

Cllr David Wimble – Cabinet Member for the Environment (Reform UK)

Monthly Report for the Romney Marsh

Since my last report, I have been extremely busy—balancing local casework for residents with the growing demands of my county cabinet role.

The **Kent Solar Forum** is now fully established, with over 70 solar project representatives invited to participate. We have been progressing work on **Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)**, focusing on the significant fire risks these installations pose. Kent Fire and Rescue will now attend our meetings to answer technical questions. They have formalised their approach, which confirms they cannot directly extinguish these fires. Instead, they will prioritise cooling the perimeter while allowing the units to burn out—a process that risks releasing substantial volumes of toxic gas into nearby communities.

Under my portfolio, the Leader has tasked me with creating a **county-wide Water Group**. This body will have more influence than district or borough-level groups and will cover a wide range of issues—not only sea pollution, but also water supply concerns, including the upcoming Broad Oak Reservoir project. The first agenda-setting meeting will be held in early September, with a full stakeholder meeting planned for October. I have suggested the new community hall as a possible venue. Tenterden Rural KCC Councillor Jeremy Ustice has been appointed as the independent chair. Membership will include every district and borough council, key stakeholders such as the Environment Agency, DEFRA, the NFU, Southern Water, internal drainage boards, the county's MPs, and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Emma Hardy.

I have also been reviewing potential uses for **19 disused household waste sites**. While unsuitable for solar development, these locations could be repurposed for KCC's *Millennium Canopy* pledge—to plant 1.6 million trees, one for each Kent resident. We are also exploring the creation of our own tree nurseries, enabling us to supply trees to other authorities and developers, generating additional income.

I was delighted to officially open Kent's **first Reuse Centre** at the Mountfield Road Household Waste Site. This has been a personal ambition of mine for nearly three years, and in its first three weeks it raised over £3,000 for local good causes. I am already looking at expanding the concept, including a larger site between the Romney Marsh Visitor Centre and St Mary's Bay.

In recent weeks, I have been visiting several of the county's countryside parks to discuss enhancing their visitor offer, such as watercolour workshops and bushcraft courses. I have also been working with senior officer David Godfrey to ensure KCC re-joins important nuclear energy forums, including NDA, Nuleaf, Great British Nuclear, and the Advanced Nuclear Technologies Group. This is with the aim of securing **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)** for Dungeness.

We have also been reviewing the **Sea Link project**—to bring power from offshore generation and Sizewell C ashore. I have argued that Dover Harbour, rather than Pegwell Bay SSSI, would be a better landing point. Dover Harbour Board currently does not have the grid capacity to recharge its new electric ships, which at present can only be charged in France. Locating the landing point at Dover would not only resolve this but would also enable the

power to be transferred along the side of the Dover to Ashford railway line directly to the Sellindge converter station, providing a direct link into the national grid.

Part of my month has also been spent visiting our heritage assets, including the eight windmills owned by KCC. With local government reorganisation and potential devolution ahead, I am working to ensure these remain in public ownership and operation, rather than being sold for private redevelopment. Maintaining them as working mills is costly, but vital to Kent's heritage.

I continue to hold **monthly surgeries**—the next in Lydd this September, followed by St Mary's Bay, then back to New Romney.

I am away on annual leave until August 21st but more than happy to answer questions when I return

District Report

At Folkestone & Hythe District Council, I remain on the Finance Overview Committee, which meets quarterly. I have now joined the **Romney Marsh Partnership**, though it currently meets only four times a year—far less than the monthly frequency we once enjoyed.