

Member Briefing on Environment March 2021

Dear colleagues,

This briefing covers a selection of the work being undertaken on the Environment by KCC and with external partners. I trust you find it of interest and will share it with your communities.

Susan Carey

KCC Cabinet Member for Environment, Kent County Council

Changes in our top team

After eleven years at KCC, including seven years as Director of Growth, Environment and Transport, Barbara Cooper will be retiring at the end of March with plans to spend more time with her bicycle. Barbara has been a real champion for Kent not least for the Environment agenda.

One of Barbara's last tasks was to reorganise the Growth Environment and Transport directorate and we hope to announce the new top team soon.

A Major Grant for KCC's Major Energy Projects

In July 2020 KCC not only committed to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2030, but also identified a series of Major Energy projects that would achieve this goal. We're now delighted to announce that **KCC has been awarded a grant of £20.6m** towards the cost of these projects. The grant comes from the Government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and will fund two solar parks, solar panels, LED lights and heat pumps across the KCC estate. These projects will reduce carbon emissions and costs as well as improving Kent's energy resilience. We've also applied for £1.2m in funding for energy saving projects for Kent's schools. We'll be moving at pace as the Government expects us to deliver these projects by 30 September 2021.

Kent REVS Up for Cleaner Air is live

Kent REVS is our Kent 'Realising Electric Vans Scheme' in partnership with Highways England. The idea is to lend electric vans to Kent businesses for up to two months to see what it's like to use an Electric Vehicle (EV) in real life rather than just a test drive. Each business will receive a free report to assist them with their decision on whether to switch to electric in future as well as more general advice about how to reduce carbon emissions including the grants available from Low Carbon Across the South East (LoCASE). We expect many businesses will be won over and go on to lease or buy their own EV.

The first two vehicles in [Kent REVS van trial](#) were handed over on 1st February and there are now 19 on Kent's roads. We'll be adding another 17 vans/minibuses of various sizes to our fleet for loan, and we're encouraging more businesses to sign up for a trial. The project also includes the installation of ten rapid charging points for use by the public and work is under way to assess placing these in seven of KCC's Country Parks.

Kent REVS is part of our plans to achieve net-zero emissions across Kent by 2050, making the switch to cleaner technologies to improve air quality and limit the impact of climate change.



Image: Eco Electrical Services (South East) Ltd receive their van

Rapid chargers for Electric taxis

The installation of rapid chargers for electric taxis continues with the Mount Pleasant charger in Tunbridge Wells due to go live this month. The remaining sites (detailed in the last update) will follow later this year.

The Parish Charger Project

The first 28 locations for our Parish Charger project are now receiving full quotes from our supplier, Connected Kerb, with installations due to start within the next month or so.

We're delighted to announce that we've secured funding for a further round of installations. Parish Councils and trustees of Community buildings who would like to have an EV charging point for public use installed on their land should contact electricvehicles@kent.gov.uk to find out more.

The District EV Charger Project

Plans are due to go out to tender this month for up to 150 rapid chargers in car parks owned by the District Councils. Our District partners are Folkestone & Hythe, Gravesham, Medway, Thanet, Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge Wells, and Sevenoaks.

Saving energy in Kent homes

COVID 19 has seen a big increase in those struggling with their energy bills. As a part of continued communications work, the Kent Environment Strategy (KES) team have created a [household energy advice](#) section on the kent.gov website. The section offers advice on available grants and funding options to the public, as well as actions individuals could take around the home to save money on their energy bills. The KES team are also working to promote this, and other new content, on the Kent Green Action [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts, and would really appreciate your support on these platforms.

Our **Low Carbon Homes Kent** events were also a great success, running from the 26-28th January and attracting 125 attendees across a range of sectors. The event focused on housing retrofit (the installation of energy efficiency measures and low carbon heating in existing buildings), as well as discussing the current best practice in Kent and elsewhere and the barriers and opportunities for retrofit in the county. Feedback has been positive, with 98% of attendees surveyed saying they would strongly recommend the event.

Setting the Standard

How do we make sure that our environmental commitments are delivered across KCC and our subsidiaries? The answer is we use the internationally recognised ISO14001 Environmental Standard.

We're delighted to announce that following a rigorous four days of assessment by the British Standards Institute, our education subsidiary, The Education People have been recommended for certification to ISO14001. KCC's Sustainable Business & Communities team have been working with The Education People since 2019 to ensure they would meet the Standard's criteria. The team also led the three-day reassessment of KCC's own certification to this standard, which we've held since April 2009.

The assessor praised the teams delivering within the environment and transport portfolio, in particular the continued innovation and breadth of delivery, despite the significant challenges faced in the last year. The assessor commented that he has not come across another organisation that is delivering so much to improve the local environment and work towards net-zero emissions as KCC is doing. Praise indeed!

Helping make Margate a cooler, greener place

We are undertaking an innovative programme of work in two streets in Margate to reduce the risk of flooding and heat stress. The streets suffer from heat stress during the summer and form part of the catchment which during heavy rains results in flooding. Over 30 trees are being planted along two roads; 11 of the trees will be installed in tree pits which will also help manage surface water by collecting and infiltrating the water back into the ground. The species of trees, a mixture of Maples and Maidenhair, have been selected for their canopy size to generate shade, as well as their ability to withstand both drought and heavy rainfall as well as being good for biodiversity and improving air quality. Work is due to be completed in Spring 2021. You can find out more about this project [here](#).

Countryside Partnerships

Kent High Weald Countryside Partnership are continuing to deliver Forest School sessions for keyworkers' children in partnership with local schools and hope to extend this to wider sessions during the Easter holidays subject to the current guidelines. Countryside Partnerships have also been awarded funding from Forestry England to carry out woodland surveying for the invasive Oak Processionary Moth.

Celebrating archaeology in Kent

At the end of 2020, the Heritage Conservation team's community archaeologist, Andrew Mayfield, reflected on the challenges of running projects through the 2020 lockdowns, for a Council for British Archaeology (CBA) [blog](#). In his own time, Andrew volunteers as a leader for the North Downs Young Archaeologist's Club (YAC). Club members also wrote about their [experiences of 2020 for the CBA](#). The North Downs Club has been shortlisted for a CBA Marsh Christian Trust national award for their work as a YAC group across 2020. For their practical sessions they worked with the Heritage Conservation team's archaeology volunteers at Shorne Woods Country Park. The volunteers' exploits, documented on our Facebook page [Archaeology in Kent](#), led to a surge in interest on the page over Christmas and saw them pass the 4,000 likes barrier, with the top post, about recording the narrow gauge railway line at Shorne, having a reach of 16,000 people. Andrew has just nominated the volunteers for a Community Engagement Award from the Association for Industrial Archaeology for their work.

A raft of papers on Environment

Finally, the next meeting of the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee is on Thursday 18th March and will be webcast live on the KCC website. The agenda covers a large number of Environment issues, including a presentation

on our plans for a Heat Network in Maidstone using energy from the River Medway, the Kent Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan, Nature Based Solutions to Climate Change, and the Trees Outside Woodland project. These reports are all available in full on the council website. Go to www.kent.gov.uk and view the council meetings section.