

DOWNSWOOD PARISH COUNCIL MEETING ON TUESDAY 2 JUNE 2026

BOROUGH COUNCILLOR REPORT BY CLLR DENIS SPOONER

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

I now anticipate that MHCLG will be publicly announcing its final proposals for LGR in Kent and Medway at some time prior to 21 July because on that date, MBC Officers have scheduled a briefing on them for Borough Councillors.

In the meantime, and independently, MBC is continuing to work towards establishing a new Maidstone Town Council which will cover the unparished parts of the existing Maidstone Borough.

To make it clear; it is currently intended that Maidstone Borough Council will disappear in May 2028 and be absorbed into a new, much larger Unitary Council which will cover a far bigger area and which will provide all the services currently provided by MBC and KCC.

The soon to be created Maidstone Town Council will cover only the unparished parts of the existing Borough and it is expected that it will only have similar powers to existing Parish Councils.

The precise duties and responsibilities of both the new Unitary Council and of the new Maidstone Town Council can only be finalised once the final details of MHCLG's LGR proposals are known. It is expected that elections to the new Unitary Council and to the new Maidstone Town Council will take place in May 2027.

It is also expected that the Mayoralty of Maidstone which goes back over 500 years will continue as a ceremonial function but, the details of how it will operate have yet to be worked out.

I do not expect that any of these changes will have any direct impact on DPC and that DPC will continue to deal with the new Unitary Council in the same way that it has always dealt with the existing Maidstone Borough Council and that it will deal with the new Maidstone Town Council in the same way that it currently deals with other existing parish councils.

MBC'S 5 YEAR HOUSING LAND SUPPLY (5YHLS)

This continues to be of serious concern. Speculative planning applications for housing development in various locations around the borough continue to be submitted but none, apart from the two that I reported to you in April, have yet proceeded to a decision.

MBC NEW LOCAL PLAN – ‘CALL FOR SITES’

On 9th June, MBC resolved to proceed with a ‘call for sites’ exercise to be got underway in May. It is very worrying that nothing has so far been done to publicise or get it moving.

I am expecting several sites in and around Downswood and Bearsted, including the field to the east of Parsonage Place, to be brought forward by landowners and developers as potential new housing sites.

MBC GYPSY, TRAVELLER AND TRAVELLING SHOWPEOPLE DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT (DPD)

On 3 June, the MBC Planning for Healthier and Safer Communities Policy Advisory Committee is being recommended to approve a draft of this document for the purposes of public consultation. In effect, it is a plan for additional gypsy sites throughout the Borough. There are no proposed new sites within or near Downswood. Most new sites are within the parishes in the south of the Borough.

WATER SHORTAGES IN MAIDSTONE BOROUGH

Widespread publicity is currently being given to serious water shortages in various parts of Maidstone Borough, particularly Coxheath, Headcorn, Ulcombe and Staplehurst. I have not been made aware of any problems in Downswood or Bearsted. These shortages are entirely the responsibility of South East Water (SEW) which supplies water to most of Maidstone Borough and which is a private company answerable only to its customers, shareholders, Ofwat and, ultimately, the courts. Neither MBC nor KCC have any control over SEW and can do nothing about the current shortages of water supply, apart from assisting with supply points for bottled and tankered water, etc.

SEW has recently confirmed that there is adequate water to supply all the housing allocations in the MBC Local Plan Review (2024). It remains to be seen how it will comment on speculative planning applications for housing development on unallocated sites to make good MBC’s lack of a 5YHS and how it will comment on potential housing sites that come forward as part of the ‘call for sites’ exercise when it finally gets underway.

There have been public calls for a ban on house building. Such action could only be initiated by the Government but, in my view, would be pointless. It would not solve localised and, hopefully, temporary water supply issues. MBC and other councils are legally required to prepare Local Plans; allocate sufficient land for housing to meet the Government’s housing requirements; and, then to grant planning permission for them.

If water supply issues become a major impediment to the Government's housing objectives, it will be a matter for Government to 'thrash out' with SEW.

CONTINUED ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN THE MALLARDS POS

A Bearsted resident has complained to Emma about continued anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the Mallards. As this POS is owned and managed by MBC and DPC has no power to deal with ASB, I have agreed that I will draft a co-ordinated reply to the complainant with inputs from MBC Officers, Kent Police and DPC. I have not been able to progress this work as quickly as I would have liked but, I have the matter in hand.

MEETINGS ATTENDED

4 May: I attended the Mayor of Maidstone's evening cruise on the River Medway. All proceeds go to various charities and the cruise, which takes place every year, is highly recommended.

12 May: As both a Maidstone Borough Councillor and a Bearsted Parish Councillor, I attended the BPC AGM.

14 May: I attended:

i) an exhibition at the Mercure Maidstone Hotel in Hollingbourne provided by Homes England and showing further details of how the Heathlands Garden Community is to be developed; and

ii) a rehearsal of the MBC Mayor Making Ceremony to take place on 16 May.

16 May: I attended the MBC AGM and Mayor Making Ceremony followed by the annual Civic Parade and a service in All Saints Church. I was again appointed to the Planning Committee and to the Planning for Healthier and Stronger Communities Policy Advisory Committee. I was also elected Deputy Mayor for 2026/27.

19 May: I attended, as necessary, a consecutive series of meetings of all MBC committees which met solely to elect their respective Chairman and Vice Chairman for 2026/27.

20 May: I attended a briefing by MBC Officers on the procedures for creating a new Maidstone Town Council (see above) and on progress with drawing up a Town Centre Strategy which will be aimed at maintaining and enhancing its viability and vitality.

21 May: As Deputy Mayor, I visited the Bower Mount Care Home in Maidstone to chat with its residents.

Borough Councillor Denis Spooner 1 June 2026.