

Cllr Mike Bland

Report to Waltham Parish Annual Meeting 7th April 2026

This is a brief report of my activity over the past year. It does not include that of my colleague and fellow councillor as there will be a joint newsletter from us both coming soon, and we also hope to deliver a leaflet to homes soon.

In respect of the parish, I have maintained a close interest and offered support regarding a number of planning enforcement actions. This has included issues at Anvil Green, and I attended a meeting with our MP Rosie Duffield and Anvil Green residents regarding the problematic illegal development there. I keep Rosie informed of the situation there. I am particularly pleased that the new Draft Local Plan includes the development of a new site for the Traveller Community. This has been a statutory requirement of local authorities for some years and has not been delivered sensibly by Canterbury City Council to date. The lack of such has been a weakness in tackling unplanned traveller developments. More on the local plan below.

Rural residents in the ward have contacted me for support regarding the annoyance of failed bin collections and illegal tipping. I have assisted in these cases and believe satisfactory outcomes have been achieved.

Recently, Cllr Brady and I challenged at an Overview Committee the lack of regard to rural areas and wards within the new draft Cultural Strategy for the Council. We made suggestions and called for some community engagement with the villages and hamlets in respect of how a Cultural Strategy could and should work for them. I would welcome a local discussion with residents and the Parish Council on what local people would like to see in such a strategy.

There are two looming big issues for the Council and District over the coming two years. The first is about the Draft Local Plan, and the second regarding Local Government Reform. There will be more focus and discussion on both in the coming months.

First, the Draft Local Plan. This is currently out for Regulation 19 public consultation together with the new Draft Transport strategy. At a special full Council meeting I voted for the Plan to be submitted for consultation and to be placed before the Planning Inspectorate for adoption. There are no new development sites identified in the plan for Waltham Parish. There is however an interesting and overdue clarification proposed in respect of the

'boundaries' of village and hamlet areas. This strengthens protection for their character and definition. The Draft Transport Strategy in support of the Draft Local Plan is one which residents may wish to examine and comment on. Comments are possible through the City Council's website. All such comments will be conveyed to the Planning Inspector. The Draft Transport Strategy embeds the 'Bus First' and 'Active Travel' principles of the Draft Local Plan. Between now and 2042 there will be changes to the transport character of journey from the rural areas into Canterbury City. There will be more emphasis on park and ride and cycling and walking. There are ambitions too for further development of the type and frequency of buses. Cars will still be allowed through Canterbury, but the expectation is to reduce this through other healthier forms of transport.

Next major issue is Local Government Reform. A decision will be made shortly by the Government on whether Canterbury District will be combined with other Districts to form either one of three or four Unitary Authorities across Kent. There will be no City Council elections in May 2027 as would be normal. Instead sitting councillors will continue for a year as part of the transition to a new Unitary Authority. There will, however, be elections in May 2027 for councillors to a new 'shadow authority', that is the beginning of the new Unitary Authority which will take over from the district councils during 2027-8. More information on this will be published shortly.

Lastly, both SouthEast Water and Southern Water attended a Scrutiny Committee (of which I am a member) recently. The Scrutiny Committee heard presentations from both authorities and held them to account for poor service. There are planned improvements, but I am not persuaded these are sufficient. Whilst there has been much regional and national focus on coastal areas and sewerage I raised questions about Southern Water's performance in respect of our River areas, and particularly the River Stour. I shall be continuing that focus over the next year.

I would very much welcome questions at the meeting and afterwards too!

Cllr Mike Bland

mike.bland@councillor.canterbury.gov.uk

01227 250602

Facebook: MikeBland4CanterburyLabour

X (twitter): Mike Bland for Chartham & Stone Street @MikeBlandMorrow