

Winter2026


GULLANDS
SOLICITORS

InBrief

The Magazine of Gullands Solicitors



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Welcome to InBrief

We have been celebrating the success of small businesses in Maidstone and Gravesham in recent weeks following the High Street Heroes Awards and the Gravesham Business Awards. Small businesses are the lifeblood of the economy and our high streets, and they need all the support they can get at the moment. By championing them, their products, services and staff we are trying to do 'our bit' to raise awareness of them and encourage more people to use them.

A pound spent with a local business typically goes back into the local economy, supporting the jobs, livelihoods and families of many others.

January is a month when many people make life decisions. We have some guidance for those looking to move on in life from their current relationship, wanting to resolve issues with their neighbours and for those considering Wills and Inheritance Tax rule changes to Agricultural Property Relief or Business Property Relief.

Finally, a warning and reminder for new drivers on the risks of having their licence revoked. We look at some of the frequent issues which can lead to multiple points on your driving licence.

As always if our team can help with any of these or other issues you or your business are facing, get in touch today.



With best wishes

John Roberts
Managing Partner



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Urban Blue Bus

Practice Manager Paul Mannering (back right) paid a visit to see the team at the Urban Blue Bus and to talk about their work in the town. We are delighted to support them and their outreach work in the town. The charity supports those using the night time bars, restaurants and other facilities in Maidstone, providing first aid and welfare support for those who need it.

The team of volunteers provide a safe space for those who need it and they provide first aid cover for local community events including bank holiday raves, youth football tournaments, Maidstone Pride and the Christmas lights switch on.

Come and see us!

Our team are at a number of events in 2026 including:



Kent Farming Conference

Wednesday 21 January 2026, Kent County Showground, Detling.

BIFGA Technical Day

Wednesday 25 February 2026, Weald of Kent Golf Club.

Maidstone Business Show

Thursday 26 February 2026, Mercure Maidstone, Great Danes Hotel.

Farm Expo

Wednesday 4 March 2026, Kent County Showground, Detling.

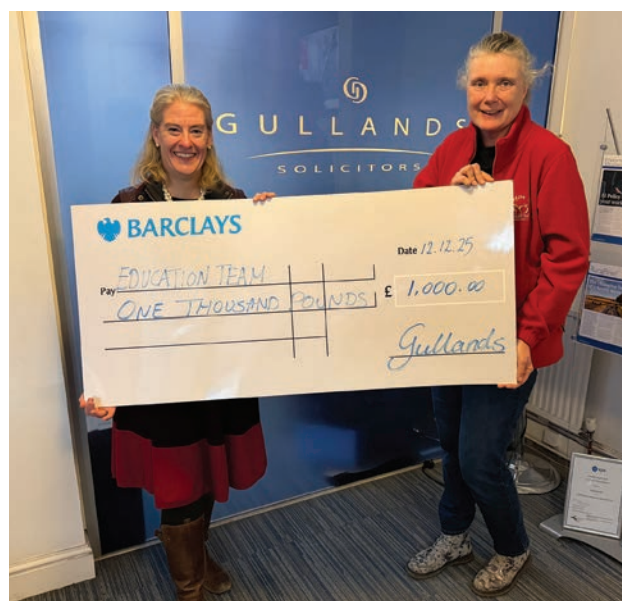
Vaisakhi

Saturday 18 April 2026, Sri Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara, Gravesend.

Weald of Kent Ploughing Match

Saturday 12 September 2026, venue tbc.

Charity donation



Partner Catherine Lloyd left with Mandy Hounsell Education Officer.

We were delighted to make a donation to the National Fruit Show Education Team to help them expand their work in schools and at events talking to children and young people about all things apples and pears.

Maidstone's High Street Heroes Awards winners announced

The winners of the Maidstone High Street Heroes Awards 2025 were announced, Thursday 13th November. The Awards are organised by Gullands Solicitors in partnership with One Maidstone Bid and Metro Bank to say thank you to Maidstone's high street business owners and their employees who have provided excellent customer service throughout the year.



Thirty-two town centre businesses were nominated by members of the public and the winners are:

Café/Coffee shop Winner:

Café Beck

Pub/Micro-brewery Winner:

Craft Brewed

Pub/Micro-brewery runner up:

Market House

Restaurant Winner:

Frédéric Bistro

Fast food/Takeaway Winner:

Chunky's Sandwich Bar

Charity shop/Charity Winner:

Handmade with love by Making Miracles

Charity shop/Charity runners up:

Maidstone Street Pastors

Making a difference to Maidstone

Circle of Friends

Mid Kent Mind

Hair/beauty/Tattoo Winner:

Man Cave

Hair/beauty/Tattoo runners up:

Spirits health and beauty

Rush

Bisi beauty

Hollywood nails and beauty

Entertainment/Leisure Winner:

Kentish Lady River Cruises

Entertainment/Leisure runners up:

Bierkeller

Ovation

Creative Maidstone Community Arts Hub

Retail Winner:

N2 Sweet labs

Retail runners up:

Salamander

House of Meat

Mr T's Jewellers

Grimhilda's Kitchen

R&B Fashion accessories

Home Media

Choice Carpets

Financial/Professional Services/Property Winner:

The Health Hut

Financial/Professional Services/Property runners up:

Marcus Niblett and Suzanne therapies

Express cabs

Individual employee Winner:

Jade from Mid Kent Mind

Individual employee runners up:

Kasia from Wildwood

Tom from the Deaf Cat

Cora from Making a difference to Maidstone

Emily from Rush

Barry (Baz) from The Mall security

Carlone from Salamander

Nigel from Maidstone Street pastors

Hollie from Ovation

Danny from Ovation

Amanda from Mid Kent Mind

Ulric from Frédéric Bistro

Jake from Mancave

Janice from Urban Blue Bus

Judges award Winner:

Circle of Friends



Paul Mannering, Business Manager at Gullands, who hosted the event at Maidstone United Football Club, said: "It was wonderful to see so many local business owners and their staff come together to celebrate the fantastic work happening on our high street. The Gullands High Street Heroes Awards are all about showing the public's appreciation for the excellent customer service that makes Maidstone's town centre such a great place to visit. We're proud to support and champion our fellow high street businesses."

"The best part about these awards is that they're driven by the public, we never know who will be nominated. Each of the businesses nominated have done something truly amazing over the past year that has made a customer stop and say thank you, and that's what truly makes them heroes of our high street."

Public voting took place throughout September 2025, and the award nominations were judged in October by a team from Gullands, One Maidstone Bid Team and Metro Bank. No one went away empty handed, as there were winners for each category and then everyone nominated received a certificate.



Gravesham Business Awards 2025



It was an evening of sparkle and anticipation as 15 of Gravesham's top companies and apprentices gathered for the prestigious Gravesham Business Awards 2025 at the Inn on the Lake.

The evening was opened by Gravesham MP Dr Lauren Sullivan who spoke about the increased million-pound investment support the government was providing to the area.

She was followed by youth work manager Jackie Coupar from the evening's charity Gravesend Network Development explaining the opportunities her charity had given to young people in Gravesham. The raffle for her organisation raised £1001 and she said it would make a huge difference to their work.

Judge and Gullands Partner Julie Hobson said: *"The Gravesham Business Awards have become an integral part of the Gravesham business community, showcasing the best of our diverse local economy."*

"All of us judging the awards had a very hard task judging all of the entries with so many inspiring successes across many industries."

"This year's finalists and the winners of each award category were well deserved, congratulations to everyone who took part."

The category winners are:

The People's Choice, as voted by the public

– **Zoe Adele Performing Arts**

Best Apprentice Award – **Joshua Reeve**

Best Hospitality – **Iron Pier Brewery and Taproom**

Best Youth Owned Award – **Total Line Marking Ltd**

Best High Street Award – **JMV Cars Ltd**

Best Community Award – **Cyclopark**

Best Environmental Award – **MDCV UK**

Best Manufacturing Award – **Iron Pier Brewery**

Best Innovation Award – **G & T Events Ltd**

Best Family Owned Award – **Maucare Services**

Best Not for Profit Award – **ellenor**

Best Cyber Protection Awards – **MCC Partners**

Best Professional Consultancy Award – **Embridge Consulting**

Best Health and Wellbeing Award – **Mindful Movement Studio**



Budget changes - time to act

Following the November 2025 budget and a further government announcement in December, there is now greater clarity on the changes to Business Property Relief (BPR) and Agricultural Property Relief (APR).

After 6 April 2026, Inheritance Tax (IHT) will be charged at 20% on business or agricultural assets which exceed the new £2.5m allowance and nil rate band allowance. Some good news is that the £2.5m allowance is also going to be transferable between spouses.

This means after 6 April 2026, a married couple with qualifying assets will be able to leave £5.65m free of IHT (this is two APR/BPR £2.5m allowances and two nil rate bands of £325,000). If either of their estate is valued under £2m on death, then a further £350,000 residence nil rate band may be available.

It is worth remembering that pensions will be brought into the scope of IHT from 6 April 2027.

Those with qualifying assets should now review the total value of their assets and their Wills and consider their options for efficient tax planning which could include:

1. Bringing forward succession plans to bring the next generation into the business or farm now.
2. Making gifts. If you are going to make gifts to children or grandchildren, then consider how the gift is held by them. This will depend on their age and personal circumstances. You need to survive seven years for the gift to fall out of your estate if it is made before 6 April 2026. However, if you were to die after 6 April 2026, only the first £2.5m (or £5m if you are married) would be covered by 100% BPR or APR during the seven-year period, so timing could be crucial.
3. Consider a trust. A trust can be useful to help pass on shares or assets owned by a family business. A family trust could be used and there is usually no IHT to pay on trust assets when one of the beneficiaries dies. Instead, there is a IHT liability paid every ten years on the market value of the trust assets at a maximum rate of 6%. This is much easier to plan for than a potential 40% IHT liability on death if the assets are owned personally.

All of these options should be considered along with your general tax planning advice, and we are happy to work with your accountants to ensure any changes made are accurately reflected in your Will.

Alex Astley can be contacted at s.astley@gullands.com



Separation and New Beginnings

Separation is one of life's most significant transitions. It can bring a mix of emotions including uncertainty, relief, anxiety and hope, all at once. As you approach this new chapter, clarity, preparation and support will help you make decisions that protect your children, your finances and your future.

What Makes Separation Challenging?

Breaking up with a partner can feel overwhelming because it often requires confronting complex legal, emotional and practical issues at once. Many people delay thinking about separation for fear of conflict or the unknown. However, understanding your situation early helps you make calm, informed choices rather than reacting under pressure.

A proactive approach can reduce uncertainty, limit emotional strain and help avoid disputes escalating later.

Understanding Your Separation Options

Separation does not have to follow one rigid path. There are several ways you can approach it, depending on your relationship, communication and personal circumstances. These may include:

- Traditional separation or divorce with individual solicitors
- Mediation
- Resolution Together (one solicitor for both parties)
- Trial separation
- Staying together with professional support

Choosing the right approach early can save time, cost and emotional stress.

Talking About Separation Calmly

Having a thoughtful and measured conversation with your partner is often the first step. It can help to:

- Choose a calm moment and private setting

- Focus on practical arrangements rather than blame
- Be clear about what you need to consider next
- Agree to take independent advice if needed

If there are concerns around safety or emotional wellbeing, professional support should be sought immediately.

Putting Children First

Children's wellbeing should remain central throughout separation. While every family is different, children benefit most when parents communicate respectfully and prioritise stability.

Key considerations include:

- Reassuring children that the separation is not their fault
- Protecting them from adult conflict or legal discussions
- Avoiding asking them to take sides or make adult decisions
- Maintaining routines around school, friendships and activities
- Creating clear and consistent arrangements for time with each parent

Parents are encouraged to focus on what works best for their children both now and in the future, recognising that arrangements may need to adapt as children grow.

Looking After Your Emotional Wellbeing

Separation can bring emotional ups and downs, even where the decision is mutual. It is important to look after yourself during this period.

You may find support through:

- Friends and family
- Counselling or therapy
- Divorce coaches or wellbeing professionals
- Taking time to plan, reflect and adjust

A new year often represents a chance to reset priorities and focus on positive change, allowing space for healing and forward planning.

Practical Financial Considerations

Finances are often one of the most complex aspects of separation. Gaining clarity early can reduce stress and prevent misunderstandings later.

Steps to consider include:

- Identifying all assets and liabilities, including property, savings, pensions and debts
- Understanding individual and joint income and outgoings
- Considering short-term financial arrangements during separation
- Avoiding major financial decisions or changes without legal advice
- Gathering relevant financial documents and records

Clear financial planning helps ensure fair outcomes and supports long-term stability for both parties and any children.

Resolution Together — A New Way Forward

Resolution Together is an innovative and constructive way to resolve separation and divorce for couples who are separating amicably.

It enables a couple to work with one solicitor to reach a final agreement on issues arising from their separation, particularly in relation to financial arrangements. This approach is designed to reduce conflict, encourage transparency and manage costs effectively.

Resolution Together is only suitable where:

- Both parties are comfortable discussing matters openly
- There are no concerns regarding controlling or abusive behaviour
- There are no known legal conflicts of interest

Partner Julie Hobson will meet with each party individually for an initial fixed-fee appointment. The cost of this appointment is £200 plus VAT per person. These meetings allow Julie to assess whether Resolution Together is appropriate for your circumstances.

If, following those meetings, Julie is satisfied that the case is suitable, joint meetings will begin. Resolution Together is charged at an enhanced hourly rate, reflecting that there is one solicitor acting for you as a couple, rather than two separate solicitors and two sets of legal fees.

Julie will also work with you to identify and involve other professionals where helpful, including:

- Mediators
- Financial and pension experts
- Family therapists
- Divorce coaches and other family support services

When to Seek Legal Advice

You do not need to wait for a crisis or a final decision before speaking to a solicitor. Early legal advice can provide reassurance, clarify your options and help you plan confidently.

It is particularly important to seek advice if:

- Communication has broken down
- Children's arrangements are unclear or disputed
- Financial matters are complex
- You need help understanding your rights and responsibilities

Contact

Sunita Chauhan s.chauhan@gullands.com or

Julie Hobson j.hobson@gullands.com or

Amanda Finn a.finn@gullands.com for more information.

Is Will reform on the agenda?

In May last year the Law Commission published its recommendations and a draft Bill to reform the law of wills in its report *Modernising Wills Law*. The Bill for a Modern Wills Act would replace The Wills Act 1837. Whilst the government published an immediate response to the report, nothing further has been timetabled.

There are fears that some people might currently be put off making a Will as the law isn't clear. Whatever happens in the future with law reform, having an up-to-date Will is still the most important document a person will create in their lifetime and gives their loved ones certainty and security after their death.

In the Law Commission's report, they make a number of recommendations for reform which includes protecting the person making the Will (Testators) from undue influence and fraud and where possible increasing the clarity and certainty in the law.

These recommendations include:

- Giving the court the power to dispense with the formality requirements to make a valid will on a case-by-case basis. This would allow the court to deem a document of record to be a valid will where the court is satisfied the document reflects the person's intentions. This will help overcome some of the issues around wills being invalid.
- Reduction in the minimum age a person can make a will from 18 to 16.
- Abolish the rules that a person's Will is automatically revoked when they marry or enter a civil partnership. This will help to protect people from predatory marriage and financial abuse.
- Increasing protection for those who are coerced into making a Will. Currently it is too difficult to challenge the validity of a will based on undue influence which can often be hidden as it happens behind closed doors.

There are also recommendations to enable electronic wills to be formally valid and a clarification of the law on testamentary capacity following the test in the Mental Capacity Act 2005.

We can only welcome greater clarity around Wills in the hope it will encourage more people to make them and keep them up to date.

If you would like to discuss a new Will or update an existing Will, get in touch with our team.

Alex Astley can be contacted at a.astley@gullands.com



Probationary drivers – know the risks

Learning to drive and passing your driving test is the ultimate ticket to freedom and also opens up new work possibilities. But as many new drivers know, it is expensive to have lessons and can take months of waiting just to get a test date. Many new drivers might also be surprised to know that they can lose their licence easily.

If you receive six or more penalty points within the first two years of passing your driving test, then your licence will be revoked, and you will have to take your test again.

This in practice means you will need to apply for a new provisional licence and pay for it again. Once you receive your provisional licence then you will be subject to the same rules as any other learner driver, and you can only drive again on a full licence once you have passed both the theory and practical test.

If you have a tractor licence (category F), the two-year probationary period starts from the day you pass this test.

A revocation is different to a driving disqualification. The points count from the date the offence was committed and not when you receive the notification of the points.

Some traffic offences can carry a significant number of points which many inexperienced drivers may not realise. For example, failing to stop after an accident, failing to give particulars or report an accident within 24 hours can each carry 5-10 points. Driving without due care and attention or without reasonable consideration for other road users can carry 3-9 points and using a mobile phone when driving carries 6 points.

Others carry fewer points such as using a vehicle with a defective tyre(s) 3 points. Points can add up quickly and inexperienced drivers need to fully understand all of the responsibilities having a full driving licence means.

For a 17-year-old newly qualified driver, it can come as quite a shock if they find themselves at the centre of court proceedings. One silly mistake or lapse of judgement can have very serious consequences when behind the wheel of a car.

If you or your child are facing court proceedings for driving offences which may result in disqualification or licence revocation, then our expert team are available to provide advice and to represent your interest throughout the legal proceedings.

Get in touch to discuss your questions regarding motoring offences and prosecutions.

John Roberts can be contacted at j.roberts@gullands.com



Disputes with neighbours

It's a familiar scenario, a new neighbour moves in next door, and their behaviour starts to annoy you. Whether it's their dog barking non-stop, loud music and parties, endless building work which disrupts you working from home or an argument over where the boundary is when a fence or wall is replaced.

How you deal with this could have several implications, financially, emotionally, and legally if you decide to sell your home in the future, so what is the best way to handle these neighbour disputes?

Noise disputes

Firstly, try to solve the problem informally and speak to your neighbours to let them know you are being disturbed. They may not realise they are being noisy, but also ask yourself do you have a realistic expectation of noise levels. For example, children playing in a garden on a sunny day is perfectly reasonable.

If your neighbour rents their property and the noise continues, speak to their landlord to let them know the issue you are having, as there may be terms in the lease which are being breached.

If you want to escalate your complaint further, you can try using a mediation service to help you to discuss this with your neighbour.

Where complaints involve a statutory nuisance such as loud music, vehicles, machinery and equipment or a barking dog between 11pm and 7am, then you can make a complaint to your local council.

A last resort is to take legal action against your neighbour.

Boundary disputes

A second area where neighbours frequently fall out is regarding boundaries. Whether a dispute is about a fence, wall or the boundary line, people quite rightly don't want someone encroaching onto their land.

Disputes over boundaries tends to happen when someone puts up a new fence or wall, usually without discussing it, with their neighbour who may rightly or wrongly believe they own the land. It is therefore important to establish where the boundary is before you begin any work. Don't assume that an existing fence is in the right place as previous occupants may have come to a different agreement.

Avoiding a boundary dispute

To establish where the boundary is you should look at the title deeds to your property which are available from the Land Registry. Boundaries on Land Registry plans only show the general position of the boundary and unless there is a plan with measurements are normally only accurate to + or – 1 metre. Ideally speak to your neighbour to reach an agreement.

If you are unable to both agree to this then you could consider seeking the help of a chartered surveyor and if you both agree to their decision, sign an agreement which a solicitor can help draft. The surveyor could also draw a new boundary plan which is submitted to the Land Registry to help avoid this issue in the future. Useful for when you want to sell the property or if the neighbouring property subsequently changes hands.

Existing boundary disputes

For existing boundary disputes with neighbours where an agreement can't be reached, both parties might decide to consult their own surveyor and if this fails, then it is likely the dispute will go to court, or the First Tier Property Tribunal and a judge will decide on the boundary placement.

Party Walls

There are separate rules that protect a Party Wall which is shared with neighbours and anyone planning on carrying out work to a Party Wall is required by the Party Wall Act 1996 to obtain their neighbour's written permission. Written permission is also needed to carry out other works such as increasing its height, strengthening foundations, and other building works directly to it which could affect the structural integrity of it. You should take advice from a specialist Party Wall Act surveyor if you are unsure about carrying out any work to a Party Wall.

Disputes with neighbours often start with one issue and escalate. Compromise is often needed on both sides to help avoid and resolve a dispute with a neighbour. If you plan on selling your property you must declare any dispute you have had which could impact on the future saleability of the property.

If you have any concerns about issues with your neighbours, consult our Litigation team at Gullands for advice and support.

Anna Golding can be contacted at a.golding@gullands.com



New starter

Welcome to Armando Bogdanov who joined Gullands in November 2025 as a Paralegal, working within the firm's Corporate and Commercial team.

Armando will be utilising his undergraduate commercial law knowledge to assist the team in a wide range of tasks such as reviewing commercial agreements, supporting company incorporations and restructures, preparing share documentation maintaining statutory registers and assisting with due diligence exercises.

Prior to joining Gullands, Armando completed a placement year in the R&D Tax Innovation team at Grant Thornton LLP before graduating from the University of Exeter.

Armando is a keen content creator across a number of platforms including TikTok.



L-R: Georgie Deol, Ula Staniszewska and Stacey Irwin

New trainees

Congratulations to our three new Trainee Solicitors who have begun their training, having previously worked as Paralegals in the Corporate and Commercial and Private Client teams. Georgie Deol (Corporate and Commercial) will be a traditional Trainee Solicitor (LPC Route) and Stacey Irwin (Corporate and Commercial) and Ula Staniszewska (Private Client) both begin as Trainee Solicitors via the new SQE Route.