Who made golfing history at the castle?

ONE of these women – Tracy Skinner of Kingswood, left, and Louise Phillipou of Broomfield – recently made an interesting piece of golfing history on the nine-hole golf course at Leeds Castle.

Find out who did it, and how, on page 3

Medical centre ‘still has room to improve’

A MEDICAL facility has begun the long road to recovery after being placed in special measures a year ago.

The most recent inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) shows the Staplehurst Health Centre, which serves 5,500 people, still “requires improvement”.

The CQC report, published on September 18, said, among many findings, the practice’s procedures put its patients at risk.

The surgery was placed into special measures in November 2017, and was ordered to improve or lose its registration.

The latest CQC report says: “The systems, processes and practices did not always keep people safeguarded from abuse. Patients were at risk of harm due to medicines management procedures not always being implemented effectively.

“Improvements had been made to the way in which significant events were being investigated and recorded. However, the practice was unable to demonstrate that they recorded these appropriately, as well as learned from and made improvements when things went wrong.

“Patients did not always find the appointment system easy to use and reported that they were not able to access care when they needed it.”

The areas where the CQC made clear the practice must make improvements, as they are in breach of regulations, are in ensuring care and treatment are provided in a safe way to patients. There should also be effective systems and procedures to prevent those using the service from being abused, and to ensure the practice provides care that is up to the fundamental governance standards.

Despite these negative points, the report did find the practice had an action plan to improve quality and was in the process of reviewing the timeliness of the care provided.

It also found that staff treated patients with compassion, kindness, dignity and respect, and there was a strong focus on continuous learning and improvement at all levels of the practice.

Staplehurst Health Centre was approached by Downs Mail for a comment but there was no response.

News

Worrying development
CONCERNS are growing about the level of traffic in Coxheath once another housing development is built.

Vicar criticises MBC
A VICAR has attacked the borough council for its mass house-building plans.

Care agency report
A CARE agency in Boughton Monchelsea has been rated as requiring improvement.

Tesco bus withdrawn
A FREE bus service to Tesco in Ashford from Headcorn has been halted.

Panto cast sails in
THE cast of the Hazlitt Theatre panto has sailed into the county town.

Obituaries

Crime Reports

Parish Councils

There have been complaints of noise from pubs in Loose; a pothole appeared in the road leading to the rail station at Marden; Chart Sutton, which is considering a Lorry Watch scheme, was told by Leeds it lacks Kent Police support; street names were agreed in Coxheath; new member Jane Butler joined at Loose.

Comment
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Louise’s hole in one is a castle first for women

THERE is a saying in golf that the more you practise, the luckier you get.

But for one local woman, who took up the sport a few years back to spend more time with her husband, a treasured hole in one was a mix of graft, craft and a dash of good fortune.

Louise Phillippou is thought to be the first woman to achieve the sport’s most sought-after prize at the picturesque nine-hole course overlooking Leeds Castle.

She was attempting the 118-yard fourth hole with golfing partner Tracy Skinner, of Kingswood, when the 38,000:1 shot trickled in off the pin.

Louise, (49), mum of two teenage girls at Invicta Grammar School, said: “I was having a pretty bad round and said to Tracy to stop scoring me and that I’d just practise some strokes. She took out her Thermos flask and poured herself a cup of tea, while I lined up the shot on the fourth. I was sort of concentrating on the follow-through and hit the tee shot.”

“Tracy said: ‘That looks like a good one’ and we both reckoned it would land on the green. The ball then trickled across the green, hit the pin and went in. Tracy just threw her arms in the air and called to the people near us: ‘She’s got a hole in one!’ I just couldn’t believe it. It was such a good feeling.”

Louise, who lives in Broomfield with her husband Steve (43), a business development manager, took up golf four years ago.

She added: “He’s been playing golf since he was 11 and he plays a lot, so I took it up so that I could see more of him. He won’t play tennis against me because he knows he can’t win. But he has never had a hole in one!”

Louise said she was playing badly on August 31 because her mind was preoccupied with a tennis tournament – the ladies’ doubles final – the following day at Bearsted. She said: “We won that match – so it was a fantastic weekend of sport all round.”

Husband Steve said: “It is such an achievement and I’m pleased for her – if a little jealous.”

Louise claims she has been promised a plaque in the Leeds Castle clubhouse to mark her achievement. Leeds Castle pro Steve Purves (51) said the chance of hitting a hole in one is around 38,000:1.

Nurse’s story

HEADCORN Active Retirement Association’s meeting will hear about wartime nurse Edith Cavell.

HeadARA meets at 2pm on the third Tuesday of the month in the Andred Hall at Headcorn village hall, providing guest speakers and entertainment for the over-50s.

On October 9, Melanie Gibson-Barton will talk about the British nurse shot by a German firing squad, in spite of her life-saving work treating soldiers from both sides without discrimination during World War I.

For more details about the association and the activities and trips it organises, email jennygore@btinternet.com.

Florist’s closes

A FLORIST’S shop which has traded in Coxheath for many years has closed down and is set to become a barber shop.

Flowers of Distinction, which offered a wide range of floral arrangements, has closed its doors after the owner sold the business.

A notice in the window of the store states that it will now become a barber shop. There is currently just one hairdresser in the village.

In Advance: Adults: £6.00 Seniors: £5.00
At the Event: Adults £7.00 Seniors £6.00
(telephone & online bookings are subject to a 7dp handling fee – this is per order not per ticket)

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A20 road work
ROADWORKS lasting over seven months have started on the A20.

The long-awaited Harrietsham Highway Improvements Scheme will impose a 30mph limit on vehicles using the A20.

Other work will include upgrading the pelican crossing to a toucan crossing at the West Street junction, building wider kerbs to narrow the carriageway, and to accommodate wider footways. Centre islands will also be built, and a micro-asphalt surface laid.

It is understood that the scheme has received up to £900,000 from developers’ contributions.

KCC said: “Construction will take up to 30 weeks and will be carried out from 8am to 5pm.”

Tree festival
THE parish church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in Headcorn holds its Christmas Tree Festival from December 9-9.

Organisers would like to hear from people who would like to decorate a 5ft tree. There is a charge of £25 for the tree.

Contact Anne Marie at amtrustram@btinternet.com for more details.

Castle filming
A BOLLYWOOD film has been made in Leeds Castle’s grounds. The movie, called “Give Me Love”, was filmed over the summer.

Chief executive Sir David Steel, writing in the Leeds & Broomfield parish magazine, said: “The estate ‘rocked’ to mainly Indian music, and had the chance to see a glimpse of just how a Bollywood movie is made.”

Festive concert
THE Weald of Kent Rotary is holding a Christmas concert in Headcorn village hall.

The event, “A Winter Concert with a Christmas Theme”, takes place on December 8 at 7.30pm and features the Ashford Invicta Singers.

Ticket details will follow in due course.

Speeding help
HEADCORN Parish Council has asked for volunteers to help with cutting speeding in the village.

Only six people are currently on the team and organisers say that anyone interested need only spare about two hours a month.

A spokesman said: “Please contact our clerk with an offer to help, rather than another complaint.”

Contact the parish clerk on 01622 892496.

Homes scheme brings concern over ‘rat-run’
CONCERNS have been raised about the level of traffic in Coxheath once a new 210-unit housing development goes through.

The community is set to increase in size by 25% once all the new homes are built, according to one Maidstone borough councillor.

Liberal Democrat councillor Richard Webb (pictured) warns that the £52.8m scheme on 19 acres at Forstal Lane could send traffic down country roads as village traffic continues to build.

Housing association Optivo and developer Chartway Group say the homes will include a mix of affordable rent, shared ownership and outright market sale.

Outline planning permission was granted by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) in February 2018.

The planning application will be submitted to the council in the autumn and construction will start next year and spread over four years, according to a statement.

Cllr Webb said: “Coxheath has taken a large hit in terms of housing in the Local Plan and will mean a near enough 25% increase in the size of the village.

“The problem we are having with this is the road system and I and others are very concerned about the construction traffic and when the new residents move in.”

He is worried that the cars will start to rat-run through Stockett Lane and Well Street.

David Jeffrey, project manager at Optivo, said: “Our plans have been carefully considered and will reflect and preserve the rural ambience of the area.

“We are keen to tackle the housing crisis and create a place which people will be proud to call home.”

Tim McLoughlin, projects director of Chartway Group, said: “Designed to encourage social interaction, the scheme will benefit new and existing residents of Coxheath, creating a sense of community pride and ownership.”

The statement does not address the issue of the increase in vehicles.

Liberal Democrat-led MBC claims that the 17,600 new homes in its Local Plan will be mitigated by the concept of “modal shift”.

Modal shift encourages people to walk, take buses or cycle in conjunction with limited road schemes.

But Lib Dem council leader Martin Cox admitted in a recent interview with Downs Mail, that he is “not 100% sure” that modal shift can work.

An Optivo spokesman said: “I have spoken to the project manager and traffic issues had been picked up in the outline permission.

“These will be addressed in the reserved matters application and a separate highways application (which will be submitted alongside this).”

Innovative houses up for awards
TWO housing schemes from the area are through to the finals of this year’s Kent Design and Development Awards.

Two one-off timber-framed detached homes in Lenham Heath (pictured) and a dramatic design at Caring Wood, Maidstone, are among 34 projects shortlisted for this year’s building honours.

The timber-framed Cowshed and Lambshed, built in just 12 weeks by TG Designer Homes in Lenham in December 2017, have already appeared in Grand Designs magazine.

Judges will visit the sites – selected from 80 nominations – over three days to announce the winners, and Project of the Year, at a ceremony in November.

Categories include: commercial, industrial and retail; conservation; environmental performance; infrastructure and renewables; public buildings – education and community; and residential (minor and major).

The awards are jointly organised by Kent County Council, planning consultant DHA, and marketing agency Maxim.

KCC leader Paul Carter said: “The diversity and quality of the entries demonstrates a real commitment to creating well designed buildings that work well for the people who use them, for the environment and sit well in the Kent landscape.”

Residential property expert Brian Horton is chairman of the judges.

This year’s sponsors include law firm Cripps; CTP Consulting Engineers; Kent Construction Focus Group; the Kent Environment Strategy; the Rochester Bridge Trust and Sibley Pares, with support from Quinn Estates, the Gallagher Group, and Penenden Heath Developments.
Vicar criticises council’s plans

AN OUTSPoken vicar has retired from his rural parish with a parting shot about Maidstone Borough Council’s massive house-building plans.

In a clear reference to Liberal Democrat-run MBC’s bitter legal dispute with Kent County Council (KCC) over road levies, Rev Steve Hughes (69) said it will be “nice to get out of a place where joined-up thinking seems to be a thing of the past”.

Rev Hughes, pictured, who was the minister for Otham, Langley, Broomfield & Kingswood and Leeds until mid-August, said it is “fine” to build more houses – as long as the infrastructure and services are there to support them.

He and wife Mandy are moving to north Wales, where she is to take up a senior NHS role.

In his final column for the Leeds and Broomfield parish magazine, Rev Hughes pays warm tributes to the communities he served.

He adds: “Locally, we have some very good councillors (parish, borough and county), but it will be nice to get out of a place where joined-up thinking seems to be a thing of the past, especially where housing, infrastructure and traffic are concerned.

“Fine, build more houses if need be, but only as long as the infrastructure, schools, dentists and medical centres are there to service the new housing.

“I certainly will not miss one little bit the traffic on Church Road and other, similar rat runs, and this is not going to get any better with the impending construction of the Bicknor Park Estate, between the White Horse pub and Gore Court Road.”

MBC intends to build 17,600 homes, many of which are in his former parishes, as part of the Local Plan.

The council has become locked in a dispute with KCC over the use of developer contributions being used to pay for studies into the viability of a Leeds-Langley relief road.

MBC chief executive Alison Broom claims the taxpayer-funded High Court battle will bring “clarity” to the issue.

County councillor Gary Cooke said: “Steve and I got on incredibly well and there was a really good understanding between us.

“He always made the church available to me or anyone who needed it. He is a real man of the people and we were very lucky to have him.

“I wish him every happiness in the next phase of his life.”

Staplehurst planner is now ready

THE Staplehurst Calendar will soon be available in local shops.

The community yearly planner features illustrations by local resident Ken Collins, who has designed it for the past 15 years and has helped to raise more than £20,000 for worthwhile local causes.

This will be the 15th edition, with now over 100 different drawings of local places and views in Staplehurst. The theme for this year is ‘meeting places’ with ten new pen and ink drawings. The calendar will be on sale at multiple locations.

On Saturday October 13, it will be available for purchase at the Staplehurst Photographic Society’s exhibition. On November 18, it will be on sale at The French Market. On Saturday, November 24, the calendar will be on sale at the United Reformed Church Christmas Fayre and Coffee Morning. It will lastly be available on Saturday December 1 at the All Saints Church Shepherds Market.

Proceeds this year will go to help young people at the Staplehurst Youth Club, Staplehurst Scout Club and Staplehurst District Guides.

Mr Collins said: “We would like to thank our sponsors for their support and to you all for your help by buying calendars which has helped to raise £21,000 for Staplehurst organisations to date.”
Care company told to improve management

A CARE agency in Boughton Monchelsea has been told by the government’s Care Quality Commission (CQC) it must strengthen the management and safety of its service.

This was the first comprehensive inspection of Jasmine Care South East since it was registered as a limited company in January 2017.

The agency in Brooker Close provides home care to those with disabilities, including dementia.

The agency received an overall rating of requires improvement after it was found a formal application had not been submitted to register a manager and the service was not always safe. The inspector’s report advised the agency to update its records with the latest local authority safeguarding documents.

It ordered the business to initiate risk assessments for users of the blood-thinning drug Warfarin, so that staff knew which side-effects to watch for. These assessments are to be recorded to meet the needs of the individual. In spite of being marked down on safety and leadership, inspectors heard that those receiving help – 11 at the time – were happy with the service they received, with praise for the service which was described as caring, responsive and effective – all of which were graded good.

One relative told the inspector: “When Mum had a fall, even though I found her, the carers stayed until we were sure she was comfortable.”

Another said: “The manager comes out to give care sometimes, she is very kind and has a caring manner and I think they are delivering her personal care well.

“I am there sometimes and I hear them chatting.”

The inspection team was told the provider was currently putting processes in place to monitor the delivery of the service with the support of an external consultant.

Jolanta Crampton (59) director of Jasmine Care South East Ltd said her business is “thriving” despite the negatives in the CQC report.

But she was unwilling to offer an explanation why her company was the subject of a compulsory strike off notice from the Registrar of Companies in March this year, which is published on the Companies House website.

When pressed, she variously claimed to know nothing of it, that it is an error by Companies House and Downs Mail was looking at the wrong company.

Kenward rally

THE Kenward Trust celebrated its 50th anniversary with a classic car rally.

The trust, a leading drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre based in Yalding, welcomed 70 cars, including a Mercedes 300 SL and a Rover P6. There were also two Ford Mustangs.

The oldest car in attendance was a 1930s Austin 7, with the rarest being an immaculate Skoda Rapid.

As well as the cars on the lawns, the event featured a sale of products made by Kenward residents, including woodcrafts and jewellery, and a chance to meet the trust’s alpacas.

Vote for park

VOTERS can select local parks in Maidstone in a bid to win the People’s Choice Award as the UK’s favourite.

Four of Maidstone’s parks – Mote Park, Cobtree Manor Park, Whatman Park and Clare Park – have previously been awarded the prestigious Green Flag Award.

To vote for your favourite open space, go to www.greenflagaward.org to find your local park. The top 10 sites are to be announced on October 16.

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Enquiries led to the arrest of a 28-year-old man in connection with the incident in Allen Street. Crews from Kent Fire and Rescue Service had brought the fire under control by 7.15am on September 3, to reports of an incident at a house. The fire was dealt with by 100 firefighters from five stations in Bearsted, at Combe, Lenham, Harrietsham, Snodland, Trottiscliffe and Chilham.

A 34-year-old man was charged with arson and possession of an offensive weapon. He was a friend of John Chadwick, who was charged with5。“We have a passion for creating custom made jewellery”

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£60k bill for homes brochure

A SLICK brochure to promote the development of five plots of private land into 1,000 town centre homes cost the taxpayer almost £60,000, Downs Mail has learned.

Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) paid property agents Savills to produce a document detailing development of five privately-owned sites in the heart of the county town.

The plan has already suffered a cross-party backlash since it emerged in August. Len House in Mill Street; the Granada cinema and Gala Bingo sites, Maidstone west; the Broadway; Baltic Wharf (Medway riverside) and Mote Road have all been earmarked for housing.

Independent Maidstone councillor Eddie Powell, a former planning committee member, said: “They've forked out £60 grand and none of the councillors on the ground, who represent all the main parties and know the area as well as anyone, think the idea is worth tuppence.

“Surely, this money could have been spent better and those members should have been consulted.”

A spokesman for MBC said: “The cost of Savills to produce the report for the five opportunity sites is £59,440.50. This has been funded from the (government’s) ‘business retention pilot’ scheme that the council was successful in securing money through.

“The commission to Savills is extensive, to include background research, property market analysis, scenario testing, extensive stakeholder engagement, as well as the production of detailed planning briefs for each site, and an over-arching brochure to promote the opportunities to developers and investors in the medium to long term.”

Downs Mail asked how much the landlords were asked to pay towards the cost of producing the plans, but MBC failed to respond.

Councillors representing the wards affected by the proposals are unhappy about the strain the extra homes will have on local services, traffic levels and parking.

Chairman of the planning committee, Lib Dem Clive English, said: “I think it’s fair to say we are not in agreement with the thrust of many of the proposals and will be preparing our own intervention.”

The cross-party group has written to MBC senior management outlining its concerns. The riverside area could see 922 apartments in three and five-storey tower blocks (with about 700 parking spaces), while Maidstone west might see 325 flats on up to seven floors. Bridge ward councillor, Conservative Jonathan Purle, said: “This isn’t master planning. It’s just cramming in more and more flats.”

Pressure is growing on the council to show that the roads can cope with the increased traffic associated with the Local Plan’s 17,600 new houses.

The Lib Dem leadership claims it can be mitigated by modal shift – the concept of persuading people to walk, take buses or cycle, in addition to some junction improvements. But MBC leader Martin Cox has admitted to Downs Mail he cannot be “100% sure” that modal shift can work.

‘24,000 homes’ on Local Plan

BOROUGH councillors have attended a workshop where they were briefed on the consequences of 40% more housing being imposed on the borough by central government in the Local Plan Review, scheduled for 2022.

This could mean Maidstone bearing the brunt of about 24,000 new homes, rather than 17,600 contained in the Local Plan adopted last year – increasing the number of homes which must be built annually from 800 to 1,200 per year over the life of the Local Plan.

Conservative group leader John Perry said: “We will need to work with Kent County Council – after all, it is the body to provide the schools and build the roads.”

Legal costs for judicial review

TOP brass at Maidstone Borough Council have held high-level talks on the progress of its challenge to the authority’s failed judicial review.

Downs Mail understands the senior management team met with its legal experts on August 23 to discuss the current position before proceeding with a taxpayer-funded ‘oral hearing’ over road levies at the High Court in London this autumn.

Liberal Democrat-led MBC took Kent County Council to the High Court over the allocation of funding for the studies into a Leeds-Langley relief road. But the process fell at the first hurdle when Mrs Justice Lang threw it out as MBC had not presented an “arguable” case to proceed.

So far, the case has cost the taxpayer £14,500, with legal bills set to climb even higher when the oral hearing takes place. The oral hearing is designed for MBC to again set out its position over the “implications for the discharge of the council’s statutory planning functions”.

MBC chief executive Alison Broom claims she needs to challenge KCC in the High Court for “clarity” on how section 106 money (developer contributions) is spent by the county council on roads.

Infrastructure levy ‘a missed opportunity’

A CHANCE to boost funding from developers for Maidstone’s flagging infrastructure needs has been missed, it is claimed.

As the government’s Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) kicks in, Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) admits its demand on developers will leave the borough £182.2m short of what is needed to keep community resources and roads in line with new development.

The shortfall from the levy, which comes in on October 1, is “still to be identified”, say MBC planners.

County councillor Shellina Pendergast (pictured) welcomes CIL because it allows parishes a share of developers’ cash to cope with infrastructure pressures in their communities, but the low rate secured by MBC is a “missed opportunity”.

The charge set for new housing in Maidstone per square metre is £93 for urban development, £99 for rural, £77 for the Springfield site and £45 for care homes. It is £150 for retail development and £75 for outside the town centre.

Cllr Pendergast said: “As one of the fastest-growing regions in Kent, our rate should not be among the lowest. To suggest that KCC or others will make up the difference when budgets are stretched is ludicrous.”

She says more work is needed to calculate a realistic and consistent rate that reflects the upgrading of facilities in urban and rural areas.

KCC argues: “The county council considers it essential … the borough council clearly identifies both how the overall loss of funds per new dwelling when compared to the existing £106 (developer contributions) regime will be recovered, and how the CIL receipts that are raised will be directed to where they are needed.”

A spokesman for MBC said: “The amount of CIL which will be secured from development for Maidstone is about 20%. It has never been anticipated that CIL would fund the whole cost of the infrastructure required and £106 money will continue to be available.”
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Dementia walk
A KENT Memory Walk was held in Mote Park to highlight the issue of dementia in families.
More than 3,000 entered the sponsored challenge on September 8 in aid of the Alzheimer’s Society.
The charity funds and supports people living with the condition.
The event in the park allowed the loved ones of sufferers to share their experiences.
A spokesman said: “Every penny raised will help the society provide information and support, improve care, fund research and create lasting change for people affected by dementia.”
Visit memorywalk.org.uk for more information.

Winery centre
HUSH Heath Winery has opened its new £4m visitor centre which overlooks the famous vineyard.
The building, located near Staplehurst, has a 200-seater tasting room, shop, commercial kitchen and a roof-top terrace bar.
Hush Heath also plans to double the size of the winery, increasing the size of the estate to 130 acres. It is hoped this will achieve the target of producing 500,000 bottles of wine a year.

Tory Karen wins vote despite Lib Dem rally
OVER-DEVELOPMENT of the borough’s rural villages was the single biggest issue faced on the campaign trail of Headcorn’s newly-elected councillor, Karen Chappell-Tay.
Conservative Cllr Chappell-Tay, pictured with MP Helen Whately, was elected on September 13 with an unassailable 57% of the vote on a 29% turnout.
In the run-up to the poll — triggered by the resignation of Cllr Shelinna Prendergast in order for her to concentrate on her county council duties — house-building, traffic, anti-social behaviour and inadequate broadband featured heavily on the doorstep, she said.
Cllr Chappell-Tay, of Ulcombe, runs a management consultancy firm with husband, Martin. They have four children.
She said: “I have never been a councillor before so this is an entirely new experience for me. There are lot of issues to be tackled.
“What kept coming up time and again when I was campaigning was the over-development and expansion of the rural villages and all that brings with it.
“Local people also brought up issues like antisocial behaviour, broadband and increased traffic.”
The Tories slipped 7% compared to the previous election, while the Liberal Democrats went up a massive 30% in a concerted effort in Headcorn.
Cllr Chappell-Tay said: “I am told that the Lib Dems put out five leaflets and newsletters during the campaign. They appeared to have canvassed very, very hard.”
Lib Dem candidate Merilyn Fraser, of Headcorn, polled 409 votes (34.1%). The Labour Party and Green Party both lost ground. A Tory activist said: “The Lib Dems put in a huge amount of effort into that by-election and they’re good at fighting single seats.
“They did pretty well but considering all that they threw at it, they still lost and lost badly.”

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ELECTED: Karen Chappell-Tay (Con) 686, 57.3% (-7.3%)
Meryl Fraser (Lib Dem) 409, 34.1% (+30.1%)
Jim Grogon (Lab) 63, 5.3% (-2.2%)
Derek Eagle (Grn) 40, 3.3% (1.4%)
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Medical centre agreed despite local concerns

PLANNING approval for a new medical centre for Coxheath “over the border” in Linton has angered opponents, who say the surgery is in the wrong place.

In spite of opposition from Coxheath, Linton and Loose parish councils, Maidstone Council’s planning committee gave unanimous approval to the proposal to merge Greensand Health Centre and Orchard Medical Centre in a new surgery at Hill Farm, Linton.

Cllr Bernard Cresswell (pictured), chairman of Linton Parish Council, said: “Only one councillor mentioned environmental concerns at all, and then only to comment on the proposed landscaping arrangements.

“It would appear to follow from this that policy SP17 [designed to protect rural areas] of the current Maidstone Local Plan now carries no weight whatsoever. The consequences for Linton and other rural parishes surrounding Maidstone can be imagined: in future, no building proposals will be turned aside on environmental grounds, whatever damage they might cause.”

He says the parish council is now left only to discuss the location of the building and the transport arrangements that will be needed to get patients to the new site.

Maidstone Council has confirmed there is currently no timeline for the new medical centre to open.

Previously, Juliette Norton, practice business manager of Greensand Health Centre, told Downs Mail: “With no movement on an alternative practice at Clock House Farm Estate, and with every cupboard and shoebox utilised at Greensand, we believe there is nothing to lose and a lot to gain from exploring a new build at Hill Farm.”

Residents say the surgery is in the wrong place and incorporating a pharmacy and healthy living café will threaten existing outlets, like the Lloyds pharmacy in Coxheath. There is also concern about the adequacy of local footpaths and crossing points to the new surgery.

The borough council did consider the possible introduction of a minibus driven by volunteers to get patients to the new site, but then expressed concern about who would pay for it.

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Church event
FOLK from the Headcorn Baptist Church will be going M.A.D. this half term.

It stands for “Make A Difference” and lasts from October 20-25, when the schools break up.

The Baptist team will be around the village in distinctive red T-shirts, collecting litter, planting bulbs or weeding flower beds.

The church is also holding a fun day on October 24 – details will be released nearer the time.

Christmas fair
ST MARY’S Christmas Fair will be held at Sutton Valence village hall between noon and 2.30pm on Saturday, November 24.

There will be food, gift, Christmas decorations, jewellery by LouLou Workshop and gift hamper by Little Bluebirds.

Scout quizzer
HEADCORN Scout Group is holding a quiz night at Egerton village hall at 7.30pm on October 20.

Teams of up to six are welcome and the price per person is £9, which includes a hot meal and cake. Call Kevin Harper on 01233 756659.

---

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Soft Baked Beetroot, Smoked Aubergine, Goat’s Cheese & Walnuts
Sautéed Duck Livers, Wild Mushrooms & Marsala (all served with a selection of breads)

Main Courses
Traditional Roast Turkey, Duck Fat Roasted Potatoes & all the Festive Trimmings
Red Wine & Shallot Braised Beef Cheeks, Potato & Pannip Mash & Pannip Crisps
Stuffed Portobello Mushrooms, Spinach & Gorgonzola, Parsley Crumb, Anna Potatoes
Pan Fried Hake Fillet, Mussel, Leek & Samphire Risotto
Roasted Guinea Fowl Breast, Chestnut Biscuits, Potato Cake & Tarragon Crème Fraîche

Desserts
Christmas Pudding & Brandy Sauce
Lemon Posset, Clementine Curd & Spiced Biscuits
Chocolate & Almond Torte, Sour Cherry & Amarostro Sorbet
Stem Ginger Pudding, Caramel Custard
Cheeseboard, Biscuits, Plum Chutney (£2 supplement)

Book now for Christmas
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Dinner Monday to Thursday
3 Course £27.00
2 Course £21.00

Dinner Friday & Saturday
3 course £30.00

Menu available 1st to 24th December, excludes Sundays
The Orchard Theatre, Dartford, have announced that Marti Pellow will lead the cast of this year’s spectacular family pantomime Aladdin from Saturday 8th December playing the role of the evil sorcerer Abanazar. The hugely talented performer, Marti Pellow has achieved some of the UK’s biggest number-one singles, and has regularly featured in the UK charts throughout his career, both as a solo artist and as the frontman to Wet Wet Wet. Aladdin will be produced by Qdos Entertainment, the world’s biggest pantomime producer, and the team behind Dartford’s annual pantomime, who guarantee another must-see production packed with a lamp-full of audience participation, sensational music and dancing, jaw-dropping special effects and fantastic festive entertainment suitable for all ages. Featuring a wish-granting genie, an evil sorcerer and the timeless tale of the Twankey family panto lovers should hop aboard a flying carpet and fly to the Box Office to secure their tickets for this year’s must-see, genie-us family pantomime. See Marti Pellow in Aladdin at The Orchard Theatre from Saturday 8 – Sunday 30 December.

Teapot Island, Yalding, with its huge collection of novelty teapots is still growing and currently stands at over 8,000 with over 2,000 for sale! Teapot Island started life in the 1950s as a tin shack which sold bait to fishermen and served up tea. Now the family-run business includes a café with a tranquil garden and a wide variety of food on the menu. It also offers the chance to paint your own pottery from teddies to teapots.

Stronger Kent Community Fair - Taking up a hobby or volunteering does wonders for your health and happiness - and can even help you live longer, says an event organiser promoting Maidstone community...
fair this month (Wed 10th Oct). Stronger Kent Community Fair at Hazlitt Arts Centre will showcase dozens of voluntary and leisure opportunities and more than 35 exhibition stalls will share information and advice with visitors. Volunteer opportunities include everything from making veg boxes, raising with children, social media, visiting prisons with the Samaritans, supporting a bereaved child, volunteering in a community café, wrapping presents, event organising, knitting or collecting bread, cakes and pies from Groggs. Leisure opportunities include wellbeing activities for over 50s such as Tai Chi, painting, bowls and more. Other services offer mindfulness and Live Well Kent helps clients improve their everyday living, become more independent and confident, meeting new people, get better skills and find a job. Organiser Emma Conroy said: “This event is for people to get information and advice, but also get to see a variety of local groups they can get involved with if they fancy. There are proven health benefits to volunteering, connecting with people and being part of something bigger than yourself. There’s lots of talk about loneliness, health and wellbeing, with more people living alone, and technology often making it easy for us to stay indoors, isolated and inactive.” Stallholder activities include a heritage quiz, raffle, giveaways, tombola, therapeutic colouring, photo props, making a friendship bracelet. Amnesty petition.

Village Hotel, Maidstone, is just 100 yards from the River Medway. It is also just five minutes’ drive from Maidstone’s centre, with direct access to the M20 motorway. With free Wi-Fi and free parking, the property offers extensive leisure facilities. At an extra cost, guests can use the Village Gym, with a swimming pool, sauna and steam room. Each bedroom has a flat-screen TV with satellite channels. The rooms
also include a hospitality tray, telephone, and a private bathroom with a hairdryer. Village Grill offers a varied menu of seasonal dishes in stylish surroundings. In The Village Pub, guests can sample traditional food and drink, with live sports also shown. Guests can also enjoy a selection of hot drinks and snacks from the on-site Starbucks coffee shop.

Heart of Kent Hospice - The 8-14 October is Hospice Care Week across the UK, giving people the opportunity to explain why they love the work their local Hospice does. Heart of Kent Hospice, your local Hospice, has supported over 14,000 people since 1992 and provides its services free of charge to patients and families in our community. The team will be out in the community during Hospice Care Week, telling people more about Heart of Kent Hospice so look out for them during the week. Matt Miles was cared for by the team at the Hospice and his wife, Claire, explains their experience, “It wasn’t as scary as we thought, it enabled Matt to come home and have a better quality of life for several months. I will never have enough words to say thank you.” Please visit www.hokh.org.uk for more information or to volunteer your time or make a donation.

Kenward Fireworks night is back due to popular demand! Prepare to be amazed by this year’s spectacular themed display on Thursday 8th November at our beautiful site at Yalding! Fun for all the family and a great way to support such an amazing charity. Don’t miss out buy your tickets NOW at Kenwardtrust.org.uk. Also, Kenward Trust’s annual Christmas fair is happening on Saturday 8th December 2018! Come along and pick up some beautifully crafted and handmade gifts made our very own residents here at Yalding! Beautiful Christmas Trees also available at the fair.

Kenward Trust

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Buy your tickets online at
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Adult £8 | Child (under 12) £5 | Family £20*

*Family ticket: 2 Adults and up to 2 Children. Registered charity no. 1146481. Registered in England no. 7931728.
News
do@smail.co.uk

Re-routed lorry clips trees, blocking road

A HAULAGE company has apolo-
gised for damage caused by a lorry
to trees on a country road, writes
Jadie Schopman.

The HGV broke branches and
scattered debris along a back road
between Ulcombe and Headcorn on
September 12. The road has a ton-
nage and height restriction for vehi-
cles to avoid damaging overhead
cables and trees.

The lorry clipped a tree and a sub-
stantial part of it broke over the
lorry, leaving the road blocked for
some time. Motorists were forced to
swerve around obstacles and feared
damage to their vehicles.

The lorry belonged to Essex sup-

Headcorn borough councillor,
Martin Round, said: “A number of
farmers, residents and our parish
councils have suffered greatly by
this act, particularly with the extra
costs. Lorries travel through that
road frequently, despite the fact
there is a limit.”

The Woodland Group said in a
statement: “Due to road works and
road closures on the driver’s route,
he was forced to follow a diversion.

“We apologise for the inconven-
iences caused and will attempt to
find an alternate route for this deliv-
ery location until the preferred route
becomes viable again.”

Drivers flout bans

THE issue of lorries flouting bans
continues on the B2163 between-
Hollingbourne and Langley.

Downs Mail highlighted the issue
several months ago and Kent Police
released figures which showed vir-
tually no enforcement had taken
place in the previous 12 months.

A Langley resident said: “The po-
lice haven’t taken any notice and
that means the lorry drivers don’t
either. They don’t have to – there is
no enforcement.”

Woodland Group’s vehicle boasts
the slogan: “WE CARE, WE CON-
NECT, WE DELIVER”.

Clr Round said: “The route
should have been much better
planned. This wasn’t the first lorry
to go down that road and it certainly
won’t be the last. The driver was fol-
lowing other guidance because of
the road closures, but the re-route
was just inappropriate.”

Elderly victim in doorstep con

A BALDING burglar is being
hunted by police after he tricked
his way into an elderly woman’s
house and stole cash and a brooch.

Kent Police issued this e-fit of the
suspect after the burglary in Snow-
don Avenue, between 8am and
3.30pm on Friday, September 7.

Investigating Officer Detective
Constable Tracey

Brightman said: “The offender
knocked on the door and entered
the property under the pretence
of fixing a dripping tap.

“While the victim, a lady in her
90s, was distracted, he stole cash
and a gold brooch.”

The man is described as white
and in his 40s. He was clean-
shaven and had short, brown hair.
He was wearing a gabardine jacket
which was either beige or green.

Anyone with information or who
recognises the e-fit is asked to call
Kent Police on 01622 604100 quot-
ing reference number YY/32877/18.

Alternatively, contact Crimestop-
pers in Kent, anonymously, on
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Young face rising anxiety

THE crisis of mental health in people of all ages is rarely out of the news. In a special report, Neil Nixon examines the problems, challenges the established wisdom and talks to those affected...

OVER the past 20 years, Britain has experienced a growth in reported mental health problems.

Each person’s problem is unique to them, but reports and investigations have established a series of causes, all of which appear to have contributed to the current national crisis.

There is no shortage of research and statistical information on the range of problems, and the overall picture suggests one of increased levels of mental health problems across the whole population.

The average life expectancy in the UK has continued to rise in recent years, although a 2018 report suggested this has almost levelled off, caused mainly by earlier deaths in poorer areas.

This still leaves the numbers of those living much longer at an all-time high.

In 2014, the Office for National Statistics reported that 13,780 people who had reached the age of 100 were alive in 2013 – more than four times the figure for 1983.

Age-related mental health conditions – notably dementia – have placed a massive strain on the NHS, local surgeries and care homes, with a surge in demand on the time of medical staff and the prescribing of related medication.

The NHS predicted demand caused by the ageing population, but not the spiralling increase in problems amongst the rest of the population.

A number of causes have been identified, including the financial crash of 2008 which raised levels of stress and anxiety. It also caused a range of other problems – notably in terms of the knock-on effect on young children at the time who are today’s teenagers and young adults. A 2008 British Medical Journal study reported that 45% of people who are in debt have mental health problems compared with only 14% of those who are not in debt.

It added: “The effects of [an economic] downturn affect the mental health not only of some adults but also of their children…Numerous studies have also shown the effect of general economic recession and unemployment on the rate of suicides and people considering suicide.”

More recent studies have confirmed those observations and highlighted the role played by the resulting austerity measures and social media in contributing to the growing issues.

Late in 2015, The New Statesman revealed that UK suicides were rising, particularly for men aged between 45 and 59.

Amongst the young, social media is reported as a major factor behind episodes of anxiety, depression and self-harm.

Young people’s charity Ditch The Label reported in 2017 that 71% of young people felt social media platforms did not do enough to prevent cyber-bullying.

Concerns also exist about algorithms within platforms that respond to user behaviour and work to keep people engaged. Digital devices are blamed for disrupted sleep patterns, which can increase anxiety.

I found help and career

KELLY Lee (31) works for Maidstone and Mid-Kent Mind – a choice that has been central to her own recovery.

She said: “I have suffered with mental ill-health from a young age. Diagnoses such as anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder and bi-polar led four years ago to a diagnosis of a borderline personality disorder.”

“I had feelings of high anxiety. At times I couldn’t leave the house, my moods fluctuated from deeply depressed to really high.

“I suffered with paranoia and impulsive behaviours – they are part of the disorder.

“I would burn out quickly and suffered from suicidal thoughts. In 2015 I made an attempt on my own life. I now see that my symptoms were not failings but part of my illness, not reasons for shame.

“I voluntarily went into a psychiatric hospital to get my medication sorted and have support while I was understanding my new diagnosis.

“Later, I sought further support and that led me to Maidstone and Mid Kent Mind. I was so thankful to them that I wanted to help where I could. Fundraising and volunteering in their befriending service helped me continue my recovery.”

“Three years later, I work for MMK Mind. The courses we run have helped me immensely, and I can look forward to the future. My children have helped raise money for mental health support and understand it’s not something to be ashamed about.

“I aim to build my career within mental health and continue to help people with MMK Mind. I want to become a CBT practitioner, and I am lucky that there are opportunities within Mind to build on skills.”

Now I’m back to me

PENELIPE (25), of Fant, feels her recovery really started with the correct diagnosis.

She said: “I have always felt ‘different’, struggling to cope with emotions. This worsened with my parents’ divorce when I was nine.

“Constant arguments taught me that screaming and shouting was a normal method of communication. Soon I was out of control, and self-harming from 12. I became increasingly violent in a bid to stop this behaviour.

“Sleeping pills and therapy didn’t solve the problem and in my teenage years I hoped to end it all through taking pills. I ended up in A&E mental health services.

“I was banned from classes to the point where I had to move school. I was regularly drunk at weekends.

“In the end, I moved out before I was thrown out, which led to more drinking and a terrible co-dependent relationship. I got into a fight so bad I was arrested and found myself in a young person’s psychiatric unit. I just wanted to die.

“I planned to get out of there and kill myself on my 18th birthday.

“Thankfully, I met my husband two weeks after I got out. At 19, I was depressed again and went to my GP. She really helped, getting me tested for ADHD.

“I was told I should have been diagnosed at 10, having shown classic signs. I was medicated until last year, when I started coming off my pills.

“I had a dip about two months ago. It was horrid to be in that situation, but my GP was amazing. I am now back on some of my pills, but feel like I am back to me.”
Recovering by helping others

LOCAL government has seen its funding cut. In and around Maidstone, the problem is not as severe in terms of responding to mental health needs, especially for the young.

As elsewhere, services have often been outsourced to charities, with a focus on being reactive by responding to problems rather than proactive in dealing with requests.

The Maidstone and Mid-Kent (MMK) branch of the mental health charity Mind recently reported a 238% increase in the numbers of young people worked with from April 2017 to March 2018. This figure did not include pastoral support provided in schools.

MMK Mind’s Nikki Brooker said: “We have developed a range of support for young people, ranging from courses to peer support groups, following youth participatory principles of giving young people a voice to shape the services they are involved in.”

Business is taking this issue seriously. A successful book on management, Leaders Eat Last by Simon Sinek, included a lengthy consideration of the problems of the millennial generation. It investigates how committing to help others boosts the brain chemicals oxytocin and serotonin, which are highly effective at combating anxious and depressive moods.

Mr Sinek noted the vast market for self-help books and the virtually non-existent market for books on helping others.

MMK Mind has shifted initiatives, such as the anger management course ‘Taming my Temper’, to a position where sufferers help others.

The Forward Thinking Females group uses group discussions and exercise to focus on body image and self-esteem issues, while Bounce Back focuses on resilience in decision-making skills. Mind’s work locally comes alongside the county-wide Headstart Kent programme, targeted at young people.

Mind works with people of all ages, but another major area of mental health problems has seen those with long-term issues becoming homeless and vulnerable housed.

The level of deaths amongst this group has risen noticeably in recent years. Accurate figures of those sleeping rough locally are hard to obtain, but local charities and hospitals have seen a rise in deaths amongst this group.

Martin Gore, of the Canterbury-based charity Catching Lives, said: “Living on the streets is not likely to lead to good health outcomes... With clients with multiple complex needs, you can’t make doctor’s or hospital appointments in the usual way, because it just doesn’t work for them.”

Austerity measures may have driven up homelessness and poor lifestyles may be a factor in the mortality rate increase.

Amanda Sidwell, from Making a Difference to Maidstone (MADM), said: “Mental health is a big issue with our street homeless. “Just being on the street affects wellbeing and, in most cases, exacerbates an already-fragile mental health state. It is a perpetual circle for many.

“Many fail in our society due to this continual battle of mind and spirit. There are instances of those who take their own lives, self-harm and generally just do not fit in anywhere, feel lonely and are isolated.”

“We at MADM believe there is always hope for the many who are unwell, and who all have the ability and opportunity to get well and be healed – or at least should be considered for help, regardless of their life choices.

“They are a part of our community, are we not to ‘love our neighbours as ourselves? I see those hurting, lost and confused and am sensitive enough to realise that they should not be abandoned.”

Funeral director Jo Loveridge, of Albany Funerals, confirmed that recently local deaths had shown a significant increase in families impacted by losing someone to drink or drug use.

Additional research by Abbie Hambleton

Bobby brings creativity to raising awareness

BOBBY Duncan (26), of Maidstone, has embraced the idea that helping others is the best route to dealing with your own mental health issues.

After graduating, Bobby followed an eclectic but far from lucrative career in creative media, before working as cabin crew for British Airways.

Issues with anxiety and panic attacks got so bad in the second job that in March of this year, Bobby found himself facing an ambulance crew and, soon after, a psychiatrist at the Priory clinic, who diagnosed cyclothymia (mood swings) with borderline personality disorder.

He left his job soon after to re-think his priorities, a decision that led to him establishing his own company – Doyourbitik – and devoting his time and creative energies to fundraising.

An ongoing project involves Bobby parking his car in prominent locations and using pens to decorate it to raise awareness of mental health issues. His work during mental health awareness week, covering the car with thank you messages to those who had helped him and placing it in Fremlin Walk, raised £750 for the charity Mind.

Bobby has gone on to work in Bristol and roll out his car project in local nursery and play schools.

He says: “I’m firmly with Simon Sinek in seeing that helping others is the key to finding a sense of purpose. Doyourbitik is taking me in that direction, and it has been a privilege to bring my creativity to projects.

“I’ve had support from a pen company which provided free pens to decorate the car, and I have a long-term goal to support and expand the ‘Dreamflight’ project which provides flights to Disneyland for severely disabled children.”

Maidstone Weald October 2018 19
Threatened Tesco bus ‘a community service’

LOYAL supermarket customers hope a campaign will persuade Tesco to keep running its free bus service for shoppers in the Weald.

Its driver told users the Friday service to the supermarket at Park Farm, Ashford, will stop on October 19 after 15 years.

Regular users including Cathy Smith (60), from Moat Road, Headcorn, say the service is vital to many, including the elderly.

She said: “It’s more than just a bus service, it’s a community service offering people the chance to enjoy a day out and the independence to buy what they want unaided.”

Mrs Smith claims the bus service, which calls at Headcorn, Smarden, Puckley and Hothfield, is used by more than 20 people a week, adding: “We hope to do whatever we can to get Tesco to have a change of heart.”

Headcorn Parish Council has expressed its concern, as has county councillor Shellina Prendergast, and a petition is set to be instigated in Smarden.

Mrs Smith added: “Tesco is advising customers to buy over the internet, when seven out of 10 aren’t online, or advising convoluted journeys on public transport to make use of its other free services, when our driver already does all he can to accommodate everyone, including lifting bags on and off the bus.”

Tesco’s Ashford store is popular because it has facilities for those with visual and hearing problems as well as the disabled.

A 72-year-old user from Headcorn said she was disappointed by the news as the store provides not only food but clothes, homeware, a pharmacy, photo booth and ATM.

She said: “When Tesco is looking to invest in Jack’s stores to compete with Lidl and Aldi, you would think they would be able to support a service that brings in loyal Tesco fans who spend up to £50 each a week.”

A Tesco spokesman said: “We have made the difficult decision to stop this bus service to and from our Ashford Park Farm store. Unfortunately, it is under-used and makes a loss, which means we are no longer able to provide this service. We apologise for any inconvenience this causes.”

Cllr Prendergast, who will contact Tesco, said: “I’m concerned about this...it serves some of our most vulnerable residents in some quite isolated rural areas.”
Brexit poll shows strong call for vote on final deal

WITH less than half a year until Britain leaves the European Union after 40 years, the current debate is whether Prime Minister Theresa May should hold a second referendum on the final deal.

Downs Mail has been conducting an online poll to gauge the strength of opinion about a re-run of the June 2016 vote, which started the process of the withdrawal.

As this edition went to press, almost 400 readers had voted via our website.

Like Brexit, the issue has clearly divided local people, with a clear 17% lead in favour of a second referendum with 58% of the votes so far. Only 1% of voters are unsure.

We posed the question: “With less than six months until we leave the European Union and the Prime Minister’s exit strategy stalled, do you believe that we should have a second referendum?”

The question certainly provoked a lively exchange on Facebook, with Alan Wynne commenting: “Definitely – now more of the facts have been exposed, the impact of our leaving on our economy, on our incomes, our restrictions, on movement, access to education...”

Sue Whitfield said: “The votes are counted - get over it and move on.”

Nils Janson wrote: “The EU Commission would not accept any divorce deal, whatever it was. No deal is not a bad deal and we will save £39bn. Businesses will dictate the trade terms, not the commission of unelected, undemocratic clowns...”

Carolyn Morgan said: “No way, let’s not forget it was the Conservative Party which asked us to vote and think of our children’s and grandchildren’s future. I did, and voted out. A second referendum and our country will go mad. To me, it’s almost like saying ‘I voted Labour and the Conservatives won’ - but would we get another election?”

John Barret said: “I would have preferred sensible negotiations leading to a sensible deal, but given the potential dire outcome, particularly in our area, I’d say it makes sense to either extend talks or ask the public to vote on the final deal.

The prime minister has consistently ruled out a second referendum, declaring it a betrayal of democracy and trust.

●To have your say in our Downs Mail online poll, go to www.downsmail.co.uk/views/9/

WWI event

INVICTA Grammar school will host an event to mark the 100th anniversary of the Armistice that ended WW1.

The evening on Saturday, November 10, will be hosted by WWI specialists Richard Knight and Jim Barker-McCardle, and will include events such as history talks, military recruitment demonstrations, period singalongs and refreshments.

Proceeds of the event at the school in Huntsman Lane, Maidstone, will go to the Heart of Kent Hospice.

Tickets start at £10 for adults and £5 for children – call 01622 790195 for details.

Drugs in jail

THE number of drugs found inside Maidstone Prison has risen sharply in the past five years.

The Howard League, the prison reform charity, revealed the increase in contraband reflects a similar issue across the rest of Britain.

In the 12 months to March this year, 48 searches uncovered drugs in prison cells, a marked increase on 2013.

In the same period, 15% of inmates failed mandatory drug tests. The most common drug found is spice, the psychoactive substance.
M20 bridge work is delayed to next year

THE M20 footbridge, which was destroyed two years ago in Addington, will not be rebuilt until next year at the earliest, Downs Mail has learned.

The structure, which was hit by a digger on the back of a lorry in late August of 2016, is now set to be re-instated in 2019 after a lengthy process of getting the new walkway up to current design standard.

The new bridge will have an accessibility-compliant ramp. Highways England is in the process of buying a small parcel of land needed to accommodate the design.

A Highways England spokesman said: “The Addington footbridge requires a complete replacement, which includes purchasing land so it can be built to modern standards.

“We are negotiating the purchase of this land and agreeing to the access we will need for construction, and expect to start work soon after the M20 J3-5 smart motorway upgrade opens to traffic in 2019.”

Mary McKinley, chairman of Ryarsh Parish Council, said: “Apparently, Addington owns the land.

“ar meetings with Maidstone Borough Council, we pointed out that work should be done at the same time as the Smart Motorway development, to avoid people being diverted through Ryarsh.

“We had a meeting with Highways England six weeks ago and they said they were waiting for Addington to agree to sell the land.

“The people of Addington do want the bridge back, because it cuts their town in two.”

Work is hoped to begin in 2019, despite pleas from local MPs Tom Tugendhat and Tracey Crouch, who wanted re-building to start during the Smart motorway project.

In a letter to Highways England written in 2017, they said: “We are concerned about inevitable pressure both works will put on the local road network, especially through the villages of Ryarsh and Birling and along the entire A20 corridor.

“If these projects could be merged, it would reduce the timescale for these projects by five months.”

Attack appeal

WITNESSES are being sought for an attack in Maidstone that left a man with serious injuries.

The 36-year-old, from Maidstone, was found on the forecourt of a car dealership in Mill Street on August 19. He had a serious injury to his stomach and was taken to a London hospital for treatment.

Detective Inspector Natalie Potter said officers were now keen to speak to any witnesses. She said: “Enquiries are ongoing to establish the circumstances of the incident and whether the assault took place in Mill Street or elsewhere.”

Anyone who saw anything suspicious should call Kent Police on 01622 604100, with reference 19-0208.

Fight claims

TWO motorists were involved in a punch-up in Maidstone.

The altercation took place on Monday, August 27, on the A249 Bearsted Road on a roundabout close to Eclipse Park.

It has been reported that between 11.15am and 11.30am the driver of a white Seat got out of his car and assaulted a man in a black Ford Focus.

Kent Police are also investigating counter allegations that the Seat driver was assaulted. No serious injuries were reported.

RAF memorial

THE Royal Air Force Association held the Annual Battle of Britian Memorial Service in Chart Sutton at the Memorial Garden at Parkhouse Farm on Sunday, September 2.

A packed gathering took part in the service led by Rev Philip Cox, with wreaths laid by the Mayor of Maidstone and representatives of family and other RAF organisations.

A Battle of Britain flypast followed the service.

Rescue calls

KENT Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) staff were called out 145 times in the past year to remove objects from people.

KFRS has not reported details of the call-outs, but many are believed to involve wedding rings or hand-cuffs.

Others include bottoms being glued to toilet seats as pranks and the more traditional cats up trees.

Festive cards

MAIDSTONE’S charity Christmas cards shop runs this year at the Methodist Church, Union Street, from Friday, October 12 to Thursday, December 13. It opens Monday to Saturday, from 10am to 4pm.
Soap star Richard at helm as pantomime cast sail in

THE cast of Aladdin sailed into Maidstone aboard the Kentish Lady pleasure cruiser to launch this year’s Hazlitt Theatre panto.

In a blaze of colour and flanked by the pupils of East Borough Primary School, the players waved to the public as they arrived in Maidstone town centre.

Starring stand-up comic, actor and singer Richard Blackwood, the Christmas family favourite runs from December 1-31 at the famous 350-seat venue.

Most recently, Richard played Vincent in EastEnders.

He plays the Genie in this year’s panto, while crowd favourite Elizabeth Bright returns for a second year, this time as Princess Jasmine.

Richard told Downs Mail: “I really like Maidstone – it’s the place that everybody needs to head to in Kent. The people are so welcoming and friendly. I can’t wait to get started.

“Playing in a soap means that you can always shoot a scene again. Live theatre is obviously different, except that with panto, the mess-ups all become part of the fun. It doesn’t matter so much.

“With panto, the audience is young, but I love working with the kids because they are true and the reaction is always genuine.

“I am sure that we as a cast will really gel together because a cast that gets on always transmits that on stage. And I think it’s obvious when it is not happening.”

This is the fourth panto for Richard, who recently left the part of Vincent Hubbard in EastEnders. Kivan Dene is playing Abanazar, Alessandro Lubrano is Aladdin and Erin Lewis takes on the role of Slave of the Ring.

A Hazlitt Theatre spokesman said: “The boat trip worked really well again this year and we’re massively grateful for the response.

“We’re also grateful to the East Borough Primary School for allowing their pupils to become our sort of mascots for the day. The cast members loved them.”

MP to attend Brexit debate

MP HELEN Whately is to stage a town hall-style debate on Brexit, with six months to go before Britain leaves the EU.

Mrs Whately, the member for Faversham and Mid Kent, hopes for a lively exchange of views at Lenham Community Centre on October 5 at 7.30pm.

The MP will give her perspective and a view from parliament and take questions.

Mrs Whately said: “Brexit will affect us all. Rightly, people have very strong feelings about it. I want to make sure they have a chance to put their points to me in person.

“I also want to bring people together with different views. It’s no good if Remainers only speak to Remainers and Brexiteers to Brexiteers – that just makes the divisions grow.

“This is ever more important as the options for our future relationship become clearer. And I will learn more about what people want to contribute to the debates.”

The consequences of Brexit on the M20 were brought sharply home over the summer when residents near Crafty Green learnt that Highways England is searching for sites for a lorry park in the area.
Ellana’s year helping others

FOR Maidstone Girls’ Grammar School student Ellana Hall, left, her next step after A-levels is a year out helping others.

She sets off this month on the UK Government-funded International Citizen Service (ICS) programme and will spend 12 weeks working with young volunteers in Nigeria tackling poverty in some of the world’s poorest communities.

ICS is open to those aged 18 to 25 and offers a chance to gain skills viewed favourably by employers and universities, including teamwork, leadership and project management.

Ellana said: “It’s a great opportunity to travel, learn about new cultures and make a difference in the world. After sitting my A levels, it seemed the ideal time to broaden my experiences and I’ve deferred my university place until next year.”

Young people need no experience, qualifications or cash to volunteer for the ICS, just the ambition to make a difference, with three-quarters of volunteers describing the experience as incredibly useful for their professional development.

Ellana said: “I knew I wanted to travel during my gap year but when I began researching I realised I could use my time in a much more purposeful and meaningful way through volunteering. I chose ICS and VSO because it is professional, reliable and well organised. The programme is also government funded so I did not have to worry about the cost, just demonstrate my commitment through fundraising.”

She will be learning about the culture in Nigeria, while living with a host family.

Ellana said: “I hope to build long-lasting friendships with my Nigerian and English counterparts. I know that the memory of this placement will stay with me for the rest of my life and I am excited about building long lasting friendships.”

Ellana Hall is one of 17,000 young people from across the UK participating on ICS overseas since 2012.

Felicity Morgan, director of ICS at VSO, said: “Leaving school or college is a milestone and young people are often under pressure to decide what to do next. Volunteering overseas provides a unique opportunity to experience another culture and develop new skills supporting people living on the margins of society.”

ICS placements are available for departure from January 2019, and 18-25-year-olds from Maidstone and the surrounding areas are encouraged to apply. Find out more at www.volunteercis.org.
EDITORIAL apprentice Jade Schopman, left, explains why she eschewed a university place to learn journalism on the job...

THE PRESSURE for young people to know exactly what they want to do once they leave school is an ongoing problem.

Some go to university, others leave to go in to full-time employment and some decide to take a year out after two years of stressful A levels.

I had just finished two years at sixth form, where I studied English Language and Literature, Philosophy, and Ethics and Criminology, all with the desire to write as a career, as they are very essay-driven subjects.

I was influenced to believe that university was one way to get where you wanted in your career – any other path was pure luck. I had never thought of doing an apprenticeship as I hadn’t been offered that as an opportunity at my school.

Pupils are encouraged by teachers to apply to university in the first year of sixth form, whether or not they want to go, in case of any second thoughts down the line. But, in the midst of these applications, I opted for something that would exactly reflect what I wanted to do in the future.

I had been offered a place at university to study English Literature, but declined in order to complete an editorial apprenticeship at the Downs Mail. This would also mean I would be paid, rather than have the £40,000 student debt hanging over me at the end of my degree. I felt you had to be certain about your course to spend that amount of money.

Being in debt was something that didn’t feel worth it to me – was I really going to study for three years on a course where I was only interested in one area? All my friends were going to university, so did that mean I had to, too?

University is often known as being the best time of a young person’s life, with friendships that last a lifetime and the opportunity to move away and become an adult, but for others, including me, the workplace is where I find the motivation to climb higher up the career ladder. I discovered that university offers a degree, whereas an apprenticeship and full-time work offer the valuable experience employers look for.

Either way, it must be in something you love, for it to benefit you.

I am now studying for my Level 2 Business Administration Diploma and a Certificate Level 1 and 2 in ICT, whilst working full-time as a trainee journalist.

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Stub it out in Stoptober

SMOKERS across Maidstone and Malling are being encouraged to make use of Public Health England’s Stoptober campaign this month to improve their chances of quitting for good.

The government’s health team says using a national initiative as motivation massively increases your chances of kicking the habit over going it alone.

Stoptober was launched in 2012, helping to push down the number of adult smokers to a record low last year – down a quarter on 2011. But the habit remains the biggest cause of preventable deaths in England.

In Maidstone, 17.1% of people smoke – higher than the prevalence across the South East at 13.7%. The district in Kent with the most smokers is Thanet (23.7%) and Dartford is the lowest at 10.2%. In the borough of Malling and Tonbridge, 11.6% of people smoke.

What is true, according to the figures, is that of the South East’s 967,011 smokers, six in 10 want to quit.

Stoptober last year helped nearly 400,000 smokers stop, cutting the number of smokers nationally to 14.9% of the adult population. The campaign is based on research that found if you can make it to 28 days smokefree, you are five times more likely to quit for good.

New this year is a free online “Personal Quit Plan” to help smokers find the best support for them, with suggestions including face-to-face advice, nicotine patches, gum or inhalers, and e-cigarettes. Visit https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/be-healthier/quit-smoking/stoptober/

- There are a million fewer smokers in England than in 2014.
- Smoking prevalence in England amongst men is 17% and amongst women 13%. News from Public Health England.
- E-cigarettes remain the nation’s favourite stop-smoking aid, with about 3.2 million adult users in Great Britain.
- TV presenter Jeremy Kyle, who quit smoking earlier this year after 30 years on 20-a-day, is supporting this year’s Stoptober campaign.

Care agency rated good

A SERVICE offering people support to live independently in their own home has been rated good by the Care Quality Commission.

The Kent Enablement at Home domiciliary care agency provides help to people in West Malling, Maidstone and the Tonbridge area, often following time in hospital.

The service, run from Kings Hill, was being used by 150 people at the time of the inspection in August. Three people were visited at home and asked about their experiences.

Inspectors found the agency provided good, safe, responsive, personal care to those with physical disabilities and dementia. One told them: “I’m afraid of falling, so it makes me feel safer to walk about whilst carers are there watching out for me.” Another said: “They come first thing to make sure I’m safe. I like to know someone is there for whatever I need.”

The inspector noted: “There were enough staff to meet people’s needs. People were supported with their medicines, protected from infection and lessons were learned when things went wrong.”

“Individual’s needs were assessed before their service began and staff had the skills, knowledge and experience to meet them. People were supported to drink and eat enough ... and were supported to have maximum choice and control of their lives, with kindness and compassion that respected their dignity and privacy.”

Hospital still needs to do better

AN inspection of Medway Maritime Hospital has listed a catalogue of failings requiring urgent attention.

A team from the independent Care Quality Commission (CQC) tasked with checking the quality of emergency and urgent care, surgery, outpatients and diagnostic imaging, found staff shortages and management issues were still causing safety concerns and delays.

Deputy chief inspector of hospitals Amanda Stanford said Medway NHS Foundation Trust had shown some signs of improvement in recent months as it continues to implement reforms designed to or requires improvement for the quality, safety and responsiveness of its services and leadership.

She added: “Medway NHS Foundation Trust has come a long way in the last five years. However, there is still a lot more work to be done, particularly in ensuring a culture of safety exists across the whole of the trust.”

Issues identified included:

- failure to meet national requirements for consultant cover in urgent and emergency care, with poor patient flow causing significant delays for those awaiting specialist review or a bed on a ward;
- significant challenges in surgery, particularly in retaining nursing staff.

KIMS staff face 200-mile charity ride

FOURTEEN members of KIMS Hospital staff, based near junction 8 of the M20, have been preparing to take part in a 200-mile cycle ride.

The fund-raising team were due to pedal from the private medical business to Maidstone’s twin town of Beauvais in France. It was due to take place at the end of September as this edition of Downs Mail went to press.

The team aims to raise some funds for the Maidstone and Weald Samaritans group.

A spokesman said: “The Samaritans in Maidstone are an amazing charity, providing 24/7 mental health support, and I am sure that will spur us on as we pedal over the two days.”
Family Funeral Service brings its personal service to Headcorn

Family Funeral Service brings its personal service to Headcorn

FAMILY Funeral Service has opened a new base in Headcorn, offering its friendly service to even more people across the Maidstone area.

The family owned, and family run business offers a personalised approach, with the option of home visits and access to a friendly voice at the end of the telephone 24 hours a day. Already operating out of Bearsted, Family Funeral Service is run by Michael Lawrence and his son Robert, along with Kim and Angela - the team behind the third-generation business that has been helping families in the area for 40 years.

Michael Lawrence said: “We are pleased our branch in Headcorn High Street is now open. We’ve worked hard to ensure the premises is sympathetic to the village conservation area, with help from Nick Prior, at Woodland Carpentry, and provides a comfortable environment in which people can relax and talk through their needs.

“Jo will be our lady on hand to help families looking to arrange a fitting tribute for their loved ones. I will also be there daily to meet families and help with their requirements and wishes.”

To meet his new business commitment, Michael has recently moved to Headcorn. He added: “The loss of a loved one is never easy to cope with, and the added stress of making arrangements can often bring further emotional upset. With our experience of making funeral arrangements we have learned how to help families have and be part of a meaningful service that celebrates life.

“Our approach is simple. We sit with you in our office or your home, taking you slowly and methodically through the various decisions that you will face and the options available to you. Sometimes, it’s just good to sit and talk to someone with experience and compassion before making a decision.”

Contact Family Funerals on Bearsted 01622 260200 or in Headcorn on 01622 962001.

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Witness appeal
POLICE are appealing for witnesses to an attack at a Maidstone nightclub on Sunday, September 23.
Two men have now been arrested after officers were called to Dusk 2 Dawn in King Street in the early hours of Sunday to two men outside the club with stab injuries.
Both victims were taken to a London hospital for treatment.
The incident is believed to have happened at about 4am.
A 29-year-old, from Gravesend, and a 28-year-old man, from Swanley, remain in custody after being arrested on suspicion of assault. Officers would like to hear from any witnesses or anyone with information that could assist their enquiries.
Call 01622 604100, quoting reference 23-0271, or Kent Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Pit your wits
A QUIZ night has been organised by Hollingbourne Panto Group in Hollingbourne village hall.
The fun event is on Saturday, December 1 at 7.30pm, and individuals or teams of eight are invited to take part – and those who come in fancy dress could win a prize.
To book a table or an individual ticket (£10 each) contact Natasha on 07802 408549.
The next panto production, Rapunzel, will run from February 13-19. Auditions will be held on October 24 (8pm), October 28 (7.30pm) and at 6.30pm for children on November 11.

Kenward cars
THE Kenward Trust celebrated its 50th anniversary with a classic car rally.
The trust, the leading drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre based in Yalding, welcomed 70 cars including a Ferguson Ted 20 and a Rover P6.; There were also two Ford Mustangs. The oldest car in attendance was a 1930s Austin 7, with the rarest being an immaculate Skoda Rapid.
As well as the cars on the lawns lawns, the event featured products made by Kenward residents.

Ringers’ tour
HEADCORN’s bell ringers enjoyed an outing to Romney Marsh over the summer.
Ringers and their friends visited a number of country churches, including a small wooden chapel at Fairfield, the six-bell church at Newchurch and eventually on to the final tower at Lydd.

Hospital proposed as a specialist stroke centre
MAIDSTONE Hospital has been named as one of three in Kent earmarked to become specialised stroke centres.
The other two are Darent Valley Hospital in Dartford and the William Harvey Hospital in Ashford.
The announcement comes after lengthy research and public consultation.
The three acute units will replace existing care at six hospitals in this £40m project. The quality of this care has not always hit required standards, the NHS admitted.
Speed of highest-quality treatment led by teams of consultants and specialists using the latest equipment is seen as vital for patients.
The three selected locations should see 98% of patients admitted and treatment started within an hour.
Helen Grant, MP for Maidstone and the Weald, said: “I am delighted that such an outstanding service will be on the doorstep of many of my constituents. I look forward to continuing to work with the trust as they develop the new unit.”
Patricia Davies, the senior responsible officer for the Kent and Medway Stroke Review, said: “It is important to stress there are still several hurdles to clear before a final decision is made about urgent stroke care in Kent and Medway.
“I would like to thank the hardworking staff at all our stroke units for their ongoing loyalty and dedication. I appreciate this is a time of uncertainty, but I believe there is an exciting future for everyone working in stroke services across Kent and Medway.”
Glenn Douglas, accountable officer for the eight Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Groups, said: “The clinical committee was satisfied that the consultation did not identify any new evidence or viable options that required a change to the consultation proposals.
“However, the responses to consultation emphasised important issues for consideration during the implementation of the final option.
“For example, people were concerned about travel times, relatives and carers visiting loved ones, effective rehabilitation close to home and the ability to staff the new units.
“These and other issues will all be considered in the detailed implementation plans for the final option. Some work to address these issues is already underway.
“For example, we are looking at how we can make staff and effective rehabilitation services can be delivered locally and close to home for people, once the immediate period of their care in hospital in a specialist unit is complete.”

Pharmacy ‘must do better’
PATIENTS have criticised a pharmacy in Maidstone for delays in dispensing and poor customer service.
A simple post on Downs Mail’s Facebook page complaining about slow service at LloydsPharmacy, Grove Green, triggered the surprise response from more than 100 frustrated users across south Maidstone and beyond.
They cited stressed staff, poor management, excessive queues, prescription delays and poor collaboration with GPs – even though the Grove Green pharmacy is just one door away from the surgery.
Emily Fisher said prescriptions were not ready days, or even weeks after they should be, posting: “I try calling the pharmacy beforehand to check – no answer.”
“Queues towards the door every time. I visit...”, wrote Caroline Browning added: “I gave up using Grove Green last year. Appalling service, long waits and then you find your script hasn’t been done.”
In Allington, Kirsty Hancock posted: “My repeat prescription is never ready, even if it is several weeks after its due date.”
“I am told it’s staff shortages but

Borough Cllr Malcolm McKay no longer uses LloydsPharmacy at Grove Green
Green this has been going on for months,”
Charlotte Johnson, who worked at the pharmacy in Grove Green, blamed poor pay and too few staff. She said: “When I worked as a dispenser I was paid less than a McDonald’s worker.”
“Budget cuts meant the store was always under-staffed. The staff work extremely hard and often miss lunch.
“It is head office who need to wake up and implement better working conditions to ensure a better experience for customers.”
Borough Cllr Malcolm McKay has stopped using the Grove Green pharmacy. He said: “The management need to diagnose the cause of the problem and find a long-term cure.”
LloydsPharmacy apologised, adding that the manager at Grove Green was on holiday.
However, when told the problem was not limited to Grove Green, and there was concern about the future of the area’s pharmacies, the spokesman said: “A number of LloydsPharmacy stores were identified for sale or closure last year, but that programme has now been completed.”
Call the customer service number on 0345 600 3565 - option 2.
Friends name draw winners

THE winners of the Friends of Headcorn Church 100 Club’s monthly draw have been named.
The August winners are Connie Hogan (£25) and Pat Cutting (£15). Organisers have reminded participants that £10 subscriptions are now due. Jenny Morrison will be calling to collect cash from those who do not have standing order.
If you would like to join the prize draw scheme and lend support to the church call Jennyn on 01622 89238.

Health date

THE future vision of Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust will be the focus of a public meeting in Maidstone.
The trust’s AGM is at the Village Hotel, Sandling, from 6.15-7.30pm on Thursday, September 27.
To attend, complete the RSVP at www.kentcht.nhs.uk.
The trust has a budget of more than £224m and employs about 5,000 staff.
As one of the largest community health providers in England its services are funded mainly by clinical commissioning groups.

MAIDSTONE Choral Union is hosting a gala concert to mark 100 years since World War One ended.
The union will perform The Armed Man with Maidstone Wind Symphony orchestra.
Karl Jenkins’ powerful Mass for Peace will be performed by more than 100 voices at Mote Hall, Maidstone Leisure Centre, from 7.30pm on Saturday November 10.
The concert will also feature BBC Young Musician of the Year finalist Matilda Lloyd and singers from choirs and schools across Kent.
The Maidstone choir is busy rehearsing after its latest concert success in Bayeux, home of the world-famous tapestry. Bayeux is close to where the D-Day landings took place in 1944, which began the end of World War II.
An audience of more than 250 people applauded the choir’s performance in the 11th century Bayeux Cathedral.
Martin Hindmarsh, the choir’s music director and conductor, sang three psalms for voice and organ, accompanied by guest organist Nicholas Bland, who also played the Offertory for Easter Day, by French composer Boey.
David Pickett, the president of Maidstone Choral Union, said: “Our performance was very well received. It’s the third time the choir has sung in a French cathedral and we are gaining a reputation which does credit to the county town.
Mr Pickett added: “Now we are looking forward to performing The Armed Man at the Concert of Remembrance. It is a stirring piece and will be highly appropriate to commemorate the coming anniversary of the ending of WWI.”
The choir, founded in 1902 has been making annual concert trips abroad in recent years with visits to Germany, Holland and France.

Celebrating lives

There is such a thing as a ‘good’ funeral and celebration of someone’s life. Sadly, too few people experience it. We are passionate that people in the Kent area have this, which is why I started Albany Funerals - I wanted to make sure a safe place existed where a family’s wishes take priority.
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Derek Smith
DEREK Thomas Smith (68) lived in Barming and before that in Bredhurst. Born in Portsmouth, he moved with his family to Aldershot where his father retired after serving in the Royal Navy. Derek served with the Royal Signals for 12 years, including in Holland. He worked in a Dutch paper mill before moving to Maidstone, where he drove for Nu-Venture buses.

Derek was married to Dorothy “Dee” and father to Nedascha, Daisy, Tony and Tracy. Dee said: “Derek kept the qualities he developed in the military throughout his life. He was also really funny and had a lot of stories to tell.

“As a mark of respect for all he brought to Nu-Venture, the company is naming a bus in his honour and it will carry a photograph of Derek.

“People will remember him as a man of character who always spoke from the heart and said what he felt about things.”

Derek leaves his wife, children and grandchildren Gemma, Denise, Samantha, Jessica, Bradley, Nathan and Tiffany.

Mike Holmes
MICHAEL “Mike” Holmes (78) of Bearsted followed a demanding career in banking that took him to many locations. Born and raised in Dorset, Mike joined the National Provincial Bank – forerunner of NatWest bank. Whilst working in the bank he met his wife of 43 years, Audrey and the couple settled in Bearsted in 1974. Mike enjoyed bowling, playing at Maidstone Bowls Club in the summer and indoors at Mote Park in the winter. He was also a member of Maidstone Lions.

Audrey said: “Mike got on well with people. He made friends easily and always did his best for others. His funeral at Vinters Park was packed, and I have been inundated with cards paying tribute to his character.”

Mike leaves his wife and his brother, Barry.

Vic Smith
GEORGE “Vic” Smith (96) died after a long illness at Pembroke House Royal Navy retirement home, Gillingham.

He was known throughout the area from years of leading a popular accordion band in the 50s and 60s. Vic spent his life living in Gillingham other than time spent in the Royal Navy during and just after the war. His Naval service included work supervising Japanese prisoners as they rebuilt part of the harbour area in Singapore following the Japanese surrender.

Vic had started work as a welder at the Naval dockyard in Chatham in 1940 and continued until the closing of the dockyard, after which he was appointed to a position in health and safety during the de-commissioning process, eventually leaving in 1976.

Vic played accordion and performed live under a number of names, including the Vic Smith Accordion Band, which was popular with party goers in and around Maidstone.

Vic was married to Norma for 62 years and father to Colin, who said: “People will remember my father as the life and soul of the party, a man who often laughed out loud at his own jokes and could bring his infectious humour to his work as an entertainer.

“He was one of those people who could light up a room and he loved a laugh – so much so that Tommy Cooper’s song Don’t Jump off the Roof Dad was part of his funeral service.

Vic – who was widowed in 2013 – leaves Colin, his wife Rosemary and grandchildren Natalie and Marianne.

Valerie Spurrier
THE death has been announced of Valerie Lilian Spurrier (78), who lived in Grove Green. Born Val Langran in London, she moved to Kent in the 1960s with her husband Bill, and brought up children Timothy and Georgina. The family spent many happy years living in Penenden Heath, before moving to Bearsted.

After Bill’s death in 1991, Val became part of her local active retirement association (BEARA). Daughter Georgina said: “My mother made many true friends in the active retirement association and her friends and family will remember her as someone who was always happy and got on well with everyone. She also started volunteering at charity shops and Maidstone hospital.

“She took great pleasure in spending time with her six grandchildren and she will be greatly missed by them all.”

Val leaves her children and grandchildren Sophie, Lauren, Alex, George, Saskia and Maddi.

Cyril Cooling
THE death of pioneering cancer surgeon Cyril Ivor Cooling (95) has been marked nationally, charting a career that included time living in mid-Kent and working at Benenden Hospital.

Cyril’s career brought him into contact with local families, in particular, the families of children with cancer, when he worked at the Royal Marsden Hospital. From this post, he went on to work at Benenden Hospital in the latter part of his career.

He was noted as a man of many talents and one online tribute stated: “What a remarkable life with an amazing career, many hobbies especially as a musician and a real rock to many of his family.”

Cyril was married to Phyllis for 72 years and father to four children. He died at Cradlehall Care Home, in Inverness, having moved to Scotland in 2010 to be near his son. He leaves his wife, children, 12 grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren.

As a tribute to his life’s work, his family requested donations instead of flowers be given to the Royal Marsden Hospital Charity.
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Farm workers plan ‘too small’

FARMERS have questioned whether a new government plan to attract fruit pickers to Kent will be enough to halt the decline in seasonal workers coming to the UK from abroad.

Between spring 2019 and December 2020, the scheme aims to help reduce labour shortages during peak production periods by allowing six-month visas for up to 2,500 workers a year.

Some workers are now being deterred by the high cost of living in the UK, while the agricultural sectors in parts of eastern Europe are starting to thrive.

The Seasonal Agricultural Workers’ Scheme, which was launched in early September, is supported by MP Helen Whately. But James Smith, of Lodddington Farms in Linton, said: “It’s encouraging to see, but in terms or numbers it’s too small for what the industry needs. It’s difficult to get the number of workers that we need, and when we do it is even harder to keep them.”

Terry Gilham, of Winterwood Farms in Chart Sutton, which employs 45-50 seasonal pickers and 250 full-timers in the pack houses, said: “It is not really enough, since the industry needs between 80-100,000 each year. Only about one in 100 online applications comes from local people.

“There is a whole range of factors and I don’t think Brexit is entirely to blame, either. According to what we’re hearing, there are recruitment problems in Spain, Germany, Holland and Portugal, too.”

Robert Pascall, of Clock House Farms in Coxheath, said: “It has been harder over the last few years to recruit, especially over the last two years, because the EU is pumping money into agricultural projects and work in the countries most of our employees come from.

“It doesn’t make sense for them to come to England if there is already work at home. We’re very worried about next year, as we already have a lot of people saying they have been offered jobs back home.

“We expect about 60% of people to have come back this year, but next year we fear the number will be much lower. The pilot scheme will help, but it’s just at the starting point.”

Faversham & Mid Kent MP Helen Whately said: “We’ve been arguing for two years that labour shortages are holding back Kent’s thriving fruit industry. The pilot will provide just a small proportion of the seasonal workforce needed, but it should lay the foundations for a more substantial scheme in future.”

MP could lose seat if changes go ahead

FAVERSHAM and Mid Kent MP Helen Whately, right, is facing the prospect of losing her parliamentary seat after proposed boundary changes were passed.

Her constituency, which she has represented since 2015, is to be split into three, with other areas taking up its constituent parts. The change is part of government plans to cut the number of MPs from 650 to 600, but the plans could come in for fierce opposition from Labour and campaigners who feel it is unfair.

The Boundary Commission for England said its final report on September 10 took account of more than 35,000 comments from the public. A spokesman for Mrs Whately (pictured) said: “The Faversham and Mid Kent constituency will be divided into three under the current plans. But these are still only plans and nothing has yet been decided. It would have to go to a vote in parliament and that is not necessarily going to happen either.”

The Canterbury constituency would be re-cast as Faversham and Canterbury, represented by Labour’s Rosie Duffield. If selected, Mrs Whately could contest the seat at the 2022 general election.

Neighbourhood Watch

Working to reduce crime – Call local police or Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

A BRICK shed at a farm was broken into in Hermitage Lane, Boughton Monchelsea. A Karcher pressure washer, a leaf blower and two Honda strimmers were stolen. A house was broken into in Adbert Drive, East Farleigh. Car keys and a vehicle were stolen.

A Ford Mondeo parked in a driveway was broken into in Whitebeam Drive, Coxheath. Climbing equipment was stolen. Someone tried to break into a garage in West Street, Hunton. A Fiat 500 was broken into on a driveway in Station Road, Headcorn. A wallet containing cash and personal items was stolen.

A man was seen breaking into a house in Lenham Road, Ulcombe. He is described as in his 30s, white, about 6ft tall and stocky build. He left in a dark blue Ford Fiesta with a female said to be in her 20s, white, slim build, around 5ft 2in, with shoulder-length black hair. The roof was slashed on an Audi A3 convertible parked in Hawkenbury Road, Headcorn. A parked vehicle was keyed in High Street, Headcorn.

A house was broken into in Wheeler Street, Headcorn. A man’s gold and silver watch, two other watches, a sapphire and diamond ring, a safe and spare keys for an Audi Q5 and VW Caddy van are all missing.

Fuel was stolen from a Honda Civic parked in the road in Hamptondale Lane, Nettlestead. The rear windscreen was also smashed. Someone damaged a door and removed a padlock from an outside electricity box in The Cockpit, Marden.

A white Boardman bicycle and a white Cuda bicycle was stolen from a garden in Cranham Square, Marden.

Five parked vehicles were broken into and their catalytic converters stolen in Collier Street, Marden.

A shed at a house was broken into in Martin Lane, Marden.

A grey Excel 240 inflatable boat was stolen from its moorings in Lees Road, Yalding. A black Vauxhall Corsa parked in the road had both number plates stolen in Maidstone Road, Nettlestead.

Oxford-educated Mrs Whately was recently given the vice-chair of the Conservative Party with responsibility for women.

If the commission’s plans are passed, Jeremy Corbyn would see his Islington North patch split up and former Brexit minister David Davis’ Haltemprice and Howden constituency phased out. Former foreign secretary Boris Johnson might see his Uxbridge and Ruislip constituency slip into a more Labour leaning district.

The shadow cabinet office minister, Cat Smith, said the final recommendations amounted to “an undemocratic power grab”.

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**Chart Sutton**

**Police report** A burglary had been reported, but this appeared to have been a neighbour issue and the stolen item was returned. A parishes warder reported the theft of red diesel from farm machinery, and it seemed that the thieves had returned the following night to steal the machinery, but it had been removed as a precautionary measure. An abandoned lurcher had been found and reported to the authorities.

**Community warden** Liz Lovatt reported on the Voluntary Warden Scheme. She asked for a donation from the parish council towards a monthly coffee morning for parishioners. The clerk was asked to put this on the agenda for consideration.

**Lorry Watch** Cllr Waring had discussed the scheme with Leeds Parish Council, who had abandoned the scheme due to lack of support from the police. Borough Cllr Morford said he would add this to his list for discussion with the MP. He added that KCC was working on a route planner which would encourage lorries to take preferred routes.

**Brishing Road** Residents of two cottages in the Brishing Road and Chart Road had been having problems with HGVs and farm vehicles driving too close to their homes. KCC had put in double kerbs but would not fund anything else for private dwellings. It was agreed to approach Cllr Hotson for money from his member’s grant for ‘Unsuitable for HGV’ signs and traffic bollards, which the parish council would be willing to match fund.

**Pavilion** During the summer, Peter Underdown had re-painted and cleaned the pavilion ready for the football season. He had also repaired two of the parish noticeboards. It was agreed to pay him £100 for his work.

**Village green** Members considered the offer from Peter Underdown to treat the pool of the village signpost with wood preserver and agreed that this should be carried out. Other work that needed doing included moving the sleeper/steps into the north west corner, replacing broken posts, trimming hedges and a general tidy-up.

**Crocus bulbs** Members agreed a request from The Rotary International Organisation to repeat last year’s exercise of planting crocus bulbs in the village, to highlight the campaign for eradication of polio across the world.

**CCTV upgrade** Three quotes were considered, taking into account annual maintenance costs, additional expected costs and the current life at the village hall. It was agreed to accept the quote from Brooke Security, and to use the S137 budget to pay for it.

**Road surface** Cllr Folknall reported that the road surface on the Hertsfield Bridge on Chart Hill Road was breaking up and sinking. The clerk was asked to report this to the highway department.

**Councillors’ reports** Reports of an inconsiderate resident would be passed on to Community Warden Liz Lovatt. The textile bank had been moved. The village hall had a new cooker. A tree surgeon would be contacted about the oak at the village hall, which was unhealthy.

**Coxheath**

**Noticeboards** The clerk had identified a potential replacement noticeboard through Greenbarnes Ltd but the items cost £500 each. It was agreed that Maidstone Borough Council would be approached the see whether they could provide replacement frontages, given their refurbishment of the village centre notice board.

**Scouts** The clerk contacted the group Scout leader regarding the decision to offer financial support to the scout hut refurbishment project.

**Street names** Susan Francis at Maidstone Borough Council agreed the following names should be recommended for the Linden Meadows development: Gala Way, Rubens Court, James Grieve Mews, Braeburn Drive, Saturn Road and Meridian Close.

**Hamilton House** Cllr Down expressed concern at the rubbish in the immediate vicinity of Hamilton House, some of which was suspected to have fallen from overhead gutters. He felt that the owners of the property should be reminded of their responsibilities.

**Street lighting** Cllr Bird reported that the street lights at the southern end of Stockett Lane had been upgraded with LED lights.

**Village post box** Cllr Parker suggested that a direct approach to the senior management of Royal Mail should be made, seeking the refurbishment of the post-box in the village centre.

**Litter** Cllr Down reported that two volunteers had come forward to join the team of litter pickers.

**Commemorative seat** Cllr Parker said the commemorative seat outside Holy Trinity Church should be re-oiled to withstand harsh weather. It was agreed that the clerk should make arrangements with S W Yorkes and Sons.

**New clerk** Recruitment for someone to replace the clerk, who had retired, was considered with a new contract, job description and draft advertisement.

**Community centre** Cllr Mrs Page met with MBC and said the village centre street furniture refurbishment was progressing well. The issues discussed were: the possibility of introducing a further bollard outside the charity shop; the need to replace the bollard missing from the entrance of the Hamilton House car park; the need to add a bench at The Beacons to the refurbishment list, and the outstanding need for a map of street furniture, especially bins throughout the village.

**Youth club** An invoice was submitted to the secretary in respect of pitch hire fees, amounting to £475. It was also noted that informal discussions were held with the chairman and the secretary of the junior football club over the possibility of developing an artificial pitch in the middle field.

**Memorial plaque** The cost of the plaque for the commemorative stone outside Holy Trinity Church was estimated at under £5,000.

**Dog control** MBC consulted residents about the possibility of introducing measures to combat irresponsible behaviour by dog owners.

**Dog waste bins** RJP Cleaning Services noted that the charge for emptying dog waste bins would increase by 50p per bin per visit. This was considered reasonable.

**Traffic volume** Michelle Hutchinson called the parish council regarding unacceptable high volumes of traffic using Forge Lane.

**Audit reports** David Buckett had contacted various parish councils, including Coxheath, to apologise for the delay in submitting this year’s internal audit reports. The delay was caused by personal family problems.

**Play area inspection** Maidstone Borough Council Safety Inspector reported the need to repair a gate spring holder and to replace a shackle bush on the junior swings.

**Scam warnings** Doorstep criminals had been selling household cleaning products. There were reports of mis-sold lease agreements for park home sites, whereby members of the public were told they could live on a site for 12 months when the maximum is only 10 months. Bogus callers had been claiming to represent SSAFA (Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen Families Association).

**East Farleigh**

**Railway** The clerk received a reply from South Eastern Railway, saying that the possibility of a timetable change to avoid a two-train situation at the level crossing would be considered.

**McDonald’s** The clerk wrote to McDonald’s about a mobile litter patrol but had had no response.

**Lollipop system** A resident suggested a lollipop system for pedestrians using the bridge, whereby they take a lollipop as they walk across which warns drivers that a pedestrian is there. They then leave it in a box at the other side for the next person to use.

**Parking** Car parking at the end of Kilnbridge Close, at its junction with Lower Road, was deemed dangerous.

**Air quality** Members agreed that they need diffusion tubes to monitor air quality near the Horsewash at the Bull crossings near the triangle.

**Flood plan** Cllrs Hussein and Wilson worked with Jenny Nernman at the Environment Agency on doing a dry run of the flood plan. The flood pod had been moved to a dangerously inaccessible position and it was agreed to arrange a new site.

**Defibrillator** The clerk had ordered square pads and a prep kit for the Old School Hall defibrillator. A quote was received from the Community Heartbeat Trust for the installation of a defibrillator in the Gallants Lane phone box. The unlocked option was £1,650.

**Village car park** Cllr Peter Beasley felt the weed growth needed doing urgently and Pearson’s had been contracted to do it for £588.

**Footpaths** The clerk was asked to re-report the damaged gate on KM38 near The Horseshoes.

**Speedwatch** A new portable speed indicator device had been in operation at the East Farleigh Club site and would be moved to a new location. Just under 400 vehicles were observed, 35 were reported for speeds over...
35mph, and 17 over 40mph. All were first-time offences.

Fete Roughly £1,300 profit was made for the benefit of the village. Cllr Alan White congratulated the church on the work they had done cleaning up the wall on Station Hill.

Headcorn

Resignation Members heard that Cllr Angela D’Urso had resigned. The clerk would advise MBC and when the vacancy was confirmed, the parish council would be seeking to co-opt a new councillor.

Police matters There had been an assault on householders in the early hours of Monday, August 6. Kent Police was investigating. The chair said there had been an attempted break-in at the store, but access had not been gained due to the new security arrangements. The police had been informed.

Hammerstream MBC had confirmed that someone was living at the site, which was in breach of the injunction. The person had said they would not leave the land until they were evicted. MBC had now started the eviction process.

Southern Water The work in Kings Road had started, and a small number of complaints had been received about inconvenience.

Dawkes Meadow The clerk was to follow up completion of the work promised – replacement of the footpath section of the PRGW. The vehicular section would be patched.

Debrillator The installation on the wall of the Heart of Kent Hospice shop had been confirmed and was due to start shortly. The chair said she had heard talk of a national database of defibrillators, as the ambulance service currently was not aware of where they were. The clerk was asked to let the Kent service know the location of the Headcorn ones.

Old School Nursery The Community Right to Bid application had been filed with MBC. The chair stressed that KCC Cllr Shellina Prendergast was working hard to reach both a temporary and a long-term solution.

Highways The Kent Highways Improvement Plan was discussed. The chair noted that, as the cost of speed surveys was lower than anticipated, and Cllr Prendergast was willing to fund one from her member’s grant, three surveys would be sought – two on the A274 and one on Lenham Road. The clerk would circulate the plan when it had been submitted to KCC Highways.

Surrender Field The clerk had written noting concerns of the council about the fact that trains were no longer sounding their whistles when approaching a footpath. However, a response said risk assessments confirmed that whistle notices were no longer necessary and would not be replaced.

$10k funding A couple of projects were being pursued. These were the purchase of equipment for the mowing of grass areas and the dredging of Spires Ash.

Road closures Emails had been received expressing concern over the lack of co-ordination of roadworks resulting in road closures and traffic gridlock in the village. The matters would be addressed in the Highways Improvement plan.

Road repair Bovis had completed the repair on the A274 but it had not worked and the dip in the road was worse than before. The clerk had alerted Highways.

Sunken drains Emails had been received about noise generated when HGVs crossed sunken drain covers. This would be included on the highways improvement plan.

Speedwatch The clerk asked councillors if they could each find one person to volunteer. The group had four members and new volunteers were vital to keep it going.

Animal waste The chair reported that the Green Wicket Sanctuary had been seen to be disposing of animal waste in Headcorn Parish bins. The clerk had spoken to the sanctuary and explained that they needed to have a commercial waste collection. The matter would be reported to environmental health teams.

Loose

New member The chairman welcomed Jane Butler to the parish council.

Noise complaints There had been several complaints about noise with regards to the Chequers and the Beer Barn. MBC was aware of the situation and was monitoring complaints.

PSCo Martin Chivers is moving on to another department within the PCSO team. He had enjoyed his time working in Loose. He will be replaced by Ross Russell.

Police report Two vehicle-related tickets had been issued and a stolen car was seized.

Parking The inconsiderate parking at the start and end of the school day was being tackled by naming and shaming the culprits, taking photos of inappropriate parking, reporting incidents on 101, and reminding parents via the newsletter not to park inappropriately.

SMART WillAct had joined forces with the Maidstone Action Group for Infrastructure Change (MAGIC) to form a combined voice to Local Authorities, whilst suggesting solutions for infrastructure problems in Maidstone.

Speedwatch At the last session, 528 cars were observed, with three being reported for driving in excess of 40mph.

New shed The planning application for the shed on Brooks Field was approved. Ted Davis advised that the architect had been instructed to prepare the plans for building regulations.

Village fete The mayor had attended Loose Fete, which featured vintage cars. Although the local Vets4Pets had changed ownership, the sponsorship would continue this year.

Rehabilitation work The clerk had received an email from Maidstone Community Rehabilitation Company (Maidstone Probation) to see if the parish council would be interested in the Community Payback Service Scheme.

Marden

Newsletter A library of photographs still needed to be put together and Cllr Newton was asked to pass on any he thought would be suitable to the clerk.

Traffic lights The lights opposite the railway station had not been working. It had been reported and the situation was being monitored.

Station A pothole had appeared at the entrance to the station car park and trees were said to be obscuring the CCTV on the down platform. The clerk would report this.

Staplehurst

Footpath KM312 Members noted the deputy clerk’s report containing an update on the anticipated legal fees relating to the transfer of land to the parish council. It was agreed to increase the sum allowed for the parish council’s own legal fees from £600 to £1,000 to cover fees and disbursements.

Grass-cutting Forestry First had agreed to take over the grass-cutting on the parish council’s land between Chestnut Street and High Street at the price charged by the previous contractor.

Parish council surgeries The surgery heard that construction vehicles had damaged vehicles near Slaney Road. An issue of inconsiderate parking outside Homeleigh and the school had been taken up with the company and the PCSO. It was agreed that Headcorn Road that needed cutting had been referred to residents and KCC. The issue of speed and the possibility of a 20mph limit in the residential area was raised and Speedwatch was notified. A meeting would be held with Kent Highways. The provision of a bin at Wimpey Field was considered, as were “Take litter home” signs. The disappearance of the bin from the junction of Thatcher Road and Bathurst Road was reported to Maidstone Borough Council. There was praise for the new paving at the Parade.

Surrender Field The clerk and the caretaker had initiated some repairs and repainting at Surrender Field.

Street cleaning The meeting heard that the street-cleaning service was being delivered efficiently, but it was questioned whether or not the parish council should be providing such a service. It was said to extend and enhance the MBC service and the cleaning dirt and fallen leaves from entering the drains. However, it meant parishioners were paying twice for street cleaning, and there were other priorities for parish council resources. It was resolved by a majority vote to terminate the contract.

Neighbourhood Plan It was noted that the items nominated for consideration as community assets were Bell Lane public conveniences and the defibrillator at the library. The parish council held a lease of the toilet premises until 2028 and the defibrillator did not meet the criteria as a community asset.

Station regeneration The meeting heard that MBC was looking to commission studies regarding the regeneration of the station area. Cllr Burnham had met SouthEastern, who had advised that some more immediate works had been proposed, including additional seating, new litter bins, and heritage gates at the eastern car park.

Inconsiderate parking Cllr Symes said Headcorn Parish Council had installed A-boards in some locations to discourage inconsiderate parking, which had been positively received. The subject had been submitted to Community Enhancement Group for discussion.
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MAILMARKS
DENNIS FOWLE President
dennisfowle28@gmail.com

One is the old Granada cinema site at the bottom of Gabriels Hill – an eyesore for so long. I had hoped The Mall shopping centre would expand into this area, but town centre retail is so depressed that this now seems very unlikely.

Residential seems the most likely answer to a problem we need to see solved. It would be a well-located place to live, especially for those not using a car.

Another proposal is for Len House, Mill Street, lining the River Len. This grade II-listed building dates back to 1937 and is seen as no longer fit-for-purpose by the car dealers planning a move to Park Wood business estate.

It is looking very sad and neglected nowadays, in what should be one of the most attractive areas of our town. Attractively-designed apartments with a Meaningful river frontage could look superb on this site – a wonderful place to live, again probably for non-drivers.

Neither of these would be huge developments – but the full proposal for more than 1,000 flats etc in the town centre is a different matter. Maidstone councillors are rightly concerned that in our overcrowded town, there are not the infrastructure and vital services to support another huge increase in our town centre population.

We have to meet Government demands for new housing, but I do not favour much of this in urban Maidstone. There is talk of new developments/villages with their own infrastructure and this makes much more sense to me, despite opposition from countryside organisations.

Crowded crematorium

PARKING has been enlarged and much improved at Maidstone Borough Council’s crematorium – but the real problem remains.

The crematorium itself seats fewer than 100 mourners and I have been embarrassed too many times at bigger funerals by serious overcrowding. So often mourners are the older generation in need of a seat but left to stand at the back or in the corridor – or unable even to enter the building.

It is a problem that has been ignored for too long and Maidstone deserves better.

MONTHS OF ROAD CLOSURE HELL

IT ALL started with the heavy snow during the winter and things in Gatland Lane have deteriorated ever since.

After the snow, residents of Gatland Lane and its surrounding roads had to negotiate the “surface of the moon” to avoid damaging their cars’ suspension, such was the state of the road.

We made constant pleas to the county and borough councils for help and, eventually, the road was marked. The surface was to be attended to and the road closed for four days for work. And the day before, the A26 Tonbridge Road collapsed.

Ever since, Gatland Lane has been turned into a busy thoroughfare with open backed vans/lorries bouncing their cargo through the road calming cushions at 4am and waking the residents.

Getting out of our drive is a dangerous manoeuvre as nobody takes notice of the speed limit and everybody is in such a rush that to leave between 7.30 and 9.30am is hazardous.

We understand the problems that the A26 has presented and the inevitability of the use of Gatland Lane but, would it be so far from reality to expect users to have some consideration for the residents?

We are then faced with the ongoing problem of Jubilee School. Gatland Lane has always been a fairly quiet backwater, with residents mainly being on the upper side of 50. What the school has introduced is a total anathema to this environment

with aggressive parents prepared to justify, verbally and physically, blocking residents’ drives. The level of parking is a real hazard – and the school is only 60% full of its present limit of 210 pupils.

We welcome the opening of the Tonbridge Road!

Gareth Owen, via email

BUS COMPLAINT FRUSTRATION

I THOUGHT readers might be interested in the difficulty we have had making a complaint against Arriva buses.

We do not have a computer, but you are expected to do it online. We wanted to highlight the fact that the No 7 should have got to our stop at 12.50pm. However, it did not arrive, so we had to get the next bus at 1.50pm.

This is not the first time. On several occasions in the past, the bus has failed to arrive.

This is why I am writing to you, in the hope that Arriva will take notice and something will get done.

G Trotter, Bearsted

HOMES ON BORDERS

TONBRIDGE & Malling Borough Council has received an application from Gladman Developments to build 840 dwellings in Hermitage Lane, Aylesford.

This site is on the borough boundary between Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling and, should approval be granted by this council, it will have repercussions for the residents in Allington.

There will be two access roads, one onto the A20 at the 20/20 roundabout and White Post Field into Hermitage Lane which can only increase the congestion on these two major roads.

The infrastructure is already poor in this area, with schools and doctor’s surgeries over-subscribed. Recently, two surgeries in the Allington area closed, leaving 5,000 patients without doctors until the surgery was replaced by a practice from the town centre.

Although S106 payments will be paid by the developer towards infrastructure budgets, these will go to Tonbridge & Malling Council, but it is inevitable there will be an overspill of residents from this estate using the schools, doctors and dentists in the Allington area.

It is therefore essential that there are cross boundary discussions between Maidstone Borough Council, Kent County Council and Tonbridge & Malling to ensure this does not happen without some budgetary recompense.

The masterplan for this application has no provision or land safeguarded for a GP or new medical centre. More than 2,000 new patients could therefore fall within the Maidstone Borough Council area, which is already at breaking point.

The increase in traffic along the A20 to the M20 roundabout, already a bottleneck, will not be resolved unless a new railway
bridge across the A20 is provided to allow the A20 London Road to be widened.

The access road from White Post Field into Hermitage Lane will increase an already congested road and serious consideration should be given to land from the Gladman Development being made available to increase the width of Hermitage Lane to two-lane traffic from the A20 to Barming station, although this benefit will be reduced by the bridge at this point.

Apart from this development, a representative for Clarendon Homes has already sent letters to Allington residents asking for their views on the proposed development on land known as Bunyard’s Farm. If approval is given it is intended to use the Beaver Road access into A20 London Road, which will mean even more congestion.

Both these developments are unsustainable and would benefit only TMBC, because they would receive S106 payments from the developers.

Other questions being raised by local people are, with so much development in and around Allington, will the sewage farms be able to cope with all the extra effluent? Is Barming station able to cope with the influx of travellers? Will the car park be able to cope?

New Allington Action Group (NAAG)

Brexit vote democratic

I FEEL I should write in reply to D Hackett’s letter in the September issue.

In respect of his suggestion that a 66% (referendum) vote should have been required, I think we should remember that, after a huge amount of publicity, people had an opportunity to vote. If people chose not to vote, that is their choice and, in effect, their vote.

We should also remember that more than twice as many people voted in the referendum as in our normal general elections. It was therefore truly representative of the public’s intentions.

Furthermore, 3.5% more people voted to leave, which is a similar margin to many of our general elections, none of which has been called into question as being too close to allow. It is called democracy.

I think it’s important to remember that the government offered the public a referendum. I believe they then attempted to frighten the public into voting remain. Had the government decided to allow the public a free vote, without project fear, I think the result would have been a far greater vote to leave.

Mr Hackett describes the 17 million British people who voted to leave as thinking “on the basis of a glorious return to the days when we had an empire”. Personally, the people I spoke to regarding the referendum were intelligent, thoughtful and very aware of the magnitude of the potential result. They also considered the direction the EU is heading in, and reached a decision. They then voted, as is their right.

Regarding his point about the EU and the European Customs Union, I think people were aware that the two things are intrinsically linked, in the same way that a driving licence and a car are linked. You can’t really have one without the other.

The UK is primarily a services-based economy, whilst the EU is not. The UK exports 56% of goods outside the EU already, and yet I don’t see the queues of lorries etc we are regularly warned against. The UK imports 54% of goods from the EU and manages to import the other 46% from the rest of the world without any undue issues.

Whilst we are often warned against a no deal scenario, we need to remember that no deal is not actually an option. We have two options – a deal with the EU and a deal on WTO terms, something that many other countries around the world manage. Even the EU trades under WTO rules. We should remember that the EU has very, very few trade agreements with countries outside the EU, and yet manages to trade quite comfortably with countries around the world.

I feel that this government, which has never been in favour of leaving, has continued the same project fear that existed before the referendum. However, they should remember that the voters weren’t fooled then, and I don’t think they will be this time either.

We live in a democracy. The public voted to leave. If the people who run our country refuse to deliver, or decide that the public “didn’t really know what they voted for” and ignore us, then we don’t actually live in a democracy. If that happens, however you voted, it is a very sad day for the UK.

P Grove, Maidstone

Look elsewhere for balance

IN RESPONSE to K G Banks’ comments in Downs Mail August edition, being an (unusual for an 80-year-old) passionate “remoaner”, I agree with all the points expressed in his letter.

However, I would respectfully point out that Dennis Fowle is highly unlikely to have many, if any, Guardian-reading friends. Amongst others, the Daily Mail and Telegraph more accurately reflect his views.

Those wishing for more factually-balanced coverage of EU matters should consider the BBC news, together with the Guardian/Observer and Private Eye.

Roy Datson, Bearsted

Wrong place for surgery

I AM appalled to hear that the new medical centre at Hill Farm has been approved.

Developers and land owners have swallowed up the sites nearer to the village centre, leaving little option as to where the medical centre can be built.

There are quite a few concerns regarding the proposal, pavements are either inadequate or non-existent.

The junction at Linton crossroads was obviously designed by a complete idiot, who had no conception of the current width of modern vehicles.

The width of the exit onto the A229 may well have been adequate in the days of the horse and cart, but it now becomes a logjam if a wide vehicle is waiting to turn towards Linton Hill.

On the upside, the congestion caused will stop or slow the traffic so that patients can cross the road to the new surgery.

Mick Sloman, via email

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