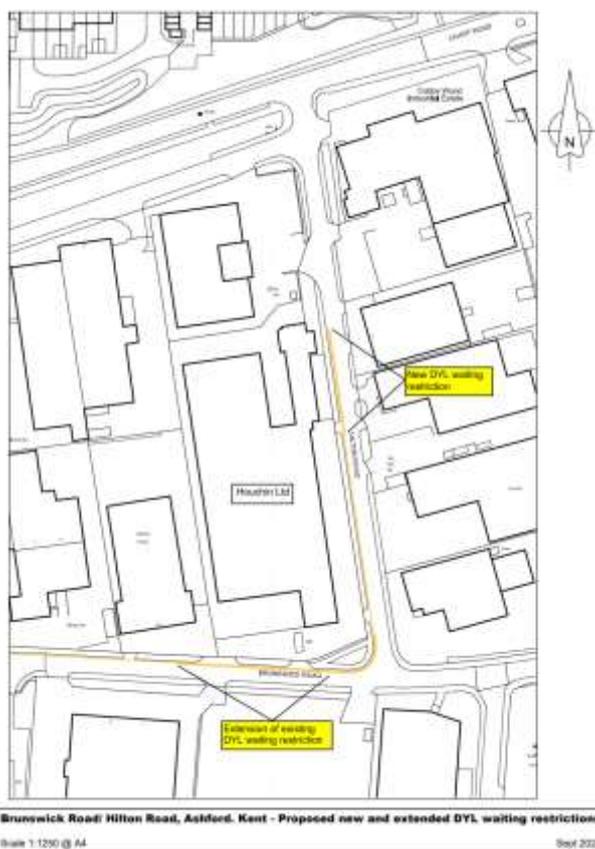


COUNCIL UPDATE 12.2022

WAITING RESTRICTIONS COBBS WOOD



Comments can be made on the application to create new waiting restrictions on Hilton Road and Brunswick Road on Cobbs Wood until 16 January 2023 at www.kent.gov.uk/highwaysconsultations where more details are available.

WILLIAM HARVEY HOSPITAL

At the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 30 November we heard about progress on delivering the new Hyper Acute Stroke Unit (HASU) at the WHH. An updated review of travel time between the QEQM in Margate and Ashford will be carried out prior to submitting an updated build business case in Feb 2025. Opening will follow 19 months after contract award.

We asked the hospital to carry out an investigation after mothers in labour were unable to access gas and air pain relief at the end of November. An issue with ventilation on maternity wards meant women in labour did not have access to Entonox, a mixture of oxygen and nitrous oxide gas. This was due to the levels of gas in the air, which could affect the health of staff who work for long periods in the labour rooms. A temporary solution was put in place by 2 December with a promise for permanent ventilation being put in place within 3 months. The Trust's chief nursing and midwifery officer said an investigation will take place to find out what went wrong.

CHURCHYARD PHONEBOX

I have asked ABC to investigate if it can buy the phone box in the Churchyard from BT and revamp it. This is normally done by the appropriate parish council, but as there is no parish council covering the town centre, ABC will investigate.



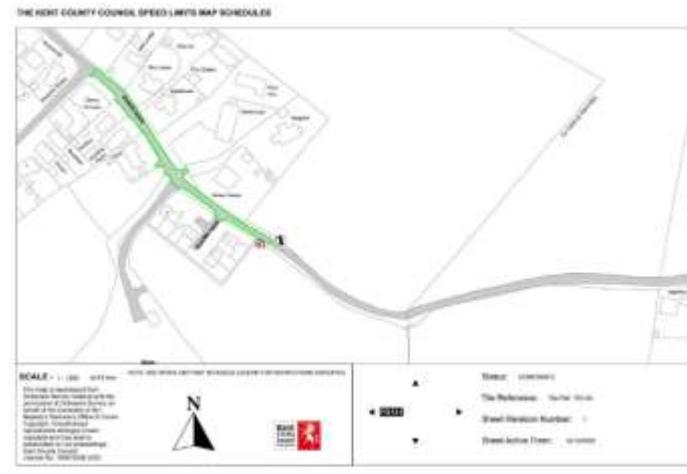
BELMORE PARK ALLEYWAY

I have asked ABC to investigate if something can be done to improve the lighting in the alleyway between Belmore Park and Magazine Road (AU30).

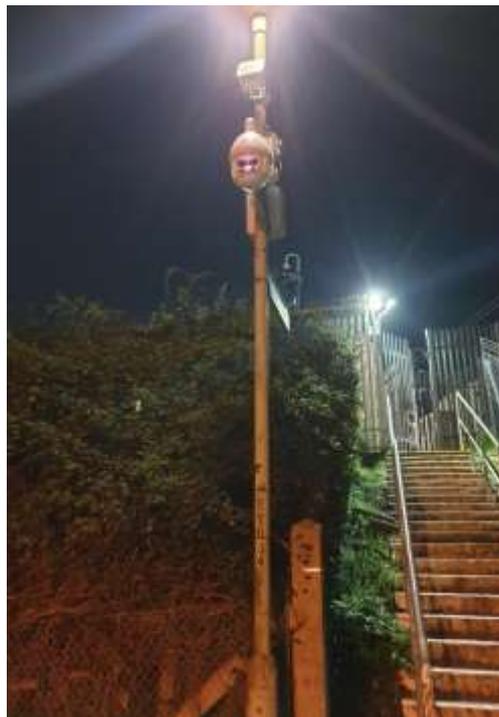


SPEED LIMIT BOWER ROAD

A Speed Limit Order on Bower Road, Mersham is on public deposit until 23 January 2023 and can be viewed on line at www.kent.gov.uk/highwaysconsultations



CCTV – STATION UNDERPASS



The promised CCTV camera has appeared after protracted debate over siting and land ownership. The location is not ideal, as some visibility issues arise, but this is progress along with improved lighting in the underpass. Separately, the two streetlights between the new camera and the underpass have been repaired. When Network Rail put the underpass lights in recently they had to move the power supply to a box in the underpass and for some reason they disconnected these lights not knowing they were fed from the same supply

from KCC. Network Rail were advised but they failed to rectify so ABC instructed a contractor to sort this out. The lights are now working.

STONESTREET SOLAR

The ABC planning committee considered the Statutory Consultation for the solar development in Aldington and Mersham on 7 December. My statement to the Committee is reproduced below following which the Committee agreed a Holding Objection.

The scheme does not yet meet the required standards of mitigation to minimize harm form on the rural countryside. I consider there are a number of fundamental objections by reference to Policy ENV10, ABC Guidance to Solar Farms and Planning Policy Statement, EN-3.

1. ABC guidance, which is supported by National Policy, is for PV panels have a design life of between 25 and 30 years. This application is for a 40-year life so is a reason for objection. A 40 year operational lifespan will directly impact characteristic features of the landscape because the removal of existing field boundaries and hedges to accommodate the arrays is not acceptable because this will be irrevocable damage.
2. The development will become a significant and defining characteristic of the villages and North Downs ANOB. Guidance says that large scale PV should avoid landscapes designated for their natural beauty, this development is within the setting of the ANOB. A wider zone of visual influence should have been considered which is required under National Policy. Because of the failure to investigate other areas that do not have such an effect on the local landscape, this application should be objected to. Specifically, Stonelees and Bank Farm are directly adjacent to the application site and suffer considerable harm. Furthermore, significant effects on residential visual amenity are identified in relation to residents on Bank Road and The Forstal and these should have been investigated and reviewed to identify opportunities for mitigation.
3. ABC guidance (supported by National Policy) requires developers to extend existing habitats, create new habitats and encourages biodiversity improvement around arrays. A development of this scale in the countryside requires a far greater element of green infrastructure to break up the scheme. Specifically, this could be achieved by installing new cultivated strips or plots for biodiversity gains such as wildflower planting. This can only be achieved by adopting a 5m buffer strip between solar arrays. Broad, open green corridors would reduce the massing and scale of the development and enhance the opportunity for biodiversity gains. This application does not provide for biodiversity improvement beyond the fact that land is taken out of agricultural use. This is a reason for objection as a matter of fundamental principle. The development fails to encourage biodiversity improvement in its own right and results in a loss of yellowhammer, skylark and brown hare habitats. Greater green infrastructure in this application would enhance the experience of PROW users; walking through a field of PV panels will not be a particularly enjoyable experience. The applicant suggests the land will be managed as unimproved grassland and this is simply not good enough, it should deliver environmental

benefit. Only 360 trees are proposed to be planted and this is a very poor show, new green planting is dwarfed by the scale of the development.

4. The fact that a significant element of the development is on grade 3a is a reason for objection; the developer argues that the lack of brownfield and suitable agricultural land in Ashford is a reason for the application to be approved. Their point is unreasonable; the lack of suitable land does not mean that development can be brought forward on unsuitable land. The view of ABC is that development should be outside the best and most valuable land which is supported in National Policy. The applicant suggests that because most of Ashford Borough is Best and Most Valuable Land, any solar development of a similar size in Ashford would result in a loss of Best and Most Valuable Land; this defeats the object of the policy. Furthermore, there is no assessment of the loss of existing use on the local agricultural economy; the reports tells us how many construction jobs will be gained but fails to set out how many jobs will be lost; the developer should have been clear about the overall loss of grade 3a land.
5. The application does not provide evidence of any substantial economic benefit. It does not say how the application can help retain the attractiveness of the location for tourism. Furthermore, the assessment of the effects of climate change does not include the carbon costs of producing the PV panels overseas and delivering them to the UK. There will be a direct benefit of 34,500 tonnes but we need to see the cost. There is an indirect cost in the supply chain of the development which must be properly explained.
6. National Policy Statement Para 2.54.7 requires the cumulative effect on the local road network to be considered by the highway authority to protect the residential amenity from multiple solar farm developments from impact of access routes. National Policy says that applicants of various projects should work together. There is no evidence that this has been done so is a reason for objection.
7. The application requires the deployment of 130 CCTV cameras which creates potential for invasion into residential amenity.

INTEGRATED CARE PARTNERSHIP

The Integrated Care Partnership met on 8th of December to recommend to KCC on 15th December a draft plan how the NHS in Kent and Medway will liaise better with Social Care Providers to improve the flow of patients. My role is to represent the east Kent area and my contribution was as follows.

This innovative new approach to healthcare can transform care for residents, focusing services on areas of greatest need, helping to reduce health inequalities and improve life expectancy.

I asked the Board adds support given by me as chair of Kent and Medway's Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to the East Kent Hospital's request for capital funding of £460m.

Acute NHS care in east Kent is not sustainable in its current form and the case for investment is undeniable. These calls have been added to by the Kirkup Report calling

for a new obstetric theatre in Margate, where clinical services are offered from buildings built in the 1930's. The wider programme for east Kent has been in discussion for over 20 years.

The latest response I had from the Department of Health and Social Care on 21st November was: "We are in the process of reviewing expressions of interest and aim to announce final decisions later in the year. While I am not in a position to provide a further update at this stage, the programme remains a key priority for the Government."

COUNCIL HOUSING – DECENT HOMES

The issue of damp and mould in Ashford's Council housing was discussed at the Council's Cabinet Committee on 15 December. It was singled out due to the current national interest following the media rightly reporting a coroner's verdict tragic death of a child in Rochdale. The Council's Housing service has produced a management action plan that details its approach to responding to reports of damp and mould. It is also briefing all internal stakeholders as to the Housing Ombudsman guidance on this matter and moving far away from 'lifestyle' as the assumption of causation. This will shift the responsibility from one of placing onus on the tenant to one of the Council adopting a zero-tolerance approach to damp and mould. All tenants will be written to, and those concerned will be asked to contact the Council, who will act quickly to rectify any issues.

At the same meeting a new Private Sector Housing Strategy sets out how the Council intends to deal with landlords who are failing to meet their obligations and ensure that residents renting from private sector landlords live in homes that are safe, well maintained and meet required standards.

It is the Council's intention that all of its social housing reaches at least an EPC C, by 2050. There are around 1,200 homes, within the managed stock that fall below an EPC band C. This is anticipated to cost around £20m, however it is expected this will be partially offset by government grant funding. The Council's first bid seeks just over £5m grant funding. Working at the planned pace, the Council would achieve an EPC C rating for all of its HRA stock by 2030, surpassing the Corporate Plan target of 2050.

The Council has recently completed three high-quality schemes, East Stour Court (29 homes), Berry Place (31) and Halstow Way (17). Future projects are unable to be progressed without mitigation for impact of nutrients on the Stodmarsh Lakes, though two schemes have planning approval 'subject to mitigation' – 55 Mabledon Avenue (20 homes) and Kilndown, Stanhope where a 5-bedroom house will be provided to add to stock numbers.

Plans for a 'zero-carbon in operation' independent living scheme at Oakleigh House for older persons and those with learning disabilities will be resubmitted for planning permission. Although Stodmarsh has affected the Council's

ability to build new homes, there is still a significant need in the borough. As a result the Council's route to delivering new affordable housing has been through acquisitions, such as the street purchase programme (110 homes since 2019/20), the acquisition of s106 homes (where Registered Social Housing Providers are unable or unwilling to step in, such as the acquisitions at Chilmington) and homes bought off-plan (notably at the New Quarter).

NEW WASTE COLLECTION CONTRACT

A new waste collection contract was agreed on 15th December. Collection will remain as alternate weekly, one week recycling and one week waste. To deliver a carbon reduction, two electric street cleansing caged vehicles will be used, subject to confirmation that UK Power Network are able to provide supply to the agreed depot. The bidder identifies that the annual CO2 saving in implementing this is 16 tonnes per annum. To mitigate carbon emissions, the bidders' vehicles will be Euro VI which is the highest available standard at time of tendering. The collection and cleansing routes will be optimised so that vehicles will travel the most efficient route saving time and reducing fuel consumption.

Further emissions will be reduced by ensuring restricted access routes are adhered to and driver behaviours (avoiding harsh acceleration and breaking and excessive speeds) are monitored to minimise emissions. On board cameras also aid in monitoring standards, inspections and investigation of incidents. The downward trend in fly tipping in the borough, has had a "knock on" effect enabling removing an dedicated refuse collection vehicle which is a saving of approximately £200,000 in capital, not including the additional human resource associated.

NEW PLANNING GUIDANCE

New planning guidance for developers was agreed at Council meetings on 15th and 16th December which is designed to help deliver more sustainable forms of development by reducing carbon emissions in new homes. The guidance advises that applicants should deliver solar photovoltaic (PV) panels, infrastructure for electric vehicle (EV) charging and facilities for rainwater harvesting.

The provision of solar PV and infrastructure for EV charging will help mitigate the impacts of climate change by reducing reliance on petrol and diesel cars and energy from non-renewables sources, which in turn, will help reduce carbon emissions. The provision of facilities for rainwater harvesting will encourage owner/occupiers to use water more sustainably to reduce pressure on mains water supply, which is important given that the borough is located in an area 'water stress'.

The guidance predominantly applies to schemes proposing new-build residential dwellings and dwellings resulting from a material change of use. However, applicants proposing to carry out certain types of householder development are also encouraged to apply the guidance.

WATERBROOK RESIDENTIAL

I attended a meeting on 22nd December to hear about progress on the planning application which is now expected in March 2023. The developer had originally argued that the open spaces surrounding the development should be taken into account as the definition of “open spaces” required for the purposes of the Local Plan. They have now accepted that the site should deliver additional open spaces within the housing itself to be compliant with the local plan. The site’s maximum capacity is reduced to 363 (from 400) units due to this and the nutrient neutrality constraints.

CCE agreement is outstanding for removing the area at the end of the "road to nowhere" from the application but it was noted that a footpath is expected through that part of site which would need consent.

FULL COUNCIL 22 DECEMBER 2022

The following is the report I delivered at the final council meeting of 2022.

I am pleased to report that on the 6th December the Leader received the Final Report from The Greater Ashford Borough - Environment & Land Mapping Commission. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Members of the Commission for their professional input to the examination of this important subject. This Final Report will now be the subject of detailed discussion and consideration regarding just how this work can meaningfully contribute to the effective management of our Borough. This work and the Commission's Recommendations will doubtless assist us in strengthening further, the protection to our environment, as well as informing our continuously evolving Corporate Plan and ongoing iterations of our vital Local Plan. A hard copy of their Final Report has been made available to all Elected Members.

I can announce this evening that the Leader has made the following changes in terms of Member responsibilities in the Administration. Cllr Buchanan, the Portfolio Holder for Housing has been appointed to Chair the Climate Change Advisory Committee, which has a role across all aspects of the Council's activities, and accordingly he will remain a Member of the Cabinet. Cllr Barrett, the current Chair of the Climate Change Advisory Committee, has been appointed as the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

As you will know Brompton Bikes have now lodged their Planning Application, which has been validated, for a new Factory as part of their proposed Global Headquarters Relocation here in Ashford. The application will be subjected to our rigorous planning process to ensure it meets the high standards upheld in this borough.

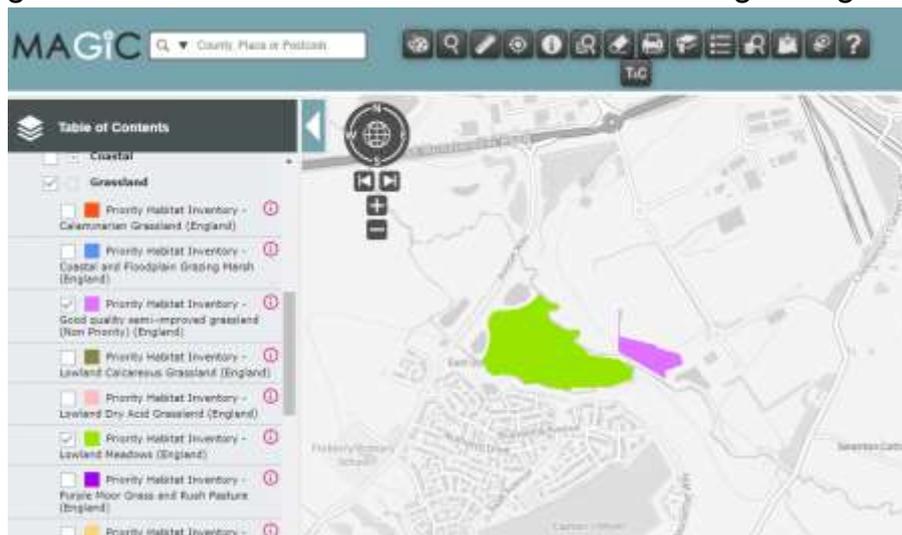
In terms of the Leader’s Report to Council, The Leader had intended to make a Summary Slide Presentation, but unfortunately Covid has intervened to frustrate that opportunity.

The Leader hopes to make a final address to Council in its last meeting of this four-year term in March 2023. I know the Leader would be keen to say that he could not possibly have done it without the support of all of us members and officers, past and present...."you have all done very well"

Christmas is traditionally a time for family and friends to join together. But there will be many this Christmas who will not enjoy the food, warmth and families that many of us take for granted. I am delighted to hear about the work of many in our community, supported by our councillors and officers, which bring hope and warmth to many. That will need to continue into 2023 as the cost-of-living crisis continues. Thank you to all of you who are working hard to protect our communities, merry Christmas and happy new year.

LANDSCAPE DESIGNATION

The government's public facing mapping system has been updated to show that some of the area of Finberry and Waterbrook now meet certain criteria for Priority Habitats (<https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>). The Finberry flood plain is shown as Lowland Meadow where a native provenance meadow seed mix was sown on development. At Waterbrook, Good Quality Semi Improved grassland is shown which is where orchids are growing.



The Waterbrook ecological report for the Mullberry Homes development does not show this new information as the report was produced at a time before the above information was produced. This will need to be communicated to the developer.

Kent County Council has committed to a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) of 20%. The government's latest BNG metric now includes a case study for a residential development. It has includes a table (reproduced below) showing how current ecological units on a site are calculated and thus how much BNG is needed. It is unclear at this stage what the Waterbrook application's mitigation strategy actually is.

Assumptions and limitations

Within this case study it is assumed that:

- In both scenarios:
 - Two thirds of the site will be taken up with the development (houses, gardens, roads, shops, etc), one third retained as open space, and 0.1ha of green roof is created – only the layout is different.
 - All hedgerows and lines of trees habitats that are present at baseline will be lost, apart from 0.05km of native species-rich hedgerow in moderate condition, with medium strategic significance. These are replaced by creating new, native species-rich hedgerows around the perimeter of the development.
- 0.53ha of woodland and 0.14km of hedgerow within the site are of medium strategic significance (i.e. location ecologically desirable but not in local strategy), due their connectivity with adjoining woodlands and hedgerows to the east and west.
- Remaining habitats are of low strategic significance.
- The target post-intervention condition of the proposed habitats is reached. (In practice this would require monitoring and oversight by an ecologist to ensure it was achieved).

Baseline biodiversity units – both scenarios

Using biodiversity metric 3, the biodiversity value of the site baseline was calculated to be 11.77 area habitat biodiversity units (AHBUs) and 1.83

Table 1. Number of biodiversity units for habitats within the site at baseline. Data extracted from biodiversity metric 3 calculation tool.

Habitat type	Area (ha) / length (km)	Habitat Distinctiveness	Habitat Condition	Strategic Significance	Baseline biodiversity units
Modified grassland	2.6	Low	Poor	Low	5.20
Other neutral grassland	0.52	Medium	Poor	Low	2.08
Mixed scrub	0.16	Medium	Poor	Low	0.64
Other woodland; broadleaved	0.19	Medium	Moderate	Low	1.52
Other woodland; broadleaved	0.53	Medium	Poor	Medium	2.31
Total habitat area	4.0ha	Total habitat units (AHBUs)			11.77
Native species rich hedgerow with trees	0.04	High	Moderate	Low	0.48
Native species rich hedgerow	0.14	Medium	Moderate	Medium	1.23
Line of trees (ecologically valuable)	0.01	Medium	Good	Low	0.12
Total hedgerow length	0.19km	Total hedgerow units (HBUs)			1.83

SALT BIN REFILS

Salt bins will now be empty following the cold weather in early December. I have ordered a refill for the one in Cheesemans Green Lane. You can report any other empty bins on the KCC website at <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-a-problem>



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

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