

Kent County Council Councillor's Report
Rich Lehmann
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I've decided to write something a little more philosophical this month as I've been reflecting recently on the role of councillors in local government with regard to what they should do when their personal or political opinions differ from those of the residents they represent.

At council level there is rarely an issue. If a resident reports a pothole or needs help with an issue relating to schools, highways or any of the other things KCC is responsible for, I will do my best to get that issue resolved as quickly as possible. Similarly, with the seemingly never ending line of planning applications that come through for massive housing estates and 'garden villages', my views align with residents.

There is little conflict for me in most cases relating to housing. The Greens are the only major party to have avoided setting nationwide annual building targets, instead stating that "Housing provision targets should be based upon housing needs surveys produced or commissioned by local authorities". In 2020 a housing needs survey in Faversham concluded that the town almost exclusively needed one and two bedroomed houses, but more than half of the houses included in the latest version of the Duchy Estate proposals would have three, four and five bedrooms.

One slightly more 'grey' issue that has come up for me recently is something that I was initially firmly on one side of. In Teynham, a popular foot crossing over the railway is currently subject to an emergency closure, with Network Rail hoping to close the crossing permanently and divert the public right of way. To me, this seemed like an unnecessary move as the number of recorded 'near misses' over the past few years was shown to be relatively few for such a well used crossing. I have now been shown some images which show that some local youths have been behaving very carelessly around the crossing, which has drawn me more to the middle of the debate.

My personal belief is that the enjoyment and convenience of the majority should not be spoiled by a tiny minority; and I still believe that Network Rail could, and should, do more to improve the safety of the crossing rather than simply close it. However I can also see that their desire to close it is not simply a box ticking exercise and that there is a genuine risk to safety if it remains open without any new safety precautions. In this case I will be encouraging local residents to respond to the public consultation, which will be opening soon, and will support the majority view.

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