

## COUNCIL UPDATE 8.2025

### **VICTORIA PARK**

I reported the root growth at Victoria Park on 2<sup>nd</sup> August. It has pushed up the tarmac and it's near the start of parkrun and a couple of runners have tripped up (including me!) I have asked if Aspire (the Borough Council's landscaping team) can address this.



### **KENT AND MEDWAY BETTER MENTAL HEALTH NETWORK**

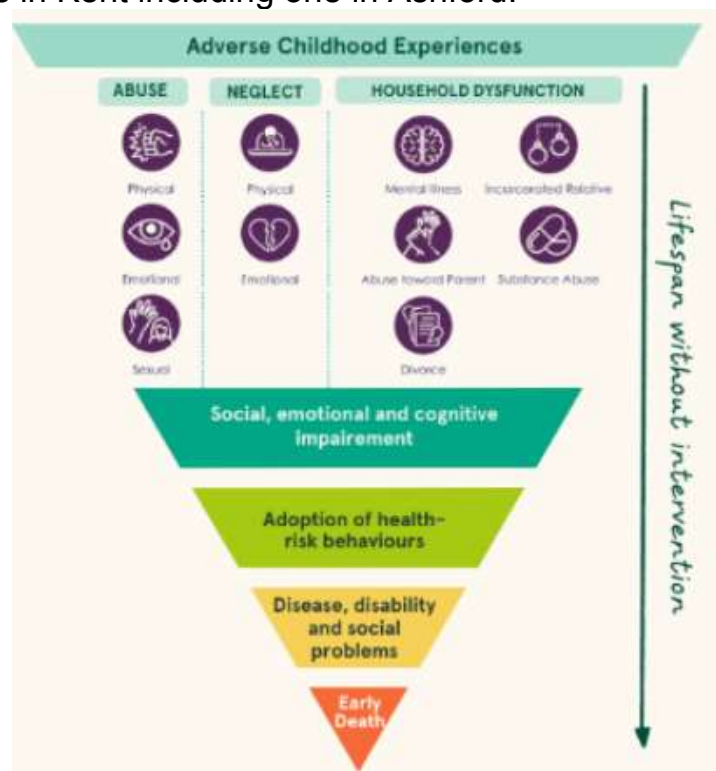
The group (which reports to the ICB) met on 5<sup>th</sup> August. Key issues were as follows.

- Oasis have provided domestic abuse support since 1994. The meeting focused on service to young people at risk of harm from domestic abuse. Safe accommodation is available for 18+.



- The PCC is funding a Don't Disrespect Campaign providing insight into sexual violence from young people. 9/10 girls have suffered from name calling or inappropriate texting. More training is required for educators to set boundaries, empowering young people to set boundaries and speak out when something does not seem right. This needs to start in primary schools. Assembly resource packs are being prepared.

- PC Rich Davies (Strategic Prevention Command) spoke about “Right Care; Right Person”. This is triage in the control room when health related calls are received. Police will now respond to mental (and other health) calls only if there is a risk of crime or threat to life. A welfare call is to be conducted by the agency already engaged with the individual. Hospital AWOL patients should not be reported to the Police as the duty is on the NHS. Police need a warrant or your permission to enter your property. However, there are exceptions, primarily when there's a risk to life or property, or when they are pursuing someone who has committed a serious crime.
- Dandelion Time is a therapeutic programme to support children who have experienced trauma, abuse, loss or neglect including household disfunction. Therapy includes access to open space, animals and craft in three sites in Kent including one in Ashford.



- A new Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy (2026-2030) is out for public consultation (<https://letstalk.kent.gov.uk/kent-and-medway-suicide-and-self-harm-prevention-strategy-2026-2030>).
- The Baton of Hope is a national suicide prevention campaign which is carried out across the UK. It's on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> September and updates are provided by a newsletter. A free non-ticketed event is being held at Mote Park and at Canterbury Christchurch (this is a free ticked event) the day ends at Dreamland, Margate (£5 ticketed event). <https://getinvolved.yha.org.uk/fundraising/appeals/yha-breaks-programme-appeal/>

## CATAPULTS

Kent Police have contacted all schools in Ashford following a rise of incidents (see below). The CSU reports a reduction in reports (and other anti-social behaviour - ASB) in the town centre following greater profile of the issue and the PCC funding of the gaming bus on Fridays and additional police officers patrolling in the town centre.

*There has been an increase in incidents reported to the police recently. These include catapults being used to target and cause injury to people, pets, and wildlife, as well as to cause damage to property. Reports indicate that many of these incidents involve the use of homemade catapults.*

*We are clear that catapults should not be used for illegal purposes, whether against wildlife, people or property. The law already provides the police with powers relating to the use of any item as an offensive weapon including a catapult, and if used in anti-social behaviour or for criminal damage. Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996, there are also offences around injuring and inflicting unnecessary suffering on wildlife. These measures give the police powers to deal with cases where wildlife is attacked, including cases involving the misuse of catapults.*

*We are writing this letter to request that you reinforce with your students that catapults should not be used for illegal purposes and encourage students and the public to report incidents involving their misuse to the police.*

*Under the law a catapult could be considered as an 'offensive weapon' in situations where it is being used, or is carried with the intention, to cause injury. Anyone caught in possession of an offensive weapon in a public place without good reason could receive a maximum sentence of four years' imprisonment, a fine or both.*

*We do of course understand that anglers use catapults to attract fish in rivers and lakes and would make clear that the police are not targeting the use of catapults for this or any other legitimate purpose. We do, however, want to raise awareness of their misuse which causes damage to people, objects, pets and wildlife.*

## **SOUTHEAST COAST AMBULANCE SERVICE (SECamb)**

The Board of SECamb met on 7<sup>th</sup> August including an "in public" session. Work is being done with Care Home Managers to reduce the number of calls which do not require patients to be conveyed to Emergency Departments. An Advance Paramedic Practitioner has been commissioned to lead the project. This is the first time I knew this was an issue and is of interest as several Care Homes are run by Local Authorities including ABC.

Progress on delivering the new SECamb business plan was discussed by governors on 21st August. Key deliverables include:

- Prompt, standardised emergency response, and
- Enhancing care navigation for non-urgent calls – to avoid SECamb taking people to Emergency Departments unnecessarily.

Integrated patient pathways and service delivery will include GP liaison. A key challenge is ensuring how SECamb delivers care navigation (through NHS 111) for non-urgent across the different Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) in Surrey, Sussex and Kent, each have different priorities (Surrey and Sussex ICBs are merging).

SECAM has access to enormous amounts of data as do Adult Social Care (ASC) / Community Health Teams. There is a hope of SECamb starts to

understand what ASC offers and what they do; a term of reference needs to be designed for the process during Local Government Reorganisation.

## **COMMUNITY SAFETY UNIT (CSU)**

The unit met on 7<sup>th</sup> August (Chair, DI Simon Johnson). Key issues included.

- The government has confirmed that the second national test of the UK Emergency Alerts system will take place at 3:00pm on Sunday 7 September. During the test, millions of mobile phones across all 4G and 5G networks will emit a 10-second siren-like sound and vibration, accompanied by a text message clearly stating that no action is required. This test is part of the government's ongoing commitment to ensure the system works effectively and that the public is familiar with it. A public information campaign is underway, including targeted communications for vulnerable groups and the first national British Sign Language information video. More information and resources: <https://prepare.campaign.gov.uk/emergency-alerts-campaign-resources/>. Whilst these alerts aim to protect the public in emergencies, they could put victim-survivors of domestic abuse at risk — especially those who rely on hidden phones as part of their safety plan. They can opt out of this test by following the steps here: <https://www.gov.uk/alerts/ opting-out>
- A new advice note from the Martyn's Law Steering Group helps parish and town councils prepare for the upcoming Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025. It outlines key responsibilities, emergency planning, and available support. <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/resource/preparing-for-the-terrorismprotection-of-premises-act2025.html>
- Three Public Space Protection Orders have been issued in respect of ASB in Tannery Lane.
- 139 fly tipping reports in July in Ashford Borough.
- Events were held in August at Conningbrook Lakes with Kent Fire & Rescue and CSU about the dangers of dangers of the water.
- 5 e-scooters seized in the town centre and transported to Ashford Recovery.
- 80% of Primary Schools had a Transition Talk about staying safe in the summer holidays. It was directed to those going to secondary school in September.
- KCC have reduced the age at which care leavers are supported from 21 to 19 resulting on an increase in reports of homelessness.
- The CSU is asked to distribute flyers regarding pavement parking. The Borough Council cannot ticket cars unless there are double yellow lines. Police can only take action (subject to resources) if the parking reduces the pavement width to less than 1.2m.

## **ALLOTMENTS**

With plans for allotments in Finberry and concerns raised regarding price rises of allotments in Ashford, National Allotment Week was celebrated 11<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> August. The 1911 Allotments Act, a pivotal piece of UK legislation, addressed the growing demand for small personal gardening plots. Its key features included:

- A requirement for local authorities to provide allotments upon the request of six residents
- Authority for local councils to acquire land, including through compulsory purchase
- Guidelines for fair rents and plot maintenance Promotion of health benefits

This act significantly boosted urban agriculture, particularly during the World Wars, and its legacy continues with active allotment communities today. There is a renaissance in allotment gardening, triggered in part by the cost of living crisis. The outdated image of the traditional allotment holder has evolved. Those who use them grow wholesome, naturally organic fruits and vegetables,

This year's theme is "Allotments and Wellbeing," which is particularly timely as we are encouraged to focus on health and self-care. The humble allotment not only provides healthier food options but also serves as a fantastic way to socialise with others.

## **TANYARD (FORMER KENT WOOLGROWERS)**

The Design Panel met on 13<sup>th</sup> August. The site is a brownfield site in the town centre and ABC planning are supportive of its development as social housing. It is in the local plan as part of the "Commercial Quarter". The constraints to development are Whist House (currently "buried" in the derelict KWG buildings – there is a pending planning application for their demolition), Green Corridor and part of the site is in the floodplain. It is accessible to local transport nodes, but direct walking links to train station and town centre are key factors. There is potential for nearby further development (Civic Centre, Sorting Office and The Flour Mills) which need to be complementary.

A planning application of 159 homes was granted in 2015 and a subsequent application for over 200 homes was not progressed.

The proposal is 179 new social housing units (86 2 bed, remainder 1 bed – no 3+ bed) with all buildings removed except Whist House. It is important for ABC to put affordable housing in the town centre and there needs to be benefits for new residents from living in the town. All flats will have balconies, be double aspect and none will have north only facing windows.

There is a desire for a walkway over the river to access the green corridor. There will be an open park setting around Whist House, the ideas for which have been taken from Kings Cross in London; affordable housing schemes in London have their own identity and that will be the case with Tanyard.

Parking (0.7 parking ratio and podium development will allow parking under the residential blocks with active frontage – not just railings into a car park), access to residential blocks, landscaping, river walkway and climate change resilience will be integral.

The setting of Whist House is important as it is a rare example of a listed property of its type in the town centre. The new development will respect the height of Whist House at 8m so the bulk of the height and development will be toward International House. Near to Whist House they are proposed to be 3 to 4 floors of accommodation (plus parking on ground floor); nearer International House, 10 floors and graduated in between – International House has 13 floors.

The viewing corridor of St Mary's Ashford from Mersham Church will be respected.

Details from the Coachworks and nightclub will be incorporated into design and materials. The design of the site will be taken from its tanning heritage. Negatives from nearby stock in Victoria Way – privacy, access to amenity (e.g. private roof terrace), more solid balconies – will be considered.

## **ASHFORD LOCAL PLAN TO 2042**

The council launched its consultation on the draft Ashford Local Plan 2042 on 18<sup>th</sup> August. It is open until 5pm on Monday 13 October 2025. The Plan will set out the vision and spatial development strategy for a sustainable and deliverable pattern of growth for Ashford borough.

The draft Local Plan and evidence documents are available to view at: <https://haveyoursay.ashford.gov.uk/draft-lp42-consultation>

Hard copies of the documents will also be available to view at Ashford Gateway. A 'drop-in' event intended to provide communities with the opportunity to find out more about the draft Local Plan consultation, to ask the Plan-Making & Infrastructure team questions and respond to the consultation will be held at Mersham Village Hall on Thursday 25 September 2025, 3 - 7pm. There will be a virtual event via Microsoft Teams on Thursday 2 October 2025, 5 – 6.15pm.

At this stage the consultation is on the “area of search” for new homes surrounding Ashford and the land owned by the Church Commissioners (ref LP41/175) has been agreed by ABC as one of these “areas of search”.



The area of search is bounded by the train line and Mersham to the northeast of the area. The A2070 and junction 10a of the M20 motorway are also near to the area of search providing access to the strategic road network. This land (owned by the Church Commissioners for England) is characterised by a dense network of agricultural fields, hedgerows and trees and rural lanes. The land slopes down from Colliers Hill, south of the area of search into the floodplain of the East Stour and the network of streams and ditches. A large portion of the centre of the area of search is in Flood zones 2 and 3 from the network of streams and ditches that connect to the East Stour River which flows into the centre of Ashford.

Pros of part of this area being considered for an extension:

- Lack of current social infrastructure in Finberry could mean that more nearby development may lead to developers bringing forward the infrastructure. It is a mono development, housing all bar a primary school (residents have never got the “village centre”, extra care facility, community centre, bus service etc).
- The CCE have failed to manage the environment around Finberry. A possible reason is the management costs of doing so. Spread over

more homes may enable the environmental management to be delivered.

- There are no meaningful cycling and walking opportunities into the town (other than in the summer but even that requires at grade crossing of the Hastings railway with styles either side preventing cycling/pram and wheeled access). More development may trigger more sustainable access.

Cons against an extension:

- Lack of accessibility; it will create additional traffic either on rural roads through Sevington and Mersham or from the A2070 junction through Finberry.
- If Finberry extends beyond Cheeseman's Green Lane it will impact on the villages of Mersham and Aldington Frith and the special environment of the area.

Possible sites within the village of Mersham will be the subject of a second consultation in 2026.

## **RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND (REPF)**

ABC has secured funding from the Government to support rural areas in the borough. The money will go towards the following capital grant schemes.

- Rural Green Business Grant – to provide grants to support energy efficiency or energy transition projects in commercial premises in rural parts of the borough.
- Rural Place and Provenance Grant – to provide grants to support rural food and drink producers, hospitality and tourism attractions or venues, to increase productivity and sustainability for businesses. In addition, to support the creation of start-up spaces and tackle the 'Last Mile' challenge in rural areas, seeking to create viable travel routes to increase visitors to rural destinations.

Applications close on 31st October 2025 at <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/repf>

## **CROWN DEVELOPMENT IBF APPLICATION**

Although comments do not need to be with the Planning Inspectorate until 12<sup>th</sup> September, here are my draft comments:

*This documents sets out the comments on the Crown development Application by DfT/DEFRA/HRMC for "Retention of the existing buildings, Goods Vehicle parking spaces, entry lanes, refrigerated semi-trailers, staff car parking spaces, access, site infrastructure, utilities, hardstanding, landscaping and ancillary facilities and associated works; and ongoing use of the site for an Inland Border Facility and Border Control Post, operating 24 hours per day, seven days per week."*

*By way of background, I am the Ashford Borough Council Ward Member for Mersham, Sevington South with Finberry and the application site is within this ward. I live very close to the Sevington IBF, south of HS1/Ashford-Folkestone railway at Imber (Cheesemans Green Lane).*

I had an opportunity to meet with DfT, DEFRA, JLL and Kanda Consulting (who were DfT's planning advisor) on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2024. I attended public consultation events on 19<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> October 2024 in Mersham Village Hall and Willesborough Church. I had a site visit on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024 which is the source of the internal IBF photos included.

The issues I have are below.

- **Long term assurance over the non-development of the land east of Highfield Lane is required.** This is required under ABC local plan (Policy SP7) which prevents the coalescence of Ashford with its surrounding villages. The site must be retained for the long-term benefit of biodiversity and the local community ending the speculation that the site will be developed as was envisaged by the previous owner (AXA/Friends Life). The reason for concern is linked to the request for increased usage at the Sevington IBF. A concern could be if the UK government are seeking to consolidate operations at the existing IBFs into a fewer number, including Sevington IBF; this could require expansion into the field east of the Sevington IBF.
- **Attempted HGV access via Kingsford Street and Church Road Sevington remains problematic with regular attempts to enter the IBF via the staff entrance.** When this happens the HGVs cause damage to residential properties (including my own – my garden fence was destroyed by a HGV reversing to accommodate traffic from the opposite direction, pictures below).



HGV Damage to my property



Collateral damage by HGV on Church Road

Clearer signage is required approaching Church Road from the A2070 that there is no access to the IBF such as this.



- **There are regular right hand turns from the A2070 into the IBF.** This is when lorries access the IBF from J10 – better signage from the M20 is required to prevent exit from the M20 at J10 rather than J10A. The issue is that the signage on the M20 is limited and the black cross on a yellow square is missing from the ½ mile exit signs from London. SatNav operators / Google Maps should be advised of the correct route via J10A.
- **The landscape management plan for the land east of Highfield Lane is required to be developed and implemented** as there is a lack of planting to shield Mersham from the impact of lighting. A repeat of the excessive growth of ragwort and thistles from 2024 alongside Kingsford Street must be avoided.



Excessive thistle growth on the field east of the IBF

*Many of the trees planted around the IBF have died, these need to be replaced.*



A collection of photos showing just how many trees have died

*In partnership with KCC, DfT said in 2022 that they intended to implement a pilot woodland scheme on site, "trees outside woodland" which aims to reconstruct indigenous woodland within 20-30 years including the Miyawaki method. There is no evidence that this has happened. That said planting proposed to provide visual screening must be natural regeneration, not just planted trees.*

*The area was supposed to provide a habitat for hedgehogs, bats, dormice, brown hare, reptile, newts, birds of prey and breeding birds of conservation priority including skylark and nightingales, what has gone wrong as there is no evidence this has happened?*

- *I assume **pollution monitoring** is being carried out. Does current usage of the site reach the trigger points for particulate prevention?*
- *There is **environmental damage with the amount of litter by the roadside**. It's evident to see just outside the main entrance of the IBF on the opposite side of the A2070 the actual amount of litter mainly involving plastic bottles filled with a liquid (not recommended for consumption). The IBF has a duty of care to ensure that the surrounding areas are free of litter created by their users.*
- *In addition to litter thrown from HGVs approaching the IBF there is a huge amount of **dog faeces on the bridleway paths**. The developer needs to provide litter bins and signage to counter this happening on their land.*



66 dog poos on the surrounding bridleways on a recent walk around the bridleways

- The **maintenance of the bridleways is less than ideal**. The following picture shows the deterioration from water runoff south of the staff entrance.



Bridleway deterioration near staff entrance

- 12m columns for the lighting units is not desirable or necessary given the height buildings used on site. It causes **excessive light pollution in Mersham.**



View of Field to East from IBF showing height of light columns is excessive

*I accept that lighting is switched off at the overspill areas when they are not used but more needs to be done to manage light overspill. Operations on site are limited (the pictures below were taken on a Friday afternoon) and the site appears oversized. There needs to be a way of shutting down lighting on those swim lanes which are not used.*



Empty Swim Lanes showing the excess capacity at Sevington IBF



Light spillage from Mersham

- **Landscaping is required in the viewing corridor** and other actions required to ensure its long-term prevention of development. Other planting should be considered in areas of the car parks to soften the impact.

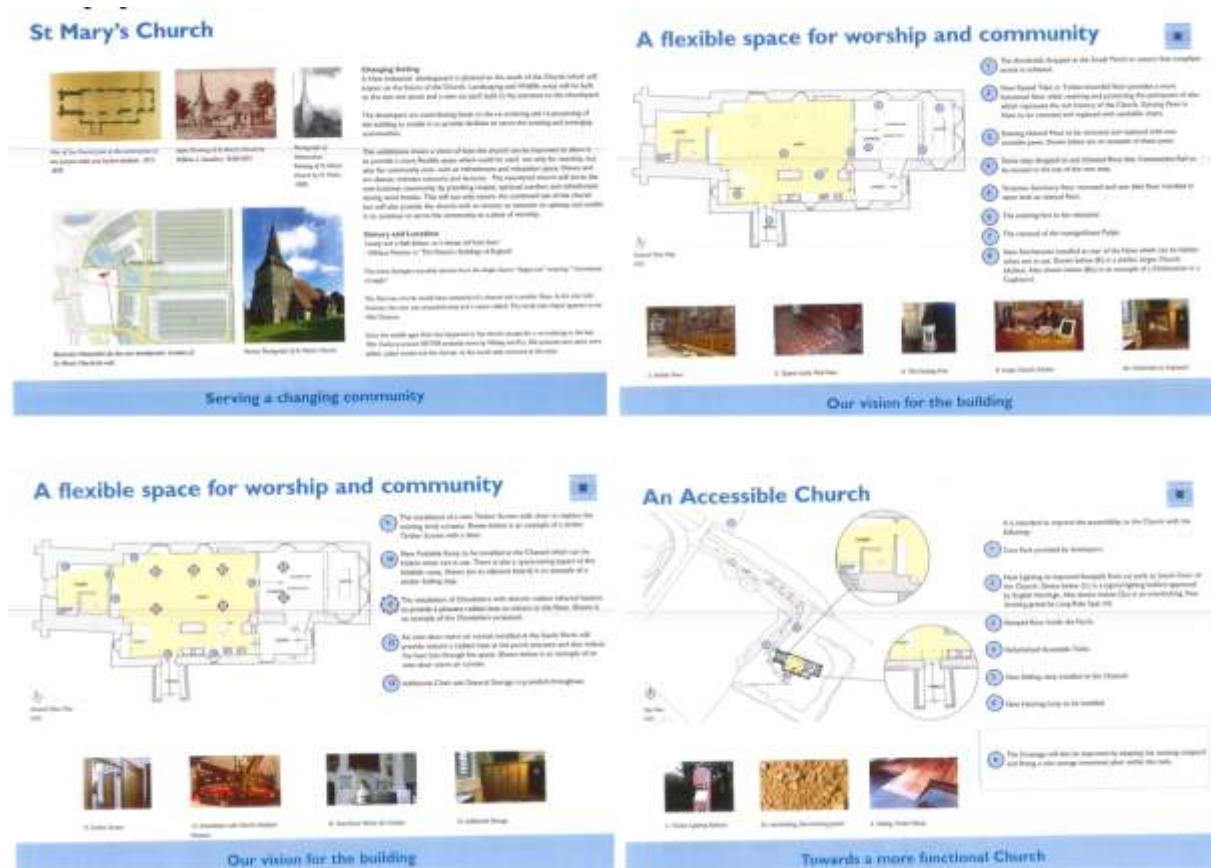


Viewing Corridor requires better planting



Original AXA/Friends Life plans for planting in the viewing corridor – not delivered by DfT et al

- **The frontage on to the A2070 link road is poorer than expected with less planting.** It is a dismal entrance into Ashford off J10A. As a key entrance to the town it should be presented with planting to soften the visual impact of the security fencing.
- **S106 contribution must now be provided to Sevington Church as envisaged.** It was delayed by the long-term lease granted to National Power Network, but I understand this is now resolved. The Church Works Specification submitted by the diocese sets out how the improvements to the Church will complement the operations at the IBF as it will provide a valuable opportunity to spend time away from the workplace and enjoy a break.



#### Church Work Specification

The information board at the public exhibition refers to £792k being provided in wider social benefit, I have no idea how this calculation was made but providing the payment to the local Church will support social benefit as well as the IBF.

- A number of **employees travel to the IBF for work on e-scooters**. The applicant is reminded that these are illegal on roads and staff should not use them to travel to work.
- I have noticed a **lack of respect for the zebra crossing** at the staff entrance with speeding and tailgating by some drivers exiting / egressing the staff car park by car. This presents a risk to pedestrians and other users of the bridleway and needs to be managed better.
- **Information boards** were agreed by AXA / Friends Life to explain the Cold War Observation Bunker and other archaeological finds along with the Biodiversity Strategy. These should now be brought forward.
- The DfT should explore long term improvements to connectivity by **extending the PROW from Blind Lane to the village shop in Mersham**.
- **There are issues with idling engines on site and EV charging points should be explored**.
- I have heard plans have mooted **plans for the IBF to be used as a Brock overspill or alternate**. **This is unacceptable** and should be specifically excluded from the consent.
- At the moment, the Trade Operating Model (TOM) established by the old government (with plant and seeds & sanitary and phytosanitary checked at the IBF in Sevington) is in existence and DEFRA etc are still operating towards that. **Clarity is required on changes arising from the recent EU reset** and if / when live animal checks will start; at one point they were due to start in October 2024.
- When I last inquired, KCC have a draft post excavation report on the **archaeological works undertaken** for the IBF site in 2020. It had not been finalised and as such, not in the public domain. The report on the archaeological works done on the adjacent field east of Highfield Lane also revealed significant archaeology including a Bronze Age barrow. It will be beneficial

to disseminate positive information about the important archaeology found through local groups.

- There are reports of the spread of **invasive Goats Rue** from the site. It seems to have colonised from the IBF all the way down the M20 to junction 11. Apart from its tenacious nature – this plant can regenerate over several seasons – it is toxic to ruminants with the potential to induce a build-up of excess fluid in the lungs, cause blood pressure, paralysis and eventually death. This needs to be controlled.
- At a meeting with Southern Water (SW) on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024, SW reported that they were still tanking waste from DEFRA away from the site rather than using the **foul water sewerage system**. There is environmental cost of using tankers. At the public meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> Oct the DEFRA team assured me that the waste was not being taken to Bybrook so does not contribute to the nutrient neutrality / phosphorus issue at Stodmarsh SSSI. The applicant should provide assurance over where it is being taken, and confirm it is not being discharged into the Beult as this river has its own reasons to be protected..
- **Vibrations on adjoining homes** in Church Road have been reported. There have been reports of low frequency droning noise, and monitoring equipment has been previously installed at Bridge Cottage and Orchard House with the results requiring update and independent scrutiny. Since the IBF became operational for SPS inspections, the **low-frequency hum** has been ever present - often around the clock. Could this be related to refrigeration or power systems associated with the facility's new storage functions? As I say, independent scrutiny is required.
- There are plenty of incidences of HGV traffic passing between the sheds and acoustic fence, in a low gear and at slow speed, leading to **raised background noise**. I do not believe the acoustic fencing is fit for purpose. If gathered evidence finds the internal ring road to be an issue, the site is to be redesigned with additional noise mitigation methods to be installed. This is required now the site is to be in long term use.
- The overflow lorry park (behind my house) has lorries parked in it from time to time. This is the case when the remainder of the site is at capacity or when maintenance work is being undertaken. When in use, the lights are on all night, which have no shields. Also, there are **no acoustic barriers for this section**. I need to sleep elsewhere in my house when this happens because of the light and a low thrumming noise at night coming from the site. The light disturbance is unacceptable along with the fact that one of the CCTV cameras is directed into one of my bedrooms. CCTV coverage outside the IBF to be reviewed and ensure it is not excessive.

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 that have been brushed under carpet listed above need to be addressed.

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