
SITTINGBOURNE AREA COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in The Sapling Room, The Appleyard, Avenue of Remembrance, Sittingbourne ME10 4DE on Thursday, 26 September 2024 from 7.00 pm - 8.40 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Tim Gibson, Mark Last (Vice-Chair), Angie Valls (Chair), Karen Watson, Tony Winckless and Ashley Wise.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Janet Dart and Lisa Fillery.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Rich Lehmann.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillors Simon Clark and Angela Harrison.
Kent County Councillor Mike Dendor, Divisional Member for Sittingbourne North.
Joseph Ratcliffe, Kent County Council.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Derek Carnell, Shelley Cheesman and Charlie Miller.

274 **EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

275 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No interests were declared.

276 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meetings held on 22 February 2024 (Minute Nos 684 – 695) and 15 May 2024 (Minutes Nos. 33 – 34) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct records.

277 **KENT LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 5**

Joseph Ratcliffe from Kent County Council (KCC) advised that a briefing on the Local Transport Plan 5 Consultation was being presented to all four Area Committee Meetings.

He said that this was a statutory plan for KCC which developed policies for the promotion and encouragement of safe, integrated, efficient and economic transport to, from and within their area and carried out their functions which would implement those policies. The plan would cover the period up to 2037.

KCC wanted to improve the health, wellbeing and economic prosperity of lives in Kent by delivering a safe, reliable, efficient and affordable transport network across the county and as an international gateway. KCC would plan for growth in Kent in a way that enabled them to combat climate change and preserve Kent's environment.

He said that KCC would do this by delivering emission-free travel by getting effective dedicated infrastructure for electric vehicles, increase public transport use and make walking and cycling more attractive. This would be enabled by maintaining their highways network and delivering their 'Vision Zero' road safety strategy.

Mr Ratcliffe said that KCC were consulting on the ambitions and outcomes set out in the document. He said the consultation closed on 8 October 2024 and responses would then be reviewed before going to a KCC Full Council meeting in December 2024. People could either respond by emailing comments to LTP5@kent.gov.uk or via their 'Let's Talk' online platform at www.kent.gov.uk/ltp5.

The following comments were made:

- Junction 7 of the M20/A249 roundabout was dangerous at peak times;
- were the Junction 5a M2 improvements and the continuation of the Northern Relief Road, Sittingbourne, associated with the Highsted Valley, Sittingbourne, development, should it be approved?;
- were cycle paths subject to Government approval?; and
- the rail transport timetable proposals only addressed part of the problem, extra carriages were needed, especially on the high-speed service.

Mr Ratcliffe responded and explained that the Junction 7 M20/A249 roundabout improvements were a priority but were subject to successful bids for funding and nearby development. Regarding the Junction 5a M2 improvements and the continuation of the Northern Relief road, it was for Swale Borough Council (SBC) to decide on the Highsted Valley development and KCC would work with them, but it would be a developer led project. Active Travel controlled the funding for cycle paths, some developers would fund cycle paths and KCC would deliver them. The Kent Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (KCWIP) set out where the routes would go. Mr Ratcliffe agreed on the point about reduced carriages on the rail network and said he would add it to the LTP5 as an issue. He urged everyone with comments to respond to the consultation.

278 SCRUTINY OF WASTE & STREET CLEANSING CONTRACT

Councillor Rich Lehmann, Chair of the Waste & Street Cleansing Scrutiny Review Member Panel, gave a presentation on the review being carried out.

He said that SBC were the collection authority and this was a statutory duty. The previous contract with Biffa expired in March 2024 and Suez had been awarded an eight-year contract. SBC were part of a Mid-Kent Joint Partnership (Swale, Ashford and Maidstone Borough Councils).

When the new contract started, a period of settling in was always anticipated. However, several months of disruption had been experienced by some residents.

On 16 July 2024 the Environment & Climate Change Committee agreed that a scrutiny review be carried out and a panel of five councillors was set up. They would look at a range of issues around the start of the new contract, including

resources and staffing, data and rounds, contract and project management and communications.

The panel would spend the next couple of months carrying out detailed investigations into these topics, using a range of methods to get information and feedback, including workshops, consultation with Area Committees and the Local Councils' Liaison Forum. A public survey had already been launched which asked for residents' experiences with the new contract.

Councillor Lehmann asked for comments to feed into the review, and these included:

- Were the re-rounds working?;
- one of the issues had been communal bins being missed, what had been put in place to resolve this?;
- there had been confusion about collection days for residents living in properties on the High Street, Sittingbourne;
- some litter bins had not been emptied and were overflowing;
- Councillors emailing Cleansing Services with problems were not always receiving replies;
- the Council Leader, Councillor Tim Gibson thanked Councillor Lehmann for all the work he had done over the period of disruption. He said it was a mammoth task and he had done a sterling job; and
- why were Fridays the worst day for missed collections?

Councillor Lehmann responded that there were improvements since the re-rounds which commenced on 16 September 2024. Now if a bin was missed, it was usually collected the following day. Work was ongoing to improve communal bin collections. It was important to report all missed collections as well as litter bins that had not been collected. At the beginning of the period of disruption, officers had been overwhelmed by the amount of communication received and as such it had not been possible to respond to all Councillor emails. Cleansing staff had been focusing on areas that experienced repeated missed bins on Fridays to try to resolve the issue.

279 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Members noted the progress on actions.

Sittingbourne Tennis Club - Kevin Kelly, the Chair of Sittingbourne Tennis Club asked for help to push forward a project to get some basic facilities to support the development of the Tennis Club. The Chair of Sittingbourne Area Committee read out an update from the Greenspaces Manager:

"The Council's refurbishment of the tennis courts at Milton Recreation Ground was completed in May 2024 at a cost of £51,300 using an LTA grant, plus a further £32,400 of Council funding to refurbish floodlighting controls and LED's.

The changing facilities at Milton Recreation Ground proposed for use are in relatively poor condition, used by some of the football teams and are within a

complicated existing third-party lease for the buildings. However, as previously communicated to the tennis club, the tenant has already agreed to usage during their normal opening hours. SBC were also in the process of receiving quotations for works to facilitate external access and make some improvements within the building, while accepting the limited budget will not permit complete refurbishment at this time."

Mr Kelly said that the Tennis Club were not asking for funding, they would like permission to do the work themselves. After some discussion it was agreed that Councillor Mark Last would speak to SBC officers to see if a scoping meeting with the leaseholder could be set up.

Heritage issues – Councillor Tony Winckless asked if the Milton Regis Conservation Area boundary changes had taken place and if Milton Regis Library was a listed building. The Policy & Engagement Officer agreed to ask the Conservation & Design Team these questions.

Resolved:

- 1) That Councillor Mark Last would speak with SBC officers to see if it was possible to set up a scoping meeting with Sittingbourne Tennis Club and the leaseholder of the changing facilities at Milton Recreation Ground, Sittingbourne.**
- 2) That the Policy & Engagement Officer would ask the Conservation & Design Team if the Milton Regis Conservation Area boundary changes had taken place and if Milton Regis Library was a listed building.**

280 PUBLIC FORUM

A member of the public said he was surprised that this Sittingbourne Area Committee meeting was so poorly attended. He offered to promote future meetings at the Swale Media Arts Centre and would provide his email address so he could receive information on forthcoming meetings.

A member of the Milton Regis Society spoke about buildings putting up plastic shop signs with lights behind them and plastic doors which were not permitted. Councillor Tony Winckless said he had already reported these issues to Planning Enforcement. He said he would make further enquiries and feedback to the Milton Regis Society.

A member of the public asked where he could take a complaint if it had not been resolved satisfactorily through the formal SBC Complaints Procedure. He was advised the final step was to contact the Local Government Ombudsman.

A member of the public asked about the process for competing charities applying for funding grants. The Director of Resources advised that any application submitted would need to meet specified criteria. A Councillor added that charities were encouraged to work together so there were not lots of organisations doing the same thing.

281 ENHANCED BUS PARTNERSHIP - SWALE LOCAL BUS FOCUS GROUP

The Chair advised that there had been a meeting of the Swale Local Bus Focus Group on 19 September 2024. Councillor Karen Watson, who had been in attendance, gave the following update:

- Chalkwell, Stagecoach and KCC were in attendance;
- roadworks were impacting local bus services;
- utility companies were frequently digging up roads which affected bus services;
- bus companies were placing Quick Response (QR) codes at bus stops so passengers could get live updates on services;
- bus companies were looking at improving accessibility for people with mobility issues;
- limited or no services in some areas at weekends and bank holidays were an issue;
- waiting to see what would happen with Government funding for bus services;
- the £2 price cap was being removed;
- the X3 service timetable would be amended to take into account the faster travel time since the Stockbury Flyover opened;
- Network Rail would be invited to the next Swale Local Bus Focus Group meeting, which would hopefully take place early 2025; and
- if anyone had any issues they would like raised at the next Focus Group meeting they should let the Sittingbourne Area Committee representative, Councillor Tony Winckless, or Councillor Watson know.

282 SWALE TRAFFIC FORUM

The Chair advised that due to the General Election, there had not been a meeting of the Swale Traffic Forum since February 2024. The officer who coordinated this group had left SBC. She suggested that if anyone had any issues to email the Sittingbourne Area Committee's Swale Traffic Forum representative, Councillor Simon Clark.

283 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED

Councillors advised that they were pleased to note that closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras were being installed in Sittingbourne Town Centre and Milton High Street.

It was requested that a representative from the Police be invited to attend the December 2024 Sittingbourne Area Committee.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Policy & Engagement Officer would invite a representative from the Police to attend the December 2024 Sittingbourne Area Committee.***

284 MATTERS REFERRED TO SERVICE COMMITTEE CHAIRS FOR CONSIDERATION

No issues were raised.

Chair

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