

COUNCIL UPDATE 7.2024

FINBERRY PLANNING

At a council meeting on 26th June, we learnt the following facts relevant to Finberry. In the last 5 five years the completions at Finberry were 19 (in 2019/20), 48 (in 20/21), 40 (in 21/22), 88 (in 22/23) and 38 in (23/24). There are 321 dwellings with reserve matters permission or under construction. Outline consent for a further 63 dwellings were granted in March 2024 to include the local village centre commercial development (near the school). This paves the way for Aldi at Waterbrook to be able to be started and as a nitrate mitigation solution was found. Pre-application discussions have commenced with CCE on land Northwest of Finberry (partly owned by Taylor Wimpey). It may be possible to explore how the pre-application discussions can speed up the planning requirements on wider Finberry.

Outstanding Crest issues include the following (updates from Crest on 5th July with comments from officers after the Crest call).

1. Captain's Wood Management Board. Crest have audited what needs to be done in respect of the approved Plan. Various remedial measures need to be undertaken including fencing and clearing paths. Crest expect to use Community Engagement Consultants to help try and move forward a Management Community Group to assist and there could be a PC role here to get community reps involved.
2. Community Centre delivery/timescales. What is envisaged is a single-story building (16m x 11m). Crest is pricing, with its cost consultants, what the capped s106 sum would deliver against the baseline for provision in the s106. ABC Corporate Property team to be introduced to Crest to help move things forward any shortfall on funding which may arise will need to be assessed. Ongoing discussions include operational management such as heat source and running costs. An operator needs to be agreed along with role of the parish council.
3. Maintenance of roads whilst building is on-going includes managing the parking around the school at drop off and pick up times. Changes to the traffic flows at pick up times to be discussed with the school.
4. Boarding around building sites and maintenance of these areas is primarily with Crest and any issues to be communicated.
5. Bus service/bus stop delivery timescales and opening the Northern Link Road depend on ANPR camera trials elsewhere in Ashford being successful but may require some re-write s38 Highways adoption agreements to KCC's satisfaction.
6. Ecological management around Bilham Farm. A wildlife corridor is to be managed for the benefit of wildlife which means that they do not always appear to be 'neat' with taller grassland and scrub habitats required to provide

shelter for amphibians, reptiles, and other wildlife. Wildlife areas cannot be managed as lawns as this does not comply with the conditions of the great crested newt licence. The new subcontractor management company have been provided with the management plans for these areas including spot treatment of undesirable species (e.g. creeping thistle) and cutting very narrow strips along edge of paths and near properties to show that long grass is intentional and deliberate. Site clearance works prior to construction of Bilham Lawn and Bilham Farm phases were carried out by Crest under a European Protected Species Licence issued by Natural England. This remains in place until the works at Bilham Farm phase are complete (including construction and landscaping). Amphibian exclusion fencing is therefore still in place in some areas of the site, and ecologists provide on-site support during construction activities. The wildlife corridor includes small bunds with buried bricks which provide sheltering and hibernation locations for amphibians and reptiles. Log piles have also been created. These works are agreed within the licence issued by Natural England. Prior to commencement of construction of Bilham Lawn, a newt mitigation area was constructed west of this location and were agreed in a Natural England licence application. All the licences are in place without a sub-surface tunnel under Swift Avenue; although it was viewed as possibly being necessary to facilitate reptile movement at the time when design work was done many years ago, that need has fallen away and there is now no ecological necessity to provide one.

7. Providing a crossing at the end of Wagtail Walk to the play area on Swift as part of the traffic calming before opening of the Southern Link Road is being explored by Crest.

8. Occupations on Finberry were recently counted at 777 so Crest are not in breach of providing the Southern Link Road as 800 occupations is the s106 trigger. A timetable of by Q1 2025 is suggested by Crest.

9. Timetable for the road to Waterbrook - Application for Bridge over East Stour to connect Waterbrook and Finberry was submitted in July 2024. It was delayed due to the need for an assessment whether an Environmental Impact Assessment was required. The road on the Finberry site up to the point where the Bridge would be provided is part of Reserved Matters ref 16/00125/AS.

9. The application for the road to Waterbrook will include allotments and a play area.

10. Community representation is required on the team responsible for operations to ensure Finberry is maintained to the required standard and there is effective communication from HML. The conditions set out in the second Memorandum dated 15th September 2014 to the Management Plan package are:

- A Residents' Group / Committee to be phased-in,
- The intention is that 'Resident Directors' can be phased-in after the last occupation,
- From the first occupation onwards, a commitment to consultation, engagement and feedback with residents
- Householders to be kept up to date with information about the evolving quantum of public open space and the facilities therein, possibly via an Internet based tool
- The intention for the Management Company to have a site presence enabling residents to feedback easily, be involved in and help steer the management and maintenance that they will fund
- A commitment to yearly open meetings so that residents may participate; this meeting to enable any issues not resolved through the other means of involvement and engagement identified by the applicant to be openly aired with the Management Company

Crest have agreed to supply a scope of work for HML and a red line of the areas they are responsible for which will identify who is responsible for what. This will ensure trees on Avocet which are dying due to lack of access to water are managed.



Dying willow trees on Avocet Way

11. Extra-care affordable housing close to the school and emerging local centre. ABC approved a reserved matters scheme pre-Covid but, to date, Registered Providers have not been able to make it work to move to delivery. If extra care at Finberry cannot be delivered a fresh scheme also would be caught by Nitrate Neutrality. Ideally, it would be good to see development here at the same time as local village centre.

Separately, Waterbrook has outlined consent for 364 with 144 awaiting detailed consent; ABC believe that 60pa will be built once work starts.

SEVINGTON EAST FIELD (THE HIGH FIELD)

DfT met with their contractor and ecologist at the end of June to explore if there is a way of safely clearing at least the perimeter of the field from thistles and ragwort now. The DfT have been advised that due to the high presence of nesting birds, this would be very difficult and likely to have very little to no impact to neighbouring properties from the weeds. The DfT are expecting a proposal from them with a plan for resolving this as soon as it is safe to do so

once the risk of nesting birds is no longer present. The DfT fully understand they are required by The Weeds Act to clear the weeds, but are also legally bound to protect the birds under The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.

WATERBROOK BARN OWL

The ringed barn owl found in the nesting box on Waterbrook came from Aldington Frith. It demonstrates the importance of the East Stour Valley as a wildlife link and will be used as evidence of keeping it free from development in the next local plan to 2042.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP MEETING

The group met on 2nd July. Key issues included.

- Men's IDVA (independent Domestic Violence Advice) and Domestic Abuse Service presented. They are a PCC funded service for Kent & Medway who are part of Look Ahead Care Support and Housing. Male victims are not recognised as a victim in the same way as female victims are (1/3rd of DA & stalking victims are male). There are barriers to getting support such as fear of not being believed and stereotypes about masculinity or sexuality. They can be contacted at MIDASS@lookahead.co.uk, helpline 0333 000 4660. There are two refuges in Kent for male domestic abuse.
- Gaming continues to be a risk of grooming for terrorists. Far and right-wing terrorism activity is a continuing worry.
- Non-uniformed officers are being used outside clubs and generally in the town centre to watch from a distance to spot issues arising before they arise. High profile patrols operate in high-risk areas including the station. There has been a reduction in violence between women and girls picked up by CCTV. There has been a reduction in the number of s34 disposal notices which is reflected in reduction in street drinking and ASB in the town.

SOUTHERN LINK ROAD (FINBERRY TO BRIDGEFIELD)

The concrete blocks have been moved at both ends of the Southern Link Road. I guess this is so the new storage unit can be accessed via its consented access, but it means that traffic from Rutledge can access the track from Bilham Farm to Cheesemans Green Lane. I have asked that Taylor Wimpey (TW) should put signage at the end of Rutledge Ave to say "no through road" or something similar. In the meantime, TW have agreed to move the blocks back on the Rutledge Road end.



Finberry End of Southern Link Road



Rutledge Ave end of Southern Link Road

KCC – ASHFORD WATER AUDITS

The KCC Flood and Water Management Team and Climate Change Team have been working with Southeast Water (SEW) and Aqualogic to save water and reduce water bills across schools and the KCC estate in Ashford. SEW carried out audits to detect leaks and identify opportunities for water efficient fixtures and fittings across the KCC estate in Ashford, including 2 schools, Kroner House, Ashford Gateway, Ashford North Youth Centre and the Rainbow Centre. SEW have also funded the recommended improvement works. A further 12 schools are in the process of having water audits carried out over the next few weeks.

The team has previously worked with Thames Water on a similar scheme within the Dartford area, benefitting 17 schools and 4 other KCC properties. The benefits of these water efficiency assessments can be both financially and environmentally significant. For example, fixing leaky toilets and taps has saved Kroner House over £13,000 per year.

BROAD OAK CROSSROADS

I have reported the damage sign at Broad Oak, presumably caused by a vehicle mounting the verge (from the damage to the grass). Ref 818330.




KENT PLANS FOR LINKS WITH CHERNIHIV REGION OF UKRAINE

Although not a twinning arrangement, this initiative is Kent CC positioning itself to allow business and communities in Kent who wish to support projects in the Chernihiv region in Ukraine to allow it to recover following the Russian invasion. Example projects include English teacher training, targeted aid coordination, environmental collaboration, joint tourism promotion and sports initiatives and public health.

GROUNDWORK COMPLETE AND PROVEN MODEL


Friendships Established

After five visits to the region, Jordan has established lasting and strategic friendships at all levels from the Regional Administration, to City Councilors, Librarians, Volunteers, Aid workers and business leaders on the ground.




Areas for cooperation established

In consultation with the Leader, Jordan presented the areas of cooperation to the Administration who have agreed that these are areas on which a cooperation agreement could be developed.




Partnerships Explored

From meetings with Heads of Services, through to local charity projects, youth clubs and schools, we have a number of over-ready partnerships to explore and significant interest from Kent businesses, community groups and organisations to get involved.




Much local support

With limited publicity, Jordan has been overwhelmed at the level of public backing for this type of work and the county has a unique opportunity to further this work.




Local Delivery Proven


With very little publicity and a bit of graft, we have proven that there is a way for County Councilors to take a lead on this by mobilising their local communities and businesses within their division and in a way which is supportive of our local businesses here in Kent.



Early success achieved

Nearly 10tons of aid collected and delivered, including 500 English books, 2500 items of baby clothing for orphanages and much needed medical supplies and equipment.





CHERNIHIV REGION

FINBERRY COMMUNITY BUILDING

I had a meeting to discuss operator options for the new community building at Finberry on 8th July. The baseline position is a community centre plus a MUGA and three tennis pitches. This outside sports provision may not attract significant footfall and will add to the operating costs.

A “3G” football pitch has been considered as a bolt on / alternative to the tennis pitches as there are s106 for these from Bridgefield however the work and effort to maintain a “3G” pitch is significant and may not be supported locally due to traffic and noise impact. There are tennis pitches in Aldington if there is demand.

I recommended that Crest developed three options (i) as per the s106, (ii) larger building with MUGA and no tennis pitches and (iii) building only. In each case the operating costs will need to be estimated so the operator (could be the parish council) are on board.

COMMUNITY SAFETY UNIT

The unit met on 11th July.

- Ashford Police are one year into the new neighbourhood policing model at less than 50% of the required strength. There have been some serious crimes (Tadworth Road guns) without communication about the event; they need to communicate better. The PCC believes that a beat officer should attend parish councils every three months (some have not seen a police officer for 3 years!) The Police explained there were two new recruits joining in the Autumn and one has just joined in Ashford covering south Ashford urban wards. The direct email to the Ashford Police CSU unit is csu.ashford@kent.police.uk.
- 2,200 people attended Ashford Pride, it was very successful with very few reported issues.
- A Bockhanger Community Day is being held 10am to 2pm on 14th August, further details to follow.
- Public Space Protection Order Sites will have two visits each week – Conningbrook was renewed on 12th June for 3 years.
- A fly tipping event in the town centre was caught on CCTV.
- Kent Fire & Rescue Service are receiving reports of parking problems preventing access. They have achieved access “to a point” but future incidences are going to be logged by CSU.
- Kent Wardens are now up to capacity (2½ FTE). Visits take place within 7-10 days. A location area plan is being developed which could provide data on where the wardens should be based. A new referral form has been created.

LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN

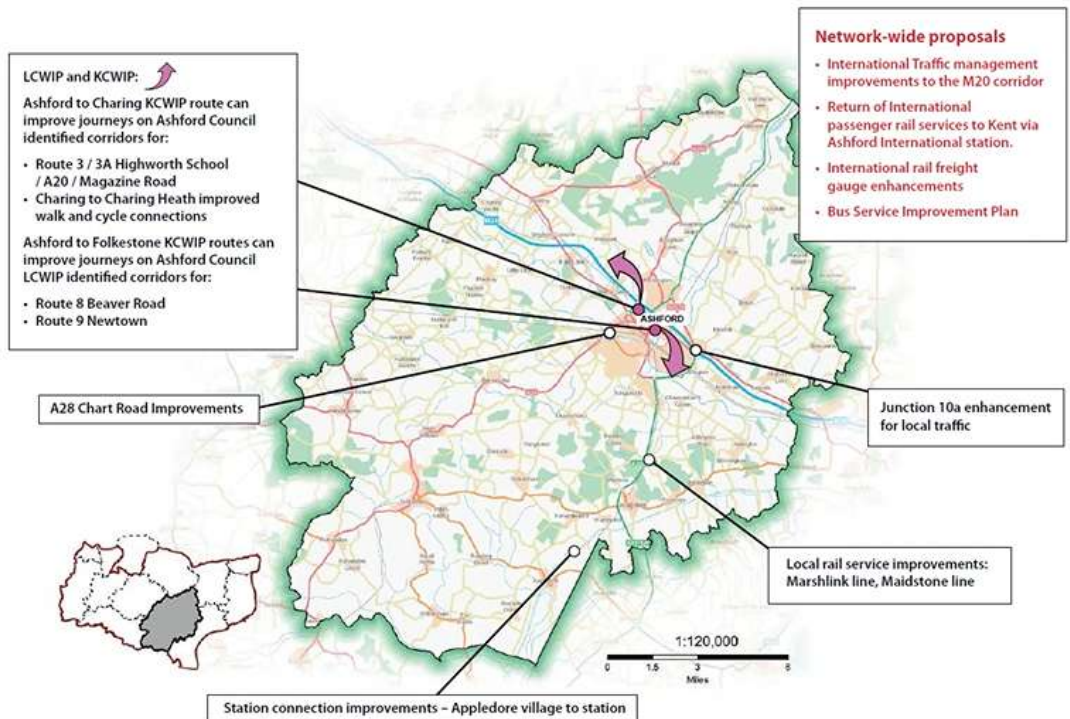
Councillors met on 12th July to discuss the Local Transport Plan for Kent. The plan sets out a business plan to Government on how Kent wishes to deliver its plan to maintain and develop the current network as safe reliable and efficient. It includes the condition of the network, developing a EV strategy, re-introducing international rail passengers and freight gauge improvements, bus service improvements, Elizabeth Line extension to Ebbsfleet and opposition to Gatwick expansion and improving rail access to Gatwick from Kent. A focus affecting Ashford is the international haulage traffic management using the M20 (Opp Brock / Stack, Lower Thames Crossing and A2 Dover access).

County wide proposals for the Strategic Road Network



Specifically for Ashford.

Ashford district proposals



The Plan will be out to consultation until 8th October – www.kent.gov.uk/ltp5

BLUE BADGES

Councillors had a presentation on Blue Badge applications on 15th July. It is one of the most visible services provided by KCC Adult Social Care. KCC assess applications for permit to use to assist with securing accessible parking. There are 55,000 permits issued by Kent. Automatic eligibility includes registered blind and people who meet criteria related to the mobility component of Personal Independent Payment and Disabled Living Allowance; applicants for Badges from this group are issued automatically. If a further assessment is required because the applicant has a physical disability or non-visible disability (e.g. autism) an assessment by the KCC team is required. It is the badge and the person that has the right for assessable parking, the fine for misuse is up to £1,000.

Badges are issued for a 3-year period. Reminders for renewal are given 4 months in advance of expiration; overall application processing time is 34 working days. There has been a 30% increase in applications in the past 2 years and we agreed a plan to recruit 2 additional FTE assessors to clear the backlog.

LOCAL PLAN BRIEFING

I attended the Ashford Local Plan briefing session on 16th July at The Ashford Cinema. Key issues I raised included:

- Protection of the wildlife corridor between the IBF “Sevington East” field and the A2070 at Finberry is essential.
- Impact on East Stour Valley between Sevington and Aldington through Mersham needs to be assessed.
- Traffic and general highway access to the proposed extension to Finberry east of Cheesemans Green Lane must be assessed – is Orchard Way (the new road from J10A across CTRL) still being recommended as there are limits of amount of additional traffic that can be accommodated through the rural road network?
- Delivery of non-housing infrastructure (healthcare, community facility and village centre) on Finberry should be speeded up if there is an extension. There has been a long delay in these being brought forward on Finberry (contrast this with Repton).
- A link to Local Needs Housing is required. A site in Mersham is supported by Church Commissioners for England (CCE) and English Rural Housing pending a local needs housing survey.
- Walking and cycling access to Ashford would be problematic from any Finberry extension due to lack of existing infrastructure, particularly direct walking and cycling routes.

HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The committee met on 17th July. The following observations are relevant to Ashford.

- The Ashford base of SECAM (on Orbital) is trialling a new “pre-dispatch” model which focuses on 999 calls. It gives callers a real-time assessment by clinicians and co-ordinates the correct clinical response. This trial is designed to change the fact that only 13.25% of calls need a “blue light ambulance” and 33% of these need double crewed response teams. They are beginning a new volunteer service similar to Special Constables and Retained Firefighters used in other Blue Light Services.
- A three-month trial at West View Integrated Care Centre in Tenterden has proved successful. It is designed to provide integrated rehabilitation advice prior to discharge to both the patient and their families so they are empowered to understand their own care with regard to getting out of bed (where appropriate), dressing themselves and meal times.

MAKING SPACE FOR NATURE

The Borough Council discussed on 18th July how nature depleted the Borough has become. I spoke how the old government created Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) under the 2021 Environment Act with KCC appointed as the responsible authority for Kent and Medway. LNRS is a system of spatial strategies for nature to underpin England’s Nature Recovery Network’s priorities and actions for recovery. It will identify where best to deliver these to see the greatest benefits for nature and wider environmental improvements. It is designed to deliver the old government’s commitment to ending the decline of nature and supporting its recovery.

Before the draft Strategy goes to public consultation, KCC first must share it with Natural England and the Kent district authorities including Ashford. ABC will have a four-week period to respond. Once KCC has addressed any issues raised, the draft Strategy will then go out to public consultation for eight weeks. A consultation response will then be published.

Once the Strategy is finalised, KCC will share it with ABC. There will be a further four-week period to address any issues, following which KCC will inform the Secretary of State of KCC’s intent to publish. So, ABC will have three opportunities to comments and contribute and I welcomed the creation of a task group to do this work.

NHS K&M COMMUNITY SERVICES PROCUREMENT

I attended a public listening event covering the procurement of community NHS services on 22nd July. There have been concerns over the joined-up nature of community services. Community services represent 13% of NHS

services, it is mainly nurse and therapy led specialists embedded in communities to help people regain independence and get back on their feet after illness or injury. It supports people with long terms conditions and give dignity at the end of their lives and families. 20% of all acute trust admissions are thought to be avoidable with right community services.

What currently works well:

- Timeliness of services
- Urgent Treatment Centres
- Having to refer via GP is causing delays where that is necessary
- Lower leg wound treatment is working much better than historically.

The NHS think they can do better by:

- Connecting better with patients and their communities
- Providing personalised, person-centred care
- Make better use of technology – technology designed for carers may not be designed for the patients
- Travel and transport are critical
- Patients are unclear about referral pathways
- Develop workforce models that are flexible and sustainable based on national skills and competencies
- Health inequalities arise due to increased lack of close family (20% of those born in 1966 do not have children) need to be managed as NHS currently assume family care will available.

GREEN SOCIAL PRESCRIBING GROUP

This KCC group works on the public health benefits from “green and blue” open spaces. It met on 23rd July.

- Mapping is now used to identify (and so increase use of) green social places. A workshop was held on 10th July with Natural England and others; the aim is to give access to these sites within 15 minutes of home. This is important for the new Ashford Local Plan. Mapping workshops will be held in September.

LNRS regulations

Reg 56. “But recovering or enhancing biodiversity does not just benefit the natural environment. For example, improving biodiversity can help increase land value or **support people’s health and wellbeing and access to nature**. Whilst these **co-benefits** are different from the strategy priorities, responsible authorities and local partners can **propose action for biodiversity in ways and in places that will achieve them.**”

From Reg 70 “Responsible authorities may also shape potential measures so that they will deliver **non-environmental co-benefits**, for example **improving public access to green space** as well as helping biodiversity.”

But more guidance to follow from Defra on these aspects.

- Medway and Swale are trialing micro-payments to organisations delivering social prescribing of £30 for each referral (providing they attend); there is an app (Joy App) which includes activities such as Dark Sky Walks. There is seed funding up to £5k to get groups starting (a Rainham Autism group has been created).
- Kent Wildlife Trust updated the Group on “Wilder Wellbeing”. They have been awarded funding to run a 6-week course at Pegwell Bay for families with young families. It is designed to build evidence of the benefits that parents get from accessing outside spaces.
- RSPB provide Nature Prescriptions. They are a guided conversation between the health professional and patients. So, it’s not a social prescription as such but is a prompt of seasonal ideas and suggestions for people to explore ways of connecting with nature from wherever they are (e.g. the RSPB around the Dungeness Nature Reserve including Ashford & Folkestone and the villages in between).




Helping nature this month
 Find and explore a wild patch that is helping nature. It is great for nature to mow grass less often and create a mini-haven for beetles and other creatures.
 Visit rspb.org.uk/stopmowing to learn more.

Wildflower garden



Helping nature this month
 Providing a birdbath can be one of the best things you can do for wildlife, and one of the most rewarding, too. You can install a birdbath at any time of year, but summer is a particularly critical time when water can be scarce for birds and animals for drinking and bathing.
 Learn how to make a simple and safe birdbath rspb.org.uk/perfectbirdbath.

Homemade birdbath

SEA LINK CONNECTION

A new connection has been proposed to connect the Electricity Network in the Southeast at Minster. This is to connect the Southeast to Suffolk where there is power available from offshore wind turbines. Councillors had a presentation on the proposal on 24th July. A proposal was considered to connect the link at Sellindge but this is not now being taken forward.

The need for Sea Link



Grid | July 2024 update

- In Kent a connection is needed along the coast, east of Kemsley substation
- would increase the amount of power that can be transported to/from the south-east and beyond

Alternatives considered

- Isle of Grain and Kingsnorth not suitable as would not reinforce the network in the right place
- considered connections to Sellindge, Richborough or Canterbury areas
- backchecked converter station location and alternatives post-consultation



Plans are to construct enough offshore wind turbines to power 20m homes over the next five years are part of GB Energy, the state-run green energy producing firm. Overhead wires, as opposed to subterranean ones, will be used to distribute power. The money the Government is putting into GB Energy is intended to be a “catalyst” for private investment.

ASHFORD HEALTH ALLIANCE

The group met on 25th July. The meeting was arranged to discuss substance abuse, in particular vaping. A recent survey of pupils between 11-18 showed that 11% were vapers (defined as using vapes every day). More girls were current or ex-vapers, and there is a higher % of vapers amongst older pupils. The reasons were to relax and deal with anxiety and reduce hunger and suppress appetite. Half of vapers do this first before moving to cigarettes.

Concerns were expressed that new Vaping Products Duty from 1 October 2026 would result in users seeking out contraband vaping products and smuggled cigarettes. HMRC have said that it would collaborate with border and domestic agencies to tackle this. There were also concerns about individuals making their own vaping products for their own use and the domestic fire risk that this creates. A concern that once the ban on disposables comes into effect, there will be a rise in other nicotine products such as pouches. Legislation on the ban got as far as its second reading before the election but the new government has not said whether it would be re-introduced.

FEATHERBED LANE

I have reported fly tipping of these sofas and mattresses (ref 21117094).



HOME UPGRADE GRANT (HUG2)

I attended a presentation on 31st July. Homeowners in the Borough with a household annual income of less than £31,000 who are not on mains gas are eligible for free measures such as insulation, solar panels and low carbon heating retrofitting. You can check if you are eligible to apply at www.hugapply.co.uk. The deadline is 30th September.



HUG

Lower your energy use

And your carbon footprint

HOME EFFICIENCY UPGRADES:

Struggling with an old heating system? If your home uses oil, LPG, solid fuel heating or an electric heating system and you're struggling with your energy bills, you could upgrade **at no cost to you**. Here are some of the ways your home could be transformed:

- INSULATION**
Insulation to keep your home warm and help cut energy bills
- HEATING CONTROLS**
Or an energy efficient hot water solution helping you to only use heat when you need it
- HEATING**
A new low-carbon heating system
- LIGHTING**
Energy-efficient lighting which is cheaper to run

HUG

Save energy Stay Warm

With FREE upgrades

SAVE £££ ON YOUR ENERGY BILL

We can help you access **free** energy saving upgrades from the government for your home that could help you make savings on your fuel costs.

DELIVERED BY:

e-on

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

Department for Energy Security & Net Zero

Ashford Borough Council

CAN I APPLY?

You could be eligible if your household:

- Is off-gas for heating (for example, uses oil, LPG, solid fuel heating or an electric heating system)
- AND**
- Has a combined annual income of no more than £31,000 (gross) increasing to £36,000 on 2 April 2024 or, under £20,000 after rent or mortgage costs
- AND**
- Live in a hard to heat home

NB: If you are not financially eligible, you could still be eligible if you live in a defined priority area.

WWW.HUGAPPLY.CO.UK **0333 302 4820** **SCAN TO APPLY**

WWW.HUGAPPLY.CO.UK **0333 302 4820** **SCAN TO APPLY**

KALC

The meeting was held on 31st July. Key issues included.

- The call for sites required bigger maps, colour-coding for possible land uses and sites already allocated but not yet developed. The next step is filtering of the sites by the planning department and the various analysis of retail need, education needs, air pollution, transport needs, healthcare needs etc which have not been commissioned yet.
- A consultation period has started on the new NPPF and calculation of the housing allocation. Although Ashford's housing numbers has not materially changed the districts surrounding Ashford have been given higher housing numbers. Consultation closes on 24th September.
- Suez staff are being balloted for strike action who are looking for pay parity with Maidstone.

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