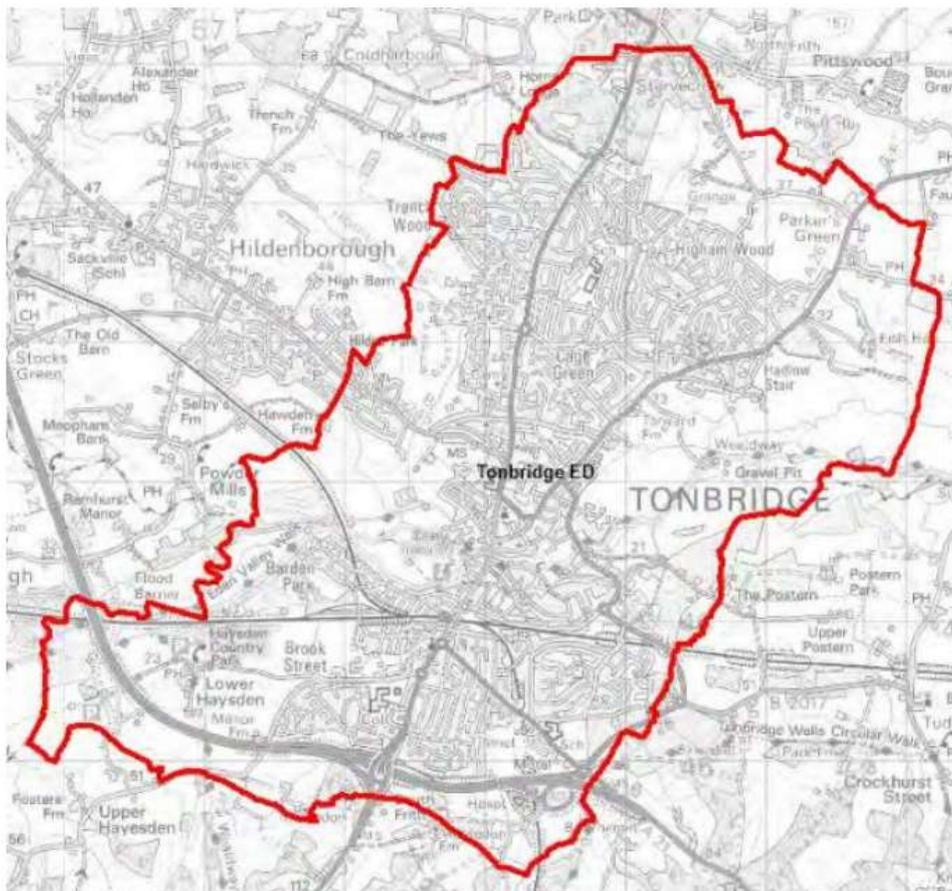


COUNCIL UPDATE 6.2025

KALC AREA COMMITTEE

The meeting was held on 2nd June.

- The discussion included 20mph zones. I explained how that was achieved in Bockhanger (and not brought forward in Godinton Road). It required a speed assessment that showed the speed was less than 30mph so that to bring it down to 20mph so it would not require too much physical changes to the road (e.g. speed bumps and traffic calming). It also required a survey of residents to ensure there was community buy in. Ahead of the Speedwatch conference on 14th June, Kent Police confirmed that any changes to speed limits need to go to KCC highways via the highway improvement plan,
- It was noted that on 2nd June Tonbridge and Malling BC started a consultation on a town council for Tonbridge (they seem to be ahead of Ashford). Their proposal is shown below, a single town council covering the whole of the town of Tonbridge. This might be better than a fragmented approach whereby the town of Ashford has three parish councils, one for each Forum area.



NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (NPPF)

I attended a CPRE webinar on the NPPF. The following key issues emerged.

- There are no firm proposals (yet) to reduce the definition of affordable housing which is currently 80% of open market value.
- The value of the green belt was re-iterated as it may be eroded from the new planning rules allowing development of the “grey” belt (previously used land within the green belt). Example of green belt abuse go to info@cpre.org.uk. The new Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which aims to expedite planning decisions by reducing local authorities' powers, could lead to the construction of 1.5m new homes on grey belt. The risk is that this will just create new, soulless settlements, taking away green belt. There is a consultation on change to planning committees at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reform-of-planning-committees-technical-consultation/reform-of-planning-committees-technical-consultation>
- The Clean Energy Action Plan is designed to generate 47 gigawatts (GW) of energy from solar in the UK (it is currently at 18GW, so it is a big increase). In 2023 there was enough wasted rooftop space for 117GW. There are inefficiencies in the current planning system to achieve this, but the aim is for all new homes that can accommodate solar should include it on construction by 2027 (the Baby Sham Factory in Shepton Mallett has save the company £3.4m on energy by putting panels on their roof without any objections to the planning). A further aim is for Power Purchase Agreements where homeowners can have the solar for free in exchange for rooftop solar on their homes. There is a government consultation on car parks which might require them to have solar canopies (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/solar-on-car-parks-and-electric-vehicle-charging>). My thought is that the car/lorry parking area at the IBF could be used for solar.

JOINT TRANSPORT BOARD (JTB)

The Board met on 3rd June. Key issues included:

- Junction Improvements to the A20 Hythe Road junction with Church Road, Smeeth are programmed to commence 4 August 2025.
- The scheme to instal new infrastructure to allow for remote CCTV enforcement of existing traffic prohibitions at Bluebell Road Ashford (overbridge across A2070) has been put on hold. This work is necessary before a new bus service can start for Finberry.
- Flood Street Forstal Bridge strengthening is scheduled for delivery in 2026.
- I requested an update on the Church Road, Mersham petition at the September JTB meeting.
- New EU Border Checks (the Entry/Exit System - EES) are expected with a 6-month phased implementation from October 2025. The new system will replace the need for UK passports to be stamped. Instead, travellers will have their fingerprints scanned and a photograph take to register them on a database, with the information stored for three years.

Full biometrics will be required 60 days after implementation date. Eurotunnel are ready to go but work is ongoing at the Western Docks for Dover to make the arrangements. Brock is expected to be in place for a longer period during implementation as it is expected there will be further queues at Dover as the checks are made before people embark on cross-Channel journeys.

- The pet passport system is being reintroduced meaning that dogs travelling from the UK will no longer need animal health certificates for every trip which have proved to be costly and burdensome. Further information at www.thekennelclub.org.uk/Brexit. No date has currently been set for when this will come into effect, so Animal Health Certificates will continue to be in force for the time being.
- I raised a concern regarding the ongoing issue with the traffic lights at the junction opposite Orbital Park and Finberry on the A2070. These lights have repeatedly failed, most recently on 26th April, 30th April, and on 31st May. This is a very busy and high-traffic junction, and the repeated failures are creating a dangerous situation for drivers and pedestrians. It appears to be a recurring problem that needs urgent attention to prevent potential accidents. National Highways has not signed the Completion Certificate for the 'A20 Finberry Cheeseman' scheme so the responsibility of the traffic signals is still with the Developer. Although it's a developer scheme, National Highways still ultimately responsible for the safety of the junction.

COMMUNITY SAFETY UNIT

The Unit met on 5th June. Key issues included.

- The signage on the knife bins is being replaced and a new location of the bin in Park Mall is being considered. It was always well used as it was outside CCTV coverage. There are other bins in Bockhanger and Stanhope.
- ASB case reviews are considered when there are three or more reported issues to any agency (three separate issues).
- New signage and sprayed stencils are being considered for dog fouling.
- Extra Police patrols are taking place during the nighttime.
- The Police are trying to find out what three issues are of concern in each ward – they want to know through a survey on My Community Voice. Initial results are e-scooters and road safety.
- Kent Fire and Rescue are holding a CPR training session at 6.30pm on Thursday 3rd July.
- 42 Speedwatch sessions are planned in east Kent for Friday 6th June or the “all out day of action”. Local police officers may attend, and Matthew Scott may come and support.

SEVINGTON CHURCH CAR PARK

I reported the fact that the chain and padlock has been removed to the DfT on 4th June. HMRC replaced the chain and padlock on 23rd June, hopefully it will last longer than the last.

DRAINAGE ON LAND SOUTH OF CAPTAINS WOOD (OTH/2025/1026)

A planning application has been received to approve of a revised design for part of the drainage network under Swift Avenue. The revised design includes an additional bund which seeks to reduce localised ponding understood to be caused inadvertently by the mammal underpass installed pursuant to the discharge of condition approval ref OTH/2024/1220. Comments can be made to <https://ashfordboroughcouncil.my.site.com/pr/s/planning-application/a0hTw000002LxaDIAS/oth20251026>



CONSTRUCTION METHOD ON LAND SOUTH OF CAPTAINS WOOD (OTH/2025/1027)

A planning application has been received to approve of a method, statement/code for construction work and maintenance during the building on the site. Details are at <https://ashfordboroughcouncil.my.site.com/pr/s/planning-application/a0hTw000002LvIKIAS/oth20251027>

where comments can be made.

SOUTHERN LINK ROAD FROM FINBERRY TO BRIDGFIELD

Crest have been reported (by Taylor Wimpey) as moving the blocks at the end of Routledge Ave. I have asked if this is a precursor of opening Swift Ave enabling direct access to Finberry.



VILLAGE GREEN APPLICATION

I have submitted a Village Green application in Quantock. This is an effective way of protecting areas from inappropriate development.

Under the Commons Act 2006, anyone may apply to the County Council for land to be registered as a Town or Village Green, but in order for land to qualify for registration it must be shown that 'a significant number of the inhabitants of any locality, or of any neighbourhood within a locality, have indulged as of right in lawful sports and pastimes on the land for a period of at least 20 years'. For use of the land to have been 'as of right', it must have taken place without any force, secrecy or permission. The consultation runs until Monday 28th July 2025. I have 73 letters of support from nearby residents.

On Friday 27th June the owner placed fencing around the application site. The play area has an access on the far side from Quantock Road and the fence has prevented access. The Planning Enforcement Team has been asked to examine this and because there are public rights to access the Play Area which is now blocked, the PROW team at KCC has been asked to look at this fencing.

IN THE BOROUGH OF ASHFORD
KENT COUNTY COUNCIL
COMMONS ACT 2006 – SECTION 15(1)

**NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR THE REGISTRATION OF LAND
AS A TOWN OR VILLAGE GREEN**

Application has been made to the Registration Authority, Kent County Council, by Mr. P. Bartlett under section 15(1) of the Commons Act 2006 and in accordance with the Commons Registration (England) Regulations 2014. The application seeks the inclusion in the register of Town and Village Greens of the land described below which is claimed to have qualified for registration as a Town or Village Green by virtue of the use of the land for the purposes of lawful sports and pastimes 'as of right' and without challenge by the landowner for a period of over twenty years. If the Registration Authority is satisfied that the land described below qualifies for registration as a Town or Village Green, it will so register the land.

The application, which includes a plan of the land proposed for registration, may be inspected at the offices of Kent County Council. Please contact the Commons Registration Team on 03000 417171 (or by email at the address below) to make an appointment prior to visiting to ensure that a member of the team is available to assist you.

Any person wishing to make representations regarding the application should send a written statement of the facts upon which the representation is based to Ms. Melanie McNeil at Kent County Council, either by post at the address below or by email to commons.villagegreens@kent.gov.uk, so as to arrive no later than Monday 28th July 2025. Please quote reference VQA700.

Representations must include the name and postal address of the person making them and the nature of their interest (if any) in the land affected by the application. They must also be signed by the person making them and state the grounds on which they are made.

Please note that any representations that are to be taken into account by the Registration Authority in reaching a decision on the application cannot be treated as confidential and may come into the public domain during the processing of the application. Copies of any objections or representations received will be forwarded to the applicant for comment and may be disclosed to other interested parties, including the Planning Inspectorate where the case is referred to it for determination.

**Description of the land claimed to have qualified
for registration as a Town or Village Green**

An area of land of approximately 0.25 acres (0.1 hectare) in size situated on the southern side of Quamock Drive (adjoining and including part of the playground area) at Ashford.

Commons Registration Team
PROW and Access Service
Kent County Council
Invicta House
County Hall
Maidstone ME14 1XX

Date: Thursday 12th June 2025



PARK MALL

A petition was submitted at the Council meeting on 12th June to try and save those parts of Park Mall which have not yet deteriorated. The petition has more than 1,500 signatures so will be discussed at the Full Council meeting in July.

PLANNING APPLICATION FOR THREE NEW HOUSES ON CHURCH ROAD (SEVINGTON)

Notification was received on 12th June of the planning decision for land between The Paddocks and Ashdown Cottage, Church Road, Sevington, TN24 0LD. It was turned down by the planning inspectorate having been turned down by the ABC Planning Committee. The reasons for the refusal were (i) impact on the Stodmarsh SSSI with no mitigation scheme, (ii) impact on highway safety and risk of road traffic accidents (iii) potential impact on archaeological remains. It was noted that HOU5 (suitable access to local amenities) was not a reason for refusal given the new footbridge to the retail park meaning that facilities were within 800m. The Inspector carried out a site visit.

COUNCIL GARAGES

Councillors discussed the policy at a meeting on 12th June. The Council offers garage rentals to residents living within the borough and are focusing on

optimising the use of Council-owned garages. Garages that are in poor condition and have low demand are being sold at auction in order with the proceeds being ringfenced specifically to refurbish and upgrade garage blocks that are in high demand. This approach allows the Council to reinvest the funds in improving facilities for residents while ensuring the Council's assets are effectively managed and utilised. However, it was recognised that the commercialisation strategy is ready for review and that will be done this year.

STONESTREET SOLAR

The following update has been issued by ABC; a recommendation will be made by the Planning Inspector before 19th August with the secretary of State (Ed Miliband) deciding within three months.

Key updates:

- The Examination period was formally closed on 19 May 2025.
- The next stage of the DCO process is for the Examining Authority's (ExA) Recommendation to be sent to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero no later than 19 August 2025.
- Prior to closing the Examination, the Examining Authority (ExA) held the following oral hearings in February 2025:
 - Issue Specific Hearing 3 on Public Rights of Way
 - Issue Specific Hearing 4 on Battery Storage
 - Open Floor Hearing 2
 - Compulsory Acquisition Hearing 2



Stonestreet
Green Solar

DCO process

1. Pre-application
2. Acceptance
3. Pre-examination
4. Examination
(to 19 May 2025)
5. Recommendation
(before 19 August 2025)
6. Decision
(3 months for Secretary of State decision and reasons)

The Examination stage included a number of key deadlines. Since Issue 3 of this Briefing Note and prior to closing the Examination, ABC and KCC made a number of further written submissions as summarised below.

Deadline 5 (15 April 2025)

- ABC submitted a **Response to the ExA's second written questions relating to the use of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Land and Public Rights of Way**

Deadline 8 (14 May 2025)

- The applicant submitted the **Final Statement of Common Ground (SoCG)** between the Applicant and ABC and between the applicant and KCC.
- ABC note that Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) made a written **Response to Examining Authorities Written Questions**.
- ABC sent a draft section 106 legal agreement to the applicant seeking to secure a financial contribution towards a feasibility study (and potential future delivery) of upgraded off-site public rights of way in connection with the on-site works to be secured as part of any Development Consent Order. Whilst the applicant has regrettably indicated to the ExA that they do not intend to enter into such an agreement, the ExA is aware of the ABC's position and will need to take into account when making their Recommendation.

Questions?

- PINS: call 0303 444 5000; email stonestreetgreensolar@planninginspectorate.gov.uk
- Stonestreet Green project team: call 08081 698335 (free of charge); email info@stonestreetgreensolar.co.uk; website: www.stonestreetgreensolar.co.uk; post: FREEPOST Stonestreet Green Solar; Twitter: @SGS_solar
- ABC: Matthew Durling, Deputy Team Leader, Strategic Development and Delivery matthew.durling@ashford.gov.uk; 01233 330288

Quick links

For details of the **NSIP application process**: <https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/decisions-making-process-guide>

For full details (and documents) related to the **Stonestreet Green Solar DCO application**: <https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/EN010135>

BANK STREET

I reported on 16th June the accumulation of rubbish between County Square and Bank Street to Environmental Service to clear up and prevent a recurrence.



LOCAL PLAN SITES

An initial assessment has been published (p154 of the ABC Planning Committee, 18th June) for three sites in the Ward:

Land at Church Road, Sevington TN24 0LD. "This site is located within an area dominated by commercial and employment buildings and land and is subject to other constraints including relating to heritage. It is not capable of accommodating similar residential capacity and it is not sequentially preferable."

Land East of Bockham Lane TN25 6PS. "This site is in an isolated rural location over 50m from the Ashford and Willesborough settlement boundary and with poor access to public transport. It has been promoted for employment use only. The adjacent constraints, including Ancient Woodland mean that a lower density development than that subject of this application would be necessary. It is not a sustainable location for residential development, and it is not sequentially preferable to the application site."

Parcels South of M20 TN25 6NH. "This site is in an isolated rural location over 50m from the Ashford and Willesborough settlement boundary. It has been promoted for industrial and BNG use only. Site access is via a motorway bridge which would require significant upgrades or land not within the red line. It is not considered to be a sustainable location for residential development, and it is not sequentially preferable to the application site."

The point made was that these sites cannot be used for residential development as an alternative to that being considered at the Planning committee on 18th June (application site on Kennington Road).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

Issues have emerged during June (including at the KALC EGM on 19th June):

- KCC have requested a deferral of the date by which proposals for local government re-organisation are submitted to the government from 28 November 2025 to 31 March 2026. This will allow for appropriate engagement with residents on future structures. (on 25th June it was reported that local government minister Jim McMahon has given a "hard no" to the request.
- It is essential there are opportunities for parish councils to have a say in the future of their area and play a part in improving it, ensuring they can take control of local assets and spaces if appropriate. Parish councils play a key role in communities but need to be supported. Unparished areas could benefit from hyperlocal democracy.
- The cost of disaggregating ASC / Children in Care and other KCC services is still unknown.
- The transition timetable is early 2026 to April 2028.
- In 2027 there will be election to a shadow unitary, and the Borough elections may be cancelled.
- "The best people possible" should be retained by the Borough and transfer to the unitary.
- The allocation to Kent and Medway of funding to cover costs is £514,410. An estimate of the cost of transition is £20m.
- A "strategic partner" is being appointed to carry out the modelling of options for the new local government structure (e.g. number of unitary councils). They will look at the right geography, democratic arrangements (number of wards and possible "democratic deficit" if wards are too large – but could include local area committees/forums like the Joint Transport Board – but these will be under auspice of the unitary council), value for money and the likely cost (will it really be £20m?) and what the functions of the new unitary are.
- A single submission is expected on 28 November 2025 - but there could be several options. If Councils do not engage, local re-organisation will still happen but those not engaging will not have a voice.
- 500,000 population for a unitary council is a target but is not set in stone.
- Parish councils are getting more focus, and the government recognises the importance of them and the need to work together. Government believe that it is down to local population to decide if parish councils are needed for unparished areas through a Community Governance Review (CGR) (these set up new parish councils where they do not exist).
- New unitary councils will inherit significant amounts of debt.
- Constraints on what existing councils can do may apply in the last year of their existence.
- Any transfer of assets to a parish council must be justified for reasons not just limited to local government re-organisation.

- ABC Leader's view is that there should be 4 unitary councils.

ABC officers attended the Central Forum on 23rd June to explain the process of the CGR. The CGR will look at the area of the borough that does not have a parish or town council and consider:

- Whether a town council should be established, and if so;
- Potential boundaries for the town council
- Electoral arrangements, including the number of councillors.

The final decision will be made by Ashford Borough Council following completion of the review process. There will a consultation 23 October 2025 to 31 January 2026, all residents in the unparished area will be written to along with the parish councillors for the areas adjoining the unparished area. The Terms of Reference for the CGR was considered by Borough Councillors on 30th June.

FINBERRY LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

HML are supposed to manage the "B9 Eco-Corridor" close to Kestrel Drive as part of HML's responsibility. However, no work has been carried out to date despite residents now paying HML.

I raised this at a meeting with Crest / KWT on 20th June which was set up to discuss landscaping on the new development southeast of Captains Wood (Area B6-B8). I also raised the issue about tree canopies taking out too much light in the gardens of the new homes, alongside the farm track to Bilham Farm from Cheesemans Green Lane. Crest agreed to look at the species to ensure the spread is managed.

The ongoing management plan for areas to the north of Finberry (open, species rich, grassland), Captains Wood and the wetlands between Finberry and Waterbrook (including Sevington Lakes where the birch trees have died) has not been managed as required in the 2002 application. Crest promised to take the point away. The 15m buffer zone between Cheesemans Green Lane and the new homes will need a policy for management so it does not become scrub; the wildlife connection route from the farm track to Captains Wood is too narrow and Crest will look at the planting.



Solar panels will be installed on each house.

IBF PLANNING APPLICATION

The DfT have changed their approach regarding the full planning application for the Sevington Inland Border Facility (IBF).

HM Government is seeking full planning permission for Sevington IBF and its Border Control Post (BCP) operations. but the application is now to be submitted directly to the Secretary of State via the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) rather than determined by ABC in the normal way. The PINS is expected to be validated in early July.

PINS will then proceed with a 30-day consultation. The application will be published on the PINS website, as well as on Ashford Borough Council's local planning register.

This is a significant change as the application through PINS is less democratic than an application via the Borough Council. It follows new legislation introduced by the Government as part of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 in May 2025, allowing nationally important infrastructure, such as the Sevington IBF, to be determined through the 'Crown Development route'. This process allows applications for Crown Development to be submitted directly to the Secretary of State via the PINS.

The local community will give the opportunity to provide comments, but taking the decision making away from democratically elected councillors is not acceptable.

PINS will decide whether the application should be examined through written representations, a public hearing, or a public inquiry.

Once the examination concludes, a recommendation will be made to the Secretary of State, who will issue the final decision later in the year.

You can contact the IBF team at contact@engagesevingtonibf.co.uk if you want to express a view on this decision, I have and asked our MP to intervene as the consultation on the defenestration of planning committees has not yet been completed.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

I attended a meeting of the Better Mental Health Network for Kent and Medway on 24th June. The meeting was run by NHS England who have recently published guidance to reduce suicide, emphasising formulation and safety management over risk prediction. The link to the report is here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/staying-safe-from-suicide/>

The reason for the new guidance is the number of patients who have been diagnosed at low risk from suicide. Of the 17 who take their own lives each day in the UK, 5 are in contact with the NHS and 4 out of the 5 are assessed as low risk of taking their own life. This is called “The Low Risk Paradox”.

Practitioners are now recommended to explore risks collaboratively, understand changeable safety factors, and co-produce safety plans. This is because risk is too variable to rely on static categories - it demands nuanced, relational care. NHS England Guidance says

- **do not** use risk assessment tools and scales to predict future suicide or repetition of self-harm
- **do not** use risk assessment tools and scales to determine who should and should not be offered treatment or who should be discharged
- **do not** use global risk stratification into low, medium, or high risk to predict future suicide or repetition of self-harm
- **do not** use global risk stratification into low, medium, or high risk to determine who should be offered treatment or who should be discharged
- **instead** focus the assessment on the person’s needs and how to support their immediate and long-term psychological and physical safety
- ***mental health professionals should undertake a risk formulation as part of every psychosocial assessment***

The Minister for Mental Health (Gillian Merron) has committed to put her weight behind the new collaborative care.

FINBERRY VILLAGE CENTRE

I have received an update on 24th June from the Church Commissioners on progress on developing the village centre (on Avocet between the School and

Bullfinch). They advise they are continuing to work with the preferred developer on contractual matters ahead of them submitting the application for the local centre. The preferred developer has progress pre-application discussions with Ashford BC. The process is taking longer than originally envisaged but they report they are continuing to make good progress.

ABC's PORT HEALTH OPERATIONS AT THE IBF

Defra have confirmed that whilst they aim to start the detailed negotiations on the new EU trade deal, they have not started but hope to do that as soon as possible. Any legislative changes required to implement the Agreement will be subject to Parliamentary Scrutiny as GB Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) rules will now need to match EU SPS member state rules. As result respective GB procedures and legal frameworks will require substantial review as a large amount of realignment is needed before any changes can be implemented. This is consistent with ABC's initial assumption that changes are likely to be some time-off. Imports must be made in full compliance with the Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) until any changes are made. For now, there is no change, and operations continue as usual.

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) committee and Parliamentary Business & Trade Committee have commenced a call for evidence about the trade deal. ABC are currently considering contributing to this process.

FLYTIPPING

I have reported builder waste left roadside on Cheesemans Green Lane (ref 23822348).



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