

## **Report 2024/25 for Marden & Yalding Ward Parishes' Annual Meetings**

The Borough Election last May saw Claudine Russell re-elected as a Borough Councillor for the Ward, and two new Councillors elected from the Green Party, Michael Summersgill and Grace Couch. With a change in overall control at the Borough for the next four years (the Council is now being led by a Green & Independent Alliance and Liberal Democrat coalition), Cllr. Russell assumed leadership of the Conservative group on the Council after the election and became Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny committee, holding the Cabinet to account on its policy directions; the topics that O&S have worked on this year have included assessing the Borough's Infrastructure provision via S.106 funding & Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies and reviewing the direction of Planning Enforcement.

Cllr. Summersgill was appointed as vice-chair of the MBC Planning Committee, and also then took on a role as a Cabinet member, with a portfolio covering Climate Transition and Nature Recovery. Mike has spent much of this first year taking forward some pre-initiated projects on the Borough 'estate', looking at solar panels and biodiversity net gain sites, plus scoping some natural flood management projects on tributaries of the Beult (he was also appointed to the Upper Medway Drainage Board). In March, a review/update of the Council's existing Climate & Biodiversity strategy was agreed, being halfway through its ten year 'lifespan' and now being more firmly targeted to what can be achieved.

Cllr. Couch has brought her youthful expertise as a council officer (in Swale and London Boroughs) to bear in her role as vice-chair of the Policy Advisory Committee (PAC), dealing with climate themes, corporate matters and environmental services. Grace has also been speaking out about Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), working with our Ward police officers on incidents, and visiting local venues to ensure that their 'Ask Angela' and similar policies are up to date and protecting vulnerable citizens. She has also contributed directly to new local initiatives like Plastic Free Marden and the new Yalding Repair Café, as have Claudine and Mike.

Across the Borough and Ward, all three of us have been involved closely in dealing with individual issues and problems of many constituents, which have covered a wide range of issues, as well as matters affecting the wider community like last year's 'Bin problems' and concerns over Traffic. We have liaised closely with the five Parish clerks and numerous councillors, to facilitate or assist queries that they have brought up, and that may need MBC action. It has also been great to support Borough-wide initiatives such as 'Shaun the Sheep' last Summer, the new Museum extension, the third Eco-Hub last Autumn, various Arts events and the Covid memorial tree-planting last month.

Ward Councillors - Claudine Russell (Marden), Mike Summersgill (Hunton) & Grace Couch (Yalding)

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