

DOWNSWOOD PARISH COUNCIL MEETING ON TUESDAY 1 SEPTEMBER 2026

BOROUGH COUNCILLOR REPORT BY CLLR DENIS SPOONER

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR)

On 17 July, MHCLG announced, as expected, that in May 2028, MBC will be abolished and merged with Tonbridge and Malling BC, Sevenoaks DC and Tunbridge Wells BC to form a new West Kent Unitary Council (UC). What was unexpected is that there will be 3 and not just 2 other UCs created in Kent and Medway.

A North Kent UC will contain Dartford, Gravesham and Medway; a Mid Kent UC will contain Ashford, Swale and Folkstone & Hythe; and an East Kent UC will contain Canterbury, Thanet and Dover.

I expect that each UC will have a number of new Unitary Councillors, proportionate to its population and almost certainly based upon the trebling up of the number of existing county councillors representing each of the existing KCC Divisions.

If this is the case, the new West Kent UC will have the following numbers of new unitary councillors as shown in the table below:

<u>FORMER DC</u>	<u>POPULATION</u>	<u>COUNCILLORS</u>
Maidstone BC	190,000	27
Sevenoaks DC	120,000	18
Tonbridge and Malling BC	140,000	21
Tunbridge Wells BC	120,000	18
West Kent UC	570,000	84

At present, Downswood Parish is within the KCC Division of Maidstone South East which has 1 county councillor and also contains Leeds and Otham Parishes.

From May 2028, Downswood PC is likely to have 3 new Unitary Councillors that it will share with Leeds and with Otham PCs. All the existing borough and county councillors will disappear. Elections to a new shadow UC will take place on 6 May 2027 and the shadow UC will work alongside the existing MBC until MBC is abolished in May 2028.

MBC'S 5 YEAR HOUSING LAND SUPPLY (5YHLS)

This continues to be of serious concern. Speculative planning applications for housing development on unallocated sites in various locations around the

borough continue to be submitted but, so far, only three have been determined. It is not known when any of the others might be determined.

MBC NEW LOCAL PLAN – ‘CALL FOR SITES’

The ‘call for sites’ exercise concluded on 23 August. As expected, a great number of sites have been suggested all over the borough, several of them around or close to Downswood and Bearsted, including the field off Church Road, Otham opposite Parsonage Place.

They can all be seen on the MBC website – visit:

<https://maidstone.oc2.uk/document/15>

To meet Government housing targets, MBC needs to identify land for about 10,000 new dwellings over and above all existing housing commitments as shown on the existing MBC Local Plan Review (LPR) 2024. I think that all the sites submitted in the ‘call for sites’ exercise will grossly exceed this figure.

The sites submitted will be considered at a meeting of the MBC Planning for Safer and Healthier Communities (PHSC) Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) on 8 October. I do not know whether the PAC will be asked to approve for public consultation either all the sites that have been submitted or just those that the Officers consider are worthy of further investigation to meet the 10,000 homes target.

Alternatively, the PAC could be asked to approve just the sites selected by the Officers to be allocated for housing on a draft NLP to go out to statutory public consultation early next year. There is a very short, Government-imposed timeframe to complete the NLP. At this time, I simply do not know how the current administration at MBC wants to take the NLP forward. I will report back as soon as I know more. In the meantime, there is no reason why DPC should not object in writing to MBC about any sites that it considers unsuitable.

CONTINUED ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN THE MALLARDS POS

I have now responded to a Bearsted resident who has complained about persistent ASB in The Mallards POS. My reply incorporated advice that I received from Kent Police and MBC Officers and I have copied it to DPC and BPC.

At its meeting on 15 September, BPC will consider installing CCTV to counter ASB in various locations within its parish. I am pleased that BPC and BPC are liaising with each other over their mutual concerns about ASB.

MEETINGS ATTENDED

13 July: I attended a briefing on MBC's accounts by MBC Officers in the town hall.

14 July: As both a Borough Councillor and a Bearsted Parish Councillor, I attended a full meeting of BPC.

22 July: I attended a pre-app meeting for the proposed new Garden Community at Lidsing.

24 July: as Deputy Mayor I attended a graduation ceremony at the European School of Osteopathy in Maidstone.

27 July: As Deputy Mayor, I attended a garden party to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Pilgrims Way Nursing Home in Maidstone.

28 July: As Deputy Mayor, I attended the Triumph of Grace Ministries Summer Camp.

30 July: As Deputy Mayor, I attended a South Park Community Centre coffee morning

6 August: I attended a pre-app meeting for the proposed new Garden Community at Heathlands.

11 August: As both a Borough Councillor and a Bearsted Parish Councillor, I attended an extraordinary meeting of BPC to discuss the worrying recent outbreaks of ASB in the parish. The meeting was well attended by local residents.

15 August: As Deputy Mayor, I attended the Wishing Hearts Charity Summer Tea Party.

18 August: I attended a meeting of the Kent Downs Line Community Rail Partnership that was held at Hollingbourne Station

20 August: I attended a meeting of the MBC Planning Committee. There were no items on the agenda that were of direct relevance to Downswood.

Cllr Denis Spooner

Bearsted and Downswood Ward

28 August 2026