

DOWNSWOOD PARISH COUNCIL MEETING ON TUESDAY 3 MARCH 2026

BOROUGH COUNCILLOR REPORT BY CLLR DENIS SPOONER

At last, there are some updates on some important issues.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

On 5 February, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced a public consultation exercise into the proposed reorganisation of local Government in Kent and Medway. It is seeking views on the 5 alternative schemes for the provision of unitary councils across Kent and Medway that were put forward to MCHLG in November 2025 by the 14 Leaders of all the existing councils in Kent and Medway.

Further information is on the MBC website and I believe that MBC and/or KALC have already consulted parish councils in Maidstone Borough.

HEATHLANDS AND LIDSING GARDEN COMMUNITIES

On 4 February, the MBC Planning for Healthier Safer Communities Policy Advisory Committee (PHSC PAC) formally adopted the Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) for both the Lidsing and the Heathlands Garden Communities. The provision of, respectively, 2,000 and 5,000 new homes at these locations is critical to MBC in seeking to regain and maintain its 5 Year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS) which, again, is critical to opposing planning applications for speculative housing development on greenfield unallocated sites anywhere in the borough, including around and close to Downswood.

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

There is precious little that MBC can do in the short term to make good the loss of its 5YHLS apart from granting permission asap for about 600+ new homes across borough. Already, speculative planning applications for several hundred new homes on unallocated sites have been submitted or are soon to be submitted across the borough. These include application 25/505209 for 16 homes just off the Ashford Road in Firs Lane, Hollingbourne. It is also known that developers are preparing other speculative housing applications near Bearsted but, I am not aware of any such applications coming forward near Downswood.

LOCAL PLAN REVIEW 2028 – 2043: 'CALL FOR SITES'.

At the full MBC meeting on 25 February, the Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Management mentioned (perhaps inadvertently?) that MBC will be

commencing a ‘call for sites’ exercise this Spring. This exercise is undertaken at an early stage of the Local Plan Review process and invites all developers and landowners to come forward with sites that they wish to be considered for housing development in the LPR.

There has, so far, been no official statement of the numbers of new dwellings that MHCLG will require MBC to provide over the 2038 -2043 period, but, added to recent increases in dwelling requirements required directly by MHCLG and by recent changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, MBC may have to provide land for up to 8,000 to 9,000 additional new dwellings with the Borough up to 2043, over and above all existing housing commitments, including the new communities and Heathlands, Lidsing and Invicta Barracks.

MBC BUDGET FOR 2026/27 REMOVES FUNDING FOR RESEARCH TO SUPPORT A LEEDS/LANGLEY RELIEF ROAD.

For some years, MBC has included in its annual budget a sum of £1m to help pay for traffic modelling and other research to justify the construction of a Leeds/Langley Relief Road (LLRR). I have always strongly supported the LLRR as it will remove a great deal of traffic from Willington Street, Deringwood Drive, Church Road, Spot Lane and other local rat-runs to the east of Maidstone.

I was, therefore, bitterly disappointed that this funding has been deleted from the MBC budget for 2026/27. It was one of the reasons that I voted against the MBC budget at the full MBC meeting on 25 February – see below.

MEETINGS ATTENDED

4 February: I attended a meeting of the MBC PHSC PAC. Among other items on the agenda, the committee adopted the DPDs for Lidsing and Heathlands – see above. It also resolved to make forceful comments to the MHCLG about its proposed changes to the NPPF – see my report to DPC for last month; and agreed to make some significant improvements to several heritage sites and areas within Maidstone Town Centre.

5 February: I attended a ‘pre-application’ meeting with developers and MBC Officers about a speculative housing proposal on an unallocated site in the south of the Borough that has been generated solely by MBC’s lack of a 5YHLS.

10 February: I attended a full meeting of Bearsted Parish Council as both a Maidstone Borough and as a Bearsted Parish Councillor.

12 February: I attended a meeting of the MBC Planning Committee. There were no applications on the agenda that had any direct relevance to Downswood.

23 February: I attended an online Training Session on Neighbourhood Planning provided by MBC Officers for all borough and parish councillors. Attendance at this training is free.

25 February: I attended a full meeting of MBC. The key item on the agenda was the MBC budget for 2026/27 which I voted against for a number of reasons, including its deletion of funding contributing to the LLRR.

The current administration at MBC considers that the LLRR is not needed and, if built, will simply create demand for more housing. It is clear to me, however, that MBC is going to have to provide much more land for housing in future years and that the opposition of the current administration to the LLRR will simply mean that MBC will have to provide the housing but, won't get the new roads needed to serve it.

Also at this MBC meeting, Cllr Brian Clark (Loose and Linton Ward) was elected Mayor and I was elected Deputy Mayor for 2026/27.

26 February: I attended a public exhibition in Lenham provided by developers showing their proposals to redevelop the former Marley Tile Works just off the Ashford Road which is now derelict. This is a major development over a 70 acre site which will provide up to 3,000 new jobs.

Borough Councillor Denis Spooner
Bearsted and Downswood Ward

1 March 2026