

Edenbridge Annual Town Meeting 2017

Prior to the start of formal business, residents had the opportunity to view displays by the Doctors, Town Band, Rotary Club, Chamber of Commerce and the Neighbourhood Planning Group.

The Annual Town Meeting was held on Monday 27 March 2017, at 8pm in the Women's Institute Hall, by kind permission of the Management Committee. The Chair was taken by Cllr S McGregor, Chairman of the Town Council. There were 61 members of the public present, including ten Town Councillors of which three are also District Council and one is also County Council, five Town Council Officers, the Community Warden, and seven invited guests. One representative of the press was present.

1. The Chairman's Welcome

The Chairman welcomed County Cllr Clive Pearman, Cllr Simon Raikes, Chairman Sevenoaks District Council, Chief Inspector Roscoe Walford, Kent Police, PCSO Simon Humphreys, Kent Police, Peter Fleming, Leader Sevenoaks District Council, Adrian Rowbotham, Chief Finance Officer Sevenoaks District Council, and Annette Hards, Chairman Edenbridge Neighbourhood Plan Group. He also thanked Ben Brownless, from Sustainable Edenbridge, for providing a sound system in the absence of Charles Laver. Apologies were received in advance from Pav Ramewal, Chief Executive Sevenoaks District Council, and Cllrs Roger Bell, Mrs Jill Davison, Richard Davison, Vince Maynard and Joseph Woollorton, Edenbridge Town Council.

2. The minutes of the 2016 meeting were signed as a correct record

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting, held on 18 April 2016, at 8pm in the Women's Institute Hall, were signed by the Chairman in accordance with Standing Orders, having been available on deposit in the Library and on the website.

3. Chairman's Annual Report for 2016/2017

The Chairman presented his Annual Report (copy attached) which had been published on the website and circulated throughout the town. He highlighted the importance three major consultations 'Health Services for Edenbridge', the Draft Policies for the emerging Neighbourhood Plan and the District Council's Local Plan.

4. Neighbourhood Planning

Annette Hards, Chairman Edenbridge Neighbour Plan Group, gave an update on progress over the last 12 months. The response to the initial consultation on the draft policies was initially fairly low, 8%, and the demographic leant towards the over 65's. During the summer further targeted consultations were undertaken to get responses from a wider age group, and this information has been used to inform and update the policies. To assist in this process, a recently retired former Senior Planning Officer was employed to help the group and the policy submission has been sent to the District Council for comment. Once this is returned the group will tweak it and put it out for final consultation. Annette thanked all the members of the sub groups for their continued efforts and hard work to get the project to its current stage.

Q. Would this document help promote the town as a nice place to visit?

The purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan is to provide a planning-based assessment for future development, however the Tourism and Business Forums are both working to promote the town.

Q. What can be done about the shocking state of the hoardings/land at St Johns Way/Station Road?

The Chairman has taken this up with Enforcement at SDC who have made a number of visits, and the owners have promised to carry out a proper repair shortly.

Q. Can more bungalows be built for older residents who wish to stay in the town and have a garden?

Bellway Homes will be presenting their plans for the 300 new homes at 4pm on Wednesday 29 March at the Eden Centre, and the Chairman urged everyone to attend to see what they have planned and make any comments so that they can be taken into account. The Leader of SDC said that the housing needs assessment would be identifying the mix of accommodation required for the District.

5. Comments on behalf of Sevenoaks District Council

Peter Fleming, Leader Sevenoaks District Council, updated the meeting on the key financial challenges and opportunities for the District Council, to meet central government budget cuts, sheet attached. Next year they anticipate having to become self sufficient and have been investing in a portfolio of commercial property to bring in approx. £600,000 income to protect and enhance services.

Partnership working between the Community Safety Partnership and Kent Police has proven to be very successful, with both operating from the District Council Offices. Close working with both Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge and Malling Councils has led to cost savings, but there are no plans to combine the Councils and the existing Local Government structure is to remain. However, the possibility of further localising of Highway and Community Safety services was under consideration.

Planning remains a challenge, with the rules being changed just after the Local Plan had been agreed, requiring an immediate rewrite. The Objectively Assessed Housing Need had resulting in a figure of 600 houses a year being required and the policy team were working through ways to achieve this within the constraints of the Green Belt, which has recently been strengthened by Government commitments.

The Swanley Master Plan has been completed, and a vision for Edenbridge, focusing on the north and industrial parts of the town, is under consideration. It will also look at transport.

Q. The issue of parking on the Stangrove Estate was raised.

This was looked at as part of SDC's review of assets. The small parcels of land were offered to West Kent Houseing who did not wish to take them. Many are no longer Green Spaces and could be used to better regulate parking. The District will ensure that this is addressed.

6. Comments by Cllr Clive Pearman on behalf of Kent County Council

Cllr Clive Pearman encouraged everyone present to attend the consultation on the 300 houses and express their views. In addition to his printed report, which is available on the Council's website, he elaborated on the utter confusion prevailing at County Hall brought about by Brexit uncertainty. This was now making it unclear which projects would go ahead and which not. The £250m lorry park, catering for 4,000 articulated lorries, is under threat of delay and commitments to housing may also be delayed.

Over the 4 years of representing the town there had been many successes, not least on environmental issues, reducing the amount of rubbish heading to landfill had been particularly rewarding, as had achieving many successful appeals against provision of school places. This was becoming increasingly difficult, with cost pressures impacting on outcomes. Potholes are another area where budgets have been tightened, to ensure sufficient funding is available for key services of health and social care.

Clive thanked everyone who had voted for and supported him over his four year term, and said he had mostly enjoyed it and was now looking forward to spending more time at home and with family. It is a huge commitment, with 70 to 80 hours a week driving a thousand miles a month.

7. Comments by a representative of the Police

Chief Inspector Roscoe Walford, Sevenoaks Division, explained that although there had been an increase in crime this was due to the way the statistics are currently compiled. In the whole of Sevenoaks District there was an average of 19 crimes per 24 hours and 50% were domestic incidents. In 60% of cases the perpetrator was known. However, Edenbridge remains a safe place to live. Cross border policing has been improved, with criminals coming from out of the district being returned back across the borders quickly. Police priorities have changed with greater emphasis on radicalisation, terrorism and child sexual exploitation.

Further changes to Local Policing are expected to be implemented in September.

8. Other Business

The Chairman invited Dr Simon Morrison to give an update on the plans for a combined Doctors and Hospital services. He stressed the importance of people getting involved in the consultation, as development in the Green Belt is 'almost' impossible without public support.

The Chairman opened the meeting to questions.

Q. Are the Council going to offer the Da Vinci School the opportunity to come and present their plans? The Council is keen to encourage a secondary school into Edenbridge and is happy to speak with any provider. Councillors have already attended meetings with the project team from the Da Vinci School and have asked the Harris Federation to put together a proposal for an academy in the town.

Q. A resident raised serious concerns over the delay in the arrival of an ambulance when he had a heart attack at 12.20 on Sunday 4 December. The response time was 45 minutes and he understood that the vehicle had had to come from Caterham. Others attending the meeting had also experienced delays in ambulance arrival times and long waits at A&E at Pembury.

The Chairman promised that the Council would contact SECAM and try to establish what the issue was.

Q. Chief Inspector Roscoe Walford was asked to explain what support would be available if travellers returned to the town.

The position was that eviction was a very serious matter and requires high levels of man power to achieve. The Police will use their Section 61 Powers only if there is serious criminality, but the lack of sites to send travellers to makes this a difficult option.

Q. Stangrove Lodge has been closed for some time, is there any news on what might happen there, dementia care in Edenbridge is almost impossible to find.

The site has been sold and confidential discussions have taken place with the new owners, and hopefully plans will come forward shortly. Cllr Peter Fleming highlighted the efforts by SDC to make the district more dementia friendly, which should help.

Q Can anything be done about the appallingly dirty state of the main hall at Edenbridge Leisure Centre?

Cllr Peter Fleming would take this back to the service provider.

Q. Nothing has been done about vehicles using Stangrove Park as a rat run damaging the grass. This was reported to the Council 18 months ago.

The Council was unaware that this was an ongoing problem and would investigate.

Q. Can't anything be done about the state of the High Street, speed bumps?

The council is keen to see the area further developed and has set up a Business Forum to achieve this. On a practical note, the white lines are to be repainted in the next couple of weeks which should brighten up the area.

Q Is there to be a memorial to John Surtees in Edenbridge.

This will be discussed at the next Council meeting.

The Chairman again thanked everyone for coming and for the positive tone of the meeting.

The meeting finished at 9.25pm.