
SWALE RURAL FORUM

MINUTES of the Meeting held at Warden Bay Village Hall, Warden Bay Road, Warden, Isle of Sheppey, Kent, ME12 4NB on Tuesday, 26 May 2015 from 7.00 - 8.49 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Bobbin, Monique Bonney, Tina Booth, Lloyd Bowen, Duncan Dewar-Whalley, June Garrad, Lesley Ingham, Ken Ingleton, Gerry Lewin, Padmini Nissanga, Prescott (Chairman), Ben Stokes, Mike Whiting and John Wright.

Other Organisations:

Kevin Attwood, Swale National Farmers Union) and Inspector Dave Smith (Kent Rural Police).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Kellie Mackenzie, Lyn Newton (Swale Borough Council) and Bill Ronan (Kent County Council).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs Ann Barnes (Kent Police Crime Commissioner), Chief Inspector Tony Henley and PC Frost (Kent Police), and Tim Owen (Kent Downs of AONB Unit).

APOLOGIES: Councillors Bowles, Nicholas Hampshire and David Simmons, and Canon Caroline Pinchbeck and Inspector Gavin Wade (Kent Police).

29 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Resolved:

(1) That Councillor Prescott be elected Chairman for the Municipal Year 2015/16.

30 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Resolved:

(1) That Councillor David Simmons be elected Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year 2015/16.

31 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 February 2015 (Minute Nos. 477 – 485) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

A Member drew attention to Minute No. 484 (Lack of Bridleways) and requested further evidence be sought from Kent County Council's Public Rights of Way Officer that there were no problems caused by horses on public roads. He requested that the item be considered at the next meeting on 25 August 2015.

32 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

33 PUBLIC SESSION

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

Mr Bill Tatton, a local resident, asked whether Kent Police would be providing a visible police presence through foot patrols in the Leysdown and Warden area?

Chief Inspector Tony Henley stated that if they were able to, foot patrols would be provided. He stated that Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) would be operating foot patrols on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings during the Summer period.

Mrs Brenda Hardman, a local resident, spoke about a planning application at Bayview, Leysdown Road and raised concern that planning enforcement would be monitoring the site.

The Chairman assured Mrs Hardman that the matter would be monitored.

Mrs Pat Sandle, a local resident, raised concern about the lack of parking control in Leysdown. She stated that Swale Borough Council (SBC) needed to do more to improve parking arrangements in Leysdown as this would help to improve tourism.

The Chairman asked Mrs Sandle to send a letter to him direct about the issue and he would take it up with Councillor David Simmons, Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs.

Chief Inspector Tony Henley agreed to liaise with his sergeant for the area to see if there was anything they could do to improve parking enforcement in the area. At the request of a Member, Chief Inspector Henley agreed to also check parking enforcement in Eastchurch.

A Member spoke about the success of SBC's parking enforcement team in dealing with parking in town centres. He believed that the head of that service area was looking to roll the scheme out to rural areas.

34 POLICE CRIME COMMISSIONER - INVITED TO ATTEND THIS MEETING

The Chairman welcomed Ann Barnes (Kent Police Crime Commissioner) to the meeting.

Mrs Barnes stated that following recent Government cuts to their budget the Police had as a result lost a fifth of its workforce and further cuts were expected. She spoke about how crime had changed with child sex exploitation becoming the focus for Police following high profile cases such as the Jimmy Saville inquiry and its impacts on police resources.

Mrs Barnes spoke about the importance of frontline staff working in Police call centres as they were the first point of contact for victims of crime. Mrs Barnes also spoke about the possibility of providing Police officers with computer tablets which she felt could improve their efficiency and also save them time as they would not then need to go back to the office to write statements and check details.

Mrs Barnes spoke about the Crime Rural Advisory Group which was made up of representatives from rural organisations and the Rural Task Force who had specialist teams that dealt with crimes including fly-tipping and hare coursing. Mrs Barnes also spoke about the National Rural Crime Network survey, the biggest ever survey into rural crime and anti-social behaviour, to assess how the Police could better serve rural communities. Mrs Barnes urged all those in attendance to complete the survey which could be found on the Kent Crime Commissioner website: www.kentpcc.gov.uk/home.php?category=News

Mrs Barnes reminded Members about the good work of the Crime Safety Units (CSU) which were a good example of partnership working and enabled the Police to prioritise their work better. The units were funded by Kent County Council and if they were not working effectively Members needed to let her know.

The Chairman then invited questions from Members of the Forum and the public in attendance.

A Member queried why community groups were not supported by the Police with regard to requests for CCTV in rural areas?

Mrs Barnes stated that any CCTV evidence needed to be of good quality and this may be a problem in rural areas.

Chief Inspector Tony Henley spoke about the Automatic Plate Reader meter system they operated. He stated that there was one installed on the Sheppey Bridge which had been very successful. He stated that PCSOs and CCTV were used when 'hotspot' areas were identified if appropriate.

A Member raised concern about partnership working between British Transport Police and local police officers in relation to CCTV at Newington train station which was not manned and was experiencing a lot of Anti-Social Behaviour.

Mrs Barnes noted the comments and stated that the Transport Police were specialised and the problem could be a logistical one. She agreed to look into the matter further.

In response to a query about rural crime statistics, Chief Inspector Henley advised that these were available on the Kent Police website: www.kent.police.uk

Mrs Barnes spoke about the inaccurate reporting of crime in the past which had been addressed and there was now 97% accuracy rate in Kent. This had resulted in the crime figures in Kent rising but at least crime was being recorded accurately. She added that 70% of Kent was rural and only 26% of crime recorded was committed in rural communities.

In response to queries, Mrs Barnes advised that Police officers would like to be more involved in pre-planning application discussions. She advised that her Police and Crime Plan set out her vision, priorities and objectives for policing. Members were invited to comment on the plan which was refreshed annually and could be viewed on her website. Mrs Barnes agreed to forward a copy to all Members of the Forum for comment.

A Member raised concern that the proposed cuts would have an adverse impact on recruitment to the force. Mrs Barnes agreed that the amount of people leaving the force was an indicator of morale, but there were currently more people joining the police service than leaving.

In response to a query about PCSOs and the powers they had to enforce, Chief Inspector Tony Henley considered that if they were given more authority then there was a risk that they would not be able to be out in the community as much as they were currently. He considered that their responsibilities were about right.

Mrs Barnes agreed that PCSOs should have authority to issue fixed penalty notices outside schools. In response to a query, Mrs Barnes stated that PCSOs should stay in-post for two years but she was aware that this was not always the case.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Barnes for attending the meeting.

35 UPDATE FROM KENT POLICE

Members agreed that the Police Update should be circulated to Members.

Resolved: That the Police Update, covering the period February 2015 to May 2015 be circulated to Members.

36 UNDERGROUND ELECTRICITY CABLE IN SWALE

The Chairman welcomed Mr Tim Owen from the Kent Downs AONB Unit.

Mr Owen gave a presentation about underground electricity cable in the vicinity of Lees Court estate and Selling. Mr Owen advised that they were working in partnership with Southern power networks, OFGEM and local landowners to install electricity cables underground within AONBs. OFGEM had provided £10 million funding for the southern regions protected landscapes. It was hoped that the work currently being carried out in Lees Court and Selling would be completed within 12 months. Currently only electricity cables were being re-laid, but they were working to get British Telecom on-board.

At the request of a Member, Mr Owen agreed to explore whether underground cabling work could be carried out at Queendown Warren, Hartlip.

In response to queries from Members, Mr Owen explained that the project would have a benefit to the visual amenity of the landscape. The Kent Downs AONB Unit assessed any impact to local wildlife prior to any works being undertaken. He noted the importance of Sites of Special Scientific Interest but work could only be carried underground in AONBs. The risk of deterioration to cables underground

was less than overhead cabling. Cables had been laid under the Norfolk Broads with no issues.

Mr Owen agreed that it would be possible for him to send the presentation to Parish Councils. He would also send literature about the scheme to Members of the Forum.

The Chairman thanked Mr Owen for attending the meeting.

37 RURAL BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Resolved: That the Rural Business Opportunities be noted.

At this point Members requested the following items for discussion at a future meeting:

- Improving tourist facilities in rural areas
- Issues with horse riding on rural roads
- Rural traffic enforcement

Chairman

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