
WESTERN COUNCILLORS AND RESIDENTS FORUM

MINUTES of the Meeting held at Bobbing Village Hall, Sheppey Way, Bobbing, Sittingbourne ME9 8PL on Thursday, 2 July 2026 from 7.00 pm - 8.12 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Richard Palmer, Paul Stephen (Chair) and Sarah Stephen (Vice-Chair).

NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES: Parish/Town Councillors Sue Chapman, Sarah Poole, Gareth Randall, Ross Richardson and Uwe Koepsel (Bobbing Parish Council (PC)) and Vivien Rich (Tunstall PC).

NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES (Virtually): Parish/Town Councillor Brian Clarke (Bredgar PC).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Janet Dart and Charlotte Hudson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillors Ann Cavanagh and Monique Bonney.

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

163 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

164 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 May 2026 (Minute Nos 36 – 37) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

165 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

166 PUBLIC FORUM

No issues were raised.

167 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW UPDATE (POTENTIAL CHANGES TO ARRANGEMENTS FOR TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS)

The update report was noted.

168 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION UPDATE (GOVERNMENT WANTS US TO DELIVER YOUR SERVICES DIFFERENTLY)

The update report was noted.

The following comments were raised:

- Would the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) be discussed at the Full Council meeting on 22 July 2026?;
- LGR had been imposed with no consultation or engagement;
- there needed to be transparency about implementation costs;
- it was felt that there would be a lack of local voices, councillors would not want to cover large areas;
- large community safety partnerships would not be as effective as the current ones;
- councillors would not want to travel further to meetings due to extra costs, and meetings were more likely to take place during the day which would deter some people from putting themselves forward for election; and
- the identity of Swale would disappear.

The Head of Housing & Communities and the Chair responded that if the decision was announced by Government on the unitary selection on time, it would be discussed at the Full Council Meeting on 22 July 2026. There had been a public consultation on LGR which closed on 26 March 2026. The Member of Parliament for Sittingbourne and Sheppey, Kevin McKenna, had confirmed that the Government had made funds available for the implementation of LGR. Having spoken to other areas who had gone through LGR, it took about five years to align all services and bed-in. The Police covered a wide area and had localised teams.

169 YOU SAID, WE DID (INCLUDING UPDATES ON MATTERS ARISING)

The update report was noted.

Councillor Mike Baldock said that he thought an invitation to nominate for the Local Heritage List would go out in 2026. The Policy & Engagement Officer said she would check and feedback after the meeting.

Post meeting note – The Principal Heritage Officer advised that work on Action Plan 3 was being shaped by current statutory priorities, especially the preparation of Article 4 Directions for our Conservation Areas and the wider conservation management tasks linked to them. Because of this workload, the next Local Heritage List invitation to nominate was now expected to take place in summer 2027. This timing reflected the team's available capacity and helped manage designated and non-designated heritage work in a balanced way. In the Action Plan 3 timeline, this meant initial preparation would begin in late spring 2027, followed by public engagement, assessment, and panel review stages running into 2028.

Comments were raised about the lack of Swale Borough Council enforcement on breaches in conservation areas. A number of examples were discussed and it was agreed that the Chair would write to the Head of Place highlighting the issues raised.

170 SWALE BUS PARTNERSHIP FORUM

The Minutes of the Swale Local Bus Forum on 21 April 2026 were noted.

The Western Councillors & Residents Forum representative on the Swale Local Bus Forum, Councillor Baldock reported that since the closure of the public toilets

at the Forum, Sittingbourne, Chalkwell buses had reduced some services as the drivers had no access to toilets at the Sittingbourne bus hub.

Councillor Sarah Stephen said that as a new doctors' surgery would soon be operating from the Memorial Medical Centre, could the Swale Local Bus Forum look at providing a bus service to that location?

The idea of a circle line bus stopping at key locations including the Memorial Hospital, Sittingbourne was discussed.

171 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED

National Highways & Transport Network - public satisfaction survey

The Chair encouraged everyone to respond to the National Highways & Transport Network public satisfaction survey. The Policy & Engagement Officer would email details to everyone after the meeting. The survey could be accessed via this link:

[National Highways and Transport Surveys 2026-27 | Let's Talk Kent](#)

The survey closes on 28 February 2027.

Bobbing Garden Village

Residents and councillors at the meeting felt strongly that the building of 2500 houses would have a devastating impact on the rural area, surrounding villages and infrastructure.

Councillor Baldock proposed that the Chair of Western Councillors & Residents Forum writes a letter to the Mayor requesting it be read out at Full Council on 22 July 2026 stating that that Western Councillors & Residents Forum utterly condemned the decision by Swale Borough Council to include Bobbing Garden Village as a strategic option in the Local Plan. Councillor Sarah Stephen seconded the proposal and on being put to a member and public vote was agreed.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Chair of Western Councillors & Residents Forum writes a letter to the Mayor requesting it be read out at Full Council on 22 July 2026 stating the That Western Councillors & Residents Forum utterly condemned the decision by Swale Borough Council to include Bobbing Garden Village as a strategic option in the Local Plan.***

172 CONFIRMATION OF MATTERS REFERRED TO SERVICE COMMITTEE CHAIRS FOR CONSIDERATION

No issues were raised.

Chair

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