

Minutes of the Meeting of Open Spaces held in Rickards Hall on 22 July 2024 at 7:30 pm

Present: Cllrs. Jon Aldridge, Angela Baker (*Chairwoman*), Sarah Compton, Michael Gemmell Smith (*Vice-Chairman*), Carey Jacques, Alan Layland, Stephen Sumner
In attendance: Town Clerk, Head Groundsman, and minutes clerk - no members of the public and no press.

1 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received, noted, and accepted from Cllrs Cummings, McGregor, and Streets.

2 **Declarations of Interests, or Predeterminations**

None.

3 **Public Questions**

19:31 *The Chairman closed the meeting.*

There were no questions or statements.

19:31 *The Chairman re-opened the meeting.*

4 **To Receive and Sign Minutes of the Open Spaces Committee 3 June 051/1-8**

Resolved: that the minutes of the Open Spaces Committee meeting of 3 June to be signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record of the meeting (051/1-8).

5 **To Receive Analysis of Receipts and Payments to 16 July 2024**

Members reviewed a copy of the income and expenditure for the first quarter (April-June, plus some July expenditure) and noted:

Other staff costs: included £140 for training due to be refunded;

Annual Maintenance: £1238 for skate park repairs included £590 for works in December 2023 not processed in the last financial year;

30 year maintenance plan: some of the UKPN costs had been processed to enable the replacement column programme;

OS Vehicles: included the new Kubota (£25k); also insurance, and fuel supply for the tractor.

Members had no further comments.

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

Members were advised replacement slats had been needed for the picnic bench at Stangrove Park which had been set alight to in May, total cost of £327.98 plus VAT.

Resolved: to ratify the £327.98 for replacement slats for the picnic bench, from the vandalism budget.

7 **Correspondence**

Members noted a resident's email which had been circulated to them, asking for more trees at the Recreation Ground playground, and the concerns for use of pesticides on the sport pitches and field. Members noted the Town Clerk's response which had explained the restrictions/difficulties for planting at the playground; and that the Council uses only "amenity approved" products for weed control for the sports pitches, and that is safe for animals and people.

7.1 **To receive a request from a resident to consider using their falconry pest control services to manage pigeons and seagulls in Edenbridge**

Members had been circulated with recent correspondence from a resident offering falconry pest control to the Council as a deterrent service, aiming to make pigeons and seagulls believe areas

around Edenbridge were not safe in which to find food, roost, or nest. He stated that there would be no culling, as his birds would be a deterrent, and asked for Council/Committee to consider his offer. It was unclear whether the resident was offering this service free or for payment.

Members received a summary of the Town Clerk's investigation had revealed that a licence was needed to be able to use birds of prey to manage seagulls or other bird populations. This licence covered situations where the Secretary of State was satisfied that there was no other satisfactory solution regarding the species and purposes that the licence covered. The licence allowed an 'authorised person' to carry out activities in relation to certain species of 'wild birds'. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (section 27/1) says "authorised person" means (a) the owner or occupier, or any person authorised by the owner or occupier, of the land on which the action authorised is taken; (b) any person authorised in writing by the local authority for the area within which the action authorised is taken. The Town Council had responsibility for its own sites and property, but had no jurisdiction over the wider sites and properties in Edenbridge. It appeared KCC would be the local authority which could potentially consider this. However, there were restrictions, on the types of birds that could be targeted and for purposes of preventing serious damage to crops, fisheries, and some business property. (For example, wood pigeons can only be controlled for livestock and crops.)

In 2019, "Wild Justice" successfully won a legal challenge against Natural England, causing a review of the way they interpret legislation when it comes to Gull management. This had resulted in no licences being issued. The Secretary of State GL42 licence, was a general licence (valid to December 2025) to permit the killing of certain wild birds (gulls are not included on the list). Whilst the resident says his birds would only deter and would not cull the birds, measures of reassurance would be needed. There were pest control companies that do offer bird control/deterrent services, but the Clerk believed these were for specific sites/buildings.

Members discussed, and concluded that where businesses or residents had a specific issue, they could make their own enquires to pest control companies, and unanimously,

Resolved: not to take up the offer of falconry pest control.

8 Head Groundsman's Report

Members noted the routine seasonal work as reported. In addition, the team had started marking out the football pitches at the Recreation Ground for the next season and would be completed over the coming weeks. Following the felling of some trees along the railway line at Nomads/Mowshurst, a substantial amount of wood chips had been acquired for use across our various pathways and flower beds etc. The annual large scale selective weed-spraying took place last week on the Council's sports pitches at Nomads, Blossoms Park and the Recreation Ground. The team had been painting the Council's street furniture, including the bollards in the Market Yard car park, as well as some benches and various posts around town, and had repaired the fire damaged bench at Stangrove Park. The in-house summer tree survey had been completed and a programme of works set for the grounds team. They were also working through recommendations from the 2-yearly external tree survey, with any work beyond their remit being referred to local contractors for quotations. Members thanked the ground staff team.

8.1 To approve the expenditure of £526 for a new backpack blower

Members noted that following a recent theft from vehicle, a new blower was required (this had been reported to the Police and CCTV checked). Members unanimously,

Resolved: to support expenditure for a replacement blower at £526 for a new Stihl backpack model.

8.2 To approve the expenditure of £168 for a replacement air compressor

Members considered two options to replace the broken air compressor and unanimously resolved,

Resolved: to approve the expenditure of £168.00 for Draper 24 litre oil free Compressor.

8.3 To approve the expenditure of £540 for a Chainsaw Maintenance & Cross cutting course for the apprentice, plus expenditure for protective clothing budget £250

Members were advised that the grounds apprenticeship training at Plumpton College did not include chainsaw training. It would benefit the groundstaff team to have an extra skilled person with a chainsaw licence, and the apprentice was keen to do this. He had been set a proviso, that he needed to pass his Pesticide PA1 training and certificate first, which was a requirement of the apprenticeship.

The chainsaw course would require necessary protective clothing to be provided: Forestry Helmet (EN 397) with ear muffs and mesh visor; chainsaw protective trousers (pr EN 381-5) Type A front leg protection or Type C all-round leg protection; safety boots with chainsaw protection to BS EN ISO 20345:2004 and bearing a shield depicting a chainsaw to show compliance with EN381-3 (toe cap - EN 345 Chainsaw protection pr EN 345 part 2); chainsaw gloves (EN381-7). Estimated budget £250. It was unanimously,

Resolved: to approve the training expenditure of £540 for chainsaw maintenance and cross cutting, (including registration and assessment fee £144, and training fee £396), plus a budget of £250 for necessary protective clothing.

9 To receive the 2-yearly tree inspection report and approve the expenditure for recommended tree works, the annual maintenance budget allowed £4,320

Members received the biennial tree inspection report, and noted the Head Groundsman was currently working through the report, and obtaining quotes from tree surgery contractors. One tree had been felled, as recommended for emergency works, £800.

A resident had also contacted the office regarding a tree overhanging their property. The tree report had not identified this tree for work, but there were some dead branches and the contractors would be asked to look at this and make a recommendation.

Subject to the contractor's report and quotes, Committee was asked to authorise the Head Groundsman and Town Clerk to approve the necessary tree works, using the annual budgeted tree works allowance of up to £4320. It was noted that the £800 for emergency works had been covered already within other maintenance plan works. Members had no questions, and unanimously,

Resolved: to authorise the Head Groundsman and Town Clerk to approve the necessary tree works, using the budgeted tree works allowance of up to £4320.

10 Open Spaces Business

Members noted the following updates on Open Spaces business:

Recruitment for the Open Spaces Officer: unfortunately this did not result in an appointment. Recruitment would continue in September and in the meantime, the Town Clerk and Head Groundsman continued to monitor and implement necessary works, with help of office staff and minutes officer (temp).

High Street street furniture 4-year repaint: Following approval for the expenditure for this project from the 10-year maintenance plan, works started on Tuesday 16 July.

Kubota: Following Committee approval at April meeting, this had now been received, insured, and was in use.

Pavilion replacement windows and new electric shutters update: These works took place during the first two weeks of July and the new windows and shutters were complete. Guttering and pipework repainting would be costed and presented to Council.

Playground Inspections: The annual playground inspections for Council sites were booked and expected to take place in August.

Pound Green: SES Water had been undertaking pipe replacement works along Lingfield Road. Following investigation of re-routing and connection via other water connections, they had contacted the Council to advise that it would be required to lay a small section of water main

through Pound Green (approx. 4m in length across the narrower section of the land). SES Water had already been advised that Pound Green used to be a pond, and that there was a large oak tree at the north/west corner on Crouch House Road section. The Clerk had been told no works would take place under the canopy area of the tree. A letter would be sent reiterating this, and requesting to ensure the site was made good. Currently these works were pencilled for October 2024 and expected to last 10 working days.

Saturday Waste Freighter collections - feedback: The collections, funded by Council, on 22 June, seemed to go well – there were no complaints to the Council, though the office was advised of some waste being left at a couple of sites in advance. SDC had provided two freight vehicles this time, for the usual four locations.

10.1 To receive the Burial Report

Members noted there were no burials or ashes interments in June, one burial in July.

Cemetery activity over the past two months had included ashes bookings for August, and November, Wall of Remembrance booking, enquiries for the Cemeteries, and updating filing and the manual Registers.

10.2 Cemetery matters

10.2.1 To receive the periodic Memorial Safety Inspections

Members noted the Head Groundsman had carried out the summer check of memorials. Items identified were:

Churchyard: One headstone with a big crack - this was laid down for safety.

Cemeteries 1 and 2: nothing to report. Cemetery 3: One headstone with movement - Grant of Right holder had been contacted.

10.2.2 To receive an update on Memorials in the cemeteries which are not compliant with Memorial Regulations

Outstanding memorial issues: a further recent inspection of the Cemeteries identified 15 memorials not compliant with the regulations; a few of these were ongoing cases and some others were new ones with excessive planting being the main issue. The office was in the process of preparing and sending out further letters to Grant of Right (GOR) holders with memorials which were in breach of the memorial regulations, having expanded the permitted size, area, and/or placed photos, badges, artificial flowers/plants and other items. The Council's solicitor was assisting with advice on certain issues, with letters being issued in those cases.

Work on the new signage had started. Once this had been finalised and installed, staff would then look to clear the artificial flowers which are not permitted. Members had no further comments.

10.2.3 To receive two separate requests for a Memorial Headstones

Two separate requests had been received for memorial headstones, both within the permitted measurements 1.07m height, 76 cm width, 30 cm plinth depth. However, both were of a different style to other examples already in the Cemeteries and were therefore being put to Committee to consider if they were suitable and meet the requirements of headstone memorials. Members considered the memorials requests individually.

Resident 1 application: The initial request in 2023 for a statue style memorial with an inserted memorial tablet was refused by officers (the rule book allows for memorial headstones and tablets). The applicant had responded asking for the decision to be reconsidered, as the proposed memorial would be within in the headstone permitted measurements/size. Having considered the proposed design and the current rules, and after some discussion, it was

Resolved: to uphold the original decision to refuse the application, the design being not in keeping with the character and visual harmony of the Cemetery.

Resident 2 application: A tapered headstone and pitched edges to create a memorial more natural in appearance, rather than uniformed in material and shape. Having considered the proposed headstone design and material, it was

Resolved: to approve the application.

10.3 Allotment matters & updates

10.3.1 To approve the expenditure of £2,300 for new replacement doors to stores/garage at the Forge Croft Allotments

It was reported that for some time it was known that the doors on the main storage building at the Forge Croft Allotments were old and damaged. Three options to replace and make secure had been costed: this work had not been budgeted for in either the 10 year buildings or open spaces maintenance plans so would be an overspend to either budget code. Having considered the options, members

Resolved: to support replacement gates/doors powder coated with new steel frame, and the expenditure of £2,350 plus VAT, to be funded from the buildings 10-year maintenance plan.

10.4 To receive an update on the Annual Works Programme

There was nothing to add since the previous meeting. Routine annual works were being progressed - works on the schedule for later in the year would be reported to future committee, including Blossoms Park - skate park chainlink fencing replacement (budget £5,600); Market Yard and Rec car parks' annual gully pots emptying, to schedule in the autumn.

10.5 Vandalism report

Members noted that a panel had been removed from the framework from the framework - groundstaff repaired and replaced. In Stangrove Park a picnic bench had all slats replaced after being set alight in May. There had been some minor graffiti on noticeboards, cleaned by the Community Warden.

10.6 Gardening Competition

Members noted that due to the slow start to the summer, the closing date had been extended to 22 July, and they were reminded of arrangements for presentation of the prizes to the winners at an afternoon awards event in Rickards Hall on Monday 2 September, 4-6 pm, with Hever Castle Head Gardener Neil Miller as guest speaker. This year's Edenbridge Gardens In Bloom competition categories were: allotment, front & back garden, youth/school groups, young gardener, window boxes & hanging baskets, and the strangest/unique space to create a colourful display. Judges were: Cllrs Baker, Layland and McArthur.

10.7 Summer Family Fun Days

Members were reminded of the arrangements for the free Family Fun Days sessions run by Play Place, one session funded by SDC and three funded by the Town Council. Activities provided range from crafts and games to sports and face painting in a friendly, safe environment for children up to 12-years old, who must be supervised throughout by a parent or guardian. Dates for Edenbridge, 1, 8, 15 and 22 August, 2.00 - 5.00 pm Stangrove Park. Details were included in the July/August edition of the newsletter (Edenbridge Magazine) and would be on Facebook page.

10.8 Open Spaces sites visit/inspection date

The planned councillors' sites visit in July had to be cancelled (it also rained heavily on that date).

11 **Streetlights maintenance plan and works update**

11.1 **Update on proposals for 2024-25 replacement programme**

Members noted the confirmed column replacement programme 2024-25 (budget £45k) now had a total spend of £36,606, reported June meeting. UKPN planned to undertake its work to streetlight 25 in Church Street, numbers 31, 33 and 32 in Croft Lane, numbers 109 and 111 MYCP, and 118 and 117 in Marsh Green Road on 9, 10 and 11 September. Numbers 120 and 122 Marsh Green Road needed a road closures so dates were to be confirmed. Streetlights work on these columns would be in the same period. Members had no questions.

11.2 **To consider adding to 2024-25 replacement programme streetlight 110 between toilets & old Natwest Bank and using the surplus funding from this year's programme**

Presented to full Council at its July meeting, Members received an update on the proposals for UK Shared Prosperity Fund (via SDC) funding for a project for the Market to utilise the access road from the High Street, creating an additional space and new archway. Part of this would require moving streetlight number 110, set in the centre of the bollards near the access road and toilets, proposed about 4metres nearer to the noticeboard. Council supported the proposal, subject to the costs from UKPN and Streetlights. These were yet to be confirmed. The proposal would be to fund from the surplus £6,394 in the replacement programme for 2024-25, due to other street lights not viable to proceed. Committee last month suggested holding this money back to see what may come up in terms of the replacement programme, or for LED conversions. Details of costs to relocate and replace column 110 would be presented to Council's September meeting to approve. Members had no questions.

12 **Health & Safety Audit July 2024**

12.1 **Stangrove Pond: To approve a budget of £800 for the expenditure for two new lifebuoy rings, housing station and posts and approx. £200 for new signage**

Following the Health & Safety audit in July, the H&S Inspector visited the open spaces and made several recommendations, which would be presented in a full report to Council in September. However, safety at the Stangrove Park pond was questioned, suggesting the existing throw ropes were not sufficient, and provided emergency coverage for only part of the pond. The strong recommendation was that there should be at least two life ring stations, one either side of the pond, plus improved signage and instructions. Initial quotes for two lifebuoy rings (two sizes) with housing box/station and posts was approx. £800. The housing box/station was not a necessity but would provide added protection against vandalism and misuse.

Signage costs would depend on the size and fittings, but proposed signage on dibond, displayed either on the lifebuoy post, or on metal lecterns (already have in stock) or between two wood posts. A budget of £200 was proposed. This would need to be funded from contingencies (budget £3k) or small projects (£2,500).

Resolved: to approve the expenditure of up to £800 for two lifebuoy rings and stations, plus signage costs of approx.£200.

13 **To consider permitting a children's fun fair for two weeks - 20 August to 3 September**

Members received a request from the the company which had provided the Children's Fun Fair (24 May - 2 June) to return at the end of August (20th to 3rd September). The fair had been well received by the community, and there had been no issues. It would feature the same rides as last time, but laid out differently with some new games, stalls and marquees. Fees charged were £998.29 for fun fairs, plus deposit against damages of £1k. Members noted the first week of the two proposed included the last of the four Family Fun afternoons in the park with PlayPlace, which would need to be consulted over arrangements. It was

Resolved: in to permit the second visit of the fair 20 August to 3 September, subject to separate arrangements for location of the Family Fun session in the park.

14 News Release

Members suggested publicity to be given to the new Kubota, the Family Fun sessions, and the return visit of the fair.

15 Date of next meeting - 16 September 2024

Noted.

The meeting was closed at 8.51pm.