

## **Leader's Statement to Full Council – Wednesday 24 January 2018**

### **HGV Parking and Associated Issues**

Most Members will know that I have campaigned consistently on this issue for at least the last twelve years, possibly longer. The first leaflet I issued for the May 2005 Kent County Council Elections led on this very issue. I recently held a meeting at Swale House with the then Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways Transport and Waste and his senior officers to discuss the location or locations of potential lorry parks within Swale Borough. Members will no doubt be aware of the horrendous accident on the A2 at a layby adjacent to Boughton Village in the early hours of 11 January. Obviously our first thoughts must be with the families and those close to the young men who unfortunately lost their lives. Without wishing to prejudge the causes of the accident, it only goes to reinforce the urgency of freeing our laybys, slip roads, industrial and residential estates from the blight of overnight lorry parking with all the associated dangers and adverse environmental impacts. I trust the newly appointed Kent County Council Cabinet for Planning, Highways Transport and Waste, to whom I offer my congratulations on his appointment, and our relatively new Swale Police District Commander Chief Inspector Rachel McNeil, will now prioritise action on both dealing with this curse in the short term and providing a real solution as soon as possible.

### **Kent Environment Champions Group Celebration Event 21 December 2017**

Members will know of my passion for the environment and that as a representative of Kent Council Leaders I am Chairman of the Kent Environment Champions Group. Each year we hold a celebration event to reflect on the commitment of the champions to not only take forward the Kent Environment Strategy but to challenge the progress being made. In addition the Group promotes good environmental practice across all sectors in Kent and, although unfortunately unable to attend due to my recent operation, I am delighted to report that amongst those recognised for their achievements Swale was very well represented. This was particularly so in the charitable and voluntary groups' category with the Abbey Physic Garden, the Community Chef Project and the Friends of Westbrook Stream all being recognised.

I was pleased for the team that has taken over the management of the stream and Stonebridge Pond in Faversham one of our members of staff, Anna Stonor, was rewarded for her volunteering. I am equally pleased that in the individual category Kris Stables, our Greenspaces Ranger, was rewarded for the work he has done in developing a comprehensive diary of events which engage young people and families in a range of outdoor environmental and cultural activities at Milton Creek Country Park. The park's location brings its own challenges but he has encouraged engagement from local residents and businesses and created a sustainable model

which addresses local recreational and access needs. The benefits of the ranger have been demonstrated in fewer acts of anti-social behaviour and vandalism. A large element of Kris' work has been to develop a committed, regular and enthusiastic volunteering workforce to ensure the sustainability of the park. So my congratulations to all the Swale projects and thank you for your efforts and commitment.

## **Reflections and Aspirations**

Many of you will know the Christmas break started a week early for me this year as I went into hospital on the 14 December for knee replacement surgery.

Since coming out of Hospital, whilst not driving or attending meetings, I have dealt with numerous local issues for both Parish Councils and individual residents by means of email and phone calls to officers.

It has also given me time to reflect back on 2017 and forward to 2018. The last year has seen the vote in favour of "Brexit", a resounding Conservative victory in the Kent County Council Elections and the unexpected General Election with its far from clear result leaving a Conservative Government without a clear majority. 2018 should be election free, fingers crossed, here in Swale.

Work will hopefully progress on seeing acceptable terms agreed to exit the European Union. If not achieved I believe we should just leave, no deal being better than accepting a poor deal. Locally the regeneration of Sittingbourne Town Centre will continue to move forward. I personally cannot wait to start attending the new Multi-Screen Cinema which should soon start to rise before our very eyes. In Swale I am determined that we will place greater emphasis on air quality. I know the working party under the chairmanship of my cabinet colleague of Cllr David Simmons has already held its first meeting. Air quality must be a major consideration for the Borough moving forward in Environmental, Planning and Housing Policy Development. I am pleased that, I understand at the time of writing this, a cross party motion will be on the agenda for this evenings meeting.

Just to prove a local politician's life is not an easy one I shall be grappling with two major local issues. I always describe myself as one who was an Environmentalist before I ever became a Party Politician. Green Energy to me should always be preferential to relying on carbon fuels or nuclear. However, the scale of the development proposed at Cleve and Nagden Marshes, referred to above, in the village in which I grew up is stunning. Not surprisingly those who will live adjacent to the proposed Solar Park are prominent amongst those urging me to oppose but they are joined by many others who value the unique landscape. This decision will be made at Government level but I will seek to ensure all opinions are fully heard.

Since 1990 I have campaigned to secure another link between the A2 and M2 East of Sittingbourne and West of Faversham, initially to relieve congestion in Ospringe, Teynham, Lynsted, Bapchild etc. This has become ever more critical as we more fully understand the life-threatening effects of air pollution often associated with motor vehicles. As readers will know a developer has put forward a proposal which will provide such a link roughly between Bapchild on the A2 and adjacent to Kent Science Park on the M2. The downside of these proposals is the figure of 11,250 houses to be constructed to fund the infrastructure, not just the road but also new Secondary and Primary Schools, etc. However, I believe we are already being asked to build too many houses. With the Government insisting on a review of our recently approved Local Plan by 2022, including the suggestion that the revised method of assessing housing need would result in a 36% increase in the number of houses to be built annually, all your local representatives will have to wrestle with the equation of either just saying no to Central Government and accepting the fact that they have the ability to take over our planning function and take these decisions centrally or to accept the extra housing and seek to ensure it is built in the place that will give local residents most advantages. Although we do not yet have a planning application we do have an Environmental Impact search. This means that the debate has already restarted. Not surprisingly I am being lobbied by residents of Rodmersham, Bredgar etc. opposed to the scheme in its entirety. I am also being contacted by residents of those villages along the A2 East of Sittingbourne and by residents of Sittingbourne itself who are broadly in favour of the scheme. As I say, a local Politicians life is never easy.

## **Feedback**

I am aware that Members always appreciate feedback on items covered in previous Leader's reports. I have received a response on behalf of The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, on the subject of a new medical school in East Kent and expressing our concerns in the difficulties recruiting GPs in Swale. Any Member who wishes sight of the response may request a copy from my Personal Assistant.

**Cllr Andrew Bowles**  
**Council Leader**