



SUMMER NEWSLETTER

Is this the “New Normal”? Most days seem to include at least two online meetings for KCC plus Parish Council meetings every weeknight Monday through to Thursday.

At least we have some good news, most pubs are open! In rural areas they provide the social hub of village life. We can catch up with friends and neighbours barely glimpsed since the start of “lock down”. Meanwhile at home we can host outdoor socially distancing visits from Children and Grand Children.

Two personal highlights included watching live cricket as Selling Cavaliers hosted Sturry on 11th July, I have almost totally given up hope of watching Kent live this season. The second was attending live music as The Lost Revellers played in the garden at the White Lion on 18th July.

There have been some positives at County Hall as well. Firstly, we approved the Kent & Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy. This deserves a full reading but in summary it commits the County to delivering clean growth including an affordable, clean and secure energy supply. It specifically commits the County to become carbon neutral by 2030 rather than 2050.

I am a Member of the cross-party Kent Environment Strategy Working Party; we have been working on low carbon opportunities for recovery post Covid. I am especially interested in seeking to sustain the increase in active travel, walking and cycling as normality, whatever that is, returns.

At a more local level I am pleased that KCC is bringing forward plans for improvements to the A251/A2 junction. We seem to have been discussing this for years, lets hope we now secure agreement and something gets done.

Also pleased to see that M2 Junction 5 improvement at Stockbury have secured Local Growth Fund monies. Subject to completion of a Public Inquiry this will hopefully go ahead to the benefit of all Sittingbourne area communities and businesses.

August is usually a quiet month in Local Government terms, less so this year. With less Members and Officers away on leave this year the County have arranged numerous Member Briefings on subjects as diverse as Design, Recovery and Renewal and of course in these times Budget! I have managed to attend them all so far. Also, there seem to be many more Parish Councils choosing to hold August meetings this year. Partly I suspect because Members are available, but also because most missed meetings earlier in summer before deciding to trial online meetings. Certainly, Annual Internal Audits and submission of Accounts were allowed later this year.

As we approach the end of August and the rapidly approaching new School Year County Officers have now found safe and legal ways to hold Home to School Transport Appeals. A

combination of full Face to face appeals, paper-based appeals and, most popular amongst parents, a hybrid system whereby parents can be present online to present their case and answer questions.

As the Chairman of the Counties Regulation Committee I shall be Chairing most Appeals.

In the first week of September I will also be Chairing a meeting of the Swale Joint Transport Board online. Due to Covid the Board has not met since March so a very long Agenda. With a Membership of seven County Councillors, seven Swale Borough Councillors and three Parish Councillors plus Officers, guests and members of the public all used to using different Online Platforms this seems guaranteed to be interesting, hopefully not a disaster.

ANDREW BOWLES
KCC Member – Swale East