

Green Party Councillors' Report of **February 2025**, for Marden & Yalding Ward Parishes –

In a very busy period within the Borough Council, the Budget for 2025/26 and the new Corporate Strategy were 'signed off' by Full Council on 19th Feb, with a debate taking place on three amendments to the Budget (which were not passed). Matters continue being complicated by the new Government, as it seeks to introduce significant Planning changes (with more housing numbers) next month and the 'surprise' news that there would be KCC elections in May. This means that, with election 'purdah', some Borough business has to be completed through Cabinet next month, or it waits until June. Only the monthly Planning Committee and a Scrutiny committee will meet in April.

At Cabinet on 5th February, the medium term financial strategy through to 2030 was discussed, but little other new business; the Cabinet Agenda for 19th March is much longer as it is including some items that would have gone through to April. Within that Agenda are Mike's projects on the updated Biodiversity & Climate Change Strategy (now split into two strategies) and an update on Biodiversity Net Gain sites in the Borough; the Decarbonisation project is being costed and reviewed.

With the Budget for 2025/26 now set, there will be new matters coming forward, including a Citizens' Assembly on the topic of Violence against Women & Girls (VAWG), and a Nature Recovery Fund has been set up to improve our green spaces and potentially add new ones. There are already works going on in Jubilee Square in town to improve and 'green up' the environment. Grace has been liaising with Marden Wildlife and Natural England about improving the rural environment too.

Updates for Newsletters/Sharing with Residents:

Covid Memorial Tree Planting

MBC is planting 633 trees on Tuesday 4th and Wednesday 5th March to commemorate the number of people who died across the borough of Maidstone because of Covid, five years ago. The trees will include a combination of Oak, Birch, Hawthorn & Field Maple and will be placed in a variety locations across Maidstone including Allington Open Space, where people can visit, stop, remember and take time to reflect on those impacted since the pandemic started. Maidstone residents are being invited to volunteer and take part in the tree planting to be part of the commemoration.

Maidstone's 'Big Day Out'

Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) is inviting everyone to get out and enjoy our amazing parks and open spaces, and to be part of the first community-led 'Big Day Out.' Being held on Saturday 14 June 2025, this inaugural one-day festival is celebrating outdoor areas to be found across the borough.

Organisations, local businesses, Parish communities and all the residents of Maidstone are invited to take part in the 2025 festival and register their interest by emailing: Maidstone@BigDayOut.info

To find out more about the Maidstone Big Day Out, to register your event as part of the day and how to take part, please visit the website: <https://bigdayout.info/>

Parish Matters –

Collier Street – nothing to report, apart from noting a couple of new planning appeals in the Parish.

Hunton – Liaison continues with upset residents over noisy construction activity on a large ‘agricultural’ site, and heavy traffic movements causing verge damage on the minor roads.

Marden – Mike has been dealing with a couple of resident queries on highways and accommodation problems; assistance from other Councillors (KCC & MBC) has been important in dealing with these.

Nettlestead – request from a resident for a litter pick on Hempstead Lane & Station Road; scheduled for this week. Mike is also liaising with the local SpeedWatch co-ordinator to help re-energise it. Approved 600 trees for planting on private land in Nettlestead Green, as part of MBC’s 3000+ planted this Winter; applications for further tree planting initiatives are welcome – see MBC website

Yalding –The Repair Café event in March is gaining strength, and Mike spoke about this at the Parish Council Environment Network meeting in Sutton Valence on 26th Feb, then met the organiser after. On that same day, Mike attended the planning Appeal for 3 houses on Vicarage Road, which he had called in back in May – several residents spoke at the Appeal, plus MBC & KCC, and we wait to hear. Mike also visited the Syngenta/YEP site on 27th, to discuss aspects raised with the Developers/MBC, related to new applications but also to see if the flooding nearby in January had affected the site.

Borough Councillors Grace Couch & Mike Summersgill – 28th February 2025

Emails: michaelsummersgill@maidstone.gov.uk, gracecouch@maidstone.gov.uk