
WESTERN AREA COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Committee Room, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 9 September 2025 from 7.00 pm - 8.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Ann Cavanagh, James Hunt, Richard Palmer, Paul Stephen (Chair) and Sarah Stephen (Vice-Chair).

NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES: Parish/Town Councillors Sarah Poole and Mariusz Bencych (Bobbing Parish Council (PC)) and Steve Tolhurst (Iwade PC).

NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES (Virtually): Nicola Butlin (Borden PC) and Brian Clarke (Bredgar PC).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Michelle Anderson, Janet Dart and Lisa Fillery.

OFFICER PRESENT (Virtually): Andre Bowen.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillors Mike Baldock and Monique Bonney.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Lloyd Chapman, Roger Clark and Chris Palmer.

274 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

275 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 July 2025 (Minute Nos 124 – 134) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

276 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

277 LOCAL CYCLING AND WALKING INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN (LCWIP) - PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Active Travel Co-ordinator, Michelle Anderson, gave a presentation on the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) public consultation.

She said that LCWIPs were evidence-led, long-term plans to identify cycling, walking and wheeling improvements. In recent years there had been a growing interest in walking, cycling and wheeling and as a result there was increased emphasis on the importance of high-quality infrastructure. By developing a Swale-wide LCWIP, it would be possible to take a network-based approach to planning and delivering this infrastructure.

There were many benefits to active travel which included improved physical and mental health and environmental and air quality benefits.

Swale already had one agreed LCWIP in place in Faversham, led by Faversham Town Council. The current open LCWIP public consultation referred to the Faversham LCWIP but largely concentrated on the Isle of Sheppey towns and Sittingbourne. Using data, evidence, and stakeholder engagement, the Swale LCWIP had identified an aspirational high-level network of future walking, wheeling, and cycling corridors across the borough.

A public consultation was launched on 1 September 2025 and would close on 26 October 2025. Anyone could respond via the online link <https://swale.gov.uk/consultations>. Maps could be viewed and comments and/or photographs could be added to map pins. Paper copies would be available from 15 September 2025 at the three hubs across the borough; Swale House reception (Sittingbourne), The Gateway (Sheerness) and Faversham Town Council (Faversham).

All feedback would be reviewed and a final report would be drafted for councillors to consider.

The following comments were raised:

- Some cyclists might not feel safe using cycle paths on roads like the A2 and would use the pavement instead;
- the LCWIP sounded similar to the Walking and Cycling Guidance Statement which expired in 2022 which was a piece of work that accompanied the Swale Local Plan. The work on potential routes carried out as part of this Statement did not materialise, what would be done to make sure the LCWIP proposals were delivered?;
- the LCWIP was a good approach, suggested not making comparisons with London authorities but use other district LCWIPs as examples; and
- would have liked to have seen more rural links using established rights-of-way.

The Active Travel Co-ordinator responded and said that once the aspirational routes were known for the area then design could take place to tackle issues such as busy roads. Not all cycle routes would necessarily be on the road, they could be positioned away from the road. When the Walking and Cycling Guidance Statement was written there was not a full-time Active Travel Co-ordinator in post at Swale Borough Council (SBC). Funding was key and the LCWIP needed to be in place to get the funding. Rural links were something that could be looked at in the future.

The Active Travel Co-ordinator thanked everyone for their comments.

278 CONSULTATION ON PUBLIC TOILETS

The Service Improvement & Project Manager, Andre Bowen, gave a presentation on the Public Toilets facilities consultation.

He said that SBC currently operated 16 public toilet facilities across the borough and the Council were considering options which would help to reach a balanced budget position. The options included delivering all services in-house, outsourcing, closing all toilets, charging for use of SBC public toilet facilities, transferring toilet facilities to Town or Parish Councils and some other appropriate local organisations or the community toilet scheme model.

SBC proposed a mix of the following options:

- Carrying out formal negotiations to transfer seven public toilet facilities to town and parish councils, or other appropriate local organisations;
- closure of three public toilets;
- introducing a community toilet scheme in areas affected by the closures; and
- continue to operate the remaining six toilets facilities outsourced.

At this stage SBC would like to hear the views of Swale residents, visitors, community groups and businesses and were carrying out a public consultation which closed on Friday 3 October 2025. The information gathered would be carefully considered by councillors before any final decisions were made. SBC were committed to ensuring that the voices of local communities were heard and reflected in the Council's decision-making.

The following comments were raised:

- It was premature to make the decision on public toilet facilities while the Local Government Reorganisation was ongoing. This should be something for the new unitary council to decide;
- it was a good idea to hand the running of public toilet facilities to parish and town councils;
- had research on the impact to residents been carried out on other districts that had closed public toilet facilities?;
- people with medical conditions relied on the public toilets in Sittingbourne town centre;
- the public toilet in the Forum, Sittingbourne was in a bad state of repair;
- would parish councils want to take on the financial responsibility for public toilets?;
- charging for public toilets might work;
- some cemeteries had composting toilets, that might be an effective option in some rural areas; and
- the proposals were causing anxiety for some residents as they could not walk far and relied on the Forum public toilet in Sittingbourne after getting off the bus.

The Service Improvement & Project Manager thanked everyone for their comments which would be fed into the consultation.

279 PUBLIC FORUM

No issues were raised.

280 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED

No issues were raised.

281 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Members noted the update report.

Councillor Sarah Stephen said that sadly some vandalism had taken place at the baby memorial garden in King George's Playing Field in Sittingbourne. She said it was very distressing and heartbreaking for the families. Councillor Stephen had reported the incident to Kent Police and was liaising with the Communications Team to put together a public statement. Councillor James Hunt suggested approaching local undertakers as they might be willing to sponsor the baby memorial garden.

282 SWALE BUS FORUM UPDATE

The Minutes of the last Swale Local Bus Forum were noted.

283 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