

COUNCIL UPDATE 7.2026

COMMUNITY SAFETY UNIT

The unit met on 2nd July, key issues included.

- Knife bins have been relaunched with a wider concept of amnesty bins. They are at Dover Place, Stanhope, Station Rd Tenterden, Bockhanger Shops and Court Wurtin (relocated from Park Mall).
- 5 Fixed Penalty Notices were issued in June relating to Public Space Protection Orders in Town Centre.
- Only 109 fly tipping reports in June, lower than last June. 14 commercial waste checks were carried out to ensure compliance (4 FPNs issued)
- 8 stray dog reports (4 returned to owners).
- With the warm weather there have been reports of young people entering areas of water including Conningbrook Lakes where there are real dangers present. A dispersal order was issued at the lakes (PSPOs cannot be issued to under 16s). Education events are being carried out in schools and at the Youth Festival at Civic Park on 5th August along with additional patrols in the area.
- The Butterfly Project has been launched in Ashford. A series of butterfly murals have been created across the town centre, helping to signpost residents to support services, resources and reporting tools related to violence against women and girls (VAWG). The project has been delivered in collaboration with the Kent Police and the Rising Sun Charity, with murals designed and created by local artists and schools. Find out more about the Butterfly Project here- <https://www.kent.police.uk/butterfly-project>
- The Churchyard Passage PSPO gating order expires on 14th August 2026 (Henley Fields PSPO ends on 20 October 2026). There are plans to renew both.
- Biggest issue with the public is with catapults which have grown in popularity on social media. Some are making a business out of selling high powered catapults. It is being tackled by attending and reviewing unattended incidents to develop intelligence and identify offenders and carry out high profile patrolling leading to warnings or prosecution. Innovation and problem solving is design to tackle long term trends including amnesty bins and school education (year 6) around the dangers and risks of catapult related crime. HM Government feels that a specific offense is not required as legitimate uses exist such as fishing bate, target clubs. It is part of some group's culture.
- The Eat Well; Spend Less Roadshow is on 27th August in Willesborough.
- The whereabouts of the Churchyard railings which were removed along with a fallen tree was investigated and they are at the Aspire yard. A work order to reinstate has been made.

PLANNING REGULATIONS

The Government's new National Scheme of Delegation will remove many planning decisions from elected councillors and place them in the hands of planning officers from 31st October 2026. The long-established ability of ward councillors to "call in" planning applications for public debate at Planning Committee will be severely restricted denying residents a meaningful voice in decisions that affect their communities.

At present, if a planning application is due to be decided by officers, councillors can call it in to be decided instead by the planning committee where councillors make the decision, giving residents and other interested groups the opportunity to address the meeting.

In addition to this, under new arrangements, councils wishing to refuse planning applications for developments of 150 homes or more must notify the Secretary of State before issuing a refusal, allowing Ministers to decide whether the application should instead be determined by central government.

Ward councillors know their communities better than anyone. They understand the pressures on local roads, schools, GP surgeries, drainage, water supply, public transport and the environment. If residents have genuine concerns about a planning application, their elected representatives should have the right to ensure those concerns are heard in public by the Planning Committee.

ABC CABINET MEETING

Councillors met on 9th July, key issues arising included.

- 2024/25 Mean (average) gender pay gap in hourly pay 7.5% (up from 23/24 7.0%); 2024/25 Median (mid-point) gender pay gap in hourly pay: 9.1% (up from 23/24 8.9%).
- In May 2021 report from Laser Energy returned a carbon baseline of 1,277 tCO₂e for 2019/20. The carbon footprint for FY 2024-25 was 1,148 tCO₂e (10% reduction over 5 years, 2% pa). £2.8m spent for EON to retrofit further units of the Council's housing stock to obtain an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of Band C to comply with new legislation.
- There is financial pressure of £180,000 relating to homelessness costs with the average number of Temporary Accommodation cases increasing to 262 compared to a budget assumption of 254. Homelessness Action Plans are to reference those with Children in Education to manage distance to school when temporary accommodation (TA) is provided outside the Borough. A new duty to

inform exists from September to advise GPs, Schools etc of placement in TA outside the borough.

- There has been an increase in parking income and season ticket sales totalling £443,000, reflecting a return to income levels which are more consistent with pre-covid figures. But Parking usage in Ashford and Tenterden down from 275,090 (Q1 25/26) to 247,703 (Q4 25/26)
- Council Tax collection has dropped (The final in-year collection rates for 2025/26 were 96.5%, p/y 97.1%), it is thought this is due to external factors, particularly economic climate such as cost of living generally, empty homes premiums and increased resistance to paying council tax. New rules due next year will give residents longer before the council can pursue arrears. This highlights wider affordability pressures facing households and local authorities.
- In quarter four there were significantly higher volumes of housing complaints driven by seasonal pressures. Further resources to support complaint management were included in the HRA Business Plan. This has been caused by the introduction of Awaab's Law and the Housing Ombudsman recommendation for a Repairs Service Improvement Plan. These have increased awareness by tenants along with increased use for agency staff during the year to support the levels of demand as they are less responsive/proactive.
- Repton Medical Centre - The planning application has been submitted, discussions with the primary healthcare provider (NHS) have taken place, there have been delays whilst negotiations have been ongoing for use as mental health services.
- The virtual golf simulators are expected to open at Elwick by the end of July 2026, with the remaining elements of the redevelopment opening during the October 2026 half-term, starting 23 October.
- Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Redevelopment was discussed. This includes work on the carpark, activity hub and destination play area and connected and waymarked route works which will all be undertaken during 2026/27 with estimated costs totalling £1.62m which is fully funded by s106 contributions. The overspill carpark is being developed into a functional and welcoming arrival point to improve the overall visitor experience and increase footfall; works have already commenced and the carpark is due to be open to the public by end of July 2026. The construction of an activity hub (water sports kiosk, café and utilities building) and play areas will provide a high-quality visitor experience and family orientated attractions; construction is expected to commence in August 2026 with the café and play areas opening in October 2026 coinciding with the school holidays, and the water sports kiosk opening Spring 2027. The connected and waymarked routes are enhancing accessibility and navigation across the site to strengthen internal linkages and encourage greater visitor movement throughout the park. Works are also expected to be completed within the same timeframe as the café and water sports kiosk in October 2026. I asked about plans

for open water swimming in a safe Lido area. A consultation on the plans closed on 6th June and I asked how the consultation been reflected in the redevelopment.

AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

A workshop on 13th July was held regarding Ashford's aging population (I was unable to attend due to a diary clash). Ashford's older population is growing faster than average increasing demand on health, social care, housing, transport and community support. This is, because a larger older population is likely to include more people living with long-term conditions, frailty, reduced mobility or changing support needs. This makes prevention, independence and supportive environments increasingly important to help people stay well for longer and maintain independence.

Creating age-friendly places and neighbourhoods to support independence, safety and confidence. It requires attention on:

- Walkability, seating, lighting and toilets
- Neighbourhood-level differences and local solutions
- Involving residents in identifying practical improvements
- Improving transport, connectivity and reliability

Transport is a key enabler across health, social participation and access to services. Issues include:

- Accessibility, reliability and information
- Urban and rural differences
- Working with partners to explore both formal and community-led solutions
- Supporting people to age well at home

There is a strong preference among residents to ***remain independent at home***, with the right support at the right time. This requires:

- Better information and advice on housing options and adaptations, alongside earlier intervention
- Earlier conversations and planning for later life
- Stronger links between housing, health and community support including preventative models such as falls prevention, frailty identification and proactive "ageing well" support
- Increasing the availability and accessibility of appropriate housing options for older people, including supported, adaptable and specialist housing
- Consider how housing supply can better meet current and future needs, including downsizing options and homes that support independence

Enabling social connection, participation and community capacity requires supporting volunteering and community-led activity as key enablers of sustainable social connection. Actions include:

- Reducing practical barriers such as transport, cost and confidence
- Strengthening access to existing community assets
- Supporting inclusive, welcoming spaces
- Growing volunteering and community-led activity
- Creating opportunities for older residents to contribute and shape local services
- Clear, accessible communication and information

Improving how information is shared, accessed and trusted is critical to ensuring that older people can navigate services, participate in community life, and benefit from the actions developed through this work. It includes:

- Improving how information is shared and signposted
- Using formats and channels that people trust and can access
- Working with partners to align messages and reduce confusion.

ACTIVE TRAVEL GROUP

The Active Travel Group (walking and cycling) met on 14th July. Access to Chilmington Green Secondary School was discussed, a good example of how not to provide active travel as it is so unsafe.

£10k is provided for secondary school cycling maintenance and confidence sessions, £15k is provided to run 3 workshops to encourage cycling/walking behaviour change with council tenants. £35k is provided to carry out a feasibility assessment for Hythe Road, including the railway bridge, to create a bike route. ABC funding allows a further key route to be identified for cycling/walking enhancements; noting that this can cover behaviour changes and infrastructure changes are for KCC.

Active Travel England has urged introducing 20mph speed limits on some rural roads where pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles share space, alongside measures such as narrower carriageways, bollards and removing centre lines to improve safety. The guidance, covering low-traffic "quiet lanes", is designed to help create safer walking and cycling routes. It is intended to deliver practical, safe and accessible active travel routes, improving connections between communities while encouraging healthier travel choices.

LOCAL PLAN DELIVERY

The local plan will now cover 15 years to 2043 assuming the Plan is adopted by March 2028. The number of housing units required pa to accommodate this is 986. This is a challenge with the housing delivery constraints happening nationally demonstrated by the slow down of building in Ashford with minimal development in Finberry and Chilmington.

The accelerated deadline to produce the plan may mean there are less in person consultation events. Development sites should be identified by November, and formal consultation will follow. The number of objectors is important, but they must be supported by planning reasons. Phasing of housing (including gypsy and traveller sites) and economic including leisure, retail and recreational development will be agreed by May 2027.

The plan will need to set out the infrastructure required to support the housing and economic development by May 2027. A key point is ensuring the local plan reflects the new NHS 10-year plan. The 10-year plan will deliver new community healthcare facilities, local hubs of larger primary care facilities providing not just GP services but also adult social care, community health services and mental health support.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW

The outcome of the Secretary of State's deliberations for the new council structure was announced on 16th July. Ashford will be merged with Swale and Folkestone and Hythe:



This option was chosen due to economic comparability, placed based alignment and neighbourhood empowerment. Ministers say the reforms will improve efficiency, support housing growth and enable further devolution. Elections to the new authorities are planned for next May, with councils expected to be operational by 2028, I have raised concerns about costs, disruption and impacts on local communities.

A key feature of the new unitary council which replaces ABC and KCC is the introduction of neighbourhood governance which requires the unitary to have arrangements for neighbourhood-level decision-making. Parish and town councils will be integral to these arrangements with an important place in neighbourhood governance and in the wider community empowerment agenda, playing a central role.

Communities will have greater control over local assets through the new Community Right to Buy, which will allow communities the first opportunity to purchase valued local buildings and spaces, with time to raise the necessary funding. Ashford will have the flexibility to design arrangements that work for them, with decisions about services and assets made through local partnership and negotiation.

FULL COUNCIL MEETING

Councillors met on 16th July. I raised three issues.

PARK MALL REDEVELOPMENT

The Council's approach to working with shopkeepers and managing relationships with stakeholders has been less than perfect. I expect transparency and discussion with businesses. It is too late to change the demolition process, but we can ask for greater scrutiny, discussion, awareness, advance notification and better suppression of dust and noise. In other words, learning from the mistakes of this process as we move into Phase II (building the temporary car park and the new flats that will follow) and the redevelopment of the old Mecca.

At the Borough Council meeting I spoke about the extent of dust and water mist blowing around in St George's Square which is creating an unhealthy environment to spend any time in. Some people complained that they had been showered in water and dust in the street.

The Central Ashford Forum has spoken to the main businesses in the High Street and 48 have signed a petition. One business has to dump food on some days; clothing stock has had to be washed. Nurseries have shut because of noise and dust. By The Tank café reported no customers on 10th July and is closing. The staff parking cars behind the photo shop in the High Street have had cars scratched.

I do know that council officers are going to site every other day and speaking to the contractor daily, to review working practices to ensure the contractor is mitigating risks as far as possible. The tank has not been identified as being at risk of damage. I asked to see the record of meetings and confirmation that there is no risk of damage; as this is not consistent with the reports I have heard.

I also note, the Council has a large water suppression machine on St Georges Square, it will produce mist which can reduce the dust; acoustic matting can try to help with noise. I have requested the data from the dust and vibration monitors to review these actions.

Environmental Health have also visited the town centre; they have not witnessed impacts in which statutory nuisance action could be taken. However, they are also continuing to review the situation.

PARK MALL TEMPORARY CAR PARK

I asked for a short route exit from the temporary car park at the former Park Mall site to the High Street to be created in time for the car park opening ahead of Christmas trading.

No meaning plans have yet to come forward as to what will replace Park Mall and we are drifting into very uncertain economic times where house building is already facing a downturn. As a worst-case scenario, the cleared boarded up demolition site could be with us for an extended length of time. LGR may mean our influence to decide on future plans could be reduced.

My case for a short route path:

- Only one exit is a significant reduction in convenience that we had before
- Only one exit affects the elderly and disabled unfairly
- The new car park will be the nearest we will get to "Pop-and-Shops", access to which will be improved by the time saving short path
- The rejection was initially based solely on cost of security measures
- It is important that the short route sets a precedence, so it is included in whatever replaces (flats?) the temporary car park
- The short path has overwhelming public support demonstrated by a petition signed by 4 businesses from the High Street collected by the Central Ashford Forum and presented by me at the Council tonight.

CLOSING ON-CALL FIRE STATIONS

This Council objects to the closure of the On-Call Fire Stations in Wye and Chilham and removing on-call (nighttime) section at nearby Faversham and Tunbridge Wells and will respond to the Kent Fire & Rescue consultation that closes on 16th September accordingly.

The redeployment says it will give Ashford and Folkestone two fire engines guaranteed during the day and one at night. However, Ashford already has two engines, one is full-time crewed appliance the other is crewed by on call fire fighters.

The basis for the objection is that there are no increased resources at Ashford as we already have two fire engines, it just changes the way in which they are crewed. What it does is reduce the service in the north area of the Borough by closing Wye and Chilham and taking away the nighttime service from Faversham with the consequential effect on response times. The changes at

Tunbridge Wells will affect potential deployment to the west of the Borough, specifically Newenden and Rolvenden.

As a Governor of SECAMB, I raised KF&R's proposal at the last SECAM Council. SECAMB use KF&R assets for operational support, and they are concerned of the potential impact. The Home Office plans to abolish the Crime Commissioner and reorganise 53 police forces to 12 this means a lot of changes for our blue light services in Ashford.

ABC have disaster response obligations, the impact of what KF&R proposes seems damaging and may put residents at risk. UK heatwaves are increasingly breaching the "30-30-30" threshold of 30C temperatures, under 30% humidity, and wind speeds of over 30km/h, with the combination of factors making wildfires harder to contain.

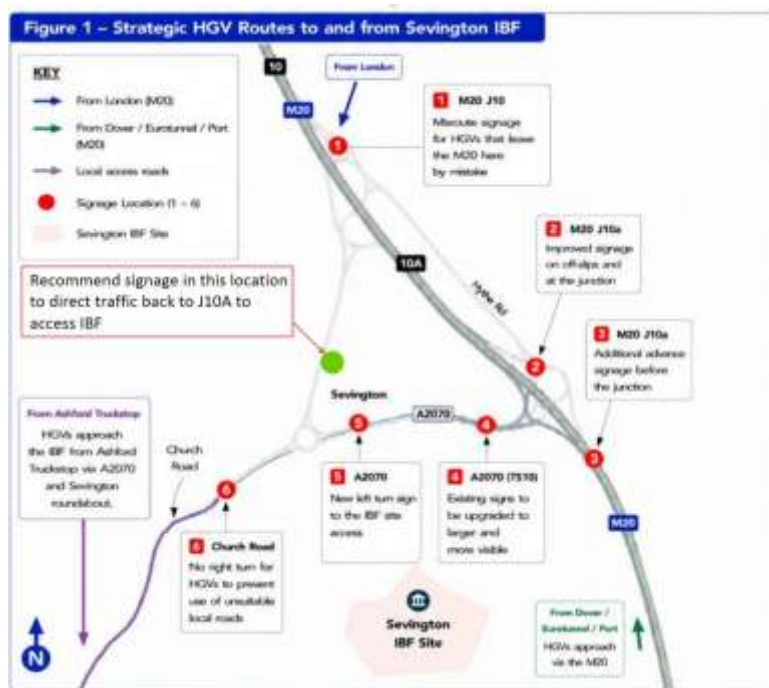
HIGHFIELD LANE PROW

The DfT have discussed with KCC the gaps in the hedgerows alongside Highfield Lane, next to the IBF. KCC advise these gaps pre-dated the construction of the IBF although I'm not sure that is the case, KCC have said some replanting has been carried out and it is acknowledged that the plants are currently very small, and that gaps remain.

The DfT has also engaged with KCC on the reported flooding of a section of the footpath about 100 yards from the staff entrance on the HS1 side of the bridleway. KCC are aware of this and have previously assessed this location. Their view is that the runoff is not excessive, that the footpath remains passable, and that the runoff occurs only following periods of heavy rainfall. KCC also advised that potential mitigation works are complicated by the presence of a high-pressure gas main directly beneath this section of the path. At present, KCC's position is to continue monitoring the situation, with further intervention to be considered should conditions deteriorate. As such, no further works are currently proposed, but monitoring will continue and the matter will be reviewed should conditions change.

HGV PARKING

The DfT have proposed a new signage strategy to mitigate the impact of HGVs parking around the IBF in Mersham and Sevington awaiting service. I am keeping a log of lorries parking nearby. There are no restrictions on HGV's waiting for their slot on adjoining roads at the moment but now the IBF has become permanent I am pressing for the Highways Authorities to give ABC powers to enforce parking restrictions. I am pleased to see that cones have been deployed at J10A to prevent HGVs parking on the roundabout.



WATER SUPPLY

Councillors met to discuss the water supply issues in Ashford on 20th July. Water companies have warned the Government that shortages could prevent the construction of more than 1m of the 1.5m homes Labour has pledged to build by 2030. Industry body Water UK says current supplies can support only around 420,000 additional homes, arguing that official forecasts underestimate future demand and overestimate reductions in water consumption and leaks. Growing demand from data centres and delays to reservoirs and other major infrastructure projects are placing increasing pressure on the system.

Councillors will hold a series of meetings to discuss the impact of this and recent disruption to the supply, future infrastructure capacity and planning implications for housing growth in Ashford, communication and support during disruption and support of all residents and businesses.

Water Supply (main focus)	Wastewater / Drainage
Impact of recent supply disruptions	Existing and future wastewater capacity
Response, resilience and communications	Constraints on growth and development
Support for residents and vulnerable groups	Infrastructure and investment plans
Future water supply capacity	Future wastewater capacity

QUANTOCK DRIVE – VILLAGE GREEN APPLICATION

I met with Quantock residents on 21st July to discuss my application for village green status on land in Quantock.

The inquiry will be held over 4 days from Tuesday 29th September (10am to 5pm with an evening session on 29th to be requested by 18th August), venue County Hall in Maidstone – I have asked for a Teams option.

The issues to determine:

- Use of the land for lawful sports of pastimes by a significant number of locals through the 20-year qualifying period.
- Is there a “qualifying neighbourhood and quality locality or localities”.
- Confirm the use is “as of right”, without “implied permission” and without “force in the face of signage”. “As of right” can be acquired based on “presumed dedication by the landowner” without force, without secrecy and without permission, peaceable and non-contentious. This presumption of dedication arises because of acquiesce (i.e. inaction by the landowner). In other words, if the previous owner has not challenged ABC’s maintenance of the site and building the part of the play area then the use of the application site can be “as of right” and not “by virtue of an implied permission”.

A Core Bundle will be prepared by KCC, any additional witness statements must be submitted by 18th August.

A list of witness and order they will be called must be provided by 4pm on 22nd September.

The council can apply to a court to have the landowner declared a “statutory nuisance”. This would force the landowner to deal with the site. This is provided in the Environmental Protection Act 1990 with enhanced enforcement powers from the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. Planning law covers this in s215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. However, for them to do this there has to be physical evidence, like rats, a fire hazard, or invasive species like Japanese knotweed. The powers are discretionary. In the meantime there’s nothing stopping residents trimming all the undergrowth that trespass over their property and return all cuttings removed to the application land.

EAST KENT HOSPITALS

Governors met on 23rd July. Key issues included.

- EKHUFT is one of only 5 trusts in England in the Intensive Recovery Programme – reflecting the seriousness of the challenge, and requiring pace, ownership and urgency of sustainable improvements.
- The definition of corridor care was updated to include all non-care spaces. Confirmation was given that no patient care was provided in **actual corridors** since June 2026. However, care is still being provided in locations which are “**not normally bedded**”. Stopping this will be facilitated by the new Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC) facilities opening in September 2026, improvement in clinical reviews and decision making, and improved partnership working with community and mental health trust colleagues. It was reiterated that corridor care does not cause increased Standard Hospital Mortality. It was strongly agreed that the Trust must continue to focus on eradicating corridor care and continue to regularly analyse our mortality data.
- Hand over times from SECamb are improving (average of 18.20min against a target of 17.30min). However, Category 2 cases (“C2”, stroke/heart attacks) mean was behind plan in April at 23.02min versus the monthly trajectory of 20.09min. This increase is partly due to a 1.8% increase in activity; transfers to SDEC enable a reduction in handover times for non-urgent cases. Transfers of stroke patients is expected to speed up once the Hyper Acute Stroke Unit opens at the WHH, no date was given but “progress is being made”. Fuller update next month....
- Cancer performance deteriorated in April, with the faster diagnosis standard decreasing to 64% from 73% and 62-day to 69.3% from 70.9% in March, primarily due to diagnostic delays rather than treatment capacity. First outpatient appointment timeliness has also reduced, reflecting workforce gaps and limited clinic capacity. Improved cancer performance is dependent on reducing diagnostic turnaround times and restoring timely access to first appointments.
- Productivity is improving, with theatre utilisation at 77.4% and increased cases per list. There has been strong outpatient utilisation (97.5%) and low Did Not Attend rates.
- There are long waits (more than 12 hours) for patients with mental health needs and high volumes of patients waiting for a mental health bed. Staff are being exposed to aggression and violence, there had been a trial of de-escalation and restraint training with a view to securing a longer-term contract. Compliance with statutory learning disability and autism training was a concern as there was a lack of funding and resources. 7 mental health nurses are being recruited.

AWAAB'S LAW

Councillors had a briefing on 28th July on Awaab's Law which came into effect in October 2025. It requires landlords prevent exposure to mould and prevent hazards in rented homes; this can be from condensation, rising damp or

penetrating damp. From 30 November 2026 it will cover excessive heat and cold, falls and electrical hazards, structural hazards. A further 15 hazards will be introduced in 2027 (e.g. asbestos).

Hazards must be investigated in 10 working days; emergency repairs must be dealt with in 24 hours. ABC have developed improved procedures for reporting including online tools that are easy and quick to complete with photographs on the reporting tool to enable tenants to determine severity. A risk Rating Ready Reckoner will determine the priority of reports. Since 27 October 2025 there have been over 700 reports but only 1% are classed as emergencies; most are due to lack of ventilation causing condensation.

In addition to the reactive approach a Decency Programme exists to improve thermal comfort by better doors and windows. “Damp Packs” are provided to educate tenants in the way that they can manage damp themselves by reopening trickle vents, using extractor fans etc.

KENT ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS – ASHFORD BRANCH

At the meeting on 29th July, the following issues were discussed.

- Ashford has signed up to become “Age Friendly Ashford”. Part of this will include developing more GP drop ins, mobile clinics, hearing aid support and better knowledge distribution of social prescribing. There is limited face-to-face support with digital access only and unclear signposting. Improving transport is a key objective. An Age Friendly Ambassadors’ Scheme has been started to champion Age Friendly Ashford; details from volunteering@involvekent.org.uk or 03000 810005.
- ABC has no plans to transfer any assets to town/parish councils as part of local government reorganisation. Its intention is to transfer all its assets to the new unitary. There will be 60 Councillors in the new mid-Kent authority, shadow elections are expected to be using KCC division with each being a double member division for those elections, but warding information will be submitted to government by August 2026. These elections in May 2027 will be for a five-year period alongside Parish elections.
- Resolutions for the KALC AGM may include a proposal to phase in the housing development with development plans for local water supplies.

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