

Headline

February / March 2021



News from your Local Lib Dem Team in West Malling



Future of Rotary House hangs in the balance

Rotary House, the former Age Concern Centre, Norman Road has been successfully registered by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council as an "Asset of Community Value". This means that if the owner wants to sell it, any approved community group can ask to bid for it. If that happens, any sale is put on hold for six months to give the community group time to raise the money to meet the price.

Kent County Council has confirmed it will sell Rotary House. West Malling Parish Council held a special meeting on Friday 19th February and unanimously agreed that it wishes to be considered as a bidder for the property. This means that a six month delay on the sale will begin whilst the Parish Council clarifies what the site might be used for, and whether it can be afforded.

The Parish Council already owns all the land around the building, except the road to the school, across which it has a right of way.

Promises broken on fast city trains

The fast off peak trains to London city, which were promised when our West Malling to Cannon Street trains were withdrawn, are not going to be provided in the next ten years.

Apparently some station platform changes have meant that the tracks are in the wrong place, and the signals don't work.

The rumour is that we are going to get a service that uses the Catford line and take 80 minutes to get to Blackfriars. This will also not connect to Crossrail, Cambridge, Luton and Bedford as promised.



Trudy writes: "*Lots of people will remember that the Age Concern Centre was given by Malling Rotary as a Charitable Gift Donation in 1988 to deliver services to older people. I am very pleased to say that, 33 years later, Malling Rotary have confirmed their support for the centre again. The money to buy the site would have to be borrowed and repayments made from Parish Council Tax. So, local people will be consulted before any final decision is made. I know that KCC offered the building to Age Concern Malling ten years ago, and I hope that they will agree to sell to West Malling Parish Council on similar terms*".



20mph - a very clear result

Thank you to all those who replied to the informal consultation on extending the existing 20mph scheme to Lucks Hill, St Leonard's Street, Offham Road and Norman Road. We had 49 replies in favour and only two against.

We can now get on to ask KCC to draw up plans and costs for the scheme in early summer.

We are also on social media!

Facebook: West Malling & Leybourne Matters

Twitter: @WMallingLibDems

Local Plan still 'frozen'

Tonbridge and Malling's Local Plan is still stuck in limbo following the Government Inspectors' decision that they cannot progress any further. They say TMBC did not fulfil their 'Duty to Cooperate' with Sevenoaks Council to help meet the Sevenoaks building targets, and so the Plan does not meet Government regulations. Inspectors suggest if TMBC does not withdraw, a new Local Plan will have to be prepared. This one has so far taken six years' work.

Trudy wrote to MPs Tom Tugendhat and Tracey Crouch on behalf of West Malling Parish Council asking them to lobby Minister Richard Jenrick on this issue. She explained that whilst TMBC and Government Inspectors are in this standoff, all the greenfields in the Malling area outside the Green Belt have no protection at all from speculative builders putting in applications which were not even in the draft Local Plan. If another Plan must be written, there won't be any left to defend.

Aylesford, Ditton, Watringbury, Leybourne, East Malling and Larkfield and Kings Hill Parish Councils all wrote in support of Trudy's letter. That's more than the whole population of Tonbridge

Tom and Tracey have written to Mr Jenrick asking him to break the log jam and direct that the Local Plan can progress to the next stage of Examination. (Mr Jenrick is proposing in any case to abolish the 'Duty to Cooperate' which the Inspectors are worried about). We are still waiting at the time of writing.

New Grit Bins?

Now the snow has gone, please let us know where new grit bins are needed.

It will be too late next February to get them installed.

Leybourne Lakes Cafe plans at last!

After holding a contribution from developers for over ten years, TMBC have finally shown plans for the Cafe and Watersports buildings at Leybourne Lakes Country Park. We have a number of suggestions for improvements. The large windows do not overlook the lake for instance, and the promised education room is missing. You can get the plans from the TMBC website, from the papers of the Communities and Housing Advisory Board at their meeting on February 16th.



Green Lib Dem footpath and charging projects squashed

We try very hard as a Lib Dem Group at Kent County Council to propose green actions the council might take. Sometimes it's an uphill task. On budget day, we proposed spending £1 million out of £130 million from the Covid Recovery grant from Government on repairs to our country footpaths and Country Parks which have taken a pounding as we all go out to exercise and get some fresh air. Heavy rainfall has turned many areas into bogs and people are climbing over and along fences to avoid muddy areas. So fences, gates and grass need urgent restoration work. But this was turned down by KCC's majority Group.

We've also suggested each new house should have electric vehicle charging points. That was turned down too. Ironically, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council put this policy in its draft Local Plan a few days later!

Not getting Trudy's email bulletin? Check your spam folder

Trudy sends out an email bulletin with local news and information every couple of weeks. We are aware that in some cases the emails are not finding their way to email inboxes but are diverting to spam folders instead. We are looking to see whether there is anything we can do at our end to stop this happening but if you are signed up to receive Trudy's Bulletin and are wondering why you haven't seen one for a while please check your spam folder and mark the emails as 'ok' so that in future your system will hopefully recognise the email as coming from a trusted source.

If you seem to have dropped off Trudy's circulation list, please email her at trudy.dean@kent.gov.uk and she will make sure you receive future bulletins.

Second access for 900 home Broadwater Farm Development.

Berkeley Homes are under pressure to provide a second access for their proposed development north of Kings Hill.

The main access is proposed to join the A228 opposite the station link road. But KCC say this is not enough. Berkeley have been unable to agree terms with Liberty Trust to use the Kings Hill road network to join the bypass at the tower roundabout.

The new design is expected to contain an alternative access to A228 just south of the Lavenders Road bridge. This is very damaging to the New Barns Conservation area which would be left on a traffic island between the two access routes.

We expect the Berkeley application to be submitted at the end of February.

The main access route to the station has been put into a deep cutting to reduce the impact on nearby houses, but it cuts right across the Conservation area between New Barns and Broadwater, and local experts say it will interfere with the ancient course of the stream which rises in a pond in the field beside the footpath between the two.

We are researching the history of the area, and are keen to hear from anyone who has information on anything which might persuade developers to find less damaging access routes.



The Broadwater 'Cwylla', located just off of the public footpath between Broadwater Road and Lavenders Road

New 70 bed care home for Lucks Hill?

The owners of the field opposite More Park Primary School on Lucks Hill have applied for planning consent for a 70 bed care home. They believe their plans for a car park are no longer profitable. The 70 single en suite bedrooms will be for private and NHS patients with dementia, and those needing end of life care.

This is another attempt to build in the area of the proposed Green Belt, just like nearby Forty Acres.

If the application is approved, Trudy asked for better street lighting, and a pedestrian crossing across Lucks Hill from Station Road North for commuters and care home users. Nick mentioned current issues with drainage and flooding in the area, and asked for this to be considered.

Proposed site layout



Disappearing Fields? No one is keeping count.

No one is keeping count of how much farmland is lost to development in Kent. We discovered this fact when fighting the Forty Acres campaign. Houses are proposed on the best soils in the country, yet it cannot be given much importance by Inspectors, because no one knows how much is left.

So Trudy used her place on a KCC Select Committee about farming in Kent to suggest that local councils should work together with CPRE and other interested rural bodies, to collect these figures. This was agreed. It should mean that in future we have some hard evidence of the rate of loss of agricultural land, which we need in order to produce more of our own foods. Producing food locally also cuts carbon emissions and air pollution.

Sign up for a Postal Vote

The Government is clear that it wishes elections to go ahead on 6th May. These elections will be for Kent County Council and Kent's Police and Crime Commissioner. If you are already registered to vote you can apply for a postal vote by downloading a form from TMBC's website. For full details you can visit www.tmbc.gov.uk and type 'postal vote' in the search box to find the correct link. Alternatively message us and we'll send you details.

Public Toilets

West Malling Parish Council has decided not to agree to accept ownership of the public toilets in King Street owing to the high maintenance costs and their poor location. They had asked TMBC not to close them until the shops and businesses with toilets are open again. But the Borough Council say they are going ahead with closure on April 1st. Only one parish in the Borough has agreed to accept ownership.

Covid Testing

Larkfield Library is operating as a symptom free testing centre. If you have to leave home for work or for other necessary reasons on a regular basis then it is recommended that you get tested every two weeks. You can book a slot on line at www.kent.gov.uk/symptomfreetest If you have Covid symptoms then you should book a test or request to be sent a home test. Visit <https://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/health/protect-kent-and-medway/test-and-trace/testing-for-people-with-symptoms>



Online Residents' Surgery

Trudy and Nick are running an online virtual surgery. They take place on the first Thursday of each month, between 11am and 1pm. To discuss any issues, use the details at the bottom of the page and a personal Zoom link will be sent to you.

Got an issue, question or comment? Get in touch!

Fill in this slip and return it to 'FREEPOST, KENT LIB DEMS'. Alternatively, use the details below.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ Email _____

Your local Lib Dem team in West Malling and Leybourne



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