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## WESTERN AREA COMMITTEE

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**MINUTES** of the Virtual Meeting Via Skype on Tuesday, 1 September 2020 from 7.00pm - 9.10pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Roger Clark, Nicholas Hampshire, Alan Horton, James Hunt, Richard Palmer, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen and Corrie Woodford.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** David Clifford, Janet Dart and Bob Pullen.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillors Cameron Beart, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor, Carole Jackson, Bill Tatton, Ghlin Whelan and Kent County Councillor Mike Whiting.

### 51 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

***Resolved: That Councillor Mike Baldock be elected Chairman for the Municipal Year 2020/21.***

### 52 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

***Resolved: That Councillor Corrie Woodford be elected Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year 2020/21.***

### 53 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

### 54 PURPOSE AND ROLE OF AREA COMMITTEES IN SWALE

The Chairman introduced the report which set-out the purpose of area committees and the Committee's terms of reference.

During discussion it was noted that it was possible to raise local issues on the night of the meeting that were not listed on the agenda in order to make the Committee responsive to local concerns. A Member considered that it was important that parish councils could suggest issues for future consideration.

The Chairman said that it was open to area committees to make recommendations to Cabinet for further consideration.

### 55 BROWN TOURISM SIGNS

The tabled paper for this item described the process for obtaining and siting of brown tourism signs. It was noted that there were many demands for more brown signs to support leisure and tourism offer across Swale. However, it is not straightforward and cheap to get these signs put up. Cabinet would like to see area committees provide a prioritised list of sites they would be interested in funding signage for, and an indication where they would like those signs to go.

Discussion ensued on:

- Signs on major roads and local roads and the different processes that applied to each;
- whether signage on major roads extended across the remit of any one area committee – concerned about using funds available to committee which would benefit other areas;
- need to ‘audit’ current local signs to identify any that are redundant;
- parish councils likely to be a good source of local knowledge;
- include heritage as well as traditional tourism sites;
- Western Swale did not have any attractions which would justify signposting from the M2;
- need to work alongside KCC and Visit Kent; and
- Blue heritage plaques honouring notable people who have lived or worked in buildings in Swale could also be considered.

The Chairman said that the focus of such an exercise was likely to be on local signs and signs advertising local businesses/attractions.

It was agreed that the Policy and Performance Officer would liaise with Economy and Community Services and KCC to find out what existing information was held and bring that back to the next meeting.

**Resolved:**

- (1) To reconsider at next meeting scheduled for 1 December 2020 following audit of existing signs, liaison with parish councils and further research.**
- (2) To get quotes for the 3 proposed CA reviews - Tunstall, Bredgar and Rodmersham. To seek comments and quotes on possible new CAs for Iwade and Bobbing. To seek views of the affected Parishes to see if they would contribute to them.**

**56 HERITAGE ISSUES**

The tabled paper explained that Swale had around 50 Conservation Areas (CA) many of which have not been reviewed for several decades. Earlier this year the Council launched a new Heritage Strategy, part of which includes the reviewing of these Conservation Areas over the period of the Strategy.

Conservation Areas reviews are estimated at costing between c£3000 and c£6000 depending on their size and complexity. The Strategy has a time frame for many of the CA reviews, but area committees may choose to fund certain CA reviews as an addition to the current timeframe. If a Committee agreed a figure for funding one, a review can be commissioned.

Discussion ensued on:

- Which areas might be due a review outside of the Heritage Strategy timeframe;

- Need to be clearer on the criteria/process for selecting areas for review – decision-making needs to be transparent, particularly where public funds are involved;
- Need input from parish councils and the wider public;
- No particular need for urgency, selection process should not be rushed;
- Cabinet prioritised programme of reviews through the Heritage Strategy Action Plan, should be able to do the same for any additional reviews;
- Bring back to next meeting for a more considered discussion.

***Resolved: To work up more detailed proposals, including criteria for selecting areas for review, seek views of parish councils and bring item back to meeting scheduled for 1 December 2020.***

## 57 CONSERVATION ISSUES - INCLUDING PONDS

The tabled paper explained that it was important that the Council has an up-to-date and accurate picture of the ponds in our Swale, their current condition, and ownership details. This did not include private ponds in peoples' gardens.

There was both a strategic need for this information and also a heritage, conservation and tourism aspect. Ponds were often signifiers of underground waterways which we need to be aware of, and are also strong promoters of biodiversity. They could also be used in promotional material encouraging visitors to our rural areas.

Discussion ensued on:

- What the committee might be able to do to restore ponds which had been identified as falling into disrepair;
- local conservation groups already likely to have useful information;
- role of Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board;
- Borough-wide issue that may be more appropriate for Scrutiny Committee or Policy Development and Review Committee to consider in first instance; and
- need to find out from officers and other organisations what information already existed.

***Resolved: Policy and Performance Officer to explore with officers and other organisations what information currently exists on the areas ponds.***

## 58 PUBLIC FORUM

The Chairman invited any members of the public to ask any questions or suggest items for future meetings. A parish councillor from Bobbing Parish Council asked how parish councillors or members of the public could join the discussion and the Chairman and Policy and Performance Officer outlined how people could register in advance their wish to address the meeting so that they could be brought in at the appropriate time. The Chairman would also set aside a slot at each public forum where the mics of those present were unmuted to enable any questions to be raised or points made on the night.

In terms of possible items for discussion at the next or future meetings Members suggested:

- Walking and cycling routes around the villages;
- maintenance and care of local woodlands;
- addressing littering in parks and open spaces including litter picking and awareness campaigns; and
- ASB on unregistered land near new developments.

Chairman

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