

Minutes of the Meeting of Edenbridge Town Council held in Rickards Hall on Monday 3 July 2023 at 7:30 pm

Present: Cllrs. Jon Aldridge, Angela Baker (*Vice-Chairwoman*), Sarah Compton, Michael Gemmell Smith, Margot McArthur, Stuart McGregor, Stephen Sumner, Bob Todd (*Chairman*), Nicola Martindale, Vince Parker, Jeff Streets

In attendance: Town Clerk; District Councillor Jim Morgan; PC Michael Sexton; and Jacob Jefferson.
Cllr Todd (Chairman) gave a warm welcome to the newly co-opted members.

1 To Receive Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received, noted and accepted from Cllrs Layland and Read. Cllr Compton had advised she would be late to the meeting.

2 Declaration of Interests or Predetermination

None.

3 Public Questions and Statements

19:33 Meeting was adjourned for agenda item 3.

A representative attending on behalf of Inspire Villages (IV), said he was there to introduce himself as would be working with IV on its forthcoming consultation for the Integrated Retirement Community (IRC) on the former Kent and Surrey Golf and Country Club site on Crouch House Road. IV had recently purchased this site, which had been granted planning permission on Appeal for 100 retirement units. IV would be talking to Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) planning authority and were seeking to revise the existing permission, following close consultation with the local community over the coming months. These revisions planned to include a range of facilities the wider community can benefit from, including a restaurant and wellness suite and help to ensure the viability of the site. One Member mentioned the Public Right of Way (PROW) on the site would need to be maintained, and another mentioned some anti-social behaviour on the abandoned site. The comments were noted.

PC Michael Sexton introduced himself as the new Beat Officer, part of the Neighbourhood Policing Task Force (NPTF). Currently there were six Officers, but there would be 12 eventually, following recruitment and training process. The team was based in Swanley, each Officer had their own area to cover, but will work together to ensure sufficient cover as appropriate. PC Sexton's area included Edenbridge, Hever, Cowden, Leigh, Chiddingstone, Penshurst and Fordcombe. He went on to say that he had been involved in Edenbridge policing for the past 10-years, had worked on cross-boarder crime issues during which time he had developed some good relationships and had many successful outcomes.

19:40 Meeting was reconvened.

4 To receive, adopt and sign the minutes of the Council meeting held on 19 June 2023 (2023-0007/01-04)

Resolved: that the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 19 June 2023 be duly signed by the Chairman of the meeting as a true and accurate record of the meeting; pages 2023-007/01-04.

5 To receive County and District Councillor Reports

5.1 County Councillor

County Councillor Margot McArthur mentioned following central government devolution to enable more local control, there were early discussions for Kent County Council (KCC) and Medway Council to merge, which would allow both authorities to improve commitment into better services such as transport services, and to also have its own Mayor. She had also been liaising on flooding solutions for Lingfield Road, electric vehicle charging points and some highways issues.

5.2 District Councillors

District Councillor Jim Morgan provided a report, the first since being elected. He thanked Cllr Baker for her help and advice on local matters, and noted commonality despite different political parties. He was delighted to have been appointed to the following SDC Committees, Finance and Investment Advisory; and Improvement and Innovation Advisory. He mentioned the new Swanley Business and Community Hub providing a space for businesses, homeworkers to work, as well as a drop in centre and meeting/event space available for community to hire. He said that he would ask the Town Council to consider requesting to SDC to provide a similar facility for Edenbridge, possibly in the High Street and to help rejuvenate the area. He went on to mention the finances of SDC, which would be constrained by the pay increases. The budget process would commence in the next two to three months, looking at the reserves positions and how services could be changed. Finally, he mentioned planning activity, in particular with Edenbridge the concern with flooding and how applications referred to old data. He advised the Town Council to be mindful of this when considering planning applications. He raised concerns that planning applications coming forward encroached on the Green Belt.

19:50 Cllr Compton joined the meeting.

Cllr Baker said that she didn't have anything since her report at the last meeting (19 June), other than she had been attending several training sessions.

6 To adopt the following reports/minutes of meetings

6.1 Planning Committee - 26 June (2023-008/01-03)

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the meeting and numbered - Planning Committee – 26 June (2023-008/01-03);

19:52 Cllr Morgan and J Jefferson also left the meeting.

7 To receive recommendations from Planning Committee meeting on 26 June:

7.1 To consider if Edenbridge should explore developing a Neighbourhood Plan and include as part of its Visioning and Forward Planning

Members received the information provided with the meeting papers. The Planning Committee (26 June) had considered if it would like this Council to proceed with developing a Neighbourhood Plan (NHP) creating a clear vision for the Town and develop policies to support this, and had referred the matter to full Council to consider. NHPs can help to increase influence on development in Edenbridge, which would be a clear benefit, but they do not stop or put a definitive cap on development. Developing a NHP is a tremendous amount of work and commitment. There is technical advice support available from SDC, and grant funding which can be applied for from government funded bodies to help towards consultant fees, printing and consultation costs. Typical grants are around £10k for a basic grant and an additional technical support grant of up to £8k. The Council's NHP reserves currently has £15k. Examples of Neighbourhood Plan costs: Sevenoaks District Council £100,000 (adopted May 2023); Swanley Town Council £50,000 (up to its Reg 14 March 2023); Lingfield Parish Council £20,000 (getting up to Reg.14). Members were asked to consider if there is a need for the Town Council to prepare and produce a Neighbourhood Plan for Edenbridge. This would require significant financial and staffing resources, and producing a plan would likely take several years.

Members discussed at length. It was noted that the Council had previously invested a lot of time into developing a Plan, but following advice from SDC had paused awaiting the outcome of the emerging Local Plan. In 2021 SDC had looked at the previous pre submission NHP (2017), and had said it would require updating including the vision and objectives as some projects and developments had already happened. Cllr Baker had recently spoken to the SDC Planning Policy Team Leader who was encouraging for NHPs, but had suggested the Council wait for the SDC policy on the Green Belt. Members noted Sevenoaks Town Council NHP had taken 10-years to develop, but they were now in a better position to consider planning applications against its NHP and influence decisions. Overall, Members were keen to progress with a NHP for Edenbridge but also noted that there was sense to

let the Local Plan proceed so that a NHP could align with this, and that developing a NHP was a big take-on and would take time to develop. Members voted and unanimously,

Resolved: to investigate costs and funding resources to develop an Edenbridge Neighbourhood Plan, and make recommendation to the Visioning/Forward Planning in September to consider as part of the Council's future projects, time scales and budgets.

20:00 J Jefferson re-joined the meeting.

8 **Council Casual Vacancy**

Members noted: a new casual vacancy had arisen recently following the resignation of Steve Taylor. The Notice of Casual Vacancy had been published on the Council's website and noticeboard; deadline for a by-election to be called was 10 July. If there was no by-election called this could be filled by co-option

9 **To receive reports and any recommendations from working groups; delegated reports; clerk's and officers' reports**

9.1 **Clerk's Report**

Received and noted.

9.2 **Buildings Manager Report**

Received and noted.

9.2.1 **To receive information on maintenance work for Rickards Hall and consider approving expenditure of £9,000 from the Earmarked 10/30-year Buildings Reserves**

Rickards Hall required some maintenance repairs to the exterior and interior. There had been a number of harsh wet winters which had affected the exterior wall at the rear of the building which has suffered severe weathering and has allowed damp to get inside so there are also some repairs to the internal walls needed.

The Town Clerk referred to the report with the meeting papers. The Buildings Manager and she had looked at the issues and spoken to a couple of building contractors for advice; one quote had been received so far and were looking for a least another two. The Buildings 10-and-30 year maintenance plan reserves had received a further £9k moved from last year's budget in the advance knowledge that this work would be required. Initial indications was that the works to the outside include roofing repairs, new gutters, repointing to the rear wall; internal works to include removing damp plaster and re-plastering and painting, repair ceiling section, repair by rear window. Initial estimates were in the region of £20k. Members discussed at length; there were different views weighing up the potential urgency to complete the work before the coming winter to mitigate any further continued damage from run-off rain water, against prioritising works to manage the costs. Members also discussed engaging a surveyor to help determine what actually was necessary and were there other concerns and work needed which had perhaps not been identified. One Member noted damp in Rickards Hall went back to 1988. Members voted, and made the following resolutions:

Resolved: support, acknowledging the need for repair works to Rickards Hall, and ideally before the coming winter subject to the work proposals being reviewed and prioritised.

Resolved: to appoint a Surveyor to carry out a report on Rickards Hall and the adjoining section with Church House to ascertain the repair and maintenance works needed.

Resolved: the expenditure for a Surveyor report and the maintenance repairs for Rickards Hall to come from the earmarked Building Reserves, and the expenditure of up to £9,000 (additional funding would need to be approved if needed); with a more detailed proposal presented to the next Council 11 September (or Planning Committee 14 August if the information was available).

10 **Matters arising from the minutes for report and not elsewhere on the agenda**

10.1 **To ratify insurance cover in respect of all insurable risks and the annual expenditure of £16,621.54 (resolution Council May 2023) - policy renewal 20 July**

Members noted the Council's insurance renewal, had been confirmed at £15,646.92, this was less than estimated. The policy was under the long term 3-year agreement, that rate is unchanged so the increase from last year is just in part due to the building sum insured amendments after the reinstatement valuations plus the application of index linking as agreed on all buildings at 12% and contents at 8%.

10.2 **To receive an update on transition of the new IT Storage (SharePoint) System and Microsoft InTune**

Members noted the meeting papers, confirming the transition of the Council's document storage to Microsoft 365 SharePoint and its associated Apps; this would now provide high level security for all council papers and correspondence, and improved efficiencies. This followed several months of officers sorting through electronic files and deleting a lot of old documentation and files.

10.3 **To receive an update on the new Council logo and rebranding implementation**

The new logo and branding was now in use across the website, Facebook, email and other communications. Signage across the Council's sites would be brought inline as and when need replacing.

10.4 **To receive an update on the case for the unauthorised access gate at the Recreation Ground**

Members received an update from the solicitors regarding the progress and Agreement to resolve an outstanding issue with unauthorised access on to the Recreation Ground. Another resident had recently created an unauthorised access, Members noted a solicitors letter had been issued to request the fencing and hedging to be reinstated.

10.5 **Thursday Market: To receive an update on Market activities over the summer period**

Members noted the RFO had prepared a programme of different activities for each week in August, including Mr Hiccup returning with his balloon modelling and magic; a busker; cup cake decorating; face painting.

10.6 **To appoint co-opted Members to the committees to fill committee vacancies**

Members **agreed** the additional appointments to fill vacancies on the following committees: Planning and Transportation - Cllrs Vince Parker (NE); and Jeff Streets (SW). Open Spaces - Cllrs Nicola Martindale and Jeff Streets. Emergency Planning - Cllrs Nicola Martindale and Jeff Streets.

Members **agreed** the additional appointments to fill vacancies on the following Working Groups: Lease/SLA Negotiation - Cllr Stephen Sumner. Parking & MYCP - Cllr Nicola Martindale.

10.7 **To appoint co-opted Members as representatives to external bodies**

Members **agreed** the appointments for representatives on the following organisations: Edenbridge Town Village Hall (WI Hall) Management Committee - Cllr Nicola Martindale. PACT - Cllr Michael Gemmell Smith.

11 **OTHER BUSINESS including items referred from Committees for decision**

11.1 **To note the Family Summer Fun Days for 2023**

Members noted the following summer Family Fun Days booked for Thursdays 27 July, 10 August, 17 August and 24 August 2.00 - 5.00 pm, at Stangrove Park, and funded by the Town Council.

11.2 **To consider if the Town Council should support funding an annual community event, who should organise and budget considerations and recommendation**

The Council had held a successful Jubilee celebration event last June which was organised by the Office staff and a working group; this cost about £5k plus the Beacon, plus significant staff time. This year, the Council engaged an events organising company to put on a Coronation event for the community this cost the Council £10,500. Both events had been well received by residents. Feedback from residents and informal conversations had suggested that there was an appetite for an annual community event with music and activities. However, there were several considerations including the pressures it could put on Council resources including staff time, and the costs which would need to be included in the budget. The town already had the Bonfire Society, Edenbridge Community Christmas Association with its annual switching on the lights event, and the Chamber of Commerce annual Car Show.

Members noted the Jubilee and Coronation events were novelty events celebrating two significant national occasions. Members debated, comments included: the previous two events had created a great sense of community and appreciated by many residents; Edenbridge already had three significant annual events which take a lot of organising by volunteers and enormous resources; concern people may get bored with an annual event; organising events puts added pressure on office resources and external organisers can be expensive. One Member mentioned the D-Day 80th year celebrations 6 June 2024; and VE 80th year celebrations 2025, suggesting Council may like to consider an event to coincide with these. Members voted, and unanimously,

Resolved: to support investigating costs and a proposal for an event to coincide with D-Day 80th anniversary celebrations and to appoint a Working Group (WG) to prepare a proposal for Council. WG members: Cllrs Baker, Gemmell Smith, Parker, Streets and Todd.

It was also **agreed** to raise 'events' at the September Visioning/Forward Planning exercise.

12 **To receive a Health and Safety half-yearly update**

12.1 **To note: actions/and outstanding from the September 2022 annual review**

Members received an update on the Health and Safety audit (September 2022) and noted the majority of actions had been implemented; the service to the powered doors at the Depot remained outstanding, but were visually checked by the Head Groundsman/Buildings Managers with no obvious issues.

12.2 **To confirm the Health and Safety Policy statement and H&S**

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm and adopt the Health and Safety Statement.

Resolved: to confirm and adopt the updated H&S Policy Handbook, and the Employee H&S Handbook.

12.3 **To confirm the Council's Environment Statement**

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm and adopt the Environment Statement.

12.4 **Blossoms Park - to receive a request via the Cricket Club who have a hirer want to hire the park for children's summer football coaching**

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to support and permit the Cricket Club to hire Blossoms Park for junior summer football coaching on this occasion, and for them to manage the hiring agreement.

13 **To resolve delegated powers to Planning and Transportation Committee for July and August**

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to delegate powers to the Planning Committee for Council business during July and August, which requires decisions.

14 **Consultations**

14.1 **Kent County Council - Emerging Local Transport Plan - opens 27 June closes 18 September**

Noted.

14.2 **PROWS - Proposed diversion of part of public footpath SR620 at Edenbridge - diversion proposal to redirect through Mowshurst car park**

The public right of way (PROW) footpath SR620 was consulted on in April, with a request to a section of the path which had never been used and had been incorrectly recorded on that alignment when the historical documentary evidence showed that it should be recorded between points from Four Elms Road along the east edge outer side of Mowshurst car park (where it has always been walked). Members supported this amendment (Planning Committee 24 April). PROW had also raised for noting another section recorded did not match the historic documentary evidence. PROW had since received a new application to divert part of public footpath SR620 following the making of the Order to amend its alignment and to move the footpath onto the alignment that had been and was currently being walked by the public through Mowshurst car park. This was acceptable to the County Council and makes logical sense for the public rights of way network. Although the path had been walked on this alignment for many years, the proposal would need Council's agreement as it runs over land in its ownership.

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to support the proposal of diverting the footpath SR620 through its car park at Mowshurst.

15 **To receive reports from councillors who have attended meetings of outside bodies**

Cllr Todd, said that he had been invited by the Mayor of Mont St Aignan to its 50th year anniversary celebrations of the two towns twinning and friendship. Unfortunately, he was unable to attend but had sent a letter expressing the Council's best wishes for its celebrations and gratitude for the long friendship Edenbridge had enjoyed with Mont St Aignan.

16 **To consider any press releases**

None.

17 **Matters for future agendas**

None.

18 **Date of next meeting - 11 September**

Meeting closed 20:54