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## WESTERN AREA COMMITTEE

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**MINUTES** of the Meeting held at Bredgar Village Hall, Bexon Lane, Bredgar ME9 8HB on Thursday, 5 September 2024 from 7.00 - 9.38 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, James Hunt, Chris Palmer (Vice-Chair), Richard Palmer, Paul Stephen (Chair) and Sarah Stephen.

**NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES:** Parish/Town Councillors Ross Richardson and Sarah Poole (Bobbing Parish Council (PC)).

**NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES (Virtually):** Parish/Town Councillor Nicola Butlin (Borden PC).

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Martyn Cassell and Janet Dart.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillors Ann Cavanagh and Lloyd Chapman. Mark Welch, Principal Transport Planner, Kent County Council (KCC).

**APOLOGY:** Councillor Roger Clark.

### 205 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

### 206 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

### 207 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meetings held on 15 February 2024 (Minute Nos 636 – 646) and 15 May 2024 (Minutes Nos. 39 – 40) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct records.

### 208 KENT LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 5

Mark Welch, the Principal Transport Planner at Kent County Council (KCC) advised that a briefing on the Local Transport Plan 5 (LTP5) 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 attractive. This would be enabled by maintaining their highways network and delivering their 'Vision Zero' road safety strategy.

Mark Welsh 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](mailto:LTP5@kent.gov.uk) or via their 'Let's Talk' online platform at [www.kent.gov.uk/ltp5](http://www.kent.gov.uk/ltp5). He said there would be drop-in sessions on 10 September 2024 at Sheppey Gateway and 24 September 2024 at Sittingbourne Library.

A lengthy discussion took place and below is a summary of comments:

- Where did the proposal on the Swale slide "*Sittingbourne town traffic congestion relief including potential new highways routes between the A2 and M2*" come from?;
- the two Network Rail bridges in Sittingbourne were pinch-points and if widened would relieve congestion, why was there no reference to that in the plan?;
- freight coming from the ports caused considerable damage to the highway network, why had that not been picked up in the plan?;
- following KCC cuts, bus services in rural Swale had been decimated, some with no service and some reduced by 75%;
- villages suffered when Operation Brock was in place as motorists used the rural routes as rat-runs. The plan should include improved flow on the roads;
- Rodmersham school applied to have a 20 mile per hour (mph) speed limit on the road through the village, people did not feel safe walking along the lanes. KCC said it was not self-enforcing;
- there was no sustainable bus service to and from the Kent Science Park, Councillor Monique Bonney had previously requested that Section 106 funding be used for an early morning and late afternoon service but KCC refused. The subsidized service had now been cut;
- there was a focus on the M20 and M2/A2 corridors between London and the coast but nothing about north/south connections that assisted with moving around the county;
- Swale Borough Council (SBC) had to provide 11,000 houses in their Local Plan but there was no infrastructure to make that sustainable. Why didn't KCC support SBC to say that figure was not sustainable?;
- utility companies regularly dug up roads when installing services for new developments which caused congestion, KCC had the powers to manage that better;
- what did the plan say KCC would do to tackle congestion over the next 15 years?;
- developments needed better infrastructure for walking and cycling, people would use those methods of travel if they were safer;
- it was no longer possible to travel to Europe from Ebbsfleet or Ashford;

- more people felt isolated without bus services, a resident recently had to spend £50 on a taxi for a return trip to the doctor's surgery;
- other counties manage to provide much better bus services;
- residents believed there was no point responding to consultations like this as they thought they were just a box-ticking exercise and KCC would do what they want;
- a return ticket from Sittingbourne to London cost £72, that was not sustainable. Rail companies should be pressed to make fares affordable;
- hard copies of the consultation documents should be provided so they could be left in village shops;
- KCC should support legislation change to allow electric scooters to be used for short journeys to be a reasonable and practical solution to lack of bus services; and
- to improve congestion KCC needed to talk to district councillors on a regular basis as they had local knowledge.

Mark Welsh responded and said that there were a range of options proposed to relieve congestion in Sittingbourne and a relief road was one of them. When applying for government funding KCC needed to show that all options had been considered. International rail freight was covered in the LTP5, the containerized loads do not fit through Victorian tunnels, they would need to be notched with a modified tunnel lining or use wagons with lower loads. More locally in Swale there needed to be a market led proposal to bring back into use the rail sidings. This would need to be commercially funded and not something KCC could have influence over. There was not a lot of detail in the LTP5 about bus services as it was covered in the Bus Service Improvement Plan. Regarding 20 mph zones KCC had a clear policy on how it dealt with those. KCC stated in their Framing Kent's Future Strategy that the burden of housing should be more equally spread away from the southeast. Swale Joint Transport Board (JTB) received a briefing on utilities earlier this year. There was a lot more detail on public transport in the LTP5 than presented this evening. KCC encouraged rail networks to do more targeted fare initiatives. An electric scooter pilot took place in Canterbury, but this was not continued due to safety incidents. Mark Welsh agreed to liaise with the Policy & Engagement Officer to get hard copies of the LTP5 circulated.

## 209 SCRUTINY OF WASTE CONTRACT

Councillor Chris Palmer, a member of the Waste & Street Cleansing Scrutiny Review Member Panel, gave a presentation on the review being carried out.

She said that Swale Borough Council (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 8-year contract. SBC were part of a Mid-Kent Joint Waste 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 were 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 Palmer asked for comments to feed into the review.

The following comments were made:

- Why did the contract with Biffa end?;
- what guarantees were SBC given that Suez could do the job?;
- were there financial penalties for Suez not delivering the service?;
- were there going to be round changes for rural areas?;
- suggest that Suez do the same as Biffa and start collected at the outside of an area and work in, it would be easier to pick up missed bins on the way back;
- some areas had not experienced any problems, were they the rounds that were the same as the old Biffa rounds?;
- the problems with non-collection of communal bins were a health-hazard;
- would SBC not be making improvements until after the report was presented at the Environment & Climate Change Committee on 20 November 2024?;
- there was too much reliance on technology;
- could parish council clerks be advised about the round changes coming up to alert residents to look out for letters?;
- SBC should consider a back-up plan such as bringing in an alternative company; and
- Members complimented Suez on the clear up after Sittingbourne Carnival and the Hop Festival.

Councillor Palmer and the Head of Environment & Leisure responded that the contract with Biffa came to an end and a full open tender process was conducted. Suez was the successful bidder for the new contract following the tender process. There were a range of penalties included in the contract. Rounds had not been changed for 10 years but housing development had impacted the efficiency of the rounds. 9,000 letters would be going out to houses advising them of further round changes effective from 16 September 2024, it was hoped that these would increase the collection rate from 9 out of 10 to 10 out of 10. Once that happened the SBC could focus on the more positive aspects of the contract. Copies of letters to be sent out could be provided to Ward Councillors. Improvements would be made straight away and were not dependent on the outcome of the meeting on 20 November 2024. Improvements had already been made to communal bin stores, but further work was needed.

Councillor Palmer thanked everyone for their comments and said the public survey would close on 2 October 2024 and the report would be taken to the Environment & Climate Change Committee on 20 November 2024.

**210 PUBLIC FORUM**

A member of the public asked if there could be more communication with people who could not access the internet so they could find out about Area Committee meetings. Members agreed and commented that the poor turn out at local elections reflected the growing gap between residents and elected members.

A discussion took place about returning to four Inside Swale editions a year. The Committee felt that if things like Area Committees were advertised in Inside Swale, there would be better attendance/engagement with people who did not have access to the website or social media. Also, they believed it would ensure more people received information on a range of issues.

The Clerk of Bobbing Parish Council said they were starting to produce four parish magazines a year and requested that information on Area Committee meetings and the function of Area Committees could be provided so this information could be included. The Policy & Engagement Officer agreed to provide this information.

A member of the public spoke about problems he had experienced when trying to find out about local engagement for businesses. He gave examples of recent searches of the website which brought up information on events that had taken place in the past. A Member directed him to the Swale Means Business section of the website and encouraged him to sign up to receive emails and newsletters.

These issues were further discussed later in the meeting under the item "Matters referred to Service Committee chairs for consideration".

**211 ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP - SWALE LOCAL BUS FOCUS GROUP**

No issues were raised.

**212 SWALE TRAFFIC FORUM**

Councillor Bonney raised the issue of road closure signs being placed a mile along the road away from the start of roadworks. She said that the signage should be closer to the road closure.

Councillor Baldock stated he had not been advised if or when the next Swale Traffic Forum meeting would take place. He felt that the attitude of the KCC representatives at the first meeting was dismissive.

Further discussion took place on the impact of frequent road closures which included ambulances not being able to get through and bin collections being disrupted. This was a particular issue at Swanton Street, Bredgar.

**213 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

Members noted the progress on actions.

**Land assets in the Western Area** – a parish councillor stated he had not been able to access maps on the website. He had been advised by officers they were

located with the Property Asset Strategy. The Policy & Engagement Officer agreed to make enquiries with the relevant team.

**Littering and fly-tipping** – the Head of Environmental & Leisure Services said his team were putting together a programme of works to bring neglected areas back to specification. The contract for this work was being recruited now. An email would be sent to all Parish Clerks requesting information on areas to target.

**Parking** – the Chair of the Community & Leisure Committee advised that parking on double yellow lines was an offence. If a Traffic Regulation Order was in place, SBC could enforce. Buses parking on double yellow lines in Bell Road, Sittingbourne continued to be a problem.

## 214 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED

Councillor Richard Palmer said that he had received complaints that Planning, Parking and Police enforcement was not taking place. In particular there were problems with planning breaches taking place at a housing development being built. The problems were referred to Planning Enforcement and residents were advised that they could not act on individual incidents, and they should keep a diary.

Councillor Bonney raised the issue of road closures affecting businesses and residents.

Councillor Sarah Stephen raised the issue of buses parking on double yellow lines outside schools.

Councillor Mike Baldock proposed that buses parking on double yellow lines outside schools, parking around junctions and obstructing the road, signage for road closures being placed far from the actual road closure and incorrect diversions be referred to the Swale Joint Transportation Board. This was seconded by Councillor Richard Palmer and on being put to the vote was agreed.

### **Resolved:**

- 1) That buses parking on double yellow lines outside schools, parking around junctions and obstructing the road, signage for road closures being placed far from the actual road closure and incorrect diversions be referred to the Swale Joint Transportation Board.***

## 215 MATTERS REFERRED TO SERVICE COMMITTEE CHAIRS FOR CONSIDERATION

Councillor Mike Baldock proposed that the Chair of the Western Area Committee writes to the Chair of the Policy & Resources Committee to request that an item be added to the agenda to consider returning to four Inside Swale editions a year. Also that the Chief Executive be approached to enquire if she had delegated authority to allocate more funding for the checking and removal of archived information on the website so that when searches took place, out of date information doesn't appear, i.e. promotion of events from previous years, this would make the website more

user-friendly, and people could find current information more easily. If the Chief Executive did not have delegated authority to allocate extra funding, this matter should also be referred to the Chair of the Policy & Resources Committee for consideration. This was seconded by Councillor James Hunt and on being put to the vote was agreed.

**Resolved:**

- 1) That the Chair of the Western Area Committee writes to the Chair of the Policy & Resources Committee to request that an item be added to the agenda to consider returning to four Inside Swale editions a year.**
- 2) That the Chief Executive be approached to enquire if she had delegated authority to allocate more funding for the checking and removal of archived information on the website so that when searches took place, out of date information did not appear, i.e. the promotion of events from previous years. This would make the website more user-friendly, and people could find current information more easily. If the Chief Executive did not have delegated authority to allocate extra funding, this matter should be referred to the Chair of the Policy & Resources Committee for consideration.**

**216 ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING**

The meeting was adjourned at 8.44 pm until 8.51 pm.

Chair

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