

WARD MEMBERS REPORT TO HASTINGLEIGH PARISH COUNCIL SEPTEMBER 2023

STODMARSH UPDATE

In July, the Leader of the Council, Cllr Noel Ovenden, joined a number of other local authority leaders across the country in signing a letter asking the Prime Minister to act immediately on nutrient neutrality and demanding Government intervention. Possible strategic solutions, such as the creation of wetlands, have also stalled because key Government organisations are not working constructively with councils and constantly change their advice or stance on the matter.

Upon receipt of the letter the Leader, together with other local authority leaders, was invited to 10 Downing Street to meet with the Prime Minister's special advisors to discuss government support in finding a national solution to nutrient neutrality. The Leader specifically raised the issue of the need to unblock the delivery of affordable homes in Ashford and argued that not building new homes does very little to slow the increase in water pollution and that Government organisations need to own this national problem.

The Government has now responded by announcing a range of new measures to help address the impact of nutrient neutrality. The Government intends to legislate in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill to make Natural England's rules on nutrient pollution advisory rather than mandatory and that funding will be available to help tackle the underlying problem of pollution in England's waterways.

Although the detail is awaited, it is hoped that this quick reaction by the Government will help the Council get the Local Plan back on track to deliver much needed homes in the right places.

MYASHFORD PORTAL

MyAshford is an online customer portal that gives residents access to the various accounts held with Ashford Borough Council in one place. Once residents set up an account they can view council tax bills, find out their rent balance, see who their local councillor is, apply for parking permits and more. Once signed up, residents can link all their accounts under one single sign-on, making it easier to access all their information in one place.

The old MyAshford system will be shut down on Friday 29 September 2023. Existing users will still be able to access the system until that date, but it is recommended that residents sign up for a new MyAshford account. Existing users are being contacted giving them guidance on how to register to the new portal.

For more information, visit www.ashford.gov.uk/your-council/my-ashford.

INCREASE IN TARRIFFS IN COUNCIL OPERATED CAR PARKS

Over the last few years, the Council has experienced a significant increase in its costs relating to car parking, mainly driven by increased utility costs. The Council policy is to review parking charges every three years; however, the last review had been postponed and so it had been four years since the charges were reviewed.

Tariffs have therefore been increased by approximately 10% (rounded to the nearest 10p) whereas the Consumer Price Index has increased by 20.18% since the last increase. The charges are still lower than those in nearby centres.

LAUNCH OF CITIZENS' PANEL

Ashford Borough Council is launching a Citizens' Panel to encourage residents to engage with the Council give their views and opinions on services and issues that affect the borough.

Citizens who sign up will be able to share opinions and take part in consultations through online surveys and polls to provide their views on various topics of interest to residents. The aim is to consult the panel up to six times a year and provide regular updates on what changes to services have been made because of the feedback received. (For example, having a 'You said, we did' style campaign).

More information on the Citizen's Panel can be found at: www.ashford.gov.uk/citizens-panel

UPDATE ON KCC HIGHWAYS POTHoles AND SAFETY CRITICAL DEFECTS

KCC Highways report that it has received additional government funding to ensure that potholes and safety critical defects can be repaired as soon as possible before the onset of winter. Six additional contractors have been appointed by KCC to ensure the required resources are on hand to deliver the level of repair needed. Highways stewards will prioritise reports of damage received from residents as well as those picked up from routine inspections.

Cllr Simon Betty

Ward Member for Bircholt