

## **COUNCIL UPDATE 3.2022**

### **TRANSPORT BOARD**

The following issues are of interest from the agenda from the meeting on 1 March 2022:

- Nighttime A2070 closures for three weeks from 28 February 2022, 8pm to 5am and reduction to single lane for 6 weeks from Easter 2022 on the A2070 as part of the “Bellamy Gurner Scheme”.
- Repairs to a damaged pipe and gully outside Shelwyn, Coopers Lane to be carried out.
- Repairs to a collapsed culvert and install a new chamber and replace a collapsed headwall in Blind Lane to be carried out.
- Review of parking restrictions in Tannery Lane and Elwick Road / Bank Street.
- Consultation started on the 15th March (and will close on 9th May) at [www.kent.gov.uk/trafficmanagementact](http://www.kent.gov.uk/trafficmanagementact) on enforcing moving traffic offences at the three bus gates in Ashford.
- Design of signage on the M20 for the IBF has been agreed. Work is ongoing on the location(s) and progress is expected soon.
- A report on extending the B-Line to Finberry is expected at the next meeting in June 2022.
- A further report on the actions on nuisance motor vehicles in and around the A2070 is expected in June 2022. A “day of action” is scheduled, cross-border with East Sussex, on an unspecified date in April.
- Work to complete detailed design on the 20pmh scheme on Bybrook Rd is ongoing with delivery scheduled for 2022/23.

### **HEALTH SCRUTINY**

At the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 March 2022, key issues for Ashford were as follows:

- The car park for patients and visitors reopened by 25<sup>th</sup> March having been resurfaced following the decommissioning of the Nightingale. Nightingale Hubs were created to provide additional capacity for local services in the event they came under very intense pressure linked to the Omicron variant.
- The WHH has extended hospital visiting arrangements so that two visitors are allowed for one hour per day and there are now fewer restrictions for patients receiving end of life care.
- The committee promoted increased “duty to co-operate” between acute trusts so waiting lists are shared. We noted that there was a unmeasured “waiting list to get on the waiting list” due to difficulties of getting GP appointments.

- There was mixed support for increasing use of e-consult appointments. But this is now going to be an obligation under new GP contracts along with longer operating hours for GP surgeries.

#### **SDO4 – SEVINGTON IBF**

The key points made by ABC and KCC in response to the DfT's latest consultation include:

- ABC Environmental Protection Team will request the sources and activities giving rise to the low frequency droning noise are identified and necessary mitigation is implemented
- The need for additions to the fencing questions the effectiveness of current operational measures to deter unsanctioned people movements from within the site
- A review of planting carried out to ensure that damaged, dead or dying planting is replaced following recent storms
- The landscaping on the substantial corridor between the perimeter fence and A2070 link road has all the hallmarks of "space left over" and needs to provide a strong and meaningful woodland bank
- An analysis of effectiveness of the recent lighting review is requested and lights alongside Highfield Lane require physical changes to reduce light spill.
- Hedgerow is encouraged alongside the new PROW on the eastern side
- Electrical hook ups are to be provided for vehicles with refrigeration plant
- The archaeological record indicates:
  - a possible barrow
  - numerous portable antiquities of multi-period metal artifacts and jewellery
  - prehistoric remains, a Anglo-Saxon burial was recorded on the northern spart during the M20 J10A link road construction
  - an iron age trackway runs parallel to the new footpath on the eastern side,
  - Roman settlement, industrial activity and burials,
  - medieval water mill and
  - "slightly strange" undated pits

These suggest that the site had been a special place for thousands of years

- Britain has lost 97% of its wildflower meadows since the 1930's so the land east of the IBF in Sevington needs the ecology related proposals at the site to create new native wildlife meadows. If successful, this will be the most valuable contribution to biodiversity from the site. In addition to the wildflower meadow, the following ecology-related measures are proposed:
  - New wildlife ponds

- Reptile translocations to the area
- Provision of bat, birds and dormice boxes
- Pilot woodland creation scheme

A Landscape and Ecology Management Plan is necessary to:

- Provide a planting schedule of include native species only
- Provide mitigation measures for any future heavy ground works as protected species such as reptiles will be present
- Ensure impacts from light pollution from the IBF are limited / negated
- Produce management prescriptions for the wildlife meadow including times of mowing and where arisings will be placed – ideally in shaded areas for the benefit of breeding reptiles
- Explain how the woodland will be established – browsing pressure from grey squirrels is a major inhibitor of newly established woodlands
- Locations and the of the proposed bird, bat and dormice boxes

## **ASB**

The £550k funding from the PCC for safer streets projects to reduce violence against women and girls (VWAG) is to be spent on improved CCTV, fencing around Memorial Gardens (completed), increased staffing in the town centre and promotion of a digital app to promote safer routes. The Street Pastors have set up a mobile van for people to go to if they feel unsafe in the town centre. A review of the neighbourhood policing model is being carried out. Separately, funding for Safer Community officers has been secured for their deployment around Stanhope to reduce ASB specifically relating to catapults and county lines.

The Advisory Group has been formed by PC Katie Lane from individuals consulted when formulating the funding bid, and then from others who have shown interest in VAWG events. Due to the members being selected from both local businesses and members of the public, PC Lane is not at liberty to provide names involved at this time without their consent.

The safer street streets website is <https://www.kent.police.uk/notices/street-safe/street-safe>

The next PCC, ACC (local policing) and KALC liaison meeting is on 7<sup>th</sup> April so let me have any questions and I will try and get them added to the agenda.

## **PLANNING PORTAL**

I have discussed the question of planning reports being deleted from the planning portal with ABC's CEO. A possible compromise to all reports being removed after 6 weeks is that Highways and Environmental Reports, and any

reports from statutory consultees (which includes Parish Councils) should be left on the portal. Unfortunately, this would not include the Environment Agency and Natural England as inexplicably these are not statutory consultees.

## **G-LINE**

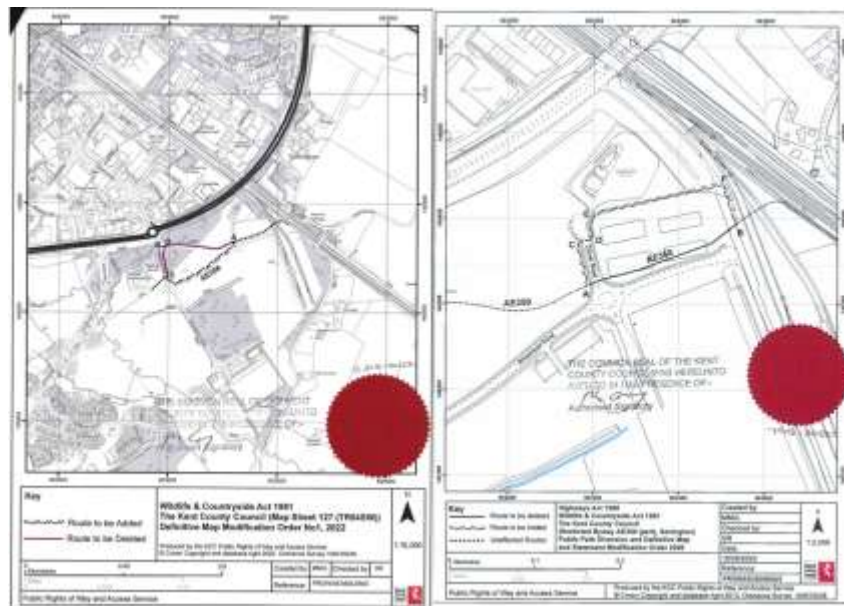
Nobody doubts the value of the G Line to residents and businesses in Ashford. Stagecoach explained at a meeting on 16 March 2022 that the reasons for scaling back the service wef 17<sup>th</sup> April are:

- The number of school children using the service has only recovered to 80% of pre-pandemic levels; adult fare paying is running about 65% of pre-pandemic levels meaning that overall usage is about 70% pre-pandemic.
- There is no direct contractual support by KCC aside a very small arrangement whereby KCC reimburses Stagecoach for accepting the Kent Travel Saver
- S106 funding provided by the Repton Park consortium ran out in early 2019, since when the service has been run on a commercial basis
- Bus driver shortage is critical in Ashford with the workforce c10-15% down on where it should be

Agreed actions arising from the meeting:

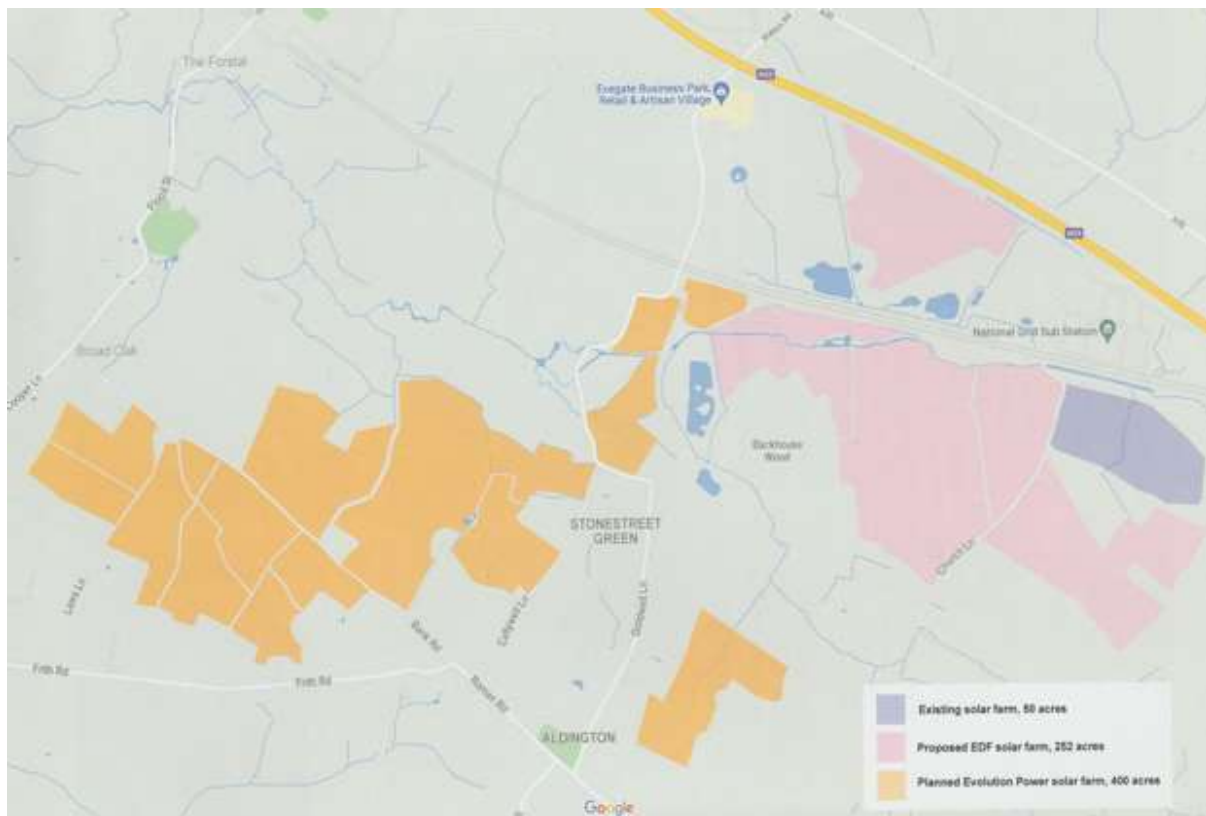
- ABC are to provide “stop gap” funding for 12 months using general funds or s106 agreement for the designer village / Finberry planning consents. Finberry was expected to be serviced by the B line but a G line extension would be acceptable
- A publicity drive will be carried out to encourage use of the revised service which will be hourly and no Sunday service. It is hoped that usage numbers will demonstrate that demand for the half hourly service will be re-instated.
- KCC have alerted all Kent bus operators, inviting them to express an interest to replace Stagecoach
- Residents are being asked by KCC to share their views on a proposed reduction of KCC Supported Bus Services ([www.kent.gov.uk/bussavings](http://www.kent.gov.uk/bussavings)) and they should be asked express support to redirect subsidy to the G line. The consultation opened on 24th February and will close on 20th April

## AE350/AE667



KCC have confirmed the Order relating to the diversion of part of restricted byway AE350 and the stopping up of part of bridleway AE667A at Sevington.

## SOLAR DEVELOPMENT



There is an existing 50 Ha solar development in Church Lane, Aldington. EDF are the developer of a further 250 acre site centred on Church Lane, Aldington. Having completed the consultation process last November, they had indicated that a formal planning application would be submitted to Ashford

Borough Council 'during the month of March'. A further 400 acre solar farm is proposed by Evolution Power Limited between Aldington and Mersham. The planning for this will be the Government as it is large enough to be regarded as "national infrastructure".

#### Pros

- The Government badly needs to generate more renewable energy to meet its emission targets and make the UK more energy independent
- Increased diversification of energy supply
- Reduced reliance on fossil fuels
- Supports the COP 26 / 2030 zero carbon commitments

#### Cons

- Visual impact including from ANOB
- Increased traffic movements on country roads
- Loss of valuable agricultural land
- Noise impact from on-site equipment
- Lack of battery storage means daytime energy collected cannot be used at night
- Supply chain for the panels needs to be assured (In 2019, China made 80 percent of the world's supply of solar panels. But buying Chinese solar panels to reduce emissions is like using gas to put out a fire)
- There is no local list of heritage assets as proposed in the Local Plan to 2030, without such a list support for this type of development (700 acres in total) may be difficult

There is a lot of support for renewable energy but the key is making sure this is done in the most effective way and takes into account the views of local people. Villages around proposed solar farms aren't being offered any sort of benefit in terms of their own energy needs, so it's unsurprising there isn't a community buy-in.

With interesting timing, KCC has secured a significant grant from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme from which, £14.415m can be used towards the delivery of a large-scale solar farm. KCC have identified a c21 MW Solar Farm based in the West Country which has proposed a fixed cost for the purchase of the SPV. The total project costs to purchase the solar farm includes costs of c£400k (these costs cover external due diligence fees for technical, legal, and commercial reviews. The scheme will be funded primarily by the Decarbonisation Fund with a further capital contribution to meet the total project cost. This additional funding will be provided by CSKL who will use the produced renewable electricity to reduce KCC's carbon emissions by c+30% as part of the Council's commitment towards 2030 Net Zero.



## EV



The Kent REVS electric van free trial scheme has proved really popular: over 170 businesses in Kent have already taken advantage of the opportunity to try an EV for up to two months. The waiting times to trial a Renault Crew or Zoe are currently very short so it's a great time to sign up to try one of these vans. Businesses can enquire by emailing [REVS@csLtd.org.uk](mailto:REVS@csLtd.org.uk) and start creating a greener tomorrow.

## PLAN TREE



Have your say on Plan Tree, KCC's Tree Establishment Strategy 2022-2032. The consultation launched on 8 March and is open until 2 May. Plan Tree sets out our ambition for more trees and extended tree canopy cover in Kent and the principles that should underpin any tree establishment in the county. Go to <https://letstalk.kent.gov.uk/plantree> or call 03000 42 15 53 if you need a printed copy.

KCC won through to round two of the Trees Call for Action Fund (TCAF) and submitted a bid for a three year project which will provide extra resources for the strategic coordination and collaboration needed to deliver tree establishment targets for Kent. The National Lottery Heritage Fund is distributing TCAF in partnership with the Forestry Commission, on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and they are expected to announce where the funding will be allocated at the end of March. Advice

on funding or subsidising tree planting is available here

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/environment-waste-and-planning/nature-and-biodiversity/trees/tree-planting-advice>

## UKRAINE

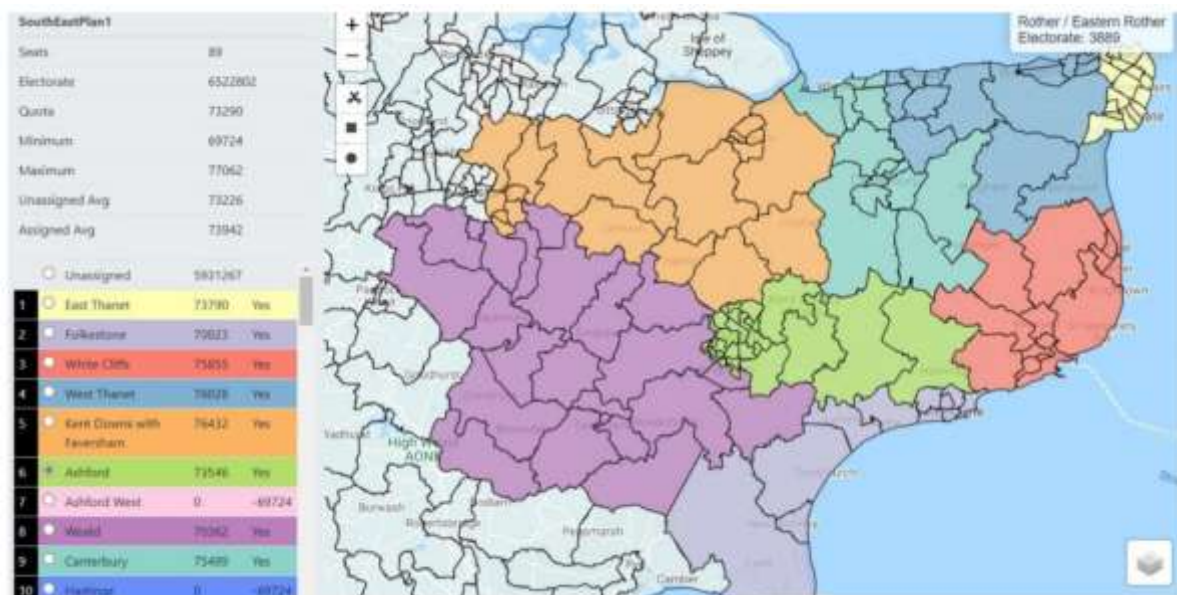
The Government has announced that local authorities will be provided with funding (£10,500 per person) to deliver the wraparound support needed by refugees coming to the UK, with an additional top-up for child education. KCC is working together with all relevant partners which builds on the support we already provide together to other refugees including those from Syria and Afghanistan.

It is expected that charities, faith groups and diaspora communities will play a central role in the operation of the scheme. There are many issues, including discharge of safeguarding responsibilities, that need to be addressed.

## BOUNDARY REVIEW

The Boundary Review Commission held open meetings in Ashford on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2022. Here is my presentation:

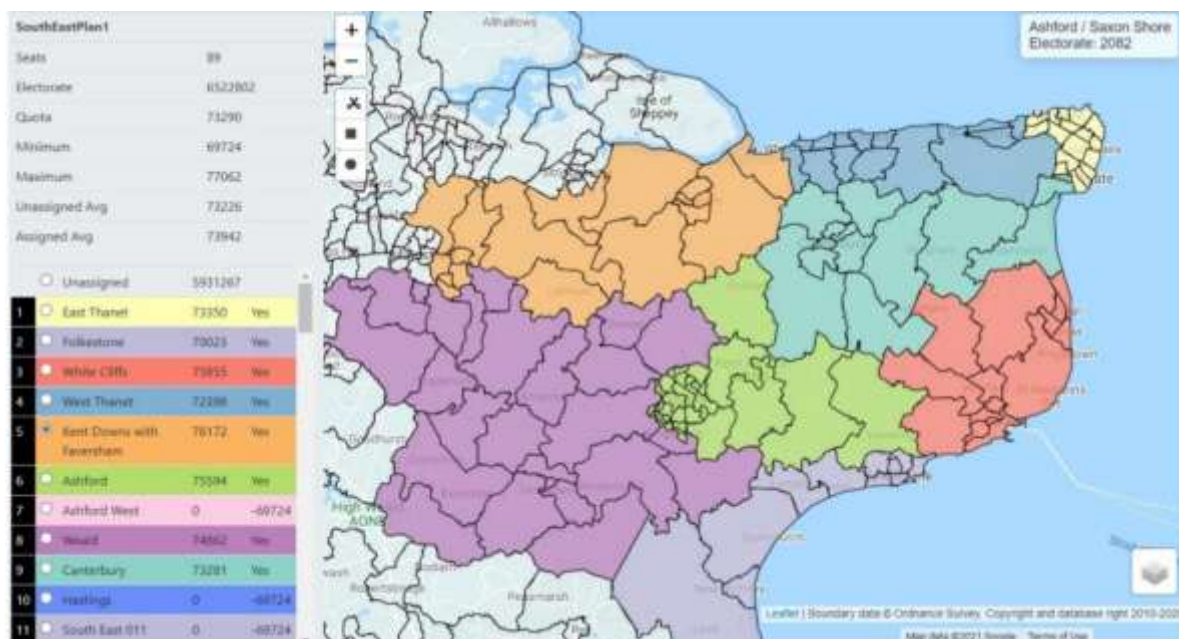
### BCE OPTION



The suggestion is that the three wards from Ashford that are currently proposed to go into Faversham are instead put into Weald and Ashford. Charing and Downs West go to Weald and Downs North remains in Ashford. By sending two wards to Weald and one to Ashford, the increases in electors in Weald and Ashford (compared to BCE Option) are minor.

### PROPOSAL





The fact that Faversham loses these three wards requires movement of a ward from Canterbury to Faversham to keep Faversham at the right size. To keep Canterbury right (because it has lost a big ward to Faversham), it needs to gain 3 wards from West Thanet and 2 wards from East Thanet. Because East Thanet loses 2 to Canterbury it needs to gain 2 from West Thanet. Overall West Thanet loses 2 wards to East Thanet and 3 to Canterbury but gains 4 from Canterbury. All these changes are necessary to keep the electorate in each constituency within the quota.

**The aim of this to ensure that Ashford Borough remains within two constituencies (as it is now) and avoids the need for three different MPs**

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