KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

GROWTH, ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Growth, Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 7 July 2026.

PRESENT: Mr A Brady, Mr J Defriend (Chairman), Mr M A J Hood, Mrs. S Hudson, Mr T Mallon (Vice-Chair), Mr M Paul, Mr T Prater, Mr R Waters, Mr A Thorp, Mr D Sian, Mrs. M Lawes, Mr P Thomas and Mrs. S Roots

ALSO PRESENT: Mr Richard Palmer (Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services), Mr Jamie Henderson (Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Public Health), Mr David Wimble (Cabinet Member for Economic Developments and Special Projects), Mr Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport , Mr Spencer Dixon (Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport),Chris Burwash (Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services) , Mr Mark Mulvihill (Deputy Cabinet Member Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Public Health) and Mr Ben Fryer (Deputy Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special Projects

IN ATTENDANCE: Simon Jones (Corporate Director for Growth Environment and Transport), Stephanie Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities),Andrew Loosemore (Director of Highways and Transport) Alex Riley ((Programme Manager-Sectors & Economic Partnerships), Matthew Wagner (Interim Chief Analyst), Sharon Thompson (Head of Planning Applications Group), Helen Rowe (Interim Head of Highways-Virtually), Robin Hadley (Soft Landscape Asset Manager*),* Joseph Ratcliffe (Transport Strategy Manager) Marck Welch (Principal Transport Planner)and James Willis (Democratic Support Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

91. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Porter. Mrs Roots attended as the designated substitute.

92. Declarations of Interest
(Item 3)

No declarations of interest were received.

93. Minutes of the meeting held on 05/05/2026
(Item 4)

1. A Member referred to page 8, item J, concerning potholes and noted that it had been confirmed that the relevant dataset had been collected. The Member recalled

that it had been agreed that this information would be reported regularly to the committee and requested that this be reflected in the minutes.

2. The Member also referred to page 20, item 3, and advised that they had recommended the proposal. However, it was acknowledged that the webcast did not clearly evidence this and accepted that the minutes would likely need to remain as drafted in that respect.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held 5 May 2026 were a correct record and that a paper copy be signed by the Chair.

94. Verbal Update
(Item 5)

Richard Palmer (Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services), Jamie Henderson (Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Public Health), David Wimble (Cabinet Member for Economic Developments and Special Projects), Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) Provided an update on the Following:

1.Mr Wimble discussed the following aspects:

a) Updated on the current state of broadband and mobile connectivity across Kent. Members were informed that ongoing work to improve the overall digital infrastructure of Kent and address gaps in coverage were underway.

b) Members were informed that the recently launched Invest Kent service was to be used to showcase investment opportunities across the county and attract potential investors.

c) The Cabinet Member had recently represented Kent at the Straits Committee in The Hague. Discussions had focused on opportunities to introduce automated agricultural technology and encourage Dutch investment into Kent. It was reported that these discussions had been followed by a productive meeting with the Dutch Ambassador to explore potential joint working opportunities further.

d) The Committee was advised that support for local businesses had remained a priority. The Kent and Medway Business Fund (KMBF) had continued to help with new commercial developments and small businesses across the region. The Growth Hub had supported almost 500 businesses since April, providing advice and assistance to help businesses grow, adapt to changing circumstances and create employment opportunities.

e) Members were informed that the Skills Bootcamps programme had continued delivering positive outcomes through the investment of £1.5 million and had created approximately 430 training places across a range of key sectors.

f) Highlighted the in-house delivery of the Visit Kent and Invest Kent services. Members were advised that, despite operating with a reduced team of six officers compared with more than 25 officers previously, the service had performed beyond expectations.

2. Mr Henderson delivered the following update:

a) The Cabinet Member provided an update on continuing works related to water security and resilience across Kent. Members were informed that, following further county-wide water supply issues experienced in May, Kent County Council was taking steps to strengthen collaboration between relevant organisations and stakeholders.

b) Members were advised that the first meeting of the partnership was scheduled to take place on 8 October and would bring together key stakeholders to consider evidence, identify priorities and develop a coordinated approach to improving water resilience across Kent.

c) Updated on work to strengthen Kent's resilience to future water supply challenges and the impacts of climate change. Members were informed that Kent County Council had secured £170,000 in funding through the European Union flagship Pathways to Resilience programme. The funding would support the development of the Kent Water Resilience Partnership and contribute to the preparation of the Kent Water Strategy, which was currently being developed.

d) Provided an update on works being undertaken to tackle fly-tipping and improve waste management outcomes across Kent. Members were informed of the forthcoming engagement with stakeholders to identify practical solutions to the issue.

e) Highlighted that a significant archaeological discovery had been made within Kent and discussed the role of Kent County Council in supporting the investigation and preservation of the county's heritage assets. Members were informed that a rare Anglo-Saxon die stamp had recently been discovered near Lynsted by metal detectorist Stephen Newbery. The find was described as being of considerable archaeological importance.

f) Notified members on the completion of a significant programme of works at the Ashford Waste Transfer Station. Works had included the replacement of the original concrete floor and the underlying reinforcement, the installation of a fibre-strengthened concrete base, and the construction of new bay walls. The site had remained accessible for much of the construction period, helping to minimise disruption to service users. Following completion of the works, the facility had fully reopened on 23 May.

g) Members were informed that a new booking system for Kent's Household Waste Recycling Centres had been introduced and had gone live on 17 Jun, the revised system was designed to be simpler, more efficient and more cost-effective than the previous arrangement.

h) Discussed developments within Kent's waste management service, including planned improvements to recycling centre systems and initiatives to reduce fire risks associated with waste disposal. The campaign was intended to protect waste management staff, safeguard public infrastructure and ensure the continued effective operation of waste collection and disposal services across Kent.

i) Provided a further update on initiatives to promote waste reduction, reuse and recycling across Kent. Members were informed of the continued success of reuse schemes operating at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC)

3. Mr Osborne delivered the following update:

a) The Cabinet Member provided an update on highways infrastructure, maintenance activity and future investment priorities across Kent. Members were informed that work had continued to focus on maintaining the county's road network, delivering major improvement schemes and securing external funding for strategically important routes.

b) It was reported that progress continued to be made on a number of significant highways projects, including the Sturry Link Road and major resurfacing and road safety improvements on the A299 Thanet Way.

c) The Committee noted that Kent County Council was pursuing substantial Government funding to support major infrastructure works. This had included a bid of approximately £63 million for significant structural repairs to sections of the A299 and funding in the region of £40 million to £46 million to facilitate the permanent reopening of Galley Hill.

d) Members were informed that applications for the Kent Travel Saver (KTS) scheme had now reopened. The scheme continued to support approximately 23,000 young people by providing access to more affordable travel for education and training purposes.

e) Advised that the Kent County Council had attended and supported the recent Kent County Show through the provision of a free shuttle bus service for visitors.

f) Provided a further update on active travel initiatives and road safety programmes across Kent. Members were informed of ongoing investments in cycling infrastructure, pedestrian safety measures and sustainable travel schemes.

g) It was reported that a new adult cycle training facility in Ashford was due to open later in the summer. Members were advised that recruitment to vacant School Crossing Patrol positions were nearing completion.

h) The Active Travel Team had successfully delivered improvements to the Old Chatham Road cycleway in Maidstone on time and within the approved budget. The School Streets program had continued to perform well, and the Scootability program had remained popular with schools and families

i) Preparations for increased cross Channel traffic during the summer period were discussed. Operation Brock would be implemented from 13 July to 24 august to help manage expected traffic volumes around the Port of Dover and the Eurotunnel.

j) Updated on the summer road safety campaign and the testing of new road gritters, rehearsed routes with additional salt capacity in preparation for winter.

4.Mr Palmer delivered the following update:

a) Highlighted the hard work undertook by officers in delivering a prominent Kent County Councils presence at the Kent County show.

b) Updated on community safety initiatives and highlighted the importance of water safety awareness during the summer months. Members were advised that incidents involving young people entering open water, particularly during periods of hot weather, remained a concern across the county.

c) Through the Community Warden Service (CWS) and the Water Safety SMART programme, nearly 100 young people had received water safety training and accreditation during the year. Members were encouraged to promote water safety messages within their local communities.

d) Provided an update on the work of the Community Safety Team and its responsibilities in undertaking Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR) and that feedback from the National Quality Board (NQB-NHS England) had been positive, recognising the reviews as being of a high standard and professionally conducted.

e) Discussed Trading Standards Operation Engage. These actions had resulted in one of the largest Trading Standards prosecutions in recent years and significant custodial sentence and had exposed fraud totalling approximately 1.3 million committed against householders.

f) Trading Standards had secured substantial benefits for consumers through its regulatory and advisory work. Through its Primary Authority Partnerships (PAP) with businesses, savings of approximately £89 million had been achieved for consumers. Trading Standards interventions had helped save £42,250 for nine victims of scams and doorstep crime.

g) It was further reported that continued enforcement activity against the sale of illicit tobacco products had led to positive outcomes, with more than half of the known illegal tobacco shops in Maidstone now no longer trading.

h) Discussed the completion of all libraries co-location projects and the improvements made to Leysdown footpaths.

i) Members were informed that the Live Longer Better Network had reached its fifth anniversary and now included nearly 200 members working to promote healthy ageing and wellbeing across Kent.

j) The Committee noted that 27 Forever Active Kent grants had been awarded to support free physical activity sessions for residents aged over 50, helping to encourage active lifestyles and improve health outcomes.

k) The This Girl Can Festival had successfully engaged around 400 girls, providing opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity and further reported that the Creative Festival, held at Dreamland in Margate on 2 July, had been opened by the Cabinet Member and had showcased a number of creative activities.

Resolved to note the verbal updates

95. Performance Dashboard
(Item 6)

Matt Wagner, Interim Chief Analyst; and Simon Jones, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment &Transport were in attendance for this item

1) Mr Wagner introduced the report and explained that the report represented the year-end position for the 2025/26 financial year and that the accompanying cover report was included within the reports pack, aspects discussed were:

   a) Of the 41 key performance indicators, 32 key performance indicators had achieved their target and were rated green.

   b) Six key performance indicators were rated amber, indicating that performance was above the minimum standard required but had not yet met the target necessary to achieve a green rating.

   c) Three key performance indicators were rated red, indicating that performance was below the minimum standard required. The following further information on these red KPIs was included.

   d) KPI '*number of people supported to access employment by the Connect2Work Programme'.* Although the formal KPI was not achieved, the Kent and Medway programme had remained among the top five delivery areas nationally (out of 41) for referrals, programme starts and job outcomes. Performance had improved, with starts in April 2026 exceeding the monthly target, and this level of performance was expected to continue.

   e) '*Highways inquiries requiring a response that are responded to within 28 days'* Performance declined in the final quarter of 2025/26 due to exceptionally high enquiry volumes. Services prioritised urgent enquiries and the service had continued to monitor performance through monthly management meetings. A further red KPI related to '*attendance at emergency highways incidents within two hours*.

   f) It was reported that a high number of concurrent incidents between January and March had resulted in performance falling two to three percentage points below the required standard each month. Members were advised that the new highways term maintenance contract had commenced in May 2026 and that the contractor was working with the Council to improve performance. Overall, 32 of the 41 KPIs (78%) were rated green, six were rated amber and three were rated red.

2. Members discussed the following aspects of the update:

a) Members raised concerns on the current response times (HT02) and emergency incidents (HT08) trajectories within the report. The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport highlighted that the new contractor was now in place and that a number of embedding aspects were solidified to ensure overall improvements occur and preparation for Winter was underway.

b) Officers reported that significant work was being undertaken through the new highways term maintenance contract to strengthen performance management and ensure a more proactive approach to operational delivery. Members were advised that a detailed report on the planned improvements could be brought to a future meeting following discussions with the Cabinet Member.

c) Members suggested that, in future, all red-rated Key Performance Indicators (KPI) be accompanied by an explanation of the reasons for underperformance and the actions being taken to address this to support the Committee's consideration.

d) In response to questions regarding a reduction (DC08) in performance against the Section 106 funding KPI to 89.7% in March 2026, attributed to the financial viability of some development sites, Members were advised that individual developments could periodically affect overall KPI performance. Officers confirmed that the specific developments impacting performance were identified and monitored as part of ongoing performance management reviews.

e) Members queried whether the underperformance against red-rated KPI EC16 was attributable to staffing and training issues.

f) In response to a query regarding performance against the Connect to Work KPI, officers explained that Kent and Medway had been among the first four areas nationally to launch the programme by using an existing provider, The Education People. (TEP)

g) While the provider had initially been less familiar with one element of the programme, resulting in a slower start and early underperformance, performance had since improved significantly. Members were advised that the programme was now ranked among the top five performers nationally for referrals, programme starts and job outcomes, exceeding initial expectations.

h) In response to questions regarding the amber-rated KPI (KSS02), officers explained that the target had been set as a challenging performance measure. Since its introduction, the service had secured a new contract which had generated approximately £500,000 of additional work within the area measured by the KPI, placing increased pressure on service capacity. While performance had fluctuated, officers considered the original target to have been overly ambitious given the current workload.

a) Members were advised that customers using the fee-paying service had been consulted and remained satisfied with current performance levels. A proposal had therefore been made to revise the target for 2026/27 to a more realistic, while still aspirational, level.

b) Raised queries regarding KPIs DC08 and PROW14 and requested that a response be brought back to a future meeting. Concerns were also expressed about issues affecting broadband infrastructure across Kent, and Members asked officers to ensure that connectivity in public locations was maintained wherever possible.

RESOLVED to note the Performance Dashboard

96. 26/00033 - Continuing the Visitor Economy and Inward Investment Service for Kent & Medway (Grow in Kent)
(Item 7)

David Wimble (Cabinet Member for Economic Developments and Special Projects) and Alex Riley (Programme Manager-Sectors & Economic Partnerships) were in attendance

1: The Cabinet Member discussed the following:

a) Introduced a report and the seeking of support for the continuation of the in-house delivery model for the Visit Kent and Invest Kent services through the Growth and Communities team. Members were advised that the services had played an important role in attracting visitors, businesses and investment to Kent and Medway, supporting economic growth, job creation and the local economy.

b) Kent's visitor economy was worth approximately £4.1 billion annually, supporting more than 82,000 jobs across around 6,000 businesses. The Committee was informed that, following the closure of Visit Kent and Locate in Kent in 2025, Kent County Council and Medway Council had acted quickly to bring the services in-house and ensure continuity of delivery.

c) It was reported that, despite operating with a team of six officers compared with more than 25 staff previously, the service had successfully stabilised delivery, rebuilt key relationships and raised the profile of Kent and Medway among visitors, investors and businesses and the service demonstrated the effectiveness of the in-house model and the commitment of the staff involved.

2: Members discussed the following:

a) Concern was expressed regarding the closure of a previous attraction and the impact on local visitors and the wider visitor economy.

b) The committee recognised the value of the visitor economy and the importance of continued support from the Council to assist its development and long-term success. Members expressed their support for the project.

c) Questions were raised regarding the suitability and sustainability of the proposed operating model in the short to medium term, particularly should Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) be delayed.

d) Officers responded that a new operating model had been established to maintain county-wide investment promotion and visitor economy functions. The officer outlined progress made to date and the approach being taken to ensure the services could demonstrate value and remain adaptable in the context of LGR.

e) LGR had presented challenges for any county-wide service operating without a strategic authority and noted that longer-term arrangements would need to be considered as governance structures evolved.

f) Members sought assurances regarding the performance management framework for the service, including the monitoring reports, key performance indicators (KPI) and value for money assessments that would be used to evaluate delivery and effectiveness.

g) In response, officers outlined the proposed approach for the Invest Kent and Visit Kent functions, including arrangements for performance management, sector prioritisation and alignment with Kent and Medway's emerging economic growth strategy. Officers explained how the upcoming Growth Plan would drive a targeted approach.

h) Members highlighted the KCC £1.27 million contribution in the past and queried if avenues of ‘leveraging ‘were being explored and the benefits to KCC.

i) Officers advised that the service had successfully secured approximately £150,000 of leveraged funding during its first six months of operation. Additionally, the officer expanded upon the recently launched partnership model for Invest Kent to drive income into the service. Officers remained conscious of the need to leverage additional funding due to financial constraints.

j) Acknowledged the hard work underway from the small team in place and queried how the endeavour would link to the current Grow in Kent initiative. Officers outlined the development and operation of the Invest Kent and Visit Kent functions, including governance arrangements, branding, performance monitoring and overall structure.

k) Members discussed the lack of available KCC merchandising material at the recent Kent County show and the Councils lack off acknowledgment of St Augustine’s day, highlighting the desire to see KCC celebrate local associated cultures. The Cabinet Member addressed the concerns and the financial constraints associated with generating merchandise.

l) Raised the exploratory work underway to deliver a visit to Kent card. This endeavour would allow for discounts for families attending Kents many attractions. Officers further discussed that different models for alternative funding were being explored, and the 40 partners had signed up for the Visits Kent service. Delivery for those partners would remain the primary focus.

m) Officers expanded further that as more funding was leveraged the teams could potentially expand in response. Officers also clarified questions on the previous Brand Kent terminology being a working title that was in place prior to liquidation. Grow in Kent would be the current title encompassing ongoing works.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision, namely:

a) APPROVE the continuation of the existing in-house provision model for the delivery of Visitor Economy and Inward Investment services, delivered through the Grow in Kent team, beyond 31 March 2027.

b) APPROVE the use of approved Kent County Council budgets and any relevant external funding or income to support the continued delivery of the in-house service.

c) DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport, in consultation with the S151 officer, to agree, finalise and manage all funding arrangements associated with the continued delivery of the service.

d) DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport to take all necessary actions, including (but not limited to), negotiating, finalising terms and entering into contracts or other legal agreements, and amending or terminating those agreements as required to implement the decision and maintain the continued delivery of the service.

97. Updated Kent Mineral Sites Plan- Regulation 19 Pre-Submission Plan and Updated Kent Minerals & Waste Development Scheme-Report
(Item 8)

David Wimble (Cabinet Member for Economic Developments and Special Projects), Stephanie Holt-Castle (Director for Growth and Communities) and Sharon Thompson (Head of Planning Applications Group) were in attendance for the item:

1. The Cabinet Member presented the following:

a) Introduced the report and explained that Kent County Council, in its role as the Mineral Planning Authority (MPA), had a statutory responsibility to ensure that an adequate and sustainable supply of minerals was available to meet local and national needs. Members were advised that this responsibility was set out through national planning policy and the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan, which had been adopted in the previous year.

b) The report provided an update on progress in preparing the Kent Minerals Sites Plan and sought Members' comments on the pre-submission draft before it was considered by the County Council as part of the next stage of the statutory process.

c) Members were advised that the subject matter was technical and complex, as reflected in the detailed report, supporting appendices and background documents. Further presentations had been provided by officers to outline the key considerations arising from the draft plan and to support Members' understanding of the issues under consideration.

d) The supporting officer discussed the current shortfall in hard rock (Kentish Ragstone) supply, nominated sites and the extension of the hermitage quarry and proposed extraction.

e) The supporting officer highlighted the significant public interest in support and objections to the proposed hard rock allocation as an extension to Hermitage Quarry. The site was discussed and how allocations would need to satisfy National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) criteria. The officer discussed the policy test for ancient woodland and the associated wholly exceptional reasons and suitable compensation strategy, and other mitigation proposed. measures

f) Acknowledged that the Hermitage quarry site was contentious, but the detailed assessment had satisfied the exceptional reasons for the endeavour and that a suitable compensation strategy existed to meet national and local planning policies.

g) Mitigation and compensation measures would encompass woodland replanting, enhanced buffers and ecological enhancements. Additional discussion highlighted the identified 20 million tonne shortfall in ragstone, the protection of a number of UNESCO buildings throughout the United Kingdom and that there had been no identified indigenous alternative available.

h) Sustainability benefits of a local supply and the practical deliverability of extending existing quarry infrastructures. The wider socio-economic values were discussed, and the role Gallagher Aggregates plays to the overall Kent community, in terms of project support, job creation and annual turnover to the local economy (£235 million for 2024-25).

i) Raised the topic of the site continuing to contribute to waste management and recycling in Kent and the development of light aggregates to be used for verging materials and drainage support.

j) Highlighted the compensation strategy, explained that the proposed biodiversity and habitat enhancement measures associated with the mineral working would be delivered through the translocation and management of soils from affected areas of the site.

k) Members were advised that, as quarrying progressed, existing non-native and modified grassland habitats would be restored and replaced with higher-quality native broadleaved woodland and informed that retained areas adjacent to the proposed mineral working would be managed to improve their ecological value. Existing woodland areas would be identified for management and enhancement, either adjacent to Hermitage Quarry or at other suitable locations within Kent, to secure wider biodiversity benefits.

l) The officer explained that woodland compensation had been designed in line with biodiversity net gain principles, with replacement habitats located as close as possible to affected areas. It was noted that no veteran or ancient trees had been identified to date, although this would be confirmed through detailed surveys at the planning application stage. Appropriate compensation would be required if any were found.

m) The proposed strategy would provide approximately 154 hectares of new and enhanced native woodland to offset the loss of 41 hectares of existing woodland, resulting in a 266% increase in native mixed-species woodland overall.

n) The officer advised that, if submitted for independent examination, the plan and supporting evidence would be scrutinised by a Planning Inspector, who would assess competing planning interests and determine which policy considerations should take precedence.

o) Summarised the case for submitting the Minerals Local Plan to the Secretary of State for examination and explained that the Plan had been developed following consideration of environmental, social and economic factors and that, on balance, it was considered sound.

2. In summary, Members raised the following matters:

a) Members highlighted the strong opposition to the Hermitage Quarry allocation due to the impact upon the ancient woodland at Oaken Wood. Many councillors have received large volumes of emails objecting to the proposal.

b) Acknowledged the protection afforded to ancient woodland and noted that Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) would be afforded the same level of protection as to other types of ancient woodland

c) That the proposal would destroy irreplaceable habitat, and impact biodiversity and habitats for protected species and stored carbon and expressed doubt over the effectiveness of soil translocation and restoration measures, particularly for fungi, mycelium and ancient coppice stools.

d) Members questioned whether the policy test in the NPPF and Mineral and Waste Local Plan had been met but did note that the Maidstone Local Plan has policy support for the use of ragstone as a local building material.

e) Raised concerns that the cumulative impact of the development and planned housing in the area. Several Members felt that more effort should be made to identify alternative hard rock sites. Suggestions were made that an interim plan relying on imports should be prepared or explored.

f) Members considered that withdrawing support for the allocation would force operators to consider other locations and also suggested that sites close to Hermitage Quarry that are subject to applications for housing redevelopment would be more suitable for quarrying, given their location outside ancient woodland, although Members also noted that this could potentially delay redevelopment of those sites for a considerable number of years

g) Questions were raised about future demand for aggregate and for heritage purposes and whether the need had been sufficiently quantified. It was explained that in order to secure stone for heritage purposes it would be necessary to extract large quantities of minerals to be used as an aggregate. Given the geology, it had not been possible to create a smaller quarry just for heritage stone.

h) Economic benefits discussed had encompassed local employment, apprenticeships, supply-chain support and wider community investments by Gallagher Aggregates Group.

i) Members acknowledged the importance of the investments at Hermitage Quarry and the impacts of the equipment necessary to successfully quarry the material into usable dimension stone and high-quality aggregate. It was highlighted that additional details and assessments would be required at the planning application stage.

j) Clarification was given on the impact of the removal of the Hermitage site from the plan. Officers responded that if this was to occur the site would not be considered through the plan examination process. In addition, it was highlighted that following the County Council decision, the plan would be published for comments on soundness, and that these would be considered by the Planning Inspector.

k) Members discussed the importance of expert views on complex technical matters and that this level of assessment was an integral part of the examination of a local plan by the Planning Inspectorate. It was recognised that there were competing planning policy issues at play regarding the environmental, economic and social impact of the hard rock allocation that justify additional detailed scrutiny by the Planning Inspectorate at the local plan examination phase.

l) Clarification was sought on the review of previous sites that had last occurred in 2012 (from 118 to 18) and asked if any changes had occurred during the last 14 years. Officers explained that the previous sites had been reviewed by independent consultants and the Hermitage site through the local plan process had been determined to be the most acceptable site.

m) Conversations progressed on the trajectory of the decision and its submission to full Council on the 16th of July and then onwards towards the Secretary of State. Additional concerns were raised regarding the increase in housing development in the vicinity of the potential site. However, it was re-emphasised that the additional matters raised would be considerations for the Planning Inspector as part of the planning process.

n) Clarified that the permission granted in 2020 required the operator to retain a minimum of 25,000 tonnes of dimension stone on site at all times for heritage purposes. This requirement was described as a safeguard to ensure the continued availability of material for conservation and restoration works. It was again explained that if the County Council removed the site from the draft plan before submission for examination, the site would not go before the Planning Inspector for detailed consideration through the examination process.

o) Advised that the opportunity for the site's allocation to be considered by the Planning Inspector would arise through the examination of the submitted plan. It was therefore indicated that consideration of the site's merits at examination would depend upon its inclusion within the plan submitted by the County Council.

p) Questions were raised regarding the potential benefits to Kent's economy, including the creation of approximately 140 direct jobs and additional indirect employment opportunities associated with the wider supply chain of around 400 companies. In response, the officer referred to the submitted documentation, which outlined the economic, social and community benefits that had been considered as part of the assessment.

q) Clarification was provided regarding the planning status of the site and the relationship between site allocation within the local plan and the determination of planning applications. It was explained that any party was entitled to submit a planning application at a time of its choosing, irrespective of whether the site had been allocated within the Plan.

r) It was explained that, where an applicant considered a proposal capable of contributing towards the identified need, a planning application could be submitted and would be assessed through the normal development management process.

3. A recommendation was proposed and seconded that consideration should be given to the removal of Oaken Woods from the Updated Kents Minerals Plan.

Members asked and were in an agreement for the following vote to be recorded:

For: 4 (Mrs Hudson, Mr Prater, Mr Brady and Mr Hood)

Against: 8 (Mr Defriend, Mr Paul, Mr Waters, Mr Thorp, Mr Sian, Mrs Lawes, Mr Thomas and Mrs Roots)

Abstain: 1 (Mr Mallon)

The recommendation was put to the vote and was unsuccessful.

RESOLVED – That the Cabinet Committee:

1.

(i) Note the progress with updating the Kent Mineral Sites Plan and the role of County Council in approving and publishing for representations on soundness and legal compliance and for submission to Government for independent examination;

(ii) Make comment for the consideration of the Cabinet Member prior to reporting the Pre-Submission Draft of the Kent Mineral Sites Plan 2026 (Appendix A) to County Council; and

2. Note a revised timetable for preparation of the Kent Mineral Sites Plan 2026 to be published in an updated Minerals and Waste Local Development Scheme (Appendix B)

98. 26/00038 - Procurement and award of contract/s for Soft Landscape Urban Grass, Shrubs & Hedges
(Item 9)

Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport), Helen Rowe (Interim Head of Highways-Virtually) and Robin Hadley (Soft Landscape Asset Manager) were in attendance for the item:

1.The Cabinet Member discussed the following:

a) The report sought approval to procure new contracts for the maintenance of urban grass, shrubs and hedges on the highway network. The officer explained that the existing contracts would expire on 28 February 2027 and could not be extended further without exceeding their approved financial limits.

b) Members noted the importance of maintaining effective vegetation management on the highway network and welcomed the proposed arrangements to secure the continued delivery of the service.

2. Members discussed the following points:

a) A Member expressed concerns regarding the timing of the proposed procurement arrangements in light of forthcoming Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals. Suggestions were made that it would have been more beneficial to wait for a future Council(s) boundary model to deliver procurement around.

b) Officers acknowledged the concern and disclosed that a number of contract clauses had been incorporated to address with LGR directly. Additional aspects on having a contract in place for March 2027, and contract provisions to modify, adapt and change to potential boundaries were raised.

c) Members were advised that, in addition to the proposed two-lot model, the contract documentation would include alternative pricing mechanisms and explained that the intention was to build as much flexibility as possible into the procurement process to ensure that the Council could respond to future changes in service requirements and organisational arrangements.

d) Officers further discussed that the tender stage had not yet begun although this was due to occur shortly. Final tenders would target the back end of the year although managing the function around LGR would be a complex endeavour.

e) In response to questions raised verge management, officers advised that the current specification enabled selected urban verges to be converted to pollinator-friendly verges where appropriate. Discussions outlined the proposed contract lot arrangements and advised that there may be an opportunity to review and redefine lot boundaries following the implementation of LGR.

f) Concerns were raised on the current use of weedkillers, discarded vegetation (after works), blocked pathways, invasive weed management and the overall performance monitoring of maintenance works attributed to KCC. Officers acknowledged the concerns raised and suggested a meeting take place beyond the scope of the Committee to address Members concerns directly.

g) Members emphasised the importance of ensuring that feedback from officers and operational experience informed the development of the new contract specification so that identified shortcomings could be addressed throughout the procurement process.

h) Clarification was sought on the risks associated with procuring the service through multiple contract lots and how best value would be achieved.

i) Officers explained that the contract structure had been informed by previous experience and extensive market engagement, including consultation with small and medium-sized enterprises.

j) In response to questions about the use of two contract lots, Members were advised that providers had strongly supported the approach, as larger volumes of work enabled economies of scale and a more competitive pricing. Smaller lots were considered less economical and could increase costs to the authority.

k) Discussed that the five-year term would enable providers to recover investment costs for equipment, depots and staffing and clarified that the contract covered grass cutting, hedge and shrub maintenance, and biodiversity management, but did not include weed treatment services.

l) Queries were raised on the responsibility of drainage cutouts and how hedge cutting could lead to a productive environment for invasive weeds. Officers explained the differences in the contracts and how such aspects would be manged, timetables and areas of responsibility.

m) A Member discussed the extent to which the successful contractors would be permitted to subcontract elements of the service, noting the importance of understanding how the work would be delivered in practice given the proposed two-lot contract structure. Officers confirmed that providers could subcontract if they wished.

n) The discussion further expanded that all subcontractors would be subjected to a KCC vetting process. Officers acknowledged that similar contracts in the past had rarely been subcontracted.

o) Queries were raised on holding providers to account if KPIs were not reached. The officer reported that contractor performance was reviewed through monthly monitoring meetings. Members were advised that new requirements under PCI 23 meant that certain performance measures would need to be published online to improve transparency.

p) The contract included mechanisms to address persistent defects and service failures. Members were advised that where defects were not rectified, a financial deduction could be applied, typically amounting to around 5% of the contractor's payment claim.

q) It was reported that continued poor performance could trigger further contractual remedies under the contract conditions including the ability to appoint alternative contractors to complete outstanding works or, where necessary, terminate the contract.

r) Members asked for updated schedules on works be provided to allow better communication with the boroughs. Officer acknowledged the request.

s) Officers clarified that closer working arrangements with district authorities to improve street cleansing could provide an effective alternative to increased herbicide use. It was discussed that removing debris and potential seed beds through regular cleansing could reduce weed growth and therefore reduce the need for chemical treatment.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision, namely**:**

1. APPROVAL to procure and award a new Highways Urban Grass, Shrubs and Hedges Maintenance contract for up to five years with an opportunity to extend this for up to three further years,

2. DELEGATE authority to the Director of Highways and Transport to take relevant actions to facilitate the required procurement activity,

3. DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport to take relevant actions including but not limited to awarding, finalising the terms of and entering into the relevant contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary, to implement the decision and

4. DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and

Transport, to award extensions of the contract in accordance with the relevant clauses within the contract.

99. 26/00035 - Dover Border Access Improvement Project (DBAIP)
(Item 10)

Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport), Andrew Loosemore (Interim Director of Highways and Transport), Joseph Ratcliffe (Transport Strategy Manager) and Mark Welch (Principal Transport Planner) were in attendance for the item:

1.The Cabinet Member Discussed the following:

a) Introduced the item and explained that it concerned the Dover Border Access Improvement Project and the proposed acceptance and management by Kent County Council of a £20 million government grant.

b) Explained that the grant would support the Dover Harbour Board in improving outbound border control arrangements at the Port of Dover. Proposed improvements were intended to increase operational capacity within the port.

2. Members raised the following discussion points:

a) Queried whether an indication could be provided of the number of vehicles that would be accommodated within the port as a result of the proposal.

b) Officers advised that the port was heavily used and that proposals would create capacity for over 200 additional heavy goods vehicles within the port. It was explained that the additional capacity would be provided within the buffer zone, which served as the principal arrival area where vehicles first entered the port.

c) Reported that this would be achieved through the relocation of the French border control facilities. Members were advised that the existing facilities were currently located in the north-western part of the port and occupied a significant area close to the main point of arrival.

d) Border control facilities would be transferred to a vacant area within the eastern docks in the south-eastern part of the port. It was noted that this land had previously been used for container cargo operations but was no longer in active use.

e) Concerns were raised that the scale of the proposed increase in capacity within the port and questioned the extent to which the scheme would alleviate wider traffic issues affecting the surrounding road network.

f) Officers addresses the concerns raised and suggested that the additional spacing would ensure that the project would significantly reduce the need for the use of the Dover TAP (Traffic Access Protocol) on the A20 and Operation

Brock on the M20 by addressing existing operational deficiencies at the port's border controls. The project could not eliminate the need for contingency measures entirely; it would look to address the existing border operational deficiencies.

g) Members acknowledged the various aspects of the proposition but also highlighted the need to continue lobbying relevant authorities regarding capacity constraints on the route to the Port of Dover as access to the port was heavily dependent on a single carriageway route via the A2.

h) In response to questions regarding the likely impact of the proposed scheme on traffic management measures, the officer advised that, based on the additional capacity provided by the project and the assessment set out within the decision report, the central forecast indicated an approximate 80% reduction in the use of Operation TAP and Operation Brock resulting from capacity-related congestion.

i) The Cabinet Member informed all Members that additional proposed improvements to queueing capacity within the port and the arrangements would provide approximately 14,000 metres of lane space within the port for vehicle queueing.

j) Updated on ongoing collaborative work with French partner organisations regarding future staffing arrangements and the operation of border systems. The officer explained that the purpose of this work was to support the continued effectiveness and efficiency of cross-border processes.

k) Partners would continue to play a critical role in discussions relating to the operation of border processes and measures to improve efficiency and streamline arrangements with the relevant authorities and operators, including the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel, and that these relationships would support ongoing improvements to border operations.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision, namely**:**

i. APPROVE the acceptance of £20m DfT grant funding for the Dover Border Access Improvement Project and entering into necessary arrangements to facilitate and support the Dover Border Access Improvement Project;

ii. APPROVE entry into the required funding agreement with the Department for Transport and Dover Harbour Board for the receipt, management and deployment of central government grant funding, constituting a subsidy under the Subsidy Control Act 2022, of £20m for the implementation of the Dover Border Access Improvement Project

iii. DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment & Transport to take relevant actions, including but not limited to negotiating, finalising and entering into contracts and other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision.

100. Work Programme

(Item 11)

The work programme was noted.