

Annual statement of Chair and Chair of Policy and Resources Committee

Never have we had so many applications for housing estates from developers. Nor have we had what are now increasing concerns about the effects of climate change. These are now beginning to become obvious, with higher wind speeds in a storm than ever before, a higher tide on the Medway than ever before, and scientific predictions that are increasingly gloomy. One of the results is a quite drastic set of changes in government legislation and policy as regards housing.

I have long been concerned that housing estate developers need to address climate change and environmental issues in designing houses and planning their estates.

As a result, I have become the TMBC Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) representative on the TMBC Climate Change Forum (CCF) and am deputy chair of the Parish Partnership Panel (PPP).

I have also become the deputy chair of the Kent Community Rail Partnership since I consider trains to be an important way of reducing carbon emissions and also their efforts to turn stations into community hubs wherever possible.

When we see housing estate applications, preferably before the formal application stage, we now scrutinise the plans and have repeatedly pointed out problems. These include: overwhelming our villages, footpaths only on one side of roads, or in some case, no footpaths at all, lack of car parking spaces, greatly increased traffic problems arising from lack of infra structure outside the boundaries of the estates, and lack of details as regards addressing climate change and environmental objectives. Although, as a parish council, we only have consultative powers, some, but not all, developers do at least listen to us. While our funds are limited, we now have a policy of seeking paid professional advice from a planning consultant to set out our objections in planning speak and have been advised by TMBC that this helps our causes. TMBC, for its part, have just appointed a Climate Change Officer, Henry Saunders, who has just written to say,

“There isn’t much we can do currently with regards to intermediary / temporary greener development policies, prior to the local plan, as they won’t hold up if developers challenge them. My understanding is that this is because they wouldn’t be attached to a plan or such a framework and therefore wouldn’t carry the necessary weight/enforcement. Additionally, as you note, our planning policy officers are stretched and are working on the local plan.”

However, “New building regs come into effect on 15 June 2022:

“The Government has made a commitment that from 2025 the Future Homes Standard will ensure that the average home will produce at least 75% lower CO₂ emissions than one built to current energy efficiency requirements. Homes built under the Future Homes Standard will be ‘zero carbon ready’, which means that in the longer term, no further retrofit work for energy efficiency will be necessary to enable them to become zero-carbon homes as the electricity grid continues to decarbonise.

“As part of the journey to the Future Homes and Buildings Standard, changes to the Building Regulations in respect of the conservation of fuel and power will come into effect from 15 June 2022. Under the new regulations, CO₂ emissions from new build homes must be around 30% lower than current standards and emissions from other new buildings, including offices and shops, must be reduced by 27%.

Additionally, “from 15 June 2022 new Building Regulations will come into effect requiring the following:

“Every new home, including those created from a change of use, with associated parking within the site boundary to have an electric vehicle charge point;

“Residential buildings undergoing major renovation, which will have more than 10 parking spaces within the site boundary after the renovation is complete, to have at least one electric vehicle charge point for each dwelling with associated parking within the site boundary and cable routes in all spaces without charge points;

“All new non-residential buildings, with more than 10 parking spaces within the site boundary of the building, to have a minimum of one charge point and in addition to this, cable routes for one in five of the total number of spaces;

“All non-residential buildings, undergoing a major renovation, which will have more than 10 parking spaces within the site boundary after the renovation is complete, to have a minimum of one charge point.”

Since TMBC officers are so stretched, being two planning officers short, I see it as part of our duty to watch what the developers do on our patch and report and complain about any deficiencies we may come across.

On the rail front, Aylesford Parish Council has adopted Aylesford Station, with a view to improving it, starting with some information boards to encourage rail passengers to visit our village and its famous bridge, and if they are able, walk or cycle up to Kits Coty House, which is our badge, and vastly older than the Egyptian Pyramids.

I also personally applied for and obtained a grade 2 listing order for the rather impressive Aylesford station Victorian goods shed, which developers had applied to have demolished. One day, if Castledene Transport move onto larger premises, we might even be having council meetings beneath its magnificent beamed roof. Please note, any citizen can and in my opinion, should apply for listed status for buildings, wherever something of historical importance is threatened by developers.

In recognition of my and our efforts, Kent Community Rail Partnership has just presented me with two Certificates of Appreciation, one for me personally and one for the Aylesford Station Adoption Group.



Finally, we are supporting the Medway Ecological Riverine Link (MERLin) initiative which aims to create a walking, cycling, ecology corridor along the river and through what was the gap between TMBC and Maidstone. And we are supporting a spinout of this, which is Village Green application VGA 687 for the land at Bunyards Farm that is in our Parish but which has been enjoyed by the residents of North West Maidstone for many years.

Dr Tom Shelley. May 17th 2022