

## COUNCIL UPDATE JANUARY 2021

### **HIGHWAYS**

1. Area 4 manages the A2070 and A259 for Highways England. Both roads are going to be subject to speed surveys which will present a solution to improve road safety and tackle ASB from noisy exhausts.
2. DfT has been asked to resolve the drainage issues outside Sevington Church created from the new footbridge built during J10A work. This is expected to be carried out while they build the new car park for the Church.
3. The “Bellamy Gurner” Scheme is expected to be started in March 2021; temporary traffic lights will be located at the Orbital roundabout to cope with additional traffic into Waterbrook IBF.
4. A complex drainage issue in Quantock Drive emerged over the weekend 13/14<sup>th</sup> November which was resolved by KCC with Southern Water. Drainage is normally the responsibility of Southern Water but there are circumstances when highway water is drained into the Southern Water system so it can become safety critical for highway safety.
5. A bid is being made for funding to install a signal-controlled crossing point for pedestrians on Forge Lane/Somerset Road.
6. Remedial work has taken place on the footways in Western Ave, Sackville Crescent and Godington Road but isolated sections have been agreed with the KCC contractor as requiring for a further finishing treatment, these will be carried out when the weather is warmer.
7. The signal-controlled crossing on Mace Lane near the Henwood roundabout will be renewed in January 2021.
8. The teen shelter, which had become a magnet for ASB near to Gerlach House, was removed by ABC during November. ABC checked the condition of the uprights as it was removed to assess viability to store it at their depot for future use at Rylands Road. As its steel, ABC can have it sandblasted and repainted for reuse. Linked to this, Rylands Park renovation has received £4,212.59 of my KCC Community Members Grant.
9. Plans are expected during December for the traffic calming scheme for Bybrook Road.
10. A litter pick was ordered at Thompson Road due to the large amount of accumulated roadside rubbish which looks like it was workers vans throwing out their lunch rubbish.
11. I have requested the KCC Schemes Team to install pedestrian fencing alongside the zebra crossing in Kingsnorth Road. This is expected to put a stop to parking on the pavement next to the zig-zag lines at the crossing.
12. Bockham Lane was inspected on 22 October 2020. Work orders have been raised for some repairs to the carriageway and verge. KCC Highways spent a considerable amount of funding and time on

Bockham Lane a few years back including patching, repairing the over-run verge areas and passing places followed by micro surfacing and edge-lining to encourage vehicles to stay within the white lined carriageway. Vehicles do use Bockham Lane as a cut-through to access the A20 and KCC cannot put restrictions on them doing so. Currently, KCC Highways have no plans to carry out another surfacing scheme in Bockham Lane.

13. Various sections of Hythe Road between Bockham Lane and the Folkestone/Hythe boundary are scheduled for 2021/22. The Hythe Road junction with Church Road, Smeeth will have a lining refresh.
14. KCC have carried out investigations into the run-off water collecting roadside at Broad Oak. A letter to residents is expected shortly.

### **BYBROOK WWTW**

Southern Water promised, in a meeting on 2 October 2020 with ABC and the EA, that a draft action plan on mitigation options for odour at Bybrook WWTW would be issued by 30 November 2020. The final version is to be issued by 31 March 2021. To support this ABC served a formal legal notice on Southern Water. The draft plan was received within the deadline and details in the final version will include:

- all potential options for odour mitigation/control regardless of achievability,
- the expected odour benefits, technical issues, and costs etc. for each measure,
- a prioritised list of options,
- a list of chosen options to be taken to secure the abatement of the nuisance and prohibition on its recurrence,
- the order in which they will be implemented and,
- a timeframe for the completion of each option.

This action follows the measures already requested by the Environment Agency under the permitting regime, but also covers the elements of the site operations that were considered to fall outside of the permitting regime. It should be noted that were rights of appeal (within 21 days) associated with the service of the notice, so the fact that Southern Water have complied and provided the draft report and not appealed the process shows a commitment to solving the issue.

ABC powers remain limited; in this case, routes to prosecute in the event of non-compliance (should this occur) are complex. ABC will continue to work with Southern Water and the Environment Agency in order to seek a permanent solution and minimise the issues associated with potential 'dual-regulation'.

It is noteworthy that 140 complaints have been made thus far in 2020; **NUMBERS MATTER** and the actions of residents in making complaints has got us to this important milestone, well done to all and keep reporting.....

## **INLAND BORDER FACILITY**

Meetings with Sevington residents, parish council, KCC, Mott McDonald (MM), Stakeholder team (BECG) and the DfT continued through December. Actions included:

- Further meetings with residents to be arranged to agree ongoing vegetation plans for the south-east of the site (MM to arrange with Sevington Stakeholder team, BECG)
- Repair to fence on Church Road needed (KCC picking up necessary repairs with contractors, Gallagher's)
- MM to review and respond on whether a diversion of new bridgeway to the south of the IBF is safe and feasible at this stage (MM to revert)
- MM to revert on whether quiet days are possible during Christmas Day/Boxing Day (DfT & Gallagher's)
- Stakeholder Engagement Team to update residents on their ongoing contact details or a "hotline" to contact re issues on site.
- Landscaping proposals to be shared with residents & ABC once approved by DfT, including investigations to reinstate the living wall (MM)
- Power cuts to be investigated by UK Power Networks/DfT.

Scheduled site visit with Kent Wildlife Trust due 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

## **FOOTPATHS**

1. A proposal has been made to close footpaths AE337A and AE338 (which run to the north of Sevington Church) on Sevington IBF. I have asked instead, that they are subject to a temporary closure Order until 31 December 2025. This is because the DfT needs the site for only 5 years.

2. I have also asked that AE639 is temporarily diverted (not closed as proposed) for the same reason. The new bridleway to the south of the IBF should not replace the longer-term reinstatement of AE639, which runs through the centre of the IBF, once the DfT temporary use ceases. I have suggested the new path around the south side of the site is retained and becomes an additional new footpath as there is an approved reserved matters application for a network of paths around the balancing ponds south of the IBF.

3. The DfT has been reminded that both the AE363 between Blind lane and Highfield Lane and AE639 through the IBF, are subject to a s106 condition to upgrade to all weather specification of public rights of way. This ought to be considered alongside the nature of the work on constructing the new route to the south, so this new footpath is built to all weather specification.

## **KCC 5 YEAR PLAN AND BUDGET FOR 2021/22**

Discussion at County and results from the budget consultation highlighted the importance of:

- Deliver essential support for businesses, promote key sectors and visitor economy, represent the interests and challenges of Kent's key sectors, understand and mitigate the long-term scarring effect of business failure,
- Progress the Infrastructure Proposition, champion major capital investments, develop shovel-ready projects pipeline, progress No Use Empty, accelerate the Kent Broadband Programme,
- Protect jobs through upskilling the workforce and supply chain, develop an All-Age Skills Strategy, feed the findings of the Post-16 review into the Employment Taskforce, engage employers to offer apprenticeship opportunities, provide more apprenticeship opportunities in-house and through Trading Companies, identify and support NEETS, promote the low carbon sector,
- Supporting the town centres and high streets to adapt and find a renewed purpose,
- Refresh the Social Isolation action plan, develop sustainable solutions for supporting households in financial crisis and food poverty, improve health and wellbeing of the population and meet new statutory duties within the Domestic Abuse Bill,
- Refresh Kent Design Guide, deliver the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, work with partners on the public realm and fly-tipping, promote community safety, promote access to green spaces, sport and healthy activities, ensure safe places to walk and cycle, and
- Refresh the Kent Environmental Strategy to improve environmental standards, tackle climate change, deliver shared priorities in the Biodiversity Strategy, accelerate delivery of green infrastructure and renewable energy, champion climate adaptation to homes and businesses, consider environmental impact in our decision making, meet increase in demand in waste management.

All of these are dependent on lobbying Government for additional funding to cover the impact of EU transition for Kent, to cover the costs of Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children and asking DfE to address the funding gap for Special Education Needs and wider education costs from lost learning during the pandemic.

## **AMBULANCE SERVICE & NHS 111**

A new enhanced 111 service called 111 First went live on 27 November 2020 providing a more robust response from experts delivered from a wider range of healthcare professionals than previously. GPs, paramedics, mental health professionals, dental nurses and pharmacists are now part of the enhanced 111 clinical assessment service, they are able to assess symptoms over the

phone, issue prescriptions and directly book people into onward care appointments if they need one. This service is expected to be further advanced when direct booking becomes available into Emergency Departments, Urgent Treatment Centres (UTC) and Same Day Emergency Care.

Building work will start in 2021 on a £6.52m Make Ready Centre, 999 Emergency and 111 Operation Centre in Gillingham. Having 999 and 111 services under one roof allows greater support between the services and aids the development of synergies which is a key part of the NHS Strategic Plan.

## **WILLIAM HARVEY HOSPITAL**

The NHS Strategic Plan includes a 50% increase in adult critical care beds from 2019/20 numbers. The plans for the WHH includes as part of wider EKHUFT £30m investment:

- A&E expansion £3m
- Mamography £1.2m
- Mobile X-ray/Ultrasound machines £0.6m
- Pathology testing equipment £0.3m
- 24 bed ITU £15.3m
- 8 bed COVID ITU £1.5m
- Theatre equipment £0.5m

UTCs are now open at all east Kent hospitals providing treatment for minor injuries and illnesses that are urgent but not life threatening. UTCs are GP-led, open 12 hours a day at Buckland and Royal Victoria hospitals and 24 hours at Kent and Canterbury, QEQM and William Harvey hospitals. They are equipped to diagnose and deal with many of the most common ailments people attend A&E for. UTCs are also available in Deal, Herne Bay, Faversham and Whitstable.

## **HOMELESSNESS**

The ABC housing department assists rough sleepers through the winter. This year's work builds on the work to bring rough sleepers indoors during the pandemic under the Government's Everyone In drive to find settled housing solutions for them. Joint delivery and partnering will allow rough sleepers to enable them to rebuild their lives, together with maintaining positive engagement in the community. The Council will also look to support rough sleepers in sustaining their tenancies and offer continuing support going forward. The Council is being assisted in this process by Riverside – an external support provider – who will provide the Rough Sleeper Navigator roles for Ashford. There are several ways that the Housing team can be advised of rough sleepers that we may become aware of, including:

- Contacting the Housing department's Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator (shirley.frank@ashford.gov.uk),

- Via the Your Ashford Report It App (details at <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/report>)
- Contact with the outreach services at Porchlight (<https://www.porchlight.org.uk/>).

The primary intention is to find suitable and viable housing solutions for rough sleepers wherever possible. The support and accommodation offered to rough sleepers also links strongly to work involving the Police and the Community Safety Unit to tackle rough sleepers' daytime presence in the town centre, which is strongly discouraged.

## COVID-19 SUPPORT

A 24-hour helpline has been set up by KCC to support vulnerable people in Kent who need urgent help, supplies or medication. It is called Kent Together, and is available for anyone in the county who is in urgent need of help during the Covid-19 outbreak. It can be used to report any concerns about the wellbeing of another person. If you are vulnerable and need urgent support, you can contact the Kent Together helpline at [www.kent.gov.uk/KentTogether](http://www.kent.gov.uk/KentTogether) or by calling on 03000 41 92 92.

Other COVID-19 support is available as follows.



Name of Organisation/Service	Email	Services offered
Age UK Ashford	<a href="mailto:sm@ageukashford.org.uk">sm@ageukashford.org.uk</a>	Meal Delivery Independent Living (assistance in the home with chores) Shopping and Prescriptions Information & Advice Telephone Befriending Doorstep Chats
Bluebells Children Centre	<a href="mailto:BluebellsCC@kent.gov.uk">BluebellsCC@kent.gov.uk</a>	Foodbank - Collect from centre - FAMILIES ONLY open Monday to Thursday 8:30am - 4:30pm Friday 8:30am-4pm
Boxes of hope; ICM Pentecostal Church	<a href="mailto:info@icmashford.org.uk">info@icmashford.org.uk</a>	Call ahead or email - FAMILIES ONLY open Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9am - 12:30pm
Ashford Vine Yard		Call or visit site - they offer 3 services. There is a membership service that covers 6 months, there is also a free family food bank and another service which provide frozen foods and fresh

## COVID & PHARMACIES

In December, Healthwatch Kent published a joint report with Healthwatch Medway detailing feedback from 101 pharmacies across Kent and Medway. The report details what it has been like during COVID-19 and what lessons have been learnt. The report presents some clear themes including:

- At the time of asking in Sept/Oct, 72% of community pharmacies didn't feel that systems had been improved in preparation for a second wave.

- 92% told us they didn't receive the information, support and equipment they needed to respond to the first wave of the pandemic.
- The Local Pharmaceutical Committee talked to us about the connections that had been built with the CCG and Local Authorities.

Healthwatch shared the findings with KCC's Health Overview Scrutiny Committee (which I chair) which agreed that, together with The Local Pharmaceutical Committee, Healthwatch will follow up with pharmacies to understand how they are coping and explore what impact the new 111 service may have had. You can read all the feedback in the report at <https://www.healthwatchkent.co.uk/news/2020-11-05/pharmacies-covid-reality>

## **HOLIDAY SCHOOL MEALS**

In early November KCC received notice of its winter emergency fund grant of £4.5m. The purpose of the grant is "to support those most in need across England with the cost of food, energy and water bills and other associated costs and to ensure no child goes hungry over Christmas." It is KCC's intention to provide support over the Christmas and following half term holiday for families where children are eligible for free school meals, building on the success of KCC's vouchers scheme which provided for food to these families during the autumn half term holiday, as well as to others in severe need. 20% of the money can be allocated to people without children and KCC will work with the voluntary sector and Borough Council on how this can be allocated to those most in need, including those who are homeless. The money must be spent before the end of March.

## **PLAN BEE**

A successful KCC Plan Bee Summit was held on 16 November 2020. The aim of the summit was to inspire and engage Kent residents in the plight of pollinators and to launch this very innovative scheme. It attracted participants from across Kent and will also have helped call attention to our Environment Strategy Conference. 120 sites are being considered for creating pollinator habitat building on work carried out by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. Rural verge cutting is now being delayed until the autumn, creating a 10km continuous Bee Road network and 37 Bee Roads across the Marsh

## **PLANNING UPDATE**

*East Stour Court.* There has been a 10 week delay due to difficult ground conditions in Feb/March 2020, when excessive wet weather made progress slow. The project is aimed at independent living for older residents and consists of one and two-bedroom units and has secured Homes England grant in the region of £45k per unit.

*Piper Joinery.* Demolition and clearance of the contaminated site has been completed. A design of 20 units of "nitrate neutral" affordable housing is being considered.

*Northdown House.* Pending s106 agreement.

*Lower Queens Road.* Pre-application discussions are ongoing.

*Mersham Village Hall.* Development is expected to start in Spring 2022 with completion at the end of 2023.

*Old Rectory Close.* Not expected in the next 5 years.

*Frith Business Centre.* No further discussion beyond prior approval for 10 units

*Chequer Tree Paddock.* Appeal with Planning Inspectorate, no start date for the appeal yet.

## **TOWN CENTRE RESET**

A new blueprint for the town centre, post COVID-19 was discussed at ABC Cabinet on 26 November 2020. It was a start to counter the widespread (incorrect) negative view of Ashford. There was a commitment to full community and Forum engagement including the shopkeepers in an advisory committee. The last resident survey was in 2018 and there was a promise to engage in the correct way. There will be work to address ASB around the Bandstand, litter, gulls and vermin in the lower High Street, redevelopment of the old Odeon Cinema (which will be “stunning”) and green spaces/play areas around the town centre.

**Paul Bartlett**

**Mersham, Sevington South and Finberry ward & Deputy Leader, ABC  
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