

COUNCIL UPDATE 10.2022

ASHFORD CYCLING & WALKING ROUTES



A meeting was held to discuss progress on delivering the highlighted cycling and walking routes around the town centre. The map shows the existing key routes that can benefit from infrastructure improvements that will increase use. The objectives are to (i) developing cycling routes which support current demand and encourage future growth for predominantly commuting, but also non-commuting trips, and (ii) improve walking access within the town centre.

TOWN CENTRE HIGHWAYS REPAIRS

I attended a site visit with colleague councillors on 6th October to agree a scope of work on the Lower High Street, Elwick Square and Forge / West Street. Red tarmac will be replaced with black tarmac as recent patching with black makes the area look poorly maintained. Some kerbs, particularly along Forge Street need to be replaced. This work will start in November.

The cobbled area on the Lower High Street will be removed and replaced with tarmac as they present a trip hazard and have become unsightly. This work will start in January 2023.



**Red tarmac patched up with black outside Elwick Place car park
(when retarmacked it will be black tarmac)**



Repairs required to central brickwork, pavement edge and cycle racks to be replaced/removed

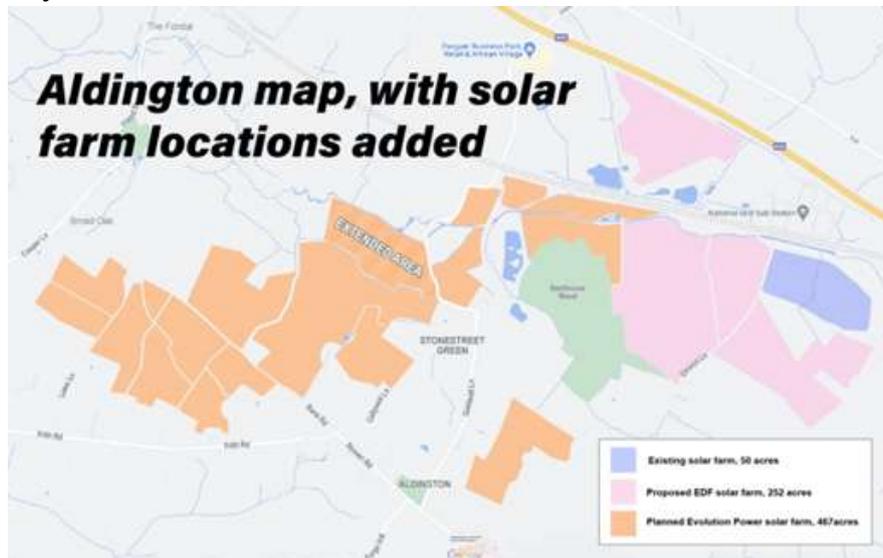


Cobbles in Lower High Street to be replaced with black tarmac to distinguish it from pavement

ALDINGTON SOLAR

Councillors had a presentation from Evolution Power on Monday 10th October. By way of reminder, there is an existing 50-acre solar farm in Church Lane constructed in 2015. EDF have applied to ABC for a 256-acre solar farm of 49.9 MW located close to this on land either side of Church Lane as well as to the north of CTRL. The extent of their scheme is shown in pink below.

Evolution Power (EP) intend to submit a planning application to the Planning Inspectorate in relation to their Stonestreet Green solar proposal. Because of its size (covering 467 acres and having a capacity of 99.9 MW) it is classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP). It is because of this designation that the relevant planning authority (ABC) is a consultee in the process and will not decide the application. When all three schemes are put together, they total more than 700 acres and look like this:



The original campaign group, “Save Aldington” has been disbanded. The Church Lane Group (centred in that part of the village) continues to operate. A new group, “Aldington Solar” were mandated to “Stop Stonestreet Solar” at their public meeting held in Aldington on 26th September. They are campaigning to stop the proposed solar farm and to preserve the land as farmland. They are spreading the word about the campaign through a dedicated Facebook page, newsletter, and door-to-door questionnaire. The Church Lane Group have submitted objections to ABC on the EDF application (ref 22/00668/AS – see Files section). No committee date has been scheduled for ABC to decide this application so there is still the opportunity for comments to be submitted online. The consultation has been left open until ABC are ready to make a recommendation to the planning committee. EDF have agreed to cover the cost of ABC’s landscape consultants. Once ABC have the consultant’s report on the landscape and visual impact, they will meet with EDF to discuss the findings, the responses to the consultation process and any consequential amendments deemed necessary. The

consultants are aware of the details of both schemes and ABC will be asking the same consultants to review the NSIP scheme in due course.

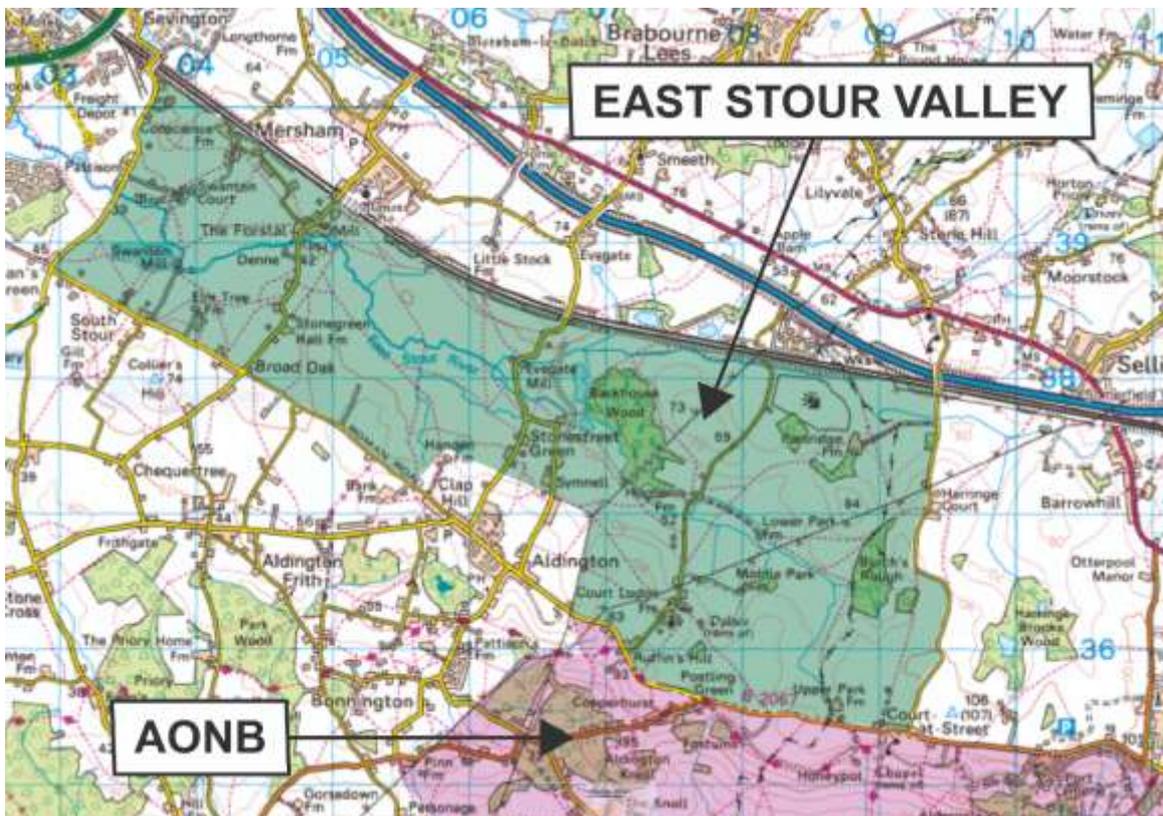
ABC have asked EP to work up visualisations when they come to submit their scheme – there has in addition been a discussion about the provision of 3D modelling – which they are exploring. Details of the EP scheme are at – www.stonestreetgreensolar.co.uk

EP have announced a series of local information meetings:

- Mersham 4th November
- Aldington 5th November
- Bilsington 8th November
- Sellindge 9th November

Additionally a “public presentation” at Aldington village hall is on 8th November 8.00pm – 9.30pm. Comments to EP as part of their required statutory consultation must be made by 29th November.

It is hoped that the work being carried out by the independent Land Mapping Commission for ABC’s review will identify areas in the borough that are deserving of further protection. Such protection will in turn increase biodiversity in those areas and enhance their natural beauty. The map below shows the East Stour Valley, which is one such area for potential protection, offering the opportunity to safeguard this Landscape Character Area which lies between the IBF buffer zone and the AONB.



COMMUNITY SAFETY

Inspector Vanessa Foster attended the Kent Association of Parish Council (KALC) meeting on 5th October. She is new in post and made the following helpful points:

- Town centre violence against women and girls will be a priority, maybe there will be a further allocation of funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner
- Undercover officers are targeting lone predators
- Youths committing ASB are proving difficult to sanction
- A no drinking area in the town centre was not progressed, instead officers have adopted an approach where they confiscate alcohol
- A new Chief Constable is being recruited for Kent who will have his/her own views on neighbourhood policing and the role of PCSOs.
- New seating areas in Middle Row / Bank Street have increased the desire for people to come to the town centre, improving the ambience
- I have asked for any ideas for work on the environment around McDonalds in the Lower High Street which could be combined with the work to remove the cobbles.

PARK MALL

At the CACF on 7th October, the issue of ongoing ASB on the top floor of the Park Mall car park was discussed. ABC sent someone from the property team on 11th October to address the issues raised in terms of the area. Work is ongoing on the recruitment of a town centre manager and ABC is working closely with both police colleagues and highways engineering colleagues to work together as a team with Aspire and Biffa to look after the town.

Separately a meeting was held to explain to businesses what is being done to improve the situation and explain the ASB strategy that is being formed. A number of businesses were invited to attend, including a number that had previously reported issues of concern. Representatives from County Square were also in attendance as they were able to speak for a number of businesses affected by youths and their anti-social behaviour. A further meeting will be held at the beginning of next year to evaluate any outcomes from suggested initiatives.

KNIFE BINS

The Knife Bin in Stanhope has been successfully relocated and can now be found near the Stanhope Hub building. A new Knife Bin has also been installed for the Kennington area and is located near the shops in the main Bockhanger Square. Both bins will be carefully monitored and emptied regularly by Kent Police.



ONE STOP AT PARK MALL

Normal opening hours 9.30-4pm Tuesday-Friday; trial dates are set for Saturday opening – October 22nd, November 26th & December 10th – 9.30-1pm. Front of house lifestyle staff will offer usual advice/help and health checks will be available. The shop will shut at 4pm on Friday 23rd December and reopen Tuesday 3rd January 2023. For information, Park Mall now do not shut the centre until 8pm.

Since the Eat Well, Spend Less Road Show on 7th September an ABC Welfare Reform Intervention Officer is now available at the shop every Wednesday 1-4pm. No appointment required.

A fruit & veg offer is up and running. It arrives in the shop on a Tuesday. A donation suggestion of a £1 per bag or pay as you can afford. The shop is providing recipe sheet with ideas for the fruit & veg on offer.

The shop is still a distribution/collection point for family food bank boxes – they receive 10 a week but demand is out weighing this. A decision has been made to use some of the donation money to purchase other food items to give to clients who are in need – the homeless and others - especially if there is no food box to give them. The donation money is normally used to pay for the supply of fruit & veg from Fare Share for the shop but was also always meant to be used to further help our residents so this is a positive way of doing so.

Women's health and wellbeing course is to be run from the shop by Faith Dawkins who approached the council for help with a venue. This first course is for 8 ladies and starts on 7th November – 5pm-7.30pm for 6 weeks.

There has been the start of a discussion to whether the shop could be used as a safe / warm space.

COBBS WOOD HWRC

I have been asked to enquire if the Cobbs Wood HWRC could facilitate pedestrian or cycling access. Here is the answer I was given:

*Ashford is a Waste Transfer station **and** HWRC, so the freighter & haulage movements are really extensive with obviously inherent dangers if pedestrians were to gain access, particularly as they would utilise the same entrance as cars and / or HGVs. It is also in the middle of a busy industrial estate, I can't recommend this as something that should be considered at the current time.*

It doesn't sound like the Ashford site could safely accept bikes or pedestrians – I can also imagine that if they were carrying waste they would be even more vulnerable.

EAST KENT MATERNITY SERVICES

In my role as chair of the Kent Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee I met with leading NHS staff at the QEQM on 13th October. This was ahead of the publication on Wednesday 19th October of the Independent Investigation by Dr Bill Kirkup into East Kent Maternity Services. It focussed on care provided to families between 2009 and 2020.

What struck me on the visit was the age and condition of the buildings and how the staff are expected to operate, side rooms had no en-suite, no air conditioning or comfort cooling. Staff facilities are thin on the ground. There was no piped Entonox with delivery rooms relying on canisters. Proper investment is estimated to cost £24m including for a second obstetric theatre and to increase the number and size of rooms available for women and their families. I have written to the new Secretary of State to speed up the decision of the £460m funding for east Kent health services reconfiguration. In the meantime, the hospital Trust is currently investing £1.6m in maternity services at WHH and QEQM Hospital and £1.7m in the Special Care baby Unit at QEQM.



Recovery rooms are small without ensuite

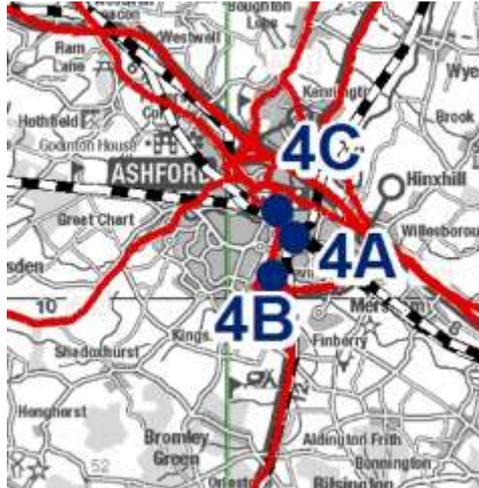
The hospital Trust have already taken action to improve services such as ensuring consultant presence, increase midwife numbers, provide CTG monitoring for baby's heartbeats and provide new "take 5" spaces to give patients the space to speak up.

From Saturday 15th October, there has been an enquiry line in place to support people who have used our services, are using them or may do so in the future and have questions about the investigation.

INVESTMENT ZONES

KCC has submitted an application to central Government detailing the expressions of interest including three sites in Ashford, the Brompton Bikes Site, the Commercial Quarter (Kent Woolgrowers) and the Newtown Works.

KCC's shortlist of sites seeks to make the most of international stations at Ebbsfleet and Ashford. In Ashford, KCC's focus is on driving new, high-value employment to complement the rapid growth of the town. The case for Investment Zones is keenly made by Teesside and freeports and it remains to be seen if there is the bandwidth to pursue such ideas with the new PM



COST OF LIVING CRISIS

#caring ashford

We would like to hear how we can help you/your family with rising costs.



Please use this QR code to complete an online questionnaire or visit haveyoursay.ashford.gov.uk/2022col.

Or, if you are unable to respond online, please get in touch and we will provide the questionnaire in an alternative format.



Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1PL
01233 331111 | www.ashford.gov.uk | policy.team@ashford.gov.uk

Two meetings on 19th and 20th October included discussions on what actions are being taken in the county on the cost of living crisis. 19th October was the Integrated Care Partnership (they sign off the Intergrated Care Board – ICB, the NHS’s delivery arm) and the 20th was the County Council.

Most of the cost-of-living actions are with the Government who has put in place a number of financial support interventions for households and individuals including the Energy Price Guarantee to provide more certainty on energy costs. Whilst this support will help alleviate some of the pressure on many households, there will still be an increase in the cost of energy at a time when other prices are continuing to rise, and many households will still face a challenging winter and beyond.

Due to higher fuel costs, the ICB is looking at identifying transport options to help patients access outpatient and diagnostic appointments as well as how they can reduce transport for patients. This is expected to be through expanding primary care services and increasing housebound provision for patients with long term conditions.

KCC advised that The Financial Hardship Programme, which was set up to support households and businesses in need during Covid, will continue to provide support through the winter including debt advice. The ReferKent referrals system to help people experiencing financial hardship to access the right support more quickly, and a workstream to increase uptake of Free School Meals and Healthy Start vouchers. KCC's community services including libraries and Community Wardens will also be supporting vulnerable people.

Below is a link to the 'Help with Hardship' guide. This includes universal support available across Kent, as well as district-specific support. This has been produced in recognition of the cost-of-living crisis, to help all partners more easily and quickly identify the right support for families
<https://sway.office.com/vRtDoRat7BZE7oo2?ref=email&fbclid=IwAR1HR4Q7T-7illuFyhPKtH5d5evvi8pm-q-YKIBYNJD6eGzuZJ6ubbjbzbvQ>.

A third round of the Household Support Fund will be made available to KCC. In previous rounds, some funding was issued to ABC for local initiatives, some was dedicated to further supporting families eligible for free school meals and some was allocated to the Kent Support and Assistance service so that residents could apply for financial assistance including fuel vouchers. Some funding could also be held for support with water and energy bills.

A priority is to ensure that those who are entitled to existing benefits take them up. These include pension credit (£1.7bn goes unclaimed each year), the social tariff for broadband, the Warm Home Discount (increased by 14% to £160) has been extended to those claiming tax credits. None of these are paid automatically and must be claimed.

The Alternative Fuel Payment, which supports people who rely on alternative fuels to heat their homes, will deliver a one off payment of £100 to UK households who are not on the mains gas grid and therefore use alternative fuels, such as heating oil, to heat their homes.

KCC HIGHWAYS PLANS

The forward work plan for KCC Highways for 2022/23-2023/24 has been published. Here are relevant extracts for Central and Mersham. The eagle-eyed will see the concrete road resurfacing of Bybrook Road finally on the list.

Road Name	Road No.	Town/Village	District	Asset	Description of Works	Extents	Identification
Avenue Jacques Fauchaux		Ashford	Ashford	Soft Landscape	Tree planting	To be assessed	Green infrastructure enhancement
Avenue Jacques Fauchaux	A2042	Ashford	Ashford	Structures	Expansion joint replacement	East Stour Underbridge (KCC structure no. 9122)	Condition survey
Avenue Jacques Fauchaux	A2042	Ashford	Ashford	Structures	Expansion joint replacement	Great Stour Underbridge (KCC structure no. 9123)	Condition survey
Bad Munstereifel Drive	A2042	Kingsnorth	Ashford	Crash Barriers	Upgrade tensioned corrugated beam safety fencing	Romney Marsh Road Roundabout to National Highways boundary (central reserve)	Condition survey
Bank Street		Ashford	Ashford	Shared Space	Surface renewal	Entire extents	Local needs
Bybrook Road		Ashford	Ashford	Road	Concrete road repair	Between A28 Canterbury Road and Nine Acres	Local need (removed from unfunded list)
Carlton Road		Ashford	Ashford	Footway	Reconstruction	Exact extents to be defined at design stage	Identified by inspection
Church Road	C177	Mersham	Ashford	Road	Road reconstruction	From Mersham Primary School to The Farriers Arms	Structural failure
Church Road		Sevington	Ashford	Soft Landscape	Tree planting	To be assessed	Green infrastructure enhancement
Elwick Road	A292	Ashford	Ashford	Shared Space	Surface renewal	From Godinton Road to junction with Bank Street	Local needs
Elwick Road		Ashford	Ashford	Soft Landscape	Tree planting	To be assessed	Green infrastructure enhancement
Faversham Road	A2042	Kennington	Ashford	Road	Surface preservation	From junction near A28 to Tudor Road	Condition survey
Faversham Road		Kennington	Ashford	Soft Landscape	Tree planting	To be assessed	Green infrastructure enhancement
Flood Street	C177	Mersham	Ashford	Road	Surface preservation	From Coopers Lane to Blind Lane	Condition survey
Flood Street	C177	Mersham	Ashford	Structures	Bridge strengthening / reconstruction	Mersham Forstal (KCC structure no. 131)	Condition survey
Forge Lane	A292	Ashford	Ashford	Shared Space	Surface renewal	Entire extents	Local needs
Forge Lane		Ashford	Ashford	Soft Landscape	Tree planting	To be assessed	Green infrastructure enhancement
Godinton Road	A292	Ashford	Ashford	Shared Space	Surface renewal	From West Street/Pavilion View junction to Elwick Road	Local needs
High Street (Lower High Street)		Ashford	Ashford	Shared Space	Surface renewal	From North Street to Wellesley Road	Local needs
Hythe Road	A20	Mersham	Ashford	Crash Barriers	Upgrade tensioned corrugated beam safety fencing	Local to The Street (verge)	Condition survey
Hythe Road	A20	Mersham/Smeeth	Ashford	Road	Surface renewal	From Mersham turn (The Street) to junction with The Ridgeway, Smeeth	Local needs
Loudon Way		Ashford	Ashford	Soft Landscape	Tree planting	To be assessed	Green infrastructure enhancement
Maidstone Road		Ashford	Ashford	Soft Landscape	Tree planting	To be assessed	Green infrastructure enhancement
Maidstone Road	A20	Ashford	Ashford	Structures	Bridge refurbishment	Maidstone Road (KCC structure no. 869)	Condition survey
North Street			Ashford	Road	Surface renewal	Junction of Somerset Road to A28 Canterbury Rd	Road grip survey
Rylands Road		Ashford	Ashford	Footway	Reconstruction	Exact extents to be defined at design stage	Identified by inspection
Simone Weil Avenue	A28	Ashford	Ashford	Road	Concrete road repair	Between Drivers Roundabout and A28 Canterbury Rd	Local need (removed from unfunded list)
Simone Weil Avenue		Ashford	Ashford	Soft Landscape	Tree planting	To be assessed	Green infrastructure enhancement
Western Avenue		Ashford	Ashford	Soft Landscape	Tree planting	To be assessed	Green infrastructure enhancement

UKRAINIAN FAMILY HOSTS

People hosting Ukrainians as part of the KCC Homes for Ukraine Scheme will receive more money every month as part of a county-wide increase. The Government continues to set host payments at £350 per accommodation, but KCC has decided to increase this to recognise not only the generosity and kindness of Kent hosts, but also the challenges they currently face from increasing costs in energy, the price of food and rising inflation.

KCC has taken the decision to increase the payments after fears many people wouldn't be able to afford to extend their current six-month agreements as winter approaches and the cost-of-living bites. The increased payments will begin at the end of October and will continue until March 2023, when the current Government scheme ends. This applies to existing hosts who are already in receipt of thank you payments, and new hosts who complete all the checks satisfactorily going forward. There is also a separate hardship fund available to those who may need extra financial support in order to continue to provide accommodation for Ukrainian guests. For those hosts who have supported their guests for more than 6 months, the council will also pay an additional £500 in March 2023 in recognition of their continued support during these difficult times.

CHURCH ROAD

I have reported the damaged "no HGV" sign near the turning to St Mary's in Church Road, Sevington



KENT AND MEDWAY HEALTH AND CARE SYMPOSIUM

There's been increasing coverage about the growing number of delayed discharges from hospital because of a lack of capacity in the community to support the patient once they leave an acute setting. The government has

announced £500m of funding to assist with this issue. The annual state of the nation report from the CQC announced: “Gridlocked health and care system leading to deterioration in people’s access to and experience of care”. It noted that “Only 2 in 5 people are able to leave hospital when they are ready to do so, contributing to record-breaking waits in emergency departments following a decision to admit, and dangerous ambulance handover delays.”

I attended the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board Symposium on 28th October to agree actions to address these issues. It covered:

- The need for each party to access each other’s data on health, economic and social activity etc. This is to enable the NHS and social care providers to provide what is needed, where it is needed.
- How residents and “lay” members can input into the required changes.
- The fact that there was not enough money in the system for health providers means that each need to use what they have smarter and make it go further.
- There is a strong link between how the cold affects the most vulnerable. A 1% drop in temperature below 19C increases mortality by 2.3% for the vulnerable. Responding to the energy crisis (which is the major cause of the cost of living crisis) will tackle health inequalities.
- COVID burn out has contributed to the difficulties in recruiting and maintaining staff, this is essential to long term planning for health providers.

Paul Bartlett

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