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## SWALE RURAL FORUM

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**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Rodmersham Village Hall, Rodmersham Green, Rodmersham, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME9 0PS on Tuesday, 17 November 2015 from 7.00 - 8.30 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Mike Baldock, Bobbin, Monique Bonney, Tina Booth, Lloyd Bowen, Bowles, Duncan Dewar-Whalley, Nicholas Hampshire, Gerry Lewin, Prescott (Chairman), David Simmons (Vice-Chairman), Ben Stokes and Mike Whiting.

**Other Organisations:**

Rollo Parsons, Swale National Farmers Union and Canon Caroline Pinchbeck, Diocese of Canterbury, Chief Inspector Tony Henley (Kent Police).

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Kellie Mackenzie, Bill Ronan and Emma Wiggins.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillor Mike Henderson, Mrs Elworthy, Mr Clarke, Ms Bennett, Chief Inspector Tony Henley, PC Frost, Mr Rob Carver and Mr Kevin Haugh (Natural England).

**APOLOGIES:** Mr Kevin Attwood (National Farmers Union), Councillors June Garrad and Padmini Nissanga, Parish Councillors Richard Palmer and Amanda Saunders, Mrs Pamela Prescott (SEESwale) and Inspector Gavin Wade (Kent Police).

**338 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 August 2015 (Minute Nos. 157 – 165) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

In response to a query Councillor Bowles advised that the Kent Environment Strategy would be considered at the Kent Leaders Group next week.

A Member queried why the Horse and Rider Awareness roadsigns item, which had been withdrawn from the agenda for the August meeting was not on this agenda for consideration. Councillor Bowles stated that the item had been pulled from the last meetings agenda as funding for the particular item had been received.

The Chairman agreed that the item would be considered at the next meeting on 23 February 2016.

**339 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No interests were declared.

**340 PUBLIC SESSION**

The Chairman welcomed the three members of the public present. There were no questions.

**341 UPDATE FROM KENT POLICE**

The Chairman welcomed Chief Inspector Tony Henley and PC Preston Frost from the Rural Task Force.

Chief Inspector Tony Henley gave an update on the structural changes which would come into effect on 1 February 2016 due to reductions in funding. He explained that further details would be announced end of November early December 2015. The number of Chief Inspectors was being reduced from 13 to 7 so they would need to cover two districts.

Chief Inspector Henley reported that he would be retiring in the New Year and his replacement was Chief Inspector Fox who currently covered Thanet district so was aware about the issues facing rural communities. Chief Inspector Fox would be responsible for both Swale and Thanet. The police stations at Sittingbourne, Faversham and the Isle of Sheppey would remain.

In response to queries, Chief Inspector Henley reported that patrol units would remain sited where the highest demand for them was. He understood that the public would be concerned about the restructure as officers on the frontline would be lost. PCSO's did not have to come from the area that they served and Police officers were appointed so could not be made redundant unlike PCSOs who were not on the same employment terms. Chief Inspector Henley confirmed that there would be no change to the Rural Task Force.

PC Frost tabled an update on the work undertaken by the Rural Task Force. He spoke about several undercover operations that the team had been involved with helping to combat: hare coursing; theft from stables; theft from properties and protected shipwrecks.

The Chairman thanked Chief Inspector Henley and PC Frost for attending the meeting.

**342 COASTAL ACCESS**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Kevin Haugh and Mr Rob Carver from the Coastal Access Team, Natural England.

Mr Carver gave a presentation on The England Coast Path. He explained that the government funded project would be completed by 2020 and created a long-distance walking route around the English coast which should be accessible to public on foot. The path would be 2,700 miles the longest in the world and would be a great resource for all.

Mr Carver outlined the key benefits of the coast path which included: secure, continuous, clearly way-marked, well managed route; boost to the local economy and reduced liability on coastal access land. Mr Carver explained that Natural

England would be carrying out an Access and Sensitive Features Appraisal looking at the impact on sensitive wildlife sites and undertake a Habitat Regulations Assessment. They would seek to align mitigation measures with any strategic access plans and noted that the Swale Special Protection Area would be affected but would work with the relevant officers to ensure impacts to wildlife were minimal.

Mr Carver reported that they had started to consult local landowners about development of the coast plan from Whitstable to Iwade and starting work on the route from Iwade to the Isle of Grain end of 2015. He spoke about roll-back and repositioning of the trail due to coastal processes and that the Saxon Shore Way was being used, and outlined the different stages of development of the Coast Path. Mr Carver advised that the path on the Isle of Sheppey would be started in 2016-17 and completed by 2019. 59 stretches were being delivered nationally.

In response to queries, Mr Haugh, advised that ferry crossings could be used at places like Dartford. With regard to Faversham nothing was finalised but it could possibly come to the west side of Faversham Creek, across the swing bridge and through Oare marshes.

Members raised the following points: good opportunity for local businesses; need to ensure local leisure facilities were ready for the coast path; concern that taxpayers money has been spent without them being consulted about it; may have economic benefits but very generic costs provided, would have preferred a proper breakdown of the costs involved; welcome any economic benefits to the borough; would prefer to see the Isle of Sheppey completed before Iwade; concern that maintenance of the coast path would fall to local authorities; need to ensure that a proper consultation was carried out; landowners were aware of the process via the Natural Farmers Union; and would need to ensure that all those affected were engaged.

In response to queries, Mr Haugh advised that funding was available for signage mitigation but not for general publication of the scheme. Restrictions could be made to stop cyclists from using the path. Information about reduced liability was available and all statutory reports about the final proposes for submission to the Secretary of State could be viewed on their website: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england)

In response to a suggestion from a Member, the Head of Economy and Communities agreed to liaise with Kieren Mansfield and Lyn Newton SBC's Economy and Community Services Managers and update the Swale Rural Forum about how the Council planned to publicise the scheme and what officers were doing to engage with Swale's tourism industry about the project.

***Resolved: That an update from SBC officers be provided about how the Council could publicise the coast path and also what the Council were doing to involve Swale's tourism industry.***

### 343 INDUSTRIAL/HUMAN WASTE ON FARM LAND

The Chairman introduced the item and drew attention to the response from Swale Borough Councils Environmental Response Manager and the Environment Agency which was attached to the agenda.

Some Members considered that the response provided did not answer the question and asked that the impacts caused by the smell from industrial/human waste to local businesses. A Member should be compensated in the same way that utility companies had to for road closures.

Rollo Parsons from the Swale National Farmers Union reported that regulations meant that farmers were not allowed to spread the waste at the weekend and it was a requirement of the regulations that the waste be spread within 24 hours to help to reduce odours.

Members raised the following points: the accumulative effect of farmers spreading the waste did not only affect rural areas but towns, Sittingbourne has been affected for the last two years; the smell over the weekend periods is unacceptable; local residents are adversely affected by the odours; landowners should let Parish Councils know when they are likely to spread the waste so flyers can be circulated to local residents; this usually happens during the tourist season and puts visitors off from visiting Swale; need to review this and look at providing compensation to local businesses as the effects of it are unfair on them; wind direction could have an impact and farmers have no control over that; need to have organic fertilisers or will not have any crops; had to accept this kind of odour if you lived in the countryside; and consider that the good practice regulations had alleviated the problem.

In response to queries, Mr Parsons stated that there would always be an odour unless chemical fertilisers were used. The weather often conspired against farmers who were restricted by the harvesting programme which meant that the spreading of waste often had to happen late summer. He also did not see how you would be able to quantify loss of business due to the odours caused and felt it would be unfair on farmers who were already struggling to make a living.

Discussion ensued and it was agreed that Mr Parsons would arrange for Members of the Forum to attend on site to see how industrial/human waste was stored and ploughed into the soil.

***RESOLVED: That the National Farmers Union arrange a site visit for Members of the Rural Forum to attend on site to see how industrial/human waste was stored and ploughed into the soil.***

#### **344 RURAL BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES**

***Resolved: That the Rural Business Opportunities be noted.***

#### **345 NEXT MEETING - TUESDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2016 AT LEYSDOWN VILLAGE HALL**

A Member asked that the following items be considered at the next meeting;

- Provision of housing for elderly residents living in rural areas.
- Provision of bus services in rural areas.

The Head of Economies and Communities reported that the consultation on the future of the Swale Rural Forum would also be considered at the next meeting.

Chairman

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