
SITTINGBOURNE AREA COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the The Sapling Room, The Appleyard, Avenue of Remembrance, Sittingbourne ME10 4DE on Thursday, 25 September 2025 from 7.00 pm - 9.15 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Shelley Cheesman, Tim Gibson, Mark Last (Vice-Chair), Kieran Mishchuk, Carrie Pollard, Karen Watson, Tony Winckless and Ashley Wise (Chair).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Michelle Anderson, Janet Dart and Larissa Reed.

OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually): Andre Bowen.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Dolley Wooster.
Kent County Councillor Chris Palmer, Divisional Member for Sittingbourne North.
Kent County Councillor Paul Webb, Divisional Member for Sittingbourne South.
Kent County Councillor Richard Palmer, Divisional Member for Swale West.
Roland Eglington, Managing Director of Chalkwell Coach Hire

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillor Ben J Martin.
Freya Alder, Integrated Travel Manager, Southeastern Railway.
George Paterson, Senior Stakeholder Engagement Manager, Southeastern Railway.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Derek Carnell, Simon Clark and Charlie Miller.

341 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

342 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Tony Winckless and Kieran Mishchuk declared a non-pecuniary interest as Members of the Milton Regis High Street Society.

Councillor Tony Winckless declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Trustee of Milton Regis Country Park and Milton Court Hall.

The Chief Executive declared a non-pecuniary interest as her son was a driver for public transport in the Sittingbourne area.

343 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 June 2025 (Minute Nos 97 – 107) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

344 PUBLIC TRANSPORT ISSUES IN SITTINGBOURNE

The Chair welcomed representatives of Chalkwell and Southeastern Railway to the meeting and said they had come along as questions about public transport had been raised at previous meetings.

Roland Eglington, the Managing Director of Chalkwell gave an update which included the following:

- Chalkwell was a family business which started in Sheerness in 1931;
- their principle activities included coach hire for schools, businesses and private organisations, special education needs transport, home to school buses and operation of a local bus network;
- biggest challenges at the moment included major roadworks and road closures, investment needed for switch to zero emissions, A2 Air Quality Management and funding under threat;
- costs increased faster than revenue;
- some services had been reduced or removed;
- buses were the most popular form of public transport carrying 10.2 million people a day compared to rail which carried 4.8 million people per day;
- the Government spent £400 million per year supporting the industry;
- the Better Buses Bill gave local authorities the option for local authorities to run local services themselves;
- buses took vehicles off the road which reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Buses and coaches caused up to 2% of emissions compared to 52% from private cars;
- infrastructure changes and funding support from Government was required to move to electric buses; and
- buses were an investment for growth.

Freya Alder the Integrated Travel Manager and George Paterson the Senior Stakeholder Engagement Manager at Southeastern Railway gave an update which included the following:

- Southeastern were the first railway network in Great Britain to integrate with Network Rail, meaning that infrastructure and services were run by one integrated organisation. The benefit of this was to deliver more growth and reduce the taxpayer subsidy by £50 million;
- in December 2025 additional services were planned, some of which had been made acting on customer feedback and the introduction of performance initiatives based on the operation of the May 2025 timetable;
- more changes were planned for May 2026;
- an integrated travel strategy was being developed which aimed to create seamless door-to-door journeys for everyone by better integrating rail with active, shared and public transport;
- the objectives would be achieved by enhancing existing first and last mile options, improving station facilities, improving customer information, promoting sustainable travel and gathering insights and planning for improvement;
- Station travel plans were being carried out for Sheerness-on-Sea and Sittingbourne by undertaking a strategic study of multi-modal connectivity and station access and carrying out station audits and passenger surveys; and
- more information could be found at integratedtravel@southeasternrailway.co.uk

The following comments and questions were raised:

- Were there any plans to increase off-peak services between Sittingbourne and Sheerness-on-Sea?
- were there plans to move freight from Ridham?;
- there were concerns about vibration caused by double-decker buses driving through Milton Regis;
- as there were no ticket barriers at Sheerness-on-Sea, how could passenger figures be calculated?;
- what revenue protection measures were put in place at Kemsley and Sheerness where there were no ticket barriers?;
- when carrying out surveys it was important to get the views of potential passengers;
- were there plans to introduce bus services after 7 pm?;
- would the Sheerness-on-Sea to London service be reinstated?;
- the lifts at Sittingbourne were often out of order;
- could a new exit be provided on the north side of Sittingbourne railway line?;
- the closed circuit television camera was not always in operation;
- parents viewed buses and coaches safer than the train for children travelling to and from school;
- when would the bus service be reinstated at Great East Hall, Murston;
- people with disabilities had difficulties accessing rail services from Newington, wheelchair users could not disembark when travelling from Rainham, they had to travel to Sittingbourne and return to Newington;
- when would live information boards be operational at Sittingbourne Bus Hub?;
- could services be put in place for north/south routes in Kent for example the Isle of Sheppey/Maidstone and Maidstone/Ashford;
- what was the progress on the metro-style service between Rochester and Canterbury? Could that include Strood?;
- dementia friendly ticket machines were needed in stations;
- concerns about railway crossing safety; and
- security and safety on trains was not as good as it used to be?.

Representatives from Chalkwell and Southeastern Railway responded as follows:

A strong business case was needed to increase services. Trains were weighed to calculate passenger numbers. There were good relationships between the bus and train service providers which helped to improve bus and rail timetable linkages, however, each change had a knock-on effect. Plus Bus tickets could be used on both rail and bus. Fares were regulated by government, discounts were available for off-peak and advance services. Rail Revenue Protection Officers were doing everything they could to target problem areas. The Sittingbourne Railway station team were dealing with the lift being out-of-order. There needed to be a viable business-case to reinstate the Sheerness-on-Sea to London service. There would be outreach to people who did not use trains, stakeholder input was essential. Funding was needed to provide bus services after 7 pm. Once the road through Great East Hall was adopted by Kent County Council (KCC) and remedial works completed, it would be possible to provide a bus service. It was challenging for KCC to procure the live information boards for the Sittingbourne Bus Hub and that had

resulted in a delay in their installation. An investigation was underway and lessons would be learned following the recent incident on the level crossing. All trains had an onboard manager who were trained to deal with safety and security. The question about introducing north/south Kent services would need to be answered by Stagecoach. All other comments were noted.

The Chair thanked the representatives from Chalkwell and Southeastern Railway for taking the time to attending the meeting.

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

The Active Travel Coordinator, 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:

- Routes should be safe for mobility scooters to use;
- there should be better way-finding for pedestrians and cyclists, particularly by Sittingbourne station to locate heritage and leisure sites in town;
- stop-off points on routes with safe storage for bicycles would be useful; and
- were there any schemes for young people to purchase affordable bicycles?

The Active Travel Coordinator said that there would be segregated vehicle, cycle and walking routes. Wayfinding was important, she asked if anyone had suggestions for pedestrian signage, could they please add them to the maps as part of the consultation. Stop-off points with cycle storage was not included as part of this LCWIP but it was a possibility for the future. Young people would be able to purchase bicycles for £10 as part of the Swale Borough Council (SBC) Recycle-to-Cycle scheme.

346 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:

- The Forum, Sittingbourne public toilets were in poor condition and fly-tipping often took place outside them;
- the Library car park toilets, Sittingbourne, were nearby and were in much better condition;
- the community toilet scheme would enable the public to use toilets in cafes and businesses in Sittingbourne High Street without having to make purchases;
- elderly people getting off buses may not be able to walk as far as the Library Car Park; and
- it was important to keep the Milton Regis High Street toilets open, it would encourage visitors to the Court Hall.

Councillor Tony Winckless proposed that the Sittingbourne Area Committee recommend that the Milton High Street public toilet facilities should remain open.

This was seconded by Councillor Karen Watson and on being put to the vote agreed.

Recommendation:

1) That the Milton High Street public toilet facilities should remain open.

347 PUBLIC FORUM

No issues were raised.

348 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED

The KCC Divisional Member for Sittingbourne North Councillor Chris Palmer said that a free Parent Special Educational Needs (SEND) Information Day was taking place on 16 October 2025 between 10 am and 4 pm at the Kent Showground, Detling, Maidstone, Kent ME14 3JF. Places on the workshop and free transport to and from Detling Showground could be booked via the following link: [Parent SEND Information Day Choose your workshops](#).

Councillor Watson gave an update on some events taking place in Sittingbourne, including the unveiling of the Milton Regis sign on 11 October 2025, which she would be attending in her capacity as Mayor of Swale.

The Chair advised that the Kemsley sign would be unveiled on 31 October 2025.

349 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Members noted the update report.

350 SWALE LOCAL BUS FORUM

The Minutes of the last Swale Local Bus Forum were noted. The date of the next Forum was 15 October 2025.

351 MATTERS REFERRED TO SERVICE COMMITTEE CHAIRS FOR CONSIDERATION

No issues were raised.

Chair

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

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