
Council

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 26 July 2023 from 7.00 pm - 8.24 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Andy Booth, Hayden Brawn, Ann Cavanagh, Lloyd Chapman, Shelley Cheesman, Roger Clark, Simon Clark, Tim Gibson, Kieran Golding, Alastair Gould, James Hall, Angela Harrison, James Hunt, Carole Jackson, Mark Last, Rich Lehmann, Peter Marchington, Ben J Martin (Deputy Mayor), Charlie Miller, Lee-Anne Moore, Pete Neal, Julien Speed, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen (Mayor), Terry Thompson, Mark Tucker, Angie Valls, Karen Watson, Mike Whiting, Chris Williams and Tony Winckless.

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillors Tara Noe and Dolley Wooster.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Robin Harris, Jo Millard and Larissa Reed.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Philippa Davies and Emma Wiggins.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Derek Carnell, Elliott Jayes, Chris Palmer, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin and Dolley Wooster.

216 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

217 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 June 2023 (Minute Nos. 116 to 119) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

218 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

219 **Tributes to former Mayor, Hon. Alderman Ken Ingleton**

Councillor Andy Booth led the tributes to former Mayor, Honorary Alderman Ken Ingleton who sadly passed away recently. He said that Honorary Alderman Ingleton had led a rich life in his work and politics, and he referred to his two terms as Mayor and his very many voluntary roles and dedication to helping residents, particularly on the Isle of Sheppey. Councillor Booth said Honorary Alderman Ingleton had a unique sense of humour, was an excellent Chair, a straight forward thinker and would be very much missed.

The Leader said Honorary Alderman Ingleton was a true gentleman who had time for everyone, and it had been an honour and a privilege to work alongside him.

The Deputy Leader said Honorary Alderman Ingleton was a role model and an inspiration and was a link to Swale Borough Council's (SBC) past. He spoke of his knowledge of the Constitution and said that SBC had lost a warm and knowledgeable character.

The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Councillor Mike Henderson, spoke of Honorary Alderman Ingleton's honesty and how he never let party politics get in the way. He said he was always friendly, always helpful, and always a good Councillor.

Councillor Roger Clark recalled the kindness and support of Honorary Alderman Ingleton when he was Deputy Mayor at the time of Honorary Alderman Ingleton's second term as Mayor.

Councillor Mike Whiting said Honorary Alderman Ingleton was an excellent mentor, and showed integrity and was inspirational.

Councillor James Hunt referred to Honorary Alderman Ingleton as the 'Grandfather of Swale Borough Council' who still moved with the times.

There was a minute's silence in memory of Honorary Alderman Ken Ingleton.

220 **Adjournment**

There was an adjournment from 7.24pm until 7.37pm.

221 **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor said she had been very busy since the last Council meeting. Visits included:

- The Elvis and Kresse workshop, a local company in Painters Forstal that used recycled fire hoses to make handbags and other goods;
- Elvey Care Home;
- Highsted School end of year show to see a production of 'Legally Blonde';
- Borden Fete, where £370 was raised for Kent Wildlife Trust;
- an award ceremony at Challenger Troop;
- inter-primary 2k run at Tunstall Primary School;
- Kite College, Eurolink Industrial Estate, Sittingbourne which was apprenticed-based;
- leading the parade at Sheppey Pride;
- renovations at the Dockyard, Sheerness;
- opened sensory room at Lady Dane Care Home, Faversham; and
- high tea for Faversham Carnival Court.

Finally, the Mayor spoke of her Welcoming Service that took place at St. Michael's Church, Sittingbourne and was attended by her three charities. She thanked Reverend David Ridley and Colin Brookes for the service.

222 **Questions submitted by the Public**

There were no questions from the public.

223 **Questions submitted by Members**

The Mayor advised four questions had been received from Members.

Question 1 – Councillor Chris Williams

What response has the Leader had to his letter to KCC regarding the closure of Faversham tip? What else does he think Swale Borough Council can do to encourage KCC to change their mind and keep Faversham Tip open and running?

Response – Leader

I can confirm that at the time of writing, I have not received a response from Cllr Gough.

The Environment committee discussed the issue briefly at their last meeting and agreed for the Chair, Cllr Rich Lehmann to write to KCC's Cabinet Member for Environment. This letter has been sent but has also currently not been responded to.

There have been two reports to KCC's committees so far which have outlined a number of options. The latest report has removed the potential impact to Sheerness and Sittingbourne HWRCs but remains with the Faversham closure in all options. Having expressed our opposition publicly and to those making the decisions, we feel it is best to await the detail of the formal consultation which we expect in the coming weeks.

In terms of what more Swale Borough Council can do to assist, we will continue to look at ways in which we can support the campaign to oppose the closure and of course ensure engagement in the KCC consultation process.

Question 2 – Councillor Ben J Martin

It was recently revealed that the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP, has returned £1.9 Billion of funding meant to tackle the housing crisis in England to the treasury due to "struggling to find projects to spend it on". There are 295 District and Unitary Council's in England responsible for Housing. Had the £1.9 billion been shared out equally between those local housing authorities, each would have received just shy of £6.5 million. This would have been sufficient to purchase 20-50 homes in Swale, based on current averages prices across the borough. Does the leader agree with me that the decision to return the funds was at best short sighted and that such funding for affordable homes in this borough would have not only been welcomed, but would have had a significant benefit for our residents?

Response – Leader

With the country in a housing crisis and more and more families finding themselves unable to find secure affordable and permanent accommodation, we and the government should be doing everything we can to maximise affordable housing delivery. I would have absolutely welcomed the funding in the borough, and it is disappointing to see this level of much needed investment being returned to the treasury. This demonstrates that the mechanisms and criteria that the government have attached to this funding are not fit for purpose. Last week the government launched a call for evidence to gather views and experiences of working with Homes England. I have asked officers to respond highlighting these issues.

Supplementary Question

As homelessness was on the increase, would you commit to responding robustly?

Response – Leader

Yes, we will respond robustly.

Question 3 – Councillor Ben J Martin

At the meeting of the Housing & Health Committee held on January 17th the committee approved the use of £11million to purchase up to 50 homes for use as Temporary Accommodation with 4 of those properties to be used as part of the Ukrainian resettlement scheme and for a number of large properties to be used as part of the bridging programme for refugees. Could the chair of the housing and health committee provide a brief update on the progress of the bid for government funding that formed part of that decision and on the purchase of homes for use as temporary accommodation within the borough, particularly if any properties have yet been purchased, and if so how many and of what size?

Response – Chair of Housing and Health Committee

Since the decision taken at January Committee, Officers have been putting the foundations of the project and scheme in place. We are yet to purchase any properties; as we are assessing properties available and will make appropriate purchases when the right properties come along. In terms of the bridging scheme, we are working with a local registered provider on a new build site, there have been some delays onsite, but the build is progressing.

Supplementary

Since the decision was made in January, the Government have once again moved the goalposts and offered a 'sweetheart deal' to a commercial entity. Will this have any impact on the ability to deliver?

Response – Chair of Housing and Health Committee

We are struggling to provide homes for the people in this Borough and sweeteners are being offered to landlords who require funding up front from tenants who then have to pay the rent. We all need to sort this problem together.

Question 4 – Councillor Mike Whiting

Swale Borough Council Seafront Services has been running a memorial bench scheme along the seafronts for many years now. In 2017 it was decided no more benches would be allowed in Minster. My resident wishes to commemorate his late wife, who died at the age of just 42 years old. Minster beach, east of the beach huts, was a place where he, his wife and young family regularly visited, and is a place where he feels she can be best remembered. Would the Chairman of Regeneration and Property agree to bringing the 2017 decision back to committee for review?

Response – Chair of Regeneration and Property Committee

Following consultation in 2014 and a consensus that supported the number of benches should be capped, the scheme was finally closed in 2017, by the previous Conservative administration. There are currently 150 benches in a fairly short space along the seafront at Minster Leas from the White House end to Seathorpe car park. Particularly in the area of promenade in front of the beach huts, the benches are very close together and generate different views from the public, with some liking the idea of offering memorials and others feeling that too many impact the visual appearance and feel of the area.

The existing benches do create an on-going liability for the Council in terms of cleansing, repairing or replacing if subject to vandalism. The impact of this is mitigated somewhat by selecting hard wearing benches suitable for the location, but it remains is a consideration.

The scheme is still available at other locations. The scheme remains open along Sheerness Seafront where is currently a substantial amount of space for more memorial benches whilst balancing the needs of all beach users, from Garrison Point through to opposite Barton's Point entrance, and this area continues to remain popular with applicants.

So, in conclusion yes, I am happy for the issue to be debated at the Regeneration and Property committee.

224 Fire Drill

The meeting was adjourned from 7.55pm until 8.07pm as a fire drill took place.

225 Leader's Statement

The Leader said:

In many respects it is with a heavy heart that I commence my Leaders statement this evening. Frankly, I sincerely hope that I never again have to stand before you all on an occasion where it befalls me to commence with reflections on the passing of a serving Councillor. Notwithstanding all of the heartfelt tributes that have already been heard here in the chamber, I would just like to formally reflect on the loss of Councillor Ken Ingleton, holding up his character and courteous manner as an exemplar standard.

I am indeed indebted to Councillor Booth for his moving tribute and to members of all of the groups for their kind words and like expressions of condolence this evening which clearly demonstrates that in this chamber people transcend politics at the most difficult times.

One of the many qualities that I personally admired in Ken was his openness and in the spirit in which I know he would accord, when elected leader of this Council I undertook to strive for a more open approach. To that end I recently held the first of a proposed regular meeting forum for all group leaders from both this administration and the opposition. The meeting was convened and conducted on an informal basis in an air of mutual trust and respect and was acknowledged by all to be a very valuable and welcome forum where frank and open discourse was facilitated.

Another pledge I made was to strive to ensure that we maintain the impetus in our commitment to the Environment and Health agenda, continuing to build upon the excellent work that has already been undertaken previously.

One pledge I didn't make however was one of appearing to be becoming a covert vexillologist. Whilst it is a privilege for me to metaphorically fly the flag for Swale it is even more gratifying to observe the physical flags awarded to this council by outside bodies. On that note I am delighted that Swale Borough Council is celebrating receiving a Green Flag Award for both Milton Creek Country Park and Oare Gunpowder Works Country Park.

The Green Flag Award scheme, is managed by the environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy under licence from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The charity recognises and rewards well-managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of green spaces across the United Kingdom.

The news that Milton Creek and Oare Gunpowder Works have achieved the accreditation, is testament to the hard work and dedication of the team that care for those green spaces so that residents and visitors alike can enjoy them and I congratulate the team on this exceptional achievement.

Whilst congratulating the team I also pay tribute to the magnificent cohort of volunteers who work extremely hard alongside staff to create parks and green spaces that meet the exacting standards expected of green flag parks. I know just how much these spaces matter to people, so it is so pleasing to see recognition of all the hard work that is put in to maintaining them by one and all.

It was also gratifying to have those sentiments echoed by the Keep Britain Tidy's Green Flag Award Scheme Manager Paul Todd MBE. He commented these are vital green spaces for the community in Swale, bringing people together and providing opportunities to lead healthy lifestyles. The staff and volunteers do so much to ensure that it maintains the high standards of the Green Flag Award and everyone involved should feel extremely proud of their achievement.

Whilst acknowledging that ringing endorsement it is worth noting that this is the second consecutive year that the Milton Creek Country Park has received the award, but incredibly it is the 18th yes 18th year in a row for the Oare Gunpowder Works which really is some accolade.

Maintaining my focus on Health and continuing an outdoor theme, we have entered into a partnership to invest in and refurbish public park tennis courts in Swale. The park tennis courts at Milton Recreation Ground and King George's Playing Fields, Sittingbourne, will be renovated, with investment of £124,578.54 from the UK Government and LTA Tennis Foundation, £32,413 will also be invested by Swale Borough Council, helping to provide enduring quality facilities for the local community.

Park tennis courts provide an invaluable opportunity to afford both children and adults the opportunity to get active and benefit their physical and mental health. Accessible facilities in parks are particularly important in opening the sport up to a wider range of people and the project is part of a nationwide investment by the UK Government and LTA Tennis Foundation to refurbish public tennis courts across Great Britain.

We will be working together with local tennis providers and the LTA to deliver a range of activities across the park sites. This will include weekly organised free park tennis sessions for all ages, playing levels and experience where equipment will be provided. This means that people will not need be precluded from participation due to having no opponent or indeed their own racket. Local Tennis Leagues will also provide friendly, sociable, opportunities to get active through local competition.

Work on the sites is expected to be completed by autumn 2023 and I look forward to this investment providing high quality facilities for our residents for years to come and who knows maybe even producing the next Andy Murray, Alfie Hewett or more parochially Virginia Wade.

In closing can I wish those of you who are taking the opportunity to have a summer break a safe trip if you are travelling outside of and inside Swale of course and restful time until we reconvene for our next meeting.”

In response, the Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group spoke in support of the Green Flag award and said he hoped that a Green Flag would be awarded on the Isle of Sheppey as flags had been awarded in Sittingbourne and Faversham. He referred to the need to support all sports in the Borough.

The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group referred to the 18th award for the Oare Gunpowder Works and spoke of the excellent work carried out by volunteers. He asked the Leader to encourage the Communications Team to speak to and obtain quotes from those on the ground when circulating press releases. He suggested more money could be obtained from developers under Section 106 Agreements to fund changing facilities for sports.

The Leader acknowledged the comments and requests made.

Mayor

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