

AUGUST 2021



TENTERDEN
TOWN COUNCIL

COVID-19

'Magnificent' volunteers and recovery plan for businesses

PROTECTING THE TOWN

Planning, environment, green spaces

FINANCE AND TAX

Getting the best deal for residents

Annual Report 2020/21



www.tenterdentowncouncil.gov.uk



Many thanks to Cllr Sue Ferguson and Deputy Town Clerk Claire Gilbert for images used in this issue.

GETTING BACK TO BUSINESS!

It has been the most difficult trading period that Tenterden's business community can ever remember, but a series of initiatives has been designed to help ensure they can survive – and thrive into the rest of the year and beyond.

Thanks to a close working relationship with the team at Ashford Borough Council responsible for rolling out business support packages across the borough, Tenterden Town Centre and Tourism Co-ordinator Keli Nolan-Lyons has implemented a programme of activity to help the town's traders.

They include . . .

- Offering an 18-month programme of support from London business consultancy CPG, worth £7,500 per business, including face-to-face and online advisory sessions on subjects such as finance, marketing and measures to allow business to grow, plus advice on maximising online presence, both for sales and profile-building.
- Maximising Tenterden's share of a £20,000 investment in a cross-Borough marketing campaign, paid for from the government's 'Welcome Back' fund. Specialists are being invited to pitch for the contract.
- Signing up more than 50 Tenterden businesses so far for a year's free social media marketing training with platform Maybe, worth £1,140 per trader. More than 1,000 spaces are available, so other Tenterden businesses are expected to join the initiative.

- Ensuring that all offers of national or local government business grants are communicated to Tenterden businesses, a valuable element of Ashford Borough Council's Business Support activity.
- Backing the launch of a 'Localise' app, alerting visitors of the product range and special offers at local independent businesses, using high quality images and videos.
- Working with local schools and the Kent & East Sussex Railway on the Tenterden Art Trail – pupils' paintings and drawings on the theme of 'Looking Back, Moving Forward' will go on display in local shops, with celebrated Tenterden artist Mr Doodle making his own, much-anticipated contribution, and.....
- Building on TenterTed's international following! An original idea of Keli's, the appealing teddy bear which has become a mascot on the Town Council's Instagram page, is regularly pictured at different shops around the town. So far, he has attracted more than 1,000 followers from around the world!

All of this activity is designed to showcase Tenterden's vibrant tourism and retail scene, and the town's appeal was highlighted in February, when a major survey of 1,000 shopping locations across the UK ranked the town at number three, ahead of all other destinations in Kent, Sussex and Surrey.

A report from leading retail experts and analysts Harper Dennis Hobbs noted that Tenterden had "outperformed city centre destinations as consumers' shopping habits have become very localised as a result of the Covid-19 epidemic."

CONFIDENT LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS BUCK THE TREND

While media reports during the pandemic painted a picture of a devastated UK economy, a spirit of entrepreneurial confidence was alive and well in Tenterden.

The disappearance of some chain stores was countered with the launching of several new independent businesses in the town, determined to prove that it was possible to survive – and thrive – during the Covid crisis.

Examples include

- Sharen Galvin, who opened the Latte Lounge in Coombe Lane, serving breakfasts, lunches and teas, and has recently extended into the former vet surgery

next door as a place for mothers-and-toddlers called A Spoonful of Sugar.

- Sisters Hannah and Megan Longworth launched Vicki's Bridal Boutique in the High Street, after coming to the conclusion that – despite all the challenges – “if we don't do it now, we never will”. They continue a family tradition, as their grandmother Vicki was a wedding dress designer.
- Chris Harding, co-director of Beau Boutique beauty salon, pays tribute to the support he and his colleagues have received since opening in West Cross, saying they made any concerns about opening up during a pandemic disappear completely.



PICNICS & PARKING

Two of the most effective initiatives to help Tenterden through the pandemic were the purchase of large picnic tables for the High Street and the two Recreation Grounds, and free parking.

The tables have proved a huge hit with picnickers, while the free parking at the Leisure Centre and Station Road car park encouraged visitors to come into Tenterden.

In a statement, the Town Council said: “We have been extremely grateful to Ashford Borough Council for waiving parking charges right up until 21st June, which has made such a difference to the local economy.”

TRAFFIC

Kent County Council is to carry out a major traffic survey and suggest options for traffic management in Oaks Road, Golden Square and East Hill, with a possible recommendation of making it a one-way system with a pedestrian crossing opposite the Recreation Ground.

It is one of two traffic surveys proposed for the town, but KCC only have an allocated slot for one in the next 12 months. A second survey, for a potential one-way system for Bridewell Lane and Highbury Lane, is scheduled for the following year. Both surveys will be funded by the Town Council.

The Oaks Road/Golden Square/East Hill study has been prioritised as it has major implications for traffic flow and safety.

COUNCIL COMBATS NEW GOVERNMENT PLANNING SCHEME - “MASS DESTRUCTION AND A TYRANNY OF ALGORITHMS”

Tenterden’s appeal is widely known as the quintessential Kentish market town surrounded by amazing countryside. Unfortunately it is under constant threat of uncontrolled speculative development. The pressures are unrelenting.

To add to local pressures, the government published controversial proposals to relax planning law, which drew a stinging response from the Town Council. Planning committee chairman Cllr John Crawford called them “a weapon of Mass Destruction of unprecedented scale” and “a tyranny of algorithms as well as of numbers.”

The Housing Parliamentary Select Committee report referenced no fewer than 23 comments from the Town Council, and 11 specifically from Cllr Crawford, who wrote Tenterden’s submission.

While the Town Council supports the Ashford Borough Council (ABC) Local Plan, it includes an allocation for unplanned ‘windfall’ homes, which require detailed scrutiny to assess the additional impact on the Tenterden community, tourist economy, social wellbeing and precious green spaces.

The Local Plan allows for 1,000 windfall homes across the whole borough by 2030. The Town Council has already supported 100, far exceeding Tenterden’s quota based on the town’s population, which is just six percent of the borough.

To protect our cherished town and its characteristics, the Town Council will be working with ABC in 2022 to agree a conservation area, covering the Tenterden Town Centre, St Michael’s, Smallhythe and Reading Street.

The council has expressed concerns over local services’ ability to manage an ever-growing population, and the need to have sufficient parking for visitors and residents. These are among the reasons why ABC’s planning department and the Planning Inspector have concluded that small-scale, organic housing growth the only sustainable way forward, and that any new development in the town should be limited, phased and very carefully planned.

Cllr Crawford said: “Tenterden Town Council is here to serve the town and the community, not the speculative developers.

“As we forcibly pointed out in our response to the government’s proposals, their approach would squeeze out the local community consultation; members of whom have knowledge of their parish and of what is, and is not, sustainable.

“Since the publication of the select committee report, the government has endeavoured to offer reassurance, suggesting they will be following the ‘Levelling Up’ agenda, with a greater number of builds in the North.

“They have also underlined that better use should be made of Brown Field land; new homes should not come at the expense of harming precious green spaces; that urban centres are best-served for housebuilding, utilising existing infrastructure; and that building homes around transport hubs would have a beneficial impact on climate change.

“But, as always the proof is in the pudding. We will have to wait to see what the actual revised Ministry Housing bill says.”

- Proposals to build 145 new homes on Limes Land, between Woodchurch Road and Appledore Road, were considered by the council’s planning committee on Monday, 28th June, and were rejected.



TENTERDEN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

"Towns and cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody" -Jane Jacobs –
writer, activist, and author



The Tenterden Neighbourhood Plan comes at a critical time for the town. Covid-19 has underlined how incredibly blessed we are to have the countryside and green spaces on our doorstep. The health benefits of access to green space have been set out by the charity Mind, Harvard University, and the New Scientist magazine.

At the same time, sweeping changes to the planning system, set out by my colleague, Cllr John Crawford in his report (see page 4) are coming our way. We also know that nature is in trouble, and we cannot begin to tackle the climate crisis unless we take urgent action.

The Tenterden Neighbourhood Plan gives us a unique opportunity both to protect and enhance our environment and to have our say on planning policy and decisions. What makes it so important is that, if successful, the neighbourhood plan has the force of law. It must be used

alongside other documents, including Ashford Borough Council's Local Plan and national planning legislation.

Before it is finalised, the draft neighbourhood plan must go out to public consultation so residents, businesses, community groups, stakeholders and landowners can give us their views. These consultation periods will be followed by independent examination and a local referendum.

Public consultation opened on 23rd June and runs until 18th August 2021. Leaflets were distributed in late June to every household setting out how to have your say. Our banners and posters are up around the town. Information and advice is on our website and social media setting out how you can shape what gets built in our area.

Everything you need to have your say is on our website **www.tenterdenneighbourhoodplan.org** and you can keep up to date on what's going via Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

- <https://www.facebook.com/keepingtenterdengreen/>
- <https://twitter.com/TenterdenGreen>
- <https://www.instagram.com/tenterdengreenspace/>

Print copies of the draft neighbourhood plan are available to view at the Town Hall, Tenterden Gateway, St Mildred's Church, St. Michael's Church and St. John the Baptist Church in Smallhythe. If you would like to discuss any aspects of the plan, please call the Town Hall on 01580 762271 and they can assist and put you in touch with a member of the Steering Committee for advice and information.

Cllr Kate Walder

OUR NEW MAYOR

Cllr Dr Lisa Lovelidge has been elected the new Town Mayor of Tenterden.

Cllr Lovelidge, a medical writer who has worked with consultants all over the world producing communications programmes on medical issues, succeeds Cllr Jean Curteis, who has been Mayor for the past two years.

Following her election at the Town Council's annual meeting in May, Cllr Lovelidge said: "I am absolutely delighted, and pledge to work hard for the interests of our residents and our lovely town.

"I believe the Town Council has come a very long way in recent years in professionalising its activities, and I aim to see that continued, and enhanced, with an Action Plan of ideas and objectives.

"I also would like to see recognition for the marvellous work local people have done during the pandemic, often at risk to themselves.

"And I look forward to helping our community and economy recover strongly, now that we are emerging from the Covid crisis."

Cllr John Crawford, chairman of the planning committee, has been elected Deputy Mayor.



PLANS GO TO ASHFORD FOR APPROVAL

Plans for the major re-ordering of Tenterden Recreation Ground have now been submitted to Ashford Borough Council (ABC) for approval.

ABC was scheduled to respond by Thursday, 22nd July, including any suggestions for improvements to the scheme, although these are unlikely to delay work on Phase One, costed at £1.6 million, and starting later this year.

The design, intended to maximise usage of the 'Rec' year-round, includes a high-spec skate, BMX and scooter park, a children's mixed play zone, and multi-use games area, including new tennis and netball courts.

While it does not include space for a full-size football pitch, the council has assured local teams that they continue the search to find suitable land.

The re-ordering has been resident-led and the subject of intensive public consultation by the Town Council over the past four years, including social media, press briefing material, newsletters and a comprehensive exhibition, which earned the scheme an 87 percent approval rating.



RESIDENTS ASKED TO SUPPORT TOWN HALL LOAN

With work already underway to make essential improvements to the Town Hall, the council is to seek residents' approval to borrow £750,000 to complete the project.

The council wants to make an application to the Public Works Loan Board, a government-backed source of funding at low interest rates for major public sector capital projects.

As the loan, over 20 years, is subject to interest payments, Tenterden residents will be asked to give their approval in a public consultation, scheduled to run through August.

The total cost of work on the Town Hall is £1.75 million, with £1 million already set aside from the proceeds received from the developers of Tent1a, the housing development at the rear of the Leisure Centre.

While the £750,000 could be available from existing council funds, this would be at the

expense of money funding the other projects, including the Recreation Ground.

The Town Hall, built in 1792, is subject to problems associated with old, listed buildings, including a decayed roof, ancient heating system, and out-of-date lighting.

But the project is principally aimed at providing the town with a superb 21st century resource for the whole community, including full conference facilities with modern audio-visual facilities, a multi-functional office and networking space, room for exhibitions, low-cost meeting rooms for local businesses, and discreet offices for services such as NHS Healthcheck.

As part of the public consultation process, there will be guided tours of the Town Hall, scheduled for Saturday, 7th and Thursday, 12th August.

"EXTREME CHALLENGES" BUT CINEMA TEAM REMAIN OPTIMISTIC

Of the three major projects for improving the town – re-ordering the Recreation Ground, revitalising the Town Hall, and a new cinema – it is the latter which is proving most challenging.

Tom Evans, chair of the Tenterden Cinema Group, has told the Town Council that while they remain committed to bringing a cinema to the town, the resident-led group was facing "extreme challenges".

The initial idea was for a two-screen cinema with café and community facilities at The Pebbles in the High Street. However, it is a listed building, and changes to Historic England's rules now mean that going ahead would have doubled the original anticipated cost, and entailed an expansion into the Millennium Gardens.

As a result, the Group's analysis had shown that the project was "not financeable by normal investment mechanisms, but would require very substantial donations."

However Mr Evans says: "We are not giving up – far from it" and that potential operators of the cinema remain optimistic. "We are now exploring new potential locations, and less capital-intensive ways of financing the development.

"We remain committed to working with the council, the community and potential operators to try to bring a cinema to Tenterden. Once we have a clear recommendation, we plan to form a Community Interest Company which would allow every resident and business to get involved in developing and running the project. Watch this space."

VILLAGE HALL AND REC IMPROVEMENTS FOR ST MICHAEL'S

A major upgrade to the Village Hall, plans for the Recreation Ground, and the reinstatement of the village sign are among the projects being planned on behalf of St Michael's local residents.

During lockdown, the opportunity was taken to make improvements to the St Michael's Village Hall, thanks to a £10,000 grant from the Brissenden Trust which partly contributed towards the installation of new kitchen equipment, chairs and blinds.

Although Covid resulted in bookings at the hall plunging from 80 percent capacity per annum

to zero overnight, the new-look hall has just hosted its first wedding for many years.

Meanwhile, environmental improvements are planned for the Recreation Ground, with a tree-planting scheme in conjunction with the Woodland Trust to replace those removed while the maintenance unit was being built, plus a few more to help reduce carbon footprint.

St Michael's councillors – Ken Mulholland, Jean Curteis, Vic Cole, Pam Smith and Harry Hickmott – are planning to canvas local residents to gauge opinion on further improvements, and a working group will be set up to evaluate their findings.

The St Michael's sign at The Point, at the junction of Grange Road and Ashford Road has now been reinstated with a new post. The old supporting pillar became rotten posing a risk to the public.

'MAGNIFICENT' HELPING IN TENTERDEN TEAM STOOD DOWN AS PANDEMIC EASES

'Helping in Tenterden' (HiT), the volunteer organisation set up to help people through the Covid pandemic, and one of the most successful community initiatives in the town's history, was stood down in May, earning widespread praise for its "magnificent efforts".

Established in March, 2020, with a commitment to ensure that no resident was forgotten - particularly those living on their own - and that everyone was protected and helped, HiT recruited more than 200 volunteers who carried out in excess of 1,000 'missions' in the first six months of operation.

These included collecting prescriptions, shopping, telephoning those particularly suffering from loneliness, providing advice on where to access support finance and even walking pet dogs.

But as the pandemic eased in Spring, the demand for HiT's services dwindled to almost zero. As a result, the management team announced it would no longer be active from Saturday, 1st May.

In a statement, the team said: "We would like to take this opportunity to thank all volunteers who have gone above and beyond to help those in need within our community, and also those who have been working hard in the background administering the service. Thank you so much!"

The statement also made it clear that in the event of the pandemic resurging, or other national emergency, the organisation stood ready to be reinstated.

HiT combined the knowledge and commitment of Tenterden Town Council, Tenterden Social Hub, MyTenterden, the Food Bank, Ivy Court Surgery, St Mildred's Church and Tenterden Community Hub.

Town Clerk Phil Burgess commented: "In one way, we were delighted to see that Helping in Tenterden was being wound down, because it showed that we are in a much better place than a year ago, and that the pandemic was easing.

"But I think the town can be very proud that it produced an organisation like Helping in Tenterden – quite simply it was a magnificent example of a community coming together to help those who needed it most."

CHANGING PLACES

A dedicated 'changing places' facility for disabled residents and visitors is to be built at the Recreation Ground.

'Changing Places' is a nationwide scheme, and Tenterden's contribution is seen as an important addition to disability-friendly features in the town, and will ensure dignity and ease of use.

The project will cost £34,469, although grants and contributions from developers building houses in the town should reduce the total cost to the Town Council to £11,000 or less. The council also authorised expenditure of £6,320 on solar panels for the building.

The facility will replace part of the former tractor shed, which became vacant when the council's maintenance team moved to the St Michael's Recreation Ground.

CRIME STAYS LOW, BUT SHOPLIFTERS BEWARE

While it is generally recognised that Tenterden is a low-crime community, nevertheless warnings were issued during lockdown about opportunistic scams, while retailers greeted the news that a digital radio system is to be trialled in the town to help them share instant alerts about the presence of shoplifters.

The TownNet Shop Watch radio scheme has been running successfully in Ashford for some time, but has now been refined to deliver a specific service for Tenterden and St Michael's shopkeepers and pub landlords.

Users will be able to communicate with each other, and the system will link to the police, PCSOs and the town's CCTV, enabling shoplifters to be clearly identified.

Each handset has a panic button for use by shopworkers on their own, allowing other scheme users to come to their aid.

A spate of garage and garden shed break-ins, stolen pet dogs and the continued incidence of phone scams, were highlighted by PCSO Kate Richards in her reports to the Town Council.

Scams included fake texts from the NHS, demanding payment for Covid vaccinations; telephone calls, allegedly from Amazon, requiring payment in exchange for deliveries; and crooks phoning to tell residents that their house has been put in the wrong council tax band, and offering a service to resolve the issue – for £160 + VAT.

BUDGET FROZEN AND MOVES TO PROTECT TOWN'S FINANCES

The Town Council has frozen the Precept (budget) for a second year running, and moved to protect the town's finances from interest rate declines.

In common with all local authorities, the council is facing the prospect that funds set aside on deposit for existing and future projects could even lose money if negative interest rates are introduced by banks.

A combination of low interest rates and annual inflation might even mean the council loses £70,000 p.a. on the £3.5 million set aside for the town's major projects.

The council voted to authorise a financial review to be carried out at a time when the situation is more stable.

Meanwhile, and in recognition of financial pressures faced by residents as a result of Covid, the council has frozen its annual budget at £603,000 for the 2021/22 financial year.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The Climate Change sub-committee has continued its work towards Tenterden's goal of achieving carbon-neutrality by 2030.

The Town Hall staff have calculated Tenterden's carbon footprint, using the government's online measuring tools. It provides a baseline to measure progress, and includes elements such as gas, electricity and water usage, and fuel used for council vehicles and equipment.

Meanwhile, an application has gone to Ashford Borough Council (ABC) to fit solar panels on some of our public buildings. The first will be on the maintenance building at the St Michael's Recreation Ground.

This will be followed by solar panel installation on the old tractor shed on the Tenterden Recreation Ground, with the medium term objective of siting other panels on the Town Hall extension, the toilet block in Station Road, the Bowls Club and the new youth hub at the re-designed Recreation Ground.

Covid restrictions have meant that creating a recycling centre behind the Leisure Centre has had to be put on temporary hold, but the easing of

restrictions will pave the way for the delivery of 15 tonnes of free compost for our gardeners, a generous gift from Ashford Borough Council.

The Climate Change Committee – Cllr Roger Quinton (chairman), the Mayor Cllr Lisa Lovelidge, Deputy Mayor Cllr John Crawford, Cllr Paul Clokie, Cllr Kate Walder, Cllr Ken Mulholland, and local residents, Jo Gandolfo and Jayne Colvin – have also been discussing measures to ameliorate traffic pollution.

The committee is discussing the possibility of making all roads in Tenterden, apart from the main A28, limited to 20 mph, which will entail an application to Kent County Council, as the roads authority. There are ongoing trials for 20 mph speed limits in other towns in Kent, so we are waiting for the results before we move forward in this area.

Meanwhile, while installing new electricity charging points in car parks is currently proving difficult as car parks belong to ABC, investigations continue.