

Kent County Council report Sellindge June 2023

The coronation was both a solemn and joyful event so I thought I'd continue the optimism of the occasion and use this month's report to highlight some good news.

I've written before about KCC's 'No Use Empty' initiative. It started in 2005 and lends money to developers to renovate buildings that have become derelict and are hard to finance. It's been a great success in providing new homes which start paying council tax and stop being a blight on their neighbourhoods. Defaults have been very low and as the loans are repaid the money is loaned again so that in total £55m has been lent by KCC and partner district councils which together with £42m of private investment has seen nearly 8,000 empty homes restored to use. It's the equivalent of building a new town.

Another scheme co-ordinated by KCC is Solar Together which uses group buying to get a good deal for Kent households, small businesses and community buildings to install solar panels and/or battery storage. There's no commitment at the registration stage but once it's known how many people are interested, a reverse auction is held with reputable businesses. Whoever makes the lowest bid wins the contract and those registered receive a quote which they can accept or not. It's a great way to use collective buying power and the winning contractor benefits from a significant number of installations. We've seen increasing interest in Solar Together as energy costs have risen and Round Two of the scheme is just about to complete 1,550 installations. Round Three has attracted over 5,000 registrations and we intend to launch a further round this autumn.

In 2019 KCC pledged to plant 1.5 million extra trees in the county (our Plan Tree). So far we've established 160,004 trees with 48,073 trees planted between December 2022 and March 2023. KCC has been successful in winning grants not just for tree planting but also to increase our Plan Tree team which means we can make more bids and run more projects. The team tells me we could see around 300,000 extra trees planted in Kent in the next winter planting season and they'll be co-ordinating efforts to water, mulch and weed around the trees already planted.

KCC has also been successful in winning further Government funding to install public Electric Vehicle Charging points across the county. We are already well advanced in our EV 600 scheme to put a coherent network of 600+ EV charging points in council owned car parks across Kent and this funding should enable us to do even more. At the end of April 2023 there were 42,566 public EV charging points in the UK across 24,909 locations and many more at people's private homes and business premises. (For comparison there are just over 8,365 petrol stations in the UK – 2022 figures) It's also perfectly possible to charge an electric vehicle from a normal domestic socket in your garage or from a drive. I've had an electric car for over four years now and recharge overnight using a lead that has a normal three point plug. It doesn't matter

that it takes several hours to recharge as it does so whilst I sleep and I start each day with a full battery. KCC has also helped set up fast chargers for taxi drivers and installed chargers at village halls in rural locations (Elham Village Hall is one example of this). We'll be doing more to help people make the switch to electric which will reduce carbon emissions, improve air quality and reduce noise on our roads.

I hope you have found these projects as cheering as I do and I look forward to reporting on further progress later this year.

Susan Carey
Member for Elham Valley
Kent County Council