

COUNCIL UPDATE 3.2024

COMMUNITY SAFETY TASK GROUP

The group met on 28th February and discussed priorities.

- Rowdy or nuisance gathering in public – drug use a particular problem including the smell as it emerges from residential properties.
- Drunken and rowdy behaviour.
- Parking nuisance and offenses.
- Weapons.
- Violence against women and girls (VAWG) domestic violence.
- Hate crime.

Actions to deliver improvements in these issues included.

- Police response – build a better relationship with town centre officers.
- Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) could be amended to include drug offenses (currently they cover consuming alcohol and “being likely to cause” ASB) – ABC have enforcement powers (asking offenders to surrender their drink) but ABC need more resources to do that.
Councillors asked for a paper on how this could be resourced from Civil Enforcement Officers or CCTV staff. This would show the police that ABC are prepared to act so they will also up their game.
- CCTV can be used to enforce PSPOs in partnership with the police and they are people they know.
- Youth provision in the town centre can provide a diversion for youth away from ASB. A mapping of what is available is required so gaps can be identified.
- Education interventions as part of school services.
- Better intelligence and community leadership.
- A publicity drive on “dog bones” including a review of pricing (only one put in by ABC in last year).
- ASB by housing needs to be brought under a single reporting system which will bring the council towards a unified system.
- ABC communications need to set out their achievements to date on tackling ASB – capture the good stuff!

MOVING TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS

KCC has been designated the powers to enforce moving traffic contraventions (such as driving through a ‘no entry’ sign, or on routes meant for buses only) under civil law, as a last resort when all reasonable engineering steps have been taken to design out driver non-compliance. This will apply at the redesigned bus gates in Sackville Crescent, Beaver Road and Bluebell Road Accommodation Bridge. It is hoped it can be extended to Avocet Way / Damara Way to facilitate the extension to the B-Line. The Penalty Charge issued to drivers contravening the law is set at £70, or £35 if paid within 21

days of the Penalty Charge Notice being received by the registered owner of the vehicle.

KCC's CONTRIBUTION TO CYPMHS

KCC agreed to provide five months' notice on 1 April 2024 to the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board of the withdrawal of investment for fast-tracked assessments for Looked After Children (LAC) and Harmful Sexual Abuse from 1 September 2024 provided by the North-East London Foundation Trust (NELFT). The cost of the KCC investment into Childrens and Young Persons Mental Health Services (CYPMHS) per annum is £1,267,000. It has not been determined since 2017 whether Kent LAC, having received their initial assessment, are waiting the standard time for the start of intervention or not. It has not been demonstrated that a Kent LAC has a priority service over other non-LAC referrals. The funding is for a fast-track assessment, not fast-track intervention. There is no evidence to suggest that this decision would result in a reduced service. It has always been acknowledged that children and young people access the service based on risk and clinical need.

MEDWAY MARITIME HOSPITAL

Medway Hospital in Chatham has become the second trust in the UK following St Guys in London to adopt the newest robotic-assisted surgery (RAS) device, called Hugo. It is the hospital's second surgical robot, following the introduction of the Da Vinci robot in 2017 which has so far carried out more than 1,500 urology and colorectal procedures. Thanks to the introduction of Hugo, from March, the hospital can expand robotic surgery to include more urology and colorectal procedures, and also start offering robotic gynaecology procedures, creating a multi-specialty robotic service that will benefit more patients.

This minimally invasive surgery means patients experience less pain and reduced blood loss, spend less time in hospital, recover faster and have fewer complications. They have also secured a partnership with Hugo's manufacturers, Medtronic, to create a national training centre for this robot here at Medway, one of two in the UK, for teaching, training and research for robotic surgery. This will not only benefit nurses, doctors and theatre practitioners, but also give NHS colleagues from other trusts the opportunity to develop their specialist robotic skills, helping to further enhance the hospital's reputation as innovative place to work.

HOUSING QUALITY REVIEW

A recent housing quality audit has been carried out which found that ABC's property management framework, which should provide assurance that compliance and building safety are being delivered and managed, is not as effective as it should be. Record keeping and reporting mechanisms are not providing a clear audit trail of routine or follow-up maintenance being carried

out. This means that ABC are not able to demonstrate that they are meeting our legal and obligatory requirements. It was also highlighted that to demonstrate our Decent Homes Standard ABC need to conduct a full stock condition survey. This means that every council home will be inspected to assess the maintenance requirements of that home.

The Council will be writing to the Regulator informing them that it is preparing to introduce a range of measures aimed at resolving the shortcomings. We pay Council Tax to provide decent homes for those who need them, maybe the new administration is taking its eye off the ball by looking to run cinemas when it needs to concentrate of getting the basic council functions right?

WATERBROOK NEW HOMES PLANNING APPLICATION (PA/2024/00260)

The following comments on this application were discussed at the PC meeting on 4 March 2024.



There are no trees shown on the schematic of the wetland mitigation which is designed to offset the nutrient run off which is currently damaging Stodmarsh reserve on the Stour River.

The trees proposed to be removed as part of the wetland creation will remove an important habit which is one of the only territories in Ashford inhabited by nightingales. They require messy cathedral like shrub which is exactly what they have right now. The species are 100% site faithful which means they migrate to the same site each spring. Nightingale is a “red listed” protected species which has declined by 80% in the last 20 years. National Biological Data refers to no nightingales since 2018 but this is not supported by local Kent data which has 117 reports since 2018; in addition, residents have reported nightingales in good numbers.

The proposal for new tree planting (around the balancing pond to the northwest of the wetlands) will take 20 years to achieve the same growth of the trees removed so cannot be expected to provide a suitable habitat for nightingales. In addition, it is nearer to the KFC and Taco Bell which may attract gulls due to the waste produce which will displace the nightingales.

The removal of the trees will harm the view for new residents in Sevington Lakes who's view of trees will be replaced by the new homes.

I have asked that the application is decided by councillors at a planning committee meeting.

AE353 & AE355

The Parish Council will write to KCC to ask them to ensure that these two footpaths are able to be used. They are shown in green below as the blue route is not a public footpath.



HML – ECOLOGICAL MANAGEMENT

The management of Finberry continues to be an active issue with ABC who continue to engage with Crest to ensure they keep to their promises made when the original planning consent was granted (02/00278/AS). The following two areas are the ecological mitigation areas which need to be properly managed by HML (along with Captains Wood).



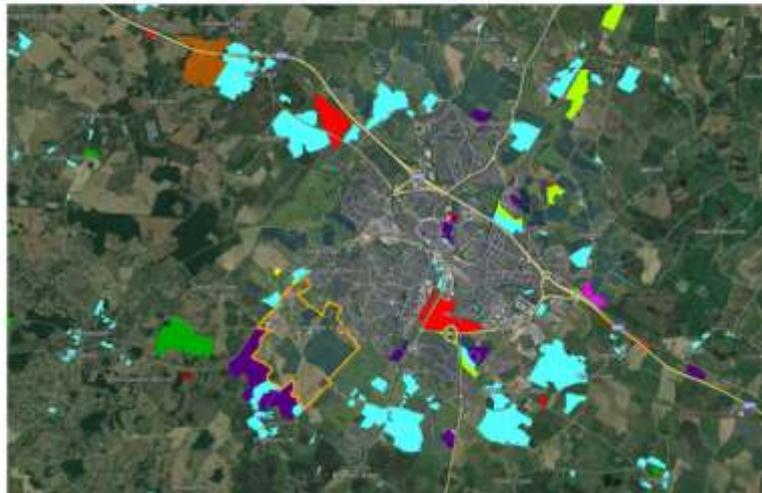
East of the two "balancing ponds" between Finberry and Waterbrook



Land next to A2070 northeast of Finberry

OVERVIEW OF ASHFORD DEVELOPMENT SITES

- Key**
- Housing
 - Employment
 - Mixed use
 - Retail
 - Extent of Chilmington Green outline permission
 - Biodiversity Net Gain
 - Wetlands
 - Lorry Park



These are the sites submitted to ABC for an initial assessment before they go forward to public consultation and then a hearing (“examination in public”) before a planning inspector. The parish council and wider public consultation is expected in 2025 with the public examination not before 2026 and final decision before the next Borough Council election in 2027.

DEVELOPMENT SITES IN MERSHAM

Ashford Borough Council **In and around Mersham village** ASHFORD

HELAA	Proposed use
081	Housing - unspecified number of dwellings
107	9 dwellings
175 / 176	To be discussed in Ashford presentation
237	8 dwellings
240	Employment
246	Battery storage
249	50 - 100 dwellings

FINBERRY POSSIBLE EXTENSION SITES



DEVELOPMENT SITES IN SEVINGTON



FINBERRY VILLAGE CENTRE

The Church Commissioners (CCE) have now received planning permission for the Finberry local centre site and have put it on the market for a developer (19/01232/AS). The delay was reportedly due to a dispute regarding education contributions between KCC and ABC. It took time to find a way forward that the parties are all agreed on but it caused a delay. Savills are now leading the marketing exercise and have advised that they have several developers who have expressed interest, and they are hopeful that at least two offers will be made. Positively, there appears to be a good level of interest in the food store element of the site, although CCE await formal offers being made to confirm this.

Separately, ABC met with the relatively new Crest Team. A number of issues were raised in relation to the timing of the opening of the connection road to Bridgefield, liaison with KCC re road issues, the yet to be constructed island crossing point on Swift Ave and the issue of Captain's Wood Management Plan (CWMP), especially given the progress with Sevington Lakes. ABC are awaiting a formal response but on the CWMP but gained the impression that things are now being put in motion including a communication strategy – the need to engage with the PC seemed to be understood. The bridge over the Stour for the Waterbrook link road is running behind schedule but should be submitted in the spring. Other issues include the community centre (which is delaying resurfacing of Robin Road), parking at school drop off and collection times and wider road safety, bus service and allotments.

SEVINGTON CHURCH

The issue of spire repairs has been discussed with ABC although it is a matter for the diocese. However, a s106 contribution is due from the IBF which relates to 'Church Works' (CW) and the specification of those works forms the 'Church Works Specification' (CWS). The CWS was intended to ensure that the Church had upgrades in order to achieve the objective of improving its

ability to form part of the industrial / office / logistics Park granted outline planning permission under ref 14/00906/AS and, in so doing, mitigate the harm to the setting of the building resulting from the park.

The diocese will be consulted on whether a CWS has been submitted; they might wish to update their plans. Put another way, it would seem that upgrading the interior to facilitate better use by the local community is going to be hampered by being open to the elements!

JOINT TRANSPORT BOARD

The Board met on 5th March. Key issues in the ward / division include:

- We received an update on Eurostar, specifically the survey on businesses affected by Eurostar ceasing services from Ashford. The responses represent businesses employing over 30,000 in Kent. 94% said that business interaction or travel to Europe was important to their business and concluded that travel and trade with Europe remains important for Kent businesses. International rail was and still is an important part of that. Within the last 3 months, three new operators have expressed an interest on services on HS1 possibly due to changes in the regulatory environment, one of these may wish to use Ashford.
- We had an update on the new Entry Exit System (EES) and how Dover Port is expected to ensure traffic system is not disrupted - serious consideration given to some checks for passengers being done at Western Docks and an app is being developed so some checks can be done from home.
- Permanent signage for the IBF from the M20 is on order. This includes two signs at Church Road/ A2070 junction (east side), one saying, "Left Turn only" on exit to A2070 and a sign approaching Church Road on A2070 saying "No HGVs" (since installed).
- A VMS was discussed for the slip road into Waterbrook showing when it is full. This is for GSE to provide with consent from National Highways.
- Plans for further planting on the Biodiversity Land (the High Field) are with DfT (no longer with KCC).
- The camera supplier for the CCTV enforcement at Beaver Road, Sackville Crescent and Bluebell Road were appointed in January 2024, the location on site of the cameras will be discussed on site (for Bluebell Road only) with delivery expected in Summer.
- Conningbrook Park works that are in design include (i) Simone Weil junction with A28 (in technical audit) and (ii) widening A2070 for two lane approach (from the development – agreements not yet signed). But there was no update on the upgrade of the crossings at Bybrook Road and Penlee Point.

- New access to the proposed Aldi on A28, including pedestrian crossing and footway works, is at the technical audit stage (since the meeting planning consent was granted).
- Flood Street bridge strengthening is in the early option study stage with delivery scheduled 2024/25.
- The Maidstone Railway Bridge north of the Drovers is awaiting quotes for the Wingwall investigation, results to be fed into the options study.
- Additional school zigzags are proposed on Highfield Road in Willesborough. The school zigzags in Mersham are being made enforceable.
- Work is ongoing to ensure the EV charging points in Vicarage Lane (6 points), Victoria Road (4), Adleys Yard (2), Elwick Place (6) and Station Road (6). Progress has been slower than ABC would like.

STONESTREET SOLAR

The Developer has reported that it continues to finalise its Development Consent Order application and now expects to submit this in late April 2024. A case needs to be made for a new consultation because the developer has not looked at alternative sites less impactful on the vista – the idea is that panels sited on the highest ground (using the 60m contour) and land between HS1 and M20.

POTHOLES

I have reported the following potholes, the Highways reference are included.



Belmont Road (ref 787334)



789604-Malvern Road



789608-Quantock Drive



791414-Outside Mersham shop



789611-Bockhanger Lane

COMMUNITY SAFETY UNIT

The Unit met on 7th March. Key issues arising were:

- A safer business day was planned on 14th March. This will make business in the town aware of APAC and police support.
- Year 9 roadshows at schools have all been completed except the Tower which will be held later. It gives out key ASB messages to Year 9 pupils and the plan is to repeat next year, funding permitting.
- PSPO for Conningbrook Lake is being reviewed and a public consultation will be held on it being put in place for a further 3 years. A PSPO is being considered for Stanhope and the reasons for it are being considered.
- A “Women Together” event will be held on 26th April at 11am-2pm at Singleton Village Hall which is designed to promote women’s safety. Tickets will be free through Eventbrite. This is paid for by the Parish Council.

- Money collecting under false pretences and selling items from carrier bags has been noticed in the town centre. Some of this is classed as peddling which is a police enforcement rather than ABC. The police understand the issue and will try and get it resourced.
- Underage purchasing of vapes (which is on the increase) is not an ABC licencing issue but KCC Trading Standards. KCC have a new full-time team to investigate sales to underage purchases and they carry out unexpected visits and mystery shopping.
- The monitoring centre did substantial amounts of work to support the police following the incident when a police officer was hurt in an investigative way. It demonstrates the importance of the monitoring centre and how they can support the police. There was a further incident on the weekend of 2nd March for which a crime report has been created.
- 396 requests for assistance in housing have been submitted to date in the municipal year.

KALC

KALC met on 7th March. Key issues noted are:

- Plain clothes officers will patrol shoplifting hot spots. ANPR has been used to intercept Designer Village shoplifters when they used the Dartford Crossing.
- VAWG event to be held at the Outlet on 21st April.
- Damian Green MP chaired a meeting on 15th March at Bethersden Village Hall to extensive fly-tipping at Hoads Wood.
- Progress is being made on establishing a successor to ACRE in Kent which can be used to access expert on village hall developments.

MAIDSTONE HOSPITAL RUBY WARD



I attended the opening of the new £12.6m Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust Ruby Ward, which specialises in mental healthcare for older women, particularly those diagnosed with dementia. Its predecessor – Ruby Ward in Medway Maritime – had 14 beds and was being wound down last year while the construction of the new ward, also called Ruby Ward, was being prepared at Hermitage Lane. The new ward opened on 14th March.

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP MEETING

The partnership met on 12th March. Key issues arising included the following.

- Reports on rough sleeping in the Panorama building have reduced but a report has been made to ABC planning as a planning condition requires the building to be secured.
- I asked for an update on the rough sleeper in her car at Sevington Church at the Community Safety Partnership. As at the date of the meeting there had been two safeguarding visits with her, and she explained that she is looking for accommodation in Dover. The car was gone by 16th March but returned on 24th March. Safeguarding visits will continue.
- Sports Connect have visited the Rectory Way playing field in Bockhanger. They are an Approved Licensed Football Provider, who aim to create interactive sports, health and education programmes. Funding has been extended to 2024/25. Further information here: <https://www.sportsconnect.uk/>.
- Dispersal orders will be extended to 72 hours and powers to create PSPOs are to be extended to local authority and police. The fines under PSPO will be increased. Closure orders are to be implemented by housing providers not just police and local authorities.
- Childrens Centres and Youth Hubs are now treated as Family Hubs. A rebranding exercise is being carried out.

BUS SUBSIDY

The government are seeking views of how bus subsidies are provided. I made the point that passengers are put off by ASB at or near to bus shelters and graffiti and catapult damage at bus stops puts people off. In addition, access to reliable information at bus stops about when the next bus is due would improve take up of services. So, my view is that it's not about just providing busses; it's about also ensuring that passengers are comfortable in using the service.

CHILDRENS SPECIALIST CANCER SERVICES

NHS Leaders have considered the options were for the future centre for Children's Specialist Cancer Services in the Southeast to be at either Evelina London Children's Hospital in Lambeth, or St George's Hospital in Tooting with conventional radiotherapy services at University College Hospital in central London under both options.

Both options were strong and each would provide a Children's Cancer Centre on the same site as a children's intensive care unit and associated services. This is in line with national clinical requirements. It will also be capable of giving innovative treatments that require intensive care support on site. NHS

leaders have chosen Evelina London Children's Hospital because, as a specialist children's hospital which treats 120,000 children a year, Evelina London's wide range of services, support for hospitals across its catchment area to look after poorly young patients, and strong performance in research are just some of the factors that showed it is the right place for the future Children's Cancer Centre. Its experienced, expert teams will work with The Royal Marsden and St George's which provide the current centre to minimise disruption for patients and ensure a smooth handover.

INLAND BORDER FACILITY

The Ashford Delivery Board met on 15th March to discuss changes at Sevington from 30th April. The government has designated Sevington IBF (a government owned facility) as a Border Control Post (BPC) despite Dover District Council's objections (DCC say that they are only entity to check product into Dover Port, but a new statutory instrument will be passed to give powers to do these checks). The changes are to protect public health from goods entering the UK and protect the UK's export food industry standing.

ABC will deal with products of animal origin. Plants and Seeds will be checked by DEFRA and commercial animal checks (pets for sale) will start in April 2025. Foodstuff contraband checks will remain checked at Dover Port by Border Force.

ABC operations will include some physical checks on food imports and checks that the animal from which meat is derived had a health certificate. Many checks will be "end to end" which means that checks are done at source and / or destination. All high-risk products go to the BCP, but low risk will only be on a surveillance basis. HGV traffic dwell time will be 90 minutes at Sevington IBF and are expected to be 30 lorry inspections per day with 24-hour basis. Lorries cannot be at the end of their tachograph period so no breaks can be taken at the IBF. A "trusted trader" scheme is expected to operate very soon. AI schemes are being tested, first with fish but this will be expanded.

KCC Highways agreed to look at the traffic lights at the exit / entry to the IBF to see if they can be adjusted to prevent them holding traffic on the A2070 when no traffic is exiting the IBF. There needs to be an information blitz to ensure those lorries new to visiting the IBF are aware of its location to avoid the ongoing issue of lost lorries in Sevington and Mersham. This to include notices at service areas approaching Calais, information at Eurotunnel and on the Ferries.

Kent made an application for a Kent Freeport to the PM (before he was PM) and interest in this is growing again and a new proposal will be submitted to Number 10 working with the team at Sevington IBF who can demonstrate that it is not disruptive to UK trade.

BUFFER ZONE

Plans are continuing for ABC to take over the ownership of the High Field. I have asked for a meeting to discuss the DfT original commitments to planting and maintenance to ensure that ABC do not take on any obligations that DfT should have completed.

A2070 SIGNAGE

The long-promised sign on the A2070 westbound approaching Church Road has been installed.



THE STREET FLOODING

Kent Highways have installed a solution to avoid the flooding on The Street, Mersham. It looks a bit Heath Robinson, but I expect it will do the job.



FLYTIPPING CHEESEMANS GREEN LANE

Not sure if this is technically fly tipping as it looks like something that has fallen off the back of a lorry, but I have reported it to ABC for collection (ref 19795495) on 18th March and it was gone by 21st.



FREEDOM LEISURE

Freedom Leisure presented to councillors on 21st March about how they are tackling issues raised about cleanliness at the Stour Centre. A third cleaner has been recruited and a new area has been created to encourage swimmers to take off their shoes before they enter the swimming area. A meeting is to be arranged to investigate the use of Conningbrook Lakes as an open water swimming area to support better mental health and social inclusion. This follows a report that the MoD are hosting an event in July / August 2024 for 4,250 cadets to use the Lake for sailing, kayaking, climbing and mountain biking (but not swimming).

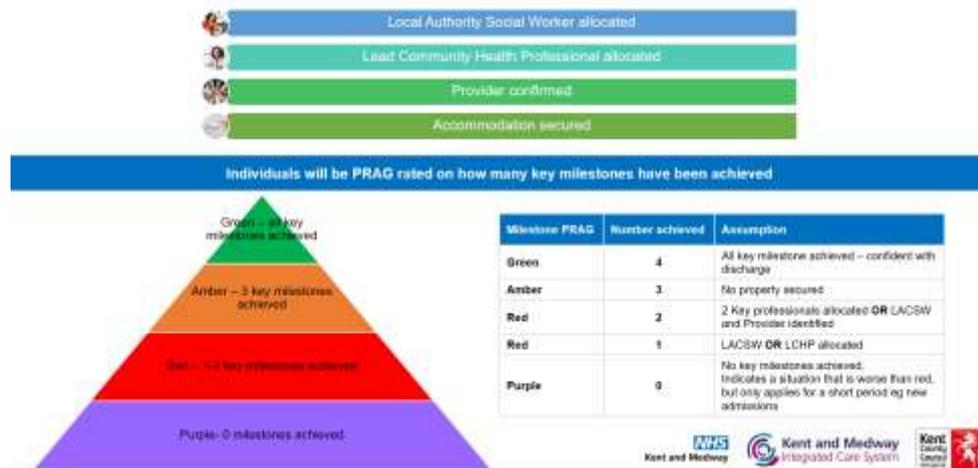
DELAYED DISCHARGES

Councillors had a meeting on 22nd March to discuss. One of the benefits of creating an Integrated Care Board is to reduce the time patients spend in acute hospitals between treatment and discharge. This is sometimes called “bed blocking”. In Kent and Medway 10% of beds are occupied by people fit for discharge with 3,817 additional days (defined as 14+ days) spent in hospitals. Too many patients are being discharged into the complex (and expensive) residential or nursing care without exploring intermediate care, community therapy or community social care. It is much more time consuming to discharge patients into complex residential care which is why they additionally spend time in the acute hospital.

The actions taken include discharge before 12pm, ensuring their prescriptions are ready and they have food in the fridge at home and other voluntary support including transport and “home to settle and sitting service” support. New providers of dementia services are being explored to avoid patients receiving complex residential care. An integrated “Home First” team has been set up in east Kent with trained support workers who deliver health and social care reablement. Technology facilitators work in hospitals to enable patients to use devices that support their help and social care needs. A 7-day bed management team is now in place.

As at 28 Feb there are 67 inpatients (in Kent & Medway) with learning disability and/or autism. The NHS target is 43 and many of these have been in hospital for a very long time. 17 of these inpatients are classed as with a delayed discharge.

Resettlement Planning – Key Milestones



The key problem is identifying the correct housing and the provider market for their needs. I did receive assurance that the programme involves the immediate family more than has been the case for those children and young people in advance of them achieving adulthood. A partnership now exists to bring funding between the NHS (for hospital stay) and KCC (for accommodation outside the hospital). This specialised type of housing needs to be identified in the new Ashford local plan.

BRAETHORPE HOUSE

Councillors heard on 26th March that accommodation for lone asylum seeker children who arrive on the Kent coast in small boats could run out before long. KCC has legal duties under the Children Act to take these children into care on arrival in the UK. Under the national transfer scheme, many of the children are subsequently moved to different local authorities around the country after 10 working days. However, due to high numbers of children arriving on their own on small boats, delays in moving them to other areas and lack of foster parents, KCC is struggling to cope. A planning application has therefore been submitted for the change of use of Braethorpe House, Canterbury Road from Class E (Commercial, Business and Service) to C2 (Residential Institution) to accommodate unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (“UASC”). This is expected to be heard at the June meeting. I am pleased that the children will be supported by social workers and will have a structured programme of support to remain engaged and stimulated with a safe space to recover. Local facilities such as the Stour Centre can be accessed along with local providers such as Sk8side. Key planning issues include.

- Ensuring the appearance of the link building is sympathetic to the design of Braeside House which is an imposing Edwardian style building.
- Only one tree is to be removed as the site is an impressive, wooded approach to the town centre.
- Sufficient parking to be maintained and marked out to ensure staff and visitors do not park in the adjoining residential streets.
- The fencing should be designed sympathetically.

FLYTIPPING

I reported these two further incidences of fly tipping (ref 19897549 & 19897605) on 27th March.



Fridge on [Cheesemans Green Lane](#) towards [Bridgefield](#)



BBQ on [Fetherbed Road](#) with black bags

INTEGRATED CARE STRATEGY

Councillors discussed the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Strategy on 28th March. There is now an enormous opportunity that the integrated care and health system will bring real improvements to the health and wellbeing of the population. Data proves that 30% of someone's health and wellbeing is delivered by diet/exercise, community safety and environmental quality of the built environment. Local communities were reported to have contribute to this including the 321 parish, town and community councils across Kent and Medway. It is unclear as to how these councils have contributed although it does say "local partners, people and communities are best placed to lead development, delivery and evaluation." The integrated care system sets out welcome targets which include.

- Using the KCC Family Hub model which will bring together universal children's services including midwifery, health visiting, mental health, infant feeding, early help and safeguarding support.
- Best use will be made of Libraries and community hubs, giving a directory of local support.

- Social prescribing will be further developed and extended.

However, the loss of KCC's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee's (HOSC) ability to refer a substantial variation in NHS services to the Secretary of State as a retrograde step. Local Authorities and its members have experience first-hand on how the NHS works in the community. The steps now needed to achieve action from the Secretary of State under the new call-in rules are unclear how and when ministerial intervention will be used. Cllrs agreed to write to the Secretary of State expressing concerns and understand how we can expect ministerial powers to be used and the role local authorities will play in the process.

Paul Bartlett
Mersham, Sevington South and Finberry Ward, ABC
Ashford Central Division, KCC
Grosvenor Hall Ward, Kennington Community Council
Sevington Ward, Sevington with Finberry Parish Council
0773 929 3502
paul.bartlett@ashford.gov.uk or paul.bartlett@kent.gov.uk