

Marden & Yalding Ward Green Party Cllrs - Grace Couch & Michael Summersgill – Parish Report for February 2026

Council Updates:

- Budget agreed at Council on Wed 25th Feb. Highlights include:
 - A balanced budget for 2026/27 has been approved, alongside a five-year Medium Term Financial Strategy. Council Tax Reduction amounts for residents who qualify due to being out of work or on low pay levels/benefits, will be increased from 80% to 100% next year, something being introduced in 6 other Boroughs to help alleviate the ‘cost of living’ crisis for those in need.
 - A surplus for the current financial year, first reported at the half-point stage, is now (at quarter3) getting bigger and scheduled to be over £600,000 now.
 - The Council agreed a 3% increase in its share of Council Tax, equivalent to £9 per year for a Band D property. County and other precepts will be higher.
 - Additional investment, aided by continuing improving finances, will support river restoration, nature recovery, climate action and community cohesion.
 - Funding has been agreed for town centre regeneration, including Earl Street pedestrianisation and more for creative and leisure provision.
 - £8 million over two years will be transferred into the Housing Investment Fund, making £20m in total for forthcoming Housing projects since 2022.
 - £300,000 has been set aside to meet Maidstone-specific costs linked to local government reorganisation (LGR), in addition to the assigned central funding.
 - Earmarked reserves of £2.5m are to be released to support economic development, tackling poverty and rural initiatives on transport and industry.
- This also includes approval of budget for 2-year project tackling period poverty, which has been brought forward by Cllr Couch
- LGR consultation with all residents has commenced and runs until 26th March:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-government-reorganisation-in-kent-and-medway>. We expect a Central Government decision in July (2026!)
- Paper is going to Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) to write to the Govt. to express interest in forming a ‘foundational strategic authority’, which is the precursor to any future unitary formation of Kent having strategic oversight from an elected Mayor.
- The VAWG (Violence against Women & Girls) Citizens Assembly commences in March, with the outcome of the online survey available here:
<https://news.maidstone.gov.uk/home/news/2027/february/survey-reveals-that-74-of-maidstone-residents-think-online-abuse-of-women-is-a-very-big-problem>
- The Borough Insight magazine is now being delivered - please let us know if any postal areas don't receive it, as we need to flag this up to Press office
- The Town Council/Parish consultation got 600 responses (71% in favour) and a 489 signature petition supporting it; there was no campaign against it. Papers go to DGP and then Full Council recommending its creation. For the first year, current elected Borough Councillors not in Parished wards will act as Town Councillors to get it set up, then there will be elections for the seats in 2028 (same time as Unitaries).
- Planning Committee this month comprised a majority of decisions related to GTT (Gypsy & Traveller) sites, and also all but one of the Appeals were on GTT sites.
- Proposals are coming forward for potential Housing sites outside MBC's Local Plan approved locations (as well as some approved sites being brought forward in time), as a result of the loss of a 5-year Housing supply in the Borough, AND a new idea in central Planning papers that locations near railway stations will be presumptively approved. Two expressions about the scoping of Environmental Assessments have been put in recently for areas north of the railway lines in Staplehurst and Marden.
- The borough Chief Executive (Alison Broom) will be moving to a part-time role in the new financial year (from April), and there will be a Deputy Chief Executive (from the

current leadership team). Alison will continue to lead on LGR (Govt Reorganisation) aspects, while William Cornell will lead on day-to-day operational matters.

- At Council on 25th February, the Mayor & Deputy Mayor were nominated. Cllr. Brian Clark (LibDem; Loose & Linton) is to be Mayor, and Denis Spooner (Conservative; Bearsted) is to be Deputy. If a Town Council is agreed, Mayoral roles will continue.

Coming Events: Highlights (full list already forwarded to Clerks):

- 20th-29th March Heart of Kent Walking Festival – several daily routes
- 28 Mar - 18 Apr Spring Showcase exhibition @ Creative Maidstone
- 11-Apr Medieval Fayre returns @ Brenchley Gardens
- 11-Apr Heritage Transport Show @ Detling Showground
- 30 Apr - 4 May Maidstone Fringe Festival, in pubs & clubs in town

PARISH Work:

Collier Street: Report from a Resident on Haviker Street about a blocked drainage channel has been passed to UMIDB (Medway Drainage Board) for inspection and action.

Yalding/Laddingford:

- Awaiting response from YEP regarding condition of hoarding raised by resident at Bulmer Lock
- Working with MBC resilience manager to share/elicit a response from Environment Agency and KMRF's Severe Weather Group Chair, regarding the use of (or lack thereof) Leigh storage/barrier during the recent 'close call' on flooding
- Cllr Couch submitted a number of objections from neighbours of 26/500120/FULL to allow them to be reviewed anonymously
- Cllr. Summersgill attended a meeting on 26th with Parish members, reviewing technical details related to the drainage of the new housing along Kenward Road.

Hunton: Significant disruption caused by a blocked culvert near the river bridge on East Street, which was not dealt with by KCC before Xmas, resulted in two driveways being damaged, half of the carriageway coned off and cracks in a building. Cllr. Summersgill contacted KCC Cabinet Member and one resident involved our MP.

Marden: Continuing involvement to try and solve Utility cost issues on Stilebridge caravan site, and fly-tipping opposite; Involvement with national Gypsy-Traveller advice team.

Cllr. Summersgill attended a Developer's 'Stakeholder Workshop' on 27th, regarding the potential North Marden housing proposal, along with the Cabinet Member for Housing, many Parish Councillors and several invited representatives from the village

Nettlestead: The petition about the road crossing did not come up at Joint Transport Board (JTB) meeting late January, as KCC Highways were still working on design details.

Borough Councillors Grace Couch & Mike Summersgill – 1st March 2026

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