

Minutes of the Meeting of Forward Planning held in Rickards Hall on 23 October 2023 at 7:30 pm

Present: Cllrs. Michael Gemmell Smith, Alan Layland, Margot McArthur, Stuart McGregor (*Chairman*),
Vince Parker, Angela Read, Stephen Sumner, Bob Todd
In attendance: Town Clerk. No members of the public or Press.
19:30 Meeting opened.

1 To appoint the Chair/Chairman for the meeting and ensuing year for the Forward Planning Steering Group

Cllr Layland proposed Cllr Todd, seconded by Cllr Gemmell Smith; Members unanimously,

Resolved: to elect Cllr Todd as Chairman of the Forward Planning Steering Group.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received, noted and accepted from Cllrs Aldridge, Baker, Martindale and Streets.

3 Declarations of interests or predetermination

None.

4 To receive the minutes of the Forward Planning Steering Group meeting held on 31 October 2022, pages 9797-9802

Resolved: that the minutes of the Forward Planning Steering Group (FPSG) meeting held on Monday 31 October 2022, be duly signed by the Chairman as a true and accurate record pages 9797-9802.

The Chairman proposed to adjust the order of the agenda, and bring forward agenda items 6 and 7 (7.1 to 7.3) to help with the flow of the meeting. Members,

Resolved: *to bring forward agenda items 6 and 7 (7.1-7.3).*

Items 6 and 7 are recorded in numerical order on the minutes.

5 Matter arising from the previous minutes for report, and not elsewhere in the agenda.

5.1 To receive an update previously proposed projects

5.1.1 Band Stand for Stangrove Park

Members noted there was currently no funding available for this project and,

Resolved: to move the Band Stand aspirations on the Strategic Forward Plan to long-term.

5.1.2 Concrete Skate Park for Edenbridge

Members received a verbal report on the research from the Task and Finish Group. Together with the Town Clerk, a couple of councillors had met with Swanley Town Council Clerk and a councillor, to discuss its concrete skatepark and the project management. They had used an external consultant together with their own fundraising officer raised the money needed, including a grant from the National Lottery. The concrete skatepark was delivered by Maverick who worked with the Council and users of the park to deliver a fabulous new facility for the town.

Meetings had subsequently taking place with the same external consultant and Maverick who had delivered over 150 skate park installations. Having visited Blossoms Park site, Maverick confirmed it provided a good footprint. They both believe a similar model to Swanley could be followed to achieve a new skate facility for Edenbridge, and that the consultant would be able to take on more of the fundraising and public engagement, with minimal input from the Council. Maverick would provide some advice to help with creating the tender specification for public tender, and submit its own tender in the knowledge that they may not be awarded the project. Edenbridge currently had a

wooden skate ramps on metal frame which required regular annual maintenance (est. annual budget £6k), a concrete skate park had a 15-year plus life span, were quieter, skateboarding was now an Olympic sport and the facility would also accommodate a range of other wheeled sports. Costs for this type of project would be £200-300k, with the consultant fees approx. 10% of the money raised.

Members discussed at length. In principle, agreed that it sounded a good idea, but had concerns with outsourcing the fundraising aspect preferring to consider employing its own fundraiser who could also work on other Council projects.

One Member raised the possibility of considering a sports pump track which had ramps and suitable for bikes. Possibly something a developer may like to consider providing as an activity facility.

Members,

Resolved: to add to the Strategic Forward Plan for exploration to understand the viability and best methods to deliver, for a Concrete Skatepark; and Sports Pump Track. Both projects medium-to-long term.

5.1.3 Neighbourhood Plan

Members received an update of the Forward Plan, noting October 2022 FPSG had agreed to keep this on hold until new Council. Council July 2023 supported investigating costs and for FPSG to consider timescales and budgets. Members discussed. It was noted that previously (2018) a lot of work had been done on a Neighbourhood Plan, only to put this on hold due to SDCs own emerging Local Plan. It would be difficult to progress without SDCs help, and that they were currently due to launch its second phase of the new draft Local Plan Regulation 18 Consultation. Members,

Resolved: to ask Council to consider and keep this under review.

5.1.4 Cyber security and compliance service improvements and upgrade

Members noted the report in the meeting papers: September Council, Members had considered upgrading its IT managed service to include complete support with cyber security and compliance service. The monthly cost £957.10 (annual expenditure of £11,485.20 incs MS Business Premium 365 x 10 licenses). Current costs: £6,881.58 (inc MS 365), so the additional annual expenditure would be £4,603.62.

There were several steps the Council would need to do before compliant. Whilst the move to Microsoft 365 Sharepoint was a positive step in the right direction, hackers and scammers were becoming more and more sophisticated hence the need for better cyber and compliance service e.g. 24/7 eye on screen monitoring, rapid detection for response to cyber-attacks, managed risk and compliance with wide range of global standards and early detection reduces time to response and reputational losses. The .gov website also encouraged organisations to sign up to the cyber essentials scheme, which would provide an appraisal and actions.

The Council's insurance had advised the Council to consider taking out cyber insurance, but without the above being completed, the Council would not meet the insurance criteria requirements, so compliance and improved processes are necessary before meeting any insurance criteria.

Members at full September Council unanimously supported carrying out an appraisal, and for this to form part of the Forward Plan, but not to proceed with the insurance currently. The budget would need to consider factoring the potential additional costs to a fully managed service (£4,603) in addition to staff time. (Also covered under agenda item 7.2.)

5.1.5 Land outside the old Police Station

Members noted Council had supported taking on this area where the flagpole sits, and to create a garden area/feature at this part of the town. £5k had been allocated in the current 2023-24 budget (code 1011). There had been a delay with the legalities of this, should this not happen in the current budget year, the funds would be moved the earmarked reserves.

6 **Visioning Training - To receive the summary report and consider recommendations**

Members received the report following the a Visioning training event provided by James Corrigan of Council HR & Governance, on 2 September. The session looked at the role of parish/town councils, the Council's current Forward Plan, proposal to change the format, and how to make this a Plan which also has community support. The day was attended by seven councillors and two officers. Feedback from Members who attend was positive, and Members supported the recommendations in the report:

1. That objectives are placed in categories ideally no more than 5 or 6 categories should be used
2. That the Council's appraisal scheme is utilised to set employees targets aligned with strategic objectives to motivate and empower the employees (*this was currently already done*)
3. To review the office opening hours to the public, thus allowing time for officers to have uninterrupted time to focus on other tasks (*this had already been reviewed and was in the process of being implemented*)
4. That the Council only agrees to objectives that it can determine itself
5. That when a clear direction is not apparent, objectives be set to develop a policy, such as provision of public transport
6. That if an objective will impact on Council tax levels the consultation with the public makes this clear
7. That the Council considers employing a part-time grants officer if it proposes to deliver capital projects in the future
8. That the Council joins the Chartered Institute of Fundraising
9. That the Council considers using a summary format of objectives that includes time frame and relevant lead officer, similar to those at Seaford Town Council
10. That all objectives set are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound)
11. That the Council undertakes public consultation on its draft objectives

One objective which Members did not necessarily support, and agreed to remove from the recommendations, was for the Council to investigate and provide containers with secure payment method outside of the Council offices for residents to pick up bin bags.

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to support an adaption of the example Strategic Forward Plan incorporating its own Forward Plan but with information to include:

- project costs and financial implications
- reason/objectives of the project
- dates for starting and completion
- how to measure its success
- officers running project
- to categorise projects into Community Enhancement, Council Operations, and External Influence
- to size the projects - small, medium, large

7 **To review the 2022 Forward Plan and update the Council's projects and aspirations for the Council term 2023-27, and the longer view**

Members spent considerable time reviewing the 2022 Plan, discussing projects, progress, needs for Edenbridge during the four-year term of this Council, and the longer-term view.

7.1 **To receive an update on the Forward Plan**

The following updates from the 2022 Plan were received and noted:

Street Lighting replacement programme: 2023-24 budget £25k included seven upgrades and 30 new LEDs. 2024-25 programme had £45k budget. Four lights were to be decommissioned following Medical Centre lighting upgrades, this would leave the Council's streetlight stock at 245

(plus two SDC).

Tourist Information website and updated walks leaflets with GPS: Website was launched May 2021, with ongoing updates. The Walks Leaflets project had been investigating GPS software to help map the walks.

Computer systems – file storage (server needs replacing / or move to cloud base storage: In June 2023, the transition over to Microsoft Sharepoint was completed.

Electric Vehicle charging points (EVCs): Work had started with the installation of four new EVCs for Market yard carp park (MYCP) – should complete 2023.

Edenbridge Dementia Friendly: The Council had facilitated the launch Spring 2023, there had been two training awareness sessions, attended by 6 organisations. Kent Dementia Alliance were providing a logo and accreditation.

Council Website – Accessibility & design review: Budget had been approved. The Communications Officer would manage this project in 2024.

Investigate and consider reopening Market Yard car park entrance: In 2017/18 discussions had taken place on the viability, concluding resources and cost of a Highways Engineer/Planner report were needed. There had been further discussions by Council, but other priorities had taken over. Members discussed this concluding,

Resolved: to included with the town centre's parking review to be overseen by the Parking Working Group and report to Council.

Projects Members agreed to have removed from the list included:

Resolved: to remove:- Bus Shelter on Swan Lane due to viability issues; Edenbridge Medical Facility was as now completed, due to open in November 2023. Spitals Cross Parking - SDC had an approved planning application which provided for additional parking spaces; new footpath alongside the Manor Care Home - there was no support from Kent Highways, and therefore limited likelihood that this could be delivered; Friends of Edenbridge Parks; defence against incursions had been completed and any other improvements would be reviewed under maintenance works.

It was noted that the project to investigate MYCP access reopening had not progressed and was currently unlikely to due to the costs of a highways survey. However, it was to referred to the Car Parking Working Group, and form part of the town's car parking review project.

Playgrounds maintenance and refurbishments were noted as part of the 10-30-year maintenance plans.

Other projects touched on, and **agreed** to remain of the Plan were:

War Memorial - relocation
Leathermarket Improvements

7.2 **To review the projects, include any additional projects and aspirations, and to prioritise projects**

Members considered other projects which had been considered previously, and if to include on the Strategic Forward Plan. The following resolutions were made:

Resolved: to make recommendation to Finance Committee to consider in the 2024/25 budget,

- To support proceeding with improving data compliance and cyber security, and allocated a budget of £5,000.
- To support Council funding and facilitating an annual community event, and to allocate a budget of £10,000 (*noting that this may need to be reduced if the budget did not allow for it*).

When considering a sound system for Rickards Hall, Members,

Resolved: for a proposal for a sound system to be presented to full Council.

Members also noted the footbridge which had been deemed not safe and had to be removed earlier this year, the costs for replacement Bridge were in excess of £16k, Open Spaces Committee had agreed that this was not a project that could funded currently. Members,

Resolved: not to proceed with future considerations for funding a replacement footbridge at Town Field to Church Street.

7.3 To consider public consultation on Council Plan and its projects?

Members noted that it already published its Forward Plan each year, used social media, questionnaires as well as raising projects at the Annual Town Meeting to gauge residents support as needed. The Council's communications had greatly improved with the recruitment of a Communications Officer, now with six newsletters in the Edenbridge Magazine, more Facebook posts and the improved website with a lot more documents and information made available, and more posters in community noticeboards. It was also noted that social media platforms offered several ways to set up online questionnaires which had started to be used. It was also noted that Members,

Resolved: the new strategic Forward Plan to be published on the website, with projects consulted as appropriate.

8 To make recommendation to the Finance Committee any additional increases to the budget and Precept to cover any proposals from the Forward/Strategic Plan

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to make recommendation to the Finance Committee to include in the draft budget and Precept proposals for 2024-25, two projects as resolved under item 7.2 - £5,000 for Cyber Security; and £10,000 for an annual event.

9 Date of next meeting

Members noted the annual meeting was next 14 October 2024. However, in view of the new format of the Strategic Forward Plan, Members agreed if there was an opportunity to meet before to view the Plan and potential public consultation, a meeting should be scheduled (noting limited Monday evening availability due to other meetings).

21:32 Meeting closed.