

COUNCIL UPDATE 11.2023

GREEN SOCIAL PRESCRIBING GROUP

The Group was formed by KCC and the NHS to support social prescribing. Social prescribing has been around for 30 years but has been scaled up recently as it is now included as part of NHS plan. The Group had a presentation on 31st October from the Office for Health Improvements and Disparities discussed how the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCSC) & community infrastructure can secure investment to ensure funding follows GP referrals (social prescriptions). Medway and Swale Health and Care Partnership have created a MoU and Strategic Framework how VCSC secure grants, operate a community chest for social prescribing, micro-commissioning, and shared investment funds of up to £5k through a Community Project Officer. The first projects were “knit and natter”, watercolour, pottery and craft group with space in charity shops. The council budget was £60k of grants and £300k from the NHS; a cost per referral was calculated. In Surrey & East Sussex commissioning of these groups can be accessed via personal health budgets.

Social Impact Bonds from private investors have been deployed in Newcastle to provide the capital to establish providers who will be set up to create a paid for service.



ASHFORD LOCAL CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP GROUP

The Group met on 31st October. The key issues were covered.

1. Destructive conflict between parents having adverse effect on children. DWP say 12% of children live in “distressed” relationship. Kent has purchased three digital resources which can be supported or accessed direct. There is a course for new and expectant parents highlighting the stress this can have on parents. The second course is “arguing better”, highlighting the causes and impact on stress and conflict. Getting it Right For Parents is a course for separated parents and how that impacts on children. There is also debt management resources and how that impacts stress. The service is universal, not limited to those within Early Help or Social Services.
2. SEND Update. The Ofstead inspection has found this needs to demonstrate considerable improvement. KCC needs to demonstrate better parental confidence in getting the right information from the right people. There is a digital offer which will be the starting point, a SEND inquiry hub which is a telephone offer (currently taking 600 calls a week) who liaise with the back office. A SEND roadshow to give in person offer was trialled in Sheppy which will be replicated across all 12

districts – 18 June 2024 in Ashford. KCC need to know what should be the focus (i.e. what issues are parents facing). The venue is TBC and should be a community venue. The latest SEND newsletter has just been launched and can be subscribed for at the SEND inquiry hub. EHPC applications in Ashford continue to increase.

3. News on Family Hub consultation is expected at end of November 2023.
4. NEET (not in education, employment or training) numbers are still rising in Ashford. Ashford specific issues include: those in NEET also have EHPC, lack of bus links from rural area and parents with a “fixed view” of their child’s outcome. The NHS are launching a cadets scheme for 9 months until July 2024 which is targeting NEET, 16-18 years old.

SOUTHEAST WATER (SEW)

SEW hosted a webcast on 31st October on their priorities submitted to Ofwat. SEW have never been in public ownership and have always been privately owned. Kent will benefit from a new grid system to move water more efficiently around and more storage. My questions were on their billing during the cost-of-living crisis and are listed below (answers in capitals given at ABC Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 14th November):

- SEW will install smart metres on all customers by 2035. Electricity smart metres can be automatically switched to more expensive prepayment tariffs, please confirm this will not be the case for SEW? **NO INFORMATION FOR NOW**
- Lower use of water will be encouraged by tariffs – what does this mean? Is a higher charge proposed the more water used? **THE INDUSTRY IS LOOKING AT TARIFFS**
- SEW will create a range of social tariffs for eligible customers but plan to increase the eligibility threshold by 17%. What does this mean in practice, will access be means tested or through customers NI number (as are social tariffs are by telephone providers)? **NO INFORMATION WAS AVAILABLE**
- The SEW single person discount is not well known and needs to be better shared with customers – can SEW data share with ABC? **SEW & ABC WILL CONSIDER DATA SHARING. A DATA SHARING AGREEMENT IS IN PLACE BETWEEN SEW AND MAIDSTONE BC.**



How will the £1.9bn be invested?

Proposed investment in running the network - £1.061bn (+20%)



Investment area	£
Day to day running costs	£500m
Fuel, finance charges etc.	£180m
Maintaining assets	£270m
New development connections and associated network upgrades	£160m

Proposed investment in enhancing the network - £827m (+33%)



Investment area	£
Water resources - new water and demand reduction	£300m
Environment - improvements and nature	£50m
Water quality - ground rise water restoration	£50m
Emergency planning / cyber security	£10m
Resilience - storage and interconnectivity	£220m
Carbon - various including electrifying fleet	£147m

south east water

Water Services Fund

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

The group met on 2nd November. The key issues were:

- KCC have agreed the wall can be used on the station underpass to site a mirror, a risk assessment will be completed within the next 4 weeks.
- Information on e-scooters is being disseminated around local schools to improve awareness of the risks.
- An emergency trauma pack was deployed in town centre in October which had significant benefits. Funding is being sought for top up packs.
- 33 responses to PSPO in town centre (Churchyard gating order) were received and the order will be renewed for three years.
- Planned begging has been reported around Boots and Lower High Street, any future activity should be reported to csu@ashford.gov.uk
- There are 5 defibrillators in the town centre but funding is looked for 2 more as many of them are in County Square.
- 3 new beat officers have joined the Ashford Police Beat Team.
- A number of fires (predominately bins) have been reported by Kent Fire and Rescue in Victoria Park. An education plan is to be rolled out to ensure those responsible understand the possible consequences. Sk8side is planning some outreach work in that area. The new camera by the fountain is up and running along with one new static and one moveable camera near the community café.

STORM CIARAN

KCC responded swiftly to the clear up needed in Sevington on 2nd November during Storm Ciaran.



KENT & MEDWAY JOINT HEALTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The committee met on 3rd November to discuss the response by East Kent Hospital Trust (EKHUFT) failing to secure £460m of funding to reconfigure A&E services in east Kent under the Department of Health & Social Care's (DHSC) New Hospital Programme (NHP). The proposal was to create a new "super" hospital in Canterbury with a major assessment centre for emergency care in partnership with Quinn Estates or two upgraded centres in Margate and Ashford.

The reason the Department did not support the east Kent project was that priority was given to those hospitals with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC). There are national standards for intensive care space per bed and this standard is met and there has been investment into the critical care unit at the WHH.

The Government were aware of the problems with buildings constructed from RAAC many years ago. It would have saved 128 Trusts (and HOSCs) a lot of time and money if DHSC/NHS had decided earlier that priority would be given to the RAAC cases and not to consider any of the other 128 bids. If one assumes that each of the other 128 bids would have cost £1m+, this would have saved nearly £130m of public money (coincidentally the same amount needed by east Kent hospitals to upgrade their maternity service units - including the Neo-natal Intensive Care Units - following the Kirkup Report published last October).

The NHP covers the major capital investments in the acute sector to 2030, it would seem that east Kent is now at least ten years away from the investment required to bring or hospitals up to an acceptable standard and to ensure that all services are in the right location to give the best possible care for our residents.

EKHUFT have been made aware of £130m of capital that will be available over the next five years but that is already spoken for other critical projects. They are working to identify what alternate sources of capital might be available.

ALDI PETITION

Aldi have launched a petition to remove the restrictive planning covenant that they cannot open without a smaller convenience store being started on Finberry. The view from ABC planning department is that nothing can be gained by winding up the Council planners. The Church Commissioner for England (relevant landowners) have been told what they need to do to unlock the situation by ensuring Finberry local centre gets off the ground to benefit residents and get a mixed-use scheme. The Planning Consultants should understand the need to avoid mono-use communities given what they say on their website about mixed use sites they have helped being promoted. ABC are working hard to protect Finberry from under delivery by CCE. A resolution is expected during January following a meeting at ABC on 21st November.



Petition

We're planning to send a petition to the Council calling for them to remove the restrictive planning condition so that Aldi can start on site now. Without removing this condition it could be another few years before a store can open. Your support can add significant weight to the argument to allow Aldi to start construction.

To add your name to the petition, you can either contact us using the details below, or visit the website where you can see the petition statement

www.planningpotential.co.uk/waterbrook

We thank you for your continued support. **With your help we hope to bring Aldi to Waterbrook soon.**

CONTACT US

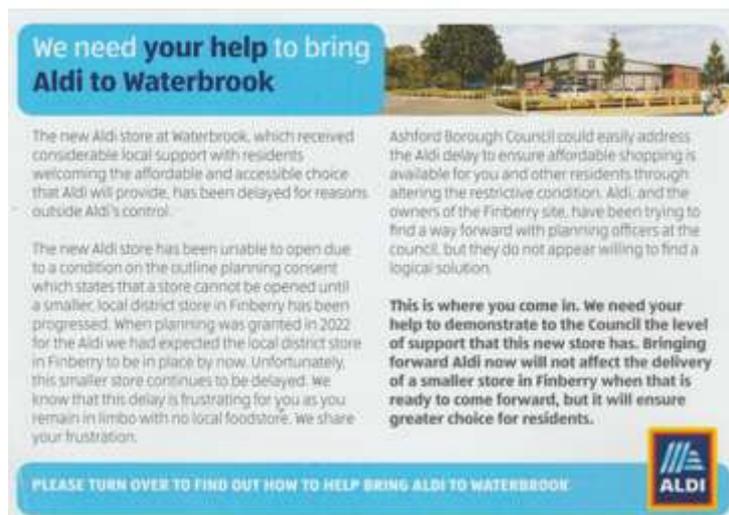
If you have any questions or would like to show your support, please contact us at:

020 7397 5212
aldewaterbrook@planningpotential.co.uk

Delivered to  ROYAL MAIL

To the Resident
Imbir
Chesseman's Green Lane
Sevington
ASHFORD
TN24 0LJ

Return address: Communications Potential, 130-148 Toulay Street, London SE1 2TU



We need your help to bring Aldi to Waterbrook

The new Aldi store at Waterbrook, which received considerable local support with residents welcoming the affordable and accessible choice that Aldi will provide, has been delayed for reasons outside Aldi's control.

The new Aldi store has been unable to open due to a condition on the outline planning consent which states that a store cannot be opened until a smaller local district store in Finberry has been progressed. When planning was granted in 2022 for the Aldi we had expected the local district store in Finberry to be in place by now. Unfortunately, this smaller store continues to be delayed. We know that this delay is frustrating for you as you remain in limbo with no local foodstore. We share your frustration.

Ashford Borough Council could easily address the Aldi delay to ensure affordable shopping is available for you and other residents through altering the restrictive condition. Aldi and the owners of the Finberry site, have been trying to find a way forward with planning officers at the council, but they do not appear willing to find a logical solution.

This is where you come in. We need your help to demonstrate to the Council the level of support that this new store has. Bringing forward Aldi now will not affect the delivery of a smaller store in Finberry when that is ready to come forward, but it will ensure greater choice for residents.

PLEASE TURN OVER TO FIND OUT HOW TO HELP BRING ALDI TO WATERBROOK



MONEY MENTAL HEALTH

I attended the Kent and Medway Better Health Network meeting on 7th November. It heard from providers supporting mental health during the cost-of-living crisis. Including Citizen's Advice, KCC Financial Hardship Programme, the Shaw Trust and the Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health.

MONEY AND MENTAL HEALTH/PERINATAL PROJECT

- ▶ STARTED IN 2021 WITH THE AIM OF PROVIDING A MORE DEDICATED SERVICE TO CLIENTS SUFFERING FROM MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS
- ▶ THE FUNDING HAS PROVIDED DEDICATED, PAID ADVISERS WHO ARE ABLE TO SUPPORT THE CLIENT ON A ONE-TO-ONE BASIS
- ▶ FOCUS ON DEBT AND BENEFITS BUT HOLISTIC ADVICE COVERS OTHER AREAS SUCH AS HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT
- ▶ PREVENTATIVE WORK IN IDENTIFYING VULNERABLE CLIENTS WHO CONTACT OUR CORE SERVICE AND OFFERING SUPPORT UNDER THE PROJECT

KCC offer a referral system which started at the beginning of the pandemic. It has 124 organisations under its umbrella. It includes a Financial Hardship Programme, a Residential work stream linked to the delivery of the Household Support Fund and other schemes that aim to improve the financial resilience of an individual. <https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/cost-of-living-support>. As part of the Financial Hardship Programme at KCC, KCC can offer support with people that are digitally excluded - Digital Kent is open for the free supply of devices for Kent residents on referral from a professional.

The Shaw Trust now has 21 partners offering individual Placement and Support for those with Severe Mental Health (SMI) into paid employment. Only 8% in Kent with SMI are currently in employment.

A new national suicide prevention strategy has been published. There are new areas of focus including adding new mothers to the group that need additional support. The new strategy can be accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-strategy-for-england-2023-to-2028/suicide-prevention-in-england-5-year-cross-sector-strategy>

HIGHFIELD LANE LITTER BIN

I reported the new litter bin on the IBF footpath as being full about 6 weeks after it being put in. It has been emptied and its use can be used as evidence to support further bins on the IBF footpath network.



RURAL AND COMMUNITY LOCAL NEEDS HOUSING

ABC has taken over the role previously carried out by ACRE on assessing local needs housing and housing for older people. This includes carrying out surveys supporting the need before a housing association can proceed with a scheme. A briefing session on the service was held on 8th November.

They will carry out surveys in conjunction with parish councils and help find sites for development. They can be flats or housing and the development size is normally 8 houses. There is no RTB so remain available in perpetuity. They were instrumental in bringing forward the scheme in Mersham. These developments are not normally permitted so the land value is lower enabling the affordable development to be brought forward with the rural housing association.



They also support the delivery home for older people who own their own housing to help them stay in the area and support community-led development on land owned by parish councils.



REDROW PRESENTATION RE CONNINGBROOK PARK

The developers presented at Kennington CC on 8th November.

- KCC are signing off the “SCOOT” assessment for the changes to the traffic lights along the A28. Draft plans have been submitted and these will determine the nature of improvements (if any including a pedestrian crossing) to Bybrook Road junction.
- The Bowls Club was planned to be delivered by 300th occupation but this may be delayed by the archaeological excavations.
- No mitigation is planned following the removal of the cycleway along the A2070. Future mitigation will be considered under s106 agreement.
- The show home will open in December 2023 with first occupation planned for April 2024.
- There are no allotments planned.
- The management company arrangements will be circulate in view of issues with HML who are ***not*** planned to be used.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Councillors attended a Climate Change workshop on 9th November to discuss what changes can be made to the planning permission process in Ashford during the local plan review. The following issues were discussed:

- Strategic Wildlife Corridors to be in place in the new Local Plan will mean that there is development around designated areas that wildlife can move through unimpeded. Applications are currently considered on a case by case basis so it would be good to have strategic corridors that development builds around in their plans
- Ashford is served well in many directions by cycling / walking routes but there is a clear gap of cycle route provision from South Ashford towards Hythe/Folkestone.
- The new local plan needs to work with PROWs staying in place rather than moving them. Far too often we see the footpaths kicked off to the side of a development as if it's an inconvenience to the developers.

- The Bat Conservation Trust has just released their new Bats and Artificial Lighting guidance for planners. Their previous version published in 2018 has now been updated by this new guidance which is far better for bats.
- Following the Sycamore Gap tree felling, the new local plan must make sure single mature trees need to be felled. Developers like grid design which can be impeded by one tree.
- The Stour and WWTW provides opportunities for heat extraction. There are space and opportunities around the town for this development.

CYP MENTAL HEALTH

A pre-market engagement event was held by the ICB on 9th November regarding CYP Mental Health services. A new study has found that a quarter of Year 13 students sought mental health support over the past year, but many were struggling to access services. Out of 417,000 children and young people in Kent & Medway, 54,000 have a probable mental health disorder with 16,000 under NHS treatment. The last review of services was carried out in 2016/17 since when we have COVID and cost of living crisis which have exacerbated the situation. A framework called iTHRIVE will develop a framework to describe and navigate information and supports. A new digital offer will be in place for January 2024 and new providers in August 2025. The focus will remain eating disorders, USAC, trans, ADHD and looked after / care leavers including those within the youth justice system.

STONESTREET SOLAR – PUBLIC MEETING

A public meeting was held at Aldington Village Hall on 9th November. The key points are that ABC have filed an objection to the scheme on scale, impact on landscape and visual impact and are fully behind the community. Likewise, KCC has asked for more information on the traffic management scheme and visual impact from PROW. A new group has been formed to support the parish councils, Aldington & Mersham Support Group. A third round of consultation starts 13th November, but this is just for statutory consultees.

Coincidentally, the head of National Grid has repeated a call for reforms to reduce delays to the rollout of renewable energy across the UK. Solar farms are being forced to wait as long as 14 years before they can be connected to the grid and start producing electricity. Research shows more than 1,000 clean energy projects are in limbo due to waiting.

Aldington & Mersham Support Group

Managing the threat of solar development

The objective of the Group, according to the 'mandate' provided by the unanimous vote of those present at the Aldington & Bonnington Parish Council meeting on 14th November 2022, is:

To oppose the Stonestreet Green Solar project due to its inappropriate location, scale and cumulative effect

The next step in the Stonestreet Green Solar project will be the applicant's submission of their Development Consent Order (DCO) application, together with an Environmental Statement and other related documents. The timing of which is currently unknown.

The process to be managed by the Support Group is prescribed by the Planning Inspectorate and is defined overleaf.

1. In relation to the Statutory Consultation process, completed in July 2023

- The preparation of a document which will define our Adequacy of Consultation submission and deliver it to the Planning Inspectorate
- If subsequently considered appropriate, the submission of the Adequacy of Consultation document directly to the Secretary of State

2. In relation to the Preliminary Meeting and Examination which will consider and process the DCO application

- The appointment and briefing of legal resource to advise and represent the Aldington & Mersham community throughout the process
- The preparation and evaluation of a strategy that will define our case, together with the identification and recruitment of specialist resources to support our case
- The research and compilation of subject matter according to the structure and content of the strategy, together with the delivery of subject matter to the Examination via the Preliminary Meeting

3. Also to deliver communications to each household in Aldington & Mersham that will inform the community and seek their support

If you wish to make contact, please email us on postmaster@supportgroup.community

3rd November 2023

IBF

UK Government have decided that Sevington is to be the only Border Control Port (BCP) dealing with the Short Straits crossing traffic. ABC we will deal with all foodstuff goods from Dover as well as Euro Tunnel. There will not be facility at Bastion Point in Dover. ABC will work with central government and stake holders to make this site a success as part of the Brexit process as the scale of work will be much greater for ABC. Sevington IBF was always the favourite due to the road network and the fact there is a HMRC facility. A DEFRA facility is also expected at Sevington IBF.

ASDA UNDERPASS

I have reported a missing "Cyclist Dismount" approaching the underpass from Asda (ref 757240).



KINGSFORD STREET GULLY

I have reported a blocked gully on Kingsford Street (ref 757239).



CHUGGERS

Regretfully on 10th November ABC received complaints with reference to the approaches being applied by charity collectors in the town centre. One referred to following people down the street with an intimidating approach.

ABC regulate street collections under the Police, Factories (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1916. This however only covers cash collections. Direct debit collecting is separately regulated by the Fundraising Regulator, who have their own codes of conduct for fundraisers, and a complaints process - See <https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/complaints/make-complaint>

That being said, a charity (and their professional fundraisers) does need to book the display space for any stands. This can be rescinded if the techniques prove unprofessional, however if they only have a tiny pedestal stand, it would be likely that they simply continuing collecting minus the stand. However, ABC have contacted the relevant booker, immediately relayed the complaints, and reminded fundraisers to ensure that approaches remain appropriate and do not cross code of conduct standards.

HYPHE ROAD

I attended a meeting on traffic issues on Hythe Road with officers on 13th November. We agreed that a speed survey will be carried out to identify whether a reduced speed limit to 20mph is feasible.

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

The partnership met on 14th November.

- ASB Hotspot Patrols are being piloted by 10 forces with increased uniformed patrol to increase presence. It is about improving the perception of safe places and reducing ASB in target areas. It is connected with Immediate Justice with visible offenders wearing high viz jackets in the local community cleaning up the area within 28 hours. This “unpaid work” is deployed at The Limes each Tuesday, the BBC planned filming on 14th February.
- Martyn’s Law will apply for enhanced security at large events. If more than 500 attend, training and risk assessment must be in place. An 8-week period of consultation will take place.
- Stagecoach have created a short 4 minute video on the effect of ASB on busses and that effects drivers and passenger. This to be rolled out within the Year 9 roadshow after February half term which includes the e-scooter presentation.
- There are reports of ASB in stairwell at the Panorama Building. The issue will be raised with the management company.
- The town centre PSPO has been renewed and extended to cover Elwick Place.

FREEDOM LEISURE

Councillors had a presentation on 14th November concerning Freedom Leisure service delivery including general maintenance and cleanliness. Usage of the Stour Centre has only just reached pre-COVID levels. Monthly surveys are now carried out by Council Officers and a new Operations Framework and cleaning regime has been put in place by Freedom. Two additional cleaners have recruited (at Freedom's cost) following a series of complaints about cleanliness. Recent innovations include:

- Cardiac Arrest Clinics – a specialised clinic for people who have had a cardiac arrest or are at risk of having one with expert advice and support.
- Home Education Clip and Climb – extended to include swim for home educated children.
- Walking Football – a dedicated group for Parkinson's patients now meets weekly.
- NEET programme – a programme helping NEETS to develop interview skills and discipline through activities such as boxing sessions.
- Kent Refuge Football – in collaboration with Refuge UK for UASC.
- Refugees Cricket with KCCC.

FRIENDS OF VICTORIA PARK

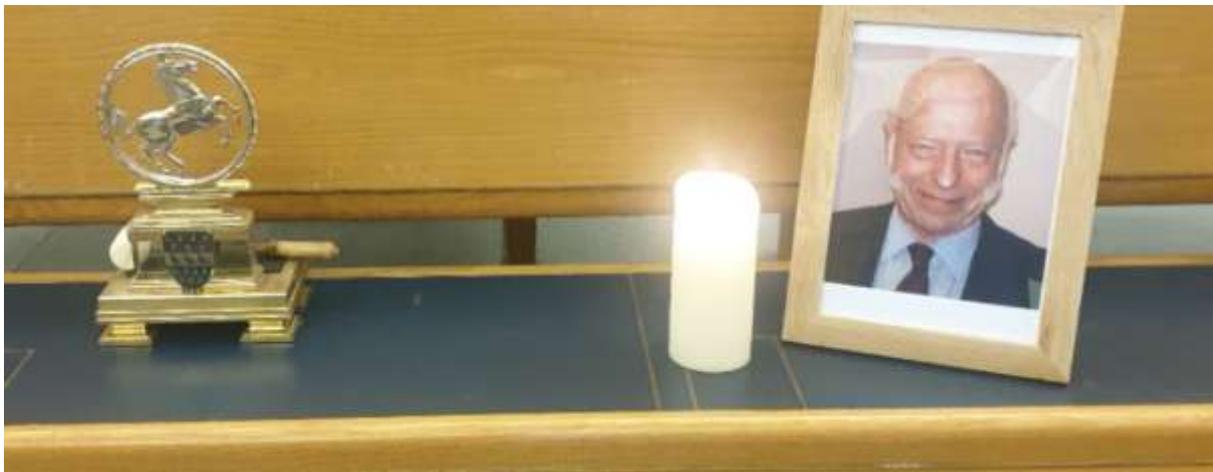
The AGM was held on 15th November. Key issues included:

- The costs are met by Ashford Community Lottery Fund
- FoVP has joined the Task and Finish Group to investigate the formation of a Foundation Trust to help support further development in the park.
- The new public toilets will be fully functional "quite soon".
- Work on the tarmacking and white lining of the MUGA is nearly finished and should be open soon.
- Work has been completed by the equipment designers to inhibit climbing outside the pentagons. This and the location of the rocks has been signed off by ROSPA.
- The gates have been reinstalled on the Christchurch Road entrance.
- Work on the entrance by the fountain has been delayed to a power cable needed to be dug lower in the ground.
- The Green Flag submission is due January 2024.
- The adult gym is still being investigated.
- New CCTV has been installed and additional lighting is considered, subject to ecological constraints.
- The wassail is scheduled for 15th January.
- Additional trees for the community orchard are planned.

FORMER KCC COUNCILLOR DEREK SMYTHE

Following the death of a KCC councillor, current councillors are invited to provide their recollections at the next full council meeting. These are my recollections of Derek Smyth given on 15th November.

Thank you, Chairman, for giving me time to share with colleagues my recollections of Derek and the hard work he gave the people of Ashford. I have known Derek and Norma for many years and the fact that we represented different parties did not matter one jot as he worked steadfastly hard to support his residents, local Forums and his colleagues to deliver the very best outcome for residents. Locally he was known for his work in securing the Ray Allen Centre, the John Wallis Academy, the Sure Start Willow Centre and the Stanhope estate improvements through PFI. He was extremely well respected, and his recent funeral was very well attended with many people across the county. Although he has not been a councillor for a few years he was still a strong supporter of many local initiatives, notably the new community council in Kennington where he lived. Until relatively recently he would attend community meetings and give his insight during public sessions. He was known for mentoring new community councillors, some now borough councillors and I am confident that in years to come he will have kicked started many onto greater things. Thank you, Derek.



A2070

I have asked KCC to contact National Highways and ask for a "Left Turn Only" sign on the central reservation of the A2070 on the Church Road exit. It has been reported when the shifts change at the IBF a number of exiting staff turn right onto the A2070 from Church Road. This is presumably to avoid the time it takes going down to the new traffic lights to make a turn in Waterbrook or Orbital. In view of the fact that the BCP will now be located at the IBF and not split between Sevington and Bastion Point, there will be more staff at the IBF so it becomes more important.



CHILDRENS CENTRES AND FAMILY HUBS

Councillors met to discuss the outcome of the consultation on changes to the Children Centres on 22nd November. KCC has too many buildings with a significant maintenance backlog. Just 10% of children and young people have accessed the children centres in the last year so the delivery methods clearly need to change to meet the needs of the community with a digital offer and face-to-face community outreach using KCC workforce. The plan is to reinvest capital receipts from surplus buildings into those buildings that we need to keep. The implication for Ashford is that the Ray Allen Centre (which has been closed for years) will be redeveloped for housing (including social housing) and the proceeds reinvested into improvements at Stanhope Library / Willow Centre.

CENTRAL ASHFORD HIGHWAYS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

I have added to the central HIP a request for improved exit from Barrow Hill Terrace at the Barrow Hill roundabout. This will assist with poor sightlines and the fact that traffic from the town centre does not expect traffic to exit this side road.

EAST KENT HEALTH AND CARE PARTNERSHIP

I attended a meeting at Ashford International on 23rd November to discuss how the NHS can move away from its silo mentality and develop a person centric approach. This will improve discharge from hospitals and maintain independence at home. This is key to building healthier communities. We discussed a better way of using rehab beds, work with therapists, and delivering single handled training for discharge so multiple health professionals are not needed. Personalised plans were discussed as a better way forward rather than a one size fits all; for example, standard discharge rules may require a patient to show they can make a 30 metre walk on their Zimmer frame when only 10 metres is required due to their home set up.

ABC RELOCATION TO INTERNATIONAL HOUSE

The council met on 23rd November to give this further consideration. Concerns were expressed about a range of issues including the future of the Civic Centre, the size and shape of a future council chamber & meeting rooms, the level of working from home (WFH) implied by the current costing figures and exactly how WFH (particularly for senior staff) might change and affect costings in future and information regarding current tenants in the Civic Centre. However, the proposal was approved, and we will have to see how it pans out.

HML FINBERRY

Crest have not yet agreed to ABC's request to meet and discuss the ongoing management issues following personnel changes at Crest. HML's retender process of the ground maintenance has been completed. A new contractor called Limetree Maintenance have been appointed to maintain the communal areas of Finberry who commenced work on 24th November. Photos of any areas that may have been missed should be sent to michelle.henry@hmlgroup.com. They are due on site twice per week going forward. ABC continue to explore legal options, but in reality that is no solution as the only winners if they go down that route are lawyers. The point is Crest made undertakings as to upkeep of the village as part of the planning process. The better way forward is to meet, discuss and reach agreement. Crest need to work with all stakeholders including ABC/KCC as their business is dependent on goodwill.

EV CHARGING POINTS GRANT

The Government has awarded ABC £127,595 for 2024/25 to fund 80% of the cost of EV charging points in publicly accessible car parks located in the rural area. The maximum grant for each scheme is £12k.

RURAL PLACE AND PROVENANCE GRANT

The Government has awarded ABC £77,345 for hospitality businesses. It is designed to support smaller projects aimed at boosting productivity and sustainability of tourism, hospitality or food and drink businesses. The first grants to be issued by March 2024.

CENTRAL ASHFORD COMMUNITY FORUM

The Forum met on 27th November. The key issues included:

- A letter of thanks to be issued to Michelle, Malcolm will be asked to arrange a small gift.
- The future of the Forum was discussed. It was agreed that a drive for new members (including businesses) through FB is to be carried out. Having regular meetings in the diary will help.
- It was agreed the Forum will meet every two months on the second Monday the first being 8th January 2024 at the Beehive. It was agreed

that Geoff would ask the Town Centre Regeneration Manager (Keli and assistant Mikella) to attend– we may also invite Tom Jenkins / Cllr Betty from ABC but this is TBC. The Forum can then look to having a meeting with town centre businesses; this will need to be in a larger venue than the Beehive.

- Feedback on the Carnival of the Baubles was less positive than previous years due to competing events in Tenterden and the Hospice Fayre at Grosvenor Hall. There was footfall in the town but not as much as previous years it was thought.
- The Civic Centre relocation was discussed including traffic management, reuse of the Civic Centre and relocation of the monitoring centre and civic suite was discussed. The Forum will be kept informed and will provide comments as appropriate.
- New planning rules allowing conversion of houses into flats was discussed as to how the conversion as to how it would be policed by the planning authority.
- The impact on businesses on the SW works in the Lower High Street was a concern. Jim to write to Jane Leaver with questions on the nature of the work to ask if she has a contact with KCC/SW.
- Feedback is needed from businesses on the review of car parking charges. “Free after Three” works well for County Square and Elwick Square but not the rest of the town centre. A scheme like Tenterden (first hour free in the High Street) could be replicated in Ashford but feedback is needed by from town centre businesses. Better communication is needed on when the High Street is open, as it is not clear.
- The Forum supports the reinstatement of a shop front policy in the next version of the local plan.
- Cllr Campkin to be invited to a future meeting to discuss walking and cycling.
- Plans for a speed reduction scheme reduction in Godinton Road and Western Ave are being progressed.

STONESTREET SOLAR - CONSULTATION

The deadline for comments on the third round of consultation was 30th November. Here are my submitted comments on highways issues which went in via KCC officers.

The paragraph numbers are taken from EPL 001's Summary Note. The comments in italics are issues that affect the traffic. This has an impact within Mersham and Sevington.

2.2.2 Land that is required for the Project will be included within the site boundary to ensure that all necessary powers over that land to enable the Project to proceed can be granted by the development consent order. The existing hardstanding access tracks to Bank Farm are therefore proposed to be included within the site boundary as this land is necessary to ensure access via Bank Farm for the duration of the Project.

2.2.3 It is expected that this minor change would not result in new or materially different likely significantly environmental effects compared to those previously described in the PEIR and PEIR Addendum for all technical topics.

The Bank Farm driveway is a single track with one passing place (adjacent to the entrance into Broadbanks). It is used by multiple businesses including the Bank Farm Egg Machine retail outlet with multiple car visitors. The applicant needs to specify how the hard standing access tracks within Bank Farm will be utilised and should do so in order that traffic impacts and risk to other road users may be assessed.

2.3.2 Following further construction vehicle tracking analysis at the entrance point into Field 20 along Goldwell Lane, it has been determined that the inclusion of the grass verge would be advantageous as it would provide a wider turning circle for construction vehicles, during the construction and decommissioning phases, avoiding the requirement to remove vegetation to the south of the access point.

The inclusion of this verge will not address the need for greater space for HGV vehicles to turn into Field 20, its use is unsuitable for this purpose and would be likely to be significantly damaged as well as impacting the edge of Goldwell Lane. The use of the verge will impact pedestrians. There are concerns about the impact upon AE474 (which connect the Church to the village) and the site entrance to Aldington Primary School. The difficulties of access Aldington via Goldwell Lane will result on additional traffic using Cheesmans Green Lane and Bank Road to access Aldington, both of which are unsuitable and cannot cope with additional traffic due to the width of the roads at various points.

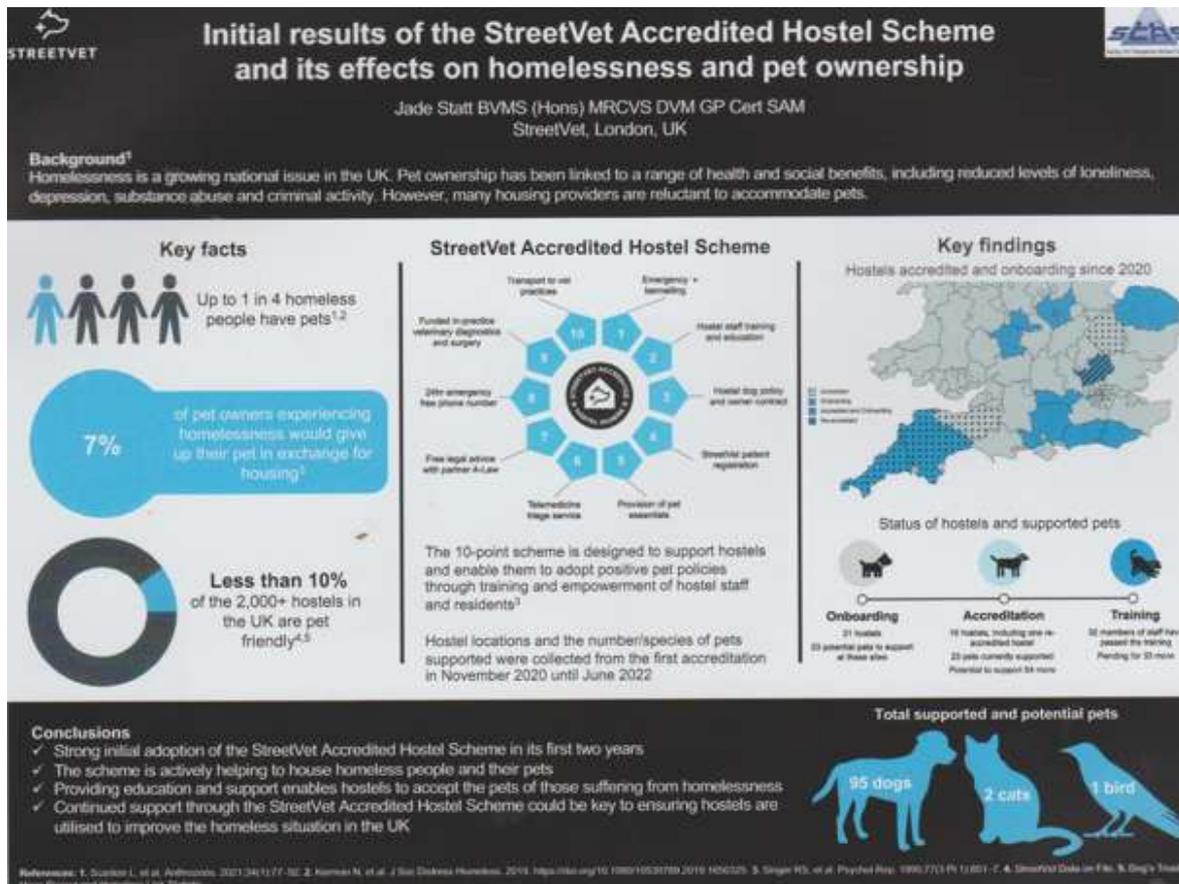
2.4.2 Following further analysis of vehicle tracking, during construction, operation and maintenance, and decommissioning phases at the main access point to the Project, it has been determined that the inclusion of a small section of Station Road and associated verges would ensure that the Project has all necessary powers over that land to manage visibility splays throughout the Project's life cycle. This ensures that the Project would be able to align with current and future UK road safety requirements.

Station Road is currently the main entrance and exit road for the majority of Aldington residents. Any control the highway should be opposed as the applicant will likely prioritise construction needs above that of other road users. Within the PIER there is also suggestion of a traffic crossing further along Station Road as well as an exit for traffic heading into Goldwell Lane. All will entail traffic management which will result in disruption for road users and could potentially mean multiple impact points along the same road, with few safe alternative routes available. The difficulties of access Aldington via Goldwell Lane will result on additional traffic using Cheesmans Green Lane and Bank Road to access Aldington, both of which are unsuitable and cannot cope with additional traffic due to the width of the roads at various points.

DRAFT ABC BUDGET 2024/25

The budget was considered at a meeting on 30th November. There is an increase in Homelessness budget by £900k (now £1.6m) I expressed concerns about homelessness with dogs – 1 in 4 of homeless have dogs and 7% of those experiencing homelessness would consider giving up their pets in exchange for a home but less than 10% of hostels providing homeless accommodation are pet friendly. The Royal Kennel Club have recently

reported the results of its StreetVet Accredited Hostel Scheme. I asked if our homelessness properties accepted homeless with pets and I received some assurance.



There are 4 reasons why the budget position could be better:

- the impact of Government increasing the LHA (Local Housing Allowance) rate at the Autumn Statement needs to be considered. The rate has been restored to its 2020 level of the 30th percentile of market rents. The change will assist in unlocking further investment through the immediate uplift and establishing a long-term policy position which investors like. ***This is anticipated to reduce the cost of Homelessness as the benefit moves closer to the rent being charged.***
- The Autumn Statement announced ***premium fee for fast tracked applications which has not been taken into account.*** It brings in the potential for full fee recovery for 'major business' planning applications that were determined within a guaranteed timeframe.
- A £270k is a payment made through a Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) on the waste contract from KCC. This payment reflects savings made (or additional income generated) from improved recycling rates. Following a recent meeting with ***KCC they have advised they will be recommending payment for next year.***
- The auditors report the results of the triennial review of the Pension Fund as at 31 March 2022 which reducing the deficit (for ABC) of £4.8m

and results in reduced pension funding payments by £200k. ***I have asked the chair of the Pension Fund to consider an interim valuation which may allow a further reduction in pension funding payment.***

The 2.99% increase in CT means an income increase in absolute terms of £272,000. It would seem to me that the effect of the these issues allows the CT to be frozen.

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