
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Thursday, 2 March 2023 from 7.00 pm - 8.18 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Derek Carnell (Substitute for Councillor Sarah Stephen), Richard Darby, Steve Davey, Oliver Eakin, Ann Hampshire, Nicholas Hampshire, Carole Jackson (Substitute for Councillor Roger Truelove), Julian Saunders (Chair), David Simmons, Eddie Thomas, Tim Valentine (Vice-Chair), Mike Whiting (Substitute for Councillor Pete Neal), Tony Winckless and Corrie Woodford.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Alister Andrews, Philippa Davies, Kelly Mehmet and Graeme Tuff.

OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually): Billy Attaway and Martyn Cassell.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillors Tim Gibson, Angela Harrison and Ken Rowles.

APOLOGIES: Councillors James Hall, Pete Neal, Sarah Stephen and Roger Truelove.

757 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

758 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

759 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 January 2023 (Minute Nos. 565 – 572) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Part B Minutes for Information

760 **Motion to ban barbeques in public open spaces**

The Head of Environment and Leisure introduced the report which set out the detail of the motion which was presented to Full Council on 7 December 2022 where Members had recommended that the motion be referred to the Environment Committee. He explained that the word 'disposable' needed to be removed from the report title, so that it reflected the sentiments of the motion. The Head of Environment and Leisure referred to the motion set out at Appendix I of the report and the proposed measures within the motion and said that it related to all barbeques, not solely disposable ones (as this only related to one of the recommendations), and hence the change to the report title. He outlined the mechanisms that could be put in place to take this forward and explained that the Council lacked evidence that barbeques were a problem in open spaces and that there was a lack of resources to take enforcement action.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- The report sets out the issues of barbecues in open spaces and the challenges in enforcement;
- in addition to recommendation (2), the impact on the use of barbecues within Swale needed to be monitored;
- there needed to be a complete ban on the sale of disposable barbecues, as if they were for sale, they would be bought and used;
- acknowledged that enforcement could be difficult;
- considered the report did not set out the motion's objectives in full;
- supported a ban on barbecues in public open spaces;
- the Government needed to ban the sale of disposable barbecues;
- there was merit in moving this forward carefully;
- this needed to be amended to make it 'tougher' and more in line with the motion;
- needed to consider that some organisations might want to offer a barbecue as part of their event; and
- these proposed measures were to deter irresponsible use of barbecues.

In response to a Member's suggestion that the recommendation be amended, the Chair said that he would not accept the amendment and reminded Members that any amendment should have been submitted prior to the meeting, as set out in the constitution. He added that he considered the report to be a detailed overview and that it proposed a sensible way forward. In reviewing what was happening within the Borough, officers could come back with more proposals at a later date when more was known.

Further comments from Members included:

- Acknowledged the Chair's discretion to accept an amendment or not, but considered the report was not in the spirit of the motion that went to Full Council;
- it was unfortunate that there was no debate on the motion at Council;
- the use of Public Space Protection orders allowed the issue of fixed penalty notices on the spot, rather than the resource issues of implementing the relevant byelaw;
- suggested there be a fixed date for the monitoring results to come back to the committee;
- paragraph 2.4 in the report was not specific to disposable barbecues, but Byelaw 9 was inclusive to all barbecues; and
- supported the use of Public Space Protection orders.

There was some discussion on the timeline for the monitoring figures to be reported back to the Environment Committee. The Chair moved the following amendment: That recommendation (2) be amended so that it read: '**To monitor Swale Borough Council land and to monitor the impact of other Councils' use of Public Space Protection orders in resolving the problem and to report back to the Environment Committee by December 2023.** This was seconded by Councillor David Simmons and on being put to the vote, the amendment was agreed.

Councillor Steve Davey proposed the substantive recommendations, to include the amendment, and they were seconded by Councillor David Simmons.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Chair of the Environment Committee sends a letter to Central Government and local MPs lobbying for a national ban on the sale of disposable BBQs.**
- (2) That Swale Borough Council land, and the impact of other Councils' use of Public Space Protection orders in resolving the problem, be monitored and reported back to the Environment Committee by December 2023.**

761 **Scrapsgate Field, Minster - Horse Riding Area**

The Greenspaces Manager introduced the report which set out background information and options to consider, following the request received at the Sheppey Area Committee on 22 September 2022 that the issue of reinstating the horse-riding circle in Scrapsgate Field, Minster be referred to the Environment Committee. He gave an overview of the site, as set out in the report, and explained that in 2012, the land was registered as a Village Green under The Commons Act 2006. This meant that the Council, as owner of the land, could not interfere with activities on the space. The Greenspaces Manager explained that there was an option to return to cutting the grass, but because of budget constraints, this would be reduced from maintaining the whole site in a rough-cut maintenance regime, to cutting a specific area three times a year, and this would be reviewed to see the effectiveness of this option. He added that he had tried to contact the riding group who had initially raised the issue at the Sheppey Area Committee, but had so far been unsuccessful.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Welcomed this initiative;
- suggested the riding group contributed to the cost of maintaining the mown area;
- the riding group should be encouraged to clear up any mess from the horses; and
- suggested Minster Parish Council be asked to get involved and contribute to the cost as well.

In response, the Greenspaces Manager explained that the use of the land was informal, and would continue to be so. He said that horse mess on the field had not been an issue in the past and that he would continue to make contact with the riding group and see whether they could make a contribution to the grass-cutting and he would also liaise with Minster Parish Council.

Councillor David Simmons proposed the recommendations and these were seconded by Councillor Tim Valentine.

Resolved:

- (1) That regular grass cutting for an informal horse-riding area on Scrapsgate Field, by reducing maintenance elsewhere on the site, be agreed.**
- (2) That the Head of Environment and Leisure, in consultation with the Environment Committee Chair, reviews the arrangements after a year to ensure the operational success and health and safety of the changes.**

762 **Marine Town Food waste and Alternate weekly Refuse and Recycling roll out**

The Environmental Contracts Manager introduced the report which set out an option for the future of waste collections in Marine Town, Sheerness, and sought approval of the suggested option to roll out food waste collections and alternate weekly refuse and recycling collections from September 2023. She explained the background to the Alternate Weekly Collections (AWC) scheme as set out in the report and that Government had said that every local authority should provide food waste collection by 2025. The Environmental Contracts Manager said that a survey had been carried out with Marine Town residents who had been in support of AWC and food waste collection. She said that this would help to improve recycling rates. It was hoped that this would be in place prior to the commencement of the new waste contract. The Environment Services Manager outlined the environmental benefits of the scheme which included the conversion of the food waste to compost; and that the scheme would result in there having to be fewer vehicles in the area for the collection of waste.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- As a visiting Ward Member, considered this had been 'a long time coming' and was delighted that this was moving forward;
- some properties on the weekly collection were putting out numerous black sacks of rubbish and this needed to be monitored going forward as in some areas the rubbish left out was on an industrial scale, rather than residential, in terms of the amount;
- supported this initiative;
- congratulated officers for the waste survey carried out in 2022, which had been a great success; and
- clarification sought on whether residual and recycling waste would remain in sacks.

In response, Members were advised that data would be collected from the scheme to see the impact of the collection of food waste on residual waste figures. The Environmental Contracts Manager said the number of black sacks left out would be monitored; communications would be sent out about the scheme and it would be monitored during its first three months. Most households in the area would remain with black sacks, rather than bins.

Councillor Tim Valentine proposed the recommendations and these were seconded by Councillor Steve Davey.

Resolved:

(1) That the implementation of the next stage of the Marine Town food waste project and the proposed methodology be approved.

763 **Items referred from Area Committees**

The Chair introduced the item as set out on the agenda front. He sought endorsement from the committee to write a letter to the Government.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- In support, but wondered if officers were already dealing with this sort of issue;
- this type of flooding affected areas throughout the Borough;
- additional funding was needed from Central Government; and
- the Local Government Association (LGA) should also be contacted.

The Chair understood that there had been discussions with Kent County Council about flooding issues, but further intervention was now required, hence the decision to write to Central Government. He said that he would request that proper funding was needed so that the relevant agencies could address the required mitigation measures. The Chair asked Members for examples of specific issues in their wards which he could include in the letter.

Resolved:

(1) That the Chair of the Environment Committee wrote to Central Government to outline the flooding issues throughout the Borough and requested that a proper funding package was provided to deal with the issue.

764 **Forward Decisions Plan**

The Head of Environment and Leisure gave an update, as below:

- Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan – re-allocation of funds, to be added to the June 2023 meeting; and
- Motion to ban barbeques in public open spaces – an update, to be added late 2023.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted and updated as minuted.

Chair

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