# Economy and Property Committee

**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 7 July 2026 from 7.00 pm - 9.49 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Monique Bonney (Chair), Shelley Cheesman, Simon Clark, Mark Last, Peter Marchington, Ben J Martin, Lee-Anne Moore, Tara Noe, Richard Palmer, Ashley Shiel, Terry Thompson and Ashley Wise (Vice-Chair).

**PRESENT (VIRTUALLY):** Councillors Sarah Stephen and Mark Tucker.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Joanne Johnson, Kellie MacKenzie and Kieren Mansfield.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY):** Councillors Elliott Jayes and Dolley Wooster.

**APOLOGY:** Councillor Carrie Pollard.

## 179 Emergency Evacuation Procedure

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

## 180 Minutes

The Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting held on 4 March 2026 (Minute Nos. 782 – 785), the Meeting held on 19 March 2026 (Minute Nos. 823 – 832), and the Meeting held on 13 May 2026 (Minute Nos. 16 – 17) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct records.

## 181 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Peter Marchington declared a disclosable non-pecuniary interest in respect of Item 8 (Disposal of Queenborough Guildhall, associated land and 44 High Street, Queenborough) as he was a member of Queenborough Town Council. Councillor Marchington spoke on the item but did not vote.

## 182 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

## 183 Chairs Briefing

The Chair provided an update on the solar panels installed on the roof of Swale House. She reported that they had ‘gone live’ on 20 March 2026. Since then, 61.6% of the electricity generated by the solar panels had been used within Swale House, with the remaining 38.4% exported back to the National Grid. Of the building’s total electricity consumption, 56% had been supplied by solar energy and 44% by the grid.

For the period from March to May 2026, the Council had saved £5,048.46 compared with the same period in 2025.

The Council had exported 13,850 kWh of electricity back to the grid, generating an income of approximately £1,177.25 during that period. In addition, the solar installation had reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 7,000 kg, equivalent to planting approximately

445 trees.

The Chair referred to the Motion presented to Full Council at its meeting on 23 June 2026 regarding the Milton Creek Water Quality Review.

The Vice-Chair, who had seconded the motion, read out the resolutions agreed by Full Council:

“1. Ask the Leader of the Council and the Chair of the Environmental Services & Climate Change Committee to write to Southern Water to ask for their plans to support water quality improvements for Milton Creek.
2. Provide Full Council support for the Leader, Deputy Leader, Mayor and Service Committee Chairs to provide any public or written support sought by Raybel Charters in support of external funding applications without the need to wait for committee approval.”

Referring to resolution (2), the Vice-Chair requested that the Chair of the Economy & Property Committee endorse the work being undertaken by Raybel Charters to improve water quality in Milton Creek.

The Chair confirmed that she was happy to endorse the work and emphasised the importance of improving the water quality in Milton Creek. Members indicated their agreement with the Chair’s endorsement of the work being carried out by Raybel Charters.

The Chair, on behalf of the Chair of the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee, invited Members to attend the Committee meeting on 8 July 2026, at which the Council-owned asset Barton’s Point, Minster, would be considered. The Chair read out the recommendation from the report, which had also been published on the Council’s website.

184 **Forward Decisions Plan**

In response to a question from a Member regarding the Queenborough and Rushenden (Housing Infrastructure Fund) item, the Head of Place reported that senior officers had met virtually with representatives from Homes England (HE) who were exploring options for making the site more attractive, following a request from the Committee. HE had provided the density information requested by Members, which would be circulated electronically. The Head of Place further advised that, following the summer period, a Steering Group meeting, which included Members, would be arranged to take the work forward.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.***

185 **Disposal of Queenborough Guildhall, associated land and 44 High Street, Queenborough**

The Strategic Programmes and Asset Manager introduced the report, as set out in the agenda papers.

The Chair proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Shiel.

The Chair invited Members to make comments and ask questions and these included:

- Supported the recommendations in the report, and noted the importance of ensuring that the Town Council did not assume responsibility for a building that would place a significant financial burden on local residents;
- the Guildhall was recognised as an important historical, architectural asset to Queenborough and a valued asset for the Town Council, it was appropriate to ensure that the transfer arrangements were completed correctly; and
- Queenborough Town Council required additional land to support the local facilities and services it provided for the community.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the decision of the Economy and Property Committee made on 9 April 2025, regarding the disposal of the parcel of land known as land rear of Queenborough Guildhall and the inclusion of the transfer of the Guildhall and 44 High Street, Queenborough to Queenborough Town Council be reaffirmed.***

***(2) That the delegation to the Head of Place to negotiate, agree and complete the terms of the disposal be agreed for a further period of six months, or such longer period as may be agreed in consultation with the Chair of the Committee and the Head of Legal Services.***

186 **Swale House Increased Security – Costed Options**

The Head of Place introduced the report as set out in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited Members to make comments and ask questions  Points raised included:

- Could not support recommendation (2) and improved security measures were required;
- considered that recommendation (3) was ‘crucial’;
- referred to previous incidents which had been tolerated and which had resulted in reputational damage to the Council;
- considered that the vast majority of incidents had been caused by known offenders under the influence of alcohol, rather than by homeless individuals;
- disappointed with the Police response to incidents that had occurred at a public building;
- supported the new Town Centre Police Unit, and hoped that it would take a more proactive role in protecting Swale House;
- the Council should not be solely reliant on the Police and, therefore, recommendation (2) could not be supported;
- the undercroft needed to be made safe for staff and commercial tenants; and
- local businesses could be used to help minimise costs.

The Chair proposed the recommendations, and these were seconded by the Vice-Chair.

Upon being put to the vote, recommendations (1) and (3) were agreed.

Upon being put to the vote, recommendation (2) was not agreed.

Further discussion followed, during which Members made further comments which included:

- A preference for the undercroft to be fully fenced and secured;
- the possibility of gates being left open during the day, with arrangements monitored;
- officers should investigate whether an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system could be installed;
- concerned regarding the potential impact of security gates on traffic movements on the highway;
- suggested that any security gates could be set back sufficiently to avoid affecting traffic flow;
- Kent County Council (KCC) were aware of the existing traffic issues on the road around Swale House;
- tailgating by vehicles entering the undercroft was rare;
- security gates could potentially remain open between 6 pm and 6.50 pm; and
- Parking Services should be consulted on any proposals, as staff worked late at Swale House and would have practical knowledge of operational requirements.

Councillor Clark proposed the following motion: That it be recommended to the Policy & Resources Committee that the undercroft was secured, whilst maintaining safe vehicular and pedestrian ingress and egress, with design input from Kent Police and skilled staff and partners. This was seconded by the Chair and agreed by Members.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the options to secure the footprint of Swale House, and in particular the undercroft, be noted.***
***(2) That there should be no tolerance to trespassers within the undercroft and that this stance informed service approaches to relevant action and support.***
***(3) To recommend to the Policy & Resources Committee that the undercroft was secured, whilst maintaining safe vehicular and pedestrian ingress and egress, with design input from Kent Police and skilled staff and partners.***

187 **Town Centre Challenges**

The Strategic Programmes and Asset Manager introduced the report as set out in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited Members to make comments and ask questions, and these included:

- Welcomed the report;
- referred to the table at paragraph 2.2 (page 26) of the report, which set out the number of vacant properties in the three main town centres in Swale, and noted that Sittingbourne had a significantly higher number of vacant properties than Sheerness and Faversham;
- vacancies in Sittingbourne appeared to be particularly concentrated from the former cinema building through to Roman Square and noted that units within the Bell Centre had remained vacant for approximately 18 years;

- considered the Council should explore enforcement and legal options to address long-term vacant properties and questioned whether powers existed to require owners to occupy, lease or sell premises;
- asked whether funding linked to the heritage strategy could be used to strengthen enforcement activity where breaches had occurred;
- raised concern that many residents did not feel safe visiting Sittingbourne Town Centre and stressed the need to address these perceptions;
- acknowledged the negative impact that online shopping had on town centres;
- expressed concerns regarding the effectiveness of planning enforcement and the purported lack of action on some breaches;
- disappointed that Sittingbourne would not be receiving a Town Council, which could have acted as a custodian of the High Street;
- external funding opportunities would be important in supporting town centre improvements;
- highlighted the need to improve access to town centres to increase footfall;
- raised concerns that some premises in Sittingbourne High Street may be being used for money laundering, which could deter legitimate businesses from operating in the area;
- highlighted a lack of action relating to street furniture;
- noted that business rates remained a contributing factor to town centre challenges;
- raised concerns that reductions in rural bus services had negatively affected footfall in town centres;
- noted the success of Faversham Town Council's Community Hopper bus service and suggested that a similar model could be trialled elsewhere where parish funding was available;
- identified fly-posting as a particular issue within Sittingbourne High Street;
- Members should report any concerns regarding money laundering to Kent Trading Standards;
- asked whether funding was available for a dedicated town centre improvement or "spruce-up" role within the Council; and
- emphasised the importance of working with partners, including SUEZ, to identify opportunities to improve the appearance of town centres.

The Chair requested that the Strategic Programmes and Asset Manager liaised with Kent Trading Standards regarding concerns about potential money laundering activities in premises located within Sittingbourne High Street.

Following the discussion the following motions were proposed:

The Vice-Chair proposed the following motion: *That officers explored the resource requirements to introduce High Street Rental Auctions (HSRA) and discussed with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Economy & Property Committee prior to the budget-setting process and where appropriate, work in partnership with Town and Parish Councils to identify suitable premises with a view to pulling together a list where these powers could be utilised.* This was seconded by Councillor Palmer and, on being put to the vote, was agreed by Members.

The Vice-Chair proposed the following motion: *That the Policy & Resources Committee considered the heritage strategy funding that had been set aside and explore whether it could be used to strengthen enforcement within the Council's existing Conservation*

*Areas and support enforcement under the forthcoming Area of Special Control of Advertisements (ASCA) provisions*. This was seconded by the Chair, and upon being put to the vote, was agreed by Members.

The Chair proposed the following motion: *That the Environmental Services & Climate Change Committee looked to encourage the Council's waste contractor to support community groups in their efforts to clean up the public realm, and in particular our town centres, including removal of flyposting and targeted event days in each town centre.* This was seconded by the Vice-Chair, and on being put to the vote, was agreed by Members.

The Vice-Chair proposed the following motion: *That the Chair of the Economy & Property Services Committee writes to the Government requesting that all areas which received Pride in Place Impact Funding be awarded a further round of Pride in Place Impact Funding, and that a proportion of this funding be provided as revenue funding.* This was seconded by Councillor Shiel, and on being put to the vote, was agreed by Members.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the content of the report be noted.***

**(2) *That officers explored the resource requirements to introduce High Street Rental Auctions (HSRA) and discuss with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Economy & Property Committee prior to the budget-setting process and where appropriate, work in partnership with Town and Parish Councils to identify suitable premises with a view to pulling together a list where these powers could be utilised.***

***(3) That the Policy & Resources Committee considered the heritage strategy funding that has been set aside and explored whether it could be used to strengthen enforcement within the Council's existing Conservation Areas and support enforcement under the forthcoming Area of Special Control of Advertisements (ASCA) provisions.***

***(4) That the Environmental Services & Climate Change Committee looked to encourage the Council's waste contractor to support community groups in their efforts to clean up the public realm, and in particular our town centres, including flyposting and targeted event days in each town centre.***

***(5) That the Chair of the Economy & Property Services Committee writes to the Government requesting that all areas which received Pride in Place Impact Funding be awarded a further round of Pride in Place Impact Funding, and that a proportion of this funding be provided as revenue funding.***

188 **Closed Public Conveniences - Property Next Steps**

The Strategic Programmes and Asset Manager introduced the report as set out in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited Members to make comments and ask questions and points raised included:

- Welcomed recommendation (2), noting that removal of the Forum toilet block would open up access between the leisure quarter and Sittingbourne High Street;
- queried whether 18 months would be sufficient time to allow discussions on the future retention of the public conveniences at Eastchurch;
- what costs had been incurred by the Council in maintaining the closed public conveniences at Eastchurch and Rushenden Road, Queenborough, over the last 20 years?;
- why had the public conveniences at Rushenden Road not yet been disposed of?;
- were there any heritage protections affecting the public conveniences at 78 Milton Regis, given local concerns about their preservation?; and
- suggested that the owners of the public conveniences at 78 Milton Regis should be made aware that a Parish Council was due to be established for Milton Regis.

Officers responded that:

- The Pride in Place Board would be required to submit a four-year Investment Plan in November 2026. Whilst officers considered 18-months to be sufficient time for the review period, this could be extended if Members wished;
- the Pride in Place Board would not be formally constituted from the outset and, in relation to property matters, the Council would as the accountable body;
- information regarding the costs associated with the Eastchurch and Rushenden Road public conveniences would be shared with Members;
- disposal of the Rushenden Road site was complicated by land ownership issues. Whilst there was some strategic value in retaining the site, there was a gap in the title ownership relating to the toilet area which needed to be resolved before the Council could progress any disposal; and
- the public conveniences at 78 Milton Regis were within a Conservation Area.

The Chair proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Marchington.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the Council retained the Eastchurch Public Conveniences, to be reviewed after a period of no more than 18 months to accommodate any potential project arising from the local Pride in Place Programme.***
***(2) That delegated authority be given to the Head of Place to authorise the demolition of the Forum Toilet factilities, subject to landlords' consent and agreement as to how the footprint of the building would be used or reinstated.***

189 **Granting of a New Commercial Lease**

The Strategic Programmes and Asset Manager introduced the report as set out in the agenda papers. He responded to points raised by Members.

The Chair proposed the recommendations, and these were seconded by Councillor Shiel.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the grant of a new commercial lease of the property detailed in the exempt Appendix I be approved.***
***(2) That delegated authority be given to the Head of Place, in consultation with the Head of Legal Services, to finalise all legal documentation, agree any minor non-material variations to the Heads of Terms, and complete the transaction, subject to the terms set out in the exempt Appendix I.***

190 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

The confidential appendix was not discussed so there was no need to go into closed session for this item.

191 **Closed Public Conveniences - Property Next Steps - Appendix I**

The confidential appendix was not discussed so there was no need to go into closed session.

192 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

***Resolved:***

***That under Section 100 (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of the Schedule 12A of the Act:***

***3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).***

193 **Granting of a New Commercial Lease - Appendices I and II**

This item was discussed in confidential session.

Chair

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