



# Oast *to* Coast



**Running thoughts  
on community  
under lockdown**  
see page 11





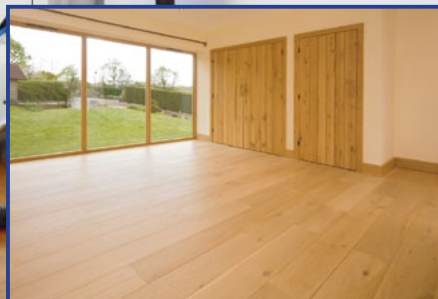
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Hello Everyone,

I am writing this the day after ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), our national “umbrella” body, started centenary celebrations for the ACRE Network - which is founded on the start of the first Rural Community Council, in Oxfordshire, during 1920 and a national support structure for village halls in 1921. We will have at least one article on the centenary in a future issue of Oast to Coast.

Our own 100th birthday is set to take place in February 2023. Kent was the second part of England to have a Rural Community Council, at the initial instigation of the Director of Education at the Kent County Council - who had become aware of Oxfordshire's version. Gloucestershire followed just a few weeks after us.

Getting to be 100 years old is still a feat for anyone, let alone an organisation, and additionally challenging given the times we are going through currently. The coronavirus pandemic has taken a terrible toll at a human level, and impacted greatly too on so many of the rural community projects, organisations and initiatives you and we have been working on as well.

I really do want to pay tribute to everyone who has played a part in ensuring no-one is left alone or put in harm's way this year. I also want to say thank you to those of you who

have taken time to write to us to say thank you for helping you; we have no expectation that this gratefulness may be relayed to us and it is appreciated hugely whenever it does happen.

In the pages that follow you will be able to read about various ways in which, despite the pandemic, people in rural communities across Kent (including Medway) have continued to look out for each other, manage their community assets - such as village halls - appropriately, and planned for the future of

the places in which we live and work. It is inspirational to me and I hope you find something that captures your imagination too.

Finally, for now, I would like also to thank my colleagues on our staff team, trustees and volunteers for both helping me to tell good stories on so many zoom calls and funders who have stepped in to provide new resources where the Covid-19 pandemic prevented budgeted-for income to arrive. A huge thanks there to Ashford Borough Council, Kent Community Foundation and the National Lottery Community Fund. As a result of the latter of these those of you involved in the management of village halls should see a new online networking portal launched during Village Halls Week, in January 2021.

Wishing you a safe Festive period and, as it progresses, a much easier 2021 too.

**Keith Harrison**

*keith.harrison@ruralkent.org.uk*

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Action with Communities in Rural Kent are fully committed to supporting the ongoing development of communities across Kent. If you would like any advice or guidance in your community – please contact 01303 813790.

# Kent Community Housing Hub

## Laying the foundations for better homes



The Kent Community Housing Hub is a new project being hosted by Rural Kent. Tessa O'Sullivan is managing the Hub which has developed from community-led housing work she has undertaken through the Rural Housing Enabling service. The Hub is part of the Community Led Homes Enabler Hubs grants programme funded by the Community Housing Fund from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

The Hub's vision for community led housing gives local residents the power to create their own housing schemes, decide how they should be developed and have complete control over how they are run. Through community land trusts, cohousing schemes and cooperatives we want to change the way housing works for everyone.

Community led housing is a people powered solution to solving issues created by the housing crisis. We enable communities across Kent to deliver the housing that local people want and need. We do this through:

- providing direct technical advice and support
- training and networking, helping groups to connect and collaborate with each other
- working to address the inequalities of access to land and finance for CLH groups
- building awareness and support for community led housing

We are already working with a mix of community land trusts, co-operatives and cohousing groups. Shepherdswell CLT, working in partnership with English Rural Housing Association is due to submit a planning application in November for a development of affordable housing for local people in their village. Tessa has been working with them for a number of years and we're very proud that

they have reached this stage.

Our Technical Advice and Support service operates in two ways:

The Enabling Programme - this service has no upfront costs. Groups will be matched with an approved technical advisor suitable to their needs. The Hub will provide a facilitated process designed to support groups through to completion. Groups will pay financial contributions back to the Hub when the project reaches defined stages.

The Consultancy Programme - for groups wanting advice and support for specific parts of their projects only, from an approved technical advisor. This work is charged at a day rate. The Hub will work with groups to help secure funding for work provided by the advisors.

New groups/groups thinking of setting up can get in touch with the Hub to talk through their ideas. The Hub can offer early stage support at no cost. We can help groups access funding for their initial set up costs and expenses incurred in the early stages. We will continue to offer funding advice as projects progress.

Visit our website:

[www.kentcommunityhousinghub.org](http://www.kentcommunityhousinghub.org)



# Supporting village halls - the next 10 years

The ten-year National Village Hall Surveys provide a snapshot of the state of England's varied and essential village and community halls, their funding, use, and changes over time. With an estimated total asset base of £5.2-£8.9bn and improvement works in the region of £46-£96m in the last five years they have a significant impact and value for rural communities.

Just before lockdown 2,109 hall committees, 60 of which were in Kent, responded to the fourth Survey which was managed by ACRE and part funded by Power to Change. An independent analysis of the data was carried out by Dr Tom Archer and his team at CRESR Sheffield Hallam University.

The survey reports on 8 different areas, makes interesting reading and we are sure that you will find many points that your committee can identify with. The Report highlights are featured on the infographic if you want a very quick overview or, you can read the Summary and Conclusion.

As we begin to recover from Covid-19 - whenever that is - halls will be at the forefront of re-establishing face to face relations and addressing important local needs. So, what are the next steps for using the data; what would ACRE like to achieve on behalf of village halls in the next 10 years?

Collaboration between hall committees and their Parish Council will need to be as strong as ever. 82% of respondents confirmed they had a positive relationship with their Parish Council, having rarely or never suffered from a lack of support but 30% were reliant on the Parish Council to assist with their running costs. We aim to encourage Parish Councils to ensure that their local village halls are not struggling financially and have the local support that they need.

ACRE will continue to input to the ongoing

Government Review of Non-Business Rates and highlight the importance of mandatory and discretionary rate relief for hall committees in managing their finances.

The report tells us that 91% of village halls are not registered for VAT resulting in the region of £9.3 to £19.5m of irrecoverable VAT. Government has been unable to reduce the VAT rates under European VAT rules so Brexit may present an opportunity for ACRE to address the problem.

50% of halls are over 80 years old with 16% planning major renovations and over a third reporting unsatisfactory condition of roofs and gutters. In 2019 ACRE was successful in putting in place the Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund. This granted 20% of total project costs for improvement work. So far 105 halls have benefitted but this is the tip of the iceberg and ACRE will continue to lobby for further investment in the ageing stock of village halls.

The Report suggests that installation of energy saving measures has increased, but that there is considerable scope for more investment in renewable energy. In addition we cannot be complacent about the rise in Broadband and WiFi from 9% to 90% as 145 people said lack of internet, broadband or mobile signal was a difficulty. There is much to do in achieving widespread improvements.

ACRE recognises the huge contribution of volunteers in keeping village halls fit for purpose and available for their communities. We would like to thank you all for responding to the survey, facing the challenges of closing and opening your halls during the last nine months and assure you that we, and the 38 ACRE Network members across rural England, will continue to support your hard work in your communities.

**Deborah Clarke, ACRE**



# Report Highlights

This represents

**21%** OF ALL KNOWN  
HALLS IN ENGLAND

**2,109**

Halls responded  
to the survey

**60%**

said village halls are the  
**only meeting place** for their  
community.

Halls are of  
**historic and  
architectural**  
value:



Access to  
WiFi and  
broadband  
has  
**dramatically**  
increased in  
the last ten  
years.

**7%**  
are listed

**35%**  
of halls are in  
a conservation  
area

At least

**10,000**

individuals are **utilising**  
**halls to earn their living**  
demonstrating the  
importance and value of  
rural halls.



**16%**  
don't have  
a car park



Car parking is critical  
to **ensuring access** and  
maximising value  
especially for  
residents that  
don't live  
nearby.

**70%**



of respondents had **undertaken**  
**improvement works** in their hall  
in the last five years estimated  
to be in the region of:

**£46m-£96m**



**91%**

of halls are not  
registered for VAT  
creating large sums  
of irrecoverable VAT  
**a burden for hall  
committees.**

**60%**

of halls are making  
progress in adopting  
energy saving  
measures.



Halls are adopting modern and  
low carbon heating technologies  
but there is **scope for more**  
**investment** in renewable energy.

## The Friendly Bench

The Friendly Bench CIC, a social enterprise which tackles loneliness and social isolation, is delighted to invite community and voluntary organisations across England to apply to join their The Friendly Bench® network, thanks to National Lottery funding.

Launched in March 2018 by Lyndsey Young, The Friendly Bench CIC aims to tackle loneliness and build community by creating open, accessible and purposely designed parklets with integrated seating and sensory planting for community-led workshops, activities or simple neighbourly chats.

Since receiving the National Lottery funding in 2019, The Friendly Bench CIC has launched The Friendly Bench® in Ipswich, Rotherham, Chester and Rugby and have plans to install more The Friendly Bench® in 2021 in Bury, Cambridge, Durham and Halesowen.

The Friendly Bench CIC are now looking for further dedicated community groups and voluntary

organisations who are committed to bringing people together and building more inclusive, connected communities to apply to join The Friendly Bench® network.

Working with the successful groups, The Friendly Bench CIC team would project management, build, install and plant one of their disability discrimination act compliant The Friendly Bench® in an agreed community space. In turn, as a member of The Friendly Bench network, the successful groups would manage and run their The Friendly Bench® as agreed, delivering regular community-led activities and events, with the aim that The Friendly Bench® is a space which actively connects people to each other, nature and places whilst harnessing the power of community.

*"It is wonderful to have The Friendly Bench so close; I now have a reason to get out of my house."  
Betty, 84, local resident*

Lyndsey Young, Founder of The Friendly Bench CIC said, "By creating free to use 'outdoor living rooms' in the heart of communities where



every barrier is removed, everyone, regardless of their age, economic background and ability can come together, reconnect with their neighbours, nature and also places in which they live.”

“Thanks to National Lottery players we are partnering with groups across the country who share our values, understand the importance of building social connections and can grow with us. Our distinctive The Friendly Bench® will be in the heart of communities across the country, each one



operating uniquely to reflect the needs of its neighbourhood, each one helping to reconnect more people back to their community.”

Jill Dwyer, Chair, Friends of East Rugby Group said, “We are really excited that we have been successful to get the first The Friendly Bench®

*“I love volunteering at The Friendly Bench, I really enjoy spending time with everyone and I can honestly say the events have been a real highlight for me.”*

*Jason, 47, volunteer*

to be installed in Warwickshire and I am proud that Hillmorton has one of the first wave of these amazing facilities to be installed across England. We think it will be a positive addition for the whole community to use.”

Morag Scargill from the Friends of the Countess of Chester Country Park said, “Having The Friendly Bench® at the heart of the Countess of Chester Country Park has provided a unique opportunity to create a dedicated, welcoming space where individuals and groups can come together to experience a sense of community and wellbeing. Such a wonderful facility is even more important now than ever before and already it has been described as a ‘Joyous

element’ by a park visitor.”

Joyce, 75, Local resident, said: “It’s a wonderful scheme. “It’s really lovely, my neighbour, who recently lost her husband, and I come here often, it’s a lovely place, you always get into a conversation. I can also see it from my window, it’s lovely to look out on.”

The Friendly Bench® has also won praise from Loneliness Minister, Baroness Diana Barran, Parliamentary Under Secretary for Civil Society, Lords Minister at DCMS as well as former Loneliness Minister, Tracey Crouch MP, who said, “It is such a creative but wonderfully simple idea to help combat loneliness. It was by far one of my favourite schemes to hear about during my time as Minister, not least because it seems an incredibly cost-effective way of creating connections within a micro-community. I would love to see many more Friendly Benches across the country.”

To express an interest in applying to join The Friendly Bench® network, please email: [thefriendlybenchtm@gmail.com](mailto:thefriendlybenchtm@gmail.com) quoting ref: “TNL Community Fund Enquiry 2020’.

**Lyndsey Young**

Founder of The Friendly Bench CIC  
[thefriendlybenchtm@gmail.com](mailto:thefriendlybenchtm@gmail.com)  
 07875 719849



# Keeping It Going!

Many of you will have been involved in activities to support your residents over the past few months. Some of you may have been on the receiving end of that support. We've heard about the huge numbers of volunteers that have stepped up to help deliver food and medicine and we've heard the questions asked about how to keep this re-kindled community spirit going on into the future. Here are two examples of communities that are trying to do just that ...

### Sundridge and Ide Hill Community Group

"We started out as a response to Covid-19 and formed a community group to take care of those in need during this time. As the restrictions were eased and our work load caring for people was reducing, we started a series of community projects to keep our 'community spirit' going.

We painted, gardened and cleaned at the local social club and pub to be ready for reopening. We also organised customer social distancing at our local garden centre to enable them to reopen.

When the restrictions were lifted further, we realised there was nowhere in our village for families and the elderly to congregate safely outside. So, we sourced the wood and cut, stained and built 11 picnic benches to go on a previously underused area in our village called Coronation Gardens.

People came forward to sponsor individual benches and we had a team of 17 volunteers turn up to build them on a Saturday morning. The area is now been used exactly as we intended with family barbecues, birthday parties and a general social distancing area for friends to meet.

On the 11th August the Community Group hosted an afternoon tea for the elderly. We controlled all social distancing and despite the 35-degree temperature 33 of the 45 people expected braved the heat. They were treated to tea, coffee, finger sandwiches, cakes, fancies and a lot of water! The KCC Community Warden came along to provide information and advice to residents who asked for it.

We are now in the process of turning the community group into a charity to increase social interaction throughout our parish."

**Martin Darby**

Sundridge and Ide Hill Community Group  
[info@sundridgewithidehill.co.uk](mailto:info@sundridgewithidehill.co.uk)



*Above: Volunteers installing the new picnic tables and benches*

*Below: Afternoon Tea in Coronation Gardens*



### Shorne

As disappointed as we were that our Pop-up Café wouldn't be returning to Shorne until next year, our Community Champion Ruth Hensman chatted to Pub Manager Paul Murphy at The Rose and Crown and to some of the regulars there too, to float the idea of running their own 'unofficial' pop-up café. They held their first coffee morning in August and are going from strength to strength.

"We had a good number of Shorne villagers join our August pop-up café, including 4 dogs who enjoyed their dog biscuits! We were all so pleased to see one lady who had just started venturing out for the first time since March. I had rung her to see how she was and to remind her about the coffee morning.

I was glad of help from two volunteers Helen Hatmough and Lynda Davey at the first coffee morning, as tea, coffee and cake orders came in fast ... I can see now how busy the Rural Kent team must get at times ... phew ... we were quite rushed off our feet! I'm pleased now to have extra volunteers, Celia Burns and Nicola Bridges, for the September and October pop ups.

Although our tea, coffee and cake, are free of charge, we do put a donation pot out - as we know from Rural Kent's experience that people like to give back. The money raised is being put back into running future coffee mornings.

Our August and September cafes were held outside on the pub's patio area. From October



*Paul Murphy, Ruth Hensman, Nicola Bridges and Celia Burns running their pop-up café*

onwards we will be inside the pub making every effort to ensure that the pub is a safe environment for everyone. All the tables and benches are cleaned down regularly. We are very careful making sure everyone distances at tables as they sit down. We have a 'track and trace' system in place. Each refill of tea and coffee we change cups for clean ones and cake and biscuits are served with tongs by our volunteers. We're working closely with the pub to keep an eye on changing regulations and to ensure that we keep people safe whilst getting them out of isolation.

To keep residents as safe as possible, advertising the coffee morning in advance is kept to a minimum, using word of mouth, the parish magazine and our local village Facebook page, to ensure local villages are the only ones using the café.

We have added Kent information leaflets on the services and facilities available for visitors (as the Rural Kent pop-up café does). These are carefully anti-bac sprayed before handing out.

Our pop-up café is becoming a wonderful success and it is especially joyful to see people getting out to meet friends and villagers in as secure an environment as we can possibly make it."

**Ruth Hensman**

Volunteer, Shorne Pop-Up Café



*Moving out of isolation and enjoying a cuppa and a chat*

# Rural Matters!

## Carl Adams in Conversation

By James Laidlaw



**Carl Adams is the Rural & Social Enterprise Officer at Action with Communities in Rural Kent, with prime responsibility for Social Enterprise and Rural Community Led Development. Carl also leads Rural Kent's relationship with "Big Local".**

*Welcome Carl. As we continue to weather the Covid storm how well are the social enterprises in the Kent rural communities coping?*

Good question! It does depend on what they trade, for some social enterprises this is very much their time. For example, those looking to support and alleviate food poverty and mental health. Now is the time they are needed the most and to be fair it is to the Government's credit that they have diverted significant funds into social enterprises via the National Lottery Fund which allows rapid access to funds. Other examples include community shops, which have gone from being "nice to have" to being absolutely vital. Rural communities are used to isolation, so I think they're pretty resilient. Overall, I think there's less bureaucracy and things are happening much quicker; funding has been turned around in four to six weeks which has previously been unheard of.

*What are the benefits of social enterprises to rural communities in Kent?*

Each social enterprise is set up on a triple bottom line approach which is around People, Planet and Profit. Social enterprises are technically nonprofit but that can be a bit of a misnomer. They are distinct from charities in the way they have to survive, effectively social enterprises need to make a profit to survive. The benefit of

social enterprises is that they offer products and services to people who need them. But when we look at why buy? social enterprise entrepreneurs need to ensure that what they offer is every bit as good as the non social enterprise alternative. Many social enterprises bring really valuable benefits to rural communities; Covid has brought to light the essential nature of rural shops and pubs, for example, and the social value in rural communities.

*Where is the main support coming from? Who is leading the support for the rural communities across Kent?*

Kent Community Foundation have been very good, they are managing grants for trustees and that's enabled the grants to get out much quicker. The Big Lottery Fund is getting out funding support out quickly, Plunkett Foundation continue their valuable support and we at Rural Kent are ACRE's representatives in helping deliver national initiatives locally.

*What projects are you working on currently?*

I've got quite a range. One I have been working on is looking for land to establish a community that's driven through the Hari Krishna movement. This is all about better connecting people to the land, to farmland and animal husbandry. My support is around making sure they adopt the right structure and approach, connecting people to the land. I really help with developing the right structures so the project can effectively raise the funds to go forward. The output of is sustainability for this and more food security. Remember, we have a vulnerability in our food chain and it's important



that we do as much as we can to improve food sustainability. Another example I'm working with is a new community interest company called Kent Couture based out at Sandgate and expanding. Kent Couture's exciting new approach came from the Founder's experience with alternative education and innovative ideas around connecting – and reconnecting – people to place via heritage and fashion to deliver a sense of pride and belonging to rural communities in Kent

### *What have you noticed during the pandemic in rural areas that might offer some optimism for the future?*

I think the attitudes of rural communities has been terrific all round, getting on with it, which is what they do historically with humour, with passion and compassion. I think rural communities have the template. So many people are connected in rural communities through village organisations and those people who were commuting are thinking about not going back to that regular daily same commute, I sense an optimism, they have caught a glimpse of a better life and it's closer to the family

### *Where are the gaps?*

Undoubtedly unreliable poor broadband and phone signal is a major gap in rural communities. You just can't run a business without effective connectivity. There will be a lot more people starting up and running social enterprises if there is strong broadband throughout isolated communities. This is a priority and needs to be fixed.

### *What are the implications for the future?*

Missed opportunities. I think, you know, there are going to be missed opportunities for job creation. It'll force people out of the rural communities into other areas just to get a good signal.

### *Where will the greatest social enterprise need in Rural Kent be?*

This has to be our time! There are so many super

talented people who see the opportunity. And I often hear people saying to me, I have all the knowledge and the skill. I think creativity in our rural communities is really becoming very strong. How will this be realised. Well, one of the organisations we work with are Social Enterprise UK led by Peter Holbrook. Social Enterprise Places are areas where social enterprise activity is thriving and one of the real success stories is here in Ashford Kent. The programme fills a glaring hole in the SouthEast. We helped Ashford to get recognised first of all and they have proved to be a local authority that gets on with it and is fully supportive of people who want to start a social enterprise. It's rare for a CIC to get rate relief but Ashford gives that support which makes a big difference.

### *How are you supporting health and well-being and particularly sports initiatives in rural communities?*

Well, mental and physical health is vital; there's a direct correlation between a healthy body and a healthy mind and that is so important. Rural community facilities are vital and essential meeting points in a village. Work we've done in the past includes working with the sports club in Mersham and we have some upcoming work in the Mereworth, Watlington area around a new Pavilion.

### *If there is one thing that you think should be changed in ACRK supporting the rural community in Kent post COVID-19 what would this be?*

I think, to find something that replaces Leader the European Union rural grant funding post Brexit that ends in December 2020. Leader was a very effective way of delivering a range of programmes. I love the way it worked. Going forward, we could get programmes delivered to the right people, twice as fast using the principle and experience learned from the Leader Programme.

*Thank you Carl.*

# Running Thoughts on Community Under Lockdown

## Tree Shepherds

"To see a human reveal really exceptional qualities one must be able to observe his activities over many years. If these activities are completely unselfish; if the idea motivating them is unique in its magnanimity; if it is quite certain they have never looked for any reward; and if in addition they have left visible traces on the world - then one may say, without fear of error, that one is in the presence of an unforgettable character."

Jean Giono's allegorical tale written in the 1950s held a message way ahead of its time. The story of a shepherd who decides to live alone and transform the fortune of his community over forty years, with the help of a



few acorns, without seeking recognition, seems what it is: a work of fiction.

Yet, I have come to know such men and women. People who toil for communities, seeking nothing more than the peaceful pillow that accompanies magnanimity.

Look carefully and you'll find them, as the narrator finds Elzéard Bouffier. There are tree shepherds and shepherdesses in every community. Especially where we're told the land is barren, deserted of kindness

and full of vice. In these so called 'deprived' communities, you'll find unforgettable characters, leaving nothing in the hands of fate. Creating change, one acorn at time, without seeking reward.

## On Boldness

Today I witnessed two separate acts of boldness from two men. From two great friends. Both lit the touch paper of genius, power and magic. Neither knew of the other, but one led to the next. Unforeseeable incidents linked as if Prometheus was moulding clay to place us down exactly where we were. Where we should be.

Authenticity cannot exist alongside hesitancy. We reek of fear when we hesitate. In contrast, fear can be harnessed through boldness and ridden to success. Viewed this way, fear of failure is not the enemy of boldness. Fear of failure fuels boldness. There is untold power in having no Plan B.

Some want everything in place before

starting a venture or an adventure. To have their path mapped out, to agonise over plans and routes before setting off. But don't.

Put everything on the line for what you believe in. And watch the magic.

"Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself,

then providence moves too.

All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would have come his way.

Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now." - *William Hutchison Murray*

### Boots on the Ground

Running takes you places. You see things you would otherwise never see. Most of these things make you happy: a snatched glimpse of a stranger's eye, the scattering of wildlife caught unaware. The dawn that brings you back to life.

On some days though, the things you see will stop you, dead in your tracks. Yesterday was such as day.

41 pairs of boots appeared on the ground in a church yard at St. Margaret's at Cliffe, Dover. Each tagged with the name of a soldier, his age and date of death. 41 names that had already been immortalised on the local war memorial.

Runners are faced with symbolism, wherever we go. Sure, we need eyes to run unassisted, but we need vision to seek and find

meaning in the struggle.

Boots symbolise movement on foot. These boots symbolise the wilful movement toward unimaginable pain. Toward life threatening adventure, at best; the ultimate adventure come too soon, at worst.

For these men, it came too soon.

But we owe it to them to keep moving forward on foot. Steve Prefontaine once said of running: "To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift."

As I looked down at their boots I thought to myself, "To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice their gift."

There's a debt to repay. I will give my best to honour these boots; with my feet, mind and all the kindred spirits I can find.





## Tree Shepherdess for a Garden City

Ebbsfleet. A non-existent town with a train station and a football club. A town seeding a garden city, without a postcode.

It feels like one of the countless super rich takeovers of a previously struggling but soulful team. Man City will never again sing a song from the away terrace like QPR fans do: "we're the Rangers, the mighty Rangers, we never win away..." to the tune of 'In the Jungle the Mighty Jungle.'

Man City sold its soul for 30 pieces of silver. Gone is the art of gallows humour.

While most of us accept, and welcome change; few fight to protect their community as my friend Mandi does. Her tenacity knows



no bounds. Only the brave dare to forget the name of this place. Her place. Our place. Your place: Northfleet. Not Ebbsfleet. Northfleet. Not Gravesend either. Northfleet.

Mandi fights fearlessly for the heritage, heart and soul of her community, like no one else I've ever encountered in community development.

Walk around Northfleet with Mandi for an hour or two and you'll soon be overwhelmed with a sense of pride. You'll uncover fascinating facts such as Northfleet's unwavering suffrage movement and the way they are honoured through the 'Active Threads' project running today; the town's winning contribution to the Second World War via Operation PLUTO, or maybe you'll learn about the first commercial cultivation of the super food, watercress. You might even leave with a precious cookbook containing recipes linked to Northfleet's heritage in a stunning work of art.

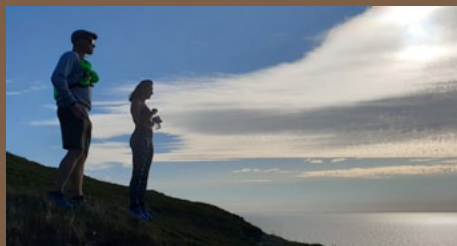
EDC: Ebbsfleet Development Corporation - developing this new Garden City, would do well win this Tree Shepherdess over.

## Prophets Walk Among Us

"Prophets Walk Among Us" - Rich Roll

One thing I've learned is that there's very little you can learn from a textbook. Enough to gain a degree, masters or PhD, maybe. But they're worthless, really. Worthless until you recognise the true prophets walking among us.

When it comes to tackling a social problem, only peer support can possibly work. There are incredible people working



in public services. I've met them. I work with them. The best of them see the prophets too. They know nothing beats a poacher turned gamekeeper.

Textbooks can't replace lived experience. If someone has lived; truly lived, then they hold the ability to teach us more in a day than it's possible to learn without human connection, in a year.

Such prophets are everywhere, covering every seemingly intractable social problem you can imagine.

Look hard enough and you'll find one for the problem you're facing. Probably right in front of you. And when you do, don't expect to be a passive recipient of expert advice.

You'll be put to work.

**Carl Adams**

[carl.adams@ruralkent.org.uk](mailto:carl.adams@ruralkent.org.uk)





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**For details and terms of our FREE Property Valuation service, visit [www.villagehallsurvey.com](http://www.villagehallsurvey.com)**

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