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

After a quiet-ish October at the Borough Council, there has been a lot of 'unseen' activity, with high-level discussions on the Budget for 2025/26 and the implications of the new Corporate Strategy on that Budget, prioritising what can and can't be done in Year1 of the new Council. Matters are becoming more complicated as our new Government seeks to introduce significant Planning changes (which would require around 1800 more houses in the Borough than in the new Local Plan) and also moots the creation of single Authorities (with Mayors) in larger/County areas, mentioning Essex, Kent & Surrey as priorities – which could mean the abolition of District/Borough Councils by 2026!

There has been a lot of work on Planning-related matters going on behind the scenes, with Stakeholder Governance Groups for the two 'garden communities' proposed at Lidsing and Lenham Heath being finalised and a DPD (Development Plan Document) for Gypsy & Travellers now out for consultation, with a mid-December return date. Also discussions held over writing a Supplementary Planning Document for HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation); recent problem in parts of the town.

At Cabinet on 20th November, two Motions put forward by other Councillors, on the local Food & Drink Industry and on the Greensand Ridge designation, were Agreed to be signed off by the relevant Council Members, and at the next full Council on 4th December, there are new Motions on HMOs and on Violence against Women & Girls; these are alongside other procedural Reports to Council and follow on after a specific/extra Motion about 'Freedom of the Borough for Key Workers'

Grace attended the Audit Committee mid-year review this month, which included considering improvements to 'modern.gov', in order to make accessing Council papers more accessible for all.

Mike's focus had been on the third annual Eco-Hub in town, in the Mall (lower level, next to B&M), which was a great success, and the location now hosts a MBC Christmas Donation hub until mid-December. I have been liaising with five Parishes about small parcels of land that MBC own and may have potential for assigning for 30 years of nature management under Biodiversity Net Gain off-site provisions, where Developers cannot provide on-site BNG; more sites continue to 'emerge'.

A new Biodiversity & Climate Change Manager started last week, and will get to work on several projects and the Strategy for 2025-2030. Unfortunately, our major project on Decarbonising MBC's main office building (above the Mall) has had to be 'paused' this month, when commercial tenders came in at close to three times the cost estimate that had been obtained by the Council in 2023, when applying for a £3m grant from Government towards the work. We will now evaluate what can be done; the cost escalation isn't good value for ratepayers, and we will have to re-apply for grants.

There are several Christmas events at the Museum coming up, see www.OneMaidstone.com.

'No Idling' posters/banners that the Borough had in stock were issued to Sutton Valence & Marden Primaries, to help with raising awareness to drivers of potential air quality issues outside the schools.

Parish Matters –

Collier Street – nothing to report, apart from a couple of enquiries about upcoming Planning matters

Hunton – Liaison over noise and mud from 'agricultural' site affecting residents on RedWall Lane; reported on Flood & Pond Warden issues to Parish meeting. Checked all salt bins for topping up.

Marden – Assisted Parish Councillors in stabilising 28 leaning/insecure gravestones at Cemetery.

Query over food waste bin collections in some of the south-western rural lanes seems to have been resolved, with swift action by Cllr. Russell.

Mike (with the Council Leader) has been dealing with two ongoing resident concerns in the StileBridge area; one requiring liaison with the main Power supplier at the Caravan site (MBC-run), and the other resulting in a Temporary Stop Notice issued to stop lorry deliveries down a rural lane.

Following the Marden Wildlife annual meeting (which all Ward Councillors and many residents attended), Grace has passed on the latest information and Natural England's biodiversity recommendations to MBC Climate officers, to aid with informing new/renewed agricultural policies.

Nettlestead – Ongoing liaison with residents over highway/other issues in Nettlestead Green.

Query raised with Golding Homes about overflowing bins and recycling options for Bryant Close flats, which is being checked (bin location is on MBC land, and other residents may be using it).

Grace attended the Licensing hearing into the Hop Pole on 7th November, and met the residents and councillors attending in support of the changes.

Yalding. Mike advised a Resident about procedures related to a Planning Appeal hearing for a site in Vicarage Road, and read the Applicant's new documentation in preparation for any Comment.

Bins not being returned to Elvey's Cottages is being resolved by Grace.

Supporting progress towards Solar installation at Kenward House, working with MBC Planning chair and Officers to clarify solar requirements at (next phase of development) Yalding Enterprise Park.

Grace is supporting a former/deceased resident's family with a complaint about the business practices at Little Venice Country Park, but this doesn't seem to be within the Council's direct remit.

We are also looking to find volunteers to receive training to become 'Countryside Access Wardens', aka footpath wardens, to report issues to KCC PROW on a regular basis – details to follow after Xmas

Borough Councillors Grace Couch & Mike Summersgill – 2nd December 2024

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