

COUNCIL UPDATE 12.2025

QUANTOCK VILLAGE GREEN

I attended the KCC Regulation Committee on 1st December which considered my application. Here are the key points.

- Any person may apply to register land as a Village Green (under section 15 of the Commons Act 2006 (“the 2006 Act”) and the Commons Registration (England) Regulations 2014 (“the 2014 Regulations”). where it can 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” (i.e. from 4th March 2005, 20 years before my application was submitted) - **75 user evidence questionnaires setting out the use of the land by local residents were sent in by 4th March. A further 7 evidence questionnaires have been received more recently. 18 messages of support have been received from local residents (during consultation in June 2025) and a further letter of support has been received from the Headteacher of nearby Highworth Grammar School. Three quarters of the users note they have used the land for more than 20 years.** The use of the land has therefore given rise to the possibility of an application being made for registration of a village green
- In addition to the above, the application must meet one of the following tests:
 - Use of the land has continued ‘as of right’ until at least the date of application (section 15(2) of the Act); or
 - Use of the land ‘as of right’ ended no more than one year prior to the date of application, e.g. by way of the erection of fencing or a notice (section 15(3) of the Act).

The Application Site was fenced off utilising Heras fencing on Friday 27th June 2025 (shortly after advertisement of the Village Green application). However, that enclosure took place after the Village Green application was made and has no bearing upon the consideration of the Village Green application.

The landowner (since purchase at auction on 13th February 2025, the date of completion is not noted in the report) has raised concerns as to the precise nature of the user evidence and the degree to which it occurred specifically on the application site (as opposed to surrounding areas). The landowner says the land was purchased to provide a safe outdoor space for the Landowner’s family and it is alleged that the application to register the land as a Village Green is opportunistic, lacks the evidential foundation to satisfy the statutory requirements for village green registration and constitutes a misuse of the legislation in order to override the legitimate interests of the private ownership

of the land. 6 points were submitted by the applicant in objection to my application (my comments on these objections in bold).

- The application failed to define a legally recognisable locality, the user evidence spanning a vague and inconsistent area that does not meet the statutory requirement for the identification of a qualifying community unit; **Quantock Drive estate is a qualifying community unit demonstrated by the ABC electoral ward of Furley and the KCC electoral division of Ashford Central. User evidence forms are all from residents of the Quantock Drive estate, with many positively identifying themselves as residents of 'the estate' or living 'on Quantock'. The fact that the area as a whole comprises a housing estate primarily developed during the early 1970s with only two entrance/exit points (thereby indicating a self-contained area) means that the area has the features of a qualifying neighbourhood.**
- The user evidence submitted in support of my Application is vague, formulaic, and lacks specificity, with much of the evidence referring to generic activities such as dog walking or walking to shops without clarifying whether such use took place on the Application Site versus surrounding areas; **The activities comprise primarily of dog walking and playing with children, but there are also examples of the land being used for picnics and ball games. Local residents went to great lengths to complete a large volume of evidence questionnaires, which reflects the depth of local feeling regarding this piece of land. It is submitted that the activities that are said to have taken place on the land are exactly those that are typical of a Village Green, and the fact that the land lies adjacent to a children's playground makes it naturally more attractive as a place for recreational use.**
- Use of the Application Site has been by virtue of an implied permission, and not "as of right", on the basis that numerous residents have made statements to the effect that they believed the land to be Council-owned and/or maintained; **Rights can be acquired on the basis of a presumed dedication by the landowner without force, without secrecy and without permission, peaceable and non-contentious. This presumption of dedication arises as a result of acquiescence (i.e. inaction by the landowner).**
- A "trigger event" (effectively meaning a village green application cannot be considered) has occurred on the basis that the land has been publicly marketed, discussed in the local media and may have been considered under local planning processes; **The marketing of land for sale, or any associated discussions in the local media or with the local planning authority, do not constitute one of the formal "trigger events" set out in Schedule 1A of the Commons Act 2006 (which disengage the right to apply for Village Green status).**

- Since its purchase, the Landowner has made consistent and lawful efforts to assert private ownership, including installing private property signs and the erection of fencing to terminate 'as of right' use; **There is no information as to the precise dates or locations of these notices, and it is likely that these appeared after the submission of the Village Green application (such that they are not relevant to the determination of the application).**
- Any use of the Application Site has been incidental, sporadic and informal, and the evidence relies heavily upon generic statements, often repeated word for word across different witnesses and frequently referencing activities (e.g. walking to shops) which do not constitute recreational use of the land at all. **I agree it is very difficult to ascertain the precise nature of the use - and differentiate between different kinds of use - on the paper evidence available. For this reason, it is considered that this is an issue that would benefit from further consideration by way of oral testimony by witnesses to clarify more precisely the nature and extent of the recreational use that has taken place on the Application Site.**

The determination of Village Green applications is a quasi-judicial function of KCC, for which the only right of appeal is by way of Judicial Review in the High Court. In the case of contested village green applications, the courts have commended the holding of an independent local inquiry and indicated that the Commons Registration Authority 'should proceed only after receiving the report of an independent [legal] expert'. The holding of a local inquiry provides residents with the opportunity to have their say, whilst also affording the landowner the opportunity to test that evidence.

KCC's view on the basis of the evidence available is that it would be appropriate in this case for a local inquiry to be held, subject to the approval of KCC's Regulation Committee Member Panel. **The report did say that I have put forward a good case in favour of registration of the land as a Village Green, there are some elements of the evidence that require more detailed analysis and some legal tests that have not been sufficiently proven at this stage.**

ASHFORD ALLOTMENT SOCIETY

The Group met with Council members and officers on 1st December. Key issues included.

- Fees per perch will increase 3.5% to £17.60 for 2026/27. The increase is due to inflation and reflects the need for ABC to cover its costs of administration. The fee increase will be considered at Budget Task Group meetings in January 2026.

- Ashford Allotment Assoc are interested in making a “submission of interest” in taking over the allotments but the argument is to wait until LGR and possible new Town Council are resolved.
- I confirmed that Kennington CC will prepare a capital cost estimate of bringing the former allotments at Lower Vicarage Road.
- The planning application for Torrington Road site (includes disused allotments) has been drafted, and a decision will be with the Planning Committee. The Allotment Association have submitted an objection.

EAST KENT DESIGN CODE

Councillors gave their views to shape the design principles and appearance of new developments in Ashford and East Kent at a meeting on 1st December. A design code sets out specific design requirements for new development including residential layouts, landscaping, streets buildings, green spaces and local character. The Design Code will be used to determine whether planning applications are acceptable in design terms and will support the aims of the Local Plan.

INLAND BORDER FACILITY PLANNING INQUIRY

The planning inquiry held its first day of hearings on 2nd December. Here are my comments.

*I welcomed that no further “significant physical development” is proposed in Sevington East (known locally as the High Field”); it is planned to be used for biodiversity gains for the next 30 years. I was concerned to read in the Applicant’s Statement of Case that “the scale and location offer optimal flexibility to cater for the range of scenarios, including disruptions and emergency situations when greater capacity is required....” **There have several times when the site has been used for additional lorry parking in the Tango Area, there have been (in the early days of operation) notification to residents and this should be a requirement as it is extremely helpful to know of use to plan activities.** There is a need for nearby residents to be able to lodge issues with the operational team on site, the email available to HMRC often go unanswered and if answered there are delays and obfuscation.*

*The staff car park gates are controlled by automatic access which is a cause of tailgating and means a lack of respect for the zebra crossing that allows pedestrians to cross the staff access route. It is not safe and needs to be made so by condition. Cars seeing the unmanned entrance gates open will speed up on the access road to get through the gap before it closes; the speed cars exit the site is excessive. **A raised carriageway is required at the zebra crossing to reduce the speed to the signed 5mph.** Improvements to the active travel plan including the provision of additional walking and cycling routes are needed.*

*There is a unilateral undertaking over the s106 mitigation towards St Mary’s Sevington’s upgrades. I welcomed the applicant’s intention to facilitate the prompt release of funds, if planning permission is granted – **I was pleased to hear of a scheduled meeting on Monday 15th to discuss with representatives of the diocese the “Church Works Specification”, what is known as “re-ordering”.***

*It is disappointing that the assurance does not extends to reinstatement of a PROW across the site if circumstances allow. I am disappointed that the applicant has not taken up a suggestion to fund PROW upgrades further eastwards beyond Blind Lane into Mersham. **I asked that the applicant include the reinstatement of the PROW through the viewing***

corridor should the circumstances permit this and the extension of the Bridleway from Blind Lane into Mersham. A previous commitment to do so has not been followed up on.

The **Natural England comments that there is an ongoing need which allows lighting to be switched off in certain areas and shielded to prevent light spill.** The mitigation proposed at to switch-off 'swim lane' lighting when not operationally required was welcomed.

There is significant erosion on the setting, the soft planting is lacking resulting in the fact that the acoustic attenuation and security fencing is highly visible. Much of the original planting in 2020 has not survived and it needs to be replaced and augmented, and there is now work on site to replant what has been lost due to lack of maintenance. **I asked for improved delivery of landscaping given the proposal to permanently retain the facility. There needs to be a commitment from the DfT and National Highways to work proactively with the Council on such improvements which will reduce light pollution into Mersham and elsewhere and protect nearby heritage assets.** The Council arranged a meeting with the East Kent Design Team and a I drew attention to the fact the setting and development of the logistic park at J8 is so much better and suitable for the environment than the development at the IBF.

There is a lack of acoustic barriers in the Tango emergency use area, this is the area nearest to my house. It is the only area without such barriers.

I welcome the statement that if regular use emerges then suitable restrictions or mitigation will be required. **What is needed is acoustic barriers and associated planting, maybe by a bund to this area.**

I asked the applicant to carry out further noise assessments with the Council's Environmental Protection Team regarding low frequency noise from HGVs, tonal noise from refrigerated HGVs, reversing beepers, use of horns, clanging of curtain sider poles and the use of the perimeter road to the south of the site by the HGVs on exit the site. This is to include alternative routes out from this part of the site avoiding the perimeter road, particularly at night) are assessed. **I was shared readings by a resident of consistent readings of 75 dB (equivalent to a passenger car travelling at 65 mph at 25 ft)**

The Transport Assessment references queuing on the A20 east and west of J10A during the peak periods. A20 traffic must wait excessively for a gap in traffic. I welcome the suggestion that the applicant will discuss mitigation to overcome this queuing which may be signalisation and the creation of additional lanes on the A20 approaches to J10A. The Kent Transport Plan includes improvements to the J10A gyratory in the Plan to promote mitigation.

Improved physical signage and improvements in digital navigation should pay a greater role in addressing routing concerns of misdirected HGVs along Church Road, Sevington (and into Chesemans Green Lane) and to a lesser extent Kingsford Street. I am pleased that ongoing collaboration with National Highways and KCC is proposed to explore additional improvements, however **Further work should be done to mitigate the effect on the local unclassified road network** (not just the strategic road network). I have lost my garden fence to misdirected HGVs but the more practical issue is the lack of road width to accommodate HGVs particularly at the bridge over the Ashford/Hastings railway.

I have concerns over **dog fouling** are in Para 190 along with degradation of the surface in parts. It is suggested it is reviewed by the Parish Council working with the Refuse and Street Scene Team at ABC on the locations which are prone to fouling. Surface degradation should be reported to KCC. **I am disappointed that the DfT etc are absolving themselves of responsibility to provide sufficient bins.**

*There are good opportunities for information boards to be provided to celebrate the archaeological find including the Cold War bunker. **There should be further archaeological investigations on the Sevington East Field.** Unexploded ordinance was detonated recently, and it is important that the community has clarity of what has been found under the surface.*

At a site visit on 3rd December, we were told that Southern Water approached HMRC to access their pumping station at the turning circle through the IBF instead of using Kingsford Street. Consent was granted by HMRC never heard from them again. I promised to speak to Southern Water to understand the reasons why they used Kingsford Street rather than the IBF.

Planning consent was granted for the IBF on 17th December and I am pleased the conditions on the application covered many points raised plus additional points from the parish council.

JOINT TRANSPORT BOARD

The Board met on 2nd December. Key issues included.

- KCC are working with Mersham Parish Council via their Highway Improvement Plan (HIP) to install an additional pedestrian warning sign at the junction with Bower Road for traffic turning into Church Road, with a plate stating that there is “no footway for xxx distance”. KCC are currently liaising with their contractor to arrange an installation date for this scheme. This should increase the safety of pedestrians that need to walk in the carriageway on Church Road between the footway at the junction with Bower Road and the footway by the junction with Church Close.
- The number of Penalty Charge Notices issued by the ANPR cameras installed are as follows:

PENALTY CHARGE NOTICES ISSUED BY MONTH

Date	Beaver Road (Northbound)	Beaver Road (Southbound)	Carlton Road	Sackville Crescent
Oct 24	64	67		
Nov 24	44	54		
Dec 24	56	47		
Jan 25	30	54	2	4
Feb 25	54	72	1	2
March 25	138	199	3	4
April 25	341	546	4	1
May 25	284	343	2	
June 25	309	315	1	1
July 25	269	255	10	11
Aug 25	228	201	15	13
Sept 25	296	287	35	8
Oct 25	162	107	5	9
TOTAL	2295	2547	78	53

The estimated revenue is £180k. I asked that this was sufficient to cover the costs as KCC consider it is necessary that income from fines must cover the costs of running the cameras before they will extend coverage to the bus link from Bridgefield to Finberry.

- A proposal to extend the footway from Great Chart to Chilmington has been put forward and following the funding award of £50,000, an initial investigation is taking place to better understand what would be possible. It falls under KCC education to produce an engineering plan for this location, KCC have confirmed that a route along the main road would not be feasible and any route would require going through the new Chilmington development.
- A report by the Good Growth Foundation says that restoring international rail services to Kent could attract 493,000 visitors a year injecting £534m into the UK economy. 82,581 have now signed the petition. Virgin trains are planning to order 12 6-car train units to start service in 2030 (this is 6 operating trains as each operating train is formed of two 6-car train units) and have committed to serve Kent Stations "if they are open". Other operators (Trenitalia UK, Gemini Trains and Evolyn) are still "in the mix". Increased competition will increase the chance of opening Ashford (and Ebbsfleet). The DfT have agreed to a working group to look at opening Ebbsfleet and Ashford – the key issues are border staff (and their funding) and new infrastructure at the stations to accommodate new rolling stock including signalling upgrades to European Train Control System (the "Ashford Spurs" upgrades were done in 2019 for the Siemens trains and were never used to the capacity expected); this is estimated to cost £4m. There is a proposal for Eurostar to give up the track access rights at

Ashford and Ebbsfleet which would cause additional costs and delays to Eurostar restarting their services that use the Kent stations. 8th January 2026 is the 30th anniversary of Ashford International, an event is planned "Bring Back The Magic" to maintain the pressure on the government for a solution. There is 50% capacity on the line.

COMMUNITY SAFETY UNIT

The unit met on 4th December, key issues included.

- There have been two breaches of PSPOs.
- Community surveys have been carried out in Tenterden and Rolvenden. These surveys are carried out around areas where there have been reports of ASB. They are limited to the block of flats (where the report is from a block resident) or 20 or so houses either side of the report.
- 92 reports of fly tipping (Kilndown Close is a hotspot).
- 16 vehicles were stopped for environmental surveillance; one was non-compliant with legislation.
- There are increased reports of HGVs parking in Henwood from KF&R, there are reports of car racing and nuisance vehicles also at Henwood, which will be covered by the new PSPO.
- 152 approaches (63% single) by potential homeless in November. There has been a reduction of people to 243 (from 290) in temporary accommodation.
- The rough sleeper count was 9 on 5th November across the whole borough. The Beacon Centre will now be open (8.30am to 1pm) every working day.
- The RSPCA have carried out roadshows with Year 9 pupils on catapult use.
- Social landlords make tenants aware of escooters / ebikes charging in their property although there is no prohibition of doing so in the tenancy agreement (but it is a tenancy breach of charging in a communal area). There have been three fires recently of fires from charging laptops on soft furnishing. Tenancy agreements are being reviewed and may include some changes for this.

A consultation on an updated area to the Ashford Urban Area PSPO will close on 04/01/2025. The consultation can be accessed here:

<https://haveyoursay.ashford.gov.uk/proposal-for-pspo-in-ashford>. The updated PSPO is to add some additional measures such as:

- No person shall be in possession of any glass drinking vessel, including but not limited to pint glasses, wine glasses, or glass bottles, within the designated public space. Any such vessel must be surrendered upon request by an authorised officer, in order to prevent public nuisance or disorder.

- No person shall be in possession of any catapult, slingshot, or any similar device capable of discharging a projectile, where such possession is deemed by an authorised officer to present a risk of injury, damage to property, or to contribute to antisocial behaviour. This includes devices that, in the opinion of an authorised officer, are likely to be used in a manner that causes alarm, harassment, or distress.
- No person shall ride or operate an e-scooter, e-bike, or any other electrically powered personal transport device within the areas marked on the map, except for mobility scooters used by individuals with disabilities or limited mobility, and legal electrically assisted pedal cycles.
- No person shall erect any non-permanent structure, including tents or pallet houses, in public spaces without prior authorisation.

LOCAL PLAN

Councillors received a summary of the “Reg 18” consultation on the draft Ashford local Plan to 2024 (and between August and October 2025) on 10th December. The consultation focused on setting out the Council’s ‘direction of travel’ for the emerging Local Plan, including setting out ambitions and intentions for sustainable development in the borough. As part of this consultation, the Council also reopened the Call for Sites, which invites residents, landowners and developers to submit sites for consideration for allocation within the emerging Local Plan.

Key issues for Mersham included:

- Protection of Mersham to stop it becoming a suburb of Ashford.
- A policy on separation of settlements is retained in the new Local Plan including “buffer” areas of restricted development.
- Mersham to be considered for some limited expansion as part of the 1,000 homes to be allocated between 45 villages.
- Some limited expansion to Bridgefield / Finberry will be considered to allow development of these established developments.

On Monday 22 December these responses were published at <https://haveyoursay.ashford.gov.uk/draft-lp42-consultation>. If you have any questions, please let the Plan-Making & Infrastructure team know via planning.policy@ashford.gov.uk.

ABC BUDGET 2025/26

Key issues noted in budget discussions on 11th and 16th December include the following.

- The Business rates re-set in the Chancellor’s Budget will mean the Council will lose around £1m.

- The government settlement will likely be flat cash, it will absorb Council Tax increases and therefore a real term reduction.
- The Mansion Tax will not generate additional resources for the Council; it will administer its collection and pass on to the government. We do not yet know if the single person discount will apply to the Mansion Tax (actually called the High Value Council Tax Surcharge (HVCTS)).
- ABC applied the Second Home Council Tax Premium from 1st April 2025; we do not yet know how many owners reclassified their second home as holiday lets to avoid the surcharge and pay a small amount of business rates instead.
- A policy statement released by government shows a notional band D council tax level of £226.60 for Ashford; this is the number used to calculate the government settlement. The assumed level of council tax in the draft budget is £199.37 for a band D property as there is a cap of 2.99% by which council tax can increase; a savings strategy to bridge the funded deficit will be needed. We do not yet know if during LGR the successor authority will be allowed to disapply the 2.99% cap and leapfrog to the notional council tax level – if they do it will be a 12% increase for Ashford.
- The costs of implementing local government reorganisation, its impact on staffing, recruitment, retention, secondments to shadow authorities are all to be determined. The Council needs to be mindful of ensuring that decisions and actions taken that do not only benefit Ashford but also have regard to the successor authority so that the current Ashford Administration does not just hand over to the successor authority a budget deficit.
- Recent Pension Valuation has resulted in a saving to the Council of £1.15m.
- There is an assumed growth of £559,000 for temporary accommodation.
- There is a decrease in budget of £502,000 in Refuse, Recycling and Street Clean.
- There are savings of £124,000 in premise costs following the relocation from the Civic Centre to International House.
- There are savings of £436,000 in expenditure relating to the upcoming demolition of Park Mall.
- Leisure contracts have seen an increase in revenue of £600,000 following the management fee income from the operator of the Julie Rose Stadium, Stour Centre and Tenterden Leisure Centre.
- The potential new agreement between the UK and the European Union to create a 'Sanitary and Phytosanitary zone' to simplify and reduce costs for trade in agri-food products by removing many border checks and certificates for animals, plants, and related goods moving between the UK and the EU, and between Great Britain and Northern Ireland will cause changes to the Port Health operations at the IBF in Sevington.

- The Port Health service is forecast to generate £250,000 from illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing checks.

CENTRAL FORUM

The Forum met on 8th December. Issues discussed included town centre HMOs and the following live planning application.

- PA/2025/1085 (5 Bank Street) Change from Class E (shops, offices, restaurants, cafes, etc) to 5 flats with small retail.
- NOT/2025/2164 (25c and 27-27a Bank Street) Change 1st & 2nd Floors to 4 flats.
- PA/2025/2164 (4 Canterbury Road). Approve existing 6-person HMO.

The issue of HMOs is becoming a concern across the borough; recent applications include the following and a revised list of conditions will need to be set out for the next iteration of the local plan. The existing conditions include: impact on parking, potential for anti-social behaviour and size of the relevant accommodation (when looking at if it accommodates single people or families). The following HMOs have been granted recently in the town centre:

- 14 Canterbury Road - 3 Flats converted to 10-person HMO.
- Bank Street has had 9 applications.
- There is a 36-bed hostel in Tufton House.
- Residential above The Phoenix.
- The Swan - Conversion to 8 flats.
- The Old Post Office - 20 Person HMO.
- Man 'O Kent – 14 people residential.
- 6-10 North Street - 20 Person HMO.
- 54 Lower High Street - Conversion to 6 flats.
- 52 Lower High Street - Permission to allow overnight accommodation for staff.

The Forum have reported traffic turning into the Lower High Street from Station Road and going the wrong way along Lower High Street. The Borough Council Civil Enforcement Officers have also noticed that vehicles regularly make their way, the wrong way, up the High Street. Unfortunately, it is not in their powers to deal with this type of offence as it is moving traffic offence. A solution would require police involvement. There are very few options available to Kent County Council, it seems to be reasonably well signed. It is possible a moving traffic camera could be installed (in theory) to issue PCNs to vehicle who contravene this restriction, though the next phase of moving traffic enforcement is concentrating on box junctions, with a large list being looked at across Kent at present for consultation, including Wellesley Road/Mace Lane/Somerset Road (see www.kent.gov.uk/mteconsultations). A no entry sign, or wording (like what can be found at A2070 by McDonalds) could be painted on the ground in addition to the two no-entry signs, but this would need to be done in conjunction with Kent Police enforcing the offence.

INTEGRATED CARE PARTNERSHIP

The partnership met on 11th December and included a presentation on the new Kent and Medway Suicide Prevention Partnership. Key findings included.

System Action That Can Add Value...

- ❖ Continued investment into public mental health, social determinants of mental health and suicide prevention.
- ❖ Providing strong leadership for better integration between services (e.g. mental health and drug / alcohol services)
- ❖ Help us to promote the new strategy across the system, and reach out to us if there are any priorities you'd like to incorporate into your own operations or strategies. We are here to help and guide!
- ❖ Join our Networks to keep informed of the work of the Suicide Prevention Programme, and to be able to share your expertise whilst learning about other work taking place locally that may be of interest to you and your organisation / service users.
E-mail: suicideprevention@kent.gov.uk
- ❖ Help us to promote the free to access suicide prevention awareness training across the system and local communities.
- ❖ Help us to promote the specialist suicide bereavement support service across the system and local communities.
- ❖ Regularly keep us up to date with the development of mental health services across the System, so that we can continue to promote these where suitable, including in our Better Mental Health Newsletter.
- ❖ Save the link to our Padlet onto your browsers – so that you can access our materials (including Release the Pressure materials) and research anytime you want or need:
[Suicide Prevention Team Resources](#)



STONESTREET SOLAR

Aldington & Bonnington PC (A&BPC) have a mandate obtained at the 10th November Aldington public meeting to go ahead with the first two stages of the JR application process. The second stage (lodging of the legal bundle) happened on Friday 12th December.

In brief, the JR case is that the Secretary of State (Ed Miliband) in making his decision did not take proper account of the comparable solar scheme which adjoins the Stonestreet Solar scheme and which was dismissed by the inspector at Appeal in July this year. The inspector found that elements of this other scheme (promoted by EDF) were unacceptable in the context of the setting of important heritage assets - namely St Martin's Church (Grade I listed) on Aldington Ridge and the adjacent Court Lodge Farm (Grade II*) which forms part of the original Archbishop's Palace. These buildings were all part of the original (pre-plague) village and lie within the Conservation Area. The inspector on EDF stated that whilst important, public benefit (from solar schemes) must be weighed against heritage impact and there is, to use his words, "no carte blanche". The EDF inspector maintained that "most if not all" of the planned power output from the EDF scheme could have been achieved by a reorganised layout.

It remains to be seen whether the application made will meet the “merit” test and we won't know about that for a bit. The Crowd Justice funding arrangement that A&BPC have set up runs into January. The community have raised just over £11,000 (as at 16th December) which, when gift aid is considered, means they are about halfway to the target of £25,000. The link it is: <https://www.crowdjustice.com/case/aldington-mersham-community-fund/>

Mersham PC held a Parish Meeting on 29th December to inform Mersham residents of the issues and decide of its support for A&BPC.

SEVINGTON CHURCH “RE-ORDERING”

I attended a meeting on 15th December to discuss the "re-ordering" that the diocese will put the s106 money from the IBF application to (now consent has been granted). In summary it will be used towards roofing, damp proofing, new flooring, a new kitchen area, removing some pews to create a useable community space and creating a new bell-ringing platform (with shorter ropes). We met with architects and discussed the opportunity to secure grant funding to make up the funding shortfall. A very useful and positive meeting. ABC have the funds from the DfT but there are strict conditions about releasing the sum - ABC need to be satisfied that the funds will be used in the way specified by the Planning Consent and require a "Church Work Specification" that meets the conditions.

SOUTHEAST COAST AMBULANCE SERVICE (SECamb)

The governors met on 18th December. These are the key issues.

Virtual Care includes “Hear and Treat” is one of the key strategic priorities for SECamb for 2026/27. This requires patient needs to be thoroughly assessed by a senior clinician remotely. This remote clinical assessment will enable patients to be cared for directly or referred to the most appropriate care provider as part of the consideration of dispatching an ambulance. SECamb have yet to increase the Hear and Treat rate to the level within the plan of 55% of patients. The Hear and Treat target is 19.7% by March 2026 but was only at 15.1% at October 2025. A pause to the development and implementation of the new operating model was noted from Nov 2025 to Apr 2026.

There is a risk that SECamb are unable to deliver this strategy due to insufficient workforce trained in virtual care resulting in poorer patient outcomes. A reduction the target for the definition of new operational roles from 33% to 22% reflects the significant scope change to clinical leadership roles to deliver this new clinical strategy. Employee Relations sensitivities across Scheduling and Integrated Care may result in increased sickness, grievances or resistance to organisational change processes, which may reduce staff capacity and affect slow programme delivery.

Without scaling virtual care effectively, the system will continue to rely on physical ambulance dispatch for cases that could be managed virtually. This limits capacity for genuine emergencies, undermines the strategic aim of reducing unnecessary conveyance, and risks eroding progress on patient safety and flow. C2 (e.g. stroke) response time target is 26:46 but current (at Oct 26) is at 28:11. However, a NHSE that £5m performance funding associated with improvement in C2 trajectory has been earned notwithstanding that SECamb is required to improve C2 response to 27 minutes; this funding has enabled SECamb to meet its financial targets.

There is a risk that SECamb does not have sufficient resilience to withstand a **cyber-attack**, resulting in significant service disruption and/or patient harm. The annual Data Protection & Security Toolkit, based on a new Cyber Assurance Framework, submitted in June 2025 was largely compliant. However, there are gaps in assurance related to the Cyber Board Assurance Framework (BAF) Risk, with the related actions included in the Digital Strategy Implementation Plan approved in August.

There are thousands of qualified **paramedics who cannot get jobs**. SECamb are creating additional lower grade roles with opportunities for career progression.

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