

from your **Local & Vocal Independent Voice**

Councillor **Michael Pearce** 

Campaign to save and protect all three Hoo Peninsula fire stations: Since April 2026, I have been raising serious concerns about the possibility of any fire station on the Hoo Peninsula being closed or the safety net across the Hoo Peninsula being weakened, long before Kent Fire & Rescue Service's proposals became public. Its June 2026 Resourcing Review proposed closing Cliffe and Grain fire stations, which would have left Hoo as the only fire station physically located on the Hoo Peninsula. I made direct representations to the fire service and, on 24th June 2026, wrote to every member of the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority, urging them to reject the proposals. I published my letter so residents could see the case being made directly to decision-makers. On 25th June 2026, the Fire Authority delayed its decision on launching the consultation by six weeks. Separately, The Independent Group submitted a detailed 53-page formal representation, making its position unequivocal: Cliffe, Hoo and Grain fire stations must all remain open and operational. Grain was subsequently, temporarily, removed from the Resourcing Review, although the fire service says its original assessment has not changed and it still believes the case for closing Grain was robust. On 15th July 2026, Ann Millington, Chief Executive of Kent Fire & Rescue Service, gave me what she described as the "current, factual position", stating that Grain would be retained for now and its position revisited in late 2028. However, during the week commencing 20th July 2026, she told the Chief Executive of Medway Council that the fire service intended to review the position in late 2027 or early 2028 to decide whether Grain's closure should be reconsidered. This rapid change in messaging is deeply concerning and means Grain could face renewed uncertainty as early as next year. The proposal to close Cliffe remains, with the Fire Authority's meeting on 6th August 2026 expected to ratify the public consultation. Cliffe, Grain and Hoo form one safety net and resilience network, and no fire station on the Hoo Peninsula should close. I will continue fighting to protect all three stations and will share details of how residents can have their say when and if the consultation formally begins.

Proposed Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) at Solomon's Farm: I am firmly opposed to Eku Energy's proposed Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) at Solomon's Farm in High Halstow (the application site is on the border between High Halstow and Hoo). The scheme would introduce an industrial development onto high-grade agricultural land in the Sharnal Valley, between Hoo and High Halstow. This is an important open rural landscape which helps preserve the clear separation between the two villages. Covering farmland with battery containers, substations, transformers, access roads, security fencing and associated infrastructure would fundamentally alter its character and appearance. There is a far more appropriate location at Kingsnorth, where extensive brownfield and previously developed land sits alongside existing electricity infrastructure. Kingsnorth already has an established energy industry character and is the logical place for a development of this scale and nature. It makes no sense to industrialise productive farmland when a suitable brownfield alternative exists nearby, closer to the infrastructure the scheme would rely upon. The planning system should protect the countryside and direct major industrial and energy developments towards brownfield sites wherever possible. High-quality agricultural land should not be treated as the easiest or cheapest option for developers, particularly where its loss would damage an important landscape and weaken the separation between established communities. I will therefore strongly oppose Eku Energy's Solomon's Farm proposal and argue that the company must properly assess and pursue brownfield options at Kingsnorth instead. The Sharnal Valley should remain open, rural and agricultural. This proposal is in the wrong place, and the countryside between Hoo and High Halstow should not be sacrificed when a demonstrably better location is available.

Medway Council's Local Plan and the campaign to Save The Hoo

Peninsula: The Labour administration's Local Plan remains one of the biggest threats facing the Hoo Peninsula, and I continue to lead the Save The Hoo Peninsula Campaign against unsustainable proposals that would place unacceptable pressure on our villages, roads, services, countryside and farmland. As previously reported, Richard Buxton Solicitors, acting for the campaign, wrote to the Planning Inspectors raising serious concerns about new or materially amended documents published after the 2025 Regulation 19 consultation had closed. The Inspectors' subsequent letter to Medway Council identified areas of "particular concern" and "significant concerns", and made clear that the Local Plan is unlikely to be adopted in 2026. The Inspectors then required Medway Council to carry out a further consultation

on supporting evidence documents, which took place from 8th June 2026 to 6th July 2026. Richard Buxton Solicitors submitted a response to this additional consultation on behalf of the Save The Hoo Peninsula Campaign. Our legal fund has so far raised £9,499 through the Crowdfunder platform, with fundraising continuing. This is a huge community effort, but the fight is far from over. As campaign leader, I will continue doing everything I can to challenge Labour's unsustainable Local Plan and defend the Hoo Peninsula from lasting damage.

Local Government Reorganisation: On 16th July 2026, the Government announced that "Option 4b" would form the basis of local government reorganisation across Kent from April 2028. In our part of Kent, Medway Council, Gravesham Borough Council and Dartford Borough Council will be abolished and their areas merged to create a new North Kent Council. I remain deeply concerned about the cost, the lack of direct public consent and the risks to local services. The reorganisation is expected to cost taxpayers across the areas currently served by Kent County Council and Medway Council £130.9 million to implement. This money could instead be spent on improving the services residents rely on, while the implementation costs could take more than 14 years to recover. The Option 4b business case states that North Kent Council would begin with a £76.6 million budget gap. In my view, this creates a serious risk of service cuts, facility closures and higher council tax. Residents in the existing Medway Council area currently pay among the lowest council tax rates in Kent and could therefore face substantial increases as charges are harmonised. I am also concerned that harmonising services could mean ending our weekly kerbside collections of general waste and recycling. Preparations for the changes are already underway and are expected to intensify following the local elections in May 2027, ahead of North Kent Council taking over in April 2028. There is a real danger that such a large and sprawling authority will become more remote from the communities it serves, focusing on regional strategies rather than local services and the protection of community assets. Parish Councils must be properly involved throughout the process, particularly if they are expected or invited to take on additional responsibilities, which must be supported by adequate funding, staff and resources. The creation of Medway Council in 1998 caused considerable upset in Rochester, Strood and on the Hoo Peninsula, and the way those changes were handled continues to contribute to dissatisfaction and mistrust today. Given the scale of the reorganisation, residents and Parish Councils must be kept properly informed and meaningfully involved throughout the process.