



Flooding at Bridge in February 2014

Picture: Tony Flashman FM3026720

£1.5m sewer repair – but will it stand days of heavy rain?

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A £1.5m repair job on sewer pipes in the Canterbury countryside will stop homes and gardens flooding with foul water, it is hoped.

Southern Water has splashed the cash on its sewerage system through Bridge and Bishopsbourne to ease the worries of villagers fearing a repeat of past disasters.

The ageing pipework has in the past struggled to cope with heavy rain, with excess groundwater causing manholes to lift and toilets to back up, forcing sewage into streets and properties.

But after checking 10km of the Elham Valley sewerage system and 260 manhole covers for leaks, the water firm has patched up 4km of pipes. Most of the repairs have been done and work continuing in Bridge and Bishopsbourne should finish this month.

Phil Barker, Southern Water's director of operations, said: "Of course, the performance of any sewer system can never be



Malcolm Mitchell

guaranteed due to ground movements, the invasion of tree roots and the like, but we are confident that, after such a significant investment, the performance of the sewer network along the Nailbourne has been improved considerably."

In February last year villages in the Elham Valley were hit by some of the worst flooding this century, sparking considerable

relief work and improvements by Southern Water.

As a result, the firm did not need to over-pump last winter, despite groundwater levels at the Little Bucket borehole peaking at 85m – three metres higher than when it was forced to pump water away the previous year.

Mr Barker said: "That winter was not as wet as the record-breaking winter of 2013/14 but was still wetter than average, underlining that our investment in the local sewer network has improved its performance."

The company says it has also tightened its maintenance regimes and made improvements to its pumping stations to make sure that, should groundwater enter the network, it can be got away as quickly as possible.

Former Bishopsbourne parish councillor Malcolm Mitchell, who has closely monitored and experienced the flooding problems, said: "I think it's fair to say Southern Water is doing all it can, short of putting in a completely new sewer system, which it can't afford. But the acid test will be when we get a lot of prolonged heavy rain again."

➔ What do you think? Email kentishgazette@thekmgroup.co.uk or write to Gazette House, 5-8 Boorman Way, Wraik Hill, Whitstable, CT5 3SE.

Victory in battle to prevent closure of Mill Centre

Oct 1
2015

A vital village facility has been saved for the community after the city council completed a U-turn and agreed not sell it off.

A campaign to save the Mill Centre in Bridge, which is home to Cubs, Scouts and Guides groups, has been fought for several years.

The Mill Centre Community Trust had tried to put forward a business plan for the long-term running of the building, which has been under threat of sale since 2012.

All looked lost in July last year when the Tory council voted to give users a year's notice to quit, after which it would be put up for sale, probably for redevelopment.

Now the new council's policy and resources committee has reversed the decision and offered the parish council a 30-year lease on the building.

But it still needs an estimated £250,000 to refurbish and update the building.

Council leader Simon Cook made an election pledge in May to save the Mill Centre.



Nailbourne Beavers and Scouts protesting against the possible closure of their Scout hall at the Mill Centre, Bridge

But he declared an interest and did not speak or vote at the meeting because of his association with the local Cubs which use the hall.

After the meeting he said there would be a community effort to

raise the funds needed, as well as applications made for grants.

Parish council clerk Philip Wicker said the future of the hall would now be discussed at a meeting of members on October 8.

Country estate owner plans to turn manor house into a hotel



'I love the old place
and my heart is here'



Above, Bridge Place owner Peter Malkin has decided to hold on to his historic property despite interest by rock star Brian May, right, who came to view the property last month
Picture: Barry Duffield FM3870943



Mr Malkin on his grand staircase, centre, one of the impressive bedroom featuring an opulent four-poster bed, and right, the bar area with chandeliers and portraits
Picture left by Barry Goodwin FM2494109, centre by Strutt and Parker, right by Barry Goodwin FM2494126

Exclusive

by Chris Pragnell

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The owner of a sumptuous country estate on the outskirts of the city has revealed plans to open a luxury hotel.

Colourful businessman Peter Malkin had put Bridge Place Manor on the market for £2,360,000 – and attracted interest and a visit from legendary Queen guitarist Brian May.

But Mr Malkin, who has owned the historic manor for almost half-a-century, has now decided to stay put and expand operations instead.

He plans to open the opulent rooms to the public later this year, and is also set to roll out the entertainments schedule to include regular live music events.

“I love the old place and my heart is here,” he told the Gazette.

“My dear boy Oliver is going to come home and help me run it.

“It’s a stunning setting and we are sure that people will love staying here. It’s really old English with antique mirrors, pictures and original staircases from 1638.

“People will love the chance to stay in a truly historic property.”

The Malkins plan to offer eight five-star double rooms, with breakfast included, at about £160-180 per night.

Rooms boasts oak-pannelled walls, four-poster beds and antique furniture, including suits of armour.

The hotel will also offer smaller rooms starting from £60.

And from next Spring, the Malkins hope to open the five-acre site as a wedding venue.

Currently the house is used for a monthly country club night, but the owners plan to introduce extra entertainment events to the schedule.

“We’re going to have not only

the club as usual, but we’re starting a jazz night too. It’ll be the first Saturday of every month,” said the 76-year-old.

“We want the house to be associated with live music again.”

Last month the Gazette revealed that rock star Brian May was among high-net individuals who had expressed an interest in the property.

At the time, Mr Malkin refused to be drawn on reports that had placed May in the area on the day of open-house viewings.

But he now admits the guitarist visited, and says the star was smitten by the house.

“He was delighted. He loved the woodwork, the mirrors, the suits of armour,” said Mr Malkin.

Mr Malkin’s son Oliver, now 34, will move back to the home next month.

Mr Malkin said: “He was born here and feels this is his home. He was very upset at the thought of it being sold.

“I’ve got his name scribed into the woodwork.”

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MANOR FOR SALE



Peter Malkin, owner of Bridge Place Manor

Is rock royalty Brian May rushing headlong to Bridge?

Exclusive

by **Chris Pragnell**

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Legendary Queen guitarist Brian May is rumoured to be eyeing up a sumptuous country estate on the outskirts of the city.

Colourful businessman Peter Malkin has put Bridge Place Manor on the market for £2,360,000 – slashing the asking price by hundreds of thousands since it was last for sale.

May, worth in excess of £80million, has been seen in the village in recent days, according to unconfirmed reports.

Mr Malkin has told the Gazette that a mystery celebrity – known the world over – has viewed the historic property and is expressing “keen interest”.

But he refuses to be drawn on the star’s identity, saying only that a singer and guitarist who is “a household name” has viewed his home.

“We’ve had a lot of interest from buyers looking for a fantastic family home,” said the 76-year-old. “There are a couple of musicians among them.”

“Two parties are expressing keen interest and one of those is a very big name – international – in the entertainment industry.

“He was delighted. He loved the woodwork, the mirrors, the suits of armour.”

Bridge Place Manor has a rich musical heritage and has hosted a variety of stars including Robert Plant and Eric Clapton, says Mr Malkin.

He has owned the Grade II-listed 17th century manor for almost 50 years. It is sat within five acres of unspoiled Kentish countryside and boasts eight bedrooms and landscaped gardens fronting a river.

May, 67, achieved global stardom as



Queen legend Brian May is rumoured to be eyeing up Bridge Place

guitarist with rock band Queen alongside frontman Freddie Mercury, who died in 1991.

Queen enjoyed phenomenal success with hits including Bohemian Rhapsody, I Want to Break Free and We Will Rock You, and May’s wealth is said to derive from royalties.

An animal rights campaigner as well as an astrophysicist, he is known to have links with the Canterbury area, having supported the Lord Whisky Animal Sanctuary in Stelling Minnis.

He is married to second wife Anita Dobson, who achieved fame playing Queen Vic landlady Angie Watts in BBC1 soap opera EastEnders.

If May snaps up Bridge Place Manor, the house will add to his portfolio of properties which includes an £11million home in London’s Kensington.

In 1993 Mr Malkin hit the headlines when he used the property to hide his young son from the authorities during a bitter custody battle with his ex-wife.

Having snatched the youngster in France and brought him back to Kent,



Mr Malkin was jailed for eight months for contempt of court.

Mr Malkin said: “I love the place and it holds only good memories. I’m a passionate man and what’s in the past is in the past.

“It’s time to downsize now. We’ve done a gigantic amount of work here. I’m a perfectionist.

“We had it on the market before for over £3,000,000. I think at that time we hadn’t done enough work.

“I’m confident it will sell now.”

A former jazz club manager, Mr Malkin says he has “earned excellent money” over the years, as well as “coming from money”.

He has always worked and says he is not planning to retire.

“I wasn’t terribly good at school – I liked history, but that was it really,” he said. “I did a number of jobs. I was a hod carrier. I worked on a farm. In fact they sacked me because my side of the haystack fell down.

“I also worked on a chicken farm but they sacked me too. I refused to strangle the chickens.”

Mr Malkin found his way into the

music industry, running clubs across the county. He also began channeling his money into restoring historic buildings.

Bridge Place has been a labour of love, he says, and has a rich musical pedigree.

“We’ve had the Moody Blues, The Kinks, The Yardbirds, Led Zeppelin, Manfred Mann – they’ve all been here,” he said.

He is now ready for new owners to take on the property.

“I’m not planning to retire. I’ll stay living locally and will probably take on a pub, maybe more than one, in the locality,” he said.

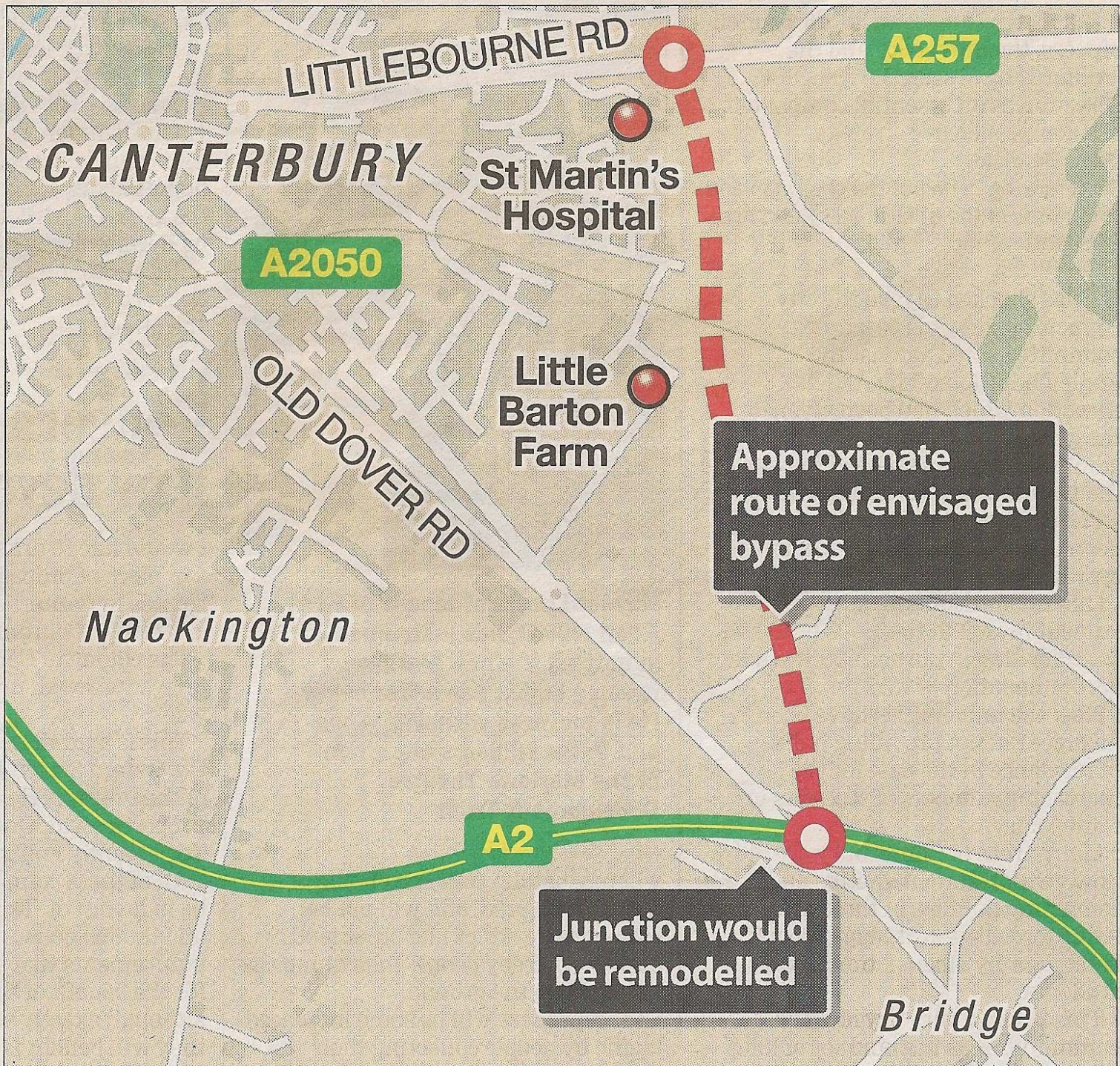
Once a month the property is used for Bridge Country Club social events, with bands and DJs performing.

Mr Malkin says the events will continue until the house is sold.

➔ What do you think? Email kentishgazette@thekmgroup.co.uk or write to Gazette House, 5-8 Boorman Way, Wraik Hill, Whitstable, CT5 3SE

18.6.2015

VISION FOR THE FUTURE:



CANTERBURY

A2050

A257

St Martin's Hospital

Little Barton Farm

Approximate route of envisaged bypass

Nackington

A2

Junction would be remodelled

Bridge

Transport 'fabrication' claim denied in housing strategy

Transport bosses face claims they relied on "fabricated" traffic analysis to support the council's preferred development vision for the city.

In an attack on its congestion research, the authority is also accused of passing off test results as "comprehensive" when it is said they are anything but.

It is proposing 15,600 homes across Canterbury, Herne Bay and Whitstable – with most built in and around the city.

According to the council, studies of computer-generated traffic simulation show that focusing the bulk of the new housing in Canterbury is the best option.

But this week a government inquiry into the city council's housing and transport masterplan was told the authority's own research suggests otherwise.

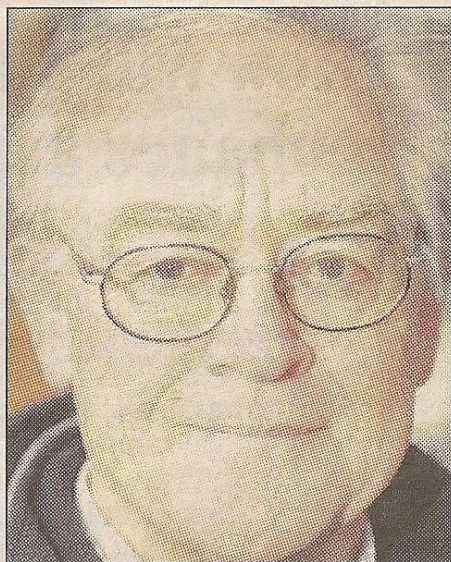
Dr Geoff Meaden, transport representative for The Canterbury Society, said he had found the council's conclusions suspicious.

"As I read through it was clear that the more dispersed development options were achieving better results," he said. So he was surprised at the conclusion that Option One 'appears to have a marginally better performance than the other options'."

Option One most closely matched the council's preferred strategy of placing most new housing in Canterbury rather than dispersing it over smaller district sites, said Dr Meaden.

But his own analysis of the same data reached the opposite conclusion. "My suspicions were confirmed and the results strongly appear to be a fabrication of the truth," he said.

"Although there is not a big dif-



Dr Geoff Meaden

ference between scores, Option One is shown to be the least preferred development scenario."

Canterbury City Council's Local Plan is being examined by an agent answerable to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Contained in it are proposals for the first 4,800 homes in south Canterbury, 1,000 in Sturry and Broad Oak, 1,300 in Hillborough, 800 at Strode Farm in Herne, 300 at Greenhill, 600 at the former Herne Bay Golf Club and 400 near Duncan Down in Whitstable.

Attached to the Plan is the draft transport strategy, which envisages a £100m series of link roads on the city's outskirts to ease congestion in the historic centre.

Dr Meaden said: The present district transport strategy has been carefully worded so as to appear that it has been carried out comprehensively. But it overlooks the fact that it has no answers to the concerns of the people of Canterbury.

"We have no idea about how the present development sce-

nario would compare with others – although we do have a very strong idea that the present development option would not best resolve traffic congestion."

Richard Moore, transport manager for Canterbury City Council, admitted the traffic modelling had not necessarily thrown up the council's preferred option as best.

He told the inquiry: "In broad terms the results were inconclusive. The council looked at three strategies from the outset: one was a focus of development in Canterbury, the second was Canterbury plus Herne and coastal areas, and the third was much more dispersal.

"We were surprised the Canterbury focus didn't come out more strongly recommended. We felt having much more in Canterbury would show more benefits."

But Mr Moore denied claims the council had solely favoured one development option. He said: "The flaw in Dr Meaden's argument is that we used that [research] to prefer Option One. We didn't adopt that approach.

"We used the modelling results to see which option could deliver a modal shift [getting people from cars into public transport].

"We didn't just go for Option One. We went for a hybrid solution, which had a large site in Canterbury but sites outside, too. A site in Hersden was not in option one, for example."

➤ What do you think? Email kentishgazette@thekmgroun.co.uk or write to Gazette House, 5-8 Boorman Way, Wraik Hill, Whitstable, CT5 3SE.

30.7.2015

TALKING POLITICS

'I want most of what we do to be driven by people'

New council leader Simon Cook is the man with the district's immediate future in his hands. He sat down with Alex Claridge to talk traffic, transparency and million-dollar

The council does not always know best.

This plain message weaves its way through Simon Cook's first major interview since he took the reins as new city council leader a few days after the May 7 election.

His party had just romped to victory, taking 31 of the 39 seats.

But if you believed the noises coming from some corners of the city, Labour and Lib Dems were poised to take at least 20 seats between them and restore the leftist coalition which enjoyed power in the district in the late 90s and early noughties.

This, the theory held, was largely the result of a series of unpopular proposals made by the Conservative group, most notably the failed Westgate Towers traffic trial and Kingsmead Field sell-off and latterly the controversial Local Plan.

In the four years before polling day, campaigners looked upon the iron leadership of John Gilbey with contempt. His successors, it is clear, realised there was a pressing need for a change of management style.

Simon's voice lacks the richness and authority of his predecessor, but this belies the fact that he comfortably possesses the sharpest mind in the council.

"But we shouldn't always think that doesn't mean we know best," the 39-year-old says.

"Local knowledge is very important and if people come to us and point things out and say you could do this better, then we will listen. They are the bosses and we owe it to them to engage as much as possible."

Simon has become city council leader at a time when people choose to judge their politicians not on their merits, but their backgrounds.

We have just endured a general election when candidates flaunted their working class credentials and experience of something called "the real world".

Our new leader makes no secret of the fact that he lacks the former. Born in Coventry, he went to the private King Edward VIII's School before winning a place at Oxford University, where he gained a first in engineering.

A work placement with an engineering firm was followed by one at a city trading firm and Simon decided he preferred the latter.

He was soon employed as a trader for asset management firm Schroeders in the City of London. He then moved to hedge

fund CQS, which is owned by an Australian billionaire who appears on The Sunday Times Rich List.

The job took him to the trading floors of Hong Kong for an incredibly successful stint until the financial crash of 2008 cost him his job.

He, his doctor wife Amanda, and daughter Becky returned to the UK and settled in Renville, a hamlet based around an old farm north of Bridge and one of the most affluent pockets of the district.

Amanda, 38, and Simon then effectively swapped roles. She

'Local knowledge is very important and if people come to us and point things out and say you could do this better, then we will listen. They are the bosses and we owe it to them to engage as much as possible'

returned to medicine and he became a house husband.

Politics soon became his life. But why?

"It might sound trite, but I wanted to do things for people. I felt like there was something I could do.

"And like any Conservative I believe in small government, low taxes and letting people get on with their lives.

"We need to be able to spend other people's money as wisely as possible. It's not our money."

It is a view which will chime with many in Britain who see the institutions of the state as too profligate, too cumbersome, too overbearing.

Such thinking led the previous Conservative administration to reduce the city council from 50 to 39 members.

And it is a view endorsed by the district's electorate as voters handed the group a resounding victory at the polls. Was this a surprise?

"I thought we would retain control, but I am surprised at how well we did. We won a seat

in Westgate, traditionally a Lib Dem ward, and we did incredibly well in Barton, where we won all three, especially thanks to Steve Williams, who really stood up for the ward.

"When people are unhappy, they make a noise about it, but on the whole I just think people are pretty happy with the way things are run in Canterbury."

Simon's administration inherits a council in rude financial health and far better placed than its neighbours to weather future local government spending cuts.

But the way the council will govern changed fundamentally on May 7. It agreed to scrap the executive style, where a group of comprising members of the ruling party wielded power, and replaced it with old-style committees, each of which reflect the actual political balance of the council.

The switch came with a promise that the council would involve the people of the district every step of the way in its decision-making, to "engage with them", as Simon puts it.

When the Kentish Gazette put the authority to the test and asked what the details were of the new development at Kingsmead, we were met with a wall of resistance.

A press officer claimed it was because of "commercial confidentiality", a pretext deployed because in fact the council has no intention of involving us all the way. We only wanted to know how many businesses, student flats and homes we are going to get.

Not a great a start, then, for our new cuddly local authority. So much for "engaging". An approach to the new council leader was met with the response that he would not be able to bring the public the information it yearns to know.

Is this how it's going to be for the rest of the four-year cycle of the council?

"Absolutely not. And the area member panels for Canterbury, Whitstable, Herne Bay and the

TALKING POLITICS



Cllr Simon Cook, Canterbury City Council's new leader

Picture: Wayne McCabe FM3862675

rural areas should be the key place where residents and councillors interact.

“We should be listening to advice and heeding those people who come forward with something fresh.”

Our clogged roads are one of the most consistently raised issues, especially in Canterbury, which sucks in workers, school pupils and students from miles around.

Does the new leader have the solution to the congestion, especially along the A28 where it is at its worst?

“If I was the dictator of Canterbury, I would create an eastern relief road which would

relieve pressure on the A28. In an ideal world, it would go from the Sturry Road park, go behind the council offices and courts and link up to the A257 Littlebourne Road.

‘We need to be able to spend other people’s money as wisely as possible. It’s not our money’

“It would be fantastic if this happened, but the fact is that it’s going to be difficult to get the money for it. And is it’s not our money, we need to be very careful about how it’s spent.”

But Simon is not a dictator,

he is a politician determined to place the experience and knowledge of the district at the forefront of the council.

What results that will bring is uncertain. Less money, more public involvement and a more laborious decision-making system will each impact heavily on the authority’s work.

But Simon is nevertheless convinced of his approach: “I want most of what we do to be driven by the people.

“The council cannot be arrogant to think it knows best and we must be open to the fact that there are times when people simply know better.”



Liberal Democrat councillor Mike Sole and Conservative Simon Cook have both pledged to oppose the sale of the Mill Centre in Bridge, shown above before renovation work in 2012

Picture: Mike Sole

Rivals' pre-election war of words over the future of village centre

by Gerry Warren

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A war of words has broken out between rival councillors in Bridge over the future of its community centre.

Liberal Democrat Mike Sole has dismissed the claims of Tory councillor Simon Cook that he will fight to keep the Mill Centre open if he is re-elected in May

– despite the executive already deciding to sell it off.

The centre is used by Scouts, Guides, Cubs and Beavers as well as a gym club but they are all on notice to quit by September.

Now the centre has become a political football as Cllr Sole and Cllr Cook go head-to-head in the new Nailbourne ward.

Cllr Cook said last week he will fight to overturn the decision to shut the centre if he wins the seat. But Cllr Sole said: “The

Conservative-run council voted to sell the Mill Centre in face of huge local opposition.

“Time and time again the decision was challenged and each time the Tories supported the decision to sell.

“Whatever Cllr Cook may be promising now, he has not been able to deliver while a councillor for the ruling group, so it is incredulous and blatant electioneering that he now claims to be able to do so after the election.

“All he is promising is a vote that will not be supported by his Conservative colleagues.

“The Liberal Democrats have already made a pre-election pledge that if they are running the council after the elections on May 7 they we will reverse this unpopular decision.

“I believe that we should be investing in local communities rather than ripping out these assets and investing the proceeds in council reserves. This is why

we will remove the Mill Centre from sale and instead enter negotiations with the village to grant a long-term lease, without extortionate rent, so that these organisations can have a future in Bridge.”

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