

COUNCIL UPDATE 6.2024

JOINT TRANSPORT BOARD

The board met on 4th June and the following items were discussed.

- Between January and May 2024, 142 lorries were clamped on Orbital and 103 on Ashford Business Park. There have been 5 reported instances to the police where clamps have been cut off and the vehicles left without payment. Ashford Truck Stop is reported full on most nights.
- Frith Road retread in June included recycling and relaying of existing surface material before applying a surface treatment.
- A streetlight on Flood Street is due to be replaced by August 2024.
- Installation of new infrastructure at Bluebell Road, Sackville Cres and Beaver Road to allow for remote CCTV enforcement of existing traffic restriction to be completed by September 2024.
- Agreements with the developer to improve the A28 junction with Simone Weil Ave and widen the A2070 approaching WHH roundabout have not yet been signed.
- The Flood Street Bridge works are still in the option study stage with delivery shown as 2024/25 (which seems ambitious).
- Church Road Kennington due to be shut 8 July to 9 August for Southern Gas Networks (SGN).
- SGN work at Western Ave from 24 July to 4 Oct and on Godinton Road 30 Sept to 6 Dec.
- National Highways to carry out work on the bridge expansion joints on Sandyhurst Lane, 28 July to 9 Aug.
- Parking enforcement at ABC housing car parks to be subject to an informal consultation so that housing residents can benefit from “firm but fair” enforcement allowing them more space to park close to their property.
- We discussed parking enforcement on spaces on highways identified for blue badge holders (Disabled Parking Bays). We agreed that better resources were needed on this. New bays are scheduled for Nine Acres and William Road with lining refreshed at Beecholme Drive.
- Eurostar are investing in 50 new trains by 2030 taking their fleet from 51 trains to 67 trains (an additional 16) to reach their target of 30 million passengers by 2030. Financial accounts for 2023 shows Eurostar revenues up 26% on 2022 to 2 billion euros, and an EBITDA of 423 million euros (up 8%). Passenger numbers were up 22% to 18.6 million. The company have also restructured their total debt down to 650 million euros and have recovered from Covid. No news of trains stopping at Ashford, but financially they are making progress.
- Double yellow lines will be refreshed in Bower Road, Mabledon Ave, Repton Manor Road, Star Road and Wellesley Road.
- The school zig-zags will be refreshed in Quantock Drive.
- Vehicle access marking will be put in Mill Court.

- A “one year on” review of the new traffic lights on the A2070 at Finberry is proposed.

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

This met on 4th June and discussed the latest position on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). 201 UASC presented in May bringing the total for the year to 672. The majority from Afghanistan, Iran and Eritrea. The national dispersal system is working better as is the information provided from the EU which has resulted in a reduction in the % of refugees presenting as USAC from 10% to 5%. To support USACs KCC has more accommodation coming on stream with Braeside House (to be renamed Maple Lodge) being refurbished and a positive report on Millbank (Supported Accommodation Unit) from United Nations High Commission For Refugees has been received.

We heard about a new Kinship Scheme which gives support for relatives and family friends who look after children when the birth parents are unable to. This now works alongside the fostering service providing this cohort with a dedicated team and access to the same training as foster carers have.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT UNIT

Ashford CSU met on 6th June. Key issues included.

- The magazine sellers selling magazines on reducing knife plans have disappeared from the town centre.
- Further VAWG events can be supported if Kennington Community Council are interested.
- Rising Sun has a domestic abuse refuge in Canterbury called Liberty House. It covers the Ashford area.
- The new staff member joining the Kent Wardens has been delayed joining. Changes to the service will be in place by September at which point parish clerks will be notified.
- Ashford Street Pastors have donated a defibrillator and will be located at the Ashford Club (2-8 Lower High Street).
- Kent Fire and Rescue are having an open day on 20th June at 3pm in Victoria Park.

KCC – GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Members had a briefing on the Growth and Infrastructure Framework (GIF) on 6th June. The 2018 version said there are expected an additional 400,000 people in Kent by 2031, a new Faversham every year! The infrastructure required will cost £16bn. The GIF is being updated by KCC.

KCC has a record of achieving 97% of infrastructure required for the County. The County sets out a local plan for ensuring there is a sustainable supply of

scarce resources to produce those minerals in which Kent is rich is (e.g. ragstone). New planning applications must provide for an improvement in biodiversity. KCC will seek contributions as set out below on education and ASC.

Service Area	Threshold for Seeking S106 Contributions	Expected Contribution	Index
Adult Social Care (TA1)	10 dwellings and above or a site size of 0.5Ha or more.	£180.88 per dwelling	BCIS All-In Tender Price
Community Learning and Skills (TA2)	10 dwellings and above or a site size of 0.5Ha or more.	£34.21 per dwelling	BCIS All-In Tender Price
Education – Primary – New Build (TA 4 & 6)	10 dwellings and above or a site size of 0.5Ha or more.	£7,081.20 per applicable* House and £1,770.30 per applicable* Flat	BCIS All-In Tender Price
Education – Primary – Expansion (TA 4 & 6)	10 dwellings and above or a site size of 0.5Ha or more.	£5,412.74 per applicable* House and £1,353.18 per applicable* Flat	BCIS All-In Tender Price
Education – Secondary – New Build (TA 4 & 6)	10 dwellings and above or a site size of 0.5Ha or more.	£5,587.19 per applicable* House and £1,396.60 per applicable* Flat	BCIS All-In Tender Price
Education – Secondary – Expansion (TA 4 & 6)	10 dwellings and above or a site size of 0.5Ha or more.	£5,329.27 per applicable* House and £1,332.32 per applicable* Flat	BCIS All-In Tender Price
Special Educational	10 dwellings and above or a site size of 0.5Ha	£569.83 per applicable* House and	BCIS All-In Tender Price

Contributions are also sought on highways, PROW, Libraries, Childrens Services and Waste Disposal. These contributions can only be used for capital projects and not for revenue spending (except for community outreach learning and under an infrastructure levy).

Highways requirement is always a thorny issue. Having a spatial strategy and transport model is essential. These shows the largest increases in traffic flows. Traffic can impact over a significant area and a transport assessment may be required for development applications. Larger developments requiring outline consent will be required to have detailed consent on traffic access. An application can only be refused if there is **unacceptable impact on safety** of a **severe cumulative impact on traffic numbers** (the fact there is existing overloading is not a reason for refusal; congestion that causes inconvenience is not a safety issue and therefore a reason for refusal; but lack of adequate visibility does have an impact on safety).

SODEXO

As part of their new contract in running the facility management at the IBF in Sevington, the Social Value Act 2012 requires greater contribution towards “social value”. I met with their consultants on 6th June to discuss how the s106 contribution improvements towards Sevington Church can also access Sodexo social value fund.

ASHFORD HEALTH ALLIANCE

The group met on 7th June. The key issues included:

- The mobile social supermarket (£20 of goods for £5) is being extended from Repton to Tenterden and there are aspirations to instigate a stop at Waterside in Newtown.
- The Childrens Centres and Youth Hubs have been transitioned into co-ordinated Kent Family Hubs. Bluebells in Hothfield has closed but all others remain open in Ashford. The premise is that it's about the first 1,001 days of a child's life. There is now much more targeted work with new community development officers being recruited. They will find out what the community wants from the service so that what is delivered in Ashford will differ from other districts in Kent. There will be building based provision plus outreach provision (working with other's buildings and providers including street based) and a digital information and guidance (not just Facebook but will now include digital platforms more relevant to youth). Further work on healthy relationships is intended for local secondary schools.
- Community Safety is looking at the opportunities for young people to access groups in Ashford and the barriers to access. The first is a stakeholder's survey to understand the groups on offer and what is good and challenging for young people to join these groups. There will then be focus groups to listen to young people to understand their needs. This will produce a map of what is needed and understand how the group can deliver new groups and services.
- There are concerns about substance use, cannabis use has not changed but the biggest increase is vaping by young people who have never been smokers (vaping is "sold" as something to stop smoking) – a local survey has been carried out showing 20% have tried vaping (nationally, 15% of children 11- to 15-years old and more than a third of 16- to 17-year-olds have vaped according to ASH). Disposable vapes can pose a serious fire risk as they contain lithium-ion batteries that can ignite if damaged, or if they are not disposed of correctly. Recharging "non-rechargeable" vapes is a significant fire risk. Trading Standards has a 2-year project to stop the sale of illegal, imported vapes. While schools ban vaping in or around school premises, young people may still carry them – there were 300 fires in primary and secondary schools in the UK last year. While this may seem a small number, one fire is too many when you consider how many teachers and young people could be put in harm's way. Fires can also be financially crippling for schools and the local authority, both of which have shrinking budgets.
- Diagnosis of ADHT, social isolation and lack of emotional resilience has increased substantially during COVID; the lack of aspirations in young people is noticeable.

KALC – JOINT PARISHES PLANNING MEETING

There will be 8 public engagement events in July / August 2024 where parishes and residents can talk to ABC officers about the results of the ‘call for sites’ maps and the local plan process itself.

Venue	Date	Time
Ashford Cinema, Elwick Road, Ashford, TN23 1AE	Tuesday 16 July	2 - 8pm
Shadoxhurst Village Hall, Hornash Lane, Shadoxhurst, TN26 1HT	Wednesday 17 July	2 - 8pm
Hamstreet Victory Hall, Ruckinge Road B2067, Ashford, TN26 2NJ	Wednesday 24 July	2 - 8pm
Wye Village Hall, Bridge Street, Wye, Ashford, TN25 5EA	Wednesday 31 July	2 - 8pm
Chilham Village Hall, Chilham Castle Estate, Chilham, CT4 8DB	Thursday 1 August	2 - 8pm
Tenterden Leisure Centre, Recreation Ground Road, Tenterden, TN30 6RA	Tuesday 6 August	2 - 8pm
Charing Church Barn, Market Place, Charing, Ashford, TN27 0LP	Thursday 8 August	2 - 8pm
Sandyacres Sports & Social Club, Sandyhurst Lane, Ashford, TN25 4PE	Monday 12 August	2 - 8pm
Virtual via Microsoft Teams	Wednesday 28 August	6 - 8pm
Virtual via Microsoft Teams	Thursday 5 September	6 - 8pm

Parishes should be prepared to talk about the sites in a strategic way and give opinions and preferences. No sites are yet sifted out, so it’s a “warts and all” starting point. The Draft Local Plan will likely surface in April 2025, so the parishes will need to attend the public engagement events, comment, and influence sooner rather than later. The Group discussed whether additional engagement with certain parishes at risk of greater development will be required. Key planning policies that the group wanted reviewed are HMO’s, affordable housing, ensuring Ashford’s housing needs are not put in the hands of too few developers, access to GP appointments and s106 limits on developers under 10 units.

CENTRAL ASHFORD COMMUNITY FORUM

The Forum Held its meeting on 10th June. The key issues:

- It was agreed the Forum would invite Jo Fox to a future meeting to discuss town centre regeneration on sites held by ABC and the Property Company.
- The Forum drafted a question for the MP’s husting on 26th June. “How will the candidates act as an ambassador for new town centre businesses, will they lead by example in running their surgeries from a high street site?”

- A new survey on traffic calming will be carried out in Godinton Road after the election.
- Traffic enforcement over the bridge near Sackville Crescent are expected to be in place by 30th September.
- CACF representative will attend SACF on 26th June.
- CACF will ask for an update from Alison Oates on the status of the parking review.

JAMES EWART AVE

Landscape Officers are working on this area of Repton and will carry out a condition audit, raise bring to standard works where needed, and add highway landscape assets to their maintenance programmes. Urban grass verges are cut 6 times per annum, urban shrubs, and hedges 1 cut per annum, and 2 weed control treatments per annum. Ashford Borough Council carry out KCC's urban landscape maintenance and will be instructed once KCC have brought these verges to standard. Weed control is carried out by weed contractors, and tree works by arboriculture contractors.

Highway trees will be added and receive a TSA (tree safety audit) visit once every 5 years and works raised where appropriate. For all highway landscape assets, reactive works for hazards and obstructions are raised as / when required.



BIN COLLECTION

Councillors had an update on the bin collection issues on 11th June. The key issues included:

- Biffa had not carried out any route and round optimisation for some considerable time – Ashford also needed to move half the borough to recycling collection and half for non-recycling each week. These added to the complexity of the change of contract.
- The new contract was intended to become “self-monitoring” – from 17th June, missed bins should be collected within 48 hours.
- Some narrow access vehicles have been servicing routes that do not need them and this will be remedied.
- The tonnage of material being presented is higher than expected.

- Garden waste is now only collected if the customer has paid.
- Biffa ignored “side arrangements” and drove on non-highways roads, this is not being done by Suez.
- There have been some bin failures due to their age – but it was a myth that the new bin lorries are heavier and are breaking the bins. Charging for a new bin is not right when they are degraded due to age.
- Social media has resulted in multiple reports of each missed bin. ABC will understand better how social media works and how reports on social media may not always be in accordance with what has happened.
- Staff had not been trained to deal with asbestos fly-tipping, this has been addressed.
- The revised system of reporting missed bins and “catch up collection” was confusing and not well understood. A round which is not completed by the end of the day is not a “missed bin” it’s a “catch up collection”. The old the “missed bin” reporting system has been reinstated.
- Recycling is higher in Ashford than elsewhere so additional vehicles have been required.

BARN OWL BOXES

Kentish Stour Valley Partnership and their licensed owl ringing team checked the barn owl boxes put up with support of Sevington with Finberry PC in June. They are located along the river at Finberry/Waterbrook to support barn owls. The results were:

- 1st Box - 4 kestrel chicks
- 2nd box - 1 already ringed 4th year female Barn Owl and 1 chick about 10 days old

They are delighted with this result. Because this as a ringed barn owl, it will tell the team where this barn owl has been ringed previously and thus where it has moved from. As you wouldn’t get another breeding barn owl in the other box as it is too close, to see the other box being used by kestrel is a real achievement.



DAVID LLOYD

KCC Ecology maintain their stance that developer should, with the evidence they have, provide mitigation for the temporary pool on the site as part of the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) calculations. The RSPB have also been very supportive. For these reasons, I have “called in” the application to be decided by the Planning Committee should officers be minded to approve the application.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE

I attended a meeting on 18th June to review progress on the current plan for managing Adult Social Care (ASC) in Kent. Key issues to emerge included:

- KCC wardens and ASC need to coordinate better, Wardens carry out safeguarding visits along with the Kent Police Vulnerable Individuals Team (VIT).
- The fact that KCC employ carers is considered much better than using agency staff (as some other authorities do).
- Having allocated workers to care users is essential.
- KCC needs to ensure that options for electronic communications are available; some learnings from the pandemic have been lost.
- The community teams are good in Kent as they focus on areas.

THE HIGH FIELD

The DfT have provided an update on the thistle issue that residents have reported on DfT owned land East of Highfield Lane (they refer to this land as Sevington East field). DfT instructed an ecologist to inspect the field and this work was carried out on Wednesday 12th June and Friday 14th June. The DfT have received the ecologist's recommendations and have also reviewed the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) that sets out the department's responsibilities under the planning agreement.

The ecological assessment found thistle to be present on the field alongside ragwort and the DfT recognise the importance of addressing these issues as soon as possible. Unfortunately, due to the presence of nesting birds which was confirmed by the ecologist, and the need to protect these habitats during their nesting season, they are unable to proceed with work to remove the thistles until August. The DfT are working with an ecological specialist to ensure that a firm plan for works is in place for August, so that work can begin as soon as possible under these guidelines and are checking if this is something they can safely do prior to August.

FULL BIN – HERBERT RD

I have reported the full bin at the end of Herbert Road (ref 20759886) to Suez and asked them to empty.

GRAFFITI – AVOCET WAY

I have reported the graffiti under Avocet Way (ref 20761901).



STONESTREET SOLAR

The Community Liaison Group met on 20th June. Key issues were:

- The Development Consent Application was submitted on 11th June meaning the Application is expected to be accepted on 9th July.
- This will start a Pre-examination period which may last three months until 9th October.
- In the Pre-examination period residents will be asked to register as a Interested Party; they will be able to do this early in the process possibly as soon as 2 or 3 days of 9th July.
- Also, in the Pre-examination period, there will be an opportunity to those who have registered as an Interesting Party to make Relevant Representation. There will be a six-week period to do this so it is conceivable these must be in by 20th August, but it is possible it would be later.
- The Pre-examination period will enable the Planning Inspector to set out a timetable for its Examination and hold a preliminary meeting. The Examination will last 6 months followed by 3 months for the Inspector to report and then 3 months for the Secretary of State to make a decision, 12 months in total. This means the outcome may be by October 2025.

BRAETHORPE HOUSE

I attended a meeting on 21st June to discuss its opening. Key issues noted include:

- The building is expected to open in July (but this is subject to planning consent being approved).
- The name will change to Maple Rise, maple trees are found on site and originate from north Vietnam where a good number of refugees may come from.
- The property will be OFSTED registered.

- It will be occupied by KCC looked after unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, mostly male due to demographics.
- The Holiday Inn is still being used by adults and families seeking refugee status.

VICTORIA PARK

Drafting the licence for Parkrun to use the compound at Victoria Park has been with the ABC legal team since the smaller units were put in there last year. A meeting is booked in for 5th July and should hopefully provide an update including draft terms which can be shared with Parkrun. A similar issue has arisen for Friends of Victoria Park and I said I was happy to look at this.

Aspire have pulled out most of the hardcore that formed the base for the builders' haul road and this is now waiting to be taken off site. ABC had originally planned to have this disposed of offsite but have now found an alternative use which saves both the cost of disposal for this material and then for procuring more of the same material very shortly after. ABC expect the hardcore to be removed in the next couple of months after which the space will be seeded to reinstate the grass in the autumn when there are better growing conditions.

SOUTH ASHFORD COMMUNITY FORUM

The issues raised at the meeting on 26th June included:

- The ABC parking review, when extended to on street parking, will require the Forum to take views from residents on any changes required.
- Access to town centre parking for blue badge holders after 9.30am needs to be clearer.
- The town centre and south Ashford sites submitted for development in the local plan were discussed including notable absences such as Gasworks Lane and Park Mall. The Forum members will attend the session organised for 18th July at the Picturehouse (Ashford Cinema).
- Fly tipping needs to be reported to ABC who normally acts swiftly to resolve.
- I offered Community Members Grant funding for seating at Bowens Field.

HEAT NETWORK

Councillors had a presentation on 27th June. The Dept of Energy Security and Net Zero re promoting district heat networks. They use heat from commercial waste (e.g. from supermarkets cooling their stores) or renewable sources to supply nearby homes directly. Heat Networks reduce emissions by 63% and provide a stable source of energy without fluctuations in prices. Any scheme

in Ashford may need to be led by the Council and should be part of a regeneration scheme. There will be considerable costs of creating the heat source and then delivering the piping to each house. Early indications are the WWTW in Bybrook could be a starting source of heat; other sites of interest include the WHH and Orbital.

TOWN CENTRE

The Central Forum met on 28th June to discuss issues in the town centre. New footfall figures have been published.

Ashford's visitor numbers

Footfall in Ashford town centre, compared over past five years, per quarter since 2019

QTR	2019	2022	2023	2024
1	838,244	911,251	1,046,447	897,371
2	885,833	1,093,233	1,110,526	852,306
3	898,210	1,147,820	1,185,104	N/A
4	843,185	1,039,388	1,028,535	N/A

Issues the Forum discussed included:

- The market task group has reviewed activities in other towns in Kent and have met with traders in the lower high street; recommendations will be taken back to ABC Cabinet. The remit of the task group is for external markets rather than inside market spaces.
- Better use of public spaces such as screens and deckchairs showing popular sporting events (Coachworks have looked at this).
- Pressing on with the regeneration projects at Park Mall and Mecca Bingo Hall.
- Relocating public offerings such as the One Stop shop to a more prominent space on the High Street or Bank Street.
- Review of parking restrictions, could the “first hour free” idea be used in Ashford that works in Tenterden?
- Bring back the Civic Pride that Ashford used to excel in. There are several scruffy buildings and attention is needed on tidying up these areas.
- Promote what Ashford is good up with its visitor attractions (including the outlet, Hobbs Parker market and open spaces) – work better with the outlet to try and get movement from the outlet (5% is the current number of linked trips). Ashford Town Centre need to market what it is doing to the visitors.
- A new play area for young children is proposed and information on the location will be available in the late summer.

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