

COUNCIL UPDATE 9.2025

JOINT TRANSPORT BOARD

The Board met on 2nd September. Key issues noted included.

- Junction improvements at A20/Church Road, Smeeth started on 20th August 2025.
- Installation of new infrastructure to allow for remote CCTV enforcement of existing traffic prohibitions on Bluebell Road overbridge to A2070 are on hold pending legal agreements with Network Rail and Highways England to allow for enforcement on their assets. This work is an essential precursor to installing CCTV enforcement on the Finberry bus link. I have raised the delay with KCC Councillors.
- The A2070 Finberry entrance is still yet to be adopted by Highways England.
- Strengthening of Flood Street Bridge at the Forstal is scheduled for 2026.
- New 33kv High Voltage electricity cables to ensure safe and reliable power supplies in Church Road Sevington are programmed to end on 4th October.
- ABC are investigating whether it is possible to replace the existing EV chargers at the Julie Rose Stadium and install new rapid chargers there and also at Elwick Place Car Park. Rapid chargers would allow customers to charge their vehicle from 0-80% during the average length of a film whilst visiting the Ashford Cinema/Julie Rose Gym.
- ABC Licensing team have been consulted regarding the potential installation of EV Chargers at taxi ranks in Ashford town centre. There are currently two electric-only taxis operating within the borough - the transition from petrol or diesel taxis to electric has not increased. Unfortunately, due to capacity constraints, installation at the Civic Centre and Bank Street taxi ranks is not currently viable.
- The new Entry Exit System (ESS) will apply for travellers from the UK to France from 12th October. This requires biometric data being collected at Dover Western docks before they enter the ferry terminal at Eastern Docks. It will take time to capture the data and some travellers may arrive at the Eastern Docks before having attended the Western Docks, so delays are expected. There will be soft launch for 6 months with just 10% of travellers being required to load their biometric data meaning the busy time will be next Easter. Brock will be expected to be a regular event to hold HGVs on the M20 to free up space for cars in Dover.

QUANTOCK PLAY AREA VILLAGE GREEN APPLICATION

I have compiled a response to the objections submitted by the landowner to my village green application for the land in Quantock. These are required ahead of any Regulation Panel Hearing at KCC.

The objections fall into the following categories, my comments are in italics

- The nature of the user evidence provided in the evidence questionnaires does not support the village green application.

The user evidence is said to be “vague, formulaic and lack specificity”. I disagree, e residents went to lengths to provide me with 78 completed evidence questionnaires and several emails direct to me and KCC. This demonstrates the depth of feeling on this issue and the nature of use. The activities are said to be “generic” but they are factual activities on the land. They include dog walking, children playing, picnics, informal games and gatherings, just the activities typical of a village green.

- The existence of a village green opposite makes the new application unnecessary.

I disagree it is not uncommon to have multiple village greens in a defined area. The existing village green bears no impact on the new application.

- There is a lack of a defined locality or neighbourhood which means the application is defective

There is an established local of Quantock with only two entry/exits to a group of 500 properties. The test required is met

- Nature of Ashford BC activities on the site meaning the use by residents was with “implied permission” as opposed to “as of right”.

The argument is because residents viewed the land Council owned (because the Council managed it due to its statutory responsibility to maintain a safe clean environment) this use gives implied permission rather than use as of right. The Council was merely discharging its statutory duty to keep the environment safe from debris, litter, noxious weeds etc. and gives no implied permission. The use was “as of right” as the area was open and free to use until fencing was put up in late June 2025.

Ashford BC has never granted any form of licence, implied or otherwise as it has never been the owner and not in the position to do so. Put simply, the use by residents for purposes consistent with the application must be “as of right”.

The new owner describes the application site as “historically underutilised”. This is counter to the number of Evidence Questionnaires submitted. The point is made that because it adjoins a play area it would discourage use as a village green. This is wrong and the opposite applies, because it adjoins a play area use would spill over into the application site.

- The new owner intends future development and sees my action as an attempt to preclude this.

I recognise that the new owner has identifies future planning potential, but no application has been submitted, nor has the application site been include in Ashford BC’s “call for sites” to support the next iteration of the Local Plan.

The new owner wishes to develop the site to create a “safe, calming outdoor place”; if this involves any permanent fixtures such as fixed fencing, equipment and any other fixtures

permanently affixed to the land, planning consent will need to be sought from Ashford BC. Any application by the new owner to make this development will be considered on its merits by Ashford BC as the local planning authority.

I think the idea that the new owner has for development on the site would be consistent with its use over the last 20 years as a public access space used for community enjoyment in a quite shaded space, the only difference would be the fact that the new owner would develop this a private area, fenced off from the public. I have no idea of the nature of the fencing proposed such as its height and if it is closed in nature.

The new owner says that they are willing to engage with the local community in good faith and looks for a formal offer. I wish all parties luck with these discussions.

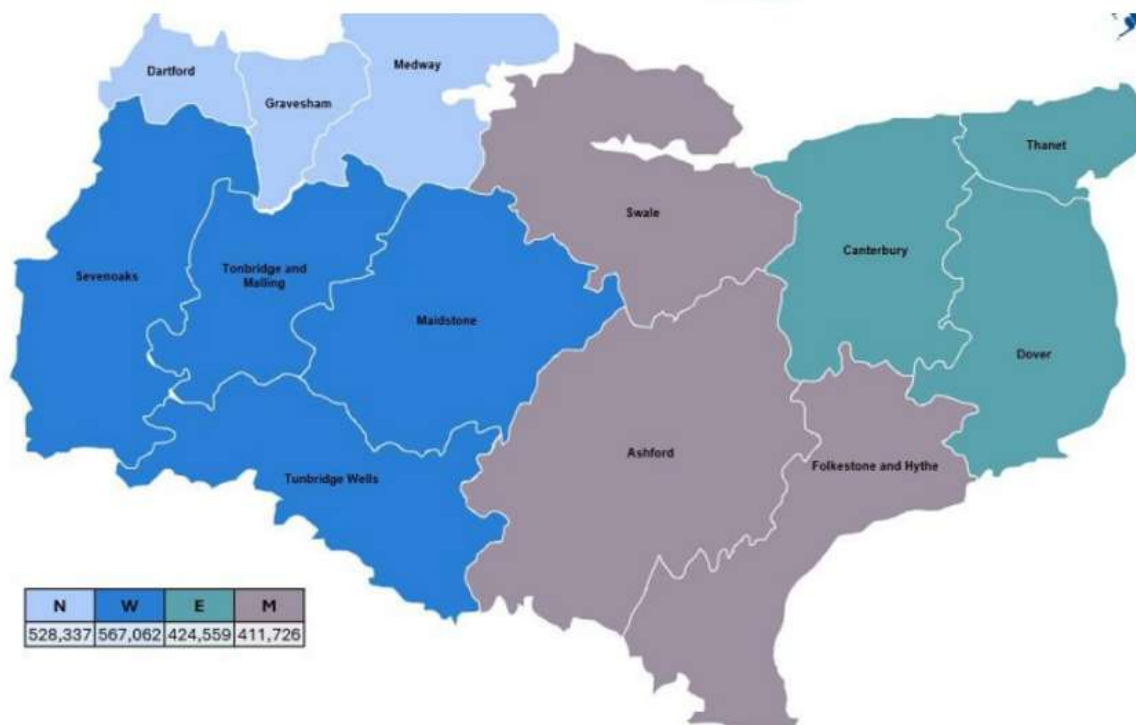
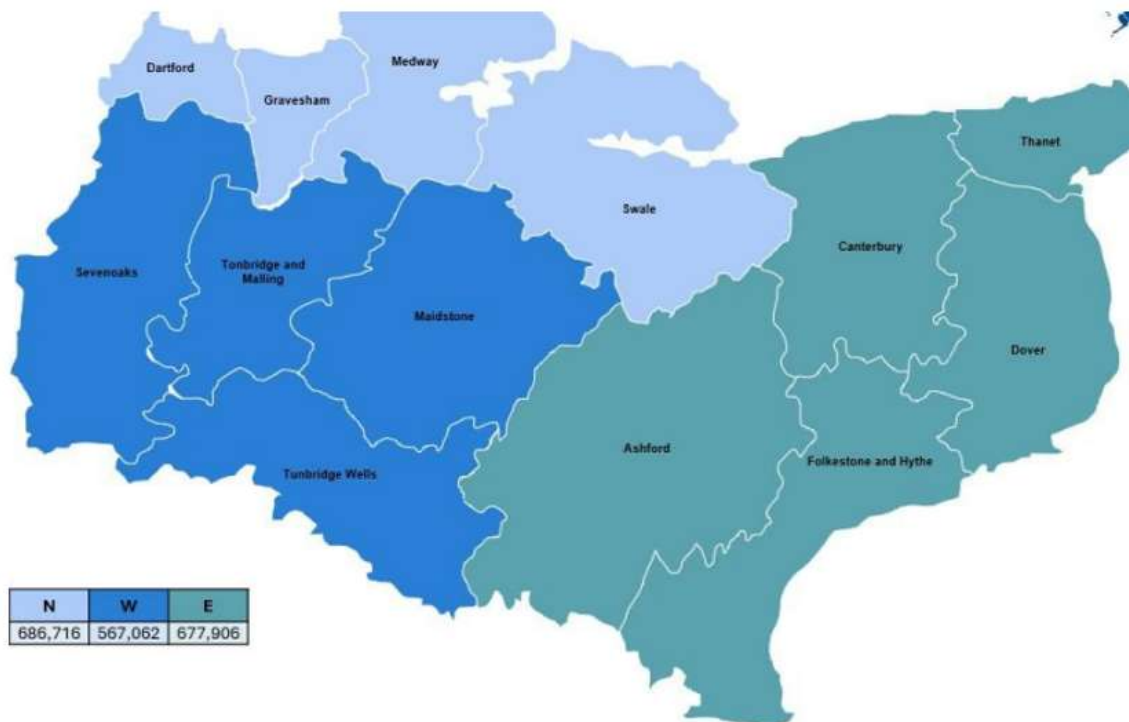
FLYTIPPING

I have reported a dozen or so black bags of household rubbish in Middle Street to Suez for collection (ref 24347753). They were removed but rubbish on the ground was not swept up.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION (LGR)

Kent's Leaders met on 3rd September and asked their consultants (KPMG) to look in more detail at two options for the number of unitary councils needed for Kent and Medway.



Ashford will therefore either be part of east Kent (with Folkestone, Dover, Canterbury or Thanet – the three unitary option) or mid Kent (with Swale and Folkestone – the four unitary option). Individual councils can also choose to commission and submit business plans for other options and I understand that KCC have commissioned a report on a single unitary covering Kent and Medway.

Once KPMG and council officers have worked together to draw up business cases for each option, councillors will decide which option it supports. Plans

will be submitted to the government by 28 November, and the final decision rests with ministers.

There is a clear expectation that ABC (and other councils) need to engage with stakeholders and the public in the development of the LGR business case by the government. A survey for residents will be launched based on best practice from other areas that have been through LGR, input from the cross-Kent comms group and feedback from chiefs and leaders. It will not ask for views on the various geographies, but centres around the principles the public might think are important considerations to help inform the business case. It is important to note this is not designed to be extensive public consultation, a more comprehensive consultation will be undertaken later in the process when there is clarity about the new unitary and when the council is looking at more detail on how it will operate.

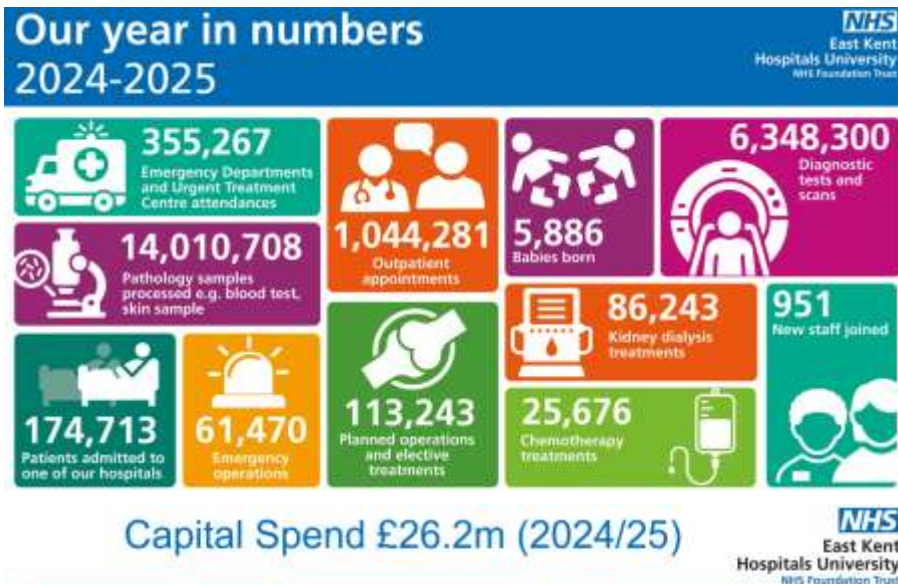
COMMUNITY SAFETY UNIT

The Unit met on 4th September.

- Dog fouling signage is being revamped as the view is that it needs to be refreshed.
- We discussed ensuring there are sufficient safety rings at open water / balancing ponds managed by management companies.
- No dispersal orders were issued during the summer in the town centre, a significant change from previous years.
- 50 e-scooters have been seized in Ashford across the Borough during the summer months. Less are now being seen.
- Kent Wardens are working closely with the Phoenix School and Library / Sure Start in Bockhanger to improve links to young people following the ending of Sk8side.
- The Queens Head in Kingsnorth has joined Ashford Partnership Against Crime (APAC).
- Housing Surgeries are now being held on the first Wednesday of each month at International House. These used to be held but attendance dropped off; they have been restarted and provides a housing officer who can answer questions from residents.

EAST KENT HOSPITALS UNIVERSITY NHS

The East Kent acute hospital trust held its Annual Members Meeting on 4th September. Key issues included.



- Waiting times have reduced for the longest waiting patients. They aim to see 60% of patients within 12 weeks and reduce those waiting more than 12m to 1%.
- 20% of patients spend more than 12 hours in the Emergency Departments – only half are admitted/transferred or discharged with 4 hours.
- Standards on corridor (Cost Coffee!) care are being established to ensure that patients are kept safe while they are awaiting treatment / transfer to a ward.
- Maternity services are now rated “good”, previously they were “inadequate”.
- The Hyper Acute Stroke Unit project has started with detailed design.
- Staff morale “is not where it needs to be” at east Kent hospitals. There are hot spots with very, very poor morale. This is a big focus for the hospital board. The board have pinpointed the departments and theme. There is a correlation between those departments providing poor service and poor morale. A new “freedom to speak up” process has been put in place along with assurances over how they are dealt with.

SOUTHEASTERN COAST AMBULANCE SERVICE

The Council of Governors met on 8th September. Key issues included.

- 5 Unscheduled Care Navigation Hubs have been set up which are producing positive results in Kent. On average one patient was assessed via the hubs each hour. Some acute trusts perceived a benefit through lower conveyance to Emergency Department (ED) although Medway Hospital is working less well for patients from Swale and Medway where there needs to be a higher level of integration. Targets are to increase alternatives to ED from 12% to 31% and reduce conveyance to ED 54% to 39%, saving 150 to 200k bed days. 2024/29 target is for virtual consultation for 55% of patients. Patients are used to being conveyed to hospital when they dial 999 so patient perception needs to be managed.
- Joined up records are essential for the success of the new NHS 10-year plan. SECAMB have no records whether a patient has just been discharged, the only data they have is if SECAMB have themselves just seen them.
- There was a constructive discussion about equity with some of the more deprived areas having fewer public access defibrillators (PAD) and fewer community first responders, reinforcing that cardiac survival is not an issue solely for the ambulance service. This shows the proportion of resuscitation attempts with bystander support. According to the Resuscitation Council UK, 38% of UK adults have never done any form of CPR training, and 61% of people are not confident enough to use a PAD. The UK's national PAD network, developed by the British Heart Foundation (BHF), is known as The Circuit. It aims to map all PADs across the UK, connecting them directly and automatically to ambulance services so that EMAs can advise callers of their closest device as soon as possible. There are 3,500 in the SECAMB area.



- SECamb Sustainability Strategy requires significant capital investment, particularly for infrastructure upgrades such as vehicle charging stations, solar panels, and vehicle replacement. SECamb continues to be ready to apply for central funding to support capital investments when it is available.

CYCLING PROVISION IN ASHFORD

I attended the public consultation event on the proposals from ABC for an expanded Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) on 9th September. I raised the ongoing delays in securing upgraded cycling / walking routes from Finberry to Ashford. Taylor Wimpey is required to upgrade the footpath from Bridgefield east of the Ashford/Hastings railway to the at grade railway crossing near the traffic lights on the A2070. Crest were obliged under the original s106 for Finberry to replace the at grade crossing with a bridge but have failed to deliver that. Due to the delay, the cost of the bridge is estimated to now be excess of the capped sum for delivery as set in the s106. However, the recent approach of Network Rail (NR) at Conningbrook Kennington in respect of bridge over railway lines could be a template for any future crossing between Finberry and Park Farm.

There is on-site activity at the Bridgefield end of the proposed footpath:



This relates to the route that TW is providing to the notional bridge and then northwards all the way to underneath the A2070 to meet the existing surfaced PRow. The length of route between the notional bridge and underneath the A2070 will be funded by Crest but will be delivered by TW's contractors which is logical to keep disruption to a minimum and provide a continuous surfaced route. There have been setbacks due to the weather but expect to have the bulk of the work finished in October.

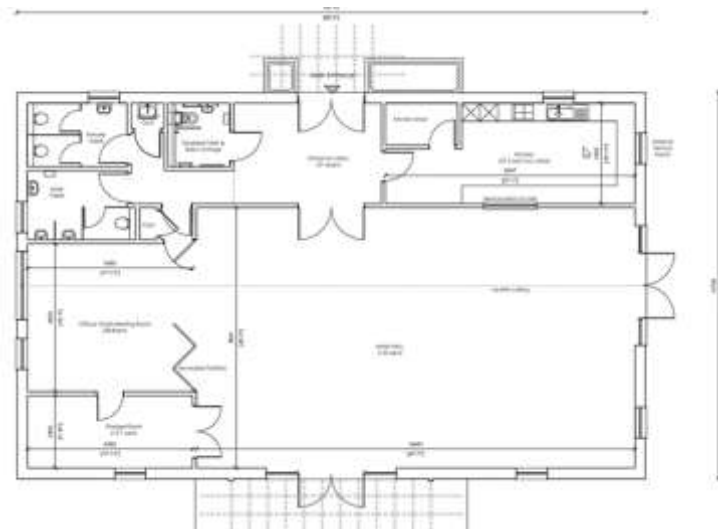
The route, when delivered, will connect residents living at these developments on the fringe of Ashford to a route northwards into South Willesborough and onwards towards the town centre (via the footway/cycle route passing below the railway line close to ASDA) as well as towards the Newtown Works and so help deliver one of the primary 'improved connections' objective that informed the aspirations for a bridge over the railway.

Other issues included providing clearer definition on the cycle route on the A2070 and ensuring the hedges are cut back due to bramble growth southbound from the cloverleaf roundabout to the Flanders roundabout. The latter stretch is in KCC control and has no cycling markings whereas the Highways England section does have markings.

FINBERRY S106

Various s106 obligations given by Crest and the Church Commissioners for England (CCE) do need amendment given the passage of time and the best route for that would be a Deed of Variation (DoV) which is simply the parties working together on amendments outside of any statutory time-scale process. Some discussions on the scope of a DoV were held just before Covid and coming out of that, the parties are aware of the need to pick such matters back up – my understanding is that Crest and CCE are actively doing so.

ABC have since COVID granted outline planning permission for a local centre, have a live stand-alone application for the bridge connection over the East Stour to connect to Waterbrook (and allotments/play area) and matters are moving forward at pre-application stage (with a stand-alone application to follow) in respect of development of the Sports and Community land (latest design below). There are ongoing discussions on delivery and running costs between ABC and Crest before any approach is made to the Parish Council on what their involvement could be.



ABC are also working with Crest to unlock the affordable housing parcel close to the school where there has been difficulty gaining registered provider interest.

All of these have a relationship with the s106 agreement and a DoV to the s106 negotiation can only help cut through a weighty existing s106 agreement that has legal text that is of its time and sought to cater for and control multiple delivery scenarios.

ASHFORD BC CABINET

The Cabinet met on 11th September. Key issues arising were as follows.

- Due to higher-than-expected procurement costs, the project scope on the Newtown Clocktower was reduced to focus on clearing vegetation, cleaning the buildings and brickwork, and making essential repairs to make the buildings weather tight until full restoration can proceed.
- The development of the proposed studio facility would require significant material public capital intervention to achieve a sustainable position. With this requirement and the challenges around attracting Studio operator interest it was agreed to depart from a primarily creative culture industry led development to a predominately residential based scheme. This change will require planning consent and approval from

Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government that this is acceptable in relation to the Levelling Up Funding agreements.

- The Monthly Makers Market (held on the first Saturday of each month) now expanded to, on average, over 35 stalls every month offering a diverse range of food, drink, crafts and creative goods, exceeding the Council's target of 30 stalls per market. Most markets, since March 2025, have operated close to or at full capacity, with a notable high of 49 stalls at the Ashford Food and Drink Festival. Currently, the gazebos for the Makers Market are stored in an empty unit in Park Mall. Due to the redevelopment of Park Mall, a solution for storage is required so a budget of £10,000 is to be allocated to support the financial requirements for a solution. This is in addition to the £100k originally budgeted to buy the gazebos and provide marketing. A further phase of implementing improved street trading in the High Street will introduce four pitches within the 'display area' beside the bandstand. These will be available for trading Monday to Friday, from 9am to 4pm. A second phase will focus on updating the lower High Street pitches to allow trading from Monday to Saturday and enhancing the overall trading offer.
- Homelessness has risen due to factors like economic hardship, housing shortages, and mental health issues with an increase of 118% since 2021. There are reports of empty homes that remain unoccupied while families struggle to find accommodation. There are concerns about out of Borough placements causing difficulties of children accessing their allocated school place and the quality of the accommodation outside ABC control.
- Council Tax Reduction (CTR) is a means-tested benefit provided by ABC for working aged people in the Borough (a scheme for pensioners is administered by the government). You can apply for up to 90% Council Tax Reduction if you fall into the following criteria:
 1. You own your home (either outright or you have a mortgage);
 2. You rent your home;
 3. You are the person whose name is on the council tax bill. If you are jointly responsible for the council tax, ABC may be able to help with your share of the bill;
 4. You are on a low income;
 5. You are 18 years of age.

The current CTR scheme, does not allow various Universal Credit Elements to be disregarded when calculating a household's income. Therefore, ABC are seeing some vulnerable residents receiving Universal Credit moving from 90% CTR support to 75% CTR support as Universal Credit is rolled out. Although the changes to remedy this inequality will need to be consulted on, ***I support a change to align the CTR Scheme for those working and on the vulnerable scheme offering a maximum level of support to all of 90% or 100% and base it on the claimant & partner income & allowances only, totally ignoring any income or allowances for children. 100% support***

would cost ABC £104k and 90% £26k but the benefit this scheme has is simplicity, and it also future proofs the scheme should the Government lift the two-child limit. Research from the Trussell charity reveals that 27% of children in the UK live in food insecure households. The number of people facing food insecurity has risen from 11.6m in 2022 to 14.1m in 2024. Trussell advocates for the removal of the two-child benefit cap, which could alleviate severe hardship for 670,000 individuals, including 470,000 children. I have provided £500 from my Community Grants Fund to the Stour Parishes Foodbank.

- A new process was agreed for housing complaints. Complaints can be made via the following methods:
 - Online: through the complaints form on the website:
<https://www.ashford.gov.uk/housing/council-tenant/existing-council-tenants/housing-complaints-procedure>
 - In Writing: email to customer.care@ashford.gov.uk or
 - By post to Ashford Borough Council, International House, Dover Place, Ashford, TN23 1HU.
 - By Phone: call 01233 331111 during business hours.
 - In Person: visit our offices or speak with a member of staff.

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW (CGR)

ABC is carrying out a review in advance of Local Government Reorganisation which will see unitary councils introduced in Kent. Unitary councils will bring together lower and upper tier local government services. The CGR will consider the governance arrangements within the unparished area of Ashford.



If a new Town Council is agreed there will be between 13 and 31 councillors and this would be akin to a parish council but with the power to elect a town mayor from the councillors. There is likely to be wards within any new council. Consultation will be between 27th October 2025 to 5th December 2025.

KALC AREA COMMITTEE

The Areas Chair/Vice Chair Committee met on 15th September. Key issues included the following.

- Public Health Officers provide support to District Councils (and the 321 parish/town/community councils) to deliver local Health Alliances. Erin Stewart is the allocated officer for Ashford. Life expectancy in Kent is has levelled out since 2011 and is now decreasing, it is no longer significantly better in Kent than the rest of England. Suicide and poor mental health have increased and is now significantly higher than the rest of England. Overweight is increasing and is now at 75% of the population and it contributes to cardiac issues and diabetes. Kent rate of hospital admissions for violence is increasing.

We need to address ALL the wider determinants of health (WDH)



- The Ashford Heath Network is designed to identify what needs to change in Ashford as “one size fits all” does not work across the whole of the county.

Ashford Health Alliance

Membership

- Chair – Corporate Director of Health and Wellbeing – Ashford BC
- Ashford Borough Council
- KCC Public Health
- Age UK
- Social Enterprise Kent
- East Kent HCP
- DWP
- KCC ASC
- Ashford PPG
- HealthWatch
- Ashford Volunteer Centre
- Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust



Priorities

- Housing
 - Helping referrals into the Energy Project
- Children & Young People
 - Vaping
 - Smoke-free spaces – public parks
- One You Shop
 - Relocation

Upcoming Projects/Actions

- Conduct survey among all AHA members (September)
- Continue to broaden AHA membership
- Establish a web page (September/October)
- Deep dive into CYP priority
- Launch of FiveDinners.com – online meal planning service
- Innovation Fund
 - £30,000 available for VCSEs to apply for to support community projects to reduce health inequalities and improve health and wellbeing.
- Supporting Ashford to become an “Age-Friendly Community”

Helping Ashford to become an “Age-Friendly Community”

Becoming an Age Friendly Community demonstrates a commitment to:

- **Improve health and wellbeing** for older residents through inclusive planning and services.
- **Alignment with existing priorities** such as housing, transport, green spaces, and public health.
- **Access to national resources and peer support**, including toolkits, training, and shared campaigns.
- **Enhanced collaboration** across local services, voluntary organisations, and community groups.

Next Steps

- Letter of Commitment
- Establish a working group – first meeting scheduled for 29th September
- Conduct a Baseline Assessment during the next Health Alliance Meeting
- Submit Registration – to the UK Network of Age-Friendly Communities (next deadline: 27 November)



CENTRAL COMMUNITY FORUM

The Forum met on 22nd September, and we discussed the following.

- PA/2024/2088 & 1727 – 54 High Street/2 North Street. The building is deteriorating and is having an adverse effect on the ambience of the Lower High Street. The Forum asked ward members to “call in” the two listed buildings consent to the planning committee.
- Community Governance Review. The view is that the Borough Council prefers a single town council for the whole of the currently unparished area. This is to ensure the precept is low per property. The outstanding issue is which (if any) assets are transferred to the new Town council and what endowment is paid to cover the running costs.
- The 2021 application (01933/AS) for the conversion of the old Post Office in Tufton Street has not been decided. It was agreed to chase for the latest position. The increased number of HMO nearby was discussed including above WH Smith’s etc.

- It was agreed that the loss of PCSO's in the town has reduced the level of policing (with thanks to Peter New for assisting on drafting the following for the Parish Forum in November). "The police have not recently made a clear statement on Ashford policing. The new Neighbourhood Policing model for Kent was rolled out (two years and three months ago) and Ashford Station need to confirm if they are still short of staff and not yet at full strength. We should be brought up to speed on a plan to get up to full number. What happens when recruits pass out (there are two passing outs November and another in February), how are they allocated and why? We need to be clear now on local policing as we move into Local Government Reorganisation or required improvements will not be delivered.

ASHFORD ALLOTMENT SOCIETY

With allotments in the pipeline for Sevington (in Finberry towards Waterbrook – there is a live planning application for allotments as part of the link road at the end of Brambling to Waterbrook), I plan to meet with council officers and Ashford Allotment Society to understand more about the issues they face.

- The Society is concerned of the absence of consultation and respect for the Society which prompted them to make a complaint. The complaint was not solely about rent increases, but covers changes to Terms and Conditions, removal of concessions for senior citizens and those on benefits, and the total disregard for others' views and input. Ashford's allotments are the most expensive in the area.
- The Council sets the rent, which is not determined by agreement but in accordance with Section 10(1) of the 1950 Allotments Act. That section states that the Council should listen to representations made by interested parties - this did not happen.
- Section 10(1) does not prescribe a specific method for determining rent, but case law suggests the most common approach is to examine rents charged by other authorities and make a balanced determination. It has been unhelpful for the Council to compare allotment charges with those for the Ashford Indoor Bowling Club, Stour Centre, or Cinema World as these facilities are entirely different from allotments, which lack welfare amenities such as toilets, washing facilities, cafés, electricity, and shelter - all of which are included in the costings for those memberships.
- The Council did not seem to understand what managing an allotment plot entail. There are no home comforts, users must visit the nearest store for a toilet or provide their own shed with a portable loo.
- New allotments would help reduce pressure on waiting lists at existing sites. It would also provide more residents with the opportunity to enjoy the many benefits of allotment gardening. It's not just about growing potatoes, it's about fostering a closer understanding of nature, building community, and promoting health and wellbeing. These are all

important benefits. It would be refreshing to see younger families and their children engaging in an activity traditionally associated with older generations.

- In developing the Finberry site, it must be properly laid out and structured. Provision of automatic water systems should be a priority to prevent wastage. The Society has other ideas but want to have their complaint over their involvement reviewed.
- I have asked ABC to confirm their understanding of the arrangements for running the Finberry allotments. LGA 1972 says that where there are a district council and a parish council, the functions of the Allotments Acts "shall not be exercisable by the district council". This means that any allotments in parished areas should be transferred to the parish and the Land Registry records updated. My understanding is there are two allotments in Wye, one run by ABC and one run by Wye with Hinxhill PC (hence the question).

IBF PLANNING CONSULTATION

Borough Councillors met on 24th September to discuss its response to the PINS application by the DfT to give the IBF at Junction 10A permanent planning consent. Here is my contribution. The next step is for PINS to decide if it will hold a public hearing or decide the outcome by written representations only.

Dealing with issues in order with them being covered in the officer's report:

First, I am delighted to read in Para 12 that no built development is proposed on Sevington East, with it being used for biodiversity gains for the next 30 years.

*Para 25 is inaccurate in that it states the staff car park entrance is manned, it is not. The gates are controlled by automatic access which is a cause of tailgating and means a lack of respect for the zebra crossing that allows pedestrians to cross the staff access route. It is not safe and needs to be made so by condition. Cars seeing the unmanned entrance gates open will speed up on the access road to get through the gap before it closes. **Recommendation 4 should be expanded to raised carriageway at the zebra crossing to reduce the speed to the signed 5mph.***

*Para 43 give assurance over the s106 mitigation towards St Mary's Sevington's upgrades with a draft Unilateral Undertaking. I welcome the applicant's intention (set out in Recommendation 12) to facilitate the prompt release of funds. It is disappointing that the assurance does not extend to reinstatement of a PRow across the site if circumstances allow. I am disappointed that the applicant has not taken up the suggestion to fund PRow upgrades further eastwards beyond Blind Lane into Mersham. **Recommendation 12 should include the reinstatement of the PRow through the viewing corridor should the circumstances permit this and the extension of the Bridleway from Blind Lane into Mersham.***

The Natural England comments on page 60 states that there is an ongoing need which allows lighting to be switched off in certain areas and shielded to prevent light

spill. The mitigation proposed at Para 136 to switch-off 'swim lane' lighting when not operationally required is welcomed. **Recommendation 6 deals with this.**

Historic England (page 67) describes the significant erosion on the setting of the historic buildings including St Mary's and they describe the soft planting as lacking resulting in the fact that the acoustic attenuation is highly visible. Much of the original planting in 2020 has not survived and it needs to be replaced and augmented.

Recommendation 1 deals with this by seeking improved delivery of landscaping. **There needs to be a commitment from the DfT and National Highways to work proactively with the Council on such improvements which will reduce light pollution into Mersham and elsewhere and protect nearby heritage assets.**

Para 141 refers to lack of acoustic barriers in the Tango emergency use area, this is the area nearest to my house. It is the only area without such barriers. One resident speaks about having to relocate their sleeping accommodation to the back of their house; I have done the same. I welcome the statement that if regular use emerges then suitable restrictions or mitigation will be required.

I welcome the requirements of Recommendation 7 to carry out further noise assessments with the Council's Environmental Protection Team regarding low frequency noise from HGVs, tonal noise from refrigerated HGVs, reversing beepers, clanging of curtain sider poles and the use of the perimeter road to the south of the site by the HGVs on exit the site. This is to include alternative routes out from this part of the site avoiding the perimeter road, particularly at night) are assessed. By coincidence, this afternoon at 14.24 I heard excessive number of repeated horns from HGVs on the perimeter road clearly unhappy with events on site.

Para 162 the Transport Assessment references queuing on the A20 east and west of J10A during the peak periods. A20 traffic must wait excessively for a gap in traffic. I welcome the suggestion that the applicant will discuss mitigation to overcome this queuing which may be signalisation and the creation of additional lanes on the A20 approaches to J10A. The Kent Transport Plan includes improvements to the J10A gyratory in the Plan to promote mitigation.

Para 165 refers to physical signage and improvements in digital navigation which have played a role in addressing routing concerns of misdirected HGVs along Church Road, Sevington and to a lesser extent Kingsford Street. I am pleased that ongoing collaboration with National Highways and KCC is proposed to explore additional improvements, however **Recommendation 5 needs to be expanded to include that further work should be done to mitigate the effect on the local unclassified road network** (not just the strategic road network).

Concerns over dog fouling are in Para 190 along with degradation of the surface in parts. It is suggested it is reviewed by the Parish Council working with the Refuse and Street Scene Team at ABC on the locations which are prone to fouling. Surface degradation should be reported to KCC. I am disappointed that the DfT etc are absolving themselves of responsibility to provide sufficient bins.

Para 194 refers to good opportunities for information boards to be provided to celebrate the archaeological find including the Cold War bunker. There should be further archaeological investigations on the Sevington East Field. **Recommendation**

14 deals with this. Unexploded ordinance was detonated last weekend, and it is important that the community has clarity of what has been found under the surface.

So, in summary I am asking for:

Recommendation 1 to include a commitment from the DfT and National Highways to work proactively with the Council on landscaping improvements which are designed to reduce light pollution into Mersham and elsewhere and protect nearby heritage assets. The area of planting to include Sevington East, particularly the raised bund outside the red line area but within the blue line area.

Recommendation 4 to be expanded to raised carriageway at the zebra crossing to reduce the speed to the signed 5mph.

Recommendation 5 to be expanded to include that further work should be done to mitigate the effect on the local unclassified road network.

Recommendation 12 to include (i) the reinstatement of the PROW through the viewing corridor should the circumstances permit this this and (ii) the extension of the Bridleway from Blind Lane into Mersham.

Residents have been very generous in their support for the site during its temporary use but now the DfT/DEFRA/HMRC has applied for permanent status, the issues I have listed must be addressed and no longer brushed under the carpet.

POLICE UPDATE

The following update from Kent Police was received on 24th September.

Further work is progressing on the ward cluster beat officer's model and in particular we have been focused on establishing systems to deliver regular attendance at Parish council meetings. With the volume of parishes in the district this is a considerable challenge. Hopefully you will already be seeing increased engagement from our beat officers and if not already I want to assure you that attendance to your meetings in the near future is planned where possible. It would be extremely helpful if the Parish Councils could provide us with meeting dates in as far in the future as possible – many we are able to obtain from open source, but there are some which we are finding difficult to obtain. There are also several councils, which have their meetings on the same evening and so in order to help us achieve our commitment we would be grateful for some flexibility in the agenda for our officers that may allow them to attend multiple meetings on a particular day, but also minimise their time present at your meeting so they can return to their visible patrolling of your wards.

Positively Ashford district has maintained a rolling year reduction in ASB and recorded crime. This is not observed in all districts in Kent.

At the direction of the Government, we have been focused with our partners on tackling issues in the town centre over the Summer period. I wanted to share with you some of the early observations on this work:

- Key indicators – street robbery, theft, shoplifting and ASB have all reduced comparable to 2024. ASB has been on a downward trajectory for some time and is currently lower than during COVID lockdown. No reports of either street drinking or groups of young people causing ASB and no

necessity for dispersal orders – a significant change from previous Summers.

- The presence of drugs is a key concern for businesses and the public in the town. Intelligence and Stop Searches have increased with a 60% increase in drug offences compared to summer last year. Bespoke operations provide intense intervention. These operations alongside a daily focus have led to multiple arrests and significant quantities of drugs and weapons seized.*
- CPW's and CPN's utilised on repeat and risk offenders of Serious Violence, VAWG and ASB restricting access to the town centre. Repeat offending rates have been minimal. CBO obtained on a repeat offender who within a week was spotted within the exclusion zone – charged and remanded.*
- Several engagement events held including VAWG walk and talk. In County Square a 'Red Flags' and 'Green Flags' in relationships event to raise VAWG awareness was held. This attracted a lot of positive interest from both males and females of a variety of ages. Responses have been displayed in County Square post event to maximise impact.*
- E-Scooters has been a constant focus as a top concern for the public. Over 50 have been seized across the district since the start of the summer with the vast majority of these in the town centre. A video compilation of seizures with a warn and inform narrative has been shared widely on various platforms and by partners, key stakeholders. It currently has 138,000 views on Kent Police Facebook and has most recently been adopted and shared nationally by the Home Office. There is an observable (from multiple sources) dramatic reduction of these now in the town.*

The neighbourhood team have also been working on problem solving the main concerns in the wards raised in the surveys. A lot of this work is supported by our partners and in particular Ashford Borough Council. For example, we have been working with the local authority and county council on fly-tipping hotspots in rural communities. Focused operations around waste carriers has supported this. We have also been working on specific cases of anti-social behaviour such as issues in Newtown where we have worked with the council to impose closure orders on two premises – recent community feedback indicates a significant improvement. We also look at those wider concerns in the community such as e-scooters, road safety and catapults. The officers will provide updates out to you through MCV, their monthly newsletters and also at your parish council meetings. We will be imminently conducting our surveys again to understand the impact and establish what the current concerns of the community are so we can respond to these. We would be grateful for your input and promotion of the surveys to your parishioners.

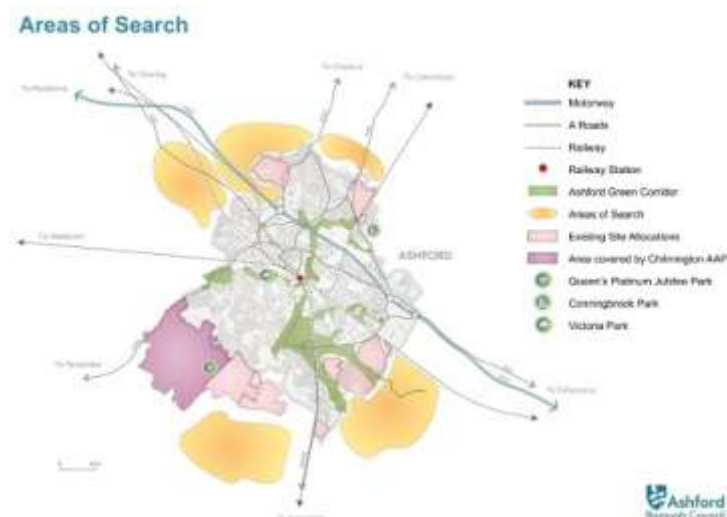
Lastly, I wanted to reassure members that we are monitoring the situation around migration focused protest activity very closely. We have been working collectively with key partners and stakeholders to manage the concerns of the local community surrounding recent anti-migration protest, displaying of St George and Union Jack flags and associated graffiti. This is not unique to Ashford, but locally we have mobilised quickly to identify and remove graffiti and worked closely with key sites and organisers of protestors to ensure these passed peacefully and without disruption to local residents. There are likely to be further local and national protest events in the coming weeks and we would urge partners and members to share with us any information or concerns surrounding these events.

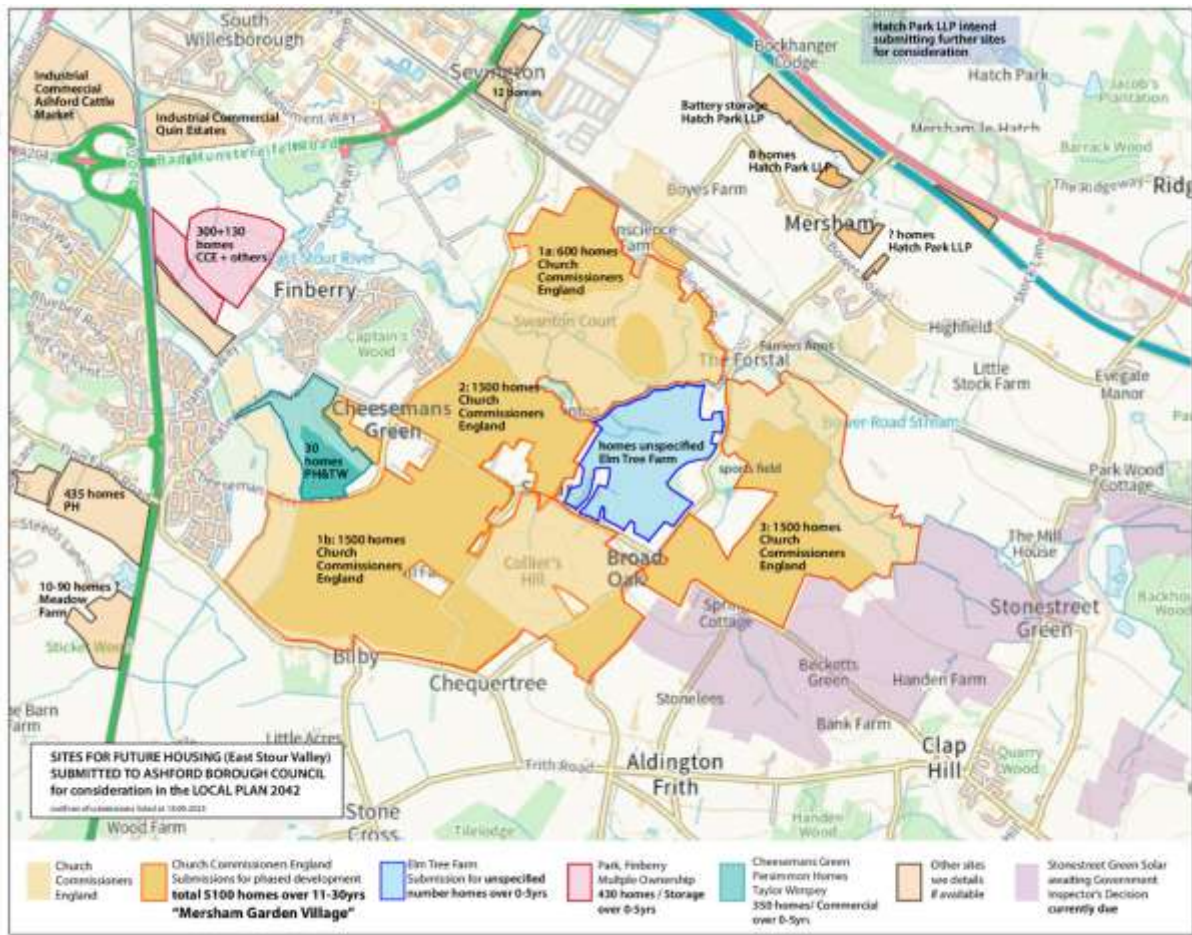
There has also been an increase in rural crime particularly overnight burglary's. Additional patrols are being deployed into this area, and we are progressing other initiatives to tackle this issue differently including introducing equine volunteer patrols into the district. We encourage reporting of suspicious incidents or crimes as soon as possible to us so we can act on this.

LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION

The Borough Council is preparing the next Local Plan which will control new building and other development in the Borough up until the year 2042. A consultation event was held in Mersham Village Hall on 25th September.

The current Local Plan protects Mersham from more development from the direction of Ashford. The map below shows the “Area of Search” which is being consulted on. My view is that development should be prevented from overspill into Mersham because traffic would be unable to access the area of new development due to width restrictions at the railway bridge in Cheesemans Green Lane, difficulties of navigating the bend near the shop and Station Road.





Map prepared by Village Alliance

Planning Policy SP7 is vital to the future of Mersham and must be retained in the next edition of the Local Plan. A reminder that Policy SP7 says: Policy SP7 - Separation of Settlements - Proposals for built development on non-allocated sites outside the built up confines of settlements shall be permitted only where its impact, individually or cumulatively, would not result in the coalescence or merging of two (or more) separate settlements, or the significant erosion of a gap between settlements resulting in the loss of individual identity or character. A view was expressed that other areas of search would not result in developments being taken into villages surrounding Ashford.

The best way to ensure that Policy SP7 is delivered by the new Local Plan is to allocate specific areas as green buffer areas where development is not permitted. There is long established consensus about this green buffer area (The Mersham Wall). Which I will argue should be shown in the new Local Plan as an area where development is not permitted.

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