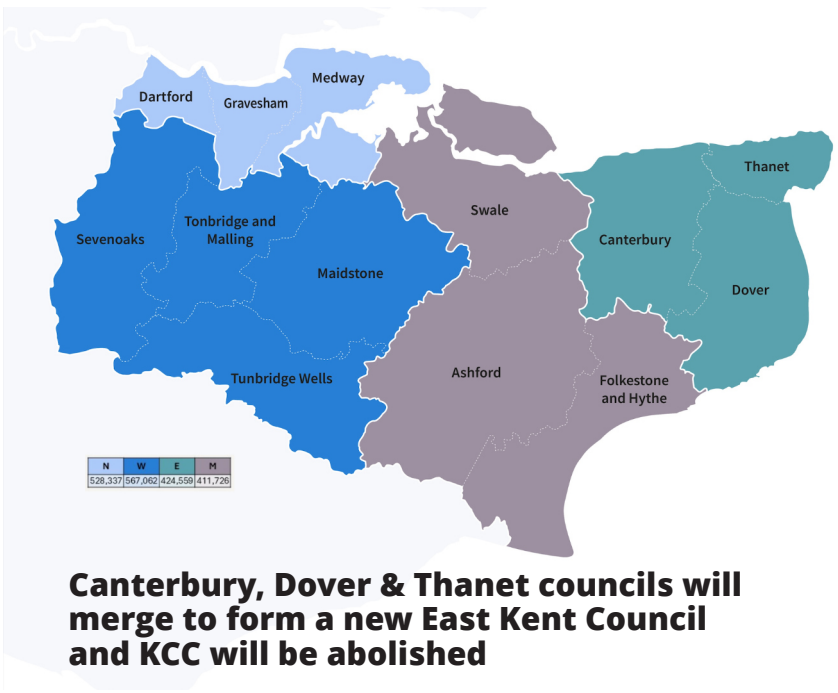
FOCUS
On Canterbury South

Including Little Stour & Adisham, Nailbourne, Wincheap (part) and Chartham & Stone Street (part) wards



From Lib Dem Councillors **Mike Sole, Lee Castle** and the local team

A New Council for East Kent



Canterbury, Dover & Thanet councils will merge to form a new East Kent Council and KCC will be abolished

The Government has confirmed that elections will take place in May 2027 for a new East Kent Unitary Council. During its first year, the authority will operate in a shadow capacity before assuming responsibility in 2028 for services currently provided by Kent County Council (KCC), Canterbury City Council, and the other district councils across East Kent, all of which will be abolished.

While Canterbury City Council has been preparing for these changes, the Reform UK administration at KCC spent much of the past year arguing for a single county-wide Kent unitary authority despite it failing to meet the Government's criteria. As a result, there is now a significant amount of work to complete in a relatively short time frame.

Mike Sole said: "There are both opportunities and challenges in this reorganisation. It is essential that all existing councils work closely together to ensure a smooth transition to the new authority. Liberal Democrat councillors are working hard to make sure services continue to be delivered and that nothing falls through the cracks."

Lee Castle added: "With two layers of local government merging into one, and KCC services being divided between several new councils, there is considerable potential for confusion and disruption. At the same time, proposals are being considered for new town or parish councils in the currently unparished urban areas of Canterbury, Whitstable and Herne Bay. It is vital that strong local representation remains at the heart of the new unitary council."

Lib Dems end coalition with Labour

The Liberal Democrat Group has ended its coalition with Labour on Canterbury City Council. This follows unacceptable demands from the Labour leadership to vote for or abstain on sites in the draft local plan, and removing **Lib Dem Dan Smith** as Vice Chair of the Planning Committee.

Liberal Democrat Group Leader **Councillor Mike Sole** said:

"These demands gave us no choice but to end our involvement with the partnership running the council. Everyone has the right to expect their planning applications will be considered fairly and openly on planning policy."

The Labour party will operate as a minority administration, with 18 councillors, whilst opposition parties, including the Lib Dems, hold a combined total of 23 seats. Council committee roles have been more evenly distributed across all parties to increase scrutiny. We hope this leads to a period of cross-party working in the best interests of the district.

Where's the Bus?

Despite receiving more than £750,000 from developers to improve bus services in Thanington, Kent County Council has yet to put the funding to use.

Mike Sole raised the issue with Stagecoach, who informed him they had not been aware that the funding was available but would now investigate how it could be used to improve services.



Mike said: "Developers are often criticised for failing to provide infrastructure alongside new housing developments. In this case, however, the funding is already there and the failure to deliver improved services lies squarely with the Reform UK administration at KCC. First they failed to deliver a new primary school in Thanington using developer contributions, and now they have failed to improve local bus services."

Mike is also continuing to campaign for the return of the evening Route 17 service that serves Kingston, Bishopsbourne and Bridge. He believes that the introduction of electric buses on the route will reduce operating costs, making an extended timetable more commercially viable.

Flooding issue resolved

Mike Sole's perseverance has finally led to a solution to the persistent flooding on the Elham Valley Road between Barham and Breech.

Mike said, "This is great news and will improve road safety. Every time that there was heavy rain, one side of the road would flood. I've been working with the KCC drainage team on this, and we should now see an end to flooding in the area."





Working hard all year round - not just at election time

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Labour's Planning Grab

The Labour Government has told local councils that all planning applications for more than 150 houses must be referred to the Secretary of State - if they are minded to refuse them.

With thousands of unbuilt planning permissions and the practice of "land banking" by developers still rife, focusing on local councils will only benefit the companies set to make large profits from a less rigorous planning process.

Little Stour & Adisham Councillor Lee Castle said: "It's unclear how this move will work in practice, but removing local oversight of the planning process will reduce the quality of final applications. If the planning committee does not have the power to refuse unsuitable applications we will lose a vital pillar of local democracy".

Prayers and Anthems

In a controversial move, Reform UK councillors at KCC have changed the council's constitution so that meetings now begin with the Lord's Prayer and conclude with the singing of the National Anthem.

Mike Sole said: "I have no objection to either in the right setting, but I do not believe a council meeting is that setting. Beginning meetings with the Lord's Prayer when councillors and staff may come from a wide range of faith backgrounds—or none at all—is unnecessary and divisive when we should be striving to be inclusive."

Mike instead proposed that meetings begin with 30 seconds of quiet reflection, allowing everyone present a moment to gather their thoughts and, if they wished, to pray privately. The proposal was not supported by Reform UK.

He added: "Council meetings will now also end with the singing of the National Anthem. You can support Britain, our institutions and even the monarchy without insisting that council meetings conclude like the Last Night of the Proms.

"What councils should unite around is public service—repairing roads, supporting vulnerable families, helping local businesses, ensuring children can travel safely to school, and making Kent work better for the people who elected us. That is patriotism in action."

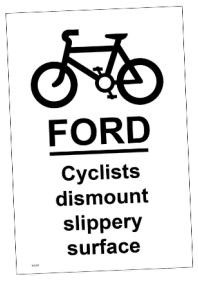
To accommodate the additional time for prayers and the National Anthem, speaking time for the leaders of opposition groups has been reduced.

Follow Mike and Lee on Facebook for up-to-the-minute information as well as monthly reports on what they have been doing for local people.

Action on Ford Safety

Concerns have been raised following a growing number of cycling accidents at the ford on Drill Lane in Ickham.

Mike Sole highlighted the issue at Kent County Council and called for improved warning signs to alert cyclists to the danger. (See proposed sign below).



Mike said: "Although only a few centimetres deep, this seemingly harmless ford has become increasingly slippery. In just a few weeks during May, at least nine cyclists came off their bikes."

Unlike several other local fords, there is no footbridge alongside the crossing. Although an Ed Davey's challenge to Andy Burnham route is available via Wickham Lane, there is currently no signage directing


Drill Lane ford, Ickham

Meet your councillors



Mike Sole and Lee Castle recently held a well-attended councillor surgery in Littlebourne.

Lee Castle said: "Mike and I always value the opportunity to meet residents and hear directly about local concerns. We are already following up issues raised with both Kent County Council and Canterbury City Council."

Look out for announcements of future surgeries on our Facebook pages

Ed Davey's challenge to Andy Burnham

Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey has challenged new Prime Minister Andy Burnham to change the way British politics work.

"If Andy Burnham is serious about changing the way we do politics –

"About ending the performative hostility and instead working across parliament to meet the challenges we face –

"If he is serious, then my door is open.

"Our broken political system is the reason why so much in our country isn't working the way it should, and why it never seems to get fixed.

"It's why water companies are getting away with polluting our environment with their filthy sewage. And why big banks and fossil fuel companies make record profits while everyone else struggles.

"It's why the social care crisis never gets fixed and the NHS suffers as a result. And



why we can't build the affordable homes we need, in the places that need them.

"It's why our immigration system is such a mess, and why our relationship with Europe is so badly broken.

"It really matters for solving the problems that ordinary people face every day. It cannot be ignored.

"Because the best way to make any of those things happen is to put real power in people's hands – and to hold the already powerful properly to account.

"So my challenge to Andy Burnham – as he makes the critical decision about what kind of Prime Minister he wants to be – is this:

"Be bold. Be brave.

"Fix the broken electoral system by introducing proportional representation. To give everyone an equal vote and an equal voice in our democracy, and make sure no politician or political party can afford to take them for granted.

"And do it now. Don't wait until it is too late. Don't wait until after the next election – when you might be powerless to do anything about it."

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