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## POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

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**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 28 September 2016 from 7.00 pm - 8.28 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Sarah Aldridge, Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart (substitute for Councillor Lloyd Bowen), Monique Bonney, Andy Booth (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), Paul Fleming (substitute for Councillor Katy Coleman), Sue Gent (substitute for Councillor Nicholas Hampshire), Harrison, James Hunt, George Samuel and Ben Stokes.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Philippa Davies, Lyn Newton and Bob Pullen.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillor David Simmons, Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Katy Coleman and Nicholas Hampshire.

### 895 FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair reminded Members of the evacuation procedure.

### 896 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 June 2016 (Minute Nos. 712 – 716) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Vice-Chairman in the Chair as a correct record.

### 897 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

### 898 SWALE GREEN GRID PARTNERSHIP - SWALE GREEN GRID STRATEGY AND BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

This report provided details of the Swale Green Grid Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plan. The Council, on behalf of the Swale Green Grid Partnership, wished to consult residents, businesses and local organisations that might have an interest, before seeking approval to adopt the Strategy and Plan.

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs, and the Economy and Community Services Manager to the meeting.

#### **Swale Green Grid Strategy**

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs reported that the current strategy had been written in 2007, and the present document was a 'refresh' to

update it. He advised that the Council had a working budget of £1,000, which he considered to be small for such a large project.

The Economy and Community Services Manager stressed that this was not a Swale Borough Council (SBC) document. It was a partnership document which comprised of SBC, Natural England, Groundwork Kent and Medway, Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Kent Wildlife Trust and the Environment Agency. It was important for SBC to relate the document to its Corporate Plan, to consider regeneration in the Borough, and to be able to add value to external funding applications. The Economy and Community Services Manager emphasised the importance of having a strategy with environmental issues; and advised that there would be an 8-week consultation period. She drew attention to the six issues under the bullet points on page 2 of the report which sought feedback from the Committee. In response to a question, the Economy and Community Services Manager advised that consultation had already commenced with strategic partners.

Members' views on the document were invited and they included the following comments:

- the budget was a missed opportunity;
- would like to see more detail on Milton Creek included;
- the document would have benefitted from Member involvement at an earlier stage;
- with reference to page 15 of the report, and costs of Public Rights of Way (PROW), how realistic was it to extend/enhance existing PROW? and
- there were a lot of good ideas in the document, but not a cohesive plan to extend green gaps, etc.

In response to these comments, the Economy and Community Services Manager, re-iterated that this was not purely an SBC document, but a partnership one, and she explained that they worked on a 'living' document which was comprised of 40 projects across the Borough, placed there by the partners. In terms of the expense of PROWs, she explained that a lot of the projects were large ones, and it was not possible to deliver everything. The Economy and Community Services Manager explained that the document was a strategic framework which helped to enable funding bids. This was an opportunity to shape the framework and to deliver projects.

Further comments included:

- the area around Sittingbourne and surrounding villages was not very well covered in the document;
- issues raised in the Local Plan Inquiry do not appear to be considered in the document;
- there needed to be more on ancient woodland; a lot of woods were missing from the document;
- more coverage needed on green areas, including village greens - were all parks included?;

- connectivity opportunities of green spaces in the same document would be useful;
- development around Bapchild needed to be considered;
- better management of changes to footpaths was needed;
- importance of tourism; and
- loss of land due to sea erosion and the affect on wildlife needed to be considered.

In response, the Economy and Community Services Manager explained that she would speak to Planning Policy colleagues. She stated that public parks belonged to a separate strategy, but these could be cross-referenced with this document. She also noted that there was a sports strategy that could be cross-referenced with, as well.

In response to a question, the Economy and Community Services Manager explained that a gateway was a location where two spaces connected with each other, and she gave an example as being the head of the Milton Creek.

A Member was disappointed that Queenborough was missing from maps one to five in the report; the Economy and Community Services Manager confirmed that she would look at the maps again.

Further points included:

- green spaces on the Isle of Sheppey needed to be observed;
- interaction was needed between other documents, e.g. Bearing Fruits; and
- some cynicism as to whether the partners would bring the plans into fruition.

In response to a question, the Economy and Community Services Manager confirmed that Parish Councils would be consulted upon the footpaths on the northern shoreline of the Isle of Sheppey.

In conclusion, the Economy and Community Services Manager explained that the consultation would be very widespread and would be open to the public. The document helped to provide a dialogue which assisted in other areas, such as signposting. A Member requested the consultation should be clear in what it was asking from the public.

### **Biodiversity Action Plan**

The Economy and Community Services Manager outlined the Plan and explained the importance of being mindful of the spaces within the Borough, and using them well to encourage good management practice, and bring in different projects. She explained that so far the Borough had a very good standard of management practices and this needed to continue and improve.

Members' views on the document were invited and they included the following comments:

- needed to include work of the Royal Society of the Protection of Birds within the document;
- roadside verges needed to be more natural, and less managed;
- welcomed the inclusion of ponds in the document;
- loss of orchards: needed to encourage traditional variety of orchards, and if community orchards were not working, needed to make sure they were;
- wildflower grassland should be extended across wider areas;
- very few parishes had the knowledge to commence work on Parish Environment Plans, advice needed to be provided;
- suggested a presentation be made to the Kent Association of Local Councils (Swale Area Committee) to take forward and develop a Plan;
- issue of lack of hedgerows, and filled-in ditches;
- Members only mainly aware of their own area, it would be useful to share ideas and have site meetings around the Borough, as visualisation could be beneficial; and
- acknowledged that some farmers encouraged educational visits by school children.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs advised that some traditional orchards were not as productive as they used to be. He also explained that partnership meetings were held quarterly, twice with strategic partners and twice with other groups, and there were opportunities then to visit different parts of the Borough.

Further comments included:

- needed to get more farmers 'on-board';
- more detail on the network of ponds and their natural water courses was needed in the document;
- local knowledge within the strategic document would be good;
- wild grass areas needed to be managed properly so that they would not look a 'mess';
- village green in Minster with long grass, had footpaths within it which had been successful; and
- welcomed meadow land in appropriate places, however, some long grasses led to residents not clearing up responsibly when walking their dogs.

The Economy and Community Services Manager outlined an educational forest schools project at Milton Creek, and it was hoped that this could be extended to include beach schools, but she advised that this was a resource-heavy project.

Members welcomed the documents and the Vice-Chairman in the Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs and the Economy and Community Services Manager for attending for these items.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the feedback and input into the draft Swale Green Grid Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plan, as minuted, be included as part of the consultation.**

**899 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report, which set-out the policies, plans and strategies due to be reviewed by the Committee during the coming year. He advised that the next four items would be split between the October and November meetings of the Committee.

A Member suggested that when a particular issue in a policy was not Borough-wide, that site visits be made so that Members were more aware of the issues that were being considered.

With regard to the Stray Dog Policy, a Member congratulated officers on their hard work under the current policy.

A further Member requested that, when reviewing the Property Strategy, the register be looked at as well.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the schedule of policies, plans and strategies due for review be noted.***

Chairman

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

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