
SITTINGBOURNE COUNCILLORS AND RESIDENTS FORUM

MINUTES of the Meeting held in The Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne ME10 3HT on Thursday, 25 June 2026 from 7.00 pm - 9.06 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Shelley Cheesman, Simon Clark, Tim Gibson, Karen Watson, Tony Winckless and Ashley Wise (Chair).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Emma Bartley, Janet Dart and Kieren Mansfield.

OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually): Emma Wiggins.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Paul Stephen and Sarah Stephen.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillors Mark Last and Dolley Wooster.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Derek Carnell, Charlie Miller, Kieran Mishchuk and Carrie Pollard.

128 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

129 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meetings held on 25 June 2026 (Minute Nos. 769 – 781) and 13 May 2026 (Minute Nos 34 – 35) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct records.

130 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Tony Winckless declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Member of the Milton Regis High Street Society, and as a Trustee of Milton Regis Country Park and Milton Court Hall.

131 WORKSHOP DISCUSSION ON HOW TO IMPROVE FOOTFALL IN SITTINGBOURNE TOWN CENTRE

The Chair said that Sittingbourne had received a share of the Pride in Place Impact Fund (PIPIF) from which money had been allocated for making physical improvements to the town. He said that the purpose of this workshop discussion was to explore potential capital projects that would improve the look or amenity of the town centre. He gave a presentation which focused on the Sittingbourne Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which was adopted in 2022 and set out Swale Borough Council's vision in respect of town centre development. The Chair also explained the challenges and resources when delivering improvements.

Discussions took place as part of the wider meeting and also during smaller group discussions. A member of public attending online also contributed.

The following comments were raised and noted by the Chair, Strategic Programme & Assets Manager and Projects Officer:

- Trees had been removed from some car parks and not replaced;
- planting of trees in Sittingbourne High Street would create shade, utility companies would be able to assist with finding suitable locations for planting;
- getting buses back into the High Street would encourage footfall;
- why was the High Street closed on Fridays when the market only covered half of the area?;
- pedestrianisation of Sittingbourne High Street on Saturdays was detrimental to trade, especially in addition to the part closure on Fridays;
- if the pavements were narrowed, it would provide space for diagonal parking spaces;
- high quality shops should be encouraged into the High Street;
- form a representative a group which could lobby Government for increased investment in high streets;
- there was a need for improved enforcement in relation to listed buildings in the conservation area to improve their appearance;
- more seating was needed on the Albany Road side of Albany Park;
- tree roots were lifting the path in Albany Park;
- the history of Sittingbourne should be celebrated;
- a central town museum was needed;
- in recent years a lot of heritage assets in Sittingbourne had disappeared;
- any funding should be spent on the worst part of the High Street;
- some of the old buildings that are unlikely to be used as shops could be converted into residential units;
- hold events to celebrate Sittingbourne;
- make Sittingbourne a destination place;
- the Avenue of Remembrance in Sittingbourne was the only one in the UK;
- the Sittingbourne Christmas Lights should be a big event;
- funding could be spent on a paid employee to promote Sittingbourne and tourism to the area;
- maintain floral displays;
- encourage a coffee culture;
- create a Facebook group for the public to comment on how the High Street could be improved;
- improve signage outside Sittingbourne Railway Station to support independent shops;
- promote the events at Kemsley Light Railway;
- alleyways required improvements to enhance their appearance and make them safer;
- look at ways to attract young people into the High Street;
- look at what could keep people in the High Street after visiting the cinema;
- improve the signage from the Forum;
- as music draws people of all ages, a bandstand would be a great attraction; and
- ensure the Sittingbourne Viaduct was included on pedestrian signage from the town and station.

Councillor Tim Gibson proposed that the Chair of the Environmental Services & Climate Change Committee be asked if the Committee could explore free 'Stop and Shop' bays parking bays in the Councils town centre car parks following the same restrictions as on-street parking in the high street and to also make the Economy & Property Committee aware of this proposal. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Shelley Cheesman and on being put to the vote was agreed.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Chair of the Environmental Services & Climate Change Committee be asked if the Committee could explore free 'Stop and Shop' bays parking bays in the Councils town centre car parks following the same restrictions as on-street parking in the high street and to also make the Economy & Property Committee aware of this proposal.**

132 PUBLIC FORUM

No issues were raised.

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

The update report was noted.

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

The update report was noted.

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

The update report was noted.

136 SWALE BUS PARTNERSHIP FORUM

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

The Sittingbourne Councillors & Residents Forum representatives on the Swale Local Bus Forum, Councillors Karen Watson and Tony Winckless, reported the following:

- The live bus times at the bus hub in Sittingbourne should be ready by the end of August 2026;
- a representative from the Faversham Community Hopper bus service now attended the Swale Local Bus Forum meetings;
- it was hoped that Southeastern Railway would attend future meetings; and
- dementia friendly bus services would be introduced.

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

A member of the public asked if there could be discounted bus fares for students in uniform, especially neurodiverse students.

Councillors Watson and Winckless agreed to take those issues to the next Swale Local Bus Forum and said if there were any further issues, they were happy for people to email them.

Jackie Davidson said that some timetables at bus services were out of date and he had reported it to the relevant bus operators. He said that a Chalkwell bus had broken down during the day which left a gap of two and a half hours without a bus service. Mr Davidson had requested a meeting with Chalkwell Coach Hire to see what could be done to prevent a similar problem in the future.

137 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED

The public consultation on the proposed live bus gate at Great Easthall would close in early July 2026.

The Chair advised that following the finalisation of the Swale Local Cycling Walking and Infrastructure Plan, Cycle Route 3 had been selected as the first key route to move forward into preliminary and detailed design. As part of engagement with local residents and councillors, route walks would be taking place on 13 and 14 July 2026 followed by broader engagement activities in September 2026. If anyone would like to join one of the walks, could they please email michelleanderson@swale.gov.uk

Following the closure of the public toilets at Milton Regis High Street, Councillor Winckless asked what the proposal was for the building. The Chair advised that a paper would be going to the next Economy and Property Committee on this matter.

Councillor Simon Clark wanted to promote the recently installed mental health bench in Albany Park, Sittingbourne. He said the Friends of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club in Kent had raised the funds for this bench and many others across the South East of England. The benches promoted mental health awareness. He said it was a beautiful bench, modelled on the benches in the Royal Parks in London. At night they were lit by solar powered batteries.

The Chair advised The Space had opened at Milton Creek Country Park where workshops and events could be held. He said it was a very nice environment to hold events.

Councillor Tim Gibson said he was disappointed that the Motion proposed by Councillor Paul Stephen at the Full Council Meeting to support a Milton Creek Water Quality Review fell and that it was a missed opportunity to work with Southern Water to get better quality water in Milton Creek. The matter had now been referred back to the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee, that delay could potentially result in opportunities to apply for external funding being lost.

Councillor Shelley Cheesman asked if anyone had any information on the nuisance motorcyclist in the Albany Road play area, to contact the Police.

138 CONFIRMATION OF MATTERS REFERRED TO SERVICE COMMITTEE CHAIRS FOR CONSIDERATION

It was agreed to refer the following item to a Service Committee Chair for consideration:

- 1) That the Chair of the Environmental Services & Climate Change Committee be asked if the Committee could explore free 'Stop and Shop' bays parking bays in the Councils town centre car parks following the same restrictions as on-street parking in the high street and to also make the Economy & Property Committee aware of this proposal.

Chair

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