

Tonbridge and Malling Briefing Note

Winter response Friday 1st Feb to Sunday 3rd Feb

Weather

The snow that arrived on Friday during the evening traffic peak broadly across the mid Kent area and settled quickly on both the A229 Bluebell Hill and the A249 Detling Hill.

The detailed Met Weather forecast that we receive specifically to inform gritting predicted rain across the county with a low possibility of snow flurries. We received an updated forecast at 18:30 which detailed up to 5 cm of snow. We had already sent the gritters out to complete gritting by 20:30 and when these returned to the depots, we instructed dedicated gritters to patrol and grit both Bluebell Hill and Detling Hill and carried out a further gritting run of the west of the county.

Whilst the snow was not forecast by the Met Office, preparations throughout the week for earlier predictions of snow ensured that all KCC and District severe weather emergency plans (SWEP) were in place and operational.

For all information on which routes we grit and how we treat snow and ice conditions on the network these are outline on our website [KCC Winter Service](#)

Emergency Response

The Highways Senior Duty Officer (SDO) was informed around midnight that 2 out of hours officers were attending Walderslade Woods after numerous reports of trees falling over stranded vehicles. Drivers had in the main abandoned their vehicles at this time and no injuries were reported. The scene when the officers arrived consisted of a very high volume of fallen and leaning trees over the highway almost the entire length of Walderslade Woods. Our emergency tree surgeon services for both West and East Kent were contacted and within 2 hours around 18 tree surgeons had arrived at the scene with large plant and cutting equipment. Trees were continuing to fall whilst the crews were on site, so the road was closed. The decision was made to cut up and remove all fallen trees and also to fell any leaning trees to remove further risk.

By 08:00 hrs the crews had felled around 80 trees throughout the night in both Walderslade Road and Boxley Road and were estimating that a further 100 may need to be felled.

KRF worked with NHS and Social Services to identify any vulnerable residents and these were contacted by telephone to check their wellbeing. Residents that could not be contacted by telephone were visited by a Salvation Army volunteer. Throughout the incident no vulnerable residents reported any issues.

On Sunday the road was closed again in order to remove the final fallen and leaning trees. Chipping plant was brought in to remove larger limbs from the carriageway and JCBs cleared the road of debris and remaining snow to fully re-open the road by Sunday afternoon. Around 200 trees in total have been felled and cleared.

Trees

Heavy snow fall can in some circumstances cause damage to trees. Significant snow damage to trees is not a frequent occurrence and depends on the moisture content of the snow. Wet snow is heavier and more damaging because it can accumulate on the trees branches and freezes in very cold temperatures. This added weight of wet snow on branches is sometimes more than the tree can support, and the result can be snapping branches or failure of the tree.

KCC inspect all trees adjacent to the highway every 5 years and instruct safety works to remove dead or dangerous trees on priority-based timescales. Trees on Walderslade Woods were inspected within the last year and were found to be in good condition. Due to the heavy snow fall, Walderslade Woods was re-inspected on the morning of Monday 4th February with no trees identified as a safety concern.

A further inspection is planned later this week of the wider Walderslade area to assess if any further action is required.

Follow-up works will be programmed within the next fortnight to allow for the clearance of the aftermath of this exceptional event.



Scene on Saturday 2nd February – Morning



Scene Saturday afternoon on Saturday 2nd February