevent housing in the valley."



CAPSTONE (CHATHAM): ViVo was recently passed this photo showing what appears to be some kind of party political propaganda leaflet produced by 'Medway Conservatives' at some point in 2013 or 2014. Remarkably, the image on the leaflet includes the current leader of Medway Council (Cllr. Alan Jarrett - Lordswood and Capstone ward), the chair of Medway Council's planning committee (Cllr. Diane Chambers - Hempstead and Wigmore ward) and the former leader of Medway Council (Cllr. Rodney Chambers - Hempstead and Wigmore ward). The three, joined by two other local councillors, are holding a banner declaring 'Save Capstone Valley' with the accompanying commentary stating 'Any developer who thinks that they can develop on this most beautiful part of Medway needs to think again as we will be doing everything we can to prevent housing in the valley'. So, ViVo asks our readers - is this why the political leadership of Medway Council seem so obsessed with dumping up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula, particularly around Chattenden, High Halstow and Hoo - avoiding the need to develop in their own back yards? It certainly looks as though residents on the Hoo Peninsula have a growing collection of damning evidence showing what looks like clear bias - very useful for when challenging Medway Council's controversial Local Plan proposals. Take a look at the article on page 28.



UPNOR: ViVo was impressed to see this Remembrance tribute on the gatepost of St. Philip and St. James Church last month - featuring a woolly WWI Tommy standing on a mound of woolly poppies. Well done to whoever created this amazing tribute.

Share your local news, photos and pics of festive lights by getting in touch with ViVo (contact details on page three).

EVERYWHERE: We've now reached the time of year when some organisations decide to undertake consultations or release news they hope will go unnoticed and, quite often, when some housing developers submit planning applications to local planning authorities - possibly believing that residents will be far too busy (with Christmas and other festivities) to notice! Keep your eyes open everyone!



Council launches second consultation on controversial and unpopular plans

Medway Council last month spent more taxpayers' money organising and launching a second consultation concerning its controversial plans for the Hoo Peninsula.

The so-called 'Future Hoo' consultation (not to be confused with the Local Plan consultation originally intended to commence in October) is part of Medway Council's continued attempts to seemingly destroy large sections of the Hoo Peninsula, particularly areas around Chattenden, High Halstow and Hoo, by constructing what it claims is the 'necessary infrastructure' to facilitate the building of many thousands of new homes, although the effectiveness of this proposed infrastructure is disputed locally.

The project, known as 'Hoo - New Routes to Good Growth' (Housing Infrastructure Fund - HIF), is funded by £170m of government (taxpayer) funding, and proposes to deliver road capacity upgrades, environmental improvements and the reinstatement of a long-closed passenger railway service (in the hope that car-users will switch to rail-use). Medway Council has developed these proposals in an attempt to

enable the allocation of up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula - the project is a crucial part of its Local Plan (for the whole of the Medway Towns), although no mention is made of this in the recent consultation documentation.

Medway Council's proposals will affect all those who use the A289 and A228.

A consultation is not a referendum about whether something should happen, or not, and residents are encouraged to be extremely cautious if they feel they need to participate.

The first consultation, held between January and April of this year, only attracted 552 'valid responses' out of tens of thousands of households on and around the Hoo Peninsula, although some residents insist that they never received a leaflet (about the first consultation). However, Medway Council advised at the time that it had delivered a second batch of leaflets to areas where complaints had been received.

Those who took part in the first consultation were directed to complete what appeared to be a carefully-worded and lengthy questionnaire. Many of our readers have told us that

they felt the questionnaire was flawed and had been designed to filter out negative feedback by restricting participants from freely expressing their views and opinions.

For the second consultation, Medway Council claims that it has listened to feedback obtained in the first consultation and has adapted its environmental, rail and road proposals, including removing a strongly-opposed 'flyover' and slip-road junction in Wainscott (at Higham Road) - by replacing it with a 'traffic light junction' further along the A289 (Hasted Road/Wainscott Bypass), nearer to the Four Elms Roundabout.

The consultation ends on Monday 10th January 2022.

If you don't want to take part in the latest consultation but are keen to share your views - you can get in touch with your local councillors - their contact details are on page 38.

Due to the government (taxpayer) funding (Housing Infrastructure Fund), you can also contact Kelly Tolhurst (MP for Rochester & Strood) and tell her what you think. Write to: Kelly Tolhurst MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or send an email to: kelly.tolhurst.mp@parliament.uk

COMPETITION
WIN WIN WIN WIN WIN

WIN A VILLAGE VOICES CHRISTMAS HAMPER

To be in with a chance of winning a Village Voices Publishing Christmas Hamper, simply send your name and address, to: Village Voices Publishing, PO Box 692, Rochester, Kent, ME1 9LN or email details to: office@villagevoicespublishing.co.uk

Entries not containing the above stated information will be treated as incorrect. Please mark anywhere on your envelope or in the subject line of your email with **'HAMPER'**. The closing date for this edition's competition is 20/12/2021 at 5pm. Shortly after the closing date, one entry will be pulled from the hat and notified.



COMPETITION
WIN WIN WIN WIN WIN



ViVo

out and about and sometimes armchair based
OUR KERBSIDE MEANDERINGS



SLOUGH FORT: ViVo couldn't possibly start the new year without going back to last year's Halloween activities at Slough Fort. This fabulous photo was taken at a ghost stories event on 27th October and shows some of the volunteers from the Slough Fort Preservation Trust dressed to impress and ready to scare. Those pictured (from left to right) are: Daune Ashdown, Shaun Winter, Colin Davis, Daniela Holgado, Keith Gulvin, Catharina Buonora Holgado, Neil Ross and Llio Spencer-Ross. A community Halloween party was also held at the fort, on 29th October.

Happy New Year from ViVo - let's hope 2022 is another good year for interesting ViVo items.



BBC TV: The most tuneful member of the Village Voices Publishing team, Ned the Nightingale, was delighted to see national treasure Sir David Attenborough feature glorious nightingales in 'Attenborough's Wonder of Song' shown on BBC1 on 3rd January. During the programme Sir David said: 'Few sounds of nature are more beloved by this nation than that of the Nightingale'. Be sure to watch this excellent programme on BBC iPlayer and you'll see why it's so important to protect the Hoo Peninsula (the most important site for Nightingales in the UK) from politically motivated and unwanted development!

WAINSCOTT: This giant industrial-sized fly-tip was dumped on an area just off the Wainscott Bypass (A289 - Hasted Road) at some point between Christmas and New Year. We don't know who was responsible, how contaminated the waste might be (or the risk to public health) or what will be done to clear the problem, but ViVo is aware that many local residents contacted Medway Council and requested action.



HOO: Residents have recently expressed concern about vehicles racing each other along Ratcliffe Highway and Ropers Lane at night. Some reports have suggested that dozens of vehicles have been seen gathering and driving dangerously at high speeds. As well as contacting Kent Police to report any concerns (contact details on page 14), residents are encouraged to remain vigilant.



BBC TV: Watching BBC Politics South East on 19th December, ViVo was staggered to see a 'foot-in-mouth' moment when the Labour councillor for Luton and Wayfield (in Chatham) confidently announced that he supported Conservative-run Medway Council's plans to build up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula. ViVo understands that Councillor Osborne's remarks, despite being spoken in an assured way, are not necessarily shared by colleagues in Medway Labour. ViVo asked Medway Labour for a formal comment/response about Cllr Osborne's remarks, but it chose not to provide one. The second HIF consultation ended earlier this month and ViVo will carefully review any response by Medway Labour. Its response to the first consultation, in March 2021, seemed woolly and bureaucratic and wasn't the kind of feisty response you might expect from an opposition party, especially when considering the fact that many Hoo Peninsula residents believe that the HIF project is politically motivated to benefit the electoral prospects of a handful of elected representatives in the Capstone (in Chatham) and Rainham areas.



Share your local news and photos by getting in touch with ViVo (contact details on page three).



You told us what you think

In the November edition of this publication we asked you, our readers, to get in touch and tell us about your civic hopes and aspirations for the year ahead.

Our appeal came at the end of what many of our readers felt was a turbulent year for Medway Council, when residents had, on a scale never before seen, questioned the legitimacy of the local authority's control over the Hoo Peninsula community.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the vast majority of those who got in touch told us that they want our area to separate from the Medway Unitary Authority (Medway Council) and return to having a dedicated district council, as per what existed before April 1998. Many referenced the fact that residents on the Hoo Peninsula, and also those in Strood and Rochester, were denied the opportunity to have their say about this at the time and that the decision to dissolve our former district council, to form Medway Unitary Authority, was never actually approved by the public in the form of a specific referendum.

The next topic raised by our readers, in significant numbers, concerned Rochester losing its city status and the need to have it reinstated.

For many years residents were given the impression, generally, that the loss of Rochester's city status was caused by some type of administrative error. In fact, the losing of city status was caused by a decision taken in January 1998 when elected councillors (on the Rochester-upon-Medway City Council) agreed not to appoint Charter Trustees - a legal requirement to preserve Rochester as a

city. At the time, the local authority was controlled by the Labour Party with a majority of 38 councillors.

Since 2000, the political leadership at Medway Council (led by the Conservative Party) has repeatedly attempted to obtain city status for the whole of the council's administrative area - in the name of 'Medway' (the fourth attempt is currently underway). However, many of our readers told us that they feel this continuing 'Medway' obsession is perverse, flawed and wrong.

The final significant item raised by our readers was the desire for Strood and Rochester to have their own town councils.

A town council in Strood, in particular, made up of residents from Strood, would be responsible for delivering a range of services. Some of the work currently undertaken by Medway Council would be devolved to the town council, but ultimately a town council would provide the Strood community with an ultra local level of representation - giving particular attention to the town's identity, celebrating its history, heritage and culture and devising bespoke community initiatives to engage and strengthen the lives of all those in Strood.

Town and parish councils are the first level of local government and provide communities with a democratic voice and structure for taking community action. Most of Kent, including 11 communities within the Medway Towns, already have a town or parish council. Strood and Rochester are the only places in our area not served by a town or parish council.

In asking you, our readers, to tell us about your civic hopes and aspirations for 2022 - you told us that you have three key priorities that you'd like to see our elected representatives working on: (1) Our area should separate from Medway Council and form its own independent district council, (2) The re-instatement of city status for Rochester and (3) The formation of new town/parish councils in Strood and Rochester.

Many of our readers told us that they feel it is becoming increasingly clear that political leaders at Medway Council have no interest in our area or the aspirations of local residents - preferring to concentrate all their efforts and resources on protecting and caring for their own areas in Rainham, Gillingham and Chatham. As a point of information - seven members of Medway Council's ten-member cabinet represent wards in Rainham, Gillingham and Chatham - only three represent wards in Rochester, Strood and the Hoo Peninsula.

A majority of those who got in touch with us said that they want to see our local elected representatives working collaboratively to make 2022 a positive year of change - by bringing to an end the political domination our area suffers at the hands of elected representatives in Rainham, Gillingham and Chatham.

We'll be joining many of our readers in closely monitoring the work of our elected representatives this year and, of course, we'll report back with any progress in due course.

No opposition from Labour on HIF plans

The Medway Labour and Co-operative Group opposition on Medway Council last month submitted its response to the controversial plans created by the leadership of Medway Conservatives to allow the building of up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula.

Responding to the second Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) consultation, Medway Labour didn't appear to show any clear opposition to Medway Council's controversial plans.

The response by Medway Labour didn't question the principle or legitimacy of what is proposed - despite the fact that the proposals have been widely condemned for being fundamentally flawed and politically motivated - seemingly to benefit Conservative wards in Chatham, Gillingham and Rainham - by attempting to prevent development in those areas.

By not opposing the principle of the HIF project - Medway Labour has, in effect, joined forces with Medway Conservatives - particularly its leader Alan Jarrett, of Chatham, who has repeatedly attempted to designate the Hoo Peninsula as the solution to avoiding developing areas in his own back yard, in Capstone and Rainham!

Despite being somewhat bureaucratic, Medway Labour's latest submission didn't provide any evidence of how it has engaged with Hoo Peninsula residents or local parish councils in formulating its views and policies relating to the HIF project.

It should be noted that Medway Labour currently has 21 councillors on Medway Council - 16 representing areas in Chatham and Gillingham and five representing areas in Rochester and Strood. It doesn't have any elected representatives on the Hoo Peninsula.

Something fishy going on!

Grain Angling Club recently released a list of 2022 fixtures for fishing competitions taking place on the Isle of Grain.

The club's first competition of the year, a catch and release match, will take place on Sunday 20th March. Fishing will be from 12pm until 4pm and it will be pegged and limited to 40 anglers. Booking-in will be from 9.30am to 10.30am at the Hogarth Inn (High Street, Isle of Grain, ME3 0BJ). Entry is £15 all in (£10 for the over 65s). There'll be prizes for first, second, third and fourth places and there'll also be a Blind Pairs competition. Presentations (and possibly a raffle) will be held at the Hogarth Inn following the conclusion of the competition. Bait restrictions will now be lug rag and fish baits only - these restrictions will remain in place for all future events.

The remaining fixtures for 2022 are: 17th April (fishing from 12pm to 4pm), 29th May (John Beeching Memorial Match, with fishing from 12pm to 4pm), 11th September (Ashley Vance Memorial Match, with fishing from 12pm to 4pm), 9th October (fishing from 11am to 3pm) and 27th November (Christmas Fayre, with fishing from 12pm to 4pm).

For more information about Grain Angling Club, or to discuss the planned fixtures, phone Andy Butler on 07931 948091. Membership is £5 - payable before the start of the first event of the year (on 20th March - see details above).



Connect with nature and make new friends

A local church Friends group has partnered with a wildlife charity to provide local residents with a programme of activities this spring.

Funded by a grant from the Test Bed Fund, through Medway Voluntary Action and the NHS Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group, the Friends of All Saints Church in Allhallows has joined with the Kent Wildlife Trust to deliver a free to attend six-week activity programme.

The 'Making Connections' initiative will run on Monday mornings from 7th March to 11th April and is ideal for those who would like to make new friends, try new activities and become more active.

The weekly sessions will usually include a gentle walk around Allhallows, or nearby, bird watching, taking part in nature themed arts and crafts activities, learning mindfulness exercises and simple relaxation, as well as to discover more about the natural world.

If you'd like to register to take part, or to find out more, contact Vicky Aitkenhead from the Kent Wildlife Trust on 07923 217068 or Jenny Glanfield from All Saints Church on 07832 252273.

Hoo Peninsula's financial strength is muted by historic democratic deficit

As 2022/23 council tax bills begin landing on doormats, ahead of the start of the new financial year next month, Village Voices Publishing has been investigating apparent inequalities within the Medway Towns, in respect of the amount of council tax and business rates paid by different areas - compared to the level of democratic representation.

Far from being some kind of poor relation within the Medway Towns area, official council tax and business rates data (for 2021/22) shows that the Hoo Peninsula is responsible for generating a significant proportion of Medway Council's income - news that will leave many of our readers wondering why our area is treated with such contempt.

In terms of Medway Council responsibility, the Hoo Peninsula is currently separated into two electoral wards - Strood Rural ward (Chattenden, Cliffe, Cliffe Woods, Frindsbury, Upnor and Wainscott) and Peninsula ward (Allhallows, Cooling, High Halstow, Hoo, Isle of Grain, Spendiff, St. Mary Hoo and Stoke).

Of Medway Council's 22 wards, Strood Rural and Peninsula are second and third highest respectively for council tax liability (the amount of council tax before reductions). Peninsula is top in the whole of the Medway Council area for the amount of business rates liability (the amount of business rates before reductions) and Strood Rural is third.

Combined, Strood Rural and Peninsula wards (the Hoo Peninsula) contribute £22.5m of council tax liability (11.7% of the council's total) and £37.1m of business rates liability (31.4% of the council's total). Therefore, the Hoo Peninsula contributes £59.6m or 19.2% of Medway Council's total council tax and business rates liability.

Despite contributing such significant sums of money to Medway Council, the Hoo Peninsula only has six (10.9%) of the 55 councillors and, as a result, these individuals are frequently outnumbered and disregarded by councillors in Rainham, Gillingham and Chatham - when making important decisions affecting our area. This ongoing situation is evidence of a democratic deficit and a representational inequality at principal local council level.

Many of our readers, residents from across the Hoo Peninsula, would like to see our area separate from the Medway Unitary Authority (Medway Council) and return to having a dedicated district council, as per what existed before April 1998. It is clear that our area generates sufficient levels of council tax and business rates to make this a plausible and sustainable possibility. Many of our readers, as well as many residents in Strood and Rochester, still feel extremely angry that they were denied the opportunity to have their say about our former district council being scrapped to form the Medway Unitary Authority - not least because this was never approved by the public in the form of a specific referendum.

Council tax bills for households on the Hoo Peninsula are the same as those issued to residents elsewhere in the Medway Council area. However, Hoo Peninsula residents also pay for local parish councils - these are responsible for delivering a range of ultra local services, such as managing allotments, recreation grounds, community halls and sometimes street cleaning. In non-parished areas, such as Rainham, Gillingham and Chatham, these services are provided by Medway Council from its element of the council tax, but Hoo Peninsula residents don't receive a discount (from Medway Council) in recognition of paying twice for the provision of some services (see more about this on page 29).

Have your say about health and care services

If you use health and care services, sharing your views about your experiences could help improve services.

Feedback is welcomed from those who have used or regularly use doctors surgeries, care homes, hospitals, pharmacies, dentists, home care services, opticians and mental health services.

Healthwatch is an independent organisation set up to champion the views of patients and social care users.

Healthwatch will listen to what you have to say and use your feedback when discussing those issues with service providers, in the hope of making services better.

If you live in the Medway Towns, phone Healthwatch Medway on 0800 136 656 (Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm) or write to Healthwatch Medway, 5a New Road, Chatham, Kent, ME4 6BB.

If you live in the Higham area, phone Healthwatch Kent on 0808 8010 102 or you can write to Healthwatch Kent, Freepost RTLG-UBZB-JUZA, Seabrooke House, Church Road, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1RD.

Alternatively, if you're unhappy with the treatment or service you, a family member or someone you care for has received from a GP practice, you can submit a complaint to NHS England by writing to: NHS England, PO Box 16738, Redditch, Worcestershire, B97 9PT or by phoning: 0300 311 2233.



ViVo

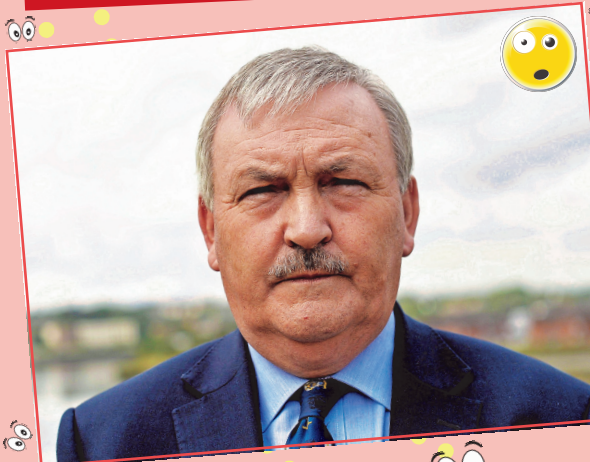
out and about and sometimes armchair based
OUR KERBSIDE MEANDERINGS

Share your local news and photos by getting in touch with ViVo (contact details on page three).



WAINSCOTT: Medway Council's seemingly half-baked attempt at effectively dealing with fly-tipping along the Wainscott Bypass (A289 Hasted Road) has left ViVo, and many of our readers, wondering why action has been so slow?! The industrial-sized fly-tip was dumped at some point between last Christmas and New Year on a site thought to be owned by Medway Council. Despite some of the more noticeable mounds of rubbish being cleared at the end of April - a significant amount was left. The site hasn't been made secure and so this has resulted in further intermittent fly-tips - and it won't be too long before the whole site is back to the way it was in January. Whilst those responsible should be identified and held to account - ViVo can't help but wonder how quickly such a disgusting fly-tipping mess would be cleared if it was located in the Capstone area of Chatham or anywhere else on the other side of the River Medway?!

CITY OF ROCHESTER: Political obsessives, delusional apparatchiks, history-deniers (and sometimes history-fabricators, i.e. the so-called 'Battle of Medway' for example) and those at Medway Council who clearly have too much time on their hands continue to ignore local people by banging on about 'Medway' becoming a city - despite recently being rejected once again by the relevant authorities - for the fourth time! Many of our readers believe very strongly that Rochester, Strood and the Hoo Peninsula have been very badly treated since the creation of Medway Council in 1998 and that it is now time for local 'politicians' to get on with righting the wrongs of the past 24 years - starting, perhaps, with formally applying to have historic Rochester reinstated as a City!



CHATHAM: Just days after Medway Council failed, yet again, to gain city status for its geographic council area (the Medway Towns), its leader Cllr. Alan Jarrett (ward councillor for Lordswood and Capstone in Chatham) reportedly announced to the world, or at least to anyone remotely interested within the Medway Towns, that he would be standing down as a councillor at the next local elections in May 2023. At the time of going to print, ViVo wasn't aware of when Cllr. Jarrett is planning to step down as leader of the council - bringing an end to his turbulent time in office. Locally, Cllr. Jarrett is a deeply unpopular character - not least because his controversial plans to allow the building of up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula would (if they still proceed) significantly change, and destroy, vast swathes of our much-loved local landscape! ViVo isn't aware of why Cllr. Jarrett has decided to quit, but ViVo wonders whether his departure will bring about any meaningful change at Gun Wharf in Chatham (Medway Council's headquarters), as the controlling political cabinet currently consists of seven councillors representing areas in Rainham, Gillingham and Chatham - with only three representing Rochester, Strood and the Hoo Peninsula - no wonder decisions made by the current political 'leadership' are seen by so many local residents as being detrimental to communities on the Hoo Peninsula!





ViVo

out and about and sometimes armchair based
OUR KERBSIDE MEANDERINGS

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HOO PENINSULA: With the next set of local council elections taking place in May - rumours are circulating that a senior councillor on the Hoo Peninsula is preparing to abandon the area - in favour of seeking election in a newly created ward in the Cuxton area. Anonymous information passed to ViVo suggests that the councillor, who is thought to be a close ally of Medway Council's controversial leader, Alan Jarrett (who is standing down as a councillor), is preparing to, perhaps rather sneakily, stand for election in what some local political commentators believe will be a new 'safer' seat in the Cuxton area. Although ViVo isn't publicly naming the veteran councillor, at this stage, an email was sent to the councillor politely asking to confirm or deny the rumours. The said councillor, who isn't very communicative at the best of times, hadn't responded to ViVo at the time of going to print. Do you have any relatives or friends in the Cuxton area? Have they received any party political leaflets through their letterboxes? Has the mystery councillor emerged on the campaign trail in Cuxton yet? Please contact ViVo with any feedback.



ISLE OF GRAIN: A new cria (a baby alpaca) was recently born at Grain Coast Crafty Alpaca Farm (Smithfield Road, Isle of Grain, ME3 0DX). First-time mum Stella gave birth to Barnaby Fudge on 18th August (at 12.25pm). The Grain Coast Crafty Alpaca Farm opened at the end of July and is working to provide a range of craft workshops, meditation and menopause sessions and wellbeing retreats. It will also host a Pumpkin Golf event this Halloween and a Santa Experience this Christmas. Find out more by searching 'Grain Coast Crafty Alpaca Farm' online or phone Mishy Winder on 07957 187116 or Iveta Kuze on 07863 353255. It's nice, a great relief in fact, for ViVo to be able to share something nice and cuddly for once - enjoy these two images of Barnaby Fudge and his mum Stella and good luck to everyone at Grain Coast Crafty Alpaca Farm - see you all soon!



To learn more about the possible health risks of inhaling nitrous oxide, talk confidentially to a medical professional or read information online by visiting:
talktofrank.com/drug/nitrous-oxide
or: drugwise.org.uk



HOO PENINSULA: A group of residents from Allhallows recently collected 148 nitrous oxide canisters from local beaches, roads and lanes. A further 580 were collected along the Ratcliffe Highway. A report was submitted to Medway Council about the group's findings and the residents are working with the local authority to create educational posters warning young people, in particular, of the dangers of inhaling nitrous oxide from the canisters. It is hoped that these posters will be placed in schools and areas where young people congregate. Experts have raised concerns that prolonged use of nitrous oxide can cause serious health issues, including permanent life-changing neurological damage. Nitrous oxide is also known as 'laughing gas' and is sometimes called 'hippy crack' or 'whippets'.



Policing News with... Sergeant Steve Holpin



I hope everyone had a fun and safe Halloween and Guy Fawkes Night - no doubt you are now busy preparing for Christmas.

This year we have the oddity of a November/December FIFA World Cup and this presents challenges for Kent Police, and other forces around the UK.

For those who aren't lovers of the beautiful game the World Cup is always usually held in the summer, scheduled between the domestic football seasons but, due to the climate in Qatar, this year's event is taking place this month and next. The first match will be on 20th November and the climax will be on 18th December - when we will hopefully be saluting Sir Gareth Southgate as our boys follow the Lionesses to glory and lift a major tournament trophy - you heard it here first!!!

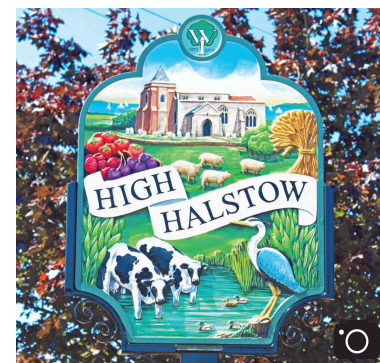
In terms of policing arrangements here at home during the World Cup - our licensing teams have already risk assessed every notable pub or club across the county. This assessment includes details such as which games each establishment will show, how many screens they have, are they planning on using plastic glasses, will they have door staff operating, is there a history of disorder and the capacity of the venue. Information from these assessments helps Kent Police to work with the venues to ensure their plans are sufficient to mitigate the risk of any trouble and to plan where we deploy our resources. We also review the fixtures and will target our resources to those that cause obvious concern, with regards to disorder. As you can imagine an England v Germany semi-final poses a more problematic policing headache than a Denmark v Tunisia game.

We also have documents called 'Community Impact Assessments' for every policing area across the county. These live documents are monitored throughout the tournament to assess how it may be affecting communities.

There are other factors Kent Police must manage, such as the increased risk of domestic abuse. In this respect, our operation must be fluid as the further UK teams progress in the tournament the greater the potential local impact. If a home nation makes it to the latter stages of the tournament, the TV audiences will be huge. But with football comes alcohol and with alcohol there is a risk of criminality from a minority of fans. This means that our response during must reflect the risk and so there will be a huge commitment of resources for those high-risk dates/fixtures.

Planning for the World Cup, as a policing operation, has been underway for a long time and the public may not realise how much information and intelligence has been gathered, analysed and actioned in preparation - and I haven't even touched on the work undertaken by the specialist football intelligence teams or the liaison between international police forces and the huge efforts to stop known 'risk fans' from travelling let alone our own 'domestic charmers' intent on causing trouble.

It is a monstrous operation - from a risk assessment of The Six Bells pub in Cliffe to monitoring international political tensions between the USA and Iran. Hopefully my next article will reflect a trouble-free tournament with England as reigning World Champions...we can but dream!



Developer plans to double the size of High Halstow

A housing developer recently carried out a consultation to effectively double the size of High Halstow.

The audacious proposal was unleashed on villagers by housing developer Redrow and included a draft plan to build around 760 new homes, as well as to provide an area for a new primary school and space for community, business, retail or leisure facilities - all on land between Christmas Lane, Britannia Road and Sharnal Street.

The informal consultation undertaken by Redrow shouldn't be confused with a consultation undertaken by the Local Planning Authority (following submission of a planning application). The developer consultation simply informs work undertaken by the developer.

Redrow staged an exhibition at High Halstow Village Hall on 5th November, but many of our High Halstow readers complained to us that they had only received a leaflet about the consultation on or around 27th October, just a week or so before the exhibition.

More information about Redrow's proposals will appear in future editions of this publication.

Local councillor will stand for election again, but not locally!

A senior local councillor will not seek re-election in the area he has represented for more than 20 years - instead seeking election in a newly formed council ward in another part of the Medway Towns.

Back in September 2022, our ViVo column reported that a senior local councillor was rumoured to be preparing to abandon his council ward on the Hoo Peninsula - in favour of seeking election in the Cuxton area. At that time ViVo did not name the councillor concerned.

Political website 'Medway Elects' (medwayelects.co.uk) recently reported that High Halstow resident Cllr. Phil Filmer, who currently represents Peninsula ward for the Conservative Party, will be standing as a candidate in the newly created Cuxton, Halling and Riverside ward.

Village Voices Publishing contacted Cllr. Filmer back in July 2022 and asked him to confirm whether he intended to seek re-election on the Hoo Peninsula or whether he intended to stand in Cuxton or Strood, in accordance with information supplied to us by a local Conservative Party insider, but he did not respond to our email. We contacted Cllr. Filmer again this month and asked him why he has decided to seek election in another area. He replied with a typically short statement, of just six words, advising 'my reason is personal and private'.



Cllr. Phil Filmer.

Cllr. Filmer is currently a long-serving member of Medway Council's political cabinet and is thought to be a close friend and ally of its controversial leader Alan Jarrett, of Chatham, who has repeatedly attempted to force through deeply unpopular plans to allow the building of up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula, particularly around Chattenden, High Halstow and Hoo.

Back in October 2021, Cllr. Jarrett confirmed that all those who serve in his cabinet must adhere to agreed cabinet policies (such as Medway Council's controversial plans to allow the building of up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula) and that every member of his cabinet is bound by 'corporate responsibility' and 'collective decision-making'. To clarify, Cllr. Filmer has remained a member of Cllr. Jarrett's cabinet throughout.

The only contact Cllr. Filmer has had with Village Voices Publishing on this specific subject was in March 2021 when he was contacted and asked if he supported Medway Council's proposals. His odd response was ambiguous and somewhat political. He simply stated 'I am against all the housing that is planned', but didn't explain what his limited nine word statement actually meant. His response didn't include any specific opposition to Medway Council's unpopular proposals and, in accordance with what Cllr. Jarrett advised about membership of his cabinet, as outlined above, such a declaration by Cllr. Filmer would have surely seen him forced from his senior cabinet role!

Village Voices Publishing is happy for Cllr. Filmer to clarify whether he supports Medway Council's controversial proposals - in the short time he has remaining as a Peninsula ward representative.

Cllr. Filmer was first elected in 1991 (serving until 1995) - representing All Saints ward (on Rochester-upon-Medway City Council). Following a short break from political office, he was elected to All Saints ward (on Medway Council) in 2000 (serving until 2003). In 2003, he then successfully stood for election in the new, much bigger, Peninsula ward (also on Medway Council) and was re-elected to serve in 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019.

Do you have family or friends residing in the communities of Cuxton or Halling, or within the area known as Strood riverside? Have they received any political literature or leaflets from their new prospective Conservative Party councillor, or any other local council candidates for that matter? Share what you know with the Village Voices Community Magazine (our contact details are on page three).

Residents say ‘Wetland Reserve’ proposal is simply ‘green-washing’

Officials and political leaders at Medway Council used the festive period to continue pushing controversial proposals to effectively destroy large swathes of the Hoo Peninsula.

Currently run by Conservative Party councillors, Medway Council’s latest action is a planning application to create a new so-called ‘wetland’ area on agricultural land near the sea wall in Hoo (located between the Saxon Shore Way, Abbots Court Road and Vicarage Lane).

The planning application is part of the council’s controversial Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) project, the political vision of the current Conservative Party administration, and is funded by £170m of government (taxpayer) funding - to implement what it believes is the ‘necessary’ infrastructure to facilitate the building of up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula, predominantly around Chattenden, High Halstow and Hoo. This project proposes to deliver road capacity upgrades, environmental improvements/mitigation and the reinstatement of a long-closed passenger railway service (hoping that car users will switch to rail).



The ‘Wetland Reserve’ application is for a publicly accessible 40-acre reserve and wildlife habitat, but it is essentially designed to offset the huge environmental damage that would be caused by the wider housing development plan.

Many local residents have contacted Village Voices Publishing to advise that they regard this planning application as unadulterated ‘green-washing’ because officials at the local authority appear to be peddling a particular message, in relation to this proposal scoring a Biodiversity Net Gain of 44%, but then doing everything possible to separate, and to limit referring to, the issue of creating this ‘Wetland Reserve’ purely for the purposes of offsetting damage caused by the council’s wider destructive housing development plan.

Despite many commentators believing that Medway Council’s HIF project is ‘dead in the water’, as a result of dwindling political support and deep-rooted factions within the Conservative Party locally, officials have stubbornly continued spending taxpayers money on the doomed project - seemingly oblivious of the political reality and of the wishes of their elected masters!

The ‘Wetland Reserve’ application, submitted on 17th October (validated on 14th November), came at a time when many local people were focused on planning for the festive period and, as such, many of our readers regard the council’s actions as cynical and divisive.

If you’d like to have your say about this application - feedback can still be submitted until 1st February. The application is expected to be discussed and potentially decided at the February meeting of the Planning Committee (on 8th February). To submit your feedback, write to (quoting reference number MC/22/2479): Planning Control, Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4TR. You can also visit Medway Council’s website (medway.gov.uk) where you should navigate to the Planning section and ‘search for an application’. Enter the reference number (MC/22/2479) and you’ll be able to explore the relevant documentation. Alternatively, email: planning.representations@medway.gov.uk

Many of our readers are troubled by Medway Council’s continued actions and want local MP Kelly Tolhurst to step up and urgently seek government intervention to cancel the £170m of taxpayer cash awarded to the council, as part of the HIF project.

If you believe our local MP must now seek the withdrawal of the HIF project funding, contact Kelly Tolhurst MP and tell her what you think without delay. Write to: Kelly Tolhurst MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or send an email to: kelly.tolhurst.mp@parliament.uk



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out and about and sometimes armchair based
OUR KERBSIDE MEANDERINGS



MEDWAY COUNCIL CHAMBER: The beleaguered leader of Medway Council (and Medway Conservatives) Cllr. Alan Jarrett embarrassed himself, once again, during a full meeting of the local authority on 19th January. Responding to a robust maiden speech by the new Peninsula ward councillor George Crozer (which included references to our local National Nature Reserve), Cllr. Jarrett (pictured left) responded to Cllr. Crozer (although he kept calling him 'Cllr. Crozier') with a garbled and waspish response, which included an admission that he didn't know there was a National Nature Reserve on the Hoo Peninsula!!! Cllr. Jarrett's exact words were: 'can Cllr. Crozier tell me where the National Nature Reserve on the Hoo Peninsula is because it must be a recent invention'. Well, High Halstow National Nature Reserve was notified in 1951 and incorporates RSPB Northward Hill Nature Reserve. The fact that Cllr. Jarrett, the leader of Medway Council, didn't know something this basic is utterly shameful. Cllr. Jarrett is one of the 'brains' behind the controversial proposal to allow the building of up to 12,000 on the Hoo Peninsula, particularly around Chattenden, High Halstow and Hoo.



DEANGATE: After Medway Council closed Deangate Golf Course in April 2018, a company called Medway Norse (the council's contractor) were granted permission by Medway Council to temporarily use the club building and associated car parks. Norse is expected to depart from this site by November of this year and move elsewhere. Local residents were granted access to the golf course site soon after it was closed - for the purposes of exercise and dog walking. The public very much regard the former golf course as Deangate Ridge Country Park. Unfortunately though, because the site probably doesn't currently have a proper management plan, you'll find overflowing (and insufficient) dog poo bins! These two, small silver caddies, intended for food waste in your kitchen, were overflowing with bags of dog waste! One was left hanging from a tree the other was on the ground. The sooner this site becomes a formalised country park the better, as it will hopefully bring to an end problems like this, but it would be nice if someone from the local authority could see that a few proper dog bins are placed around the site in the meantime.

CUXTON: Departing Peninsula ward councillor Phil Filmer, who is a member of Medway Council's political cabinet, has been spotted in Cuxton - seemingly recycling himself in the area he is contesting as a Conservative Party candidate at the local election in May. However, he was actually in Cuxton to perform official duties at the Waste and Recycling Centre - launching a new scheme whereby residents may donate reusable items to support vulnerable residents. The scheme is sponsored by council contractor Medway Norse and charity Gillingham Street Angels. Essentially, residents can donate good quality and clean items, such as books, fridges, freezers (and other white goods), homeware, small electricals, textiles (such as cushions and blankets), tools and toys. Donated items will be made good for continued use. Gillingham Street Angels supports people across the Medway Towns who may be experiencing difficult times. The charity has shops in Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham. Quality items can be donated to Gillingham Street Angels by contacting the charity directly. More information about this scheme can be found online: medway.gov.uk/donatereusableitems



Housing infrastructure bid documents released

The government agency responsible for awarding Medway Council £170m of taxpayers' money, to facilitate the building of a massive housing expansion project on the Hoo Peninsula, has published the local authority's original 'expression of interest' and 'business case' submissions.

Following a Freedom of Information request submitted by local campaigners - Homes England, a government quango, released the important documentation last month.

Unlike many other local authorities around the country, Medway Council didn't make public its full 2017 'expression of interest' or 2019 'business case' submissions - citing a variety of reasons for not wishing to do so.

The £170m of taxpayers' money was awarded to Medway Council in November 2019 and was intended to allow the council to implement its controversial plans to facilitate the building of up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula, particularly around Chattenden, High Halstow and Hoo.

The scheme is known as the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) project.

Many local residents feel that Medway Council's proposals are politically motivated, secretive and designed to protect areas in and around Chatham, Gillingham and Rainham - by preferring development on the Hoo Peninsula.

Following a relentless campaign by local residents on the Hoo Peninsula, parish councils and Village Voices Publishing, since January 2021, political support for Medway Council's proposals has completely collapsed - leaving the entire project in

tatters and an administration on the brink of public humiliation at the ballot box!

Many of the political figures who have spearheaded, championed and supported the HIF project are on the move at the next set of local elections in May. Council leader Cllr. Alan Jarrett, of Chatham, is set to retire from public office (refer to our ViVo column in June 2022), former leader Cllr. Rodney Chambers is also set to retire from public office and Cllr. Phil Filmer (Portfolio Holder for Frontline Services) will not seek re-election on the Hoo Peninsula (he's decided to seek election in a new ward called Cuxton, Halling and Strood Riverside instead).

The 'expression of interest' and 'business case' documentation, released by Homes England, might be an uncomfortable reminder for some of those who currently serve in the ruling administration at Medway Council (controlled by the Conservative Party), as the document publicly names the principle councillors who supported the HIF project from the outset.

Unsurprisingly, Cllr. Jarrett, the current leader, can be found plonked at the heart of the unpopular housing proposals, of course. He is joined by his predecessor Cllr. Chambers, who represents a council ward in Chatham, but what may raise a few eyebrows on the Hoo Peninsula is that Cllr. Filmer is shown as being a principle supporter of this devastating project.

The 'expression of interest' document, submitted to government, states: 'The Council Leader (Cllr. Alan Jarrett), Portfolio Holder for Strategic

Regeneration (Cllr. Rodney Chambers) and Portfolio Holder for Frontline Services (Cllr. Phil Filmer), in particular, fully support the proposal'.

Regardless of how some elected representatives have responded to enquiries and questions from Village Voices Publishing over the years, in relation to Medway Council's HIF project, this newly released documentation provides answers to many questions. It is therefore absolutely right and proper that Village Voices Publishing, along with members of the local community, continue to hold 'local politicians' to account for their actions.

Despite many commentators believing that Medway Council's HIF project is 'dead in the water', as a result of dwindling political support and deep-rooted factions within the Conservative Party locally, officials have stubbornly continued spending taxpayers' money on the doomed project - seemingly oblivious of the political reality and of the wishes of their elected masters!

Many of our readers have told us that they want local MP Kelly Tolhurst to step up and urgently seek government intervention to cancel the £170m of taxpayer cash awarded to the council, as part of the HIF project.

If you believe our local MP must now seek the withdrawal of the HIF project funding, contact Kelly Tolhurst MP and tell her what you think. Write to: Kelly Tolhurst MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or send an email to: kelly.tolhurst.mp@parliament.uk



ViVo

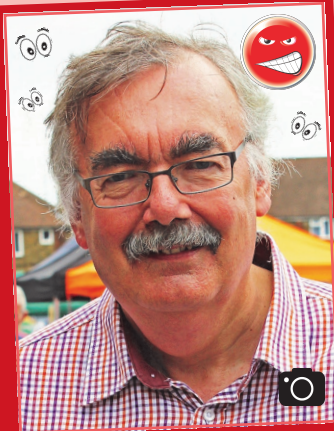
out and about and sometimes armchair based
OUR KERBSIDE MEANDERINGS

CHATTENDEN: Following last month's item about an abundance of discarded (and used) dog poo bags left at 'Deangate Ridge Country Park', ViVo is delighted to bring you more dog poo news this month! This dog poo bag holder at Hoo Common has been featured in ViVo before, for the same reason, but here we go again! Even though the idea of installing a dog poo bag holder was a very good idea - it is important to keep the holder checked and re-stocked to prevent the holder from running out of bags, otherwise what is the point of having it? Hoo St. Werburgh Parish Council is responsible for managing Hoo Common and for the poo bag holder, but the holder is rarely maintained. Come on Hoo St. Werburgh Parish Council - sort it out!



HOO PENINSULA MARSHSES: ViVo recently received an anonymous letter (ViVo frequently receives such letters and notes covering a range of topics), but the sender of this particular letter was stated as being the 'Hoo Peninsula Marshian' - a marsh dweller by all accounts! The very generous letter, full of praise and kindness, was complimentary about the content of the Village Voices Community Magazine and asked for praise to be passed to all those at Village Voices Publishing. ViVo thanks the Hoo Peninsula Marshian and is over the moon by the many wonderful and positive remarks - live long and prosper!

MEDWAY COUNCIL HQ: More insults have been flung at residents on the Hoo Peninsula. This time the culprit is Conservative Party councillor Adrian Gulvin (pictured right), who represents Walderslade ward in Chatham (he's also a member of Medway Council's controlling political cabinet). At a meeting on 7th February, Cllr. Gulvin demonstrated a deep misunderstanding of how residents on the Hoo Peninsula feel about Medway Council's controversial proposals (known as the HIF project) to dump up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula, particularly around Chattenden, High Halstow and Hoo. Cllr. Gulvin suggested that the lack of responses to a recent 'Hoo Development Framework Consultation' showed that there wasn't a 'groundswell of opposition' on the Hoo Peninsula to the huge level of housing proposed by Medway Conservatives. But, Cllr. Gulvin clearly doesn't understand the fact that huge numbers of Hoo Peninsula residents regard Medway Council's proposals as politically motivated and fundamentally flawed and, as such, treat such consultations with the contempt they deserve! Whilst ViVo doesn't think residents should spend too much time thinking about the views of this misinformed councillor, residents can, if they like, write/email Cllr. Gulvin and tell him what they think. Letters can be posted to: Cllr. Adrian Gulvin, c/o Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4TR, or emails can be sent to: adrian.gulvin@medway.gov.uk



CHATTENDEN

CHATTENDEN: As far as ViVo is aware, Chattenden is the only local village without a village/parish boundary sign in place. Residents frequently contact ViVo to complain about this and to advise that they feel somewhat overlooked and ignored by both Medway Council and Hoo St. Werburgh Parish Council. ViVo highlighted the lack of a village sign in Chattenden way back in December 2019, but nothing has happened. Do you know any other local village or community without a village/parish boundary sign? Contact ViVo to share your information (contact details on page three).





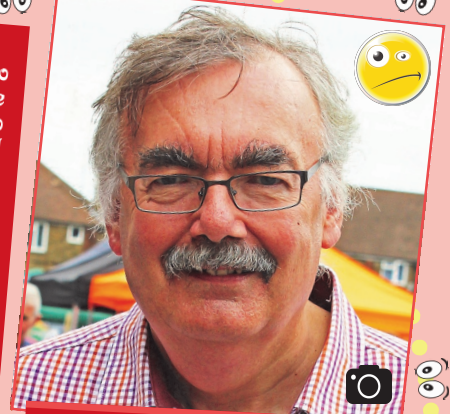
ViVo

out and about and sometimes armchair based

OUR KERBSIDE MEANDERINGS



HOO PENINSULA: ViVo is 'chomping at the bit' with excitement to discover that Homeleigh Garden Centre in Hoo will be running a competition to name the much-loved Homeleigh Horse! The competition will be open to children in the Village Voices Community Magazine distribution area (see the map on page 39) and prizes will include children's gardening items. Visitors to Homeleigh will have noticed the beautiful decorative horse standing at the side of the car park (frequently sporting different fashions and trends). More details about this exciting competition will appear next month. In the meantime enjoy the advert for Homeleigh Garden Centre on page 7.



MEDWAY COUNCIL HQ: Following their recent defeat at the ballot box, and following the departure of council leader Cllr. Alan Jarrett, of Chatham, members of Medway Conservatives elected a new leader last month. The group of 22 representatives (down from 33) chose another Chatham councillor, Adrian Gulvin (Lordswood and Walderslade ward) to lead them. Readers may recall that Cllr. Gulvin featured on this page in April because of silly comments he made at a meeting in February - suggesting that there wasn't a 'groundswell of opposition' on the Hoo Peninsula, particularly around Chattenden, High Halstow and Hoo, to the huge level of housing proposed by Medway Conservatives (12,000 houses). Cllr. Elizabeth Turpin was elected as Deputy Leader of Medway Conservatives. Cllr. Turpin represents Strood Rural ward (effectively 'Hoo Peninsula West') - incorporating Cliffe, Cliffe Woods, Cooling, Frindsbury, Upnor and Wainscott. Conservative Party insiders have told ViVo that Cllr. Turpin would make a much better leader (and Leader of the Opposition) than Cllr. Gulvin. It probably doesn't greatly matter who currently leads Medway Conservatives, as this group is expected to remain in opposition on the council until May 2027.



EVERYWHERE: With the exception of an area in Lower Higham, around Higham Railway Station, there aren't any Controlled Parking Zones in the Village Voices Community Magazine distribution area, so fewer parking controls exist locally, albeit we still have plenty of single and double yellow lines and kerb markings etc. A reader recently submitted the above images showing inconsiderate parking in Hoo. One of these images demonstrates the difficulty of using a footway with a pram because of how a vehicle has been parked. The reader who supplied ViVo with these images is asking drivers to consider those who use mobility scooters, wheelchairs and prams and keep footways clear, as they aren't intended for vehicles! As an aside, many readers in Hoo recently contacted ViVo to report that two Parking Attendants were almost constantly patrolling the centre of Hoo for the week or two before the local elections (on 4th May). Was this a political gimmick or something meaningful? Keep your eyes peeled to see if this level of enforcement continues.



THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN

By Tony Watson

The recent Medway Council election count, held in Gillingham, started just after 10pm on Thursday 4th May and ended at around 7am on Friday 5th May.

Although not as momentous as the first election count I attended, in May 1997, the recent count wasn't entirely lacking interest.

The headline in the Medway Towns was that Medway Conservatives lost control of Medway Council having run Kent's only unitary authority for 20 years and that the Medway Labour and Co-operative Party, led by Cllr. Vince Maple, swept to victory with a shiny new mandate, albeit the victory didn't stretch to achieving any electoral representation on the Hoo Peninsula!

It'll be interesting to see how the new administration seeks to manage unresolved problems left by Medway Conservatives - most notably the lack of a Local Plan and, as part of that, the unashamed pre-determination of that emerging Local Plan - in the form of the 'still active' HIF Project, which seeks to allow the building of up to 12,000 homes around Chattenden, High Halstow and Hoo.

In the unlikely event that the HIF Project is implemented, it would be devastating for the whole of the Hoo Peninsula, and surrounding areas, affecting all those who have to use the A228 and A289.

Although in a chaotic mess and with massive opposition locally, the HIF Project remains 'on the table' and council officials continue spending taxpayers' money progressing aspects of this project - even though Medway Council's position is that the Local Plan process has

been sent back to the drawing board - definitely a case of putting the cart before the horse! Observers have therefore concluded that what is now happening is a serious example of pre-determination.

The HIF Project was created by Medway Conservatives and many of our readers feel that it was politically motivated - created to avoid developing in areas where there had been electoral strongholds for the Conservative Party - in and around Capstone, in Chatham, and Rainham.

The longer the HIF Project remains on the table - the more difficult things will be for the new Labour administration as, whatever proposals it eventually brings forward, and if the current HIF project is part of that offer, it will face robust legal challenge - and will probably be rejected by an independent examiner (appointed by the panning inspectorate). The consequences would be very serious for Medway Council.

The mandate of those elected as councillors on the Hoo Peninsula, specifically in the most affected areas of Chattenden, High Halstow and Hoo, must not be ignored by the new administration or by local MP Kelly Tolhurst. With a General Election on the horizon and both keen to attract votes on the Hoo Peninsula - the Conservative Party and Labour Party must reach out and cancel the HIF Project - this was the overwhelming demand from voters in Chattenden, High Halstow and Hoo on 4th May when the 'Crozer, Pearce and Sands' trio, who unequivocally oppose the HIF Project, obtained a 72.9% share of the vote - one of the highest ever achieved locally!

Village Voices Publishing will continue standing shoulder to shoulder with local residents in opposing the HIF Project.

I first met the new leader of Medway Council (Cllr. Maple) in 2011. I've always found him to be a friendly and likeable chap with honourable intentions. Indeed, he was one of few elected representatives to say hello and shake hands at the recent election count.

As much as I like Cllr. Maple, personally, and we share some views, I don't know if he has any desire to stand up to officials at Medway Council who have for too long tried forcing local communities to accept an unwanted political agenda - emanating from an obsession with making 'Medway' a 'place' - seemingly disregarding our area's rich authentic heritage and potential.

Having watched many Medway Council meetings, I am sadly reaching the conclusion that, aside from party political differences, Cllr. Maple and the former Cllr. Jarrett appear to be two sides of the same coin?!

Large numbers of Hoo Peninsula residents don't agree with the narrow and authoritarian 'Medway' obsession and vehemently never will, but that shouldn't mean that communities on the Hoo Peninsula are browbeaten, ridiculed, ignored, or even manipulated, by representatives of Medway Council (both elected and employed).

The unique Hoo Peninsula community is one of the largest contributing areas for the collection of council tax and business rates in the Medway Council area, so the passionate views and opinions of its residents must be respected.

Government set to withdraw funding from council's controversial HIF Project

Government funding for Medway Council's Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) Project - to enable mass housing development on the Hoo Peninsula - is set to be withdrawn by the Secretary of State.

On 9th June, government quango Homes England wrote to Medway Council to advise that it would be recommending to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities that £170m of taxpayers' cash requested by the council to support the building of up to 12,000 homes be withdrawn - effectively bringing to an end the HIF Project. The Homes England letter to Medway Council is thought to have included dozens of reasons why the project is unsustainable and should essentially be cancelled by the Secretary of State, The Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP.

Just before we went to print with this month's publication, rumours were swirling that Michael Gove was on the brink of cancelling the HIF Project by withdrawing the funding.

Medway Council has apparently wasted more than £18m of taxpayers' money on the HIF Project - a scheme many local residents believe was simply created to allocate housing development to greenfield sites on the Hoo Peninsula in order to protect Capstone Valley and Rainham. This politically motivated and biased plan was spearheaded by councillors and officials seemingly without a comprehensive evidence base or justification to allocate such a large amount of development on the environmentally sensitive Hoo Peninsula.

The Village Voices Publishing campaign calling for the HIF Project to be scrapped began in January 2021. Since that time we have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the local community to provide residents with clear information and to hold elected representatives and council officials to account.

We'll be looking back at our campaign, and provide the latest updates, in next month's publication.

Chomping at the bit to name the Homeleigh Horse!

A popular local garden centre has this month launched a children's competition to name a decorative horse.

Located at Homeleigh Garden Centre, in Hoo, the much-loved (and large) garden ornament is currently known simply as the 'Homeleigh Horse', so the owners of the long-established family business recently decided to give the animal a name!

The horse stands overlooking a fence to the side of the garden centre's car park where it is frequently dressed in different fashions and trends.

Local children are invited to come up with a name for the horse. Entries must be placed in a special post-box at Homeleigh Garden Centre (Ratcliffe Highway, ME3 8QD) or, alternatively, entries can be emailed to Village Voices Publishing (and these entries will be placed in the post-box before the closing date).



After the closing date, three names will be shortlisted and the children who submitted these suggestions will receive a children's gardening prize. One of the suggested name entries will then be chosen as the winner and the Homeleigh Horse will, at last, have a name!

So, whether you want to name the horse Herbert, Hilda or Happy, or anything else, get your thinking caps on and make sure your entry is delivered to the special post-box at Homeleigh Garden Centre (or emailed to Village Voices Publishing) by 25/08/2023 at 5pm (the closing date). Parents/carers should supply their name and contact details, the name and age of the child, as well as the suggested name for the horse. Competition rules are available on request or by going online (villagevoicespublishing.co.uk)

Labour reveals support for HIF just before the project collapses

Just 20 days after formally taking over Medway Council, the new Labour and Co-operative administration revealed its support for the deeply unpopular proposal to build up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula (the HIF Project), mostly around the communities of Chattenden, High Halstow and Hoo.

Although this news won't come as a great surprise to many, our readers have expressed disappointment that the new administration has shown such enthusiastic support for what many Hoo Peninsula residents regard as a politically motivated and fundamentally flawed project - created by Medway Council's former leader Alan Jarrett and his Conservative Party colleagues to simply avoid developing areas in and around Capstone Valley and Rainham.

At the first cabinet meeting held on 13th June, the new administration unleashed its full-throated support for Alan Jarrett's HIF Project and, to the amazement of Hoo Peninsula residents, Cllr. Teresa Murray (Deputy Leader) confirmed that the Labour and Co-operative Group had always supported the HIF Project proposals and that it had been honest with voters during the recent local elections concerning its HIF Project policy.

Many of our readers were unaware of the Labour and Co-operative Group's policy of supporting the HIF Project. Indeed, back in February 2022, an article in this publication was printed with the headline 'No opposition from Labour on HIF plans' - seemingly causing Labour councillor Stephen Hubbard to take to social media and express outrage - even attempting to unfairly personally attack the owners of

Village Voices Publishing for printing the article.

During the recent cabinet meeting, it was revealed that Homes England, the effective 'sponsor' of the HIF Project, had written to the council (on 9th June) to advise that it intended to withdraw its £170m of funding (taxpayers' money), although Cllr. Maple (Leader of the Council) didn't divulge any specific details about why. This caused several members of the Labour and Co-operative Group to express frustration about the situation and, to the dismay of some of our readers, certain cabinet members appeared to express a degree of aggression towards those who oppose the HIF Project on the Hoo Peninsula, although Cllr. Murray described herself as being 'heartbroken' by the news!

Looking back at the Peninsula Ward by-election in December 2022 - the only leaflet delivered by the Labour and Co-operative Group (and its candidate David Hodges) made no mention of the HIF Project whatsoever - despite it being one of the most important local issues. And, many of our readers cannot recall anyone from Labour declaring their public support for this controversial project before the local elections in May - apparently no one in the most affected areas of Chattenden, High Halstow and Hoo can recall having received any election leaflets from Labour and Co-operative Party candidates Gary Barwell, Giuliana Christmas and Steve Vickery.

Although the Labour and Co-operative Party won the recent local elections in the Medway Towns, it didn't achieve any significant political mandate within any of the three wards on the Hoo Peninsula ('All Saints', 'Hoo Saint Werburgh and High

Halstow' and 'Strood Rural'). In fact, collectively, across these three wards, they only achieved around 18.4% of the vote on average - compared to 36.6% for Independent candidates and 29.6% for Medway Conservatives.

Since the cabinet meeting on 13th June, Cllr. Stephen Hubbard, who now chairs the council's planning committee, has once again taken to social media to defend his party and to claim that the HIF Project was originally for 8,000 homes and that former leader Alan Jarrett increased this to 12,000 before a bid (for £170m of taxpayers' cash) was submitted to Homes England.

The contractual agreement between Medway Council and Homes England, approved in 2019, is for 12,100 homes.

Many of our readers believe that the work to produce a Local Plan, of which the controversial HIF Project is a part, is beyond the capabilities of Medway Council, regardless of which political party runs the organisation. It is understood that a number of key council officials involved in pushing the politically motivated HIF Project were also key players in the failed attempt to build a 5,000-home town on a bird sanctuary at Lodge Hill in Chattenden (in 2013). If, like many of our readers, you feel that the production of a Local Plan should be placed in the hands of experts from the Planning Inspectorate instead, because this organisation would probably achieve a fairer housing allocation for the Hoo Peninsula, contact local MP Kelly Tolhurst by writing to: Kelly Tolhurst MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or by emailing: kelly.tolhurst.mp@parliament.uk

A decade since plan to destroy bird sanctuary was rejected

Local residents and campaigners last month marked the tenth anniversary of a large bird sanctuary on the Hoo Peninsula being saved from destruction.

In June 2013, a Planning Inspector rejected a controversial plan to dump a 5,000-home town at Lodge Hill in Chattenden.

The plan was the work of housing developer Land Securities, although the scheme was fiercely promoted and sponsored by Medway Council.

The proposal was part of Medway Council's then development blueprint, known as a Core Strategy, but when examined by an independent Inspector it was concluded that the plan was unsound, unjustified and that Medway Council appeared to be targeting this specific location on the Hoo Peninsula without properly considering other locations in the Medway Towns.

Many local commentators believe that the HIF Project, the current plan to dump up to 12,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula, in many ways replicates the mistakes of the previous failed plan - with criticism that officials have seemingly not learnt any lessons from the 2013 experience - and have, as a result, probably wasted significant sums of taxpayers' money!

Despite the Core Strategy being rejected in June 2013, which included the proposal for the 5,000-home town at Lodge Hill, a planning application was, rather bizarrely, presented to the planning committee for decision in September 2014.

Despite the Planning Inspector's earlier ruling on Medway Council's Core Strategy - the



The Lodge Hill site, the most important in the whole of Britain for Nightingale, was notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 2013.

planning committee at the Local Planning Authority (Medway Council) unanimously voted in favour of the devastating proposal.

Interestingly, the chair of the planning committee at that time was Cllr. Diane Chambers who, as well as being a councillor in Chatham with connections to Rainham and Gillingham, was a well known campaigner to stop development at Capstone Valley in Chatham!

A recording of this planning committee meeting can be viewed on the Village Voices Publishing YouTube channel (follow the links to this from villagevoicespublishing.co.uk).

It was said at the time that the names of those who shamefully voted for this application should never be forgotten, as these individuals ignored and disregarded information from the independent Planning Inspector (published the year before), as well as expert reports from organisations like the RSPB, and simply voted to destroy a precious and

nationally protected bird sanctuary - the most important site for Nightingale in the whole of Britain!

Those who still serve as elected representatives on Medway Council and who voted (as members of the planning committee) to destroy the Lodge Hill bird sanctuary (back in 2014) were: Cllr. Adrian Gulvin (Conservative), Cllr. Stephen Hubbard (Labour) and Cllr. Barry Kemp (Conservative).

In the early days of the campaign to save Lodge Hill from destruction, the local battle was valiantly and consistently fought by the late Lionel Pearce (who was chairman of Hoo St. Werburgh Parish Council), ward councillor Tony Watson and the RSPB.

Medway Council loudly declared a 'Climate Emergency' in 2019, but if the Lodge Hill proposal had been successful, the destruction of this protected wildlife site and natural habitat would have been well underway at this time - oh the irony!