

## Minutes of the Meeting of Open Spaces held in Rickards Hall on 15 April 2024 at 7:30 pm

Present: Cllrs. Angela Baker (*Chairwoman*), Sarah Compton, Michael Gemmell Smith (*Vice-Chairman*), Alan Layland, Stuart McGregor, Angela Read, Jeff Streets, Stephen Sumner

In attendance: Town Clerk, Head Groundsman, Minutes clerk, Cllr Todd; one member of the public and no press

### 1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received, noted, and accepted from Cllr J Aldridge, and Cummings (non-committee member).

### 2 Declarations of Interests, or Predeterminations

None.

### 3 Public Questions

19:31 The Committee Chair closed the meeting and invited the member of the public to speak.

The local resident present had received a reply from the Clerk in answer to questions he had submitted following the February Open Spaces meeting regarding Cemetery rules and regulations. (Councillors also had each received a copy). The resident was not happy with the response, and requested a meeting in person. Cllr Baker (Chair) said she and the Clerk would be happy to meet him, Cllr A Layland also said he would like to attend. The Clerk said she would offer the resident some options of dates/times for him to consider.

19:33 The meeting was re-opened.

### 4 To receive and sign minutes of the Open Spaces Committee 12 February 2024 - 2023-037/01-10

Members received the minutes of the previous committee meeting, and

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the Open Spaces Committee 12 February 2024 be signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record of the meeting (037/1-10).

### 5 To Receive Analysis of income and expenditure to 31 March 2024

Members received the budget comparisons report to the year-end 31 March 2024:

Summary	Budgeted	Actual	+/-
2023-24			
Income	395,468	400,199	4,551.34
Expenditure	379,648	360,831	underspend 21,648
Net difference			26,199.34

There was some expenditure budgeted-for, but yet to be realised (some works had been booked, and some delayed), and it was proposed to move sufficient funding into Earmarked Reserves (EMR) to cover those works, which included repairs to the Churchyard perimeter stone wall (south side) along Church Street, and equipment/tools purchase.

**Resolved:** to move £19,962 from the 2023-24 10-year plan budget into EMR for future spending, of which the amount for cemetery memorials £1,296 to be moved under Cemetery EMR; 30-year maintenance £6,500; also to move £2,644 unspent of FA Kent Pitch Grant £3,520 into a specific EMR new budget code.

Members had no further comments.

**6 To Ratify Operational Decisions for Open Spaces Activity**

None.

**7 Correspondence**

Members noted a letter with Cemetery questions had been circulated to Members last month via e-mail along with the Town Clerk's reply.

**8 Head Groundsman's Report**

**8.1 To receive Head Groundsman report**

Members noted the report on routine seasonal work carried out by the groundstaff team including:

Grass cutting all sites

Weed treatment

Maintaining planters through town, including Doggetts Barn, and planted beds in Cemetery

Topping up sunken graves

Rose pruning

Winter pitch maintenance

Benches in the Millennium Wood were being renovated, aiming to have this completed in the coming weeks. Some time was spent infilling in potholes in the car park at Mowshurst, which had vastly improved the surface, and with better weather on the horizon the works should last through to next year.

The sports pitch decompaction did not take place before Christmas due to adverse weather. As soon as ground conditions allowed the contractor would make a start.

The team had jet-washed the Wall of Remembrance and surrounding paved area, and had replaced the small decked area by the Wall used for flower vases.

Sand and soil top dressing mix had been applied to the worst areas on pitches at the Recreation Ground, and with the award of more funding from the FA this would be something done more regularly going forward.

The team had spent the last few months gradually removing ivy and dead wood from trees across all of the Council's sites. This also included branches that affect the areas the team mows.

Members had no questions.

**8.2 To receive a report on the current condition of the Kobota, and to consider if to continue with maintenance of the machine as a short-term measure or to consider the expenditure for a new one, est. £25k**

Members noted a report on the Council's Kubota ride-on mower, taken for its annual servicing. The machine itself was in good working order, but the cutting deck was found to be unsafe for use. The cutting deck is repairable but at significant cost - around £3k. The machine is nearing the end of its expected life, due to be replaced within the next year or two. Cost of a new Kubota is in the region of £25k. The Council's Earmarked Reserves could be used for this, as funding had not been included in the budget 2024-25.

Members discussed whether to repair of the Kubota in the short term would be a false economy, considering the age of the machine (nine years), potential for any other further problems, and that the manufacturers no longer produced that model. Members unanimously,

**Resolved:**

to purchase a new ride-on mower, at a price in the region of £25,000, and the Head Groundsman should seek comparison costings for the best value purchase. It was noted the the Open Spaces surplus of £3,572 to be moved to vehicles/equipment EMR towards this cost, and for 2025-26 to consider budgeting towards recovering some of the cost on budget.

Members also noted the chassis on one of the pedestrian Honda mowers had recently developed a crack, making the machine unusable. Although an older machine, it was in good working order prior to this. Repair costs were in the region of £500, and cost of a new machine would be about £1,400. The equipment replacement budget was £7,000 for 2024-25. On the basis of the age of the machine, it was

**Resolved:** to purchase a new pedestrian mower for around £1,400 to replace the Honda machine.

## 9 Open Spaces Business

Members noted that at the end of February, the then new Open Spaces Officer resigned. The position remained vacant and recruitment advertising for a replacement was being finalised. Meanwhile, work was being monitored by the Town Clerk and Head Groundsman, and Kathy Staff had been engaged to help with some elements, including year end/new season allotments administration.

**Kent FA Grass Pitch Maintenance Fund:** A grant had already been awarded for the pitches at Recreation Ground. It had very recently been confirmed that a 6-year grant to the value of £25k had been awarded for the pitches at Nomads. The details of conditions and improvement work recommendations were yet to be absorbed, and would be reported on at the June meeting.

**Pavilion replacement windows and new electric shutters update:** These works would take place end May/early June, to coincide with other Rugby Club end of season works. Details of the contract and deposit were being finalised.

**Signage:** Following the playground inspections last year, there was a comment re the notices at the Rec playground. These had now been updated, as well as a new general notice poster at Blossoms Park.

### **Items for consideration not specified on the agenda, so to be ratified at the June meeting:**

**Seesaw replacement, Stangrove Playground:** *This item should have been on the agenda for approval.* At the September Committee meeting, £2,500 was approved for a replacement seesaw. An order was placed, but it transpired that the old base would need to be removed, replaced and some surface repairs made. Unfortunately, the contractor was slow obtaining a revised quote to include the groundworks, and it was not received in time for the February agenda. The revised quote was now £3,595.65 which is just over £1,000 above the approved amount. £5k was set aside in the 30-year Open Spaces maintenance plan to help build the reserves for equipment replacements. Members were advised this could be used to cover the costs of the seesaw, or funding from the Small Projects budget. Lead time for work from order is 10-12 weeks. It was

**Resolved:** to proceed with the replacement seesaw and grounds work with expenditure of £3,595.65.

**Saturday Waste Freighter collections:** The next collection would be late June (date to be published nearer the time). However, the February collections had issues with fly-tipping at the Spitals Cross Estate location; this was not the first time unmanageable amounts of rubbish had been dumped in advance. It had been publicised previously that such behaviour could jeopardise the collection. The Council had received requests for this service to be provided at other locations around Edenbridge, including the Beeches estate off St John's Way, and Lingfield Road/Coombe Field. Sevenoaks DC would need to assess suitability of any new location.

*Cllr McGregor declared an interest in the item, being a resident at the St John's Way estate, and highlighted the need for The Beeches estate management committee to be consulted on any proposal for that location.*

Members discussed whether to discontinue the Spitals Cross collection, considering the combination of advance fly-tipping, and/or delayed pick-up due to quantity of materials brought to the three other locations earlier on the morning in Edenbridge, filling the freighter. It was

**Resolved:** to request Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) to identify a different location in the northern area of town, and to look at the scheduling of timings for collections (possibly a longer or later time-slot, or a different order of pick-up); also to ask West Kent Housing Association whether it would pay for a collection slot to maintain the Spitals Cross pick-up.

*Members wished to minute their appreciation of the Open Spaces work undertaken by the Clerk, Head Groundsman, Planning and Admin Officer and Minutes clerk, following the resignation of the Open Spaces Officer.*

### 9.1 **To receive the Burial Report**

Members noted the Cemetery activity as follows:

February: 1 burial; 2 ashes

March: 1 burial; 2 ashes

April (to date): 3 burials; 2 ashes

There had been quite a few cemetery queries the past two months, ranging from Grant of Right queries and some transfers; new memorials and Wall of Remembrance plaques; research on family members in the cemeteries; and updating some of the files and Eptipah computer records. The next significant project would be to scan the historic paperwork records on to Eptipah at some point in the future.

### 9.2 **To receive an update on memorials in cemeteries which are not compliant with memorial regulations**

**Outstanding Memorial issues:** This had been reported at meetings since September when officers started to write to Grant of Right holders where several memorials had breached the memorial regulations, having expanded the permitted size, area, and/or placed photos, badges, artificial flowers/plants and other items. Following contact with the Grant of Right holders, most had since been rectified, but some had raised complaints insisting they were not aware of the regulations, and questioned why now. However, Committee had previously considered several individual requests, and with each of these it had been agreed to uphold the regulations. For now, there was no plan to reconsider.

Over the past couple of months, officers had paused this work, but notices were about to go up at the Cemetery to advise those who tend individual plots, and visitors, that artificial flowers are not permitted and will be removed. A new audit will be carried out, and new letters sent to each Grant of Right holder giving notice to rectify any issues.

**New noticeboard/signage in cemetery:** This had been put on hold due to staff resources, but planned to progress as a project in the coming months.

*Members wished to record their congratulations to the groundstaff team on the smart appearance of the Cemetery.*

*The member of the public left the meeting.*

### 9.3 **Allotment matters**

Members noted the below items, following on from the February meeting:

**The Allotment Tenancy Agreements** for the Forge Croft and Swan Lane tenants had been finalised and issued, including the temporary structures policy with the renewals for signing.

**Agreement between the EAGA and Council** had been finalised with both parties agreeing the document. This was being presented to the EAGA's AGM and the Town Clerk was awaiting confirmation.

**Swan Lane renewals:** All bar 5 plots had returned new signed Tenancy Agreements and fees paid; the last few are currently being followed up.

**Forge Croft renewals:** These are managed by the EAGA.

**New Community Group (2 plots) at Forge Croft site:** Following the last meeting, the Plot

Officer and Town Clerk had agreed the conditions and written to the Community Garden Group with the new Tenancy Agreement, and request for their risk assessment, insurance, safeguarding policy. The Clerk is yet to hear back, but they had been liaising mostly with the Plot Officer.

#### **9.4 To receive an update on the Annual Works Programme**

No update other than the EMR funding movement decisions taken under item 5 earlier in the meeting.

#### **9.5 Vandalism report**

Members noted the following incidents:

##### **March:**

**Skate ramps:** There was graffiti to the main ramps covering quite a large area. The Groundstaff team had managed to remove most of it.

##### **April:**

**Stangrove Park notice board:** The perspex to one side had been smashed. Fortunately, there was a replacement panel already in stock, so it was replaced promptly.

**Picnic benches at Recreation Ground playground:** Last weekend the two benches were damaged by fires on both tables. Given the recycled plastic material this had melted the tops. Groundstaff will look to smooth this for now. Replacement cost would be in the region of £770 plus fixings. These had been gifted to the Council as part of the Welcome Back Funding grant via SDC.

**Bus shelter panel:** most recently the bus shelter near The Swan pub had a glass panel smashed. The cost for replacement is in the region of £195.

**Replacements:** Following the last meeting the replacement button seat for zip wire at the Rec Playground was ordered and was fitted at the end of March. The two replacement bins, for Market Yard Car Park and Stangrove Park, were delayed at the supplier end; they were expected for delivery within the coming week.

#### **9.6 Byelaws update**

Members were advised that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) confirmed receipt in February, and had raised a couple of questions, to which the Town Clerk had responded and confirmed the Town Council owns (some are on long leases, and two the Council is sole managing trustee) and maintains all sections of land referred to in the draft proposed byelaws. Therefore, the application was being made under powers in both section 164 of the Public Health Act 1875 and sections 12 and 15 of the Open Spaces Act 1906.

Council has been asked to submit an accompanying report summarising Council's reasons for the updates, and the processes undertaken in preparing the revised/updated Byelaws; most of this has already been provided to DLUHC but they need it in a report. The Clerk has advised this will be submitted late April/May.

#### **9.7 Gardening Competition**

Members were pleased to note that the Community Warden (CW), Planning and Admin Officer (P&AO) and Communications Officer (CO) had confirmed the details of the competition and categories. Posters and social media would start over the coming days.

This year's Edenbridge Gardens In Bloom competition categories are: allotment, front & back garden, youth/school groups, young gardener, window boxes & hanging baskets, and the strangest/unique space to create a colourful display. Closing date for entries 12 July. Application forms will be available from the office, online and Facebook.

The CW has secured several great prizes already including days out at Peshurst Place and

other local attractions, as well as some vouchers. The P&AO has contacted Hever Castle which will again offer some prizes and Neil Miller, Head Gardener, will attend the presentation event (date tbc in September). CW has liaised with last year's judges to do this again.

## 9.8 Summer Family Fun Days

Family Fun days this summer at Stangrove Park have been confirmed:

Thursdays 01, 08, 15 and 22 August. Sevenoaks DC has confirmed it will fund one session (8th August) with ETC funding the other three. We are currently looking at the additional activities and have approached the balloon and magic man used previously as he is always very popular. Details will be published in due course.

## 9.9 Site visits dates

It was noted the dates confirmed at the last meeting for councillors' visits to ETC sites were agreed prior to the resignation of the Open Spaces Office. The April date had not taken place due to staffing, and the 2 July is no longer viable. A new date would be circulated for June/July.

## 10 Streetlights maintenance plan and works update

### 10.1 Update 2023-24 works programme

Members were reminded their November meeting had approved an additional 30 lanterns being replaced with 30 LED, funded partially by a reserves movement and a UK Power Networks (UKPN) refund. Members had already approved a budget overspend to facilitate the LED upgrades.

Columns 241 (Swan Lane), 244 (Victoria Road), and the two pole boxes 81 and 82 (Hilders Lane) had been replaced as planned. Columns 137, 138 and 139 Mill Hill were outstanding. As 138 is sited in the old hospital grounds it cannot be replaced currently. These were expected to be completed February/March however, UKPN has since issued a credit note (£7,154) as the works had not yet been carried out. Columns 137 and 139 Mill Hill have been re-costed, now £5,481 plus Streetworks costs £2,700. This would leave a credit of £1,576 with UKPN against future works: £2,700 would need to be moved in to Earmarked Reserves (EMR) for when the work is carried out.

30-year maintenance budget had allowed £25k for column replacements, Committee November agreed a total spend £31,713 (less a UKPN refund of £5661 (net £4,718)). Actual spend shows £33,325 but with the refund and an EMR release of £2,832, the actual total spend to date is £25,775.

**Resolved:** to move £2,700 for replacement columns 137 and 139 to EMR, as expenditure had been approved for 2023-24 budget spend.

### 10.2 Update on proposals for 2024-25 replacement programme

Committee had previously agreed a proposal for 10 replacement columns, three pole boxes, and the twin set in MYCP in 2024-25. The 30-year Plan allowed £45k budget, but the costs from UKPN and Streetlights had now been received, and were over budget. Members considered options, and to remain within budget

**Resolved: to remove from the programme column 55 (Four Elms Road outside Elmwood Cottage) as the most costly due to traffic management requirements (saving £5,337) leaving the following schedule:**

Column No.	Road	UKPN costs £	Streetlights £	Total £
25	Church Street	£ 1,707.00	£ 1,300.00	£3,007.00
111 (A&B)	MYCP	£ 2,695.00	£ 2,050.00	£4,745.00
109	MYCP	£ 2,596.00	£ 1,300.00	£3,896.00

31	Croft Lane	£ 2,697.00	£ 1,300.00	£3,997.00
32	Croft Lane	£ 1,511.00	£ 1,300.00	£2,811.00
33	Croft Lane	£ 1,511.00	£ 1,300.00	£2,811.00
51 (layby/carpk)	Four Elms Road	£ 2,689.00	£ 1,300.00	£3,989.00
117	Marsh Green Road	£ 1,489.00	£ 1,300.00	£2,789.00
118	Marsh Green Road	£ 2,574.00	£ 1,300.00	£3,874.00
120	Marsh Green Road	£ 3,922.00	£ 1,300.00	£5,222.00
122	Marsh Green Road	£ 1,634.00	£ 1,300.00	£2,934.00
126	Marsh Green Road	£ 3,922.00	£ 1,300.00	£5,222.00
85 Pole box	Lingfield Road	£ -	£ 610.00	£610.00
87 Pole box	Lingfield Road	£ -	£ 610.00	£610.00
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>£ 28,947.00</b>	<b>£ 17,570.00</b>	<b>£46,517.00</b>

**NB:** UKPN will have a credit of £1,673 to come off the above costs (see above 2023-24 note).

**11 News Release**

The updated Byelaws to be subject of future publicity once confirmed.

**12 Date of next meeting - 03 June**

Noted.

The meeting closed at 8.17pm