

Minutes of the Meeting of Full Council held in Rickards Hall on 15 January 2024 at 7:30 pm

Present: Cllrs. Jon Aldridge, Michael Gemmell Smith, Alan Layland, Stuart McGregor, Vince Parker, Angela Read, Jeff Streets, Stephen Sumner, Bob Todd (*Chairman*)
In attendance: Town Clerk, SDC Cllr Jim Morgan, minutes clerk, one member of the public, no press.

1 To Receive Apologies for Absence

The Chairman opened the meeting wishing everyone a Happy New Year.

Apologies were received, noted and accepted from Cllrs Baker, Compton, and McArthur.

2 Declaration of Interests or Predetermination

None.

3 Public Questions and Statements

19:31 The Chairman adjourned the meeting for item 3.

None.

19:31 The meeting reopened.

4 To receive, adopt and sign the minutes of the Council meeting held on 04 December 2023-021/01-08

Minutes of the Council meeting held 04 December 2023 were received, and Members

Resolved: to accept the minutes of Council meeting held 04 December 2023 and that the Chairman should sign them as a true and accurate record of the meeting (021/01-08).

5 To receive County and District Councillor Reports

19:32 Cllr J Streets joined the meeting.

5.1 County Councillor

Apologies had been received from County Cllr McArthur; there was no report.

5.2 District Councillors

Cllr Baker mentioned Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) draft local Plan regulation 18 consultation had closed. She added that it had been good the Town Council's open sessions for residents to view the Plan had been well received.

Cllr Morgan reported that at the District Council planning meeting which approved the proposal for a solar farm on Gaywood Farm land off Hilders Lane, there had been many provisions put forward by planning offices. Cllr Baker and himself as District Ward councillors should to be included in discussions on the proposal details. As a separate issue regarding budget refuse collection costs, he said it was being proposed to stop the delivery of free waste bags.

19:35 Member of the Public arrived.

6 To adopt the following reports/minutes of meetings

6.1 Planning Committee meetings 11 December 2023-032/1-2; 08 January 2024-033/1-3

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held 11 December 2023 (025/1-3), and 08 January 2020 (030/1-3).

7 To receive recommendations from Committees

None.

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

8.1 Clerk's Report

Members noted the Town Clerk's report. There was some discussion on the following items:

Car parking issues in Council car parks Complaints continued to be received about residential parking at Blossoms Park restricting park users from parking and accessing the facilities. Signage had also been damaged. The abandoned vehicle at Market Yard car park had been resolved enabling the streetlight to be fixed.

Cemeteries: The past couple of months officers have been working through several grave memorial issues including where there has been an expansion on the permitted memorial area in cemeteries three and four. Over the years, the regulations have been upheld with requests for grander memorials, photos, badges, artificial flowers/plant all declined, and to maintain the standards for everyone the rules were being followed and upheld. The Open Spaces Committee would receive an update at its next meeting.

Electric Vehicle Chargers (EVCs): The installation works were completed and able to be used. The cost per kWh for the end user was 50p and the charge speed was 7kWh per hour. Payment system is through a QR code that can be scanned and will direct the end user to an app.

War Memorial: With the closure of the Hospital, contact had been made to NHS Properties, but information and meeting to discuss its future was yet to be happen.

8.2 Community Warden's Report

Members received the Community Warden's report on his first three months in post. Extracts from the report included:

Time had been spent connecting with key partners, and getting to know the volunteers, and attending an Action Counter Terrorism awareness training session. Plans were in motion to look at increasing volunteers, and working with the Planning and Administration Officer on the D-Day 80th anniversary event.

Volunteer activities: Organised four litter picks in different areas around the town which have been reasonably well attended and have been very successful. Four bulb planting sessions around the town; the Great Stone Bridge Trust (GSBT) had provided a grant to fund the spring bulbs.

Games Club: Attended numerous sessions getting to know those that attend and the volunteers. The group was going strong with weekly average attendance 12-15 people attending every week.

Portable Speed Indicator Device (SID) and Speedwatch: The SID had been out twice in the town, going forward this would be out on a more regular basis around the five approved sites. He had met with Kent Police Speedwatch officers and completed the online training. Sessions with the Speedwatch volunteers was in the process of being organised, weather permitting.

Graffiti, vandalism and fly-tipping: There had been a few issues with graffiti around the town attended to, and some fly tipping reports submitted to SDC.

Members expressed how well Kevin had settled in and pleased with how he was shaping the role.

9 To approve the Budget and Precept for 2024-25

Members noted the statement for the draft budget and Precept recommendations from the December Council meeting had been published on the Town Council website in December. Total budgeted expenditure was £858,575; other budgeted income £113,390; Precept income needed

£745,185 to achieve a balanced budget.

The conclusion and recommendation was to support a balanced budget, not to draw down on the reserves which had taken several years to strengthen and bring back to a stable level, and to Precept for the difference between expenditure and anticipated income. At the time of December Council, SDC had not issued the new 'tax base' figure, so Council had to make a best estimate using the 2023-24 figure of 3891.91 for the Precept and Band D calculation at that stage. SDC had since confirmed the tax base for 2024-25 of 3957.01 (1.67% increase on last year's figure). This would take a Band D tax level to £188.32, a £7.89 per year increase, or £0.66p per month (4.37% increase, so below the October RPI of 6.1%). This had been reflected in the statement published on the website. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the budget for 2024-25: expenditure £858,575; with other budgeted income £113,390; Precept needed £745,185.

Resolved: that with a tax base figure of 3957.01, to confirm an increase on a Band D tax level to £188.32, a £7.89 per year increase, or £0.66p per month.

10 Draft Local Plan - Regulation 18 consultation (23 November 2023 to 11 January 2024).- update

The Chairman thanked all those who had been involved in responding to the consultation, especially Cllr Aldridge and the Town Clerk. The Town Council facilitated two pop up sessions for residents to chat to councillors about the proposals for Edenbridge in the draft Local Plan consultation (part 2) on 12 December and 4 January. These were in addition to the SDC session on on 6 December. The Council had engaged a consultant to help with reviewing the Plan, looking at the proposals for Edenbridge and responding to policies ST1 - Balanced Strategy for Growth; and ST2 - Site Allocations in the Green Belt. Responses to the other site allocations and policies were also prepared and submitted to SDC.

A meeting with SDC Planning Officers had also been requested to discuss the specific issues for Edenbridge.

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

11.1 Council Casual Vacancy - update

It was noted that following the resignation of Nicola Martindale in December, SDC had confirmed that no requests had been received for an election to fill the casual vacancy. It was therefore the responsibility of Members to co-opt to fill the vacancy "as soon as practicable" (Rule 8(3) of The Local Elections (Parishes & Communities) Rules 1986). The person co-opted must be qualified for holding office, in line with the Local Government Act 1972. Council now had three vacancies: all for the South and West Ward.

A notice inviting applicants had been published on the website, as well as posters in the noticeboards. Deadline for interest was 16 February, and they would be presented to March Council. A couple of inquiries had been received to date.

11.2 To receive an update on maintenance work for Rickards Hall

It was noted the surveyor's report and 10-year maintenance plan proposal was received mid December. Building maintenance could then be prioritised, and as noted previously, some of these works being commissioned by the Town Clerk, Buildings Manager and Cllr Baker, as already agreed by Council, to facilitate the more urgent items. The recommendations from the surveyor would be reported to Finance Committee for the maintenance plans update.

11.3 SDC Annual Liaison Meeting - amended date - Thursday 18 January

Noted.

11.4 Annual Community Event - D-Day 80th Anniversary 6 June

Cllr Morgan left the meeting.

Members noted Council had set aside a budget of £5k. The officers had started to look at potential options. The Pageant Master had issued a guide for Town, Parish and Community Councils nationally:

D-Day 80 - 6th June 2024, throughout the UK, Channel Islands, Isle of Man and UK Overseas Territories in Commemoration/Celebration of the 80th Anniversary of the D-Day landings on the five Normandy Beaches in France, on 6th June 1944, an occasion to pay 'tribute' to the many, many thousands that sacrificed so much in helping to secure the freedom enjoyed today. There were several ways in which to participate, including a Beacon lighting at 9.15 pm. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to set up a small Working Group to prepare proposals for the D-Day anniversary, including Cllrs Baker, Gemmell Smith, Layland, Streets and Todd.

11.5 Food Bank: to receive an update on the Food Bank and to consider continuing supporting the Food Bank arrangements to run out of Rickards Hall on Tuesday mornings

Council had previously agreed to review annually the agreement to permit the Food Bank use of Rickards Hall Tuesday mornings, free of charge. Members received an update from the Food Bank project manager, noting that it was in a sound position to continue the work, with indication that client numbers had now reached a plateau, and food vouchers were likely to remain at the same level as the previous year. It was noted that residents using the Food Bank had increase: number of vouchers fulfilled 2022-23 755, for the 2023-24 up to December this was 601, and estimated by 31 March to be similar to previous year. The Food Bank had reported positive outcomes, that former clients now in work, free of debt, receiving entitled benefits, more able to cope, and in some cases now involved in volunteering in other situations. The Council and community were thanked for the support given to the project. It was unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm continuation of the arrangements with the Food Bank, and free use of Rickards Hall on Tuesday mornings.

12 OTHER BUSINESS including items referred from Committees for decision**12.1 To confirm the Bulky Waste collection dates for 2024-25**

SDC had confirmed the last collection date for the current financial year. As it falls prior to the next Open Spaces Committee meeting, members were asked to confirm the date and locations, and dates for the next year as follows:

Locations: Church Street; Skeynes Road; Stangrove Estate; Spitals Cross (Fircroft Way). Fly-tipping had been an issue previously at the sites, and should it happen again, it would jeopardise future collections.

Collection dates: 10 February 2024 (current financial year); 22 June; 21 September; 16 November; 15 March 2025. Cost for collection, £485 per date (or £121.25 location); this is within the 2024-25 budget. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the 10 February bulky waste collection, and the four dates for 2024-25

12.2 Spitals Cross playground, Farmstead Drive: Licence for SDC to relocate existing playground

SDC had drafted a new licence for the Town Council to agree which Members considered. The essence of the licence was to allow the closure of the existing playground on Farmstead Drive, its movement/replacement to facilitate proposed development on the current site. It also covered the ongoing status of the playground, not proposing anything that was really out of keeping with how the Town Council had been operating the playground in recent years. Members

Resolved: to confirm the Playground Relocation Licence for signing.

13 Annual Town Meeting - Monday 11 March - to agree the agenda, invited speakers and set a date to review the content

Members noted that the youth group HOUSE had already confirmed it would provide a guest speaker, and suggested Bridges should be similarly invited. Councillors indicated they wished to invite the usual range of guests from other levels of government, and outside bodies such as the Police.

14 Consultations

14.1 Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2024-34 - closes 30 January 2023

December Council agreed to refer to January Council meeting to consider responding to the Local Flood Risk Management strategy 2024-34.

Resolved: to refer the question of response to Chair of the Emergency Planning Committee.

14.2 Examination of Gatwick Airport Northern Runway project - Notice of Hearing dates February 2024

Members noted the dates of the Gatwick Airport Northern runway project hearing.

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

Cllr Read reported that she had attended the AGM of the WI Hall on 12th January. Its committee secretary and treasurer had stepped down from their roles, and that the WI Hall charity trust may have a shortage of Trustees. She suggested the Town Council should verify what its responsibilities would be if the charity closed, though the WI Hall charity was actively looking to enlist new trustees. The Hall itself was being well used by the community and had benefited from recent refurbishments.

Cllr Gemmell Smith had attended the recent PACT meeting, and reported that a second new PC was being appointed for Edenbridge. Anti-social behaviour and speeding in the High Street continued to be a concern for residents. The Eden Christian Trust youth worker had reported the Friday night youth club continued to thrive, but the newer Thursday night session for an older age-group was not so well attended.

16 To consider any press releases

2024-25 Budget; and the Annual Town Meeting.

17 Matters for future agendas

18 Date of next meeting - 4 March 2024

Members noted the date of the next full Council meeting 4 March 2024.

The meeting closed at 8.20pm.