

Downswood Parish Council meeting 1st September 2026

Borough councillor's report -Cllr Val Springett

The Call for Sites exercise for the Local Plan revision closed on Sunday 23rd August, but sites are still being uploaded. At the moment, the information visible is quite limited and so it is difficult to see the size of development that could happen on each site.

As expected, there are numerous sites in the vicinity of Downswood and Bearsted that have been put forward.

These sites will now be reviewed by the Spatial Planning team for suitability and viability before the next stage of the process. The sites can be seen via the following link to the MBC website. MBC needs to find suitable sites for up to 10,000 additional houses as well as somewhere in the region of 500 gypsy, traveller and travelling Showpeople pitches.

There are recent changes to planning rules, introduced by this Government, which have affected the ability of local authorities to fully determine larger applications in their areas. Any applications that involve more than 150 houses, that are going to be refused by MBC will now be sent to the Secretary of State Government for consideration. The powers planning committees currently have are also being reduced, which is very frustrating. Whilst this Government talks of devolving powers to local councils, this is not the case when planning decisions are involved.

Following an increase in anti-social behaviour in Bearsted, Bearsted Parish Council are considering introducing a CCTV system, to cover the worst affected areas, which include The Green, Madginford shops, along Church Landway and part of the Bearsted Woodland Trust land and a footpath that runs behind Tesco Express. This proposal has the support of our Community policeman.

Different schemes are being looked at from systems that record and save footage to systems monitored 24/7, to which the police have access. The decision will be made at the meeting of BPC on 15th September at Madginford Hall. It will be possible for additional cameras to be added to the system in the future and this would offer an opportunity for Downswood to fund one or more cameras if suitable sites could be found.

August is traditionally a quiet month at MBC as no committee meetings are held except for planning committee. There is one planning application in Downswood which I am concerned about which relates to the removal of an 'ancillary use' condition on an annexe at 17 Kings Acre. This is to allow the annex to be used as a separate dwelling. In my opinion this is not acceptable due to lack of outdoor amenity space, impact on parking and potential impact on the neighbouring dwelling. I am also concerned about the proposal for 16 self build houses along the A20 east of Caring Lane, as to me, this presents the thin end of the wedge for development creep towards junction 8. An additional site adjacent to the current one has been submitted as part of the call for sites.