
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 27 July 2022 from 7.00 pm - 8.23 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart, Derek Carnell, Simon Clark (Mayor), Richard Darby, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor, Oliver Eakin, Simon Fowle, Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, James Hall, Ann Hampshire, Nicholas Hampshire, Angela Harrison, James Hunt, Ken Ingleton, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Denise Knights, Peter Macdonald, Peter Marchington, Ben J Martin, Lee McCall, Padmini Nissanga, Ken Pugh, Ken Rowles, Julian Saunders, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen (Deputy Mayor), Bill Tatton, Eddie Thomas, Roger Truelove, Tim Valentine and Tony Winckless.

PRESENT (Virtually): Councillors Roger Clark and Mike Whiting.

OFFICERS PRESENT: David Clifford, Philippa Davies, Lisa Fillery, Robin Harris, Jo Millard and Larissa Reed.

OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually): Emma Wiggins.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen, Mike Henderson, Alan Horton, Pete Neal, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, David Simmons and Corrie Woodford.

219 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Mayor outlined the Emergency Evacuation procedure.

220 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 15 June 2022 (Minute Nos. 87 - 96) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

221 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Peter MacDonald declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in item 9 – Motion concerning loss of water supply on the Isle of Sheppey – as he sat on Sheerness Town Council.

222 **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor had attended a number of events since the last Full Council meeting including:

- Open Day at the Criterion Theatre, Bluetown, Sheerness where he had opened a new lift;
- Armed Forces Flag raising ceremony at County Hall, Maidstone;
- Afternoon tea at the Royal Society of St. George, Sittingbourne;
- Sister Act Musical performed by students at Highsted School, Sittingbourne;
- Commonwealth Baton relay event at Abbey School, Faversham;
- Challenger Troup Award ceremony at Meadowfields School, Sittingbourne;
- Mayor of Faversham's Civic Service;

- Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Swale Garden party with former Mayor which raised £700 in total and included a donation of £436 from the former Mayor's charity fund raising.

Referring to his attendance at the recent Swale Youth Forum, the Mayor praised the young people in attendance for their engagement and questions with Matthew Scott, the Kent Police Crime Commissioner.

The Mayor advised that as there was a lot of public interest in Item 11 – Community Governance Review – and public were in attendance in the Chamber for that item, he would bring forward the item for discussion after the Leader's Statement.

223 Change to the Order of Business

The Mayor altered the order of business as minuted.

224 Leader's Statement

The Leader opened his statement by speaking about the recent failure of the water infrastructure on the Isle of Sheppey, and the declaration by Swale Borough Council (SBC) to declare a water emergency. He said he had major reservations in the role that Southern Water (SW) played and pointed out that the company had not learnt any lessons from the previous incident in 2016. The Leader said that Members and Officers had expressed their concerns to SW and impressed upon them the priority need for a second pipeline onto the Isle of Sheppey.

The Leader said that SBC were seeking compensation from SW for losses the Council had suffered, and he said that the process on how others who were impacted could be compensated would be advertised.

The Leader thanked SBC staff who he said responded magnificently to the emergency, along with staff from Maidstone Borough Council and volunteers from the Borough.

The Leader then referred to the second water emergency in the Borough which occurred at Dunkirk and the surrounding villages, and he again thanked staff and volunteers for their assistance. He also drew attention to the fire at Barton's Point, Minster, paid tribute to staff in all incidents, and said their response was immediate.

Referring to the £20 million Levelling-Up Fund bid that would shortly be submitted, the Leader outlined the planned projects known as the Sheerness Revival, that, if successful, would benefit residents including an upgrade of the community, visitor and leisure facilities around Beachfields, Sheppey College extension, and an upgrade of Master's House, Sheerness. He spoke about the creation of jobs as part of the proposals. The Leader said that Swale had been awarded Priority 1 status in the bidding and the outcome of the bid would be known in autumn 2022.

The Leader said that SBC would shortly be submitting its Investment Plan which would allow the Council to drawdown on £1.17 million UK Shared Prosperity Funding. He said a cross party working group had met to agree priorities and suggest projects following recommendations made by the Regeneration and Property Committee on 7 July 2022.

Referring to the hot weather, the Leader said that it was important during the summer season that tourism and visitor centres were able to recover from the impact of the Covid-

19 pandemic. He said that Members could all play their part in supporting community events across the Borough and he was delighted to announce that both Oare Country Park and Church Milton Country Park had been awarded a Green Flag. The Leader also gave an update on the restoration of the Sheerness Clock Tower. He described Swale's rich heritage and explained that the character Jack Sparrow was in part based on local pirate John Jack Ward who was born in Faversham in 1553. The Leader said that it was national Talk Like a Pirate Day on 19 September 2022 and he encouraged Members to research the history of John Jack Ward.

Finally, the Leader said he was delighted to attend the Municipal Journal (MJ) awards at which SBC employee Grace Crouch, Climate and Ecological Emergency Project Officer, was announced as the winner of the Rising Stars award. Members applauded Grace's success.

Members responded to the Leader's Statement and asked questions and raised points including:

- There was a lack of sewage facilities in the Borough;
- more reservoirs were needed;
- questioned whether the public on the Isle of Sheppey wanted the projects chosen in the Levelling-Up bid;
- praise for Green Flag awards but other parks could be better maintained;
- the fire at Barton's Point could have been avoided with better maintenance and control of the facilities;
- supported the work to the Sheerness Clocktower;
- gave congratulations to the staff member receiving the MJ award;
- the Council had worked hard to reflect the views and needs of the residents of the Isle of Sheppey in the Levelling-Up bid;
- was critical that the Government expected tight deadlines for submission of Levelling Up bids, allowing little time, but frequently delayed the outcome;
- thanked the Environment Team for their help in the water supply issues at Dunkirk and was critical of South East Water and their lack of communication;
- praised Kris Staples (Green Spaces Ranger), and Rosie Lancaster (Green Spaces Apprentice) for their enthusiasm, approach and work at Milton Creek Country Park;
- thanked all volunteers at Milton Creek Country Park;
- highlighted that the Green Flag was awarded on first application;
- gave credit to the Climate Change team;
- would there be an investigation on the fire at Barton's Point by SBC?;
- compared the difference in how different water companies reacted to the water emergencies and said that SW had no plan;
- the Faversham Hop Festival which drew in large numbers of tourists, was returning in September 2022; and
- praised the passion of SBC officers.

The Leader congratulated Councillor Ken Ingleton on becoming Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group.

In response to queries raised, the Leader said that the Levelling Up bid was restricted to the parameters outlined by Central Government and officers had carried out an excellent

job in following the process. The Leader said he would love to see a Green Flag at Barton's Point, and the fire at the location was being investigated. Referring to the water emergencies, the Leader said they, along with flooding and unaddressed leaks in the Borough were being raised with SW.

225 **Community Governance Review**

The Leader introduced the report which set out details of the recent consultation that took place as part of the Community Governance Reviews agreed by Council in April 2022. He proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Ken Ingleton who reserved his right to speak.

Councillor James Hall proposed an amendment to Recommendation 2(a) which had been published on the website and tabled:

“To continue to a 2nd stage consultation with respect of the Murston Ward Boundary, setting out the different boundary options for residents. This should include any cost changes include parish precepts for the different opinions.

This will ensure that residents have all the information to enable them to make an informed decision.”

The amendment was seconded by the Leader who said that a second consultation would seek residents' views on whether they agreed with the proposed changes.

In the debate that followed, Members made points including:

- The response rate of 26.5% of 637 residents consulted was likely higher as only one person would generally respond on behalf of a household;
- the results were very clear, only 8.8% of those who responded were in favour of a boundary review at Great Easthall, Murston;
- a second consultation was not necessary;
- the public had already been consulted and given their views and the Council should listen to those views;
- the Officer's recommendation was very clear;
- it was unjust to keep running a process to change the outcome;
- another consultation was a waste of resources;
- 91% against a boundary change was a very large margin;
- it was good news that so many that were consulted supported their Parish Council;
- the amendment was insulting to public who had responded to the consultation;
- there may be minor changes to the boundary necessary in the future; and
- ignoring the views of those who had responded sent out the wrong message.

The Leader said he welcomed comments about democracy but referred to paragraph 3.7 of the report in which the majority did not support a review, and said there was inconsistency in the process.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was lost. Members then debated the substantive recommendation and made points including:

- Support for the boundary change at Lucas Close, Queenborough; and

- support for the boundary to include land at Brielle Way, Sheerness in case of further development in the future.

On being put to the vote, Members voted in favour of the recommendations set out in the report.

Resolved:

(1) To note the results of the initial stage consultations for the Community Governance Reviews conducted at:

- a) **Great Easthall Estate – Tonge Parish Area**
- b) **Lucas Close – Sheerness Town Council area**

(2) That having considered the results of the initial consultations, the Council agrees the following:

- a) **Great Easthall (Tonge Parish area) – no further action is taken and the review is concluded.**
- b) **Lucas Close (Sheerness Town Council area) – a second stage consultation is conducted with residents and interested parties, recommending the Town Council boundary is changed, so that Lucas Close becomes part of the Queenborough Town Council Area.**

226 Questions submitted by the Public

No questions were submitted by Members of the public.

227 Questions submitted by Members

The Mayor advised that four questions had been submitted from Members. As Councillor Whiting was not in attendance in the Chamber, his question (2) would be rolled over to the next Full Council meeting.

Question 1 – Councillor Bill Tatton

There have been two well attended Sheppey Area Committee meetings with the main conclusion that if Swale Borough Council (SBC) gets its £20M Government Levelling up fund it should be spent on the proposed swimming pool re-build, expansion of the health centre and canvassing to local employers to find out what skill sets are needed by students that are attending Sheppey College.

There had been no mention of a soft play & adventure golf putting area or indeed a further eatery.

There are more than enough eateries in the adjacent High Street, there is no need to approve the appearance on the exit from the railway station, the present scheme designers stated it would be good for tourism under the belief tourists would arrive via train. Had research been carried out, very few tourists arrive by train, these trains normally comprise of 2 carriages so may be of interest to day trippers but not tourists.

Adventure golf putting is dependent on weather conditions and once Sheerness residents have had a go, how do the remote conurbations residents' benefit? With possible Anti-Social Behaviour attacks, maintenance costs, golf club and ball hire, I cannot see how golf putting would offer the same benefit as swimming.

In a press release dated 7th June 2022 by the Chair of Regeneration and Property Committee it stated that the swimming pool preferred suggestions were not feasible and would not be possible in the timescales the government have set.

Why can't £60m be found as it was for the Sittingbourne town centre regeneration?

Response – Vice-Chair of Regeneration and Property

Wrapped around the Area Committee meeting, Swale Borough Council undertook wide-ranging consultation in early 2022 to seek people's views on the proposed Levelling-Up Fund bid, with questions including 'what would you like to see inside a new swimming pool building / refurbished leisure centre' and 'what would you like to see in the wider Beachfields footprint'.

Responses showed support for a café, soft play and adventure golf, and these were tested against current and future demand as part of the business case preparation, with evidence showing there would be a strong market for these facilities.

A key aim of the bid is to increase visitation from outside of Sheerness, to support the regeneration of the sea front, High Street and wider town centre.

In line with Council policy, we are keen to encourage public transport and active travel as primary transport means. The improvement of the pedestrian route from the station will benefit more users than just those arriving by train.

We share everyone's disappointment that it has not been possible to include a new swimming pool in the Levelling-Up Fund bid, and that the fund does not support revenue investment, which would be required to deliver new transport services. We have undertaken to look to other funding sources to complement Levelling-Up investment, and will continue to do so.

The maximum possible ask of the Levelling-Up Fund is £20m, and we are bidding for that full value.

Supplementary Question

In which area of the Isle of Sheppey was the consultation of residents carried out?

Response

I do not have that information to hand, a full response will be provided.

Question 3 – Councillor James Hunt

Government have made up to £180 million available through the Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF2), to enable local authorities to release brownfield sites in their ownership. With all local authorities able to apply, will an application be being made by Swale Borough Council?

Response – Vice-Chair of Regeneration and Property

We are aware of this funding stream, round 1 of which opened in July, with a submission deadline of 19th August. We understand from government guidance that there will be at least two further funding rounds. With a great deal of officer time being dedicated to our £20m Levelling-Up Fund bid and to unlocking our £1.17m UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocation, both with August deadlines, we will not be submitting a bid under this first call. Brownfield Land Release Fund investment will, however, be actively considered for future rounds, when we expect to be supported by the additional expertise and capacity of an External Funding Officer – the job advert for which closed last week.

Question 4 – Councillor Steve Davey

Could the chair please inform me of the current use by SBC and its contractors of pest and weedkiller including Glyphosate based varieties, and the plan to phase out the use of these products.

Response – Chair of Environment Committee

Thank you for a very pertinent question. There is an international debate regarding the use of glyphosate and current Government licensing of the product only runs until 2025. As a result, officers have been researching alternatives and using contract renewals as an opportunity to draw on industry expertise in this area.

Our new grounds maintenance contract which started in January 2022, commits to reducing the use of glyphosate over the 5 year contract term and switching to more manual weeding instead. We currently use about 140 litres of herbicide across the Borough each year and have a target to reduce this to 90 litres in year one and to use no glyphosate by year 5.

Our street cleansing contract allows for the use of glyphosate for treating specific weeding issues around the Borough, but I am pleased to report that our contractor has not used any glyphosate or equivalent product over the last few years. The new waste tender process has sought contractor views on alternative methods to glyphosate usage and whilst the alternatives are few and much more costly, we remain committed to restricting its use.

Supplementary question

Could the Communications team advertise this information?

Response

As we are in the middle of a tender process, there will be careful publicity.

228 Motion concerning loss of water supply on the Isle of Sheppey

In accordance with section 3.1.14.3 of the Constitution, the Chief Executive read out an implications note in response to the amendments submitted against the motion concerning the loss of water supply on the Isle of Sheppey.

Before he proposed the motion, Councillor Cameron Beart spoke of the three occasions in recent years that the Isle of Sheppey had been without a water supply, and he said that lessons had not been learnt. Councillor Beart said that the motion had been submitted to highlight the misery caused to residents and to find practical solutions to help in the future but as he considered that the amendments submitted by the Administration were being used as a political point-scoring platform, he chose to withdraw the motion. Councillor Oliver Eakin, as the proposed seconder gave his support to the withdrawal of the motion.

As the motion had not been proposed, the Mayor confirmed the motion had been withdrawn and there would be no further discussion on it at the meeting.

229 **Constitutional Changes**

The Leader introduced the report which sought agreement to constitutional changes recommended by the Policy and Resources Committee. He proposed the recommendations which were seconded by the Deputy Leader of the main opposition group, who reserved his right to speak.

Members raised points including:

- Considered that it was unnecessary to include the change at paragraph 3.1.17;
- supported Parish Councils giving a reason for calling in a planning application but said that Members should also be required to have a reason for calling an application in;
- submitting amendments in advance encouraged inclusivity;
- Members should give valid planning grounds to call in a planning application; and
- highlighted the recommendation should include reference to paragraph 3.12 as well as 3.11.

The Chair of the Planning Committee explained that Members did usually give a planning reason when calling a planning application in and it was not an issue.

The Deputy Leader of the main opposition group spoke in support of the changes saying that the issues had been discussed at the Policy and Resources Committee and at the Working Group and he highlighted the differences when a Member who was not a Member of the Planning Committee, called an item into Planning Committee.

The Leader referred to the long debate that took place at the Policy and Resources Committee on 13 July 2022, which was available to view on line. He said the changes had been well worked through and Members needed to work together.

Resolved:

(1) That the constitutional changes set out in paragraphs 3.4 and 3.6 of the report be agreed.

(2) That the constitutional changes set out in paragraph 3.11 and 3.12 of the report be agreed.

Mayor

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