

COUNCIL UPDATE 1.2023

LAND MAPPING COMMISSION

The Independent Land Mapping Commission has published its report and recommendations to ABC on how it sees the future strategy of the Council's Corporate Plan and Local Plan. The purpose was to create a logical classification of all land in the Borough to enable appropriate housing and commercial development to take place, maximising rural access. The policy will be to put greater focus, and place greater emphasis, on the natural environment.

The Commission's recommendation is to establish a process including mapping and funding to deliver **Ashford Space for Nature Plan**. These at scale multifunctional spaces may include public access and will include:

- green open spaces such as parks and village greens
- wildlife reserves providing species rich habitats
- nature based engineered wetlands to maintain and improve river catchments (although it was noted that phosphate and nitrate eutrophication should be addressed by improved water treatment)

None should be Grade 1,2 or 3a agricultural land as these need to be prioritised for food production.

The mapping requirement will require upgraded GIS software to identify buffer zones (not rigid "green belt"), spaces for community orchards, current and future tree belts that can screen developments, habitats and wildlife corridors, all of which need to be connected.

The principles behind the recommendation include:

- SUDS should be retrofitted in urban areas, where practical
- Small scale housing development in most villages is required with a greater proportion than the current maximum of 40% being non-market housing for rent
- More trees are to be planted
- Solar panels or roof tiles should be mandatory on all new buildings, ground based solar should not involve significant or cumulative loss of countryside
- Ashford town centre needs special attention in terms of "tidiness" and looking "loved"
- The PROW network to be upgraded to provide a useable network for walking, cycling and horse riding, but not usage for any motor vehicles, removing the abuse of our PROWs by off-roaders
- Ensure power cables, transformers and all the necessary electrical distribution apparatus is delivered ahead of development

- Broadband needs to be sorted out with a good mobile signal everywhere

PUFFIN CROSSING FROM VICTORIA PARK FOUNTAIN TO CINEMA

KCC has been successful in securing £565,439 from Active Travel England to support the better design, planning and development of walking, cycling and wheeling schemes in Kent. A project in Ashford is to upgrade the puffin crossing between Victoria Park and Victoria Way Car Park to a toucan crossing.

This puffin crossing (its name derived from the phrase "pedestrian user-friendly intelligent") has the lights signalling to the pedestrians on the same side of the road as the pedestrian, rather than across the road (as is the case with pelican crossings).

I am a member of KCC's Kent Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Group who are considering replacing this crossing with a toucan crossing. A toucan crossing also allows bicycles to be ridden across since "two can" cross together (both pedestrians and cyclists). Toucan crossings are normally four metres (13 feet) wide, instead of the 2.8 metre (9 feet) width of any pelican crossing or puffin crossing.

There are two types of toucan crossing, a "green bicycle" is displayed next to the "green man" when cyclists and pedestrians are permitted to cross. A red bicycle and red man are shown at other times. Older crossings do not have a red bicycle – bicycles are permitted to cross at any time (if it is safe to do so). Unlike the pelican crossing, before the lights for vehicles go back to green, a steady red and amber are displayed instead of the flashing amber. The pedestrian/cyclist signal lights may be on the near side of the crossing (like a puffin crossing), or on the opposite side of the road (like a pelican crossing).

KCC BUDGET

The draft budget for 2023/24 was published on 4 January and includes the next big highways project in Ashford, dualling the A28 between the tank roundabout and Matalan roundabout:

Project	Description of Project	Total Cost of Scheme	Prior Years Spend	Cash Limits			
				2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
				Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
		£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
A28 Cherit Road, Ashford (1)	Strategic highway improvement	26,247	4,122	2,768	11,026	7,256	805

£166k is budgeted for the Essella Road footbridge works to ensure it remains open. A final sum is provided to deal with snagging at the new Javelin Way accommodation for creative industries and new industrial Units (at Henwood). Orchard Way new railway bridge is still listed in the potential projects (but it

has for the last 20 years.....a tentative date of 2032/33 is given). Away from Ashford, there is a project for a new waste transfer station for Folkestone and Hythe (£9.6m in 2024/25).

“New Burden Funding” of £660k has been removed from KCC’s budget. This sum originally included expenditure to finalise the landscaping on Sevington IBF. I was concerned that because the planting has not been completed in the High Field to deliver the promised biodiversity gain, that the removal of this item from the budget indicated that planting would never be completed. However, I have since received assurances that funding for new planting remains available.

ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Sara Rivett new Divisional Borough Commander at Kent Police attended the Ashford KALC meeting on 4th January. The following key issues were discussed:

- A consultation is being carried out on “child centered policing” on how the declining number of PCSOs in Ashford will be deployed.
- 2 arrests had been made following a spate of keyless car thefts.
- The town centre dispersal order had not been used recently which is considered positive.
- An incident in Duck Passage (the station underpass) on 1st January is being investigated.
- The Kennington service by Stagecoach has been reinstated. Officers will be on board to ensure there is not a repeat of the ASB.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS FOR ENGLAND (CCE)

I had a meeting with Jo Loxton (CCE) to discuss outstanding issues.

- In order to progress the bridleway diversion to facilitate the delivery of the Aldi store in Waterbrook, the CCE need to show that there are no alternative routes to the west of the store. This is understood to be the case due to the interests held by Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and Southern Water.
- The proposed footpath / cycleway from Mersham Junior School to land north of Bank Road, Aldington is in the hands of CCE Rural Asset team who are supportive of Stonestreet Solar proposal to provide this.
- Crest management of issues at Finberry could be improved including:
 1. Frustration of speed of delivery of community centre
 2. Frustration of speed of delivery of southern link road to Bridgefield
 3. Frustration of speed of delivery of Extra Care Facility (next to school)
 4. Lack of salt bins

5. Proper management of East Stour Meadows to be documented by HML/Crest
6. General site management including snagging on Sevington Lakes

It was agreed that Jo will raise with Crest.

- Link from Brambling Ave to Waterbrook to be all vehicle and not a bus link only (Crest near to finalising new s106 to reflect)
- Village Centre at Finberry (not a Crest responsibility) awaiting nutrient neutrality resolutions (proposal submitted to ABC in Q3 2022/23). Expressions of interest received from two developers.
- Mulberry Homes development in Waterbrook requires reinstatement of indicative proposals outside the red line area to indicate what could be brought forward in area near Cheesemans Green Lane.

STONESTREET SOLAR

I have seen details about ABC's holding objection to the development of solar farm in Aldington and Mersham. Here are the key points:

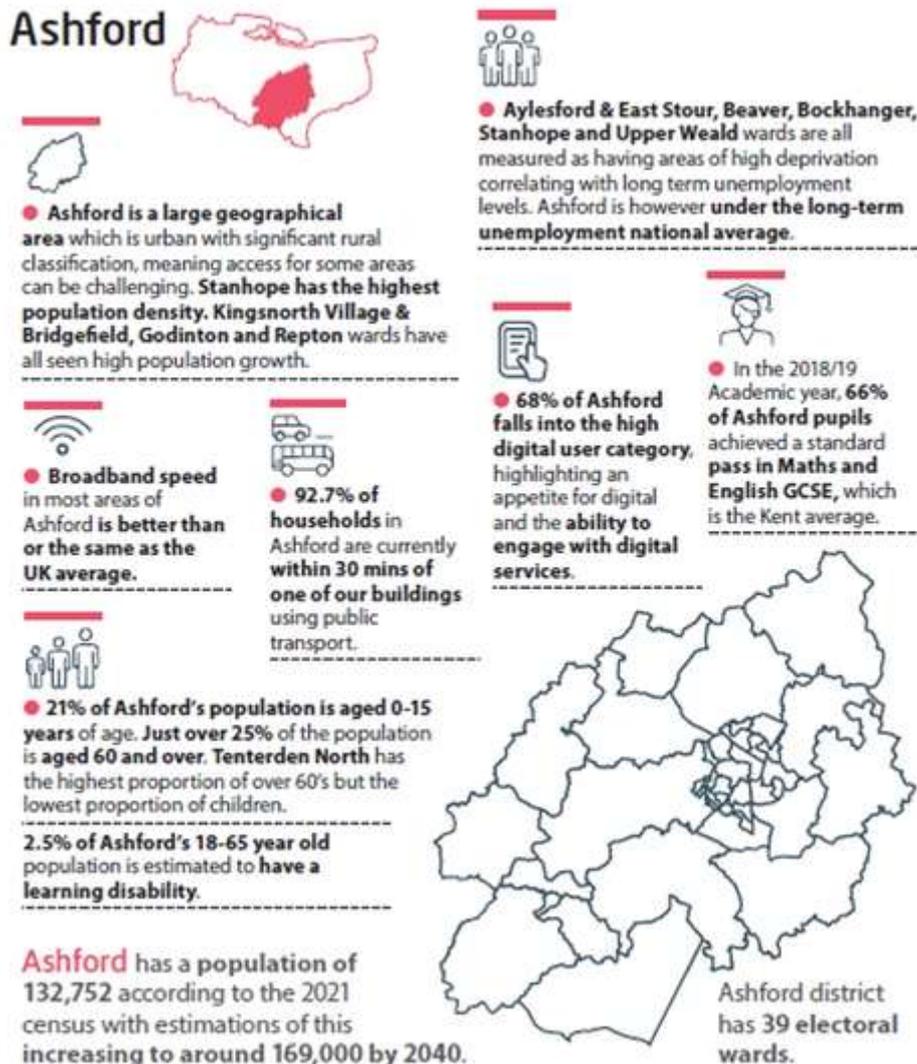
- Each heritage asset to be assessed separately based on the special character of the building. This to be a quantitative not a qualitative assessment
- There is a need for as more detailed archaeological assessment
- Landscape and views should include summer and winter views, including the evolution of views during scheme life
- The approach to mitigation using soft landscaping is not of a proportionate scale as there is insufficient landscaping proposed, lack of woodland block planting and the reinstatement of hedgerows should include individual trees
- Security fencing to be better screened
- More consideration to be given to impact on residential properties
- CCTV should not use white light and should not be positioned to intrude on nearby property
- An assessment on the impact on local Agri-economy to be provided
- The cumulative effects of Stonestreet and the neighbouring East Stour Solar Proposal to be carried out.

KCC PROPRTY PORTFOLIO

KCC Councillors had a briefing on 10 January which discussed "need maps" to support the way that CYPE, adult services, public health and gateway services (not libraries) etc by KCC are delivered. This is to reduce the high costs of operating properties because many of the council buildings are historic and therefore expensive to run.

Below is the information map used for determining the character of Ashford. It uses areas of deprivation, EHCP, free school meals, broadband scheme, high

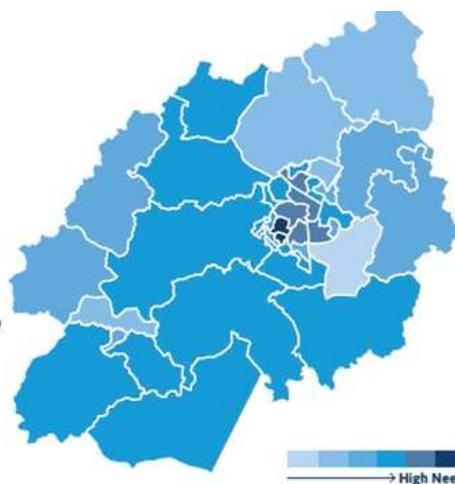
data usage and engagement with internet (which tells KCC about best form of service delivery and the need for permanent buildings).



This generated the following “needs map”

Whilst targeting services in wards with the greatest need, this has to be balanced with the fact that there is need for our services across the whole county.

The data shows pockets of need and allows us to identify where to focus our services in each district.



- ✓ Long term unemployment
- ✓ Ethnic diversity
- ✓ Educational attainment
- ✓ % of ward population aged 0-16
- ✓ Reception age children who are overweight or obese
- ✓ Deliveries to teenage mothers
- ✓ Population Growth
- ✓ Population Density
- ✓ Digital Exclusion
- ✓ Transport Connectivity
- ✓ Broadband Speed

Buildings we are proposing to deliver services from in Ashford

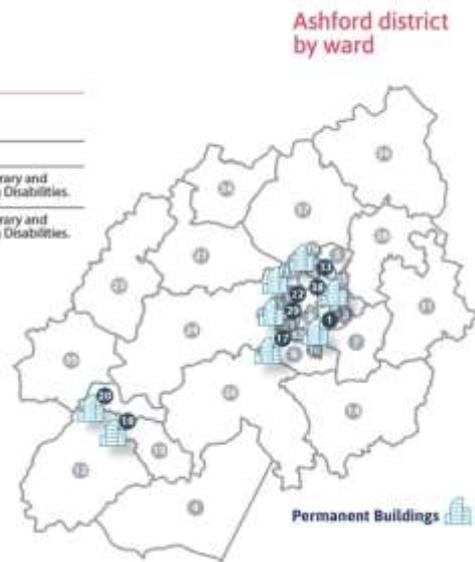
Ward.	Building.	Proposed future use.
Proposed and existing Community Hubs		
17 Stanhope.	Stanhope Library.	Gateway, Family Hub and Library.
18 Tenterden North.	Tenterden Gateway.	Gateway, Community Learning and Skills, Library and Community Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities.
22 Victoria.	Ashford Gateway Plus.	Gateway, Community Learning and Skills, Library and Community Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities.

Community, Learning and Skills

20 Tenterden St Michaels.	Homewood School And Sixth Form Centre.
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Family Hubs

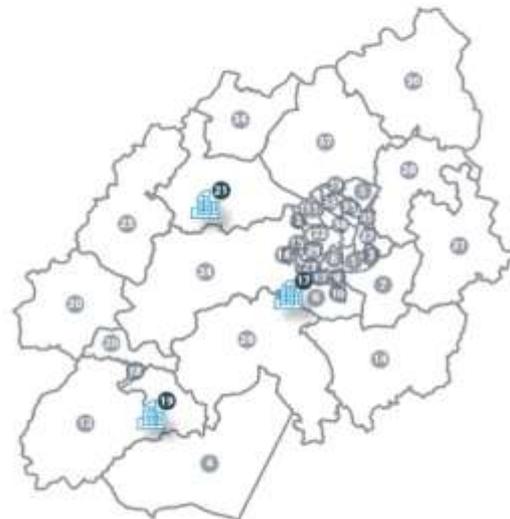
1 Aylesford & East Stour.	Waterside Children's Centre.
29 Beaver.	The Willow Children's Centre.
33 Bybrook.	Sure Steps Children's Centre.
38 Furley.	Ashford North Youth Centre.



Which means...

Buildings we are proposing to leave in Ashford

Ward.	Building.	Potential Outcome.
17 Stanhope.	Ray Allen Children's Centre	Relocate to proposed community hub at Stanhope Library.
19 Tenterden South.	Little Explorers Children's Centre.	
21 Upper Weald.	Bluebells Children's Centre.	



Consultation on the changes started on 17th January and runs until March 2023. The website is www.kent.gov.uk/communityservicesconsultation

FINBERRY – UPDATED PLANNING APPLICATION

Crest have submitted revised plans for the development between Bilham Farm and Cheeseman's Green Lane. The housing mix has changed resulting in a reduction in units by 4. The following map illustrates the boundary treatment including dense native scrub planting for dormice to maintain connectivity to wider landscape. There is a habitat corridor for great crested newts to be maintained and enhanced either side of an existing ditch; it includes rough/tussocky grassland, scrub and existing trees and connects two existing ponds.



AU106 (ZIG ZAG PATH AT EUREKA)

Diccon Spain and I met with Matthew Fox (KCC PROW team – capital projects), Richard Lloyd (Savills – Eureka managing agents) and Angie Burden (ABC community support officer) on 11th January.

Richard will investigate an additional CCTV camera on the path and Matthew will explore two additional lights. Angie will prepare a report of ASB (including a stabbing about two years ago) to support the required capital expenditure.

Pedestrian crossing signs and convex mirrors will be explored at the crossing with Cemetery Lane.

PLANNING UPDATE

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has opened its consultation on Levelling up and Regeneration Bill reforms to national planning policy. DLUHC is seeking views on how we might develop new national planning policy to support our wider objectives.

This consultation closes at 11:45pm on 2 March 2023 and is at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill-reforms-to-national-planning>.

Housebuilding targets will no longer be mandatory because national, top-down algorithms and formulas can never be a substitute for local knowledge and decision making by those who know their areas the best. This change will ensure that the right homes will be built in the right places with the right infrastructure. Developers will be penalised who sit on planning permissions longer than is necessary. This will mean that more homes can be provided in a speedy manner to those who need them the most.

In addition, a new clause makes regulations requiring or permitting the registration of specified “short term rental properties”. “Street votes” are still envisaged. Neighbourhood Plans will have greater weight.

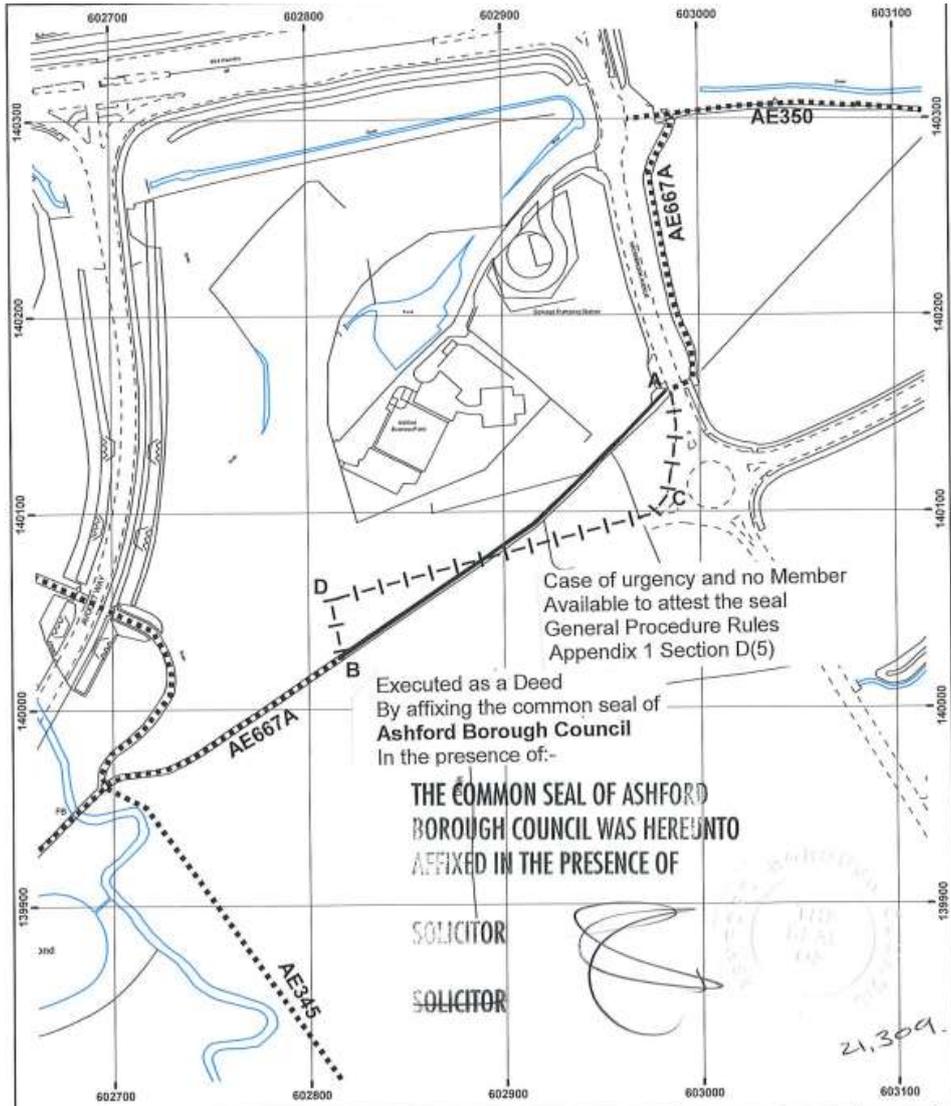
SOLAR LIGHTS

Two replacement solar lights have been installed by KCC along the “behind the hedge” footpath in The Street.



BRIDLEWAY AE667A

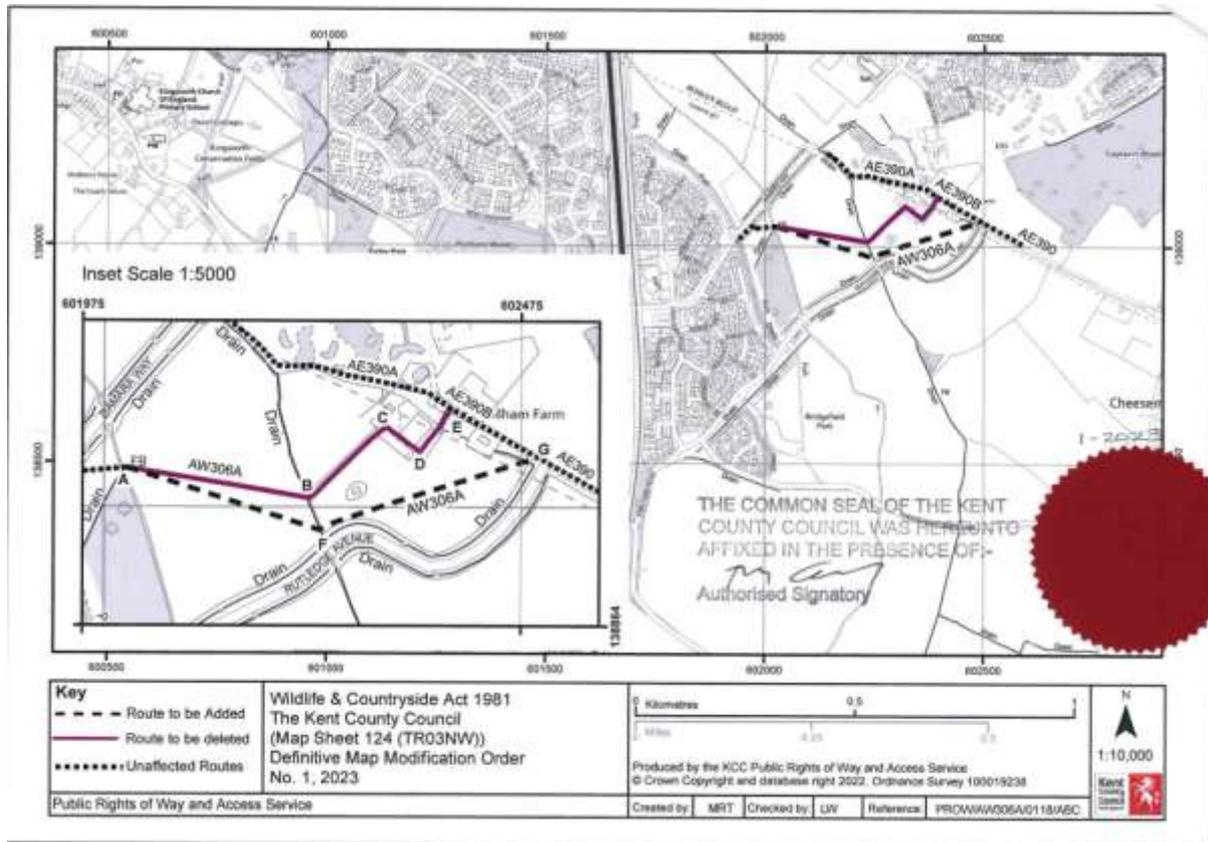
A proposal to re-route the bridleway has been made. Any representation about or objection to the Order to be sent to Emma Peters at KCC (email: emma.peters2@kent.gov.uk) not later than 17 February 2023. Please state the grounds on which they are made.



Key Route to be stopped up Route to be Added Unaffected Routes	Town & Country Planning Act 1990 Section 257 Ashford Borough Council (Public Bridleway AE667A (part), Sevington) Public Path Diversion Order 2022	Created by:	 1:2,500
		EP	
Checked by:	MMcL		
Date:	22/04/2021		
Reference:	AE667A/0110/ABC		
0 Kilometres 0.075 0.15 0 Miles 0.05 0.1		 Produced by the KCC Public Rights of Way and Access Service © Crown Copyright and database right 2021. Ordnance Survey 100019238	
Public Rights of Way and Access Service			

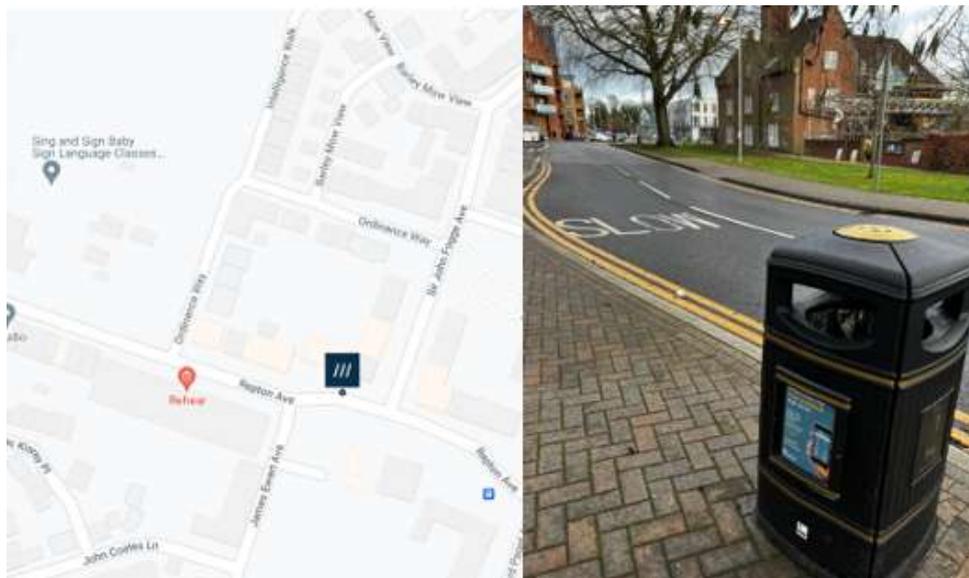
FOOTPATH AW306A

The following changes to this footpath have been finalised.



REPTON LITTER BIN

A new litter bin has been installed on Repton Ave. The location on What Three Words is SURELY.ORGANS.BLOWS near the coffee shop.



POTHOLE REPAIRS ELWICK ROAD vs QUANTOCK DRIVE

ABC are exploring contributing toward resurfacing of Elwick Road between Church Road and Station Road so it is done ahead of schedule. The cost to ABC is up to £80k. Here are some photos of the surface.



But this is what Quantock Drive looks like....



This final shot shows how the surface improves following the work on the lower end two years ago:



On the reporting app there are, 7 reports on Quantock Drive and just one on this section of Elwick Road. I have asked for the funds allocated for Elwick Road will be redirected to Quantock Drive.

FOOTPATH AE639



This is the footpath across the IBF from the Church to Highfield Lane. The DfT and KCC have applied for it to be extinguished. There was a public hearing into this at Aldington Village Hall on 24th & 25th January. I attended for

both days along with Linda Arthur (representing the Village Alliance) and Paddy Herlihy (represent Mersham Ramblers). We have put up with a lot from the IBF, light pollution, noisy lorries, lost lorries in Mersham and Sevington, delays to promised funding on improvement work on Sevington Church, disruption including dust and noise from construction, failure to protect the public by enabling ABC to start food checks and DEFRA to check seeds and plants on site and then there are the delays to the planting in the adjacent High Field to achieve biodiversity gains; the Heras fencing is still plugging the gap where hedges were removed in Kingsford Street.

All of which we took on the chin knowing the facility was needed by HMRC, and it was only temporary. After 2025 we expected a return to normality with the footpath reinstated.

At the hearing KCC and DfT had appointed a barrister to represent them. It was just us three representing objectors.

It was disappointing to hear that if the closure order to the footpath is made, KCC and DfT seemed lukewarm (at best) on the idea of applying for it to be reinstated. The footpath is essential because it comes with a viewing corridor between Mersham and Sevington Churches and ensuring that there is no “mega” distribution warehouse built, as was suggested once by the former owners.

A lot of fine words and promises were made back in 2020 when they acquired the site, we had visits from MPs, including ministers, who worked hard to get us onside. We need to ensure that DfT and KCC do the right thing and promote the reinstatement of the footpath.

GP ATTRACTION PACKAGE

In my role as chair of the Kent and Medway Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, I joined the presentation team at a webinar on 25th January to show how Kent and Medway councils are offering Relocation Navigators to encourage and enable GPs to move to Kent.

This is a joint approach from the NHS and councils to make a difference. The Navigator can offer assistance in securing housing, schooling and childcare. We can help new GPs understand local transport, commuting and parking issues and local leisure offerings. The intention is to make Kent a place where GPs can settle their families. Local councils know the areas of deprivation which is essential to how local GP practices best serve their communities. Local councils are involved in planning the growth of their communities and how the expansion of GP practises is essential to creating great places to live.

COMMUNITY SAFETY UNIT

The priorities for 2022/23 were discussed at a council meeting on 27 January 2023. Priorities include:

- Enhanced “diversion activities” for youth groups to divert their energy away from ASB. An extension to Carlton Athletics’ contract was proposed. Other activities include fishing.
- Ensuring police resources are available in peak ASB periods following the review of community policing.
- Ensure McDonald’s (in the Lower High Street) becomes a “safe space”, including possible enhanced CCTV.
- Ashford was first district to use smart water to tag offenders as this acts as a visible deterrent. This work to be extended.
- Extend KCC’s road safety to include e-scooters. Police to extend work with national retailers locally to remind them of the legality. Three have been seized recently with results posted on social media.
- Use of catapults has reduced recently.

HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

At the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 31st January we considered two issues.

- Kent’s 5 Mental Health Based Places of Safety are proposed to be moved to a single site in Maidstone. At present they are dispersed around the County in Canterbury, Dartford and Maidstone. We agreed that this was a substantial variation which needs to be scrutinised in more detail because of concerns about travel time and the sensitivity over how the consultation will take place.
- Specialist children’s cancer services will be relocated from a dual site split between Marden and St Georges to a single site either at St Georges or Guys. We did not consider this to be a substantial variation as specialist services are still in London which requires travel from Kent and the change avoids the need for patients to travel between sites.

Paul Bartlett

Mersham, Sevington South and Finberry Ward & Deputy Leader, ABC

Ashford Central Division, KCC

Grosvenor Hall Ward, Kennington Community Council

Sevington South Ward, Sevington with Finberry Parish Council

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