

Minutes of the Meeting of Open Spaces held in Rickards Hall on 3 June 2024 at 7:30 pm

Present: Cllrs. Jon Aldridge, Angela Baker (*Chairwoman*), Sarah Compton, Bill Cummings, Michael Gemmell Smith (*Vice-Chairman*), Alan Layland, Stuart McGregor, Jeff Streets
In attendance: Town Clerk, Head Groundsman, and minutes clerk. There were no members of the public and no press.

1 Elections of Chairman and Vice Chairman for the ensuing year

The meeting opened with Cllr Baker as existing Committee Chairman.

1.1 Election of Chairman

Cllr Baker requested nominations for the role of Committee Chairman. Cllr Layland proposed Cllr Baker, seconded by Cllr Compton. There being no other nominations, it was unanimously,

Resolved: that Cllr Baker be elected Committee Chairman for the ensuing year.

1.2 Election of Vice-Chairman

Cllr Baker requested nominations for the role of Committee Vice-Chairman, and from the Chair proposed Cllr Gemmell Smith, seconded by Cllr Layland. There being no other nominations, it was unanimously,

Resolved: that Cllr Gemmell Smith be elected Committee Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received noted and accepted from Cllrs Jacques and Sumner.

3 Declarations of Interests, or Predeterminations

None.

4 Public Questions

19:33 *The Chair closed the meeting for public questions.*

None.

19:33 *The Chairman re-opened the meeting.*

5 To receive and sign minutes of the Open Spaces Committee 15 April 2024 - 2023-045/01-7

Resolved: that the minutes of the Open Spaces Committee 15 April 2024 be signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record of the meeting (045/1-7).

6 To Receive Analysis of income and expenditure April & May

Members received a copy of the Committee income and expenditure for the first two months of the financial year (April, May). It was noted that some of the UKPN costs had been processed to enable the replacement lighting column programme within the 30 year maintenance plan; Open Spaces Vehicles expenditure costs included £2,287.85 vehicle insurance; diesel delivery for the tractor £1,192; and tractor service and examination of the old Kubota. Market rents were processed on iZettle and transferred to Edge, with reconciliation yet to be done - estimated income £1,500.

Members had no further comments.

7 To Ratify Operational Decisions for Open Spaces Activity

In consultation with the Chair of the Committee the following decisions, and expenditure had been made:

- Hiring of Marsh Green for 5 May (bank holiday weekend) permitted for Marsh Green village community picnic event
- Replacement waste bin for Cemeteries expenditure £619.99 plus VAT. New location outside cemetery gate
- Urgent tree felling Stangrove Park £800 plus VAT. (The biennial tree inspection identified a tree for felling due to disease; works carried out early May)
- Picnic bench, Stangrove Park - replacement of all slats £327.98 plus VAT
- Replacement skate ramps surface £590 (part of 10-year maintenance programme)

Resolved: to confirm and ratify the above operational decisions.

8 Correspondence

8.1 To receive a resident's request to consider permitting them to metal detecting at Council sites

Members considered an approach from a resident asking if they could have permission to carry out metal detecting at Council owned open spaces; this would be surface detecting and they would not dig or remove any ground surface. They understand Byelaws and concerns, hence requesting Committee to consider on individual case(s). The following is included in the new Model Byelaws approved by Committee, awaiting DLUHC confirmation:

Metal detectors

39. No person shall without the consent of the Council use any device designed or adapted for detecting or locating any metal or mineral in the ground.

Protection of structures and plants

4. (1) No person shall without reasonable excuse remove from or displace within the ground: (a) any barrier, post, seat or implement, or any part of a structure or ornament provided for use in the laying out or maintenance of the ground; or (b) any stone, soil or turf or the whole or any part of any plant, shrub or tree.

Given the difficulty of preventing metal detecting generally, once any specific person had permission, and the likelihood of damage to grass surface from accompanying digging for finds, it was unanimously,

Resolved: refused the request for metal detecting at any of its sites.

9 Cricket Club, Blossoms Park

9.1 Request to permit a commercial waste container

Members were advised that with increasing usage of the Cricket Club pavilion, it was generating more rubbish than previously. The Club had looked into the options for commercial waste collections and decided the best option was to have two wheelie bins, one 660litre wheelie bin for rubbish and recycling, and one 240litre wheelie bin for glass bottles, to be collected fortnightly and stored within easy reach of the road. The most obvious place being the public car parking area by the entrance to Blossoms Park. The Club were requesting permission from the Town Council to store the two bins within that parking area, probably tucked up close to the metal boundary.

After some discussion, and considering the potential for attracting fly-tipping, and vandalism, and the visual impact, members

Resolved: to refuse the request for two wheelie bins to be sites near Blossoms Park public parking area. However, it was suggested that the Club could consider locating the bins at the back of the Pavilion and secured to the building to prevent unauthorised movement; and to take the bins to the gate on the mornings of collection and to be returned to the rear of the Pavilion after collection.

9.2 Request for a Memorial Tree at Blossoms Park

Members were advised that the Cricket Club President, would like to have a tree planted at Blossoms Park in memory of her late husband who had been a long term member of the Club, as

well as a former Chairman and Captain. Ideally, this would be a Beech Tree. The Club was happy to be guided by Committee, and on the location. Members,

Resolved: to permit a memorial beech tree at Blossoms Park, in memory of Cricket Club's late Chairman and Captain, and for the Club to liaise with the Head Groundsman regarding its location.

10 **Head Groundsman's Report**

Members noted the report on routine seasonal work carried out by the groundstaff team including: Grass cutting, all sites, weed treatment, planters maintenance through the town, including Doggetts Barn, flowerbeds in the Cemetery, topping up sunken graves, rose pruning, and flail mowing the Watermeadows and Town Field paths.

The team had taken down the football goals at the Recreation Ground and re-seeded the worn areas on all of the Council's football pitches. Some time had been spent distributing the wood chip created from the tree felled in Stangrove Park across flower beds and planters as a weed suppressant.

The pitch decompaction finally took place late May at both the Recreation Ground and Mowshurst. The ground being slightly firmer was not a bad thing as it would help in breaking up the soil profile and with aerating the ground.

The team spent had built brush piles in the Millennium Wood, and would continue to top up these in the coming months, with a view to creating habitat for bugs and smaller animals.

Two new litter bins had been installed, one in the Market Yard car park, and the other in Stangrove Park.

Summer plants had been planted in the baskets and troughs in the courtyard at Doggetts Barn, and in the planters through the town.

Items for the future:

The new ride on mower (Kubota) approved at the last meeting had been ordered. The pedestrian mower approved had already been delivered.

11 **Open Spaces Business**

Members noted the following updates:

The Open Spaces Officer vacancy was being advertised with a recruitment agency, and it was hoped interviews would take place during the first couple of weeks in June. The Town Clerk and Head Groundsman continued to monitor and implement necessary works, with the help of office staff and minutes officer (temp).

Children's Fun Fair (24 May - 2 June): The company running the Children's Fair had maintained contact with the office and liaised with the groundstaff re access. To date there had been no issues, and they had been accommodating with arrangements to protect the ground at Stangrove Park. They had also agreed to help with the D-Day commemoration event, providing a chip van, refreshments, and a couple of inflatables.

Hanging baskets for High Street: Amethyst delivery of these 30 May.

Mill Leat: There is an arrangement with the property owner of 92a (Tanyard Cottage) to provide the water for the Mill Leat feature and a separate meter to read water usage, which is provided with a copy of the bill which Council then pays. Recent months' rain or the Groundstaff have filled the Mill Leat. The property had recently been sold, and the new owner had been in touch. (Electrics for the pump are within the Tattoo shop.)

Pavilion replacement windows and new electric shutters update: The contract had been confirmed, necessary electrical works had been carried out (approved by Council), the aluminium doors and window frames, and shutters ordered (pine green). Works were scheduled to take place 1-15 July. (The guttering and pipework would need repainting; and was to be costed and presented to Council).

Seesaw replacement, Stangrove Park Playground: Approved September and April Committee. New replacement glow worm seesaw and wetpour surfacing had been ordered - 8 week lead time. (Cost £3,595.65 funded through the 30-year maintenance plan; £5k annual allowance for equipment replacements.)

Saturday Waste Freighter collections: The next collection was 22 June. SDC had been contacted regarding the issues in February - a combination of advance fly-tipping (particularly Spitals Cross), and/or delayed pick-up due to quantity of materials filling the freighter, and delaying collection times whilst it had to empty and return. SDC had replied that they would have two freight vehicles this time, and continuation with the same four locations: Church Street (9.15-9.45 am), Skeynes Road (10.00-10.30 am), Stangrove Park (10.45-11.15), and Spitals Cross (11.30-12 noon).

Tree Survey - 2-yearly report: In April the appointed company carried out a survey of all trees on Council sites. The full report was still awaited, but Council was notified of one diseased tree requiring urgent felling - this work was done.

11.1 To receive the Burial Report

Members noted the report :

- April 3 burials; 3 ashes interments
- May: 1 burial; 1 ashes interment

Cemetery queries were ongoing, ranging from Grant of Right questions; memorials and Wall of Remembrance plaques; research on family members in the cemeteries.

11.2 To receive an update on memorials in cemeteries which are not compliant with memorial regulations

Members noted the update, including forthcoming action on outstanding memorial issues. The office was in the process of preparing and sending out letters to the few remaining Grant of Right (GoR) holders with memorials in breach of the memorial regulations, having variously expanded the permitted size, area, and/or placed photos, badges, artificial flowers/plants and other items. This had been ongoing since September, with work paused due to staff shortages and other projects. Information had been sent to the Council's solicitor also, to assist with advice on certain issues. Notices had been on display in the cemeteries, to advise artificial flowers are not permitted and will be removed, but had been pulled down (and replaced). The planned new notice board signage would be proceeded with over the summer period.

Members had no further comments.

11.3 Allotment matters

11.3.1 Allotments updates

Members received the following updates:

Forge Croft Allotments: the renewals and new updated Tenancy Agreements had been issued by the Edenbridge Allotment Gardens Association (EAGA).

Swan Lane Allotments: the renewals and new Tenancy Agreements had been issued and returned, with the exception of one person and notice to vacate had been issued. There was a waiting list, and so this plot was likely to be filled quickly. The person in breach of the Tenancy terms had still not paid the rent due 1 April, but challenged termination of the tenancy and requested reinstatement. Members noted that the previous and current Tenancy Agreements states: *The Tenant shall pay a yearly rent of £xx.xx per plot/£xx.xx per half plot (to be reviewed annually) whether demanded or not which shall be payable in full on the 1st day of April 20xx and for every year after the first year of the tenancy on the 1st day of April (clause 3).* And noted that the Tenancy Agreement sets out the conditions for renting plots, to be complied with. After some discussion, Members unanimously,

Resolved: to support termination of the Tenancy and confirm the Notice and requirement to vacate.

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 Clerk was still awaiting confirmation.

New Community Group (2 plots) at Forge Croft site: Committee and the EAGA had agreed to pilot this initiative. The Group had completed the tenancy agreement and provided its public liability insurance, risk assessment, and details for managing volunteers. The Clerk had had a conversation with the lead person about safeguarding policy and expectations, a draft policy had been provided. The Group was now being overseen by the EAGA voluntary Plot Officer.

11.3.2 To receive a request to keep ducks

A plot holder at Forge Croft Allotments had asked if Committee would consider them keeping ducks. The tenant currently had chickens, was looking to add ducks, and currently used a patch of land not suitable for an allotment plot.

The current Tenancy Agreement (reviewed February 2024) said under clause 8. During the tenancy, the Tenant shall:

(c) not keep livestock or poultry on the Allotment Plot other than reasonable numbers of hens or rabbits which shall not be kept for a business or a trade;

(f) not, except for buildings or structures which are reasonably necessary for the keeping of hens and rabbits referred to in c) above, erect a shed, greenhouse, or other building or structure on the Allotment Plot, other than in accordance with the Council's Temporary Structures policy.

Powers of councils in relation to the provision of allotments allows a council, subject to the provisions of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 and 1950, to make such rules as appear necessary or proper for regulating the letting of allotments. Research into whether ducks are permitted, has found only that it appears all livestock was originally prohibited but later legislation lifted the ban on hens, bees and rabbits. It seems it is at the discretion of each Council. The EAGA has said that in principle it would have no objection. In discussion Members had concerns regarding setting a precedent, the lack of a patch of water, and welfare of the ducks, and unanimously

Resolved: to refuse the request to keep ducks at the Forge Croft site.

11.4 To receive an update on the Annual Works Programme

Members received updates on the following: selective weed spraying, sports pitches specific - for council open spaces (Mowshurst, Blossoms Park, Recreation Ground). Budget had allowed £1,610, actual quote £40 more. These works had been booked for June.

Playground Inspections: Blossoms Park skate park; three playgrounds (Recreation Ground, Marsh Green, Stangrove Park). The playground at Spitals Cross will depend if SDC are ready to remove the items (and awaiting the new location). Budget allowed £350 (£70 per inspection), but the actual cost per inspection would be £114 per inspection so there would be an overspend on budget.

Skate park riding surface repairs - replacement sheets (£6,393 budgeted). Repairs per sheet quoted at £324 plus VAT. Currently needed two (maybe three) replaced. Safeplay would attend and repair as needed in June.

Interim tree works - details of the 2-year tree survey report awaited, and the Tree Surgeon (RWE) would then be asked to quote for these works. Budget had allowed £5,710, but urgent tree works already cost £800 (item 7 above), £4,910 budget remaining.

High Street street furniture 4-year repaint (£4,959 budgeted) - Quote £6,270 plus VAT. This would be an over spend of £1,311. (NB: the budgeted figure would have been based on 2019/20 cost).

Resolved: to continue with the above planned annual works, and approve the overspend on budget, including for the four-yearly street furniture repaint (total expenditure £6,270).

Works on the annual schedule for later in the year, would be reported back to future committee:

Blossoms Park: skate park chainlink fencing replacing, budget £5,600; playground repairs following playground inspection report, budget £691.

Pitch decompaction, verti-drain and sandslit works, usually in the autumn, budget £2,311. With the PitchPower grant and recommended works, the actual expenditure would be higher than initial budget due to pitch improvement works recommendations funding through the grant award.

Members had no questions.

11.5 Vandalism report

Members noted the following:

- misuse of a Cemetery rubbish bin, so this was removed and replacement new style bin ordered and installed
- rubbish bin at the Recreation ground had a missing lid, replaced with a spare lid held in store
- picnic bench at Stangrove Park, fire damaged table and bench slats beyond repair, frame cleanable, replacement slats ordered - cost £327.98 plus VAT.

11.6 Byelaws update

Members noted the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) confirmed receipt in February and had received answers to a couple of questions, relating to ownership/management of sites 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. An accompanying report summarising Council's reasons for the updates, and the processes undertaken in preparing the revised/updated Byelaws, was then requested. Once this had been submitted, hopefully the byelaws will be confirmed.

11.7 Gardening Competition

Members were advised that the Competition was open, with several entry forms already collected from the office, but entrants could also complete the online form via the website. It was publicised in the Council's newsletter in the Edenbridge magazine, on noticeboards, Council's website and via Facebook.

Neil Miller, Head Gardener for Hever Castle, would be the guest speaker and present the prizes to the winners at an afternoon awards presentation on Monday 2 September, 4.00 - 6.00 pm. The Community Warden (CW) and Planning and Admin Officer (P&AO) had secured some attractive prizes, including days out at Penshurst Place, Wakehurst Place, and other local attractions, plus cinema tickets, as well as some vouchers.

Edenbridge Gardens In Bloom competition categories this year 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. Judges would be: Cllrs Baker, Layland and McArthur. Members were asked to confirm to P&AO their attendance at the presentation event.

11.8 Summer Family Fun Days

Members were updated on arrangements for the four Family Fun Days in August, run by PlayPlace, one session funded by SDC and three funded by the Town Council. Activities provided ranged from crafts and games to sports and face painting in a friendly, safe environment for children up to 12-years old, who must always be supervised by a parent or guardian.

The Town Council was also funding an extra activity, having invited back Mr Hiccup with his magic and balloon modelling which was very popular with the children. The dates were Thursdays in August, 2.00 - 5.00 pm Stangrove Park: 1st (with Mr Hiccup); 8th (funded by SDC); 15th, and 22nd.

11.9 Site visit/inspection date

Members were advised the proposed date for Open Spaces walkabout was Tuesday 9 July, meeting 10am at the Recreation Ground Pavilion. They were asked to confirm to the office their availability to attend.

11.10 Kent FA Grass Pitch Maintenance Fund award for Mowshurst

Following confirmation of eligibility for a Kent FA 6-year grant of £25,600 for pitch improvement works at Mowshurst, the Grass Pitch Maintenance Fund application had been completed, awaiting confirmation of the award. The funding allocation would require no Council contribution in the first two years, then match-funding of £12,799.87 spread over the next four years. Members were advised the Council already carried out some maintenance works which would cover this over the 6-year period, and meet the Council's contribution. However, it may be that some specialist works when quoted might require further Council contributions. The grant would be managed similarly to the award for the Recreation Ground already confirmed.

11.11 Market Yard car park - surface and drain repairs expenditure £680

Members were advised there was a sunken drain and cracked tarmac surround in Market Yard car park. To repair this, the tarmac needed to be cut around the drain, and rebuilt under the drain to correct the height. The area would need to be closed for 5-days to allow the area the materials to cure. After noting that Thursday Market opening could be avoided, it was

Resolved: to approve the expenditure of £680 plus VAT to repair the sunken drain and tarmac.

11.13 Stangrove Park: to consider a planting programme

Members were reminded of past discussions whether to have some "colour" at the front of Stangrove Park, as the town's signature park. This had not progressed for a number of reasons, including ongoing running costs and groundstaff time. The officers, Community Warden and Head Groundsman had been thinking about a couple of flower beds, possibly raised or flat, which could be planted with some perennial and annual plants, as well as some bulbs.

The Head Groundsman and team could create a suitable area at the front of the park, near the railings, which the Community Warden and volunteer bulb planters could also help to maintain. This would be low cost to create, the plants could be funded from the hanging baskets budget surplus (£503); and if needed soil/compost/peat and additional costs funded under Small Projects, or Open Spaces materials budget which had an allowance for planting. In addition, the Community Warden usually applied for a grant from the Great Stone Bridge Trust for bulb planting.

Resolved: to proceed with the low-cost project to create suitable flower beds at the frontage of Stangrove Park, utilising funding from the hanging baskets budget surplus.

12 Streetlights maintenance plan and works update**12.1 Update on proposals for 2024-25 replacement programme**

Committee had confirmed the streetlights for replacement programme 2024-25 (budget £45k) but some savings had been identified in liaison with the contractor Streetlights, proposing to remove column number 51 which was in the layby on Four Elms Road and was beside the new development site. Also, number 126 Marsh Green Road is a pole box, not a column, so there was no UKPN costs, saving £3,922. Proposed replacement programme was now:

Column No.	Road	UKPN costs £	Streetlights £	Total £
25	Church Street	1,707	1,300	3,007
111 (A&B)	MYCP	2,695	2,050	4,745
109	MYCP	2,596	1,300	3,896
31	Croft Lane	2,697	1,300	3,997
32	Croft Lane	1,511	1,300	2,811
33	Croft Lane	1,511	1,300	2,811
117	Marsh Green Road	1,489	1,300	2,789
118	Marsh Green Road	2,574	1,300	3,874

120	Marsh Green Road	3,922	1,300	5,222
122	Marsh Green Road	1,634	1,300	2,934
126	Marsh Green Road	0	1,300	5,222
85 Pole box	Lingfield Road	0	610	610
87 Pole box	Lingfield Road	0	610	610
TOTALS		22,336	16,270	38,606

The 2024-25 programme now had a saving/surplus of £6,394. Members considered options for utilising this funding, including additional LED conversions (est. cost £350 each, would allow for up to 18), or transferring the excess to earmarked reserves for 2025-26 replacement programme, also the sum of £1,775.27 expected insurance settlement for a damaged column on Mill Hill. Given the early stage of the financial year and the possibility of unplanned works arising during the year, it was

Resolved: to wait until later in the year to decide the course of action for the surplus.

The Town Clerk reported the outstanding claim for the damaged streetlight (137) following a RTA December 2022 had now been settled, receiving payment of £5,444.27. 2023-24 Council had paid KCC emergency attendance and UKPN to isolate the power £1,775.27; the rest of the claim would allow the now reinstatement costs of UKPN and Streetlights (saving in the replacement programme).

14 Assets: Benches from the old War Memorial Hospital

Members considered relocation of two benches the Council owns/has on its assets register, sited at the front of the War Memorial Hospital: Coronation celebration bench (King George) – all metal, green; WWI Armistice 1918 – black metal with soldier and poppy.

The new Medical Centre management was under the impression that the black bench with soldier and poppies was donated by the Friends of Edenbridge Hospital, and moved it to its memorial garden at the Four Elms Road site; they now knew that this was not the case, and the bench was Council owned. The other bench remains at the old hospital site. After some discussion, it was

Resolved: to donate the 1918 memorial bench to the new Medical Centre, and thus remove the item from Council's assets register.

Resolved: to store the Coronation bench until the location of the War Memorial is confirmed, and install it there.

15 News Release

Members identified two projects for publicity, when completed: the new Sports Pavilion windows, and the new flower beds at Stangrove Park.

16 Date of next meeting - 22 July

Noted.