

Borough Green has used Highway lighting columns for 37 years for our Christmas Lights, and at least 15 years for hanging baskets, which we change twice a year.

KCC have tried before to charge us for the privilege of using these columns, but we have resisted strongly. Cllr Rayner has defused the situation in the past by paying for these demands out of his member's grant.

The latest demand amounted to £3600, negotiated down to £1750 by Harry, and we paid £250, being what we believed to be a fair amount for safety checks of a hanging basket and a Christmas Light, and an admin charge for a bulk permit.

Currently TMBC match fund BGPC's grant of about £2000 to the Christmas Lights Committee, the rest being raised from public donations. It is extremely likely that TMBC may have to withdraw this grant in the near future, meaning we will be spending local money not on village enhancements, but topping up just to fill KCC's coffers.

KCC would have us believe this is about safety. But these columns have been here for 30 years to my knowledge, and KCC have been unable to provide any evidence that they are unsafe or deteriorating, except a few pictures from around the country where they have been knocked down in traffic accidents. And if they were on the margins of safety, the new LED heads are far lighter than the old sodiums, and our Christmas Lights have reduced in weight and wind loading by over 50% in the past few years.

This has nothing whatsoever to do with safety and everything to do with a cash strapped KCC trying to gouge a few pounds from whatever source they think they can bully. It is extremely curious that all these columns have suddenly developed identical safety related faults and require replacement at the same time.

The safety report is fatally flawed. Half the columns are listed as on roads that do not exist in BG, and the other half are listed on the wrong road. We have 3 columns where we paid KCC to install power supplies - they have never worked.

Their latest stunt is to tell us that we will not be allowed to mount attachments to the old columns at all. Well I have news for you - we have already paid the fees with Harry's help, so they are going up, and we will be guarding them to ensure KCC don't take them down again. A great story in the papers

We have offered what we believe to be a fair load check fee, and a fair annual fee, we already own these columns, we already pay for the safety checks through KCC's exorbitant Council Tax charges, and our tax paid to HMRC.

If KCC continue to push this, we will just stop Christmas Lights and Hanging Baskets altogether, and KCC will not then get a penny from us. The amount they want will kill village enhancements.

Add to this the fact that KCC have been slowly failing its services to us for years, with Parishes taking up the slack at their own expense. My Clerk calculated that just the past 10 years totals £50,000, not counting labour costs. We are happy to take on responsibilities as partners, but we will not be bullied into also paying for that privilege. Perhaps KCC can contra their trumped up charges against these debts.

Final point - this is the only aspect of Highways that purports to be pro-active - seeking out a fault before it happens, rather than their standard approach which is to wait for us to report a failure, and then repair many many months later, if at all.

I urge this Board to recommend that KCC withdraw these demands and step down the bullying and harassment of Borough Green, Hadlow, and all the other villages who try and do their best for their residents.

Invoice to KCC below

BOROUGH GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

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INVOICE

Kent County Council
Highways Department

1st March 2022

Item		Amount
Saltbin Installation	20@ £180	£3600
Annual Salt Supply	10@ £350	£3500
Gritter Contribution	1 @ £2000	£2000
Emergency gritting cover	10@ £200	£2000
Annual Cut Highway Hedges	10@ £300	£3000
Regular Grass Cutts H'way Land	10@ £400	£4000
Purchase & Installation Gateways	1@ £13000	£13000
Purchase & Installation Road Signs	4@ £250	£1000
Maintenance PROWS	10@£200	£2000
Installation PROW gates stiles	4@ £250	£1000
Insp Potholes, signs,gullies etc	10@£300	£3000
Installation Rock Rd Planter	1@ £9000	£9000
Replacement HB brackets	6@ £175	£1050
Replacement Baskets lost	3@ £120	£360
Christmas/Party Road Closures	12@ £500	£6000
Monitoring Mineral Sites	10@£500	£5000
	Total	£50,510