

SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER

A newsletter covering the first three weeks of September to account for deadline date for several Parish magazines. As more of these recommence distribution can I thank the teams of volunteers who undertake this for us all.

Despite August seeing more meetings than usual for the month September has as always been especially busy for meetings.

As I write this, we await possible new or reintroduced restrictions due to Covid19. Hopefully as figures in Kent are continuing to fall we shall not be too badly effected but scientific advice is not encouraging. As evenings draw in we must be vigilant for our neighbours who may struggle with the effects of isolation if some form of "lockdown" returns. It may not be just those who appear vulnerable.

One issue which is exercising minds at all levels of Local Government are the changes to the planning system currently out for consultation. I am pleased that the changes to how the figures for the number of extra houses we need to build in Kent have been widely opposed. Most if not all Conservative MP's in Kent, excepting those in Government posts who cannot do so, have written jointly to the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister voicing their concerns, as has the Leader of the Conservative Group on KCC co-signed by all Conservative County Councillors.

At the same time Swale Borough Council are attempting to rush through a revision to the Local Plan. I have been studying the Agenda papers and minutes of the Local Plan Panel with horror. Under the existing Local Plan, "BEARINGS FRUITS" Faversham was expected to deliver 12.5% of Swale's housing growth and the rural area another 8.5%. Under the proposals now being promoted by the new Administration Faversham is expected to contribute between 35% and 45.5% of new housing and the rural area another 10.5%. This would result in Faversham and its rural hinterland receiving more new allocations than the rest of Swale added together. Possibly up to 55% of a number that will already be larger in total, three times as many houses for our area than currently planned.

Regular followers of Swale politics will know that both the current Leader of Swale Borough Council, Roger Truelove (Lab) and his Deputy Mike Baldock (Swale Independants) have long advocated such a policy to rebalance what they claimed was over protection for Faversham by the previous Conservative administration. All but one of our local Borough Council Councillors are part of the ruling coalition, can we trust them to defend us? Several of them hold posts as Cabinet or Deputy Cabinet Members with extra allowances. Early comments are not encouraging, they need vigorous lobbying by YOU, their electorate.

At County Level I am increasingly busy with Home to School Transport Appeals. We have given parents three options, paper-based appeals, full Face to Face meetings with a Member Panel or a midway option where Parents join the Panel online. We have successfully trialled all three and further meetings are scheduled.

Amazingly KCC have managed to balance the in-year Budget without major reductions to service levels. A truly amazing effort by the Cabinet Member, Peter Oakford, and staff in the Finance Department. With extra costs and reducing income, both due to Covid, the 21-22 Budget is not likely to prove so easy.

ANDREW BOWLES
KCC Member – Swale East