

## Report on 2025/26 for Marden & Yalding Ward Parishes' Annual Meetings

The Borough Election in May 2024 saw Claudine Russell re-elected as a Borough Councillor for the Ward, and 2 new Councillors elected from the Green Party, Michael Summersgill and Grace Couch; there was no election in 2025 or 2026, as the posts are for four years. The Council is still led by a Green & Independent Alliance and Liberal Democrat coalition, in minority control; a by-election in 2025 added three new ReformUK Councillors for one Ward, at the expense of three Independents.

Cllr. Russell leads the Conservative group on Maidstone Council (as well as now being a KCC Councillor for the Cranbrook Division) and is Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, holding the Cabinet to account on its policy directions; the topics that O&S have worked on this year have included assessing the Borough's Infrastructure provision via S.106 funding & Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies and reviewing the direction of Planning Enforcement.

Cllr. Summersgill's role as a Cabinet member changed in September 2025 from the portfolio covering Climate Transition & Nature Recovery to one covering Corporate Resources (which covers Budget and general Management), after an Independent councillor resigned her post. Mike has spent much of the half-year understanding the complexities of local government finance and preparing the budget for the coming financial year and what might change with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR); the latter is still a 'work in progress'! One legacy of his previous Cabinet role, which included updating the Council's Climate & Biodiversity strategy, was rewarded by MBC achieving 'Gold Award' status in the Kent Wildlife Trust awards in March, alongside just one other Town/District Council.

Cllr. Couch continues to utilise her previous experience as a council officer (in Swale and London Boroughs) to be applied in her role as vice-chair of the Policy Advisory Committee (PAC), dealing with climate themes, corporate matters and environmental services. Grace has also been working to recruit youth representation on LGR consultation and at the citizen deliberation on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). She also brought a 'member agenda item request' to the Health committee, securing £10,000 for a project to tackle period poverty.

Across the Borough and Ward, all three of us have been involved closely in dealing with individual issues and problems of many constituents, which have covered a wide range of issues, as well as matters affecting the wider community like continuing fly-tipping activity and concerns over Traffic. We have liaised closely with the five Parish clerks and numerous councillors, to facilitate or assist queries that they have brought up, and that may need MBC action. There have been several speculative Housing applications, or threats of applications, recently that we continue to monitor. It has also been great to support Borough-wide initiatives such as the fourth Eco-Hub last Autumn, grants to KWT for river restoration, homes for social rent, the first electric bin lorry in Kent, as well as drone expansion, prosecutions and vehicles being seized as part of waste crime initiatives.

Ward Councillors - Claudine Russell (Marden), Mike Summersgill (Hunton) & Grace Couch (Yalding)

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