

COUNCIL UPDATE 4/2021

POTHOLES

Kent has over 5,000 miles of roads and while many are properly engineered, others are layers of tarmac over a bed of flints. These are vulnerable to wet winter weather, when frost can cause break-up of the surface, resulting in potholes and sometimes damage to residents' vehicles. Nowadays KCC have a multi-million pound "Pothole Blitz" every spring, using Kent civil engineers to "find and fix" damage to the roads. Otherwise, there is a time limit on the Council of 28 days to carry out repairs to non-dangerous potholes, seven days where the damage is hazardous, or two hours for an emergency. That said, the Council usually does much better than those limits, and the average time is a "Key Performance Indicator".

The best way to report potholes is online at www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-a-problem. Please use the map facility because it will show if your pothole has already been reported.

KCC has been working on several trials which tests the very latest technology to see how it can help it save money, find and fix problems quicker, and make stronger evidence-based decisions about the road network.

The Council has piloted drones to spot highway defects, fitted cameras to buses and highways vehicles to provide road condition data.

A new trial using state of the art traffic sensors is being carried out to monitor traffic patterns to help make future transport decisions for the county. 32 sensors have been placed which are able to classify what is using the highway, for instance pedestrians, cars, buses, bicycles, and count those users and record their speeds. When compared to traditional data collection, such as loops in the road, these sensors are considerably more efficient and accurate in analysing pedestrian and bicycle usage, giving KCC data on the interactions between pedestrians, cyclists and road traffic. KCC will be able to use this anonymised data to get a real feel of how people are getting around the county and any issues that could be addressed by KCC as the highways authority and these sensors will be providing the Council with considerably more evidence to help that decision-making.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Kent businesses can now trial an electric van for up to two months to see how the switch to electric could benefit their business and Kent's environment. The scheme aims to demonstrate that a switch to electric makes good business sense as well as reducing air pollution on Kent's roads. Cleaner air

benefits all Kent's residents and brings us closer to our goal of Net Zero emissions.

A mix of small and medium electric vans will be available, the first of these are the Renault Kangoo Panel and Crew and the Nissan eNV200. In future they will be joined by a VW e-Transporter 6-seater, Renault Zoe vans and several medium sized vans so that a wider range of businesses can take part in the trial. To register interest in the scheme, email REVS@csltd.org.uk



ADULT SOCIAL CARE SERVICES

People are being invited to have their say on the future of social care in Kent. KCC, who are responsible for our social care services, are organising a series of online sessions and everyone is invited either as an individual or as a voluntary organisation. Dates for the upcoming sessions are:

- 10.30am – 12.00 Friday 5 March
- 10.30am – 12.00 Wednesday 10 March
- 10.30am – 12.00 Friday 19 March
- 10.30am – 12.00 Wednesday 31 March

To get involved, email makingadifference@kent.gov.uk. I attended the first session on Friday 26th February and found it very valuable.

SEVINGTON IBF

The DfT have begun the formal engagement period for changes to the Sevington plans. The website with the new information is live at

https://inlandborderfacilities.uk/?page_id=61, where you can leave feedback until 14th March.



The changes will increase the footprint of the Defra buildings and provide supplementary containers to enable sanitary & phytosanitary checks to be undertaken on food, live animals and plant consignments inbound to the UK. These changes will support Defra's operations on the site from July 2021. Defra will occupy an area at the centre of the site and will share responsibility for the site with HMRC from July 2021.

One risk from the increase in the footprint of the DEFRA buildings is that it would increase the number of lorries in Mersham and Sevington from July 2021, when it becomes operational. This increase in activity will follow on from HMRC checks being transferred from Waterbrook IBF to Sevington IBF. The issues I have raised in my consultation response include:

- Increased traffic on adjoining roads
- Positioning of Wi-Fi mast
- Increase in number (but reduced height) of DEFRA buildings
- Noise from refrigerated containers

Separately, the DfT plans to complete their proposals for the site to enhance biodiversity on 31 March 2021. This will enable ABC and the parish council to understand how the current owners plan to manage the land east of Highfield Lane during negotiations to transfer the land to ABC (KWT have a site visit planned w/c 1 March 2021). An important part of these discussions will be how the top soil stored east of the site is to be relocated.

The site now has its own postcode, TN25 6GE with instructions to access at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/attending-an-inland-border-facility/sevington-inland-border-facility>. The number of lorries reported in Kingsford Street at www.ashford.gov.uk/Bexit has reduced from 39 in January to 10 in February (data to 25th February). To set this in context there are around 1,000 lorries at the Sevington IBF daily.

BARN OWLS

Sevington with Finberry PC is exploring providing two barn owl boxes along the Eastern Stour corridor to support the barn owl population. The following map shows the locations of the main hunting barn owl hunting habitats between Waterbrook and Finberry where the owls have been spotted and photographed and shows where the owl boxes would best be placed. The boxes would need to be placed soon, as soon as lockdown rules are lifted, as the main nesting season is March to August.

The land is earmarked for a "buffer zone" between Finberry and Waterbrook, so will not be developed once building starts, but that must be some time off in any case.



Barn Owl numbers have historically dropped significantly due to a loss of hunting habitat and nest holes (old barns or hollows in trees). It would be great for the Council to support them and get a small stake in the ground to say that this is what this area along the river really needs to be for once the residential development is taken forward after the relocation of the lorry park to the site used as the Waterbrook IBF.

The boxes could be part of the Stour Valley Partnerships barn owl box monitoring program which also cleans them out at the correct time of year.

If the Council can show actions such as supporting barn owl support, we can reasonably approach the DfT and ask for them to do more, as it shows an element of like-mindedness.



TRANSPORT

Central Division

1. KCC have agreed to provide a drop-down kerb in Quantock Drive (opposite the drop down on the pathway to M&S) as part of their 2021/22 small works schemes (thanks to Euan Anckorn drawing this to my attention).



2. New yellow lines for Thompson Road and Quantock Drive are now scheduled for completion.
3. Amended waiting restrictions are proposed for Gravel Walk, Brunswick Road and Hilton Road.
4. Potential highway safety improvements are being considered following investigation of crash data at Somerset Road / North Street.
5. Potential highway safety improvements are being considered following investigation of crash data at Drivers Roundabout.
6. Pothole repair, new "type 1" path on Bockhanger Road is out to tender.
7. The 20-mph scheme for Bybrook is now subject to a safety audit.

Mersham Ward

1. Hythe Road resurfacing (Bockham Lane to Ashford/Shepway border) in 2021/22.
2. Culvert repair under highway and ditching work in South Stour which is awaiting a programme date.
3. Bridge reconstruction at the Forstal in design for delivery in 2021/22

KCC's consultation on Vision Zero is open until 15 March. We all have a strong interest in this ambitious target to ensure zero, or as close as possible, fatalities on Kent's roads each year by 2050. You can find further information and the consultation details here:

<https://kccconsultations.inconsult.uk/consult.ti/visionzero/consultationHome>

COUNCIL TAX HARDSHIP FUND

£6million of emergency COVID funding will be used to help Kent's struggling households pay their Council Tax. The move means all existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) working-age households will automatically have their 2021-22 Council Tax reduced by £50. There are over 65,000 families eligible for the CTRS scheme, compared to 56,000 a year ago. New claimants eligible for CTRS throughout the year will also receive the additional reduction to their Council Tax bills.

On top of this extra help, one-off funding of £10m will also be given to every Kent district council to boost their Council Tax Hardship Fund. This will enable the districts to provide Council Tax relief to those who have been seriously impacted by the pandemic - suffering a loss in income, or a change in their financial circumstances, such as furlough or redundancy. This initiative includes support for those most under pressure because of Coronavirus, including help with paying utility bills and tackling digital poverty.

The Helping Hand Scheme includes a raft of support ranging from assisting just-managing families with heating bills and helping struggling firms stay afloat, to tackling digital poverty and match-funding crowdfunded community projects providing vital local assistance.

This follows a 1.99% rise in general Council Tax increase (and 3% for adult social care) set in KCC's 2021-22 Budget, as COVID continues to stretch public services and spending.

KCC's 24-hour helpline is still available and ready to support Kent's vulnerable people who need urgent help, supplies or medication. If you are vulnerable and have an urgent need that cannot be met through existing support networks, you can contact the Kent Together helpline at www.kent.gov.uk/KentTogether or by calling on 03000 41 92 92. It is a 24-hour service.

BYBROOK WASTE WATER TREATMENT WORKS

Southern Water are due to provide an Odour Management Plan (OMP) by 31 March 2021 to Ashford Borough Council. This follows the legal notice requiring SW to take action against the odours which was issued in November 2020 by ABC.

The OMP will be a framework of measures that will be pursued and timelines for implementation. Some will be more immediate, whilst others will be longer term projects but each hopefully alleviating frequency / severity / duration of the odour incidents.

There are expected to be some significant works across the site in order to tackle the odours. Some of these may require planning consent from KCC for example allowing a modest increase in lorry movements to facilitate prompt removal of treated cake, or the building of silos/plant.

Once the OMP and list of related measures, is submitted, ABC will comment with the Environment Agency who are hoping to get expert odour assistance from one of their national teams.

Kennington Community Council might anticipate a response to the OMP in April but it will almost certainly take time in view of the need to involve experts.

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