

Agenda

Sittingbourne Area Committee Meeting

Date: Thursday, 25 September 2025
Time: 7.00 pm,
Venue: The Sapling Room, The Appleyard, Avenue of Remembrance, Sittingbourne
ME10 4DE*

Membership:

Councillors Derek Carnell, Shelley Cheesman, Simon Clark, Tim Gibson, Mark Last (Vice-Chair), Charlie Miller, Kieran Mishchuk, Carrie Pollard, Karen Watson, Tony Winckless and Ashley Wise (Chair).

Quorum = 3

Pages

Information about this meeting

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- b) Assemble outside where directed. Await instructions before re-entering the building.
- c) Anyone who requires assistance in evacuating the building, should make themselves known during this agenda item.

2. Apologies for Absence

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillors should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their families or friends.

The Chair will ask Members if they have any disclosable pecuniary interests (DPIs) or disclosable non-pecuniary interests (DNPIs) to declare in respect of items on the agenda. Members with a DPI in an item must leave the room for that item and may not participate in the debate or vote.

Aside from disclosable interests, where a fair-minded and informed observer would think there was a real possibility that a Member might be biased or predetermined on an item, the Member should declare this and leave the room while that item is considered.

Members who are in any doubt about interests, bias or predetermination should contact the monitoring officer for advice prior to the meeting.

4. Minutes

To approve the [Minutes](#) of the meeting held on 26 June 2025 (Minute Nos. 97 – 107) as correct records.

5. Public Transport issues in Sittingbourne

6. Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) - public consultation

7. Consultation on public toilets

8. Public Forum

9. Local issues to be raised

10. Matters arising from previous meetings 5 - 14

11. Swale Local Bus Forum 15 - 18

12. Matters referred to Service Committee Chairs for consideration

Issued on Wednesday, 17 September 2025

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**Chief Executive, Swale Borough Council,
Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT**

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Report to Sittingbourne Area Committee - September 2025

New actions/issues and progress with ongoing actions

No.	Item	Background	Actions/updates
1.	Conservation Area rules	The Milton Regis Society asked if it would be possible to put together a standardised set of rules for shop-keepers and residents within a conservation area. It was agreed to explore providing a “dos and don’ts” list with the Heritage Officer.	<p>Update by Design & Heritage Team of Swale Borough Council.</p> <p>Shopfronts in Conservation Areas</p> <p>Concerns have been raised regarding planning breaches within Milton Regis High Street. Planning investigations team has been involved.</p> <p>The design of shopfronts, signs and advertisements are material considerations in the determination of planning applications and advertisement consents.</p> <p>The Council has longstanding guidance relating to the design of shopfronts and advertisements within the Design of Shopfronts, Signs and Advertisements Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). This provides applicants, owners, and developers guidance on achieving high standards in shopfront design and to take a sensitive approach to security, signage and materials.</p> <p>An update to the shopfront design guidance is scheduled for 2026 which will refresh and update the design guidance. This will help ensure that alterations to shopfronts and</p>

			<p>adverts are of the highest quality, whilst supporting the local distinctiveness of our commercial centres.</p> <p>At the same time as this update, we propose a shopfront design leaflet is designed and made available to residents and shop owners to provide guidance to retailers and shop fitters on the main components that contribute to a well-designed shopfront and signpost to the updated guidance document.</p>
2.	Member briefing on SBC powers regarding traveller encampments	Members asked if it would be possible to have a Member briefing on what SBC's powers and duties were relating to traveller encampments.	A briefing will be held for all SBC members in November 2025.
3.	Empty shops on Sittingbourne High Street.	<p>An SBC Councillor raised the issue of empty shops on Sittingbourne High Street.</p> <p>It was agreed that the Chair of the Economy and Property Committee be asked if an update could be provided on what action was being taken to encourage businesses to use the empty shops on Sittingbourne High Street.</p>	Appendix I of this report is a written update on this item.

4.	Box junction, Bell Road, Sittingbourne	<p>Councillor Tim Gibson advised that he had written to KCC Highways to ask what could be done about the sequencing of traffic lights on the Bell Road, Crown Quay Lane junction. The build-up of traffic was causing people to undertake dangerous U-turns and vehicle idling.</p> <p>An SBC Councillor said that drivers were frequently waiting in the yellow box junction on Bell Road, Sittingbourne, and this was contributing to the chaos at that junction.</p>	<p>This matter was discussed at the last Swale Joint Transportation Board Chair's briefing. KCC will provide an update report on the item which will be included on the October JTB agenda. This will be circulated to Sittingbourne Area Committee members as soon as it is available.</p>
5.	Heritage issues	<p>Area of Special Control of Advertisements (ASCA)</p> <p>Swale Borough Council currently does not have an ASCA. Since the adoption of the Heritage Strategy in 2020 and subsequent Action Plans wherein a number of Conservation Areas have been reviewed, it has been proposed that in order to better manage and maintain Swale's historic environment and heritage, targeted ASCA can prove beneficial for conservation areas with a commercial centre.</p>	<p>The draft consultation document is estimated to be ready by autumn/winter of 2025.</p>

		<p>Any designation needs to be based on public consultation and must follow specific legal steps, including consideration of the order by the Secretary of State.</p> <p>Following an all members briefing in May 2024, it was agreed that a draft consultation document be prepared for approval by the Planning Committee, before undertaking public consultation.</p>	
7.	Swale Local Heritage List	<p>Updates have been given at previous meetings on the Swale Local Heritage List.</p>	<p>The Selection Panel met on 17 October 2024; 278 nominations were presented out of which 150 were shortlisted to be designated as Swale's Local Heritage.</p> <p>The proposed designation list was presented to the Policy & Resources Committee on 27 November 2024, wherein it was unanimously agreed to designate the shortlisted assets with addition of one more asset- taking the total to 151 designated assets on Local Heritage List. The current designated Local Heritage List is now published on the SBC website.</p> <p>At the Selection Panel meeting there were several deferrals. Also, the team have identified a few geographical gaps in terms of current nominations and wish to include</p>

			<p>some recommendations emerging from Conservation Area appraisal work. As such, an additional call for 'invitation to nominate' Local Heritage assets has started from 8 September 2025 for 6 weeks, with the Selection Panel meeting again in the autumn of 2025. Following that, it is anticipated the list would be updated every three years following a call for nominations and Selection Panel. The next one being scheduled for 2028.</p> <p>In addition to the above, a protocol for urgent designation of assets on Local Heritage was adopted at the June 2025 Policy & Resources committee.</p>
8.	Transport issues	<p>Members discussed the difficulties residents were experiencing with bus services in Swale and agreed the following actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Invite the bus companies and a representative from Southeastern Trains to come along to a future Sittingbourne Area Committee meeting. 2) Councillors Tony Winckless and Karen Watson to report back to the Sittingbourne Area Committee after Bus Focus Group meetings. 	To be discussed under item 5.

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Update on activity to encourage businesses to use the empty shops on Sittingbourne High Street.

At present Sittingbourne Town Centre has a vacancy rate of 13.25%, as compared to the national average of 13.9%. This is based on what is defined as the core shopping area within the Local Plan.

Property ownership across the town centre is fragmented and most vacant properties are in private ownership. This limits the Council's ability to influence the letting and occupation of individual premises, although the Council does own a small number of town centre premises, limited to Bourne Place, where there is currently only one vacant unit, having recently secured Infinity Fitness as an occupier for units 1 and 2. There is active interest in the one remaining unit at Bourne Place and the Council hope to secure a tenancy that will add to the overall offer.

The Council also has, in effect, shared ownership of 34 High Street, Sittingbourne and following the Economy and Property Committee's recommendation to dispose of this it is expected to go to market in the immediate future.

High Street Rental Auctions

Commencing 2 December 2024, local authorities in England do have the power to hold rental auctions to let qualifying high-street premises that have been unoccupied for the whole of the preceding year, or for at least 366 days in the preceding two years.

To begin the process, the local authority must serve an initial notice on the landlord which will operate for a period of 10 weeks and gives the landlord the opportunity to be involved in the letting process. During this period the landlord's freedom to deal with the property is restricted subject to the local authority's consent.

After eight weeks have passed, if no letting arrangement has been agreed by the landlord with the local authority's consent, the local authority can serve a final notice. This imposes further restrictions on the landlord's ability to deal with the property including restricting their ability to carry out works without the local authority's consent.

Landlords have the right to appeal the final notice by serving a counter-notice indicating on which of the seven statutory grounds they will be relying. If the appeal is unsuccessful, or no appeal is lodged, the local authority can continue to the rental auction.

These powers have substantial resource implications for local authorities to commence and manage a process, which could be subject to legal challenges, and the local authority will be responsible for marketing and auction fees. An auction can require the successful bidder to pay for surveys, searches and legal costs for the preparation of the agreement for lease and lease. The landlord will be expected to pay costs associated with the undertaking of works required to bring the premises up to the minimum standard prescribed by the Regulations.

There are also a range of concerns about the wider impacts on a High Street of implementing High Street Rental Auctions, which could impact on the long-term viability of both investment and holding properties in that location. For instance, a series of High Street Rental Auctions which generate limited interest may result in lower rents being paid. These could be included as comparable evidence for the purpose of statutory lease renewals and, to some extent, rent reviews across the wider set of High Street properties.

Other town centre activity

Over time the Council has attempted to play an active role in the High Streets of the Borough both through investment in Bourne Place and other town centre works which have sought to improve the offer and environment to encourage footfall, which ultimately will drive occupation of premises.

However, with diminishing resources there is no longer staff or financial resource dedicated to the town centres. Through the Property and Programmes Team some general support is provided, on request, to property owners, investors and prospective tenants, where we are able. This can range from property specific signposting and advice to providing more general information about the area.

The Council has also recently tendered for the street markets in the Borough including Sittingbourne. With challenging conditions for markets, this has attracted limited interest, but nonetheless the market tenders for Sittingbourne, Sheerness and Faversham have been awarded.

Other specific interventions have largely been through the use of external funding, or through the delivery of wider range of services and how they impact on town centre locations.

In recent years the principal source of external funding available has been through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and in the initial programme period, effectively running from January 2023-March 2025, money has been made available through the Town Action Grants. Whilst not aimed at individual businesses, grants of between £1,000 and £10,000 were made available to support stakeholders to develop plans and support activity that contributes to improving and encouraging activity in the town centres of Sittingbourne, Sheerness and Faversham but also the smaller historic centres of Queenborough and Milton Regis. In this period grants of just over £57,000 were made to proposals in Sittingbourne, supporting heritage and cultural events and improving access to amenities.

Proactive engagement and enforcement takes place where there are properties of particular significance, are vacant and/or with which there may be issues. Swale Community Safety Unit has regular multi-agency discussions about hotspot locations including insecure and dilapidated buildings - for instance Bell House and the old Barclays building. Through joint working between the Police and Environmental Response Team both of these locations are being addressed through engaging with and enforcement against the landlord.

Planning Services also has powers relating to sites impacting on the amenity of the adjacent area and can help put in place measures and address issues impacting on the amenity and attractiveness of the town centres - for instance concerns have been raised regarding planning breaches within Milton Regis High Street, which are now with the Planning investigations team.

The Council has longstanding guidance relating to the design of shopfronts and advertisements, with Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). This provides applicants, owners, and developers guidance on achieving high standards in shopfront design and to take a sensitive approach to security, signage and materials. A refresh of this is scheduled for 2026, with a proposed shopfront design leaflet to be made available to residents and shop owners.

Another tool available are Areas of Special Control of Advertisements (ASCA). Swale Borough Council currently does not have an ASCA but it has been proposed that in order to better manage and maintain Swale's historic environment and heritage, targeted ASCA's can prove beneficial for conservation areas with a commercial centre.

Any designation needs to be based on public consultation and must follow specific legal steps, including consideration of the order by the Secretary of State. Following an all Members briefing in May 2024, it was agreed that a draft consultation document be prepared for approval by the Planning Committee, before undertaking public consultation, which is expected to be ready before the end of 2025.

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MINUTES

LOCAL BUS FORUM

Meeting held on Tuesday 29 July 2025 from 2.00pm, via Teams

Present:

- Chris Webber (CW) Stagecoach
- Dan Bruce (DB) - KCC
- David Morton (DM) - Stagecoach
- Dolley Wooster (DW)
- Emma Wiggins (EW)
- Karen Watson (KW)
- Luke Naylor (LN) - KCC
- Mike Baldock (MB)
- Roland Eglinton (RE) - Chalkwell
- Stephne Pay (SP) – KCC
- Tony Winckless (TW)

In Attendance: Sharon Dormedy (SD) Minutes

Apologies: Alastair Gould (AG)

NO	ITEM	ACTION
1.	Welcome, Introduction and Apologies	
1.1	Apologies received from Alastair Gould.	
2.	Minutes of Local Bus Forum – 30 January 2025	
2.1	Item 3.2 – Update on Kent bus portal to be given during meeting. Item 3.8 – Update on Parish Rural Shelter grant to be given during meeting.	
3.	KCC General Updates including Funding Update	
3.1	<p>Dan Bruce update on the Kent BSIP headlines since January 2025 and following the extraordinary meetings in February to form Delivery Plan highlighting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25/26 Delivery Plan submitted to DfT in March 2025 and raised at last Forum. Following clarification from DfT, grant determination letter released and signed by KCC. Funding received in June 2025 to support over next 12 months. DB thanked everyone for their input in achieving this. Kent Bus Information Portal to be formally launched over coming weeks for all journey planning and displaying real time info and reporting tool. Testing taking place to ensure fully functional before going live. Update on major projects in Dover and Canterbury District Shelter Grant Scheme for 25/26 launched. Wider District Grant Scheme to follow shortly. <p>DB explained the real-time bus information available on the portal will take into consideration planned/scheduled road closures and information will be as live as information provided to Highways.</p>	

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3.2	DB gave a breakdown of the revenue spend for 25/26, including Promotions and Plus Bus Expansion to be introduced to Swale. RE was not aware Plus Bus Expansion was not administered in Swale and DB and RB will discuss outside of meeting.	
3.3	DW raised a question regarding the additional Summer 360 Leysdown bus route and DB will update DW following the meeting.	KCC
3.4	SP summarised the 2025/2026 Capital initiatives including Parish Rural Shelter Grant where Parish Councils can bid for match funding to refresh or install bus shelters. The grant had been made available to all Parish Clerks across the County and will be part funded from capital element through BSIP.	
3.5	SP updated on the bus subsidy and available funding including schools transfer element and the shared aspiration to provide additional and enhanced initiatives.	
3.6	MB raised concerns regarding KCC's future funding for home to school transport within next year's budget. SP advised home to school transport is a different budget as statutory responsibility and will request information from colleagues in Education regarding budget and home to school transport appeal positions.	KCC
3.6	SP advised engagement around these forums is in respect of BSIP funding and whatever we deliver needs to be consistent with the Delivery Plan.	
3.7	SP reminded the meeting that Government support is extremely important as funding through BSIP Revenue and Capital is only secure for this financial year. Currently waiting for spending announcement for next year and future impact to 62 services funded from BSIP.	
3.8	DW raised additional questions via the teams chat facility and KCC will respond following the meeting.	KCC
4.	Bus Companies Update	
4.1	RE advised main issue is around the challenging road closures at Grovehurst and on the Island. A shuttle bus is being introduced for the planned closure of Key Street.	
4.2	CW – thanked the meeting for the invite to attend. No additional items to raise other than issues already highlighted during the meeting.	
4.3	TL from Travelmaster had been invited to the meeting but unable to attend.	
5.	SBC Updates	
5.1	Mike Knowles looking at capacity to bid under District Shelter Grant and has information available to submit application.	
5.2	DB advised Alan Millard from KCC Highways could attend a future meeting and Ian Harrison from SBC planning will attend if available.	

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6.	Area Committee Feedback	
6.1	DW – Feedback from Sheppey Area Cttee included in chat and KCC to update following meeting.	KCC
6.2	KW – Sittingbourne AC have met and raised concerns regarding accessibility for customers with dementia/zimmer frames and waiting for response from bus companies.	Bus Co
6.3	EW – Western AC – S106 funds provided for bus services and KCC hold the money. EW to look at ways to show S106 allocation for buses.	EW
6.4	EW – Eastern AC – Representative from Faversham Town Council should sit on Swale Local Bus Forum and suggested Cllr Gould is the rep as already on the Group.	EW
6.5	DW invited RE to attend future Sheppey Area Committee to update on Summer Bus Service.	DW
7.	AOB	
7.1	Next meeting to be held end of September/beginning of October 2025. Outstanding Action and responses information be prepared and circulated.	SD
7.2	SP updated on the Enhancement Partnership Board which had not met due to the change of administration and cabinet members. An inaugural introduction board meeting is being scheduled for August and SP will forward update bulletin to stakeholders once taken place. SP conscious regular meeting has not been held allowing Scheme Monitoring Groups to report back.	
Next meeting: - Schedule for end of September/beginning of October 2025.		

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