

Tenterden Division Report — September 2026

Cllr Wayne Chapman

Kent County Councillor for Tenterden: Appledore, Biddenden, High Halden, Kenardington, Newenden, Rolvenden, Rolvenden Layne, St Michaels, Stone-cum-Ebony, Tenterden and Wittersham

Welcome to my September 2026 report. This has been one of the most eventful months since I took up this role. The Government has announced its decision on Local Government Reorganisation, fundamentally reshaping the future of local government in Kent and directly affecting every community and household across our division. Alongside this major news, August brought real and tangible local progress: Appledore Road is finally resurfaced after years of waiting, Tenterden Town Hall has reopened following its magnificent £3 million restoration, £150,000 of Active Travel funding has been secured for the Colonel Stephens Greenway, and Smallhythe Road resurfacing is now on the works programme. It has also been a month of brilliant community events across our villages. As always, please do not hesitate to contact me on any matter.

Local Government Reorganisation — The Government Has Decided

On 16 July 2026, the Secretary of State announced the Government's decision on the future of local government in Kent and Medway. Ministers chose Option 4B: all existing councils, including Kent County Council, Medway Council and all twelve district and borough councils including Ashford Borough Council, will be abolished and replaced by four new unitary authorities from 1 April 2028.

Under Option 4B, the Tenterden Division will fall within the new Mid Kent unitary council, covering the areas currently served by Swale Borough Council, Ashford Borough Council and Folkestone and Hythe District Council. This single new council will be responsible for delivering all local government services, from education and social care to highways, planning, housing, waste and leisure for residents across our area.

This was not KCC's preferred outcome. KCC had argued strongly for a single Kent Council (Option 1A), independently assessed as delivering £69 million in annual savings and £457 million over ten years. KCC Reform UK Leader Linden Kemkaran has publicly stated her disagreement with the decision but has confirmed that KCC will now focus its full energy on delivering the best possible transition for Kent residents. Nothing changes for residents in the meantime, KCC and Ashford Borough Council remain fully responsible for all current services right through to Vesting Day, 1 April 2028.

There are many practical details still to be worked through during the transition period, including council tax harmonisation, staffing, asset transfers and the future of local access points such as Ashford Borough Council's face to face services, which were temporarily relocated to Highbury Hall during the Town Hall refurbishment and are now expected to return to the Town Hall.

Key milestones ahead:

Statutory Change Orders to formally establish the new councils, expected Autumn 2026.

Joint transition committees established across Kent to oversee preparations, Autumn 2026.

Shadow Authority elections, 6 May 2027.

New Mid Kent unitary council formally takes over all services, 1 April 2028.

I will keep all parish and town councils updated as the transition timetable develops. Please contact me with any questions about what LGR means for your community or your council.

Full details available from www.kent.gov.uk – Local Government Reorganisation.

Highways — Local Investment and Works

Appledore Road, Tenterden, Resurfacing. After years of waiting and months of phased works, Appledore Road has been resurfaced. UK Power Networks completed new street lighting connections between 3 and 19 August, followed by carriageway resurfacing from East Hill to Collison Place between 20 and 30 August under the Section 278 developer funded scheme, with a few sections still to be completed by KCC Contractors by the end of September. All associated works, the traffic calming buildouts, pedestrian crossing improvements, speed restriction signage and new street lighting, are now in place alongside the resurfaced carriageway with a few remedial works still to be completed. I want to thank every resident and business on Appledore Road and the surrounding streets for their considerable patience throughout what has been a lengthy and at times disruptive process. If any defects are identified in the new surfacing, please report them via the KCC portal below.

Smallhythe Road, Tenterden, Resurfacing Programmed October/November 2026. Following sustained representations to KCC Highways over a number of years, I am pleased to confirm that Smallhythe Road resurfacing is now on the works programme for October/November 2026. This is long overdue and very welcome news for residents who have raised this road with me repeatedly. I will circulate confirmed dates as soon as they are issued and will continue to press for timely delivery to the required standard.

Colonel Stephens Greenway, £150,000 Active Travel Funding Secured. I am genuinely delighted to report that £150,000 has been secured from the Department for Transport's Active Travel Scheme to transform the Colonel Stephens Greenway, known locally as The Old Railway Track, Tenterden's only designated traffic free route for walking, wheeling and cycling between St Michaels and the town centre, connecting with the National Cycle Network. The funding will deliver a full resurfacing of 650 metres of the route, creating a 3 metre wide shared use path suitable for all weathers and all users, with new safety fencing at identified risk locations. Tenterden Town Council has described the news as wonderful after championing this project for many years. Works are due to begin in October 2026, subject to weather conditions, and will take around four weeks. The Greenway will be closed during works with diversions via the estate roads. Confirmed start dates will be shared as soon as they are available.

Newenden Bridge, A28. The bridge remains fully open following parapet repair works completed in March 2026. The planned major maintenance closure remains programmed for June to September 2027. I am continuing to work with KCC Highways, local businesses and parish councils to ensure diversion arrangements are well planned and communicated well in advance of works beginning.

Report potholes, footpath defects, drainage or lighting faults via www.kent.gov.uk – Report a problem on the road or pavement.

Local Division News

Tenterden Town Hall, Grand Reopening. It was a real honour and pleasure to attend the Grand Reopening of Tenterden Town Hall on Saturday 15 August 2026, marking the culmination of a magnificent £3 million restoration project. The Town Hall, a Grade II listed building at the heart of our town dating back to 1790, has been closed since early 2024 while Tenterden Town Council undertook an ambitious programme of works to address rising damp, sewage odours, an inaccessible upper floor and inefficient heating, while adding a new lift and restoring the building to its full glory. The ribbon was cut to officially open the restored Town Hall by the Lord Warden and Admiral of the Cinque Ports, Admiral Sir George Zambellas GCB DSC DL, a wonderful distinction for Tenterden and a fitting tribute to the significance of this historic building. The occasion was attended by Tenterden councillors, mayors, dignitaries and community representatives, making it a truly special civic occasion for the town. The result is stunning and the building is once again a space Tenterden can be genuinely proud of. Tenterden Mayor Jane Mills said the building has been at the centre of community life for generations, and its reopening ensures residents and visitors can once again enjoy this remarkable historic space. I echo that entirely and congratulate Tenterden Town Council, their officers and everyone involved in this outstanding project.

Rolvenden Cricket Club, President's Lunch. It was a real privilege to be invited to attend the Rolvenden Cricket Club President's Lunch, one of the highlights of the summer sporting calendar in the division. Rolvenden Cricket Club, founded in 1837, is one of the oldest clubs in Kent and a cornerstone of village life in Rolvenden. The President's Lunch brings together players, supporters, past members and guests in a wonderful celebration of everything that makes village cricket so special. I greatly enjoyed the occasion and the warm hospitality of the club. Long may Rolvenden Cricket Club continue to thrive at the heart of its community.

Tenterden Public Space Protection Order. Tenterden's first ever Public Space Protection Order is now in force, covering the town centre from Smallhythe Road to near Homewood School. The PSPO addresses street drinking, dog fouling, dangerous e-scooter use, catapult misuse, loitering and abusive behaviour, all matters raised consistently by residents during the consultation. Those in breach face a £100 fixed penalty notice or prosecution. I fully support this measure and commend Tenterden Town Council for pursuing it. Keeping Tenterden safe and welcoming for everyone is essential.

Homewood School and Tenterden Schools Trust. The Department for Education issued Tenterden Schools Trust with a formal Notice to Improve this summer following concerns over financial management, after a proposed merger with Aletheia Academies Trust fell through in early 2026. TST, which operates Homewood School alongside St Michael's Primary, Rolvenden Primary, John Mayne Primary and other schools across our division, is now actively exploring a merger with a larger academy trust. A redundancy consultation has also been under way at Homewood School. I am closely monitoring this situation as the new academic year begins and am happy to assist any resident or council wishing to raise concerns formally.

[**Water Supply Failures — Local Impact and KCC Action**](#)

Residents across the division have faced repeated and unacceptable water supply failures throughout 2026. Biddenden was directly affected during the June heatwave when South East Water confirmed supply disruptions across the village and surrounding area. In August, Rolvenden was among almost 1,400 properties left without water following a burst main in the Cranbrook area, with bottled water made available nearby. As Chair of the Kent Flood Risk and Water Management Scrutiny Committee I will be calling water companies before my committee to account publicly for their performance, and I continue to use every scrutiny mechanism available to press for the infrastructure investment our communities deserve. KCC Reform UK Leader Linden Kemkaran chairs the Kent Water Resilience Partnership, bringing water companies, regulators and councils together in a single public forum. Ofwat ordered South East Water to pay £30.5 million following investigations into the pattern of failures. If you have been significantly affected and wish to raise concerns formally, please contact me.

[**Community Events — A Summer to Celebrate**](#)

August was a wonderful month for community events across the division, and I want to take this opportunity to highlight and celebrate what our villages and their volunteers have delivered. These events are the lifeblood of our rural communities and the dedication of everyone who organises, volunteers and participates deserves the highest recognition.

High Halden Gardening Club, Autumn Show, Saturday 5 September 2026. The High Halden Gardening Club is holding its Autumn Show at the village memorial hall this Saturday 5 September, a wonderful celebration of the skill, patience and dedication of growers from across the parish. I was very kindly invited by the committee to attend and select the best exhibit in the show, and whilst I am unfortunately unable to be there on the day, I am genuinely touched to be asked and am sorry to have missed what will be a fantastic occasion. My sincere congratulations go to every exhibitor, prize winner, judge, volunteer and committee member who made the show such a success.

Appledore Flower Festival, Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul. The Appledore Flower Festival at the Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul over the Bank Holiday weekend was, by all accounts, a spectacular and uplifting occasion. The floral displays that our talented and dedicated volunteers create within this beautiful ancient church are truly breathtaking, drawing visitors from across the county and beyond. The festival also features live music, homemade refreshments, a children's quiz and an art exhibition, making it a genuinely wonderful Bank Holiday weekend event for the whole community. Congratulations and heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed.

St Mildred's Church Flower Festival, Tenterden, 29 to 31 August 2026. St Mildred's biennial Flower Festival, held every two years and always one of the highlights of the Bank Holiday weekend, took place from Saturday 29 to Monday 31 August, with the church open Saturday and Bank Holiday Monday 10am to 5pm and Bank Holiday Sunday 12pm to 5pm, with the tower open for those wishing to climb the 132 steps for an aerial view of Tenterden. The flower displays at St Mildred's are renowned for their creativity and artistry and always draw large numbers of visitors to Tenterden. My warmest congratulations to all the flower arrangers, volunteers and church members who made this magnificent festival possible once again.

Biddenden Tractorfest, 15 and 16 August 2026. Biddenden Tractorfest returned to Holden Farm, Sissinghurst Road for its 12th year, welcoming around 300 vintage tractors, steam engines and classic vehicles alongside falconry, a fun dog show, arena displays, a brand new Kent Art Quarter, craft exhibits, live music and local food and drink. Run entirely by volunteers with the support of the Kent County Agricultural Society, Tractorfest is one of the finest community run events in the whole of Kent. Congratulations to Chair Emma Jarvis and the entire volunteer team on another outstanding event. The organisers also arranged for children from St Michael's, John Mayne and Sandhurst primary schools to attend the Kent County Show's Living Land event, a wonderful additional contribution to our local communities.

Looking Ahead — Autumn 2026

Tenterden Folk Festival All Day Sing, Saturday 3 October 2026. A much loved Tenterden tradition returns on Saturday 3 October, with the All Day Sing-Around running from 11:30am to 10:30pm at the upstairs bar at the Tenterden Club. A full day of folk music, song circles and community spirit, free to attend and open to all.

Kent and East Sussex Railway, Autumn and Halloween Programme. The K&ESR, running through the heart of the division from Tenterden through Rolvenden and Wittersham Road to Bodiam, has a packed autumn programme including the Hop Pickers, Craft and Country Fair Weekend, Murder Mystery Evening, Photography Course and Junior Engineering Experience in September, followed by the Spellbound Express Halloween family train (28–30 October) and Fright Night (30–31 October). Events book up quickly. Full details and booking available from kesr.org.uk.

Remembrance, November 2026. Remembrance events will take place across all our communities throughout November. I will be attending services across the division and would warmly encourage all residents and parish councils to join their local communities in marking this important occasion with the dignity and gratitude it deserves. Further details will be included in my October report.

Secondary School Applications, Deadline 31 October 2026. Secondary school applications for September 2027 entry are now open. You must apply for a secondary for your child to start year 7 at secondary school, you will need to do this when your child is in year 6 at primary school, the closing date is 31 October 2026, please do not miss it. Kent Test results are released on 15 October 2026.

KCC General Advice and Support

Flu Vaccine, Book Now. All eligible residents are urged to book their flu vaccination now. Most eligible people can be vaccinated from 1 October 2026; pregnant residents from 1 September. Book via the NHS App, by calling 119 or at your GP or pharmacy, you do not need to wait for an invitation. Eligible groups include those aged 65 or over, those with long term health conditions, pregnant women, carers, and care home residents.

Bring Back International Rail to Ashford. Ashford International has had no Eurostar services since 2020. KCC is backing a campaign to restore services, but operators need evidence of demand. A three minute survey is all it takes. Almost 14,000 people have already registered, please add your voice.

Fly-Tipping, Check Before You Chuck. Fly tipping in rural lanes remains a persistent problem across the division. Always verify your waste carrier holds a valid Environment Agency licence and request a written waste transfer note. If waste is traced back to its source, the original householder faces a substantial fine.

As energy bills rise this autumn, I want to ensure every resident knows what help is available. Please share this information with anyone who may benefit.

Crisis and Resilience Fund. This replaces the Household Support Fund from April 2026, running until March 2029, and provides emergency help with food, energy, heating oil, housing costs and essential appliances for those on low incomes facing a sudden financial shock. You do not need to be receiving benefits to apply. Apply via Ashford Borough Council or the KCC website.

Pension Credit. This is significantly underclaimed. If you are over state pension age and on a low income, please check now. Pension Credit unlocks the Winter Fuel Payment of up to £300, the Warm Home Discount of £150 off energy bills, free NHS dental treatment and free sight tests. Check eligibility or call 0800 99 1234.

Council Tax Reduction. Ashford Borough Council increased maximum support for working age households to 90% of their bill from April 2026. Apply via Ashford Borough Council.

Free School Meals Extended. From September 2026 any child whose family receives Universal Credit is now eligible. Apply via your child's school.

Citizens Advice Kent Money Advice Hub. Free, confidential money and debt advice across 37 Kent locations, plus online and phone. Call 0808 278 7970.

British Gas Energy Trust. Grants of up to £1,500 are available to clear energy debts, open to any supplier's customers.

Warm Home Discount. A £150 rebate is applied directly to energy bills. Pension Credit claimants receive this automatically. Contact your energy supplier to check eligibility.

Further information and links for all of the above are available from the KCC website <https://www.kent.gov.uk>.

Get in Touch

As always, if you have a local issue please in the first instance report via the KCC portal <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-or-track-a-problem-on-the-road-or-pavement> and for all other issues please send me an email.

email: wayne.chapman@kent.gov.uk