
SWALE RURAL FORUM

MINUTES of the Meeting held at Lower Halstow Memorial Hall, School Lane, Lower Halstow, Kent ME9 7ES on Tuesday, 10 February 2015 from 7.05 - 8.58 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen, Nicholas Hampshire, Lesley Ingham, David Jones, Gerry Lewin, Prescott (Chairman), Pat Sandle, David Simmons (Vice-Chairman), Ben Stokes and John Wright.

OTHER ORGANISATIONS: Kevin Attwood (Swale National Farmers Union), Peter Blandon (Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)), Chief Inspector Tony Henley (Kent Police), Rollo Parsons (Swale National Farmers Union), Canon Caroline Pinchbeck (Diocese of Canterbury) and Sara Tucker (Kent Association of Local Councils).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Dan Bride, Huw Jarvis and Bill Ronan (all Kent County Council) and Philippa Davies and Emma Wiggins (Swale Borough Council).

APOLOGIES: Parish Councillor Mike Baldock, Councillors Barnicott and Bowles, Keith Harrison, Mrs Pamela Prescott and Inspector Gavin Wade.

477 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 November 2014 (Minute Nos. 340 – 348) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

478 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

479 PUBLIC SESSION

The Chairman welcomed the nine members of the public in attendance.

Mr Palmer, Newington, raised concern with cliff erosion at Eastchurch. He explained that some residents were notified at the 'eleventh hour' that they could have submitted their comments into the Local Plan consultation, which resulted in their comments not being included.

Councillor Lesley Ingham advised that there was a meeting about cliff erosion on 17 February 2015 with the Chief Executive of Swale Borough Council (SBC), the Leader of the Council and also Borough Councillors. Councillor Gerry Lewin explained that the Local Plan had been consulted upon previously; this had been a final consultation for the inspector. Mr Palmer's concerns could be taken to the meeting on 17 February.

Parish Councillor Mick Drury, Chairman of Lower Halstow Parish Council, raised concern with inappropriate parking on footpaths in Lower Halstow. He acknowledged that the issue of parking outside schools had led to discussions with school staff, the Police, SBC and Kent County Council (KCC) Highways, and he asked if this approach could also be adopted for parking on pavements, and

whether SBC Enforcement Officers could go out to the parishes to look at the problem.

Chief Inspector Tony Henley advised that if Police Officers were to tackle this sort of incident it meant taking them away from other Policing issues. He reported that SBC could not enforce a penalty unless the car was parked on a yellow line. It was a Police issue, but with competing demands it was difficult to address. The Police could attend when this type of parking was reported, but response to the incident was in proportion to what other incidents were taking place at that time. Chief Inspector Henley advised that Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) had no power to enforce, but they could help in educating the public, and also talk with schools, to not park in this manner. He confirmed that he would send a PCSO to Lower Halstow to look into what measures could be taken to address the problem.

Parish Councillor Drury acknowledged the need to act proportionally but explained that parking along The Street in Lower Halstow was particularly dangerous as it was a through road.

Parish Councillor Tucker considered that prevention was better than cure and suggested that there be a campaign to raise awareness of the problem.

The Community Engagement Manager, KCC explained that there was a county-wide campaign for parents to park more responsibly.

Mrs Swift, Lower Halstow, noted that the number of PCSOs was decreasing and asked whether the PCSOs were likely to be staying in the area.

Chief Inspector Tony Henley explained that the future, with both the elections, and budget cuts within the Police Force, was unclear. He acknowledged that PCSOs did a good job and wanted their work to continue. He confirmed that he would advise further when he knew more information.

A resident from Newington asked that as there was not a Community Warden in the area, could one be shared with another area?

The Community Engagement Manager advised that this scheme had not been cut-back; some areas did not have a Community Warden. He suggested that the resident contacted the County Member Mike Hill, to advise that he was happy to share a Community Warden with another area.

Chief Inspector Tony Henley advised that there was a PCSO in every area of Swale, dependent on demand. KCC Wardens worked from the Community Safety Unit, and together with the PCSOs, they worked as one with education and he considered them to be a strong partnership.

Mr Burgess, Tunstall, raised concern with surface water flooding and asked whether there was any sand-bag provision in Swale?

The Head of Economy and Communities explained that the Emergency Planning Unit would be able to respond to this question.

- Head of Economy and Communities

Councillor John Wright explained that some residents were offered gel bags for localised flooding, so this may be an option to ask for. Councillor Pat Sandle advised that residents in her area had purchased sand-bags, rather than them being supplied.

Councillor Lloyd Bowen asked when the move to turn street lights on again would actually take place?

KCC Councillor Lee Burgess advised that funding for the lighting was not included in the current budget, so the timescale for them being turned on again was unknown at the moment, it could be one or two years or longer.

Parish Councillor Tucker asked that as each LED light cost £600, was there any funding for parishes?

The Community Engagement Manager confirmed he would look into this matter further.

- Community Engagement Manager

480 LEADER PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed Huw Jarvis (Programme Manager (Kent Downs and Marshes Leader)) to the meeting.

Mr Jarvis gave a presentation on the Leader Programme. He explained that it was a rural development funding programme for England. Mr Jarvis provided some background to the funding and explained that funding was provided to areas with up to 150,000 population. Both East Kent and Kent Downs Marshes had been successful in achieving the funding this year, so all of Swale was covered. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs had then decided that Leader areas could appeal, which resulted in a reduction to £1.8million for Kent Downs Marshes and £1.5million to East Kent, which still resulted in more funds than the previous programme.

Mr Jarvis explained that administration would be shared by both areas and training was currently taking place on the processes that would be in place for when the applications started to be submitted for funding. The first applications would be considered from May 2015, with the emphasis on jobs and growth. Applications would be submitted to the Local Action Group Executive for a decision on whether the funding was approved, and a contract would be drawn-up. Funding applications for projects of up to £50,000 - £60,000 would be considered. The programme would go up to the year 2020.

In response to a question, Mr Jarvis provided contact details as follows: 03000 417104 and huw.jarvis@kent.gov.uk. He confirmed that the funding was also open to applications from churches. Mr Jarvis provided diverse examples of projects within Swale that had been allotted funding from the Programme. Mr Jarvis also confirmed that if an application came forward on the boundary of the East Kent and

Kent Downs and Marshes areas, this was not a problem as both were within the Leader Programme area.

The Chairman thanked Mr Jarvis for attending the meeting.

481 UPDATE FROM KENT POLICE

The Chairman welcomed Chief Inspector Tony Henley to the meeting. Chief Inspector Henley outlined the Rural Crime Initiative strategy which was resourced with three teams: Rural Liaison; Gypsy Liaison and Rural Special Team. Chief Inspector Henley provided an overview of work that the teams had worked on which included vehicle seizing, robbery, drugs, cruelty to animals; and wildlife crime. Officers worked closely with the National Farmers' Union and the farming community.

Chief Inspector Henley spoke on the effectiveness of Operation Nonegon in tackling rural crime.

In response to a question, Chief Inspector Henley advised that someone was in custody following a series of barn fires on the Isle of Sheppey. He responded to a request to act on drivers using mobile phones whilst driving by stating that the Police could either issue a penalty notice or prosecute.

The Chairman thanked Chief Inspector Henley for attending the meeting.

482 LOSS OF HEDGEROW ALONG THE LOWER ROAD (A2500)

Councillor Pat Sandle highlighted the issue which was also apparent on the eastern end of the A2500. Hedgerows were missing, making it impossible to see the edge of the road when it snowed. Red/black markers with reflectors put in to mark the boundary had disappeared in places and not been replaced, which made the road very dangerous.

The Community Engagement Manager stated that he would look into ownership of the hedges with KCC, and also look further into the lack of demarcation of the roads which raised safety issues.

- Community Engagement Manager

Councillor Sandle explained that some of the hedges needed to be replanted. She requested further information on who was responsible and the process to ensure they were replanted.

Mr Attwood, representing the National Farmers' Union, explained that some hedges were dying because of salt and splash from the road, and they were not there as demarcation of the edge of the road. He outlined the maintenance problems of hedges and the clogging-up effect of these on the drains.

Discussion ensued as follows: whether the matter could be taken to the Swale Joint Transportation Board on 9 March 2015; the hedges had gone, this was now a safety matter; and following the KCC budget later in the week, KCC Members would again have more funds that could be used for highway projects.

483 FACILITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN 2015/16

The Chairman welcomed Dan Bride to the meeting. Ms Bride provided an update to the services provided and explained that the department was in the middle of a re-structure, with improvements being made to efficiency, providing a 'joined-up' range of services from April 2015.

Ms Bride stated that there would be open access hubs for young people, with youth hubs being linked to schools. There would also be detached youth work; street work and rural work with community safety partners. She explained there was a range of provisions, with a whole-family approach in the new structure, with early intervention.

Some Members considered that a lot of young people on the eastern end of the Isle of Sheppey and Eastchurch were missing out as they were not able to get to events that were provided by this service as there was a lack of transport facilities. Ms Bride explained that an outreach service was also provided, and feedback would show if this was not reaching the right areas.

The Chairman thanked Ms Bride for attending the meeting.

484 LACK OF BRIDLEWAYS

The Chairman introduced the item and the following comments were raised: the number of horses on rural lanes was increasing; more off-road facilities for horses were needed; there were few places to ride in the area, and riding on the road was dangerous; toll rides that linked-up were an option, where local farmers allowed riders to ride on their land for a fee; the conflict between horses and cars was growing; there could be health and safety issues, and insurance issues if horses were allowed on farmers' land; and sometimes vehicles/off ride bikes ruined bridleways, control of this was often difficult.

The Community Engagement Manager provided some information sent by the Senior Public Rights of Way Officer, KCC. He had stated that KCC acknowledged a lack of opportunity for equestrian use of public rights of way, across Kent, not just in west Swale. To increase the 16% of the public rights of way network in Kent available for equestrian access would require resources and co-operation from landowners. There could be concern from landowners with creating additional public rights of way on their land. KCC was happy to assist where communities could demonstrate viable proposals and have agreement from all affected parties.

485 RURAL BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

The Rural Roundup was noted.

Chairman

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All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel