

COUNCIL UPDATE NOVEMBER 2020

HIGHWAYS

1. Blind Lane was closed for up to 8 days at the start of October to enable water pipe repairs to be carried out by South East Water.
2. I am looking into additional traffic calming following reports for speeding at the junction of Sir John Killick Road and John Haselden Crescent in Repton. This issue has arisen now that Sir John Killick Road is no longer a dead end and runs into Spindlewood End.
3. A traffic scheme is under design for calming on Bybrook Road.
4. Works are scheduled on the carriageway at The Pasture for 5 days from 12th October. I am hopeful this will improve the situation for residents who have reported noise and vibrations from dips in the carriageway.
5. KCC have carried out an inspection of the footpath works in the Godington Road area. The snagging list is:
 - Western Avenue – The section between No.17 and the school.
 - Outside No. 49 Western Road splashes of material on the boundary walls and the slabs /tiles on the entrance paths this is to be removed and the wall/ footway joints levelled as agreed with the resident.
 - Sackville Crescent – The section between Western Avenue and Kings Avenue.
 - Godington Road – several sections where the material has shrunk back along the kerb line as well as some where it may cause ponding issues.
 - A number of chamber covers require attention in each of the roads where the treatment has been applied.

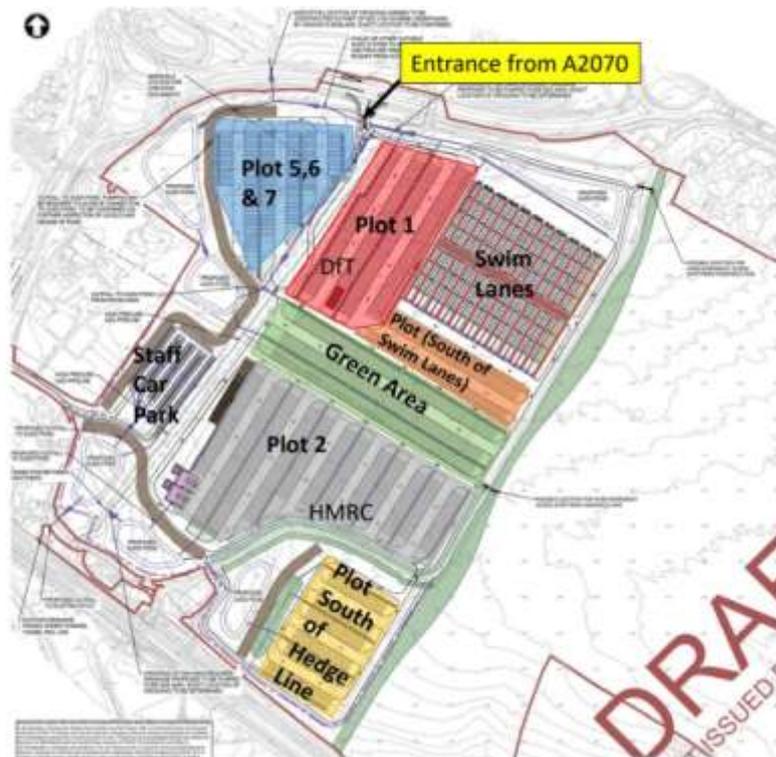
MACE LANE / SOMERSET ROAD

Somerset Road/Mace Lane was identified by KCC to install a 18 month "pop up" cycle lane due to its close proximity to schools, businesses and Ashford International Station. It fitted the requirements set out by the Government. However, there were immediate concerns among drivers during busier periods and pedestrians at all times due to the removal of crossing points. The cycle lane was removed quickly but the aim of encouraging people to cycle or walk to reduce traffic volumes remains.

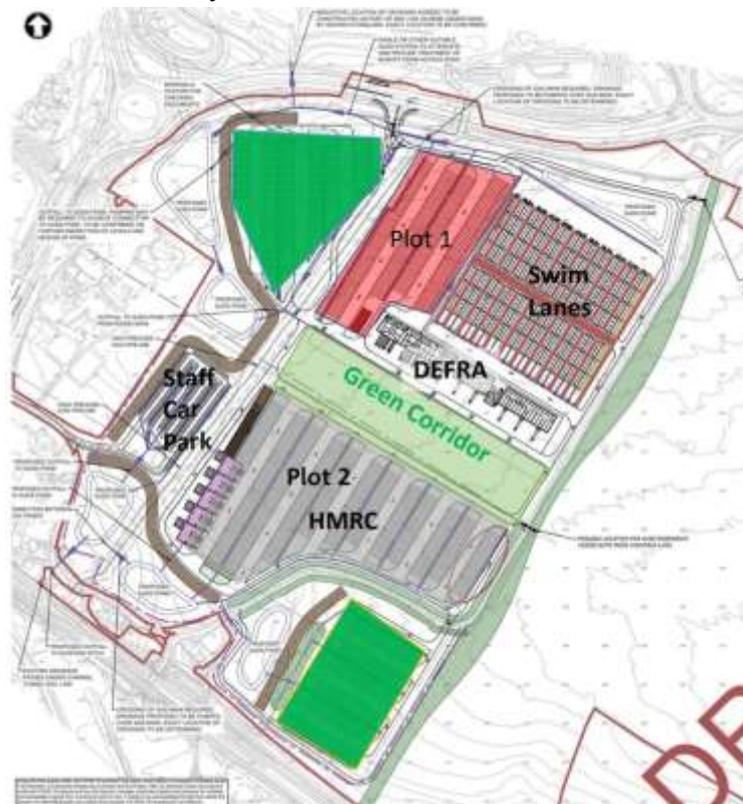
The weight of public opinion was such that the cycle lanes could not be sustained; it caused congestion and too much risk to pedestrians without the traffic light crossings. Future cycling schemes will be considered but these will be managed by Sustrans, an organisation with much more experience in cycle routes and sustainable transport schemes.

SEVINGTON INLAND BORDER FACILITY

Scheme plans have been published. This is how it will look on 1 January 2021:



And here is how it will look by 30 June 2021



A DfT portal will be opened in October which will be open for comments (good and bad) for 14 days. They will be considered and a response made public

before a final decision is taken by the Secretary of State. All the work carried out to date has been carried out under the AXAX planning consent.

This consultation will be our one and only opportunity to make it clear how we want the land between Highfield Lane and Blind Lane to be managed when construction is finished. One possibility is a partly wooded area (managed in a way very similar to how the Church Commissioners intend manage Captains Wood). This ticks some big and important boxes as to providing carbon offset and reduces nitrate run off from the previous farming activities. If we ask for a "trim trail" used elsewhere in the borough it will deliver on health and wellbeing aspirations.

PANARAMA

Ashford Borough Council has purchased the east and west wing adjacent to the Panorama building in Ashford. It comprises 109 units of one and two bedroomed flats. The deal is an £18.5m investment and is the largest ever handover of general needs accommodation to be managed on one site by the council. The acquisition is to provide affordable rented accommodation to key workers that have an identified housing need. In addition, it will also free up existing homes through transfers of key workers and, where possible, will provide vacant units in which to house those in temporary accommodation, or from the housing waiting list.

There are 65 homes in the east wing and 44 in the west wing. Work on the west wing is due to be completed this autumn, while the larger block is expected to be completed by early 2021. The deal will grow ABC's housing stock amid pressure for more affordable housing. It also creates real social benefit and sends out a positive message about cohesive communities in the heart of Ashford. If you have a housing need and want more information, visit <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/housing/council-tenant/becoming-a-council-tenant/new-quarter/>

FINBERRY SCHOOL

The Stour Academies Trust, with the support of KCC and the School's Local Governing Body, is proposing to change the designation of the existing SRP at Finberry Primary School (Ashford) from Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs (SEMH) to ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder). A copy of the consultation document and the response form can be accessed on the School website here: <http://www.finberry.kent.sch.uk/srp-consultation/>. As KCC are supporting the consultation an Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed which can be viewed on the KCC website here: <https://kccconsultations.inconsult.uk/consult.ti/finberryprimary/consultationHome>

While on the matter of schools, The Wyvern School in Ashford now has part of its electricity supplied by the power from 320 solar panels. The school has also had a complete upgrade over the summer to replace 486 lights with new energy efficient LED lighting. These will reduce the school's electricity demand by around 25%. The lighting project was managed by LASER (KCC's wholly owned energy specialist company). Taking into account the reduction of electricity from the new lighting, the solar PV system will produce 49% of the school's power requirements and in real terms 33% due to the amount used onsite and exported based on the school's power demand. The school will save around £17,353 a year on its energy bill from the combined projects and will reduce its carbon emissions by 33 tonnes a year.

BOCKHANGER HALL

The September Community Council asked that I produce an initial business plan which has been prepared for discussion at the October meeting. The key issues are that ABC should be asked to meet the capital costs of construction and set up from the Business Rate Reserve Fund and the Community Council takes on running and risk of shortfall from the operations.

PLANNING WHITE PAPER

My personal letter is below setting out my opposition to a 25% increase in housing target number for Ashford. Responses are due by 31st October.

*Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and
Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF*

October 2020

*Dear Secretary of State
White Paper on The Planning System consultation*

Ashford has long supported the Government's growth ambitions, consistently delivering more new homes than its counterparts. Ashford has led on 'Infrastructure First' development, demonstrated by the recent J10A construction and is well placed deliver its planned levels of growth, in return for the upfront investment in necessary infrastructure to support high quality development.

I write to express my strongest concerns regarding the proposals outlined in the planning white paper. These proposals would be severely detrimental to Ashford's commitment to deliver a genuine infrastructure led approach to new housing and economic growth for the

benefit of residents, communities and businesses across the borough. My concerns are as follows.

- It is a rule-based system which eliminates discretion from local communities as to how much they build.*
- It sets out a prescribed housing requirement, with no right of appeal.*
- The algorithm which determines the Borough's annual increase in housing numbers is based of the number of houses it already has so it is an ever-increasing upward spiral of housing.*
- The most expensive areas of the borough will get the most new houses, that's wrong. New housing is required in the areas of towns that need housing, not rural areas (which tend to be expensive).*
- Constraints on areas for building include ANOB's but not areas that really need to be protected such as flooding risk areas, conservation areas, wildlife areas and areas that (if built on) would cause nitrate run-off.*
- Planning permission would be given in principle when land is included in the local plan. This eliminates the obligation to consult and the opportunity to make representations at Planning Committees.*
- It removes the right of hearing and the public examination process which is anti-democratic and eliminates local involvement.*
- Generic design codes for the whole Borough would be inappropriate, one size does not fit all and what Ashford needs Tenterden may not want.*

Ashford has been tasked with the enormous challenge to meet the substantial increases in housing since identified as a growth area in 2001. The latest proposal would result in a step change, 25% above housing targets in the adopted Local Plan, these figures are simply not deliverable.

The cumulative impact of the proposed changes will dramatically increase levels of housing to the most alarming, unsustainable levels, and reap further misery on residents, communities and businesses in Ashford who would not experience the benefits of growth.

The proposed approach will only serve to compound a series of severe pressures experienced in areas across the borough on all forms of infrastructure, and on our cherished natural and historic environments.

I do recognise the Government's manifesto commitment to deliver nationally 300,000 new homes per year and I do accept that the planning system has its limitations. However, it is a sector that is

completely exhausted by consultation and fatigued by change. Local planning authorities require certainty and confidence to make plans in response to genuine local needs

I urge you to abandon this latest set of changes to the planning system and discuss alternatives which are proportionate, realistic and strive to improve the quality of life for people and the Ashford community.

ODOUR NUISANCE

The long hot summer and serious fire at Cobbs Wood on 15th September has brought into focus the problems that we have in Ashford over nuisance dust and odour. Residents are entitled to have “quite enjoyment” of their homes and the “great stink” of 2020 from Cobbs Wood and Bybrook Waste Water Treatment works will be remembered and requires action.

KCC is responsible for granting planning consent for buildings and significant changes to buildings which deal with waste. This means that when operators wish to build/change something they need consent from KCC. Conditions are imposed to prevent inappropriate odour as far as height, scale, pollution activities etc., much like any other planning application. Planning conditions can be imposed but must be proportionate and related to the work. If these conditions are not adhered to notices can be issued requiring remedy but it is necessary to specify the condition which has been breached with evidence of the offending party. ABC is responsible for most other planning applications and investigating potential nuisance from odour but have no statutory powers to require the offending party to remedy. ABC in their role as planning authority can ask builders of new houses to make a proportionate contribution towards odour infrastructure as part of their planning application. The Environment Agency are have enforcement responsibility for any air quality incidents (including dust).

The various operators at Cobbs Wood, EMH, Sheerness etc are responsible for the operations at their properties. They have a licence from the EA (Ofwat in the case of Southern Water in Bybrook) which sets out conditions and statutory obligations.

A meeting is scheduled for 19 October with all interested parties on Cobbs Wood when progress is hoped to be made to find a permanent solution. With McDonalds looking to locate near to Cobbs Wood it is hoped there will be additional impetus to finding a solution.

KENT TOGETHER

Kent residents who are facing financial difficulties due to the coronavirus pandemic may be eligible for support. KCC has received a short term, one-off

contribution from central government to support households experiencing financial hardship as a result of Covid-19. Using this grant KCC can support those struggling to afford food and other essentials over the coming months via our Kent Support & Assistance Service (KSAS). If you, a loved one, a friend or someone in the community that you know is in need of support then we can help. Visit www.kent.gov.uk/ksas to find out more. Don't worry alone, help someone struggling today.

WHH FUNDING

As part of a wider package of improvements to Kent's NHS of £38.5m, WHH & the QEQM hospitals have secured £30m of funding to increase patient capacity. The WHH expenditure includes a ten-week building programme (which has already started) to deliver:

- 11 additional treatment cubicles in the Emergency Department
- 8 intensive care beds
- A new, larger Surgical Emergency Admissions Unit, and
- A women's ambulatory unit, which will mean that women with specific conditions can be treated in a dedicated environment, away from the emergency department, and
- An extra 30-bed ward to provide additional capacity for the winter period and increase the number of single ensuite rooms to more easily isolate patients with infections.

KENT RAIL STRATEGY 2021

The draft Kent Rail Strategy for 2021 commenced its public consultation on Wednesday 23 September and runs for eight weeks until Tuesday 17 November. If you wish to respond to the consultation, please visit: kent.gov.uk/kentrailstrategy2021

MOTORING OFFENCES

The Kent Police and Crime Commissioner, Matthew Scott, is seeking local views on a piece of work that's being done to look at motoring offences and whether punishments should change. It's part of a national consultation being run by the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners on road safety. Please complete the 60 second survey using this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/apccsaferoads>

CLIMATE CHANGE

In response to the Climate Emergency, the UK Government revised the Climate Change Act 2008 in 2019. This introduced the UK target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. KCC has led on the development of the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy and has a target to reach net-zero by 2030. This will rely on many existing technologies and energy programmes already in place including LED street lighting and solar energy

schemes. The base line carbon emissions (2010/11) was 58,210 tonnes per year. By 2014/15, this had reduced to 49,461 tonnes per year and in order to be carbon neutral this must fall to 17,500 tonnes per annum.

This will be achieved by renewable energy generation, shifting to electric vehicles and energy rationalisation across the estate and will require investment of the order of an estimated £27m but is expected to deliver returns in the region of £96m. Further information is at <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s98966/Decision%20Report.pdf>

ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING POINTS

KCC will be partnering with all interested Parish, Community and Town Councils to install extra electric vehicle (EV) charge-points across Kent. The chargers will be located on land owned by the community, such as village hall car parks, and it's hoped they can then be used by local residents and businesses that do not have off-street parking.

The chargers will be owned and operated by KCC for public use. Any financial surplus generated by the charge points will be shared with the hosting council. KCC will use their share of the financial surplus to extend and maintain the charge-point network.

Providing more EV charge-points is one strand of the actions KCC is taking to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2030. The grant uses funding from the Department for Transport and Kent Lane Rental Fund and is designed to encourage a shift towards cleaner travel in Kent.

Paul Bartlett
Mersham, Sevington South and Finberry ward & Deputy Leader, ABC
Ashford Central Division, KCC
Grosvenor Hall Ward, Kennington Community Council
01233 500667 or 0773 929 3502
paul.bartlett@ashford.gov.uk or paul.bartlett@kent.gov.uk