

# Edenbridge Annual Town Meeting 7th March 2022

held at the WI Hall, Edenbridge.

Welcome and introductions by Cllr Todd, Chairman of Edenbridge Town Council

Cllr Todd welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the meeting procedure and that there would be a Questions and Answers session at the end of the meeting (for up to 15 minutes) He also stated that there was a Questions box at the registration table as well. A summary of the questions and answers would be posted on the Town Council's website.

1. **Minutes of the last Annual Town Meeting:** The minutes for the Annual Town Meeting, 03 March 2021 were signed by Cllr Bob Todd, Chairman.

2. **Introductions:**

**District Councillors:** Cllrs James Barnett (*not in attendance*), Alan Layland, Margot McArthur, Stuart McGregor

**County Councillor:** Margot McArthur, Sevenoaks Rural South, Kent County Council (KCC)  
Cllr Peter Fleming, Leader, Sevenoaks District Council (SDC), and Cllr Diana Esler, Chair of SDC.

Cllr Bob Todd welcomed all the guest speakers and said that it was his first Annual Town Meeting as Chairman of Edenbridge Town Council, which he held as a great honour, having taken over from Cllr Alan Layland who was Chairman for two years.

**Edenbridge Town Council:** Cllrs Jon Aldridge, Angela Baker (Vice Chair), Sara Compton, Alan Damodaran, Michael Gemmell Smith, Vic Jennings, Alan Layland, Nick Lloyd, Margot McArthur, Stuart McGregor, Angela Read, Stephen Sumner, Peter Smith, Steve Taylor and Bob Todd (Chairman).

Cllr Todd said that this was the third term for this Council and two co-opted members had been welcomed this year – Cllrs Sarah Compton and Michael Gemmell Smith. He said that all councillors were volunteers and dedicate a lot of time to the Council and the work it does. He thanked all the councillors for giving their expertise and time to help improve facilities and services for Edenbridge.

He also thanked the Council's staff for keeping the office services and for organising the meeting, and the groundstaff for the excellent job they did maintaining the town's open spaces.

3. **Edenbridge Town Council Report**

**A look at the past year and what's new for 2022**

Cllr Baker reflected on the Town Council's response to the pandemic over the past two years and expressed thanks to the 80 volunteers who came forward to help our residents. An amazing group of helpers; doing shopping, providing transport, and being a phone buddy, and generally just caring for people in the community. Staff adjusted their working practices according to the fluctuation of infection rates; the Council provided home working facilities and kept the office open for residents and the sale of waste and garden bags. New Covid-19 signage was purchased for the High Street and town's open spaces.

**Reminder of What Edenbridge Town Council Owns or Manages**

Five playgrounds, nine buildings and outbuildings (own/or maintain), eight Open Spaces – parks and greens, Millennium Wood, two ponds, over 550 trees maintained, 249 Streetlights

owned, plus maintains two for SDC, three Cemeteries and the Churchyard, two allotment sites, own and maintained the sports pitches, two car parks – owns Market Yard; manages Leathermarket, public toilets, Council office facility open 9.00 am – 5.00 pm weekdays. It also has partnerships with SDC and the Great Stone Bridge Trust to manage the Town Field and Water Meadows.

### **Council Activity 2020/21**

There were 56 Council and Committee meetings in 2021; the Planning Committee had responded to in excess of 150 planning applications; the Council had launched the new *visitededenbridge* website, and had supported the Food Bank in its recent transition and provided a space at Rickards Hall, as well as a storage area at the rear of Doggetts Barn; adopted the old BT phone box in the high street for a Community Defibrillator, and given a grant to the Community First Responders to install a public access Defibrillator at Stangrove Park; resumed the quarterly Bulky Waste Collections at four sites. The Open Spaces Committee continued to oversee and maintain all our open spaces and facilities, Cllr Baker thanked the Head Groundsman and his team for doing an excellent job looking after all this.

### **Project Highlights for 2020/21**

In November 2020, the Council had commissioned an outdoor gym area, and Street Snooker/Multi Use Games Wall in Stangrove Park. The efforts to get this installed during a pandemic and the quality of the provision was recognised at the UK National Go Awards, with Edenbridge shortlisted as a finalist for the best procurement. This was a great achievement as Edenbridge was up against much larger authorities.

**Stangrove Park** – new duck house built by Ground staff and new bow-top metal fencing at Children’s Playground.

**Open Spaces Trees** – The Council maintains over 550 trees and the Millennium Wood as well as having a replanting programme. The Council had also been highly commended by the organisation Kent Men of Trees.

**Thursday Charter Market** – In May 2021, the Council had taken over the management of the Thursday Market. During this time, it had attracted new stall holders, maintained a regular number of weekly stalls and the biweekly Lloyds Bank Mobile Bank. The Council had agreed to recruit a Market Officer to help develop the market further.

### **What’s happening 2022/23**

The Council had supported a proposal from Kent Highways to introduce a 40-mph buffer zone to the approach to Edenbridge, Main Road, Marlpit Hill are; safety interventions had been petitioned for by residents.

A New Games Club had started, for over 55s and anyone who enjoys games, or perhaps was feeling a bit isolated. Cllr Baker thanked SDC and KCC for funding this new club which was on Mondays 10.00 am – 12.00 noon. The Council had also given a grant to a new initiative called the repair café. Leaflets were made available in the hall.

The biggest project for 2022 was the refurbishment and extension of the Recreation Ground Playground, which would provide a range of equipment for all abilities and age groups.

### **Jubilee Celebrations 2022**

Cllr Layland spoke on behalf of the Jubilee working Group and said that there would be a new Beacon for Stangrove Park which would be lit as part of The Queen’s Jubilee celebrations, following the official start of the national Beacon chain at Buckingham Palace, scheduled for 9.45 pm on 2 June. The Town Band would be present to mark the occasion. The Council was also preparing to provide bunting and flags for the High Street, alongside the annual hanging basket display in a red, white, and blue colour scheme this year.

## **Report on the financial year 2020/21 Finance: Cllr Nick Lloyd – Chairman of the Finance Committee**

The 2021/22 Budget was set at expenditure £732,175, income £658,937. The figures presented represented 10 months of the financial year, £519,972 and income £653,324.

Cllr Lloyd provided a summary of how the budget is spent. Almost half the budget is for staff costs and over a quarter is for equipment, vehicles and maintenance of the open spaces and buildings in the town. There were usually a number of items of spend in the last couple of months of the year, but the full year spend was forecasted to be less than budget. Council income was mostly its Precept (the share of Council Tax given to parish or town councils); this was paid in advance in two sums.

The 2022/23 Budget, expenditure is £718,86: The Council had been reducing its expenditure over the past few years. Partly by bidding for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to fund several projects, partly by planned maintenance being deferred until essential, and by the Council and its staff being careful how it spends money. This year the budgeted deficit was just over £73,000 (£73,238) and even though the outcome was likely to be better, the Council expected to be drawing on its General Reserve. A decision was made by the Finance Committee and full Council not to cut office hours or reduce work carried out in on the town's open spaces, and aims to sustain the services it offers. The largest element of its spend continues to be managing and maintaining the open spaces of the town.

Town's Precept: The town was steadily growing so its tax base, the number of homes paying Council Tax, was rising. The premise for the last few years had been that this, with slightly over inflation increases in the precept, would close and then reverse this gap. However, this was not resolving the issue of the gap and the Council had decided to balance its budget for next year. i.e. to increase its income via the Precept to match its expenditure. To do this, it was necessary to increase its share of the tax by 10%. This would mean that a typical band D house would contribute £171.84 to the Town Council per annum (£1.30 per month). The Council's precept was 7.9% of the total Council Tax charge. The current forecast for inflation this spring was 6.0% which will impact the Town Council as much as everyone else.

Town Council's Reserves: At Financial year 31/03/2021 the total Council Reserves (General and Earmarked) totalled £505,382. Earmarked funds total £302,000, the largest part relates to reserves set aside to cover expected maintenance costs for the open spaces and buildings of the town; there was a cost for a Neighbourhood Plan, election costs and the community warden.

The largest part of reported reserves is the Community Infrastructure Levy Funds (CIL) which are held by the Town Council but available to other organisations with clear rules as to how they are spent. A large part of this Fund was committed, for instance £200,000 for the new Medical Centre and £174,000 to the new playground in the Recreation Ground.

This leaves the General Fund to cover emergencies and unforeseen costs, such as a major flood or even a pandemic. Generally, Councils are recommended to hold reserves of 50% of annual expenditure and those with a large asset base, like Edenbridge, more like 75%. The Council's General Fund was lower than comfortable and over time it aims to rebuild this. Balancing the budget for next year was a step in the right direction.

#### **4. Presentations**

##### **Cllr Margot McArthur Deputy Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services and Sevenoaks Rural South and sits on the Gatwick Airport Board.**

Cllr McArthur provided a summary of her dual hatted role as an SDC District Councillor and Cabinet Member for Cleaner and Greener, and KCC County Councillor.

SDC looked after: Voting and elections; Business – rates; Commercial waste; Licences and permits (taxis, alcohol, gambling, temporary events, waste); Council tax; Planning applications and building control; Housing - social housing allocations, homelessness, housing benefits; Parking off-street Sevenoaks, Westerham, Swanley; Parking on street throughout District; and Community safety. In her Cabinet position this covered Environmental Services: Street

cleansing, some litter bins; Refuse, garden waste collections and bottle banks; Climate Change; Solar Energy; Electric vehicle charging; Food Safety; Environmental health and pollution; and Dogs.

KCC looked after: Leisure – libraries, country parks, arts, history, consumer protection; Roads and transport - roadworks, bus passes, disabled parking badges; Social care and health – children and adult support, care homes, youth services, domestic abuse; Community - births and death registration, celebrants for marriage, civil partnerships and citizenship ceremonies; Education and childcare providers – school places, special educational needs provision; Business - trading standards, consumer protection; Environmental – disposal of all waste, planning, rights of way, minerals, flooding and drainage. As a county councillor she had 6 parishes and Edenbridge Town.

### **Cllr Peter Fleming, Leader Sevenoaks District Council**

Cllr Fleming spoke about the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic had had on the district and said that Edenbridge was the one town that he had been certain would be fine as the residents were already community minded and able to look after their neighbours as past experience had meant the town had strategies in place and were experienced in coping with flooding in the area. The Town Council were also quick to respond and worked with SDC and the community. NET ZERO: SDC's goal was 2030, its programme was going well so far. Although, he admitted their waste vehicles at 26 tonnes would be a problem, but they were looking at more energy efficient vehicles and other measures. There was a community engagement programme, green travel and movement strategy encouraging people to walk more, in the green spaces and environment, engaging landowners and businesses. Solar Together was a Kent Energy community purchase scheme.

SDC had been looking at land and buildings on Stangrove Park and Spitals Cross to address the parking problems on both these estates.

The Leisure Centre was at the feasibility and design stage, with the intention of making it fit for purpose.

The Local Plan: The ten-year plan had been in progress for some time. It was refused by an independent inspector and went to the High Court and the District Council hoped to progress this with a goal of completing in 2023.

**Tom Tugendhat MP** sent his apologies but gave a statement which was read by Cllr Gemmill Smith. To summarise:

"First, our thoughts are with all those in Ukraine and the terrible scenes there do show just how lucky we are to live in a stable democracy here in Britain. I know so many are concerned at what we are seeing in the country and I am continuing to do everything I can to help.

Closer to home I've been working on a number of local improvements in recent months. As our economy recovers from Covid19 I've been visiting a number of local businesses to best understand how the future looks for them given the pandemic. It is fair to say that so much has changed over the past couple of years and as an economy, locally, we have to adapt to that. The support offered by Sevenoaks District Council has been fantastic and without their efficient use of resources, I suspect many local businesses would have struggled to survive.

We've seen an increasing threat to our future though in the form of surprising decisions from the Planning Inspectorate, not least at the Kent and Surrey Golf Club....

I also want to highlight the work Margot McArthur has been doing as our new County Councillor this year, especially as she has her work cut out with some of the changes to bus subsidies that KCC wish to introduce. This will threaten routes such as the E1 which links all parts of our town to the High Street. We also continue to have the situation with many neighbouring villages being unable to get into town by bus...".

### **Joanna Brown - Edenbridge Medical Centre**

Joanna Brown spoke on the new Medical Centre and said that although progress had been slowed down by the COVID-19 pandemic, clearance was now being done on the site. The procurement was put together by a consortium, and they will build the centre and lease it to

the Kent Community Trust and then to the General Practice. The funding would come from the sale of the existing hospital, and CIL funding from the Town Council and SDC. Discussions were taking place regarding the terms and conditions of the leasing agreements. Building begins in April 2022 and completed in August.

#### **Police – Community Safety Unit Inspector Matt Atkinson and PCSO Hanna Rainbow**

Inspector Atkinson gave the reported crime figures for the period 1 August 22 to end February 22: Nuisance calls from 1 August to 28 February (6-month period) – Youths behaviour 57; vehicles 58; and other 28. He emphasised that reporting incidents (such as anti-social behaviour) on Facebook was not reporting to the Police, and these needed to be reported on 101 or 999 if there was an immediate risk. He also said that some of the reports they received were not necessarily policing issue and other partners needed to address these.

Sharing cross border information had resulted in some notable cross border arrests. For example, the past weekend had had a number of arrests: one burglar arrested, and vehicle ceased; one vehicle stolen reclaimed, but person ran off; one disqualified driver arrested; one arrest for no driver's licence and cannabis ceased; a Land Rover stolen from Seal found in Edenbridge with four arrests.

Edenbridge had no-longer its own designated station but operates from Swanley and Sevenoaks. There was also use of office space at the hospital. Emergency calls were despatched from Swanley but there had been a reduction in response times since the Sevenoaks District Council office had been made a reporting station.

My Community Voice was also promoted, a webpage used as messaging service that helps Kent and Medway residents, businesses, and community groups to keep in touch with their local policing teams. The service sends updates about your local area directly from the police officers themselves.

#### **Cllr Jon Aldridge - Portable Speed Indicator Device**

Cllr Aldridge spoke about a newly purchased Speed indicator Device (SID) which had been funded by CIL, to address the speeding traffic through town. They show the speed of a vehicle and record data on speed and vehicle numbers. For example, the volume of traffic travelling through on the B2026, over 5,000 vehicles per weekday with an average speed was 25 mph – 30 mph during the day, climbing to 35 mph in the evening. The approved locations are: Mill Hill, Crouch House Road and Swan Lane.

#### **Cllr Margot McArthur - Community Infrastructure levy (CIL)**

Cllr McArthur gave an overview on CIL which was money given from developments for the improvement of the infrastructure. It was collected by SDC and 25% of it is given to parish and town councils to be the custodians. Applications for CIL funds can be made by any organisation in the councils for local infrastructure projects.

Edenbridge first received CIL money in 2016; the total received (including any expected receipts) to March 2021 was £905,791.45. CIL funds awarded to local infrastructure projects totalled £808,419.54. They had supported 23 projects for Edenbridge including: the SID; Stangrove Park playground fencing; Tourism website; Outdoor Gym and Games Area; Cricket Club – Pavilion and parking area; WI Hall improvements; Spitals Cross playground; public toilets refurbishment; Blossoms Park defences and Open Spaces site defences; and the new Medical Centre. Unallocated fund as of 31 March 2022 total £97,371.91.

**John Gildersleeve, Edenbridge Rugby Club** – sent his apologies.

**Cllr Todd** thanked the guest speakers, and volunteers, from litter pickers, bulb planters, speedwatch and all the other wonderful groups.

**Civic Medallions** – had been presented, one posthumously to a dear friend and colleague John Scholey who had served the Edenbridge community for more than twenty years. The other

was to Julie Barry BEM, who had served the community for many years as Parish Nurse and establishing the Foodbank.

**5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS** – appendix to minutes.

***Cllr Todd closed the meeting and said that our thoughts and prayers are with the Ukrainian people. He thanked all for attending and thanked all the guest speakers.***

Meeting closed 20:35.