

## **COUNCIL UPDATE 5.2024**

### **GODINTON ROAD**

I have the results of my speed survey; there were 63 responses, 54 in favour of a 20mph zone and nine against. Much of the feedback consisted of complaints of congestion which is causing vehicles, particularly busses and taxis, to get through the narrow section before meeting a vehicle coming in the opposite direction. Also, there were comments requesting speed cushions. I plan to conduct a further informal engagement to gain feedback on two schemes:

- Installation of speed humps whilst making it clear to residents the likelihood of an increase in noise and vibration.
- Creation of a passing place by removing some parking spaces halfway up the first section of parking, hopefully creating parking elsewhere to counter the loss.

There will be a reduction in taxis using Godinton Road once the enforcement cameras are in place at Sackville Crescent later this year. This is because only hackney carriages (not private hire vehicles) will be permitted to use the bus lane. This should have an effect on the number of speeding vehicles rushing to get back to the station.

I requested signage to direct cyclists along the cycleway behind Atherfield Drive. However, Atherfield Drive and Godinton Way are private streets beyond the jurisdiction of KCC so whilst this cycle path is very useful for residents, KCC as the highways authority are unable to make changes to the cycle path. Both ends of the cycle route direct users back onto Godinton Road which is already the through route for cyclists so directing cyclists down this cycle path would effectively be a detour.

### **SOUTH EAST COAST AMBULANCE SERVICE (SECAM)**

SECAM held a public meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> May to hear from residents their concerns about the service. The issues raised included:

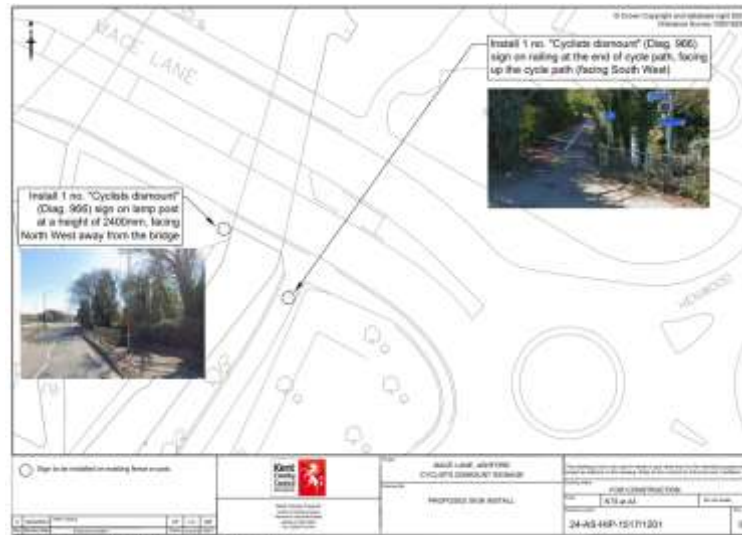
- Paramedic access to information about existing treatment was discussed. The public need to be confident that existing conditions (and wishes for treatment) are supported. It was reported that SECAM clinicians should be aware of underlying issues. SECAM advise there is “respect” for information related to the patients’ conditions.
- I asked about input that SECAM have on planning applications and whether they contribute towards design standards for roads to ensure access. SECAM are moving towards slightly smaller vehicles which will help. SECAM are involved in 20mph schemes and speed reduction schemes such as speed humps.
- SECAM have a volunteer cohort of community first responders and there is a new strategy to develop their skills and how they should

support patients. This is thought to be particularly relevant and helpful for falls where patients cannot expect an ambulance quickly.

- The annual meeting is on 13<sup>th</sup> September at Ardingly Show Ground. This will include a presentation on the new strategy and its move out of “special measures”.

## MACE LANE

I have asked for two “cyclist dismount” signs on Mace Lane as shown below.



## CAP LIFESKILLS

I attended a series of meetings from 3<sup>rd</sup> May at The Well in Willesborough. The purpose was to hear steps that residents can implement to reduce the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. Tips included taking time out before making a purchase – Stop and think - Do I need it, could I borrow it, could I get it cheaper elsewhere? The impact of credit offers (Brighthouse are the worse at 69.9% apr). BOGOF are not always only the best offer. Budgeting can be illuminating to understand essential and non-essential expenditure.

## MENTAL HEALTH

The Kent and Medway Better Mental Health Network met on 7<sup>th</sup> May. Key discussions included how art can have a positive effect on mental health.

- It reduces stress, improves our sleep quality, improves overall wellbeing and gives people reason and purpose. Arts and social activity help us recover better, live longer and recover better. It reduces the sense of loneliness and provides a better life experience. For young people it helps reduce anxiety and have real life experience; it is a safe place to express themselves. Art helps society honour the past.
- We heard from West Kent Mind who gave an overview of their programme and how it might be expanded to east Kent.
- Living Words work with KCC for those with ongoing mental health issues. Their projects include hard to reach groups to create art

projects individually or in group. They include choir singing, puppetry, acting, writing, and painting.

- Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> May was World Maternal Mental Health Day. To help raise awareness, Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Midwife carried out trolley dashes around the MMH maternity unit to help shine a light on perinatal mental health conditions and the support available to families. Thanks to The Medway Hospital Charity, wellbeing gift bags were handed out to patients to help give them a boost.
- A new £101m investment will aim to give every child in England the chance to learn to sing, play an instrument and make music. The funding will deliver 43 music hubs around the country to provide the impetus to ensure the Government's National Plan for Music Education is delivered. Rolled out by Arts Council England, the hubs will also form part of the organisation's Let's Create strategy, which aims to unlock creativity across the country regardless of people's background, circumstances and location.

## **CHILMINGTON GREEN - STODMARSH**

I attended ABC planning meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> May for a development of a new wastewater treatment works (WWTW) to service Chilmington Green located in Stubbs Cross. The issue was that the discharge goes into the River Beult not the Stour so the consideration is the effect on the River Beult SSSI rather than Stodmarsh SSSI. The applicant advised that they would test for Biochemical Oxygen Demand, Total Suspended Solids, Alkalinity, Total Nitrogen and total dissolved Phosphorus regularly. Natural England had previously considered the development could have potential significant effects on the River Beult SSSI and require appropriate mitigation being identified.

The biggest challenge is the ***seasonal changes of the river flow and intermittent nature of flows of the river south of the discharge point.*** There was ***insufficient detail on the additional measures necessary when the flow rates are low and the idea of discharging to ground or a new point of discharge further downstream; this was not properly explained by the applicant.***

Furthermore, additional monitoring would be required to ensure there is no adverse impact on the River Beult SSSI before an Environment Agency (EA) discharge permit is granted. ***No explanation was received as to how wastewater would be dealt with without an EA discharge authorisation.***

Additionally, there is the ***question of odour given the problems there have been historically from the Bybrook WWTW.*** There is a profound unfairness is residents getting a WWTW when they were promised in ***the Chilmington Green Area Action Plan (2013) for managed farmland at the site, it was considered "more than regrettable" that part of the buffer zone between***

***Chilmington Green and the surrounding villages was proposed to be lost to a WWTW given its visual impact.***

The development was not approved.

### **ASHFORD LOCAL CHILDREN’S PARTNERSHIP GROUP**

The group met at the rebranded “Family Hub” at Waterside in Willesborough on 8<sup>th</sup> May. The Family Hub model gives access to services for 0–19-year-olds (to 25 years for those with Special Education Needs and Disabilities – “SEND”) from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024 at Waterside, Belmont Road, Mabledon Ave, Willow Centre and Stanhope Library (when reconfigured by Sept 2025). There will be enhanced access to services across the whole county in Hub sites plus enhanced outreach and digital offering. Additional information, advice and guidance about support services for children and young people with SEND will be available. New names for the Family Hubs are listed below:

District	Current centre names <input type="checkbox"/>	New names (X Family Hub)
Ashford	The Willow Children's Centre	The Willow
	Waterside Children's Centre	Waterside
	Ashford North Youth Centre	Ashford North
	Sure Steps Children's Centre	Bockhanger
	Stanhope Library	N/A
	Little Explorers Children's Centre	Tenterden

Support for those Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) was discussed including digital poverty for those without internet and laptops - some only use a smartphone. A new grant can be accessed to support IT provision, but the rural parts of Ashford lack mobile phone coverage. A digital learning platform for college offering is required for those who are struggling post-COVID to move into college setting. More apprenticeship opportunities are being offered and support for businesses to create the openings.

### **COMMUNITY SAFETY UNIT**

The group met on 9<sup>th</sup> May. Key issues included.

- Consultation is underway to renew the Public Space Protection Order for Conningbrook Lakes.
- The Violence Against Women and Children (VAWG) event at Singleton Village Hall went well on 26<sup>th</sup> April. It was female only and run by Catherine Stevens. Many attended (more than expected). Further events will be arranged by Kent Police who can be contacted at [csu.ashford@kent.police.uk](mailto:csu.ashford@kent.police.uk).

- Kent Police & VRU will attend Ashford Pride on 22<sup>nd</sup> June. Kent Police will have a stand next to ABC. Kent Fire and Rescue and KCC Wardens expressed an interest in attending.
- A visit is planned for Primrose Drive Pond area to try and see if access can be designed out by Aspire.
- A new site is being explored for a CCTV on Leslie Chalk House.
- A conflict de-escalation event is being planned by Ashford Mediation and Ashford College.
- PC Tim Moody has moved to Ashford Police and will focus on the town centre and Victoria Ward.
- An event at the Designer Outlet on 13<sup>th</sup> April with uniformed and non-uniformed officers resulted in arrests and stop and searches. The plan is to repeat.
- A “day of action” was planned for motorbikes on 10<sup>th</sup> May.
- There are reports of licenced sellers of a digital link to a magazine to do with knife crime. They are operating around the bandstand which is potentially stopping people accessing the town centre. The ABC licencing team will investigate.
- Kent Wardens will have two FT and one PT in Ashford from mid-June. The PT will be operating in Stanhope. Allocation of the FT will be discussed during June, but it was noted there were increased use of the service in Kennington, Pluckley and Willesborough. One was invited to a King’s Garden party in May as a thank you for his work.
- Access to the Flour Mill by homeless has been an issue again and ABC has been in contact with the owner with a site visit. There is a flat roof area with access that has been cut; this is not a safe building.
- There is an ASB awareness week with Resolve in June which gives an opportunity for stakeholders to take participate.
- Ska8side have moved their activities to outside the Bockhanger shops (from St Mary’s) and a group of hard-to-reach youths have been signed up to a football tournament in Canterbury in June. A PCC bid has been submitted for additional funding.

## **VACANT PROPERTY**

Councillors had a presentation on 14<sup>th</sup> May. The latest situation in Ashford is shown below.



KCC launched the No Use Empty (NUE) initiative in 2005 in East Kent. Following the success of NUE in East Kent, the initiative was rolled out across the rest of the county in 2008/09 and is now delivered by KCC in partnership with all 12 district and borough councils. The primary aim of the initiative is to improve the physical urban environment in Kent by bringing long-term empty properties back into use as quality housing accommodation through a range of interventions. To achieve this, NUE operates a loan scheme providing short term secured loans registered as a first or second charge. On repayment of the loan, funds are recycled to the next project. In addition to this NUE is helping to deliver increased Council Tax receipts and collection of Business Rates. Ashford has seen a 19% reduction in vacant property but there is more work to do.

## PROJECT GIGABIT

The Government's Project Gigabit Programme is looking to subsidise the upgrade of broadband connectivity in areas that will fall outside of the commercial build areas (known as areas of 'market-failure'). A KCC Top Up Voucher provides additional funding of up to £1,000 for homes and businesses for community-led schemes which cannot be funded entirely through the standard broadband voucher. The Kent Top-Up was one of the first of its kind in the UK.

The Kent Broadband Voucher Scheme applications are processed by the government agent, who administers the Kent top-up funding as part of their national Gigabit Voucher Scheme.

There has already been significant progress in rolling out gigabit-capable broadband infrastructure across Kent with 77% of premises now having access to gigabit-capable connections. An additional proposed £112.3 million investment by Government to deliver gigabit-capable connections to harder-to-reach, non-commercial homes and businesses is in place to support the local delivery of these vital connectivity upgrades.

## **MANHOLE COVER**

I have reported a loose manhole cover at the junction of A2070 and The Street as it is very noisy when vehicles hit it. The ref is 806749.



## **ACTIVE TRAVEL**

KCC have £0.9m allocated for active travel in the county. Funds must be spent by Sept 2025. At the KCC Walking and Cycling Strategy (KCWIP) meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> May the debate was whether the funding should be spread across all districts or allocated to just one or two projects. Ashford schemes are based on its LCWIP which can be seen here

<https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/24eb1cla/lcwip-ashford.pdf>

Explore Kent and Tenterden Town Council have launched their latest walking and cycling map. These maps make it easier to swap a car journey for walking and cycling. This great for the environment, it helps people stay fit and healthy whilst saving money. The Explore Tenterden Active Travel Map enables visitors and residents to discover and enjoy the many local walking and cycling routes, beat the traffic and enjoy some fresh air. A useful feature of the maps is that you can see how far you can walk or cycle within 15 minutes. This shows how easy it is to get to popular local destinations, in Tenterden's case, the Kent & East Sussex Railway, the Tenterden Museum and more, which supports the local economy. To download this walking and cycling maps visit <https://explorekent.org/explore-kent-town-maps/>

## **ESG – DOWNSTREAM (SCOPE 3) EMISSIONS**

I attended a seminar on 16<sup>th</sup> May on how business that KCC Pension Fund invests in can reduce their Scope 3 emissions. These are the indirect effect of their products e.g. transport to consumers and by their supply chain. There are increased regulations on this area (the new deforestation regulation can apply penalties of 4% of turnover). The seminar was how businesses can access and map renewable energy use to reduce Scope 3 emissions. An example is how suppliers based in China can use green power from renewable sources as there are capacity building concerns in some regions and provinces in China. Data collection on annual emissions can be a

challenge to ensure it is credible. Getting a strong buy-in may create an obstacle and there is increased evidence of litigation (maybe without merit) from activists.

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS**

The KCC Locality Model for SEND Inclusion was presented to councillors on 16<sup>th</sup> May and discussed again on 23<sup>rd</sup> May at full council. The Locality Model requires KCC, schools, the NHS, and other SEN service providers to work together more effectively, in geographically based Clusters, to secure such improvements. The Locality Model aims to enable SEN support, and services, to be accessed more easily and delivered in a new, more sustainable way. KCC believes this will help pupils to thrive at school, be valued, visible, and supported to feel that they are included in their local communities, and are better prepared for a happy, healthy, and productive adulthood.

Headteachers, with the support of other members of the Cluster, would be responsible for collaboratively driving local SEN mainstream improvement. They would do this by implementing a school-to-school improvement process, and by influencing the way in which their Cluster's available collective resource and other resources for 'predictable' needs would be used. KCC will make an amount of shared resource available to each Cluster, to meet 'predictable' needs of SEN support services. This shared resource, rather than much smaller amounts of money attached to individuals, will allow schools to explore many options, which can be used more creatively and would bring the advantage of economies of scale to purchasing support provision. Clusters will include both primary and secondary schools to ensure they have a clear role in supporting transition arrangements for pupils.

DoE has reviewed the accelerated development plan following the notice they issued last year to KCC. The scale of progress has been significant.

## **BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN (BNG)**

Councillors had a presentation on BNG on 22<sup>nd</sup> May. The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) has launched its "biodiversity net gain" scheme, requiring housebuilders to finance the replacement of any habitat lost to development with a 10% increase. Developers can either deliver new habitat on-site, off-site, or by purchasing credits through a new private market. While Defra has claimed the policy can deliver annual social benefits of £1.4bn, the NAO has said it is relying on a private market for biodiversity credits that currently offers just 35 hectares of habitat gain on two sites, Councils have not received funding to cover the cost of compliance and enforcement. It is important that councils are properly funded, and that the Government quickly puts in place measures to ensure the land is available for BNG off-site, for instance by allowing BNG on council-owned land in the short term.



## **LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN**

This was discussed on 23<sup>rd</sup> May at KCC. KCC will use the plan to support bidding for funding on projects that are substantial and effect more than one district. Projects include promoting Channel Tunnel for rail freight (which needs an adaptation to the loading gauge), improved direct rail link from Kent to Gatwick and the ongoing impact of Brock.

Putting Brock in and out at Junction 8 and 9 creates disruption as do breakdown and accidents when it is in place. There seems little impetus to promote any form of alternative permanent solution since the idea of lorry parks was ditched. Lorry transport still seems to find a way to avoid the M20 waiting area – is the ANPR cameras at the Brock holding area really working? Avoiding the holding area has an impact on road quality, users and residents. Specifically, there are issues with HGVs leaving the M2 to use the A251 and Trinity Road to the M20. KCC has carried out a camera trial to monitor lorries using the rural network, I hope the result of this will support KCC taking enforcement powers that councils use in London. This will follow on from the enforcement powers KCC are taking later this year enforcing the bus gates at Beaver Road, Sackville Crescent, and Bluebell Road.

## **EES – DOVER**

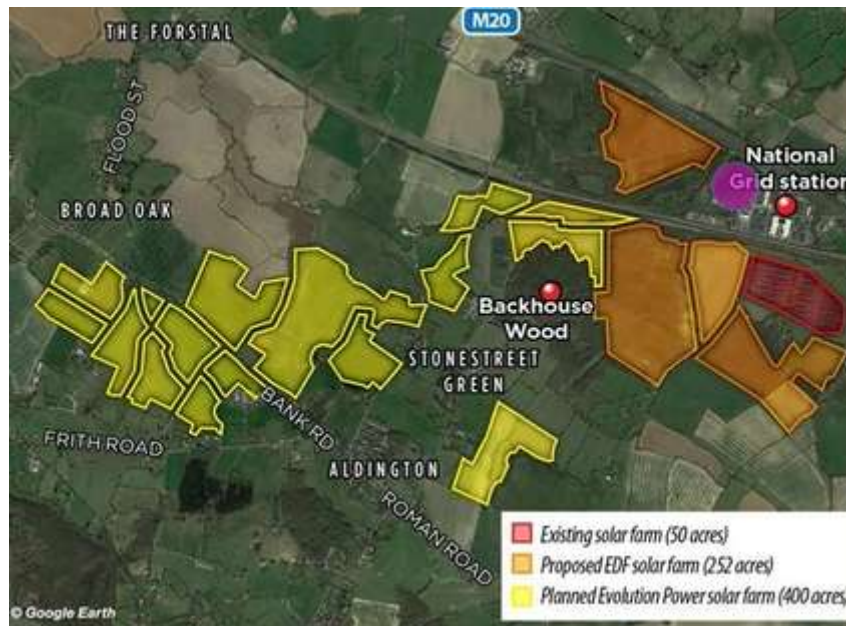
A regular topic at KCC is the new Entry Exit System being rolled out at Dover from October. There are concerns that the additional time that it will take to carry out biometric checks will cause tailbacks on the A20 and M20 and more frequent use of Brock. The current “turn up and go” system at Dover contributes to the problem as it causes travellers to turn up “on spec” regardless of queues at Dover and their time of booking.

The idea of pre-booking trips has been raised with DfT. The problem is that the licences (and associated operator franchises) with Port of Dover (PoD) would take significant time and cost to renegotiate and would not be possible until long after EES has been introduced. When this was raised, PoD were fundamentally opposed to the concept, and they also highlighted that the time and cost to modify the various systems and processes would be significant and would cause disruption to those travelling. They cited that operationally it would be very difficult - for, example, if you miss your ferry under a pre-booked regime do you lose your booking? When something similar occurs at airports, passengers need to be accommodated for quite some time until a spare seat becomes available on a flight. The turn up and go approach at PoD means that if you are at the front of the queue you get on the next ferry and is easier to co-ordinate in the space-constrained Port.

That said, KCC will work with PoD and the ferry operators on how to better manage demand. They need to be honest in their communications about delays and availability of space to travel. On too many occasions we have



## STONESTREET SOLAR



I had a meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> May to discuss how the refusal of the EDF application might affect the Stonestreet Solar scheme. A ministerial statement was issued recently by the government expressing concern about the cumulative impact, clusters of solar development and development on “best and most versatile” agricultural land. Both the EDF refusal and the ministerial statement support concerns about the impact of Stonestreet Solar on the landscape, particularly the rise up and over Bested Hill. In short **Stonestreet Solar needs to be fragmented and ABC will make that case at the hearing.** A further concern is the fact that the Stonestreet Solar site is criss-crossed by historic PROWs; EDF recognised this and proposed no changes to PROWs.

National Policy statements have been updated to say that solar are now regarded as critical infrastructure.

The Aldington & Mersham Support Group must register as an interested party when the NCIP is accepted; this will give them the opportunity to submit views and speak at any hearing. The Group’s February 2024 work will be taken “under regard” by the developer but there is a risk it will not be responded to by the developer.

The Planning Inspector is expected to ask ABC on the adequacy of the developer’s consultation. ABC’s view that the consultation was adequate but will append the Support Group’s view on the adequacy of consultation. ABC are of the view that the developer could not have done much more consultation with public meetings and website hosting they have provided. Even if ABC believed the consultation was inadequate the Planning Inspector would not need to accept that view – ABC is just a consultee. The Support

Group should be steered towards carrying out their own assessments e.g. wildlife counts etc (e.g. amphibians next to the East Stour and skylarks – the fact the land has been completely cropped will have damaged the environment).

### **OAKLANDS CAR PARK**

Delighted to see that ABC have resurfaced the car park in Oaklands. Thank you to the parish council in their support.



### **KCC – COMMERCIAL SERVICES GROUP (CSG)**

I attended a presentation from the KCC CSG team on 29<sup>th</sup> May. CSG is a publicly owned but publicly owned operation. It is the largest Local Authority Trading Company (LATCO) in the UK with an Enterprise Value of £100m and Earnings Before Interest and Tax of £17m; it has been around for 96 years. It carries out 26 commercial operations which support front line service delivery including recruitment, education support services, carbon reduction services, landscape maintenance and waste management services. As a large employer with 1,800 employees and 14,000 supply chain partners it has significant social value to Kent and has a new charity partner each year.

### **KALC**

The meeting was held on 29<sup>th</sup> May and confirmed that ABC will be holding eight ‘in person’ community events and two ‘virtual’ events in July and August 2024 to find out more about the new Local Plan. It has been agreed that events will be in Ashford Town Centre, South Ashford, North Ashford, Tenterden, Wye, Charing, Hamstreet and Chilham. The two virtual events will be held late August/September.

The sessions will be held on weekdays from 2pm-8pm with officers from the Council in attendance to answer questions. The primary purpose of the events is for communities to tell the Council what they think, ask questions, and leave feedback. Coverage will include questions and thoughts around what a Local Plan is, what is the process for producing one, what will it cover, what stage ABC are at, when ABC will go out to formal public consultation, likes and dislikes about the borough, aspirations over the next 15 years, future needs for local housing, jobs, existing and new infrastructure etc. There will be an opportunity for communities to view all of the sites submitted through the 'Call for Sites' exercise undertaken in 2023.

**Paul Bartlett**  
**Mersham, Sevington South and Finberry Ward, ABC**  
**Ashford Central Division, KCC**  
**Grosvenor Hall Ward, Kennington Community Council**  
**Sevington Ward, Sevington with Finberry Parish Council**  
**0773 929 3502**  
**[paul.bartlett@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:paul.bartlett@ashford.gov.uk) or [paul.bartlett@kent.gov.uk](mailto:paul.bartlett@kent.gov.uk)**