

COUNCIL UPDATE 2.2025

KENT AND MEDWAY BETTER HEALTH NETWORK

The network met on 4th February. The key issues included:

- One of the workforce groups that has been targeted was the fishing community in east Kent. Aside from being one of the most dangerous professions, the group has mental health issues due to working in isolation and time away from their family. Changes to the industry including quotas means they must be away for much longer and their financial outcome is dependent on the weather.
- The “Wild With Wheels” project offers free, safe and accessible routes for guided, interactive nature walks and experiences for people with disabilities and impairments. Further details at <https://www.wildwithwheels.com/>
- Able Futures is a 9-month non-clinical support for 16+ who feel their mental health is impacting their ability to cope in the workplace. There are monthly sessions for early intervention to address mild or moderate issues including neurodiversity issues. Further details at <https://able-futures.co.uk/>
- Shaw Trust IPS service helps people with mental health needs to secure employment. It is based across 11 Community Health Mental Health team sites in Kent & Medway with 28 FTE specialists. Further information is available at <https://shawtrust.org.uk/commissioning-connect-to-work/>
- Kent and Medway’s Integrated Work Strategy has been developed to deliver the government’s Back to Work Strategy. The aim is to support people and employers with the goal of helping people with long term health conditions and disabilities to start, stay and succeed in work. Further details are here on an ongoing consultation: <https://www.haveyoursayinkentandmedway.co.uk/work-and-health-strategy/surveys/work-and-health-strategy-survey> My contribution to the strategy is how local government needs to manage what it can influence (transport, housing and education) to support those back into work or changing jobs.
- Wellbeing drop ins are held each Wednesday at the Riverside Café in Clockhouse. Kennington Community Council are exploring funding to run something similar in Kennington.

Looking for a wellbeing boost?

Our **wellbeing drop ins** provide a warm and welcoming setting where you can meet new people and share your experiences.

Our wellbeing coaches are available to provide individual support where needed and can also provide personalised energy advice to help keep you safe and warm over winter.

From 22nd January, we will meet on Wednesdays from 10am to 12pm at: The Riverside Café, Clockhouse, Ashford, TN23 4YN.

We look forward to seeing you!

For more information call: 01622 692383 or visit: midkentmind.org.uk



ASHFORD LOCAL CHILDRENS PARTNERSHIP GROUP

The Group met on 4th February. The key issues included:

- KCC's Family Hub's are now a basis for providing an umbrella of local services including midwifery, early years literacy, antenatal classes, healthy child clinics, support with breastfeeding, support with parenting and speech and language. They provide drop-in sessions for parents and children and increased outreach services. There are 6 Hub spaces in Ashford with a 7th site opening soon. There are two in Central Division – Bockhanger and Mabledon Road. Further information at <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/kent-family-hub>
- There were discussions about how food bank centres in Ashford operate. The Cost-of-Living crisis is not over and there have been reports with young people not being able to access services. Full details of the offer are here <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help/ashford-food-banks-and-other-essential-supplies/> but it is worth contacting the food bank to confirm their opening times before a visit.
- The strategic assessment for priorities on the Community Safety Strategy is being put together.

THE STATE OF THE HIGH STREET

Counts of total employees by industrial sector are published annually by Kent Analytics, part of KCC. The 2023 data was published in November 2024 and was highlighted in a bulletin published by KCC.

Retail is the second largest employer in Ashford at 19.3% of the workforce, second to health and social work at 20.1%. Ten years ago, retail was the largest employer at 21.2%. The landscape for retail is suffering from on-line competition, rents that remain high following debt-fuelled spiralling during the noughties, the pandemic and ruinous business rates. To add to retailers' troubles shoplifting is at a record high with violence and abuse incidences.

The October budget reduced business rate relief from 75% to 40% and prospects of an overhaul pushed down the road. Employers NIC rose from 13.8% to 15% and now kick in on wages of £417pw (from £758pw). This will affect prices charged, and the number of staff employed.

We have an opportunity with local government reorganisation that our new elected leaders will reverse the talking down and bring some energy and life to east Kent which will benefit Ashford as it is such a large part of the region.

The data is here:

https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/8180/Business-Register-and-Employment-Survey-BRES.pdf

FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT

KCC's Flood Management Committee met on 5th February coincidentally the date DEFRA announced plans to invest £2.65bn over two years in the construction and maintenance of flood defences. The funding, up from an average of £1.05bn per year from 2021 to 2023 under the last Government, is set to support up to 1,000 projects, with £140m of funding prioritised for 31 schemes that are ready for delivery.

Kent is classified as "Seriously Water Stressed" by the Environment Agency (EA) meaning water shortages could affect business and residents. The internal Drainage Board is called "A Wise Use of Water", a data driven, collaborative approach. It will identify where water is lost and where it can be stored to improve drought and flood resilience. The aim is to ensure that infrastructure development includes water resilience. It will collect data on nitrates and phosphates to contribute towards the management of the impact of new housing development on the Stodmarsh SSSI.

The Flood Warning Service is being upgraded and the team are looking for volunteers to test it before it is launched.

Any questions?
TestFloodWarnings@environment-agency.gov.uk

Expression of interest

We're looking for people to test our new Flood Warning Service



We are improving our Flood Warning Service in 2025
We need volunteers to test it before we launch.

What will it involve?

It's simple to take part, we will send you a link to the private service where you can complete a test registration. We will then send you a small number of test warnings and alerts and ask you for feedback.

What do you need to do?

Let us know that you're interested to take part by filling in our [Expression of Interest form](#) and we will be in touch.

Register your interest to try the new service

When is this happening?

Testing will take place between February and May 2025.

We are making these improvements to ensure that our flood warning service remains resilient and effective for the next decade.

By taking part you will:

- Be among the first to try the new service
- Help ensure it works for people like you
- Make flood warnings better for everyone.
- Influence how it develops.



The EA have a hot line for reporting pollution issues with bathing water on 0800 80 70 60. The EA tests the water twice a year and will investigate pollution including water treatment companies and take action against them if appropriate. They carry out microbial source tracing (DNA testing) to see if the pollution is human or animal sourced. The priority areas include Deal, St Marys Bay, Littlestone, Dymchurch and Folkestone. Littlestone water quality has deteriorated since 2023 which has a complex catchment area as there are many properties still on cess pits. Deal bathing water (whose catchment includes Ashford) has deteriorated and work is ongoing to identify the causes through microbial testing. The importance of public reporting cannot be underestimated as EA staff cannot be on the ground all the time. There are things we can all do by taking care what we flush down the toilet. Avoiding feeding birds in public places and throwing away food in the street is essential as it attracts birds and vermin. Fouling by these (and dogs when it is not picked up) contributes to river water quality in Ashford which is upstream from Deal.

ASHFORD HEALTH ALLIANCE

The Group met on 5th February and discussed the following.

- KCC's Adult Social Care (ASC) new Prevention Framework will provide structure and develop service changes to help people stay healthy, happy and independent for as long as possible. This means reducing the chances of problems from arising in the first place and, when they do, supporting people to manage them as effectively as possible to stay out of hospital. Activities, that prevent, reduce and delay the need for social care make a positive impact on resident's health and wellbeing.
- I requested equipment to be put in the Stour Centre which is designed for disabled people to use.

- The need for access to s106 contributions derived from planning applications was discussed. The NHS had requested contributions from the Possingham Farm application towards the Headcorn GP Practice; this was rejected by the Planning Inspector because of its distance from Ashford. The point is that statutory consultees need to be more aware of the link that is needed between their development and the facilities they are requesting funding for; the Possingham Farm development will proceed without NHS s106 contributions. Had the NHS asked for a contribution towards the Woodchurch Surgery, it might have been supported.
- Freedom Leisure have started a social outreach project at the Julie Rose offering the opportunities for people to meet.
- Referral information with NHS patients with respiratory needs to link up with ABC housing and KCC health visiting team. In this way the services that residents need can be better joined up. Potentially this can be linked into the education and maternity teams as damp in homes affects all ages including young people. The team have more effect with social owned homes as housing associations are now bound by the same rules as local authorities.
- Children and young people vaping survey has been completed, and the main headlines will be reported on 6th March at KCC. Ahead of that they are looking to profile the results to socio-economic data, and initial analysis seems there is no difference between vaping across social groups. Data is being examined on how the location of vaping shops near schools affect the vaping numbers. A key finding is that 11-year-olds are using vaping to control social anxiety. In the 11–15-year-old group, 3% smoke and 9% vape (25% have tried vaping), the concern is now that vaping is a gateway into smoking. Disposable vapes cannot be sold after 1st June 2025. Mandatory smoke free spaces may be brought in as part of a new tobacco and vape bill. Alternative options to reduce smoking area (aside from signage) are being investigated.
- The KCC ASC risk assessment for bed-bound smokers who live on their own, highlights the risk of them smoking in bed can prevent them going into residential care – Kent Fire and Rescue offer fire retardant blankets when they carry out home assessments.

LITTER BINS AT REPTON

Ashford Borough Council plan to withdraw its service of street cleaning including emptying litter bins on parts of Repton. ABC now say (despite having delivered the service for 15+ years) that the Council is not responsible for the cleansing of private land, including the emptying of litterbins as they have no statutory responsibility. The argument is that this is a matter for Firstport / HML in Repton and should be covered by management fees paid by residents. This is not good enough as it results in double taxation; litter bins have been emptied and the streets swept by ABC for years and to put this

cost on residents through the management charge is unfair. Repton residents pay the same council tax as everyone else and should expect the same levels of environmental standards. There is no guarantee that the management agent will discharge their duties correctly, they are unresponsive to concerns raised by residents and often fail to do what they are paid to do.

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, councils' duty is to keep public roads and footpaths within their jurisdiction clear of litter and refuse, including dog mess, as far as is practicable, which usually involves regular street sweeping and litter collection operations. My argument against this is that because ABC have done this for several years, they have created an expectation and duty to continue to do so. Whilst the land may not have been adopted as highway it is not restricted private land, there is public access to it. It is clearly in the public interest that public land is free of litter.

Litter management and grounds maintenance is so important to having a nice place to live and lifts the community. ABC does this in most parts of the Borough (there is a big push on this in Stanhope – Aspire are taking out densely planted areas that attract litter) and it is wrong to have a two track approach where some parts of the town are done by the Council and other parts of the town are left to management companies and paid by residents in addition to their council tax. My initial resolution to Council was as follows:

Council is asked to defer the cessation of street cleaning and litter bin collection in Repton pending an impact assessment. The withdrawal of services has been proposed in the budget as the roads are not adopted. An impact assessment is required to (i) determine the capability of the management company to step into the shoes of ABC (we don't know who the management company is, and whether services proposed to be withdrawn by ABC are covered by their contract with the developers), and (ii) the cost on residents through increased management charge.

The impact of continuing these services is to be covered by additional (unbudgeted) income in 2025/26 from transferring 15 properties from the HRA to the General Fund which was agreed at Cabinet on 13th February. This transfer of properties will generate income of £29k plus there will be additional investment income of £8k from recent interest rate changes by the Bank of England. The total available sum is £37k, plenty to maintain these landscaping services.

Following debate at Council on 27th February it was amended to:

The council recognises that support from management companies to residents can be variable, leaving residents paying for services they don't receive. We recognise that this is both a local a national issue. A

specific concern is the lack of transparency over billing and aggressive collection tactics.

In Repton residents are faced with the prospect of litter bins not being collected and streets not being swept. In this case the council will engage with this management company to enable them to put in place the appropriate resources they require to deliver the needs of their residents and to deliver the services their residents may already pay for.

In addition, considering the imminent completion of the development Officers are to review the long-term provisions for the management of Repton estate and ensure that the developer has put in place suitable long-term arrangements which are transparent and accountable to their customers. A similar process is expected for Finberry, Bridgefield and other areas where management companies are used.

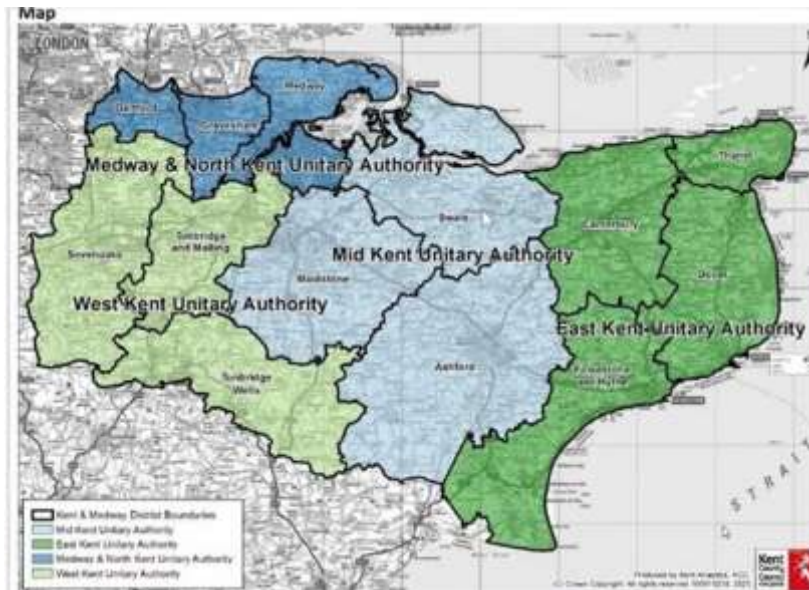
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

Kent was not listed on the priority plan for an elected mayor when it was published on 5th February. The reason given was the population disparity between Kent and Medway and the cost (and smaller savings) of elected mayor. However, reorganisation of local government in Kent is expected to continue with interim proposals by 21st March – the day after KCC “pre-election” period. These proposals may include be several different options with pros and cons. Detailed proposal to follow by 28th November so nothing irrevocable will happen by 21st March. There is no prescription or preferred option from Ministers so three (or just one) unitary councils are possible although Medway prefer four. There is a strong indication from the Minister that they expect consultation with residents.

It is important to note that this submission is not about devolution – it is about local government reorganisation. Therefore, while Kent may be reorganising, it is not receiving devolved powers nor the finances that accompany them.

The target date for reorganisation could be 2028 for the new structure to be effective although there is no specific timeline. Realistically it could take much longer. The government expect the council to cover all transitional costs from existing budgets.

The government take the starting point that district boundaries should be used as the starting blocks/default position but under certain circumstances districts could be split into different unitary authorities. A possible map is below but it was reported at KCC Full Council on 13th February that “there was a high degree of disagreement between district leaders”.



The Leader of ABC announced on 13th February that a Community Governance Review should be started for the unparished areas to ensure adequate representation of these areas.

COMMUNITY SAFETY UNIT

The unit met on 6th February.

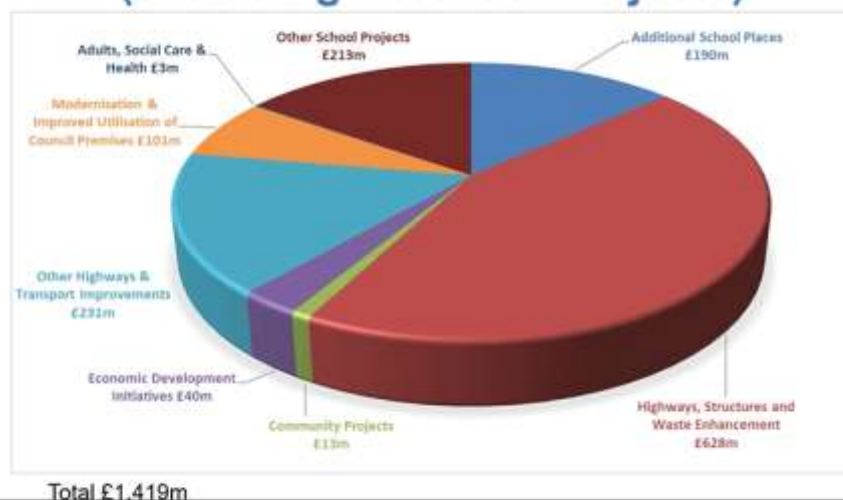
- Dymchurch Court has had a new door fitted, preventing unauthorised access.
- No new unauthorised activity has been reported at the Cloverleaf roundabout.
- The Beacon Centre in Bank Street is now open in the morning to provide advice for single homeless and street homeless. Flyers were requested to distribute to rough sleepers.
- There were 92 reports of fly tipping in January.
- Ashford Pride is scheduled for 21st June.
- Ashford Food and Drink is scheduled for 28th June followed by the Music Festival the following week.
- CCTV has dealt with 140 incidences in January.
- The Food Warehouse on Ashford Retail Park and The Rose Inn on Faversham Road have joined Ashford Partnership Against Crime (APAC). APAC is a business crime reduction scheme, to help reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in business venues. It uses a digital radio network and secure smartphone app to share information about people causing problems in venues.
- The “play train” area should be arriving in Ashford High Street by the end of March.

KCC BUDGET

A few items of note from the various meetings on KCC budget:

- For each of the last two years the Collection Fund (the amount to smooth the amount that is collected from residents) has not reached the budgeted £7m. It seems that some district councils underestimate the amount they will recover from residents and KCC needs to explore whether the amount that is recovered will be higher than expected which could enable the amount costed into the Collection Fund to be reduced, freeing up cash for services.
- A 9.3% increase in spending on Adult Social Care is budgeted due to increased costs and demand.
- There is a net contribution to reserves taking reserves to £357.7m (27% of net revenue spend) which meets the statutory requirement. In addition to these reserves there is substantial debt of more than £1bn.
- The following shows the amount of capital expenditure required over the next 10 years. To keep our highways in the state they are now would require an additional £1.3bn.

10 Year Capital Programme by Type (excluding Potential Projects)



QUANTOCK VILLAGE GREEN

Land next to the play park in Quantock Drive (near the footpath to Sainsburys) has come up for sale. I plan to progress a new Village Green application and have asked the community for statements of community use, like those collected in 2023/24. Forms to be completed were distributed during the week commencing 7th February. Given this area's plot size and the fact that it is so near to the village green, I hope it is reasonable to think that this site has been used in the same way as the village green. It would have been easier if ABC had bought the land as the play area will need an upgrade soon. This will be easier if ABC controlled the whole site, but this was not agreed by the Borough Council.



ADULT ADHT

I attended a listening event on 11th February to hear about changes to the Adult ADHT services in Kent and Medway. The service has 13,000 on the waiting list so action is needed.

The proposal is to now offer advice and support ahead of a formal diagnosis as it has been shown that some patients do not need further assessment if they get early support. 48% would benefit from online group forums with ADHT specific neurodivergent alongside in person support/coaching. Where specialist diagnosis and prescriptions are necessary the NHS is working with GPs to have their repeat ADHT prescriptions controlled at their local surgery to avoid a longer trip to see their consultant. This GP service is outside the standard GP NHS contract and there is a concern that some GPs will withdraw from this arrangement during the ongoing “collective action” dispute with the government.

A28 BRIDGE OVER M20 (CANTERBURY ROAD)

Following the Community Council meeting on 12th February, I confirmed responsibility of the A28 Canterbury Road bridge with National Highways (NH). As this is a NH structure, including the parapets, I reached out to them as to whether the height of the barriers conform to national standards and whether there are any plans to increase them. Here is their reply: *“We (NH) are looking at temporary options to try and enhance the existing fencing at site, but there is no funding at the moment for a permanent solution to replace the fencing. The whole bridge is due to be replaced in the next investment period so we wouldn’t support a funding solution because of this. The next ‘investment period’ could be at least 5 years away, so hopefully the pressure you have put on could get something done in the meantime”*

LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

The Local Plan is still on target to complete by May 2027. An outline of the draft **potential scope** of the local plan should be published by July 2025

which will show the intention and direction of the plan. The issues it will cover will include the scale of housing needed (whether 952 dwellings per year is appropriate – although this is given to us by government), the allocation of housing to the town centre, and what that involves, housing allocation to the periphery of the town and it is defined – does it include Chilmington Green and Finberry and housing numbers in the villages. It will have to include the policy on windfall sites (HOU3a and HOU5 creates the possibility of windfall on sustainable sites).

I have requested specific policies on:

- The amount of land used for development that is “best and most versatile agricultural land” as without this it creates risks about lack of scrutiny and rushing into a plan without consider all factors, such as losing the best and most versatile agricultural land.
- How development can be delivered alongside biodiversity net gain and ecological management. High quality and imaginative landscape frameworks are required including open spaces that separate land uses and views. We should avoid “mono-use” developments.
- Ensure adequate provision is made for cycling and walking opportunities from new developments on the town periphery into the town centre.
- Lighting is provided which is consistent with safety needs and the requirement to protect wildlife.
- The largest employer in Ashford (by some degree) is retail/warehousing and healthcare/social care. These sectors account for 40%+ of our jobs. We should support these sectors by ensuring there is sufficient land available for these sectors.

SOUTHERN GAS NETWORKS (SGN) – IRON MAINS RISK REDUCTION PROGRAMME

SGN are responsible for upgrading the aging metal gas mains at the end of their life span with plastic by 2030. The regional replacement depot is in Wootton Road, and they are carrying out a programme of work in Ashford including the recent work on Magazine Road. They have so far replaced 89% of the Ashford network and have 11% to go, but this is mainly on the roads. KCC Highways restrict the work, where safe to do so, to the school holidays.

We discussed at a briefing on 13th February the closure of Kennington Road between Yeomans Gardens and Blackwall Road North for 9 weeks from 3rd March. The proposed diversion is via Hythe Road, Mace Lane, Somerset Road, North Street and Canterbury Road. I asked for early signage on M20 to direct traffic to Canterbury to use J9 and Simone Weil Ave and A28 rather than J10. We advised them that Google Maps will need to know about the correct diversion.

Ofgem do compensate smaller business who will be affected but larger businesses (Givaudan for example) need to claim on their insurance for business disruption.

MERSHAM SCHOOL PARKING

Clair Bell and I had a meeting at the school on 14th February to discuss the ongoing parking situation at the start and end of the school day. The concern being the risks to both road users and pedestrians, particularly children. KCC received a request from a member of the PTA (with the headteacher's permission) for support from KCC's Responsible Parking resources. The school does not have an up-to-date School Travel Plan (STP) and KCC has requested that this is addressed who has offered support with this process.

The School Keep Clear markings do not currently have a Traffic Regulation Order in place to make them enforceable. A scheme has been started to make all of these in Ashford Borough enforceable this year. Mersham Primary School forms part of this scheme and the Traffic Regulation Order has passed the public consultation stage. ABC are just in the process of arranging installation dates for the signage at each of the schools involved and then the sealing of the order to make them legal.

Mersham Parish Council also have Church Road on their Highway Improvement Plan (HIP) and have previously reported issues regarding speeding around the school. Kent Highways have proposed an advisory 20mph scheme that would be active during school drop off and pick up times, however KCC would not be able to fund this at this time have asked if the parish wish to fund the scheme.

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

The Panel met on 18th February. A group of Children in Care have written to Janet Daby the new Children's Minister (Janet is a former social worker). An issue is how turning 18 should be a period of joy but it can throw up challenges due as services reduce at that age. Two of the cohort have been invited to the House of Commons for a visit to see the Minister so we await the result and the Ministerial input into the process.

Children in Care need their future planned out including knowing what their housing options are post-16 and not as just they approach 18. Training, education or employment may be in a new part of Kent or outside the county.

A Kinship Care Scheme was started 12 months ago. These are "Special Guardians" who are family members such as grandparents. The number of

children in this new service are up 160%. The plan going forward is formalise the local offer to avoid formal foster care placement.

CHART ROAD UPGRADES

I spoke at the hearing on 19th February into the Chilmington Green developers request to renege on its previously agreed position that the A28 should be upgraded to a dual carriageway between the Tank and Matalan roundabouts. Here is what I said.

I will speak about the recent injury record on the section of the A28 including and between the Tank and Matalan roundabouts. In total there have been 5 damage only, 18 injury collisions, including one serious injury. There seems to be a common theme of rear end shunts and vehicles not giving way to motorcyclists and cyclists. The 4 damage only are regretful but I wanted to draw to your attention the number of injuries, particularly to pedestrians and cyclists – 19 in total, one every 10 weeks, I don't need to explain to you the impact on those injured, I know that we can take it as read but they can have serious repercussions on quality of live and the ability of those effected to enjoy their lives and work for a living.

I am a regular cycle user the area, cycling along and across Chart Road from my home to Godinton and Repton to discharge my duties as the County Councillor for the area. The data I will use covers the three years to 30th September 2024.

Before turning to the injuries, I did just want to touch on the damage only incidences. Most were vehicles (HGVs in half of the cases) making incorrect turns or pulling out into traffic (so called "merging conflicts"). At least one of these (in January 2024) resulted in a physical assault, road rage, following a dispute about merging off of the Matalan Roundabout. These road rages can have a long-lasting effect on the victims including their ability to continue driving.

I am not going to list each of the injuries that effected drivers – I wanted to concentrate on cyclists – but I did want to give you a flavour of the types of injuries which arise from vehicles entering pulling in front of other vehicles often these are when two lanes go into one as drivers are eager to get to the front of a queue, these issues would not of course arise if the whole road was dualled. I did also want to say that one of these in October 2022 involved an unmarked police vehicle attempting to catch up with a suspect vehicle causing a loss of control and a second collision with the opposite kerb.

Before talking about cyclist and pedestrian injuries, I did want to point out that three of the vehicle crashes involved motorcycles. One in January 2023 and one in January 2024 knocked the motorcyclist off of their motorbikes; in the second event the offending car drive drove off without stopping. The other motorcyclist was fortunately at slow speed when a recovery truck with a car on the back collided with the rear of a motorbike.

Anyway, on to the effect on cyclists. The most serious injury was in June 2024 when a cyclist entered the carriageway to cross the A28 into the path of a car which hit them. There were less serious injuries but also from cyclists and pedestrians crossing the road when vehicles travelling at speed failed to look and avoid them. One pedestrian was wanting to cross Chart Road who was waved across by a driver, however a second vehicle was travelling in the second lane and collided with the pedestrian.

The other major issue for cyclist is at the Matalan roundabout. One cyclist in November 2022 was rear ended drove off, one in August 2023 involved a car exiting the access to Imperium Pest Control pulled out and collided with the cyclist. The final case I wanted to highlight was in November 2023 when a vehicle travelling from the direction of the Matalan Roundabout entered the roundabout, colliding with a cyclist and knocking them off of their bike, then drove off.

My point is that the road as currently designed is dangerous. The upgrading work is designed to deal with this creating safe crossing point and additional capacity on the new dual carriageway to allow safe passage for cyclist and pedestrian crossing points at Matalan roundabout and Loudon Way / Chart Road traffic signals and continuous shared footway / cycleways on both sides of Chart Road.

THANET INTEGRATED HEALTH HUB

I attended a meeting to discuss a new health hub in Thanet on 20th February which I hope to roll out to Ashford. The new Hub will include:

- A relocated doctor's surgery (St Peter's Surgery) with **same day access**. The building is an outdated converted couple of bungalows so is not fit for purpose. Accessing GP appointments is a national issue, but Ashford has some of the lowest number of GPs as a proportion of the population. Same Day Access appointments allow referral by 111 from any practice in Thanet. It will increase the number of appointments from purpose-built facilities. They have plans to offer the walk-in clinics for over 75s that we have in Ashford at New Hayesbank, 2pm to 4pm Monday to Friday. The walk-in scheme started in Ashford

with Children and was extended across Ashford for Children and we hope to that with the over 75s scheme.

- Investigation into a pharmacy on site in the hub has started.
- The voluntary sector such as Age UK will be in site to signpost to other support. This is about preventative work and give information and advice. The signposting to other local services such as housing will be available.
- A community diagnostic centre will operate from the hub including an MRI scanner and echo cardiogram and phlebotomy to give **quicker diagnostic** outside the QEQM to take pressure off the acute hospital.
- Community care “closer to home” (cardiac and respiratory and podiatry) will operate from the hub. Point of Care testing (small handheld pathology units that carry out immediate testing “bedside”) may be possible at this site (they have it at the UTC in WHH/QEQM).



Local transport and access through bus routes was key to the success of the project.

STONESTREET SOLAR PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were two public hearings on 25th & 26th February into the Stonestreet Solar Planning Application. They covered PROW and battery storage. Here are my submissions.

PROW

Some sort of benefit for the people of Ashford and Folkestone in terms of PROW access as well as biodiversity seems essential from this application. When I spoke at the earlier open sessions, I said that this development created a risk that it will become a significant or defining characteristic of Aldington and Lower Mersham alongside the North Downs ANOB.

What this development must do is create biodiversity areas it should deliver an overall 20% improvement on the current baseline as set out in KCC's aspirations. This is over and above the 10% envisaged by the NPPF. Regardless of the metric we need to know what the biodiversity

gains are and how they are achieved. My suggestion is that this is achieved by hedgerows on the development site which will provide landscape features that help to create and distinguish the local character and provide a strong sense of enclosure within the local landscape. These characteristics must be protected and there is so far insufficient evidence of such protection. ABC guidance requires buffer strips of 5m to provide for biodiversity.

This biodiversity gain then needs to be available if people can then enjoy them and experience it via a footpath and PROW. All too often, the paths either lead out onto a road that you don't want to walk down, or you have to go back on yourself, which is just frankly boring, so it would be good if there was a defined route as a gain out of this proposal or perhaps some sensible links/new paths to create circular walks and connections to the current PROW system.

The proposed link to Mersham via a new bridleway needs to be led by the applicant through contact with the landowners (Church Commissioners for England) to negotiate access and not left to residents. It is ludicrous that the developer has proposed that they will provide finance to upgrade the existing unmade up footpath but will not initiate contact or secure access to the site to carry out the work. The developer should be required to take the lead with the CCE and this must be a condition.

Preserving and/or enhancing definitive rights of way should be part of the benefit package the scheme delivers in compensation for the impact it would cause. The applicant needs to recognise this responsibility.

Too many PROWs are at risk of being lost permanently by the scheme. Footpaths follow the historic desire lines and the diversion (and sometimes closure) results in additional distance, inconvenience and are less enjoyable due to the high 3m fencing. These historic paths are part of our heritage, and many new people have moved into the area recently (with more to come) and it is essential that we give all residents the opportunity to enjoy the countryside.

It is important that we use this as an opportunity to support the local tourism industry as there will be a significant effect on the socio-economic system locally. There will be a loss of local activity in the agri economy both from the loss of a poultry farm and a substantial arable acreage which will have a knock-on effect on local support businesses. Tourism is a significant driver in the area, but people will not want to visit when the landscape changes unless proper mitigation and safeguards are provided. I am therefore disappointed that there is no

hedging provided to mitigate the visual impact of the fencing, and I would ask that this is conditioned on the development.

BATTERY STORAGE

The proposed battery units are proposed to be used to store energy collected from the photovoltaic units and the national grid ready to be sold at a time when there is demand from the national grid.

The proposal from the development is very different from previous schemes and I am concerned about a precedent that will be set; in the Cleve Hill development the battery units are located at a single site; at the Stonestreet project I understand there are 116 batteries in 27 placements. My issue is with their dispersed nature leading to a industrial landscape including above ground water towers.

The battery units proposed to be used are at risk of “thermal runaway”; they are phosphate and are at risk of explosion and producing toxic fumes covering an area of up to 250m, in addition to fire risk.

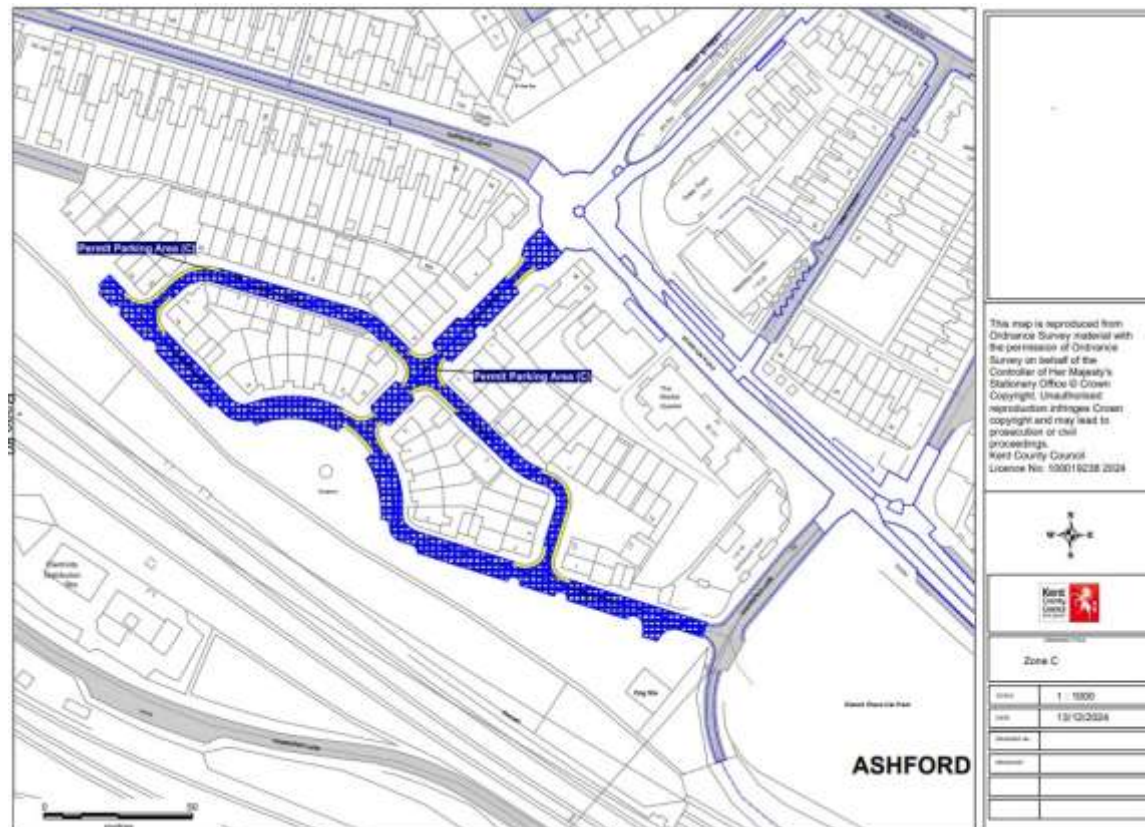
The road infrastructure is not designed to provide access to large industrial developments such as Stonestreet Solar by Kent Fire and Rescue Service. Aldington is a unique village in Ashford Borough as it is the only village in the district that is only accessible via single track lanes.

There is no acknowledgement in the DCO that each of the batteries are independent; a potential problem for Kent Fire and Rescue Service who has only a fraction of the number of fire units needed if several of the batteries combust at the same time. There should be two access routes to each battery and routes to get a fire unit to any of the batteries is extremely tortuous and creates a red flag for safety issues.

Battery fires cannot be put out and the only current advice is to prevent the fire from spreading as the fire needs to be allowed to burn out. A lot of water is needed to do this and the DCO only provides for the standard amount of water in each tank which is not sufficient. It is noteworthy that in a recent housefire in Aldington there was insufficient water in SE Water’s local reservoirs to deal with that single fire. Any development of a nature such as this should wait until the planned upgrades to the water infrastructure in Ashford is completed by SE Water, we know they are in hand, but no completion date is published.

CROUDACE DEVELOPMENT

This map shows the area of new parking restrictions at the Croudace Development (Godinton Road/Gasworks Lane) that will start on 1 March. In January a public consultation was conducted regarding the proposed introduction of a Permit Parking Area for the development which received a largely positive support for this scheme. Permits for eligible residents have been available since 28th February 2025.



KENT WARDEN SCHEME

Following the public consultation, the Kent Community Warden Service implemented a new geographical allocation policy. The service now targets specific areas within districts, maintaining a proactive community-based approach. The service webpage (<https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/community-safety/community-wardens>) has now been updated with the new areas and contact details. A postcode look-up tool is available for address checks. Referrals can still be sent to Team Leaders using the existing form. If you are new to making referrals, you can contact the Team Leader in the relevant area. They will provide guidance on how the service can assist and how to make a referral. The wardens primarily work in their designated areas, but they will consider referrals for other areas if they have capacity.

For areas not covered, two models have been developed for parish and local councils to fund their own Community Warden. These models were presented at a workshop with KALC in January 2025 which I attended and have

generated interest. Interested councils can email communitywardenreview@kent.gov.uk for more information.

MARTYN'S LAW

I raised the progress the Council was making on the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill, commonly known as Martyn's Law on 25th February. The government is committed to enhancing security at public events and venues and have increased the standard tier threshold from 100 to 200 people. This change will help ease the burden on smaller parish council-run halls and village spaces. However, there are remaining concerns about insurance premiums and liability for events in places of worship. The bill moves to the House of Lords Report Stage on 4 March 2025.

WILLIAM HARVEY HOSPITAL – STAFF SAFETY

The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (which I chair) asked EKHUFT (the Trust running the William Harvey Hospital - WHH) about incidents against staff at the WHH. The Trust provided the following response:

The Trust collect figures which include aggressive behaviour, verbal abuse and physical assault on staff. They are not able to quantify how many were hate/race related incidents but are of the view that the numbers are small. They do recognise that incidents may involve service users with cognitive impairment, under drug/alcohol intoxication, suffering mental health crises or other psychological issues.

In 2024, there were 233 incidents of violence and aggression towards staff at the WHH. This number is less than the previous year (276 incidents recorded in 2023). However, the Trust does not think this data is a true reflection of what staff are experiencing, and are developing a survey, for staff to share their experiences confidentially.

The Trust leads a 'Supporting Positive Behaviours Group'. The group provides a forum for challenge, moderation and escalation of the experiences of staff and service users, of challenging behaviours. An in-depth training needs analysis of staff managing challenging behaviours has been completed, the focus of the training will be on de-escalation, and will include clinically led restraint training for high-risk areas such as the Emergency Department. WHH management works closely with community police liaison officers who promote 'Hate Crime' awareness and we hold 'Hate Crime' clinics. This has been a successful awareness campaign and, to date since the introduction in April last year, WHH have led on seven Crime Clinics with the next date booked in March. These clinics have increased awareness and help to break barriers.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS COMMITTEE

I attended the council committee covering this KCC service which includes education and children in care services on 27th February. Important issues for Ashford include the % of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) issued within 20 weeks which has increased from 19.0% to 78.6%; the % of children with an EHCP have risen from 4.1% to 5.0%.

The number of 17–18-year-olds Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) has fallen from 3.2% to 2.3%. However, the % of care leavers in Education, Employment or Training is 54.1% (meaning the NEET % for this cohort is 45.1%).

It takes 369.8 days for a child becoming a child in care to moving in with an adoptive family.

The Engineering Hub at the new extension to Ashford College that opened in 2023 got a special mention. The investment made over the past 12 months, and through the Government's SDF (Strategic Development Fund), has resulted in a wide range of machines and equipment including: CNC (Computer numerical control) Machines, Kuka Robots, Turning centres, Ladle machines and a CAD (Computer Aided Design) suite. These facilities enable businesses to access emerging technologies and support the development of the sector. A Green Skills & Retrofit Centre is in development which will provide a focus for green construction technology for students, teaching the newest green skills to students.

DROVERS ROUNDABOUT



When you approach from Templar way onto the Drovers roundabout and wishing to head towards A28 Simone Weil Ave, the correct lane to be in is the far right lane on the roundabout. The middle and left lane is to go straight on to Fougères way towards the M20. But it is poorly signed and painted on the road not making it clear to numerous drivers; cars are pulling across thinking they are ok to do so. Highways respond to this issue as follows "Road markings are there & clearly visible. The middle lane is to go straight over

towards M20 but unfortunately when in the right lane to go towards Sainsburys, drivers in the middle lane do decide to come over & almost cause collisions. This has personally happened on multiple occasions which requires harsh braking & beeping & a few choice words.” Whilst there is no immediate answer, it is important that they know the position and have experienced the problem at first hand, I will make sure I get an action!

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