

Green Party Councillors' Report of December 2024, for Marden & Yalding Ward Parishes –

In a busy period within the Borough Council, there were a lot more high-level discussions on the Budget for 2025/26 and the implications of the new Corporate Strategy on that Budget in early December, prioritising what can and can't be done in Year1 of the new Council and announcing some probable changes (like increasing parking fees in town for the first time since 2021). Matters are being complicated as the new Labour Government seeks to introduce significant Planning changes (with more housing numbers) and also confirms it wishes to create single Authorities (with Mayors) in County areas, mentioning Essex, Kent & Surrey as priorities – which could mean the abolition of District/Borough Councils by 2027! Discussions move apace with adjacent Boroughs, and the whole Council will be briefed on the latest Government/County thinking on 6th January.

At quarterly Full Council on 4th December, tributes were paid to a former long-serving Labour Councillor and also another former Councillor (Cynthia Robertson) was made an Honorary Alderman. Two Motions were put forward by Councillors on strategy for HMOs (Home in Multiple Occupation) and VAWG (Violence against Women & Girls); the latter was taken forward to the upcoming Cabinet.

At Cabinet on 20th December, the MBC Strategy for the VAWG Motion was debated thoroughly and agreed in detail. At the same meeting, there were financial motions related to the half-yearly budget report, fee changes and Performance indicators, which were all discussed in detail. Also discussed were future plans on Landscape, Walking & Cycling infrastructure and Community Larders.

Mike's focus had been on welcoming the new Biodiversity & Climate Change (B & CC) Manager in early December, and discussing pending decarbonisation schemes and related documents with her, so that the mid-term update to the B&CC Strategic Plan can be thoroughly refreshed and re-assessed for its final five years; this is due to go to Cabinet in March. I have continued liaising with five Parishes about small parcels of land that MBC own and may have potential for 30 years of natural management, and all six sites (including one in Yalding) were visited by us both on 23rd December.

The Mayor's Xmas Supper party was a lovely event in the Town Hall on the evening of Friday 13th, where current and past Councillors & Mayors mingled and socialised warmly (with partners), and we could hear residents welcoming the season in and around Jubilee Square as the evening progressed!

While there are few events planned in January now that Panto is over, there will be a lantern parade festival in town on Friday 7th February, and local schools and community groups are to be invited to participate in workshops; see details at <https://onemaidstone.com/event/light-up-maidstone/>

Parish Matters –

Collier Street – Clerk/Resident's query about construction traffic taking wrong route to the new solar park on Sheephurst Farm, directed to Planning enforcement by Cllr. Russell. Also food waste bins not being collected became an issue, but seems to have been resolved by a change of truck.

Hunton – Liaison over potential pre-Condition submission construction activity taking place on 'agricultural' site affecting adjacent properties; planning enforcement role suggested to residents.

Marden – Mike has been dealing with an ongoing resident's concern at the StileBridge Caravan site (which is MBC-run), requiring liaison with the main Power supplier; this is still unresolved. Grace has been supporting Marden General Practice (through its PPG group) in spending/allocating s106 funds.

Nettlestead – Query raised with Golding Homes about overflowing bins and recycling options for Bryant Close flats was answered, which is now being chased by Parish Clerk after Golding's response. Mike attended a very pleasant Xmas drinks and canapes event after the December Parish meeting.

Yalding – Mike attended the Parish meeting on 3rd, after an appearance remotely at the Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) on Climate & Environment (which Grace chaired, in the absence of the designated chair); various matters were discussed/aired there. Several residents attended the MBC Planning Committee on 12th December (of which Mike is vice-chair) and matters related to 'The George' were aired with only partial resolution; a complaint has been filed by the Parish. In exciting news, the creation of a Repair Café has been announced; 1st event is in March at the Baptist Church.

Grace resolved access for bin collections across the bridge to Parsonage Lane. Also has been liaising with community safety team and beat officers over the safety of young girls in the village after recent incidents. Grace is not currently satisfied with the response, especially as they appeared to be paying lip service to this issue while VAWG motion was being discussed in Council & Cabinet.

Please note that Cllr. Couch will be absent abroad from 6th January for the rest of the month, so please direct any queries to Cllr. Summersgill – Mike is also on holiday the week of 27th January.

Borough Councillors Grace Couch & Mike Summersgill – 3rd January 2025

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