

## **COUNCIL UPDATE 5.2025**

### **FORSTAL BRIDGE**

KCC engineers have visited site, spoken to the relevant property owners and are organising to undertake the following works:

- install appropriate curbing around verge experiencing the overrun,
- install 2 verge marker posts - one on each corner,
- replace a missing verge marker on other side of the driveway further from the house,
- raise the BT box cover level; and
- Top up the verge with topsoil and seeding.

One of the KCC engineers will be visiting site soon to mark up the works required.

### **BETTER MENTAL HEALTH NETWORK**

The Network met on 6<sup>th</sup> May. The issue discussed was substance abuse which is linked to a mental health. We had a presentation on the work done for young people.

#### **KENT'S DRUG AND ALCOHOL SERVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

We Are With You support YP in Kent aged upto 25 years old

- Specialist treatment services
- Early intervention group programmes
- Support for families
- CBT service for young people
- Drug Diversion scheme "Re-Frame"
- Information and guidance for professionals

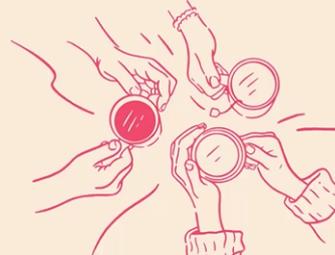
withyou



## SPECIALIST TREATMENT

- One to one support for young people in regards to their substance use
- Voluntarily referred via our Drug Use Screening Tool (DUST)
- Allocated to a worker in young person's geographical area
- Interventions tailored to risk
- Harm reduction focus
- Use of evidence based tools

withyou



## LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW

Councillors met on 6th May to discuss a Community Government Review (CGR). The review will be primarily creating parish council(s) for the unparished area of the town centre. The benefits of a parish/town council are

- A unitary council may create a wider gap between unparished area residents and their representatives.
- New parish areas could give residents more ownership and control of assets and services.
- Maintains the historic property and mayoral traditions in Ashford town (if there is a town rather than a parish or community council).
- It is better to engage now while the Borough Council still exists.

Against this include:

- There are current unknowns on how the unitary will operate – there could be a benefit in deferring the review until the unitary exists so will know what the unitary will do.
- There will be a cost of the CGR estimated at £100k.
- Any new town or parish council will result in a precept on areas resulting in an additional cost to residents during the ongoing cost of living crisis.

It was agreed that the CGR will include views from existing parish councils and any new council will need to work alongside the existing parishes. A possible option is using the "Charter Trustee" route which will mothball the CGR until after the Unitary is created, but protects the history and traditions of the area including the activities of the mayor.

<b>CGR Process and indicative timetable</b>	
The <b>Selection &amp; Constitutional Review Committee</b> recommend a CGR to Full Council	6 May 2025
<b>Full Council</b> approve the recommendation to conduct a CGR and convene the <b>LG&amp;PDTG</b>	15 May 2025
The <b>LG&amp;PDTG</b> meet to agree the Terms of Reference and timetable for the CGR.	June 2025
The terms of reference and timetable are submitted to the <b>Selection &amp; Constitutional Review Committee</b> to approve for submission to Full Council	Late June
The terms of reference and timetable approved by <b>Full Council</b> .	16 October
Terms of Reference published and KCC notified	23 October 2025
Stage 1 Public Consultation (8 weeks)	27 October 2025 to 19 December
Polling District TG consider the proposals	January/February
Selection & Constitutional Review Committee approve draft TG recommendations	March
Stage 2 Public Consultation on draft recommendations (8 weeks)	1 April 2026-6 May 2026
Final recommendations considered by Selection & Constitutional Review Committee	June 2026
Final Recommendations to July 2026	16 July 2026
Publication of reorganisation order	July 2026 and beyond – Officers make orders
Next Ordinary Elections	May 2027

## **COMMUNITY SAFETY UNIT**

The Group met on 8<sup>th</sup> May.

- The group discussed a full-scale safety review around water (river, ponds and lakes) in Ashford. The Borough Council has been reluctant to take responsibility in private areas controlled by developers. However, the point was made that where developers are not providing safety around water then the Borough Council will need to step in.
- Catapults are still an ongoing issue with a goose killed at Singleton Lakes over the weekend on 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> May. In the past busses, trains and humans their pets have been targeted. Catapults will be targeted during the knife plan action plan. The public are asked to report on 101.
- In April ASB of motorbikes was targeted which has increased in the warmer weather. There has been an increase in motorbike theft.
- There is an increase in fly-tipping. It is believed to be seasonal as people clear out their sheds etc in the spring. It is predominately household waste (which means it is often difficult to identify those responsible) in the built-up area. The flat owners above the shops in Bank Street are leaving waste on top of locked bins at the back of County Square. A plan is being worked on.

## **CHART ROAD EXTRA CARE UNIT (ref PA/25/0598)**

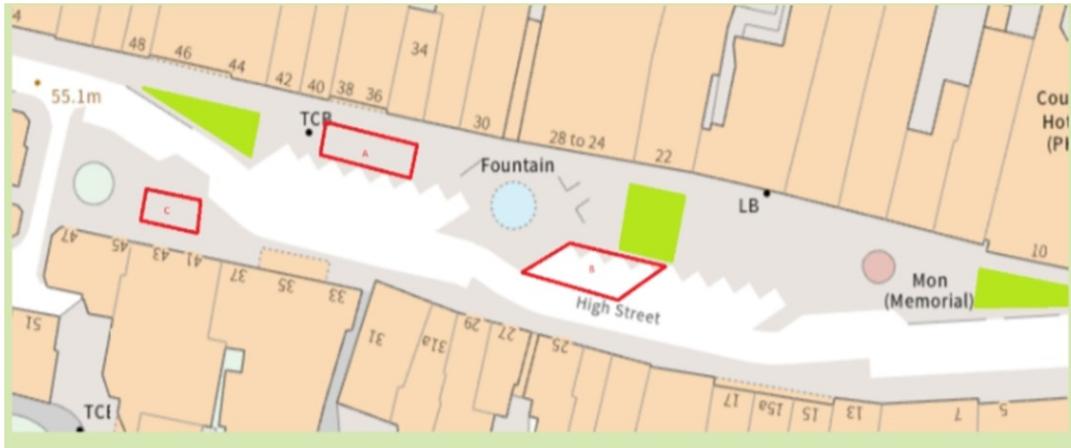
The Central Forum met to discuss concerns about the application on 8<sup>th</sup> May. The following issues arose:

- The parking issues on “Old Repton” (where there is no residents parking scheme) need to be considered as there could be significant visitor parking.
- The lack of sewerage infrastructure is noted in local plan and needs to be addressed by the developer.
- The side and massing of the building may reflect noise from CTRL / Cobbs Wood on to residents in Sackville Crescent and Kings Ave.
- The number of units is three times what was recommended in the local Plan (Site S46).

## **TOWN CENTRE MARKET**

Councillors discussed a potential change for the town centre market on 8<sup>th</sup> May. Street trading has decreased in the Lower High Street despite efforts to encourage new trade in this area. There are now only 5 street traders in the area on market days (Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays with a few traders operating on Thursdays under informal “grandfathering” rights). It was proposed that ABC moves from “market days” to established permanent street trading pitches. These will be the area between the bandstand and the new play area for three pitches (3m x 6m) for Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm (leaving the space for display and events at the weekends). The Lower High

Street would have three trading locations (which could accommodate more than the 5 traders), Monday to Saturday 9am to 3pm.



All traders will be expected to use new uniformed gazebos.

## ONE YOU SHOP

The concept of a high street OneYou shop offering drop-in health advice was pioneered in Ashford with significant support from Ashford Borough Council. The current premises in Park Mall are due to be vacated in the coming months due to the demolition of Park Mall. The OneYou shop has been offered space at the Gateway in Ashford and the move is currently being planned for the latter half of this year. It is questionable that the Gateway can be made to work as it lacks the footfall of the current location so I asked at the Council meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> May if there a longer-term opportunity to take up one of the vacant units at Elwick Square which would have significant benefits?

The view was that the existing services offered at the Gateway would be complementary to the services currently offered from a new OneYou space there. The Gateway space is therefore considered reasonable and complementary. Furthermore, OneYou is a public health (KCC) funded space which cannot pay market rent; there is space in the Gateway that ABC already has a lease so can be offered at a reasonable rate.

Notwithstanding this, it is agreed that there is a long-term opportunity for OneYou to look at alternative sites in the town centre.

## GRANTS

There are funding opportunities available to community organisations:

**Capital (one-off) grants** - up to £10,000 to provide funding to help purchase equipment or furniture, for example, or to refurbish a building or improve an open space.

**Ashford Community Amenities Grants (UK Shared Prosperity Funding)** - This fund is in the process of being updated.

**UK Shared Prosperity Fund Grant (Ashford Urban Area)** - A grant of up to £10,000 for an organisation wishing to make improvements to community facilities such as community halls or playgrounds.

**Rural England Prosperity Fund Grant (Ashford Rural Area)** - A grant of up to £10,000 for an organisation wishing to make improvements to outdoors community facilities such as playing fields or village hall outdoor spaces.

**Community Event Grants** - up to £2,000 for small events and up to £5,000 for large events. Revenue funding to help deliver community events and festivals.

**Ward Member Community Grant** - The ward member community grant scheme provides each ward councillor with the ability to financially support local projects and services and therefore to play a more active role in their ward. Each ward councillor has £3,000 in the financial year to allocate to projects within the Ashford borough. The minimum grant under this scheme is £100.

**For businesses, operating in the Town Centre** - A scheme provides businesses with the opportunity to bring vacant commercial properties back into active use.

## **PARK MALL**

I met with traders in Park Mall on 12<sup>th</sup> May regarding the council's plans to demolish. The Council plans to clear the site with an interim surface levelled car park. The following issues were noted:

- Liaison is needed with KCC Highways on their ownership and impact on Edinburgh Road. This could be an opportunity to break the stranglehold the Ring Road has on Ashford.
- Trading Standards may have a view on a loss of vaping stores who are members of the trade association.
- How does the creating of a new car park link into the council's bus/walking/cycling strategy?
- How do the savings to the council of £500k pa stack up on the way the shopping centre is currently run?
- How does the asset strategy link into the new unitary council?
- What are the proposals for the Tank which is a listed heritage asset and the nearby units in the conservation zone – do the units for part of the heritage in the way the Tank does? Is there an opportunity to retain those units adjoining the Tank and the internal route down to Greggs?
- How many jobs will be lost and what will happen to Savers and similar national retailers – have traders/residents been consulted?

There is often paralysis in local government bringing forward development. The demolition of the old B&Q site 6 years ago has not resulted in much needed housing being brought forward. Other council owned property such as Swanton House, Civic Centre, KWG and the old cinema are a mecca for rats and garbage.

## **STODMARSH**

The Council has set up a new company with Canterbury City Council (CCC), Stour Environmental Credits Ltd. It will buy credits generated from:

- Wetlands.
- Improvements to agricultural practices.
- Retrofitting water saving measure sin existing houses, and
- Conversion of properties with septic tanks to modern treatment plants.

These credits will be sold to developers with documentation to support planning applications for new housing. This is hoped to unlock smaller house building sites, but larger sites will need to provide their own mitigation schemes.

Canterbury are also reviewing their Local Plan (like Ashford) and are probably about 8-9 months ahead of Ashford. The key difference is that Canterbury areas which would be supported for development are outside the Stour catchment – this is not the case in Ashford where most of the preferred development sites are within the Stour catchment.

## **LOCAL PLAN – SEVINGTON / MERSHAM**

I had a discussion with officers on 22<sup>nd</sup> May regarding how Sevington might be taken forward in the local plan which is due to be published in draft in July. By way of introduction, I explained the report from Crest on timescales delivering new homes in Finberry as discussed at the APM. The timescales for the Waterbrook link road / allotments is when 1000 homes are occupied, this will likely be triggered in 2029/2030. The Community Centre is likely to be delivered in 2027/28 (note ACRE are planning to recruit a village hall advisor so the Finberry Community Council could be a project for him/her get their teeth into) and Finberry (as consented in 2002) is likely to be complete in 2032-35. Consent granted in 2002 spoke of a 10 year timetable, so progress has been glacial.

There has been considerable warehouse/industrial development over the last 5 years in Orbital, Waterbrook and with the IBF in the former AXA distribution site. The view for the new local plan is that not as much commercial will be required in Ashford and the buffer zone between the IBF and Mersham can therefore expected to be maintained as a buffer zone (AXA previously aspired to its development).

Sevington should be regarded as 4 areas – Highfield Ward, IBF and land next to the A2070, Finberry and the area south of CTRL. Each has its own character with a nuanced view of development to be distinguished in the Local Plan. Any new development will need to be serviced and an indication of how

quickly the promoters are prepared to take it forward. The first draft of the Local Plan in July will concentrate on the town centres of Ashford and Tenterden without specifics for sites on the edge of Ashford beyond an aspiration. The July version will be consulted on for 8 weeks with the next iteration in the first half of 2026, a hearing in 2027 and adoption before May 2028 when the new unitary might be expected to take over.

As far as the Ashford Green Corridor (AGC) around Ashford is concerned, there is an aspiration to deliver future significant extensions of the AGC as part of a wider, holistic approach to new development on the edge of Ashford, which shall form part of their wider infrastructure 'asks' such as better cycling and walking routes, and in doing so promote how any extension can play a dual 'green buffer' role. This has been demonstrated where the DfT in developing the IBF provided additional cycling/walking routes to Mersham, but Crest have not provided the promised cycling/walking routes to the town centre from Finberry. We need willingness from developers to provide these.

### **BRAMBLING AVENUE**

There are delays in Crest securing planning consent on the road extension from Brambling Ave into Waterbrook. I have therefore asked Crest if there is any way they could arrange for repairs to Brambling Avenue; when the road extension is built these repairs could have been expected to be carried out but given the delay, I have asked if there is any way that work could be completed now.

The first repair needed is at the junction of Brambling and Swift Avenue, the second is at Brambling Avenue junction of Wren Drive. Both sites are in very close proximity causing vehicles to drive on the wrong side of the road, these are not small areas, measuring 4ft in length. The average tyre is not wide enough to avoid this and with the raised iron works this is going to cause a nasty accident.



## CHURCH ROAD

I have reported that the national speed sign has been knocked down (presumably by an HGV) on the turning into Church Road from the A2070 (ref 878392).



## DEMENTIA WORKSHOP

I attended a dementia workshop at Montfort Care Home on 19<sup>th</sup> May. Key lessons included:

- Design can be really important to manage the impact on dementia sufferers, including (i) see through doors on cabinets including in kitchens, (ii) names of doors and white goods, (iii) the location and layout of things dementia users use, (iv) photos and life history books can help, (v) black entrance mats are to be avoided, (vi) different colour walls from floors with clear boundaries, (vii) signage should be yellow background with black writing, (viii) chairs should have coloured sides and cream interior, (ix) lighting should be slightly dimmer and (x) step free access. The Council's Disabled Home Adaptation grants should be accessed for these changes.
- Ashford has started a Dementia Action Forum which I asked to attend.
- The Stour Centre will be approached to offer opportunities for community sport like what it currently offers for SEN cohort to dementia sufferers.

- The location of Extra Care Units needs to be considered carefully – town centre sites can be challenging if spaces become too crowded.
- Events should be signposted as dementia friendly on the Joy Platform.
- Financing fraud increases with use of Powers of Attorney.
- Kent Fire and Resue can provide safeguarding visits.

## **INLAND BORDER FACILITY**

ABC has invested in developing infrastructure at the IBF in Sevington to handle border checks. The British Ports Association (BPA) has called for compensation after the sector across the UK invested an estimated total of £120m in border infrastructure. This is because there is now a concern that, following the Government's deal with the European Union (EU), capital and operational costs, as well as opportunity costs, may never be recovered from traders as expected.

The new EU deal relates to exports and reciprocal trade i.e. a new EU type Trade Operating Model (TOM) similar how the UK checks imports from the EU. The UK does not have significant checks for low-risk EU goods which move without Environmental Health Certificates. It is believed the new system will be replicated for exports from the UK to the EU. Because this will cover only low risk goods the claimed savings there are unlikely to be substantive for industry.

## **BIODIVERSITY TASK GROUP**

The Group met on 20<sup>th</sup> May. Key ambitions are (i) connectivity, (ii) nature-based solutions, (iii) land management and land use, (iv) flagship species, (v) grassland, (vi) successional habitats, (vii) woodland trees and hedgerows, (viii) freshwater and (ix) urban.

Landscape Management Plans for green areas will (i) enhance the green spaces, (ii) deliver community well-being, (iii) promote biodiversity, (vi) develop landscape resilience and (v) be sustainable. It will include “green realm” such as tree lined roads. Instead of s106 contributions for allotments etc, a contribution may be sought from “Landscape Management”.

A baseline audit is being carried out for all 156 ABC open spaces in Ashford. It will set out the habitat – grassland, scrub, meadow, hedgerow, orchard. Woodland, ponds/lakes, rivers/streams. The criteria include footprint, human impact, any protected species, diverse or protected flora, connectivity, enhancement, management actions, age and stability.

## **KALC**

I attended the Ashford Area Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> May. Key issues included.

- Neighbourhood policing plan envisaged police attendance at Parish Council meetings every three months. The group requested an update on progress on achieving this. A written Police Report was circulated:

*Violent and weapon related crime continues to be a priority focus for Ashford CSU. In April, following a professionals meeting with Ashford District Council Community Safety Unit, a concern was raised of two individuals threatening one another with knives during the Night-time Economy. Two individuals were promptly identified and arrested. One individual was refused bail and remanded back in to Prison on the same day whilst the other was later charged with court bail conditions. Ashford CSU continues to hold weekly partnership problem solving meetings with professionals, monthly with external partners such as Ashford Partners Against Crime (APAC) and Pub Watch to make Ashford a safe place to visit and live in.*

*Ashford Town Centre will continue to see dedicated focus for Anti-Social Behaviour, violent and weapon related crime and Violence Against Woman and Girls. There will be dedicated officers focused on deployment within the 'Town Centre' towards the summer period. During dedicated plain clothes patrolling of the High Street, Ashford during Night-time Economy hours, two individuals who are deemed a risk to woman and girls have been proactively located and issued Community Protection Notices following breaches of their community protection warnings.*

*There has been a continued focus on tackling rural crime over the last few months following an increase in reported burglaries and thefts of plant equipment as from the previous update. Ashford CSU are continuing to engage with the public, external partners and local parishes to formulate a long term problem solving strategy.*

*Whilst out on rural south weald patrols, an individual linked to drug supply to rural communities was located and arrested and refused bail for driving whilst disqualified and no insurance and remains on police bail for drug supply related offences.*

*Following the last report in March 2025 the 16-year-old male who was referred to as killing a seagull with a catapult has been charged with eight offences which includes a breach of his Community Protection Notice which has been enforced to reduce anti-social behaviour in the Ashford District, intentionally killing a seagull as covered by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as well as using a catapult as an offensive weapon.*

*In April, a vulnerable female from South Ashford, who was being targeted by drug users as part of 'Mate Crime' has been successfully supported by local CSU officers in assisting her with housing and mental health services following a successful issuing of a closure order. The female is now re-housed in supported accommodation and police have charged an adult female associated with a breach of the order.*

*ASB use of E-scooters continues to remain a priority for Ashford CSU with currently 18 E-Scooters being seized due to them being used in an anti-social manner throughout the Ashford District with 8 being in the last two months alone. ASB is not just linked to E-scooters but also Motorcycles and E-Bikes. These bikes appear to be stolen to then 'joy ridden' within the Ashford District. In May an abandoned motor vehicle that was seized by a local CSU officer was recently tested for forensics which has identified a suspect linked to numerous bike thefts in Ashford. Coincidentally, following some proactive review of social media footage of a Bike Theft in South Ashford at a nursing home by the same CSU officer, an individual has been located and arrested on suspicion of theft of a motorcycle. Whilst at the individuals address a further stolen bike was located from a separate theft and clothing and tools were seized linking him to a further two bike thefts. These links have helped formulate a strategy against the problem solving of bike thefts in the Ashford District.*

*We continue to enforce breaches of community protection notices, with an individual in Willesborough charged with X3 breaches and will be served a Community Behaviour Order by*

*the court in June 2025 following their insistent breaches of the orders causing detrimental effects to the local community.*

*In May, following engagement with a welfare concern of a homeless male by a local CSU officer, he was identified to be a high-risk sex offender who had breached his Sex Offenders Register following his release from prison and has subsequently been refused bail and recalled back on licence.*

*Finally, surveys are being submitted via My Community Voice to members of the public to identify the top 3 issues within the wards in Ashford. These will allow CSU to tackle the bespoke issues that are most pressing to the local communities. Please encourage members of the public to sign up and contribute to the surveys.*

- **Local Government Review requires a view to be submitted on Kent's reorganisation by November. In June there are two meetings, the KALC EGM on 19<sup>th</sup> June and a meeting with the Central Forum on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. On Local Plans, the Minister's letter of 15<sup>th</sup> May says "*Where reorganisation occurs, new unitary authorities are expected to promptly prepare a local plan covering the whole of their area. Until that new local plan is adopted, existing constituent local plans remain in force as part of the development plan for their area.*" On engagements with Parish Councils, the letter says "*It is for you to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way with residents, the voluntary sector, Neighbourhood Boards, local community groups and councils, public sector providers such as health, police and fire, and local businesses, to inform your final proposal(s). We welcome your engagement with the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) and would also advise that your town and parish councils and KALC are engaged as part of the ongoing development of your proposal(s).*"**

KALC will issue a survey by Friday 6<sup>th</sup> June. It will include a question on whether 3 or 4 unitary councils is preferred but without the expected financial analysis on which work has only just started.

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