

KCC Councillor Wayne Chapman

Town / Parish Council Report - May 2026

(Covering Appledore, Biddenden, Rolvenden, Rolvenden Layne, St Michaels, Tenterden,

Wittersham, Kenardington, Newenden, High Halden, and Stone-cum-Ebony)

Introduction - May 2026

Welcome to my monthly May 2026 report. May is a particularly significant month combining remembrance with celebration. On Thursday 8th May, we mark VE Day - commemorating the 81st anniversary of the Allied victory in Europe in 1945 and honouring the generation who fought for and secured our freedom and democracy. It is vital that we continue to remember and honour the sacrifices made by those who gave so much for the liberties we enjoy today. I encourage all parishes and communities to mark this important day of remembrance appropriately.

It was also wonderful to see St George's Day celebrated proudly across our communities on 23rd April, with flags flying in villages and towns throughout the division. These displays of patriotism and community spirit remind us of our shared heritage and the importance of celebrating our national identity.

This has been a productive month at Kent County Council, with Local Government Reorganisation, the arrival of our new highways contractor from 1st May, and excellent news on primary school places. I hope you find this month's report informative and useful, and as always please do not hesitate to contact me with anything you would like me to take forward on your behalf.

1. Kent County Council Update

Local Government Reorganisation

The Government's public consultation on LGR in Kent and Medway closed on 26th March 2026, with a decision expected during summer 2026 and new unitary authorities anticipated from April 2028. KCC's preferred option remains Option 1A - a single unitary 'Kent Council', supported by three area assemblies covering North, East and West Kent. This delivers the fastest financial payback (3.3 years), annual savings of £69m, and cumulative savings of £457m over 10 years.

Leader Linden Kemkaran has emphasised that splitting the county into smaller councils would increase annual running costs by up to £40 million and potentially require council tax increases or service reductions to cover those costs. A single Kent Council protects services, delivers better value for money, and ensures the county speaks with one strong voice.

I will keep all parish councils fully informed as the Government's response becomes clear and as we progress towards implementation in April 2028.

Primary School Offers - Excellent News

Excellent news for Kent families - 98% of pupils have been offered one of their preferred primary schools for September 2026. This tremendous achievement reflects the hard work of KCC's Education team and the quality of our excellent Kent schools. Families who were not offered their first choice can join waiting lists by 30th April 2026, with appeals lodged by 18th May 2026. KCC will hold a second round of offers on 21st May 2026 for any spaces that become available.

Kent Scheme Pay Award 2026

Agreement has been reached with recognised Trade Unions on the Kent Scheme Pay Award 2026. The Kent Scheme Allowance has increased to £13.56 per hour or £26,168 per annum, representing a 6.75% increase and continuing to exceed both the National Living Wage and Foundation Living Wage. This reflects KCC's commitment to supporting our workforce who deliver vital services across the county.

Reform UK - First Year Delivering for Kent

As we approach the first anniversary of Reform UK Administration taking control of Kent County Council in May 2025, I am proud to report on the genuine progress our administration has delivered in this first year.

We came into office with a promise to do things differently - to put Kent's residents first, deliver better value for money, and protect the services that matter most. After twelve months in office, we are delivering on that promise.

Strong Financial Management - In our first year we inherited the existing debt of £732 million in May 2025 we reduced KCC's debt by £114 million to £618 million, saving over £1 million in debt interest payments in revenue every year. We made £39.5 million in savings whilst setting a balanced budget with no extra borrowing and increased investment in Adult Social Care, Children's Services, and Highways. Our Council Tax increase was lower than 86% of comparable councils across England.

Protecting Community Services - Every single library threatened with closure under the previous Conservative administration has been saved. All of them. Country Parks, Community Wardens and School Crossing Staff have equally been protected. These services were under genuine threat before Reform UK took control.

Supporting Kent Business - We produced Kent's first ever Commercial Strategy, directed £55 million more in contracts to Kent companies, and provided enhanced support to 500 local supplier businesses. This is about keeping Kent's money working in Kent's economy.

2. Highways Update

New Highways Contractor from 1st May

A significant milestone for Kent's highways took place on Thursday 1st May 2026, when Ringway Infrastructure Services officially began its role as KCC's principal highways contractor under a new Highways Term Maintenance Contract. This marks the start of a new era for Kent's roads and represents a major long-term investment in the quality, reliability and resilience of our highways infrastructure.

Ringway replaces Amey, who have delivered highways services in Kent for over the past 12 years. Following a rigorous and competitive procurement process, Ringway was selected to deliver better workmanship, enhanced accountability, and improved value for money for Kent's council taxpayers. The new contract covers the full range of highways services including winter gritting, pothole repairs, bridge maintenance, drainage works, road markings, street lighting, and vegetation management across Kent's extensive 5,400-mile highway network.

Key improvements residents can expect include faster repairs, clear performance targets, better value for money, and 24/7 emergency coverage for severe weather events and urgent highway safety issues.

As we have Ringway as our new principle highways contractor, better weather for works to be carried out also funds available in our budget for highway repairs I urge you to report potholes and defects that require attention, to report highway defects at <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-or-track-a-problem-on-the-road-or-pavement>

Tenterden - Appledore Road

Works along Appledore Road continue to progress. This is a developer led project with their contractors carrying out some of the required works.

Traffic calming kerbside buildouts is the next phase to commence, pedestrian crossing improvements, speed restriction signage and new street lighting are all at varying stages of completion. I continue to liaise closely with KCC Highways and the relevant contractors to ensure works are concluded to the required standard as promptly as possible. Once current works are finalised, the long-awaited and much-needed full resurfacing of Appledore Road will be formally diarised.

Newenden - A28 Bridge

The parapet wall repair works at Newenden Bridge were successfully concluded in March following the three planned weekend closures. The bridge is now fully open. KCC will shortly be making a formal announcement regarding the upcoming major maintenance programme for the bridge. This more extensive work, which will require a full closure of the bridge, is now planned for June to September 2027, allowing businesses, residents and the wider community ample time to plan ahead. I will continue to keep all parties fully informed as further details are confirmed.

3. Tenterden Social Hub and Dementia Centre

On Tuesday 29th April, I visited the Tenterden Social Hub and Dementia Centre with Diane Morton our KCC Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, as well as Tenterden Mayor Holcombe, we were shown around by the center's CEO Lindsay Franklin to see first-hand the amazing facilities they have and the vital services they offer to residents across the communities of the Tenterden Division. The centre provides invaluable support for people living with dementia and their families, offering a safe, welcoming environment where people can socialise, participate in activities and receive expert care and support.

During my visit, I was shown the excellent facilities and spoke with staff and volunteers about the wide range of services they provide. It was clear to me that this centre makes a real difference to the lives of local people and their families during what can be a very challenging time. The dedication and compassion of everyone involved is truly admirable.

We also discussed the impact of reduced KCC funding and explored other possible avenues of support. I want to be clear that I cannot make any promises at this stage, but I am committed to working with the centre to explore all available options and to championing their cause at county level. Services like this are absolutely vital to our communities and I will do everything I can to support them in the challenging financial climate facing local government.

To learn more please visit their website or pop along and see them <https://tenterdensocialhub.org>

4. KCC Services & Campaigns

Forever Active Kent - Launched 1st April 2026, helping residents aged 50+ stay mobile and independent. Community groups can apply for grant funding for activity sessions. **Mental Health Grants** - The 2026 Kent & Medway Better Mental Health Fund offers grants from £500 to £10,000. Email suicideprevention@kent.gov.uk. **Mental Health Support (24/7)** - Text SHOUT to 85258 or call 0800 107 0160.

Electric Vehicle Charging Network - KCC has approved an expansion of the Electric Vehicle Charging Network across Kent. The rollout will prioritise equitable access across both urban and rural areas, with the first year aiming for 150 locations. This initiative requires no council tax funding and is designed for long-term financial sustainability.

5. News Across the Division

Tenterden - Wilder Kent Gold Award

Congratulations to Tenterden Town Council for winning Gold in the Wilder Kent Awards 2025, recognising the town's commitment to environmental initiatives and biodiversity. This is a tremendous achievement and reflects the hard work of the town council and local volunteers in enhancing our natural environment.

Tenterden - Spirit of Tenterden Event (3rd-5th July)

I am delighted to announce that I will be supporting the Spirit of Tenterden event with my KCC Members Grant. This fantastic community event takes place from 3rd-5th July 2026 and promises to be a wonderful celebration for all to enjoy. The Spirit of Tenterden brings our community together and showcases the very

best of what makes Tenterden special. I encourage everyone to attend and support this brilliant local event. More details will be available closer to the time.

Biddenden - Tractorfest 2026

Biddenden Tractorfest will return for its 12th year on the weekend of 15th & 16th August 2026 at Holden Farm, Sissinghurst Road, Biddenden. This wonderful community event organised entirely by volunteers features tractors, classic vehicles, arena displays, falconry, a fun dog show, food and drink, live music and stalls. Early bird tickets will be on sale in spring 2026. Visit www.tractorfest.co.uk for more information.

Rolvenden - Neighbourhood Plan Review

Rolvenden Parish Council is currently undertaking a review of its Neighbourhood Plan - an important document that carries equal weight alongside Ashford Borough Council's Local Plan when determining planning applications in the parish. The review is an opportunity for residents to help shape future planning policies on matters including housing, green spaces and community facilities. I strongly encourage all Rolvenden and Rolvenden Layne residents to engage with this process. Details can be found on the Rolvenden Parish Council website: www.rolvendenparishcouncil.gov.uk

Kenardington - Solar Farm Planning Application

Residents will be aware that green energy firm Quintas Cleantech has submitted a full planning application to Ashford Borough Council for a 35 Megawatt solar farm on a 148-acre site between Kenardington and Woodchurch. The site borders two ancient woodlands: Southroad Wood and Pond Wood. I have significant concerns about the impact on agricultural land, the landscape character of this area and the ancient woodland boundaries, and I will continue to represent the views of the local community through the planning process. I encourage all residents and interested parties to view and comment on this application via the ABC planning portal: <https://abcportal.ashford.gov.uk>

Appledore - Classic Car Show & Village Fair 2026

Appledore's popular annual Classic Car Show and Village Fair is expected to return in summer 2026, continuing its tradition as one of the largest classic vehicle events in the South East, attracting around 5,000 visitors and 450 vehicles. Organised entirely by the volunteer-run Appledore Recreation Ground Management Committee, the show raises vital funds to maintain and improve the recreation ground, pavilion and children's playground for the benefit of the whole village. Keep an eye on www.appledorevehiclerally.co.uk for 2026 dates and details.

High Halden - Community Spirit

High Halden continues to benefit from a strong community spirit and active parish council. I would like to thank everyone in High Halden who volunteers their time for the benefit of the community - whether through the Parish Council, local events, the church, village groups or simply helping a neighbour. It is this spirit of community that makes our villages such special places to live, I also would like to mention the amazing achievement of Brewmasters FC champions again but this time the ADSFL Premier Division.

6. Ashford Local Plan - Consultation

Ashford Borough Council is reviewing its Local Plan, which will shape development and planning policy across the whole borough - including all of our villages - for years to come. This is extremely important for communities such as Biddenden, Rolvenden, High Halden, Wittersham, Appledore and the other parishes in our division, particularly given the pace of housing development in recent years. I strongly urge all residents and parish councils to engage with this consultation and make your voices heard. For more information visit www.ashford.gov.uk or contact Ashford Borough Council directly.

7. Council Tax Support - Ashford Borough Council

Ashford Borough Council provides Council Tax Reduction support for residents on low incomes. From April 2026, the council has increased the maximum level of support available to working-age households to 90%, up from the previous 80%. This means eligible residents could receive significant help with their council tax bills.

Who Can Apply

Council Tax Reduction is available to both working-age residents and pensioners who are on a low income. The scheme now disregards certain Universal Credit elements linked to disability and caring responsibilities, and removes child-related income from the means test, making support more accessible to families in need.

How to Apply

If you are struggling to pay your council tax or believe you may be eligible for support, you can apply for Council Tax Reduction through Ashford Borough Council. Applications can be made online at <https://www.ashford.gov.uk> or by contacting the council directly.

For more information about eligibility, how the scheme works, and to access the application form, visit the Ashford Borough Council website or call their customer services team. Do not struggle in silence - if you need help with your council tax, please reach out and find out what support is available to you.

8. Parish / Town Council Meetings - May 2026

As in previous months, I intend to attend the upcoming Parish and Town Council meetings across the division during May. If for any reason I am unable to attend your meeting, please accept my apologies in advance. In those circumstances, my written report will be circulated and I remain fully contactable. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with any problems, issues or concerns via email at wayne.chapman@kent.gov.uk and I will respond as promptly as possible.

9. Contact Details

Email: wayne.chapman@kent.gov.uk

For any highways, street lighting, or footpath issues, please report online first via:

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-or-track-a-problem-on-the-road-or-pavement>

Many thanks,

Wayne Chapman

Kent County Councillor - Tenterden Division