

Agenda

Economy and Property Committee Meeting

Date: Tuesday, 7 July 2026

Time 7.00 pm

Venue: Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT

Membership:

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

Quorum = 5

Pages

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- (d) Anyone unable to use the stairs should make themselves known during this agenda item.

2. Apologies for Absence

3. Minutes

To approve 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) as correct records.

4. 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.

5. Matters Arising

Update from the Chair on any matters from the previous meeting or upcoming agenda items relating to this committee.

6. Chairs Briefing

Items for Noting

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Items for Decision by the Committee

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| 9. | Swale House Increased Security – Costed Options | 17 - 24 |

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12.	Granting of a New Commercial Lease	39 - 42
13.	Exclusion of the Press and Public	

To decide whether to pass the resolution set out below in respect of the following items:

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

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

14.	Closed Public Conveniences - Property Next Steps - Appendix I	43 - 44
15.	Granting of a New Commercial Lease - Appendices I and II	45 - 48

Issued on Friday, 26 June 2026

The reports included in Part I of this agenda can be made available in alternative formats. For further information about this service, or to arrange for special facilities to be provided at the meeting, please contact democraticservices@swale.gov.uk. To find out more about the work of this meeting, please visit www.swale.gov.uk.

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

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Economy and Property Committee Forward Decisions Plan – July 2026

Report title, background information and recommendation(s)	Date of meeting	Open or exempt	Lead Officer and report author
Newington Village Hall Car Park and Associated Land - Disposal	TBC	Open	Head of Service: Joanne Johnson Report Author: Kieren Mansfield
Old Library – review of disposal decision (was previously named as 44 Trinity Road – future of property)	TBC (not before August 2026)	Part Exempt	Head of Service: Joanne Johnson Report Author: Kieren Mansfield
Queenborough and Rushenden (Housing Infrastructure Fund) – Update (when appropriate trigger reached)	TBC	Open	Head of Service: Joanne Johnson Report Author: Kieren Mansfield
Great East Hall – verbal update	TBC	Open	Head of Service: Joanne Johnson Verbal Update: Kieren Mansfield
Section 106 – Impact on Swale’s Economy	TBC	Open	Head of Service: Joanne Johnson Report Author: Joanne Johnson

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Economy and Property Committee	
Meeting Date	7 th July 2026
Report Title	Disposal of Queenborough Guildhall, associated land and 44 High Street, Queenborough
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Joanne Johnson, Head Place Services
Lead Officer	David Johnson MRICS, Interim Property Services Consultant
Classification	Open
Recommendations	1. To confirm the decision of the Economy and Property Committee on 9 April 2025 regarding the disposal of the parcel of land known as land rear of Queenborough Guildhall and to include the transfer of the Guildhall and 44 High Street, Queenborough to Queenborough Town Council. 2. To extend the delegation to the Head of Place Services to negotiate, agree and complete the terms of the disposal within a further period of 6 months (or such longer period as may be agreed in consultation with the Chair of the Committee and the Head of Legal Services).

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 At the Economy and Property meeting of the 9 April 2025 it was resolved:
“That the Head of Place be given delegated authority to negotiate and agree terms of the disposal of the parcel of land known as land rear of Queenborough Guildhall, to include the transfer of the Guildhall and 44 High Street, to Queenborough Town Council, within a 12 month period.”
- 1.2 This report updates Members on progress towards the proposed transfer. Given that the original delegation to the Head of Place to complete the transaction within 12 months has passed, the report seeks confirmation of the Committee’s decision of 9 April 2025 and an extension of the delegation previously granted to allow the transaction to complete.
- 1.3 Swale Borough Council (SBC)'s adopted Property Asset Strategy sets out the requirement to: “Make it a priority that the Council only retain land and property where it makes strategic or financial sense to do so. This should be to deliver services in line with corporate priorities, to generate income, to provide a return on investment, to enable regeneration or to provide social value.”

- 1.4 The report sets out why officers recommend that concluding the disposal as per the previous resolution would be in line with this policy and would deliver benefits to both the Council and the local community.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Land to the rear of Queenborough Guildhall (plan at Appendix I) lies adjacent to Pipsqueaks Nursery on North Road and comprises a rectangular shaped parcel of land with an area of approximately 350sqm. It has been vacant for a number of years and is currently in a poor state with vegetation and the remains of a metal frame building.
- 2.2 In 2019 Heads of Terms were agreed for a 25-year lease on much of the site with Queenborough Rowing Club (QRC). This would have in turn released the Club's existing council owned site, which also offered potential for development, with a Cabinet decision (25th September 2019) to dispose of this via auction should the rowing club move.
- 2.3 However, due to a range of issues QRC confirmed it was not in a position to proceed. Consequently, the triggers for considering a disposal were met.
- 2.4 There are some complications to affect a disposal. The title of the site is split, with the majority falling into a title incorporating Queenborough Guildhall, which is occupied by Queenborough Town Council (QTC). A proportion of the site would also need to be retained to allow access to the rear of Queenborough Guildhall for access and maintenance.
- 2.5 Of the 350sq m it is estimated that circa 270sq m of the land could be disposed of for a meaningful use.
- 2.6 There have been a number of approaches to officers from interested parties, for commercial use or development. SBC was also approached by QTC in 2024 as to the possibility of it securing the site.
- 2.7 At present QTC occupies a number of rooms within Queenborough Guildhall and the adjacent 44 High Street, under licence from Swale Borough Council. QTC are now struggling for space and the approach regarding the land was driven by a need to create more room for storage and the operation of a foodbank.
- 2.8 It was agreed by the Economy and Property Committee in April 2025 that the land should be part of a wider transaction involving the transfer of the Guildhall and 44 High Street, Queenborough to QTC (titles are shown at Appendix II).
- 2.9 Such a transfer to QTC continues to offer potential advantages that may outweigh the likely capital receipt, including simplifying and consolidating the property holdings; providing certainty for QTC over its occupation and future service delivery; enabling local control and stewardship of a heritage asset

and reducing current and future management, maintenance and insurance liabilities to Swale Borough Council and any successor authority.

- 2.10 Since the Committee's decision on 9 April 2025, officers have continued to progress the proposed transaction with Queenborough Town Council. Heads of Terms have been substantially agreed between the parties. Both Swale Borough Council and Queenborough Town Council have now formally instructed their respective legal representatives to prepare, negotiate and complete the necessary documentation.
- 2.13 In order to protect the long-term public and community benefit of the assets and to prevent inappropriate development, the transfer to Queenborough Town Council will be made subject to restrictive covenants. These covenants will require that the Guildhall, 44 High Street and the land to the rear continue to be used for purposes which deliver a demonstrable public or community benefit, including community activities, heritage interpretation and stewardship, cultural or educational uses, public services, or storage and operational use ancillary to the functions of Queenborough Town Council. The covenants will expressly prohibit any material development, change of use, or disposal of the assets (or any part of them) without the prior written consent of Swale Borough Council. The transfer documentation will also include suitable provisions to ensure that the public accessibility and community benefit of the assets is maintained. These restrictions will bind Queenborough Town Council and its successors in title and will be directly enforceable by Swale Borough Council and its successors.
- 2.11 The original delegation to the Head of Place was time-limited to a period of twelve months. That period has now expired. Subject to final agreement on any outstanding points and the execution of formal documentation, it is anticipated that the transaction should complete within the next six months.
- 2.12 Given the clear progress made, the public and community benefits that will flow from the transaction and the fact that both parties are now substantially advanced towards completing the deal, members are asked to confirm the April 2025 decision and extend the delegation to allow the transaction to be finalised.

3 Proposal

- 3.1 To confirm the decision of the Economy and Property Committee on 9 April 2025 regarding the disposal of the parcel of land known as land rear of Queenborough Guildhall and to include the transfer of the Guildhall and 44 High Street, Queenborough to Queenborough Town Council.
- 3.2 To extend the delegation to the Head of Place Services to negotiate, agree and complete the terms of the disposal within 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).

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 To place the developable site to the rear of the Guildhall on the open market for freehold sale or lease, leaving the option for QTC to let the land remaining. This option should be considered if negotiations over the proposed land consolidation with QTC stall and fail to complete.
- 4.2 This option is not recommended at this time. Work against towards the Committee resolution is well advanced and the context remains the same. The transfer to Queenborough Town Council is still expected to deliver the benefits set out in this and the report to the Economy and property Committee on the 9 April 2025.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed Considered and Rejected

- 5.1 There have been no further consultations on this proposal, outside of discussion with Queenborough Town Council. The resolution made on the 9th April 2025 was supported by the ward Members.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The transaction with QTC would support the Community priority to “Work in partnership with the local towns and parishes and voluntary sector on our community assets – e.g., playgrounds, sports pitches and pavilions, community halls”. Disposal of the site on the open market would generate a capital receipt that would support the Council’s wider financial position.
Financial, Resource and Property	Whilst the proposal would potentially forgo a capital receipt, the proposal looks to reduce the Council’s future liabilities which would potentially exceed the benefit of such, over time. In the 2025/26 financial year the property represented a net revenue cost the Council of £2,500 (excluding building maintenance).
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	The Council has fairly wide discretion to dispose of its property assets. When disposing of assets, the Council is subject to statutory provisions, in particular, to the overriding duty, under section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972, to obtain the best consideration that can be reasonably obtained for the disposal. This duty is subject to certain exceptions that are set out in the General Disposal Consent (England) 2003. The council has the option to disregard the requirement for best consideration if the transaction is valued at under £2 million and if the disposal is in support of the council's key priorities and strategic goals.

	Legal will be required to draft relevant contracts with instructions from Property Services. Any future development proposals for the site would be subject to all necessary consents and if transferred the property would be covenanted so as to require the agreement of Swale Borough Council or its successor authority.
Crime and Disorder	The Land to the rear of Queenborough Guildhall remaining vacant and unused could possibly be a target for anti-social behaviour and criminal damage. A disposal to allow beneficial use will remove this risk.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	An unoccupied, unsightly and underused site is at odds with the council's goals and adopted Property Asset Strategy. Any future planning consent would need to meet the Bio-diversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements and ensure that the appearance and setting of heritage assets is preserved and where possible enhanced.
Health and Wellbeing	None identified at this stage.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	The proposal reduces the Council's risk in terms of holding a vacant property.
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.
Local Government Reform	The proposal would contribute to the rationalisation of the Council's estate and see the transfer of an important local heritage asset to QTC, prior to any Local Government reorganisation. Covenants on the property would pass to the successor authority.

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

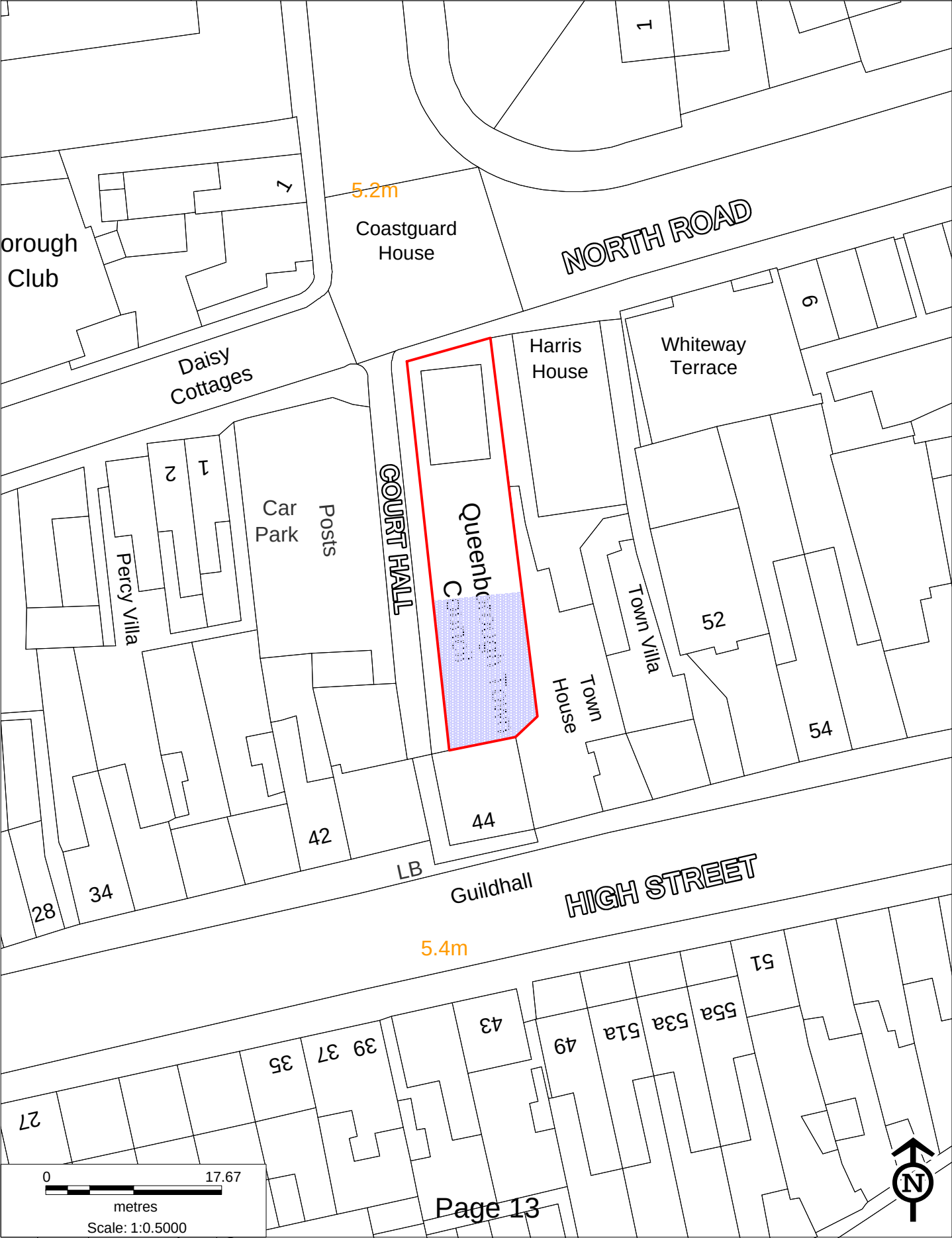
- Appendix I: Site Plan
- Appendix II: Title Plans

8 Background Papers

Land Rear of Queenborough Guildhall, Report to the Economy & Property Committee, 9th April 2025

Land rear of Queenborough Guildhall

	Drawn by: 3251	Date: 13/08/19	Scale: 1/500	Address North Road Queenborough
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Economy & Property Committee Meeting	
Meeting Date	7 th July 2026
Report Title	Swale House Increased Security – Costed Options
EMT Lead	Lisa Fillery Director of Resources
Head of Service	Joanne Johnson Head of Place
Lead Officer	Debbie Hardy Building Operations and Maintenance Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	1. That members note the options to secure the footprint of Swale House (and in particular the undercroft). 2. That members reject the options for the reasons set out in the report. 3. That members agree that there should be no tolerance to trespassers within the undercroft and that this stance informs service approaches to relevant action and support.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 At its March meeting, following consideration of a report on the Security and Safety of Swale House, Economy & Property Committee members agreed:

That officers look in to the options to secure the Swale House undercroft and the footprint of the building, including cost implications to enable Members to recommend the best way forward at the next meeting of the Committee.

- 1.2 This report sets out and assesses the related options and costs. It balances the advantages and disadvantages of each option and recommends no action is taken.

2 Background, Context and Proposals

- 2.1 At its 8th October meeting, following consideration of a report on the draft Voluntary and Community Sector Lettings Policy, Economy and Property Committee members discussed the letting of Swale House. In the ensuing discussion, concerns were raised that safety and security may impact lettings.
- 2.2 Officers were asked to provide a report on the above, scheduled to come to Committee in January. However, following the incident at Full Council in

December, it was agreed to postpone the report to enable public meetings to be included within its considerations.

- 2.3 The report was discussed at Economy and Property Committee in March and officers were asked to provide options, costs and recommendations for additional undercroft security.
- 2.4 Separately, a one-off budget of £125,000 was agreed at Policy and Resources Committee (P&R) on 4th February 2026 for “chamber / meeting security” for financial year 26/27. To date, £24,500 of this budget has been spent on extra internal building security measures with a further £17,400 notionally committed (for public gallery screens, access control points to Chamber doors, cameras in stairwell 1 and upgrades to the member voting system). This will leave £83,100 of that budget available.
- 2.5 Officers have reviewed and costed the following options:
- **Security patrols of external areas.** This would provide security and reassurance during meetings but would still leave the undercroft exposed out of hours. This cost will be approximately £26,300 per annum and would need to be budgeted in all future years. This option has been rejected as not fully meeting the brief and having ongoing financial implications.
 - **Temporary Heras fencing of the undercroft.** This has the advantage of providing visible security at a modest cost of approximately £2,000. However, temporary fencing is unsightly and more vulnerable to break-in than permanent security. It would also not be possible to secure the vehicle ramp in this way, so would require supplementing with controlled vehicular gates.
 - **Fencing of the undercroft with two access control points and a vehicle barrier on the ramp.** This has the advantage of being a comprehensive security response, protecting the building and its users permanently. It is within the available budget, at a cost of approximately £65,000 and would provide optimum reassurance for members, officers and building users. A CGI of this option is shown at Appendix I. There are, however, a range of disadvantages, including:
 - access issues for vehicles and deliveries from the main road, which could likely impact traffic flow / block the highway.
 - staff would need to be available to answer an intercom for deliveries and visitors. This would require intercom investment and a continual interruption in officers’ core duties. Adoption of this function by CCTV is possible, at no additional cost.
 - The intercom system would be open to abuse and ASB (e.g. people claiming to be deliveries to enter without permission; people using the buzzer deliberately to cause disruption). This would be hard to mitigate against.
 - There is a risk of tailgating of users and vehicles. This could then result in vehicles and individuals being ‘trapped’ or ‘kettled’ within the

undercroft, and (feeling / being) more vulnerable than with an open perimeter.

- People utilising the undercroft to 'make a point' may transfer this behaviour to the front entrance, or to the access points to the undercroft.

- **As above, but with the vehicle gate moved further up the access ramp.** This would have the advantage of mitigating the highways issues identified above, but would leave the doors to the Swale House basement exposed and would leave a sheltered area in front of the gate which may attract the kinds of behaviours the fencing is intended to avoid.
- **Fencing off the undercroft with no vehicle or pedestrian access.** This is the most comprehensive security response and would be within budget, but has been rejected as it would require all members, staff and building users to use the front entrance to Swale House. This would cause difficulties for deliveries and disabled user access, and may impact lettings. It would also create redundant space, and put pressure on adjacent surface car parks.

- 2.6. All of the above options share the disadvantage of likely displacing the issues to other areas of the town centre or wider borough. This may lead to negative reputational impact, and / or requests to support other buildings with similar investment.
- 2.7. On balance, officers consider the disadvantages of a fenced solution to outweigh the benefits. This would mean any unauthorised use of the undercroft would continue to be dealt with as it arises using existing services and the powers and means available to them.
- 2.8. Following the misuse of undercroft in 2025, cross-department officer meetings have been convened to focus on the optimum, swiftest solutions should repeat behaviours and issues occur. Actions are reflected in the internal, working Summer Preparedness Plan, which also engages external partners, such as Kent Police, in appropriate action.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That members note the options to secure the footprint of Swale House (and in particular the undercroft).
- 3.2 That members reject the options for the reasons set out in the report.
- 3.3 That members agree that there should be no tolerance to trespassers within the undercroft and that this stance informs service approaches to relevant action and support.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 Members may support any of the options assessed in section 2.5. Options which require investment will be recommended to Policy and Resources Committee.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 This report has been informed by member discussion at Economy and Property Committee.
- 5.2 The agreement to allocate £125,000 for chamber / meeting security was agreed by members at Policy and Resources Committee on 4th February 2026.
- 5.3 The existing spend from the £125,000 budget has been discussed and agreed by Members following an informal meeting of 10th December 2025.
- 5.4 Any recommendations by this Committee for further expenditure from the balance of the available budget will be presented to Policy and Resources Committee on 9th September 2026.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Effective security of staff and premises supports two actions under the 'Running the Council' objective of the Corporate Plan 2023-2027. • Support and develop staff. • Ensure well managed assets
Financial, Resource and Property	Security measures already in place are all funded within the base budget 26/27. Full Council agreed during the 26/27 budget setting in February to allocate funds for chamber / meeting security at Swale House and additional measures could be considered within that (subject to Policy and Resources Committee approval). Some of the options set out above would have ongoing financial implications (e.g. relating to staffing and maintenance) which would need to be addressed during budget setting for future years.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	Built solutions would be procured via the Council's usual processes.
Crime and Disorder	The measures outlined above seek to reduce and mitigate the impact of potential crime and disorder concerns at Swale House, although would impact on the location of the behaviours, not the behaviours themselves.

Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	No specific implications identified
Health and Wellbeing	Member and officer safety and perceptions of safety are a foundation of health and wellbeing.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	The rough sleeping outreach team consider safeguarding needs and make appropriate referrals when working with individuals rough sleeping.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	Homelessness is an emotive subject, with sometimes polarised views about how it should be addressed. There may be a reputational impact for the Council if it is perceived that the situation has been mismanaged. The health and safety of, and risks to members, staff and building users are considered in the report.
Equality and Diversity	The impact of the options on those who require disabled parking and access to the building has been considered and has informed this assessment.
Privacy and Data Protection	The implications of increased CCTV and body-worn cameras which have been invested in from the £125,000 budget have been considered from this perspective.
Local Government Reorganisation	If the building continues to be used by the new unitary authority, any measures enacted will continue to have an impact. If the building is disposed of, any physical measures may be viewed as an asset or disbenefit by a new occupier / tenant.

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Fencing Visual

8 Background Papers

[Agenda for Economy and Property Committee on Wednesday, 8 October 2025, 7.00 pm](#)

[Minutes for Economy and Property Committee on Wednesday 8th October, 7:00pm](#)

[Agenda for Economy and Property Committee on Thursday, 19 March 2026, 7.00 pm](#)

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Appendix I: Fencing Visuals





Economy and Property Committee	
Meeting Date	7 th July 2026
Report Title	Town Centre Challenges
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Joanne Johnson, Head of Place Services
Lead Officer	Kieren Mansfield, Strategic Programmes and Asset Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	1. That members discuss and note the content of the report

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report has been brought forward at the request of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Economy and Property Committee, to facilitate a discussion around the challenges faced by the Borough's principal town centres.
- 1.2 Whilst touching on the issues that are impacting on town centres nationally, the report seeks to highlight local circumstances and the extent to which the Council is able to respond to these.

2. Background

- 2.1 It has been widely reported that UK High Streets face structural decline, that has been gathering pace for some time. Key factors include:-
 - **Online & out-of-town competition:** The sustained boom in e-commerce and large retail parks offers consumers massive convenience and choice, draining footfall from traditional town centres, with online retailers in particular operating with lower overheads
 - **High operational costs:** increasing overheads—including business rates, utilities, minimum wage increases, and elevated inflation are all impacting on high street businesses
 - **Loss of anchor stores & services:** The loss of department and/or chain stores and bank branches has reduced the multi-purpose appeal of high streets.
 - **Homogenisation & anti-social behaviour:** Town centre users complain about the prevalence of betting shops, vape stores, and empty units, alongside concerns regarding local crime and street safety
 - **Changing work & footfall patterns:** The widespread adoption of remote and hybrid working is impacting on the use of town centres in different locations

- 2.2 The three main town centres in Swale - Sheerness, Sittingbourne and Faversham -have been subject to some or all of the above pressures and changes but in terms of vacancy rates have remained reasonably resilient, as shown below. The figures are based on the primary shopping areas for each town, as defined in the 2017 Local Plan.

	Vacancy rate (March 2026)	Total no of properties	No of vacant properties
Sheerness	8.7%.	161	14
Faversham	6.2%.	159	10
Sittingbourne	12.0%	183	22
South East	13.9%.		
National	14.0%		

- 2.3 The vacancy-rate for Sittingbourne in particular is expected to have improved with focused marketing efforts at the Forum, resulting in new tenants, which have attracted some attention from both the public and press. This commercial success has, however, resulted in the displacement of some non-commercial tenants. Efforts to find suitable alternative accommodation has proved challenging, reflecting the need for non-commercial spaces within town centre environments, where the community and voluntary sector can add value.
- 2.4 As well as the structural nature of the changes being felt in town centres across the country there are other, local circumstances in our towns that are impacting upon them.
- 2.5 Property ownership across all three town centres is fragmented with most properties in, sometimes distant, private ownership. Each individual property owner is responsible for the maintenance, letting and occupation of individual premises. There has been limited appetite amongst property owners and limited tools available to the Council to co-ordinate efforts to improve the presentation of premises and the type of business in occupation.
- 2.6 High Street rents in the towns are also relatively low. Current examples of available premises, in prime locations, have an asking rent of between £12 and £13 per sq.ft. but with some premises advertised as low as £5 per sq.ft. Whilst low rents discourage investment from landlords, they can contribute to keeping vacancy rates down. They also impact on the nature of occupiers that do take up space, potentially to the benefit of independent businesses which dominate each of the Borough's high streets, but also may contribute to the proliferation of particular types of occupier that raise concerns.
- 2.7 Important sites within Sittingbourne and Sheerness Town Centres in particular have stalled and are having a detrimental impact on amenity , including attracting anti-social activity. The site at Bell Road, the former New Century Cinema in Sittingbourne and the Water-tower site in Sheerness are prominent examples, with other individual buildings also of concern. Whilst proposals come forward for sites through the planning system, these have yet to materialise, with viability issues a common thread.

Council investment and resources

- 2.8 Over time the Council has attempted to play an active role in the High Streets of the Borough. Investment in Bourne Place in Sittingbourne; the Sheerness Revival Programme and the refurbishment of the Clock Tower and of Masters House also at Sheerness, the Faversham wayfinding project and other streetscape works have sought to improve the town centre offer and environment.
- 2.9 The Council's current Corporate Plan does not identify town centres as a broad priority but does identify the Sittingbourne Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) as a framework for future regeneration (see para 2.22). With diminishing local authority resources there is no longer staff or financial resource dedicated to the town centres, as was the case pre-COVID and much of what has been achieved recently has been dependent on securing external funding. Through the Property and Programmes Team some general support is provided, on request, to property owners, investors and prospective tenants. This can range from property specific signposting and advice to providing more general information about the area. However, pro-active attempts to engage with owners of significant, vacant properties to establish intent have had limited success.
- 2.10 The Council has also re-tendered for the street markets in the Borough. With challenging conditions for markets, this has attracted limited interest, but nonetheless the market tenders for Sittingbourne, Sheerness and Faversham have been awarded.
- 2.11 Other specific interventions have largely been through the use of external funding, or through the delivery of a wider range of services and enforcement powers and how they impact on town centre locations.

External Funding

- 2.12 In recent years the principal source of external funding available has been through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and more recently the one-off funding allocation from the Pride in Place Impact Fund.
- 2.13 In the initial programme period, effectively running from January 2023-March 2025, the Council decided to utilise some of the investment for 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 contributed 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. Examples of projects supported by grants include helping create improved multi-agency community space at Heather House, a number of town centre events across the three towns and a heritage trail in Sheerness.

- 2.14 Whilst significant additional resources would be required to undertake a broad programme of Borough-wide improvements, the current Pride in Place Impact Fund (PIPIF) allocations developed by the Prosperity Fund Member Working Group (and agreed by Policy and Resources Committee) have made £360,000 available to support efforts in Sittingbourne. In addition to improvements to the library public toilets, items being pursued include wayfinding and greening improvements for the town centre and potential improvements at Albany Park as a key gateway and linked leisure destination.
- 2.15 PIPIF funding elsewhere in the Borough will also contribute (albeit less directly) to encouraging visits into the town centres. For instance, planned improvements at Faversham Pools and building on the investment at Beachfields can contribute to improving the overall experience of visiting the towns and generating footfall in the town centre.

Enforcement and other legal powers

- 2.16 Proactive engagement and enforcement takes place where there are properties of particular significance or prominence, which 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 to promote joint working to try and address issues.
- 2.17 Planning Services also has powers relating to sites impacting on the amenity of the adjacent area. Whilst the team are able to deal with specific concerns, there are limitations. Section 215 notices give the Council powers to address specific issues on sites impacting on amenity of the area, but the powers are time-consuming and complex to utilise. They must be specific to identifiable issues. The Water Tower site in Sheerness has seen recent improvements through the use of these powers and the ability to use them can help the Council to engage with property owners when needed. The Council can also carry out works in relation to a Section 215 notice and place a charge on property, but this has disadvantages and it cannot be used to compel owners to finish developments or undertake ongoing maintenance.
- 2.18 Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) are another power available to the Council but it is a notoriously long process that for the acquiring authority is complex, expensive, requires specialist input and is open to legal challenge. Its use should be seen as a last resort and only where there is an overriding public interest to obtain land or property without the consent of the owner. Compensation rights payable to the property owners can include the value of the property, the cost of acquiring and moving to a new property and the costs of seeking professional advice. Lack of funding makes it difficult for local authorities to use these powers and statutory time limits give authorities a limited time to secure procurement and funding arrangements. This is further complicated as we approach Local Government Reform.
- 2.19 Within the planning context the Council has also sought to take a supportive stance. There is longstanding guidance relating to the design of shopfronts and advertisements in the form of Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG).

This provides applicants, owners, and developers guidance on achieving high standards in shopfront design and taking a sensitive approach to security, signage and materials. A refresh of this is planned, with a proposed shopfront design leaflet to be made available to residents and shop owners.

- 2.20 The council has recently undertaken a public consultation on proposals to introduce an Area of Special Control of Advertisements (ASCA) across parts of the borough's historic town centres. The proposed ASCA would apply to the commercial centres of eight Conservation Areas, including each of the three main town centres.
- 2.21 The designation would introduce stricter limits on the size, height and proportion of advertisements allowed without consent, helping to protect vulnerable historic shopfronts and improve the appearance of high streets. These new controls are a further tool to support the long-term preservation and enhancement of historic shopfronts while ensuring that commercial areas remain vibrant and attractive
- 2.22 The Council also produced and adopted an SPD for Sittingbourne Town Centre in 2022. This was subject to consultation and set out a range of considerations, particularly to inform the Council's position in respect of town centre development. The document set a vision which recognised the challenges facing town centres and the need for a diversity of use which embraced the town's heritage. The SPD also acknowledged the importance of accessibility and the public realm, an arena in which the public sector has greater influence and control.

High Street Rental Auctions (HSRA)

- 2.23 HSRAs are a further tool available to Local Authorities. Introduced in December 2024 under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, Councils 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.
- 2.24 To begin the process, Councils must formally designate specific streets or areas as an HSRA Zone, which requires a mandatory 28-day public consultation. Before a property can be put up for auction, it must satisfy two statutory conditions; **The Vacancy Condition** (as set out above) and **the Local Benefit Condition**, whereby the Council determines that the proposed letting will provide an economic, social, or environmental benefit to the community.
- 2.25 Thereafter, the implementation of an HSRA follows a strict legal framework and involves several further mandatory phases; commencing with serving notice on the landlord, after which the landlord has 8 weeks to secure their own tenancy or show they have active, concrete plans to let the property.
- 2.26 If they fail to do so, a **Final Notice** is issued, and the property moves into the auction phase. Landlords have the right to appeal the final notice by serving a

counter-notice. If this fails then, or no appeal is lodged, the Council has a **12-week window** to conduct the auction, to let the building on standard prescribed terms, ensuring the unit is brought up to minimum letting standards.

- 2.27 These powers have not yet been used widely nationally and in early adopters it has been the threat of the use of these powers on specific buildings that has generated landlord action.
- 2.28 The process does 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. New Burdens Payments are currently available to offset administrative costs, up to £5,223 per HSRA to cover the associated legal, marketing, and auction costs, although it is unclear if this would be full cost recovery.
- 2.29 The Government has also recently announced that £10 million of new funding to support local councils in England to deliver High Street Rental Auctions (HSRAs) will be made available with details to follow.
- 2.30 There have been other 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.
- 2.31 Given the resource implications and capacity issues within the Programmes and Property and Legal teams, Swale Borough Council has not taken up High Street Rental Auctions thus far. However, in recent weeks letters have been sent to the owners of a number of prominent, apparently vacant buildings in Sittingbourne, seeking to establish the current position and making reference to the availability of the powers. To date this has clarified the position in respect of one of those premises and allowed a dialogue with the owners. Follow-up contact to the remainder have been sent and any further responses can be indicated at the meeting.

3. Proposal

- 3.1 That members discuss and note the content of the report

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 The Council faces competing priorities, set against an increasingly challenging financial position, with uncertainty about the future availability of external funding. The Council has sought to balance promoting projects and programmes that support town centres with other priorities for the borough, e.g. leisure and climate change. The Council could seek to use a greater

proportion of any future external funding for town centres. This would impact on other, competing priorities.

5. Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1 The content of the report has not been subject to any consultation

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The Council's current Corporate Plan does not broadly identify town centres as a priority. Under the Economy priority, the Council's Corporate Plan identifies the two following priority actions, which relate to the content of the report. • Use the Sittingbourne Supplementary Planning Document as a model framework to support town centre regeneration. • Deliver economic development through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) (currently programmed to March 2025).
Financial, Resource and Property	The content of the report has no direct financial implications. There are currently no budgets or staff identified specifically to support town centres, although resources from across a number of teams are involved in the activity set out in the report. Future investment in town centres is likely to be driven by any further external funding opportunities that are made available
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	Action in respect of town centres falls between the Council's statutory enforcement powers and other non-statutory powers. For instance, the powers to implement the use of High Street Rental Auctions were introduced by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. Where investment has been made these have been subject to the Council's usual procurement rules and appropriate funding conditions.
Crime and Disorder	Nationally, town centres have increasingly come under a spotlight in respect of anti-social behaviour and criminality. Within Swale the Swale Community Safety Unit has regular multi-agency discussions about hotspot locations including insecure and dilapidated buildings to promote joint working to try and address issues.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	Nothing identified at this stage. It should be noted that greening of town centres is a consideration in making improvements to the town centre public realm and the linkages with adjacent greenspaces is acknowledged as an important asset in each of the three principal town centres, with investment made reflecting this.

Health and Wellbeing	UK town centres are shifting from largely commercial destinations to more community focused hubs. Accessible public spaces, green infrastructure, active travel networks, and bringing local services into towns are now viewed as important attributes which can help town centres to redefine their role.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage
Local Government Reform	None identified at this stage

7 Appendices

7.1 None

8 Background Papers

8.1 None.

Economy and Property Committee	
Meeting Date	7 th July 2026
Report Title	Closed Public Conveniences – Property Next Steps
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Joanne Johnson, Head Place Services
Lead Officer	Kieren Mansfield, Strategic Programmes and Asset Manager
Classification	Part Exempt
Recommendations	1. That the Council retains 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. To delegate authority to the Head of Place to authorise the demolition of the Forum Toilet, subject to landlords consent and agreement as to how the footprint of the building will be used or reinstated.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out potential next steps in respect of the three public conveniences which the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee resolved to close (White House in Minster; Milton Regis High Street; and The Forum in Sittingbourne) from April 2026. It also considers the position in respect of the Public Conveniences at Eastchurch, which have been closed for some years.

2 Background

- 2.1 On 12th November 2025, the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee agreed the recommendations from the Public Conveniences Review. The recommendations aimed to align the service with the allocated budget.
- 2.2 This included the closure of three public conveniences at the White House in Minster; Milton Regis High Street; and The Forum in Sittingbourne. These toilets have now all been closed. This report also considers the toilets at Eastchurch, which have been closed for some years.
- 2.3 The toilets and associated land at Eastchurch and the White House are in the freehold ownership of the Council, the Forum Toilets are part of wider lease held by the the Council, incorporating the Forum Car Park, and Milton Regis

Toilets are operated under a deed which provides rights to access and operate the Public Toilets within a property owned by another party.

- 2.4 The decision to close these toilets means that they are currently not required for operational use and at present no potential alternative use by the Council has been identified. The properties also have ongoing security and maintenance liabilities for the Council.
- 2.5 SBC's adopted Property Asset Strategy sets out the requirement to:
"Make it a priority that the Council only retain land and property where it makes strategic or financial sense to do so. This should be to deliver services in line with corporate priorities, to generate income, to provide a return on investment, to enable regeneration or to provide social value."
- 2.6 The properties currently make no contribution to the delivery of the Council's services and at this stage no viable potential with regard to the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan has been identified. Under the Council's Disposals Policy this meets the threshold for the relevant properties to be declared surplus.
- 2.7 As such the Head of Place will commence the disposal of the Whitehouse Toilets under delegation 2.8.19.12, following engagement with Ward Members and the Parish Council. The Council owns the freehold of the premises and it is anticipated that any consideration will not exceed £100,000.
- 2.8 Milton Regis Toilets were operated Council via rights and obligations on 78 High Street, Milton Regis, granted by a Deed. The rights cover use of, access to, and maintenance of the public convenience and in return, the Council has ongoing covenants to contribute to repairs, insurance, services and certain other costs. Under delegation 2.8.19.7 the Head of Place will also seek to agree terms with the freeholder 78 Milton Regis High Street for a formal surrender of all rights and obligations granted by the Deed.
- 2.9 Although also in the freehold ownership of the Swale Borough Council, the next steps for the former toilets at Eastchurch is potentially more challenging, by virtue of its position in relation to the Aviation memorial. It also falls within the Geography of the Pride in Place Programme for Sheppey East, which will now be developing its investment plans for the funding which it is set to benefit from. As such the Council could retain the site for a fixed period, to provide an option for the site to be included within these.
- 2.9 The Toilets adjacent to the Forum form part of wider leased demise the Forum Car Park and the Council's next steps will require landlords permission (not to unreasonably withheld). Whilst no alternative use for the building has been identified by Swale Borough Council, the building has attracted an enquiry from a third party about its potential for alternative use. To date this has not crystallised into a specific proposal.
- 2.10 Exempt – see Appendix I

- 2.11 If the building is left vacant it would require ongoing maintenance and has the potential to attract anti-social behaviour, with additional holding costs associated with keeping it secure.
- 2.12 There are also concerns about the barrier the building helps form between the High Street, the Forum, Forum Car Park and Bourne Place. The adopted Sittingbourne Town Centre SPD identifies this as follows.

“Berry Street is the prime route connecting the High Street with Bourne Place. A new map sign is located at the junction of Berry Street with the High Street giving directions to Bourne Place and the railway station but the route initially leads to a blank wall.”

3 Proposal

- 3.1 That the Council retains 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.
- 3.2 To delegate authority to the Head of Place to authorise the demolition of the Forum Toilet, subject to landlords consent and agreement as to how the footprint of the building will be used or reinstated.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 An immediate disposal of Eastchurch Toilets could be considered. This is not recommended at this point. The building forms part of the site of the British Aviation Memorial and is set in a position which would heavily constrain potential interest, with the potential for some alternative uses to harm the setting of the memorial. There is the potential for investment from the Pride in Place Programme, but if this were not forthcoming disposal or demolition, sensitive to its setting could be pursued.
- 4.2 Do nothing. This is not recommended. The Toilets at the White House and at 78 Milton Regis would continue to present ongoing maintenance and management liabilities. The Forum Toilets, occupy a relatively prominent location within Sittingbourne town centre and this option could result in a vacant building have a detrimental impact on the amenity of that part of the town centre as well as perpetuating the physical and visual barrier between the High Street and other town centre destinations, identified in the Sittingbourne Town Centre SPD.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed Considered and Rejected

- 5.1 The public conveniences review was subject to a consultation process. In respect of the proposals above for disposal, the relevant ward Members and Parish Councils will be approached, as required by the Disposals Policy. In

respect of the Forum and Milton Regis Toilets the Council has engaged with the owners of the properties.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The proposals align with the Councils' Property Asset Strategy to only retain land and property where it makes strategic or financial sense to do so. This should be to deliver services in line with corporate priorities, to generate income, to provide a return on investment, to enable regeneration or to provide social value. In light of the decision to close these toilets there is currently no identified operational or specific reason to retain the properties or rights to use them, with the temporary exception of Eastchurch.
Financial, Resource and Property	The proposals seek to divest the Council of the financial and management liabilities of retaining facilities, whilst potentially generating a capital receipt contributing positively to the Council's financial position.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	There is no statutory obligation for the Council to provide Public Toilets. Any transactions and removal of the rights and obligations at 78 High Street, Milton Regis, will require input from legal services.
Crime and Disorder	Holding sites increases the risk of vacancy-related anti-social behaviour or criminal damage.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	None identified at this stage
Health and Wellbeing	None identified at this stage.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	Retaining vacant property comes with risks associated with its ongoing maintenance, the potential to have a deleterious effect on the amenity of the locality in which it sits and attracting anti-social behaviour.
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.
Local Government Reform	None identified at this stage.

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Exempt Appendix I

8 Background Papers

Public Conveniences Review - Consultation Outcome - Report to the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee, 12th November 2025

Minute 457 from the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee, 12th November 2025

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Economy and Property Committee	
Meeting Date	July 2026
Report Title	Granting of a New Commercial Lease
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Joanne Johnson, Head Place Services
Lead Officer	David Johnson MRICS, Interim Property Services Consultant
Classification	Part Exempt
Recommendations	1.To approve the grant of a new commercial lease of the property detailed in the exempt Appendix I. 2.To delegate to the Head of Place Services, in consultation with the Head of Legal Services, authority 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

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks Committee approval for the grant of a new lease of the property described in the exempt Appendix I, and highlighted blue on the Title Plan at exempt Appendix II
- 1.2 The report is part exempt as it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of particular persons, including the authority holding that information (Swale Borough Council). This seeks to ensure the Council is able to contemplate financial or business affairs in relation to the property, without prejudice.

2 Background

2.1 – 2.10 Exempt items at Appendix I

3 Proposal

- 3.1 To approve the grant of a new commercial lease of the property detailed in the exempt Appendix I.
- 3.2 To delegate to the Head of Place Services, in consultation with the Head of Legal Services, authority 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.

4 Alternative Options

4.1-4.4 Exempt items at Appendix I

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed Considered and Rejected

- 5.1 Extensive discussions have taken place with the parties involved. Heads of Terms have been agreed on a without-prejudice and subject-to-contract basis.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The transaction supports the implementation of the Council's Property Asset Strategy, in line with Corporate Plan.
Financial, Resource and Property	The transaction improves the Council's overall revenue position and will maintain occupancy of a Council owned property.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	Legal Services will draft and complete all documentation. No procurement implications arise. The report is part exempt as it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of particular persons, including the authority holding that information (Swale Borough Council). This seeks to ensure the Council is able to contemplate financial or business affairs in relation to the property, without prejudice.
Crime and Disorder	The property would continue to be occupied and managed, which mitigates the risk of vacancy-related anti-social behaviour or criminal damage.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	The new lease includes modern environmental and sustainability obligations. Any future development or change of use will be subject to planning control and Biodiversity Net Gain requirements where applicable.
Health and Wellbeing	None identified at this stage.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage.

Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.
Local Government Re-organisation	None identified at this stage

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Exempt items
- Appendix II: Exempt Title Plan

8 Background Papers

None

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