



Chairman's Verbal Update to APM

It is an honour to be giving what is now my third report as Chairman of Council to residents at the Annual Parish Meeting to update you on the progress your Parish Council has made. I continue to feel very privileged to hold the role of Chairman of Council and am grateful to my fellow councillors for entrusting me with this position.

The 2025-2026 council year has proven to be a busy year for the Parish Council and I am proud of the achievements we have made throughout the year. I wanted to give a brief overview of some of these, although as you'll have seen on your chairs, we have also this year for the first time produced a comprehensive written Annual Report that is available for residents to read and understand more about the work we've been doing on your behalf.

So in no particular order, I wanted to highlight some of the key issues we've been working on, on behalf of the residents we serve –

Throughout the year, we have continued to work closely with the Neighbourhood Policing Team, District Council's Community Safety Unit and our Community Warden, to address the community safety concerns that are raised by residents. We continue to chair and facilitate the multi-agency Focus Group which is held once a quarter and enables all the organisations to come together and identify actions to resolve concerns raised.

We have had a number of achievements on this, firstly we launched the Coffee with a Cop events working alongside PC Caleb Guest which are now continued by his successor; PC Joey Weatherall. We've made strong links with the Child-Centred Policing Team so we can try and implement greater levels of preventative work with young people so they don't enter the youth justice system. We've also worked with the Beat Officers to inform them of all the local events too so they can come along and be available for residents to engage with. We're also in the process of arranging a Community Safety Day and Police vs Young People football match which will be taking place on Saturday 6 June. Never before has the parish had so many opportunities for residents to come and raise their concerns with the Police, it is important residents make the most of these.

Linked with this, we've managed after some years without it, to reinstate a youth provision for New Ash Green. This has taken considerable time and effort to do, but we have finally managed it. Whilst the Parish Council has always had a keen desire to see a better youth offer, we were faced with problems with securing a suitable venue to hold it and the lack of a suitable youth work provider to deliver it. But I'm delighted to say in recent months, both barriers have been overcome and the youth provision will launch in May 2026 as we heard earlier.

From Autumn 2025 onwards, the Parish Council has also been working diligently to secure the former New Ash Green Children's Centre so it can be repurposed into a community hub and new parish council office. I am pleased to report we have been successful in having our

offer to purchase the building accepted, and we're now progressing through the legal work to complete the transfer of the building to us.

The Children's Centre project is an exciting one, which will provide a range of new spaces for community groups to utilise, also providing office space for our Community Warden and Beat Officers. This is a new chapter for the Parish Council, and we hope by relocating the Parish Council office to the building, it will help us to be firmly at the heart of the community.

Over the last year, we've also worked on preparing a response to the Local Plan consultation held by Sevenoaks District Council. We were keen to ensure residents views were heard that existing infrastructure is simply inadequate to cope with pressures from further development. This year, we also worked on preparing a response objecting to the New Ash Green Solar Farm planning application, and I pay thanks to Cllr Jake Scott who spoke on behalf of the Parish Council at the Development Management committee meeting held at Sevenoaks.

The Parish Council has continued to ensure it is accessible to residents, we held one of our multi-agency 'Meet the Representatives' events in New Ash Green in July 2025, and we have another one scheduled for Hodsoll Street on 12th May 2026.

The Parish Council has taken the opportunity to put on free to attend activities at seasonal events throughout the year. At Christmas time, we held another Family Fun Day at the Sports Centre and we are grateful to our County Councillor; Cllr Maxine Fothergill for providing grant funding towards this. At Easter, we arranged a Easter Egg Trail and Colouring Competition. And later this year towards Christmas we will be arranging an afternoon tea for the elderly and socially isolated.

The Council has also continued to fund the Summer Holiday scheme delivered at Ash Green Sports Centre and providing a wealth of activities for kids to participate in, for the older ones we continue to fund Teen Gym sessions, providing a low-cost option for teenagers to access the gym in a supervised manner.

Throughout the year, we've also continued to update the Highways Improvement Plan, ensuring local concerns are taken into account by KCC Highways. To tie in with this, the Parish Council also agreed to adopt the Community Speedwatch initiative and we have built up a small team of volunteers to deliver this. We hope to start operating in the next few weeks but would always welcome more volunteers joining so please do visit our website for more information.

On a less positive note, sadly a few weeks ago, our former Chairman of Council; Mike Brown passed away. For those of you who don't know; Mike served on this Parish Council for a total of forty-eight years until 2023, forty-six of them he dedicated to serving as Chairman of Council. The Parish Council was extremely saddened to learn of his passing and we pay our deepest condolences to his family. When Mike stepped down from the Council in 2023, we arranged for a commemorative bench to be installed around the Minnis to recognise his many years of dedicated service to this community. But upon learning of his passing, we felt we had to go further in recognising him, and so I am pleased to announce tonight that the Parish Council have agreed to name the main hall in the Children's Centre building the 'Mike Brown Hall', leaving a permanent and everlasting recognition of Mike's many years of service.

In closing, I wanted to make sure to pay thanks to various people;

- Firstly to all of my fellow parish councillors, thank you for all the time and commitment you have given up throughout the year. Whenever people think of Parish Council's, they either think of Vicar of Dibley or the infamous Jackie Weaver saga. But I am so honoured that the Parish Council I get to be Chairman of is nothing like that, instead it's a council where there is deep respect for one another, a strong desire to make a positive difference to the local community and a willingness to be bold and ambitious.
- To the Parish Council officers and our Sports Centre staff, you deliver for this parish day in day out without much recognition and we simply could not be successful as a council without the efforts you put in.
- To my Joint Vice-Chairman; Carol and Matt for all of their unwavering support to me throughout the year.
- To our external partners; people like Jackie West, PC's Joey Weatherall, Ellie Collins, Caleb Guest and Claire Harrison and PCSO Tim Darling who it has been an absolute joy to work with.
- And finally, to my family and friends for their continued support to me in enabling me to fulfil the role of Chairman, very often they are roped in to help with events and even my nephew at six months old came to a budget discussion with me!

You'll be pleased to hear that concludes my report for tonight, there is of course plenty more I could say, but I wanted to ensure I gave a good general overview of the council year. As ever, I am now more than happy to answer any questions as we move onto Public Question Time.