

Swanley Town Council
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**ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
7:30PM THE CIVIC CENTRE
Wednesday 29th March 2017**

MINUTES

Present: Mayor Cllr Ball, Leader Cllr Southern, Deputy Leader Cllr Morris, Cllr Horwood, Cllr Willingale, Cllr C Barnes, Cllr J Barnes, Cllr Scott, Cllr Dyball, Cllr Hogg, Cllr Darrington, Cllr Halford, Cllr Searles

Officers: CEO Steve Nash, Civic Manager Toni Roast, Estate & Facilities Manager Dan Sutton, Democratic Services Officer Barb Playfoot

Introduction: The Mayor welcomed the all to the meeting and advised the room of changes in the Agenda running order

1. To receive Apologies for Absence

Cllr L Gaire, Cllr S Gaire, Cllr Scott, Cllr Komolafe

2. Lead Councillors' Report

Report to the Swanley Town Meeting of March 29th 2017 by Cllr. Victor Southern
Leader of the Council – See report A

3. Swanley & District Twinning Association Report

Roger Bryan gave the audience a brief history of the Twinning Association. He provided an update on their planned activities and reinforced the benefits of being a member of the twinning association and encouraged people to join the association by attending 'Discover France' on 14th July 2017

4. Report from Chief Inspector of Kent

Chief Inspector Walford provided the meeting with a comprehensive report on crime figures, trending offences and how Kent police were preventing and combatting crime across the county. He also took questions from the floor and responded as required.

5. Public Questions

Resident from Archer Way, Swanley asked for a vote of thanks to go to the Councillors for opposing the 'Garden Town' build.

Cllr V Southern responded that it was more a community initiative

Resident from Highcroft Close, Swanley asked for an update on the site of the 'Working Men's Club'

Cllr V Southern responded stating that Sevenoaks District Council purchased the site in July 2016 and the last update was that they were awaiting community input and surveys.

Resident from Archer Way, Swanley asked what the council were doing about the 'Shopping trolley Art'

CEO Steve Nash responded that the council were working with ASDA on preventing the trollies being taken beyond Swanley Town Centre, also the Parks department have been charged with collecting stray trollies when carrying out their grass cutting duties around Swanley. He also confirmed that all grass areas will be cut even if there was doubt over the ownership of the land.

Resident from Ladds Way questioned why the council did not have access to the previous CEO's documents.

CEO Steve Nash responded that data had been removed and attempts had been made to retrieve the documents but with success.

Resident from ???? Drive asked if anything was being done in regard to the speed limit in Goldsel Road and the speeding vehicles.

Chief Insp Walford responded by stating this was KCC's responsibility but a 'Volunteer Speed Watch' could be organised.

Resident from Waylands, Swanley commented that the CEO Steve Nash had turned things around so quickly but why was Swanley Banqueting not monitored correctly and why was it allowed to continue

Cllr V Southern responded by stating that the financial procedures have now changed but the Olympic in early October 2016 was running at £200,000 per year loss. The committee for Banqueting has now been merged with the Finance and Audit (Policy & Finance) so meetings will take place on a regular basis and the finances are monitored daily.

Resident from Bonney Way, Swanley asked if there were any grants for Community Groups.

It was confirmed that there was and the criteria for application was available from the Town Council.

Resident from Archer Way, Swanley commented that there should have been more accountability of the councillors during the period that Council funds diminished.

Ex Cllr Lee asked what was being done with the Age Concern building owned by Sevenoaks District Council and would there be any alternative provision in Swanley.

The 'Garden Town project' was mentioned again regarding how the planning had been stopped but Cllr V Southern said that this would not be the end but would put up a united front if the decision went to appeal.

6. Next Meeting Wednesday 28th March 2017

Meeting Closed at 20.50

Report from Chief Inspector Walford – Kent Police Annual Town Meeting 28th March 2017

Crime Issues

Sevenoaks has the approx. population of 120,000 people, the crime rate is low, the average number of crimes reported in any 24 hours is 21, 45% to 50% are domestic violence which is a real problem but Kent police provide a good support service to help the victims.

In the Swanley area there has been a number of thefts, particularly of motorbikes, Kent police are working in partnership with Met police to apprehend those who are committing the crimes. He did warn the meeting that they should not tackle any burglars and ring 101 immediately if they are witnessing to a crime.

He also reported that Sevenoaks had the lowest figures for Anti-Social behaviour in the country.

Police priorities have changed dramatically over the years, PSO's are now seen as the local Community policing team. The police now focus on Domestic Violence, Sex Industry & Violence, Terrorism and Extremism. All school and colleges provide information to students/teachers on all these subjects and advise on the how they can be indoctrinated and how to detect if some is being radicalised.

Modern slavery and trafficking is also a problem for the police to tackle, the Chief Insp gave a brief on how these people were controlled and the likely places these people could be employed or used. He went on to say that has not been any Gangs, drugs or extortion identified in Sevenoaks district. The police were concentrating on supporting vulnerable young adults who have been subjected to child sexual exploitation. The Chief Insp took a question from the floor regarding cyber bullying, he responded that new processes were being put in place and increased monitoring would be in place later in the year.

The Mayor thanked the Chief Insp for his report

Report A. Report from Cllr V Southern – Leader of Swanley Town Council

Thank you for attending this evening. This is my last appearance as Leader of the Council so I will set out to inform you of what your Council does, has done in the past year and plans for the new Council year about to start.

During the year the Council has had high spots and low spots. For example we did not cover ourselves with glory over Swanley in Bloom. A departed officer attempted to save money on the street planters and we ended up with much inferior plantings. The Council reviewed the issues and decided on a new approach and just last Saturday Coolings Nursery had a function in the Town Centre detailing how they will handle the competition on our behalf. A new supplier will provide and maintain the planter boxes. These changes will not increase the Council's expenditure.

Another low spot was when we handed back the unprofitable grass cutting contracts to the County and District Councils. We did not realise they had no maps of where they should cut. Our new policy is if we are in doubt we will cut it and we will shortly be buying new equipment for that purpose.

On the other hand the Council carried out a large and varied series of events for the residents, all very well received – the 1812 Night and the Guy Fawkes display attracted many compliments – including several “best ever” remarks. We have an even larger set of events this year which include the successful Italian market at the end of February and the Continental Market of just a few days ago.

Those markets were initiatives of our new Town Clerk, Steve Nash who has other fine ideas to enhance our town. Another Italian market is already arranged and we also hope to hold another Jobs Fair this year as we did so successfully in 2013 and 2014 but we do not yet have a date for that.

A large part of the Council's time this year has been taken up by just a few matters such as Swanley Banqueting, staff reorganisation and fighting off inappropriate development. Some of those put a heavy and unexpected strain on our finances and our reserves need some rebuilding. I might take some comfort from the very recent statement by a member of the Bank of England's monetary policy committee, a Mr. Vlieghe who said that unrealistic expectations were being placed on economics and forecasting models. “I'm never confident of any forecast,” he told the Treasury select committee and “It is always going to be the case... that there are going to be large forecast errors; that we are not going to forecast the next financial crisis”. If such a large organisation can't do it then one should not expect perfection from a town or parish council.

On a positive note we have, we hope, stemmed the losses made by Swanley Banqueting and the Town Clerk reviews its performance daily in real time whereas the Banqueting Board met perhaps 3 or 4 times a year. The Board is now abolished and its functions taken into the new Policy & Finance Committee which will meet almost monthly.

Undoubtedly the most difficult tasks which faced Swanley was to fight off the Vision Plan for Swanley which involved a massive “Garden Village” development in the Green Belt east of the town. This was considered to be a done deal by the cabinet members at the District Council but we fought a massive and successful battle aided by many residents who put heart and soul into the fight. We passed 3 resolutions in Council, regarding the Recreation Ground, the Green Belt and excessive development and our District Councillors won over enough allies to defeat the proposals at the District Council and so the Cabinet had to reverse its stand. Councillor Michael Horwood was particularly prominent as were residents such as Chris Prestedge, Michael Jenkins, Ruth Glenn and Paul Darrington who has now joined the Council as a Councillor for White Oak. I apologise for missing out any of the other valuable contributors by name. I should say before leaving that matter that this was a cross-party fight with all Councillors supporting our stand.

I would also like to commend Chris Hunt who has kept a watchful eye on the activities of Persimmon on the old United House site. Direct resident involvement is valuable to the community.

We have also expressed very severe opposition to aspects of the U&I plan to redevelop the town centre and their original plan was withdrawn. Your Council is in favour of progress and would welcome a regeneration of the main shopping area but we felt that several aspects of the scheme were unacceptable. This is an ongoing concern which will be in front of us for some time to come.

The arrangement which the Council made with Can You Experience to manage the Swanley Park was financially unsuccessful although the Council did not suffer financially compared to recent years. Steve Nash advises us to manage the entire future operation ourselves – something the Council has never done before. The Council is assured that adequate planning is going into this and it offers us a potential to receive a positive inflow of money whilst training several young people right through the apprentice system. The system whereby residents can obtain free parking permits for the Park are in place again and a visit to The Link with your V5, proof of identity and a utility bill proving residence will swiftly reward you with such a disc.

While I am mentioning The Link I am happy to report that this facility is getting rave feedback from many users. In July we had the official opening by HRH The Duke of Gloucester and the activities continue to expand. For example, tomorrow evening they have a book signing and talk by two leading published authors of crime novels, Lisa Cutts and Simon Booker. Lisa is actually a serving police detective in Kent and Simon is author of many TV scripts and lives in Deal.

Councillors, council officers and residents recently spent two days on a litter sweep of the town. The quantity and type of material which is thrown or dumped is distressing to many residents and makes our town look bad. I have asked Councillors Dyball and Darrington to work with the schools in the hope that the children will set an example and shame their parents or neighbours when they see such antisocial behaviour. Also, of course, they will get to understand how the problem impacts on their own environment. The Head of the Orchards Academy, Natalie Wilmans, has agreed to help us with this really important initiative.

The Council is processing the sale of the Woodlands which will produce a gross sales figure of about £2.5-million. The KCC has a charge over this, equivalent to a mortgage, which is £350,000 plus interest accumulated since 1995 but the nett proceeds will allow us to handle some much overdue infrastructure projects as well recover some costs and still have money in hand to bring the parks equipment up-to-date. Your Council will give very close attention to what priorities we should have for this. Apart from our expenditure of £172,000 in 2012/3 on new playground equipment the Council has not made any significant investment in infrastructure from its own funds since about 1997 but has spent hugely on maintenance. One certain project will be to provide specialised play equipment for disabled children, a project dear to the heart of Councillors Nina Scott and Shanker Gaire. We have already made a start on that with a special swing and we have £2000 in the kitty already but quite a lot more is needed.

Thank you for your patience. The Mayor will open the meeting to questions shortly.
