

---

## WESTERN AREA COMMITTEE

---

**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in Newington Village Hall, Off the High Street, Newington, ME9 7JJ on Tuesday, 31 August 2021 from 7.00 pm - 9.47 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Mike Baldock (Chairman), Monique Bonney, Nicholas Hampshire, Alan Horton, Richard Palmer, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen and Corrie Woodford (Vice-Chairman).

**NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES:** Parish Councillors Nicola Butlin (Borden PC), Brian Clarke (Bredgar PC) and Gareth Randall (Bobbing PC).

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Simon Algar, Janet Dart, Kieren Mansfield, Jo Millard and Larissa Reed.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillors Cameron Beart and Mike Dendor and Roger Truelove (Leader).

Kent County Councillor Rich Lehmann, Divisional Member for Swale East representing the Western Area.

Marisa White – Area Education Officer East Kent.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Roger Clark and James Hunt.

Parish Councillors Graham Addicott OBE (Hartlip PC), Tony Mould (Newington PC), Tyrone Ripley (Upchurch PC).

### 202 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman read out the emergency evacuation procedures.

### 203 CONFIRMATION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

Councillor Mike Baldock was confirmed as Chairman and Councillor Corrie Woodford was confirmed as Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year 2021/22.

### 204 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

### 205 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 June 2021 (Minute Nos. 24 – 35) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 206 SECONDARY SCHOOL PROVISION

The Chairman welcomed Marisa White, the Area Education Officer for East Kent and the Swale Borough Council Leader, Councillor Roger Truelove to the meeting for this discussion.

Following a question by a Member, the Leader explained that it was important for the matter of secondary school provision to be discussed at individual Area Committees as each area had specific issues they would want to discuss.

The Leader set out the Administration's view of the situation of secondary school provision in Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey. Many people were concerned about secondary school places and a large number of Sittingbourne pupils had been allocated schools on the Isle of Sheppey. There was also a skills gap in Swale. The Leader added that it was important to get secondary education that would be of benefit to the pupils and the local economy.

The Area Education Officer went through her presentation, explaining the figures and the pressures on secondary schools. She also went through the options Kent County Council (KCC) had considered for new secondary provision and the issues that had been encountered, making progress difficult. The North West Sittingbourne allocated school site could not move forward until the site was purchased by the developer, which at present looked unlikely to happen for some time. Discussions with the Oasis Academy indicated it was unlikely to release the West site at this time, meaning any new provision on the Isle of Sheppey would be subject to the identification of a new site. The favoured option was for the Department for Education to work with the Oasis Academy to release the West site, but site searches continued. If one were found it would take a number of years to implement and whilst KCC did not have the funds to purchase a site, if that was the only option, they would have to re-prioritise to pay for it.

The expansion of the intake at existing Sittingbourne schools could only provide temporary respite, due to highways and other local issues constraining the possibility of significant expansion. Other issues added to the pressures, such as parents not understanding the process of choosing school preferences, which resulted in unpopular outcomes.

A discussion ensued and below is a summary of comments:

- Road access to release the North West Sittingbourne site was as a result of KCC Highways & Transportation decisions;
- KCC policy on assistance with travel to schools was not helpful for Isle of Sheppey pupils who wished to attend a grammar school;
- a Member suggested assisting parents in selecting their preferences, including a video explaining the process on the KCC website. The Area Education Officer agreed that was a good idea and would follow this up;
- home education was discussed, KCC could give advice and deal with safeguarding issues but did not have the money to provide resources. A Parish Councillor commented that Swale had a good home education community; and
- the pressures on special places were commented on in light of increasing mental health issues.

The Chairman thanked the Area Education Officer and the Leader for attending the meeting.

## 207 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Members noted the progress on actions.

The Conservation & Design Manager gave an update on the Conservation Area (CA) Reviews:

- The Milstead CA Review was out for consultation and available to view online. The consultant had identified some boundary changes and had produced a very good document. The consultation closed on 19 September 2021 and should be adopted in December 2021.
- The consultant was not able to complete the CA Review documents for Rodmersham Green and Tunstall, a new consultant was appointed and would start on 13 September 2021. These CA Reviews would go out for consultation late October 2021 and be adopted early in 2022.
- More research needed to be undertaken on the possibility of an Iwade CA Review, the area would be limited to the High Street near the Church.

With reference to the run-down state of the Western Area, it was suggested community litter picks could take place over the Autumn.

Further to the Chairman speaking to Highways England about the possibility of using spoil from the Junction 5 improvements to dampen the sound of road noise, they responded that although they were not opposed to the idea, the spoil would have to be checked for contamination. So far, Bredgar Parish Council had not responded with information about how they dealt with a similar situation.

Members noted the paper on Youth Provision in Villages. The Chairman suggested contacting the KCC Environment Warden for ideas in taking this forward. Councillor Richard Palmer agreed to take this forward and said that a report would come back to the next meeting.

A Member advised that the Agricultural Bill would be discussed at the September 2021 Swale Area Committee Meeting. A Tunstall Parish Councillor had done some work on this and would feedback.

**208 MILSTEAD CONSERVATION AREA REVIEW**

Due to a technical problem, it was not possible to give this presentation. The Conservation & Design Manager gave a verbal update under Matters Arising from Previous Meetings instead.

**209 PUBLIC FORUM**

No issues were raised.

**210 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED**

A Parish Councillor for Bobbing brought the Committee's attention to the Government Fund Changing Places Toilets. Local Authorities were invited to submit expressions of interest by 26 September 2021 to install larger accessible toilets for people who could not use standard accessible toilets, with equipment such as hoists, curtains, adult-sized changing benches and space for carers. The

Committee agreed that as this was a Borough-wide issue and it should be referred to Cabinet.

A Parish Councillor for Bobbing raised the issue of residents in the future needing to charge electric cars at home when they had no driveway. There needed to be a policy change to allow for a wire to be run either under or over the pavement. The Committee agreed that this issue was not specific to the Western Area and should be referred to Cabinet. Additionally, a Member said that the infrastructure needed to be put in place locally for high-speed rapid chargers. If such chargers were installed in communal parking areas, there would be a quick turnover of cars using them.

Councillor Mike Baldock proposed and Councillor Alan Horton seconded taking the Changing Places Toilets and the suggested solutions for charging electric vehicles locally to Cabinet. Members agreed.

**Resolved: That the Changing Places Toilets and suggested solutions for charging electric vehicles locally be taken to Cabinet to be considered as a whole Borough issue.**

## 211 CLOSED CHURCHYARDS

The Chairman explained that over £1 million of works needed to be carried out across Swale on closed churchyards to ensure they were maintained for heritage and health and safety reasons but the Council did not have this funding. Each year there was a budget of £50k to carry out these works which achieved limited progress. The Chairman asked if the Area Committee wanted to look at this going forward?

Discussion ensued and the possibility of a pilot scheme trialled in the Western Area was considered which would provide an avenue for the community to engage in this work. It was agreed to add this to the work plan to discuss further at a future meeting.

## 212 UPDATE ON WORK PLAN

The Area Committee considered the report setting out a proposed work plan and criteria for future funding applications to comply with.

Discussion ensued which focused on the process proposed by the Area Committee Review Working Group to score funding bids and if this mechanism was in line with the Constitution. The Chief Executive advised that officers had considered this and it was in line with the Constitution.

After further discussion Councillor Mike Baldock proposed and Councillor Paul Stephen seconded the following:

- The work plan for the year 2021/22 to include:
  - Continue with ongoing projects and receive updates;
  - potential positive activities for young people in villages; and
  - closed churchyards.

- References to fireworks and drones in the section on Exceptions to funding to be checked and if found to be incorrect, removed;
- bids for funding should demonstrate the criteria “*seek to improve the appearance, environment and facilities of the area and should benefit residents across the Western Area*”; and
- to reject the Area Committees Review Working Group’s process for scoring of applications, the Western Area Committee Members to assess the bids individually.

On being put to the vote, members agreed the proposal.

**Resolved: That the work plan for the year 2021/22 to include:**

- **Continue with ongoing projects and receive updates;**
- **potential positive activities for young people in villages; and**
- **closed churchyards.**
- **references to fireworks and drones in the section on Exceptions to funding to be checked and if found to be incorrect, remove;**
- **bids for funding should demonstrate the criteria “*seek to improve the appearance, environment and facilities of the area and should benefit residents across the Western Area*”; and**
- **to reject the Area Committees Review Working Group’s process for scoring of applications, the Western Area Committee Members to assess the bids individually.**

#### **213 MONITORING REPORT - FUNDING ALLOCATIONS 2020-21**

The Monitoring Report for funding allocations for 2020-21 was noted.

The Chairman advised that since publishing the agenda, the following update had been received:

*“Sittingbourne in Bloom Sensory Garden refurbishment at King George V Playing Field. Phase 1 had been completed which included replacing all timber bunding around the old ex-sensory beds and the recomposting and new planting. This cost £3,884. Phase 2 – SBC Green Spaces Team were being consulted regarding the planting regime and groundwork.”*

#### **214 MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE BY CABINET**

No issues were raised.

#### **215 MATTERS REFERRED TO CABINET BY COMMITTEE**

It was agreed to take the following matters to Cabinet for consideration:

- Changing Places Toilets – submit an Expression of Interest by 26 September 2021;
- to look at changing policy to allow residents to run a wire either under or over a pavement to charge an electric vehicle where there was no driveway;
- to encourage the installation of high speed/rapid chargers locally; and

- to encourage the provision of communal parking areas where high speed/rapid chargers could be installed.

**216 ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned from 20:15 to 20:22.

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