DOWNSWOOD PARISH COUNCIL MEETING ON TUESDAY 6 OCTOBER 2026

BOROUGH COUNCILLOR REPORT BY CLLR DENIS SPOONER

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR)

On 7 September, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government announced a pause in taking forward LGR in Kent and Medway and within 15 other local authority areas across the country. It is not known how long the pause will last. Elections for the new Unitary Councils in Kent and Medway will not now take place in May of next year.

If the Unitary Council elections for Kent and Medway take place in May 2028 and the newly elected Unitary Council is to run alongside the existing MBC for 12 months, it will mean that all existing Maidstone Borough Councillors will be required to stay in post for a further year until May 2029. Their existing 4-year term of office will otherwise expire in May 2028.

The election of 22 Town Councillors to a newly created Maidstone Town Council will still take place in May 2027. This election will not involve Downswood.

MBC'S 5 YEAR HOUSING LAND SUPPY (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. It is not known when any of the so far undetermined applications might be decided. Decisions on these applications will now be affected by the new rules for council planning committees which come into force on 31October this year - see below.

PROGRESS ON THE MBC NEW LOCAL PLAN (NLP) AND THE 'CALL FOR SITES'

183 sites have come forward from 107 respondents. 84% of the submitted sites are for housing of which 87% are on greenfields. There are many submitted sites to the south of Downswood and in the Leeds/Langley/Otham area as well as in the Medway Valley to the west of Maidstone and around the other larger settlements in the Borough such as Lenham, Harrietsham, Marden, Staplehurst and Headcorn.

All submitted sites are currently being systematically evaluated by MBC Officers and technical consultees. They can all be seen on the MBC website – visit: https://maidstone.oc2.uk/document/15

CHANGES TO PLANNING COMMITTEE DELEGATIONS.

For many years the vast majority of all planning applications have been determined by MBC Planning Officers under delegated powers. Very few, perhaps on average about 8 – 12 a month come to the Planning Committee for decision. These usually tend to be the most complex and controversial cases. Additionally, any Parish Council or any Borough Councillor has been able to request that any application be determined by the Planning Committee rather than by the Officers if they consider that it is in their interests to do so.

All this changes on 31 October this year when a National Scheme of Delegation comes into force. Parish Councils and Borough Councillors will lose their power to request that planning applications be determined by the Planning Committee. There will be a presumption that nearly all applications will be determined by Officers unless either the Chairman of the Planning Committee or, in his absence, the Vice Chairman of the Planning Committee and/or the Head of Planning and Economic Development or, in her absence, the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Place consider that an application should be determined by the Planning Committee.

It will be interesting to see how this will work in practice. Whatever; the number of planning applications being determined by the Planning Committee is likely to be considerably reduced.

MEETINGS ATTENDED AS A BOROUGH COUNCILLOR

2 September: I attended a meeting of the MBC Planning for Healthier and Safer Communities (PHSC) Policy Advisory Committee (PAC). There were no items on the agenda that had direct relevance to Downswood residents.

17 September: I attended a meeting of the MBC Planning Committee. There were no applications on the agenda that were directly relevant to Downswood.

30 September: I attended a full meeting of MBC which resolved:

i) to make necessary changes to its constitution to reflect the new planning committee delegation rules imposed by the Government – see above; and

ii) to reject a ‘halt the houses’ motion proposed by a Borough Councillor which requested the Leader of MBC to write to the Government requesting that its

housing requirements for MBC be reduced because of the lack of infrastructure including water supply. I understood this motion to refer to the 10,000 additional houses that the Government is now imposing on MBC and to be provided for in the New Local Plan. I considered the motion well founded.

Sadly, however, many other Borough Councillors wrongly interpreted the motion as referring to houses either currently under construction or with existing planning permissions or allocated for development in the MBC Local Plan Review (2024) – which, in my view, is a nonsense. A majority of councillors, therefore, voted to reject the motion. In my view, this vote simply epitomises the chronic lack of understanding that many Borough Councillors have of the development planning system and process.

EVENTS ATTENDED AS DEPUTY MAYOR

28 August: I attended:

i) a conference on family health and wellbeing at The Great Danes Hotel that was organised by the Triumph of Grace Ministries; and

ii) a music concert organised by the Mayor of Swanley in Swanley Park.

19 September: I attended a 'Memory Walk' for dementia patients at the Abbotsleigh Care Home in Staplehurst.

21 September: I attended:

i) a tour of the Battle of Britain Museum at Hawkinge; and

ii) The Lord Mayor of Canterbury's Annual Service in Canterbury Cathedral.

24 September: I visited the operational headquarters of the Kent, Sussex and Surrey (KSS) Air Ambulance at Rochester Airport.

26 September: I attended service in Maidstone Baptist Church to commemorate the commissioning of 20 new trained Pastors.

28 September: I attended a Maidstone Schools under 11 boys' 7-aside football tournament.

29 September: I attended the 12th Annual Civilian and Armed Forces Covenant Conference in Dartford.

30 September: I opened a newly created digital inclusion hub at the Maidstone Community Support Centre in Marsham Street, Maidstone.

2 October: I attended the Kent High Sherrif of Kent's Annual Justices Service at Rochester Cathedral.

Cllr Denis Spooner

Bearsted and Downswood Ward

4 October 2026