

Downs and Mereworth - Annual Borough Councillor Report – March 2023

It's been a very busy year for Borough members with plenty of memorable events, the climax being the Jubilee celebrations in the summer that saw parishes all over the borough celebrate Her Majesty's reign. The sad passing of Her Majesty in the autumn was also commemorated with dignity and respect.

Last year saw significant changes to the governance of Tonbridge and Malling Council. Advisory boards were replaced by Select Scrutiny Committees. This has allowed for more effective, accountable decision making by the Council, enabling us to respond more quickly to events than has been the case in the past.

The Council launched a number of initiatives in 2022/23, including:

196 solar panels installed to heat the pool at Larkfield Leisure centre, 32 new electric car charging stations throughout the Borough and the opening of our cutting-edge Eco Café at Leybourne Lakes are just the highlights of the work being done by the Council as part of its green environmental strategy.

The reinstatement of the garden waste service and resolution of the waste collection issues. Recycling levels are now amongst the highest in the county of Kent. Fly tipping, continues to be a nuisance though Initiatives such as Operation Assist where vehicles carrying waste are targeted and waste carrier licences checked have contributed to a fall in fly tipping incidents.

The TMBC app launched, allowing residents to check all manner of Council related matters, from paying Council Tax to checking waste collection days.

The Council has secured £200,000 worth of funding to rejuvenate the shops on Station Approach, next to Tonbridge Station.

New council owned temporary accommodation property was opened in Tonbridge that allows the Council to house vulnerable residents in suitable accommodation, reducing the need for alternative less suitable and expensive solutions such as bed and breakfast accommodation.

The Community and Safety initiative has secured a number of mobile CCTV cameras to assist with preventing anti-social behaviour and reducing crime.

The Conservative group launched a high profile campaign to bring the Beales building in Tonbridge back in to use. Supported by our MP, Tom Tugendhat, we are making progress with our negotiations with Sainsbury's to resolve the issue.

The lorry park proposed for Wrotham was successfully opposed. Further plans have recently been put forward and we will continue to support residents in opposing any unsuitable development in this area.

In addition to all of this, we have the lowest crime rates and the lowest council tax in the county.

Perhaps the biggest change was the decision of the Electoral Commission to redraw the ward boundaries in the Borough. This has sadly meant that the ward of Downs and Mereworth will cease to exist after the May 2023 election. Birling joins with Ryarsh and Leybourne to form a new ward. West Peckham and Mereworth join with Wateringbury and East Peckham. Trottiscliffe and Addington form part of the new Pilgrims with Ightham ward. Offham becomes part of a new ward with East Malling and West Malling.

Ann has chosen to retire from Council life and Piers is hoping to represent the new Bourne Ward. It has been an enormous pleasure to work with you all over the years and we would like to thank all of the Parish Councillors (and Clerks!) for the invaluable work they do for their communities.

Ann Kemp and Piers Montague