

Minutes of the Meeting of Full Council held in Rickards Hall on 9 September 2024 at 7:30 pm

Present: Cllrs. Angela Baker (*Vice-Chairwoman*), Bill Cummings, Michael Gemmell Smith, Carey Jacques, Alan Layland, Margot McArthur, Stuart McGregor, Vince Parker, Angela Read, Michael Stockdale, Jeff Streets, Stephen Sumner

In attendance: Town Clerk, minutes clerk, one member of the public and no press.

1 To Receive Apologies for Absence

The Vice-chairman opened the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received, noted, and accepted from Cllrs Jon Aldridge, Sarah Compton, and Bob Todd (Chairman).

2 Declaration of Interests or Predetermination

Cllr Cummings declared a non-pecuniary interest (Item 12.2.1), being a member of the Bonfire Society.

3 Public Questions and Statements

19:32 The Vice-Chairman closed the meeting.

None.

19:32 The Vice-Chairman re-opened the meeting.

4 To receive, adopt and sign the minutes of the Council meeting held on 01 July 2024 (2023-053/1-8)

Members had received the minutes of the previous Council meeting, and

Resolved: the minutes of the Council meeting held 01 July (053/1-8) be signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

19:32 Cllr Jacques joined the meeting. 19:34 Cllr Parker joined the meeting.

5 To receive County and District Councillors Reports

5.1 County Councillor

Cllr McArthur reported that Kent County Council (KCC) was publicising information regarding accessing Pension Credit benefit in light of the proposed national withdrawal of the Winter Fuel Allowance for pensioners not receiving that benefit; also that household support funding remained available. The Government's housing targets and the prospect of 58% additional housing allocation for Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells was causing concern as to where locations could be identified for development. The addition of VAT to independent school fees from January could see numbers of small schools closing, affecting children with special needs and put pressure on state schools.

The date for launching the new EU entry/exit system was now 10 November. Drivers were being warned to be prepared for long queues, and £1.6million had been allocated for re-surfacing of roads which emerged as alternative routes being used to access the Channel crossings.

5.2 District Councillors

There had been no District Council meetings in August.

6 To adopt the following reports/minutes of meetings

6.1 Planning Committee 08 July 054/1-3; 29 July 057/1-2; 19 August 058/1-3: and 2 September 059/1-2

Resolved: to adopt the minutes from the Planning Committee meetings of 08 July 054/1-3; 29 July 057/1-2; 19 August 058/1-3: and 2 September 059/1-2

6.2 Finance Committee 15 July 055/1-5

Resolved: to adopt the minutes from the Finance Committee meeting of 15 July 055/1-5.

6.3 Open Spaces Committee 22 July 056/1-8

Resolved: to adopt the minutes from the Open Spaces Committee meeting of 22 July 056/1-8.

6.4 Personnel Committee 3 September 060/1-3

Resolved: to adopt the minutes from the Personnel Committee meeting of 3 September 060/1-3.

7 To receive recommendations from Personnel Committee

7.1 To confirm the Market Officer's fixed term contract be extended to 31 May 2026

Resolved: to confirm the the Market Officer's fixed term contract be continued to 31 May 2026, and to be reviewed in October 2025 for budgeting 2025-26.

7.2 To ratify the recruitment costs for external online recruitment platforms up to £500

Resolved: to confirm expenditure up to £500 to advertise the Open Spaces vacancy additionally using online recruitment platforms Reed and Totaljobs.

7.3 To confirm one-off remuneration pay to each of the ground staff team (4) as recognition of recent additional workload, payable with November pay

Resolved: to confirm one-off remuneration pay (£1,000) to each of the four ground staff team as recognition of recent additional workload, payable with November pay.

7.4 To confirm updated employee contracts

Each year, the Council's employment advisers Worknest review the employee contracts, to ensure they remain current and reflect any legislative changes. Members

Resolved: to confirm the updated contracts.

7.4.1 To confirm a new current version of employee contracts issued to all employees (noting no material changes from initial contracts but providing more clarity)

Resolved: that the updated version of employee contracts be issued to all employees to proved further clarity; and where a contract may have individual specifications to include in the updated version, thus material details would remain the same.

7.5 To confirm and adopt the updated Employee Handbook

Resolved: to confirm and adopt the updated Employee Handbook.

8 To receive reports and recommendations under summer delegated authority

8.1 Delegated decisions from Planning Committee (August)

None.

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

9.1 Clerk's Report

Members noted the updates in the Clerk's report, including success in unblocking and cleaning of the flood closure flaps in the north bank of the river, downstream of the Stone Bridge, which were now functioning correctly - unlike during last year's flooding. They wished to record their appreciation and thank you to the Planning and Admin Officer for liaising with the Environment Agency and the resident at Honour's Mill.

Members were advised that there were no further formal updates regarding the future of the War Memorial. Access to the site had been confirmed for Remembrance Sunday 10 November (Item 11.6), as well as to the New Edenbridge & District Residents Associations (NEDRA) to clear and maintain the Memorial, and the groundstaff had helped remove any vegetation arising from the NEDRA activity.

10 Draft Local Plan - update

Members noted there were no further updates since the Council's July meeting. However, the Town Clerk had been in email communications with Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) regarding traffic concerns for Edenbridge as a result of the development proposals in the emerging Plan. SDC had forwarded the concerns raised to Kent Highways for response. In Kent Highways response, it had agreed with some of the Town Council's concerns which had also been raised in its response to the draft Plan consultation, but other concerns it had said that any mitigation work would need to be designed and delivered by developer/s through S278 mechanism.

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

11.1 AGAR: To receive the external auditors completion of the audit for the year ended 31 March 2024

Members were pleased to note that the external auditor, Mazars, had confirmed a clean audit with no issues, and had returned the completed Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). The Notice of conclusion of the audit Annual Return for the year ended 31st March 2024 was published 28 August.

11.2 Rickards Hall maintenance updates

11.2.1 To receive an update on Rickards Hall building maintenance work

It was noted that additional works to replace a rotted window had been completed, and a specification for internal decoration and repairs would be drawn-up for tender in due course. Quotes would be presented to Council for consideration and approval, this being additional expenditure not budgeted for.

11.2.2 Rickards Hall kitchen fire shutter: To approve the expenditure of £325 to fit interface from the Fire Alarm to enable automatic closure of the new fire shutter, costs

Members were advised that following installation of the new kitchen fire shutter (approved Council May meeting), it was found that there was no electric capacity/interface with the fire alarm to close the new shutter. A 1m cable from the interface was required to enable connection to change state from closed circuit to open circuit in a fire alarm condition, and left coiled adjacent to the shutter control, ready for the shutter installer to return to connect to their controls. The cost for these works would be £325.

Resolved: to confirm the expenditure of £325 to fit interface from the Fire Alarm to enable automatic closure of the new fire shutter.

11.2.3 Rickards Hall kitchen: To approve the expenditure of £675 fit and supply new kitchen sink hot water small boiler due to current leaky system

The hot water tap in the kitchen is run off a small electric unit under the sink. This had been leaking on and off for several years, but was now beyond repair. To supply and fit a suitable Jude water heater would cost £675.00.

Resolved: to approve the expenditure of £675 for a replacement water heater for the kitchen.

11.3 To receive an update on unauthorised access onto Council Open Spaces

11.3.1 Recreation Ground

At July Council Members were advised that one resident continued to use the gate they had installed, despite solicitor letters and hedging planted at the gate to prevent this. Unfortunately, this had been damaged. A further solicitor's letter advised the resident Council was extremely disappointed with this conduct which was not tolerated, and that they would now be liable for costs. It was reported a settlement agreement had been made including reinstatement of the hedge, which had now been paid.

11.3.2 Stangrove Park

During a recent review of Council trees at Stangrove Park, it was noted that a resident had replaced the fence at the rear of their property bordering Stangrove Park (Council registered land), and had included a gate creating an access directly on to Stangrove Park. This had been created without the Council's approval and was therefore unauthorised access over Stangrove Park. Members were advised that a letter was sent to the resident requesting this be rectified within one month. Other accesses had also been noted and letters were being sent to those properties also.

The resident had contacted the office and had agreed to rectify, but had requested more time, to which the Clerk had agreed. A letter confirming this would be sent and the matter monitored. At this stage it was not considered necessary to send a solicitor's letter. Members had no questions.

11.4 Project for new Market Archway at Market Yard car park access road

11.4.1 UK Shared Prosperity Fund (via SDC) funding: Update on project for the Market to utilise the access road from the High Street creating an additional space and new archway

Council meetings May and July had received updates on the project for a new archway to promote the Market in Market Yard car park, with the works funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (via SDC). The Community Warden had obtained quotes and designs, one of which had been settled on, but the costs exceeded the grant money available. Further quotes were being investigated and to include grounds work contractor costs, bollards and with a view to remain within budget.

Planning requirements for the archway remained unclear, but as soon as a blacksmith and design were confirmed SDC would be able to advise whether this does or doesn't fall under permitted development (it is believed it depends on the font size for 'Edenbridge Market'). Members had no questions.

11.4.2 To receive update and confirm approval of £3,493 expenditure relocation of streetlight 110 Market Yard street light (between bollards at the entrance) included in the replacement programme for 2024-25

At the July Council meeting, Members supported the proposal to replace and move column 110 to facilitate the new market archway, to be funded from the 30-year Open Spaces maintenance replacement programme surplus of £6,394. Estimated expenditure was £3,896. Members were advised UKPN had subsequently confirmed its costs at £2,093 and Streetlights costs £1,400. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm expenditure of £3,493 to replace and move column 110 Market Yard car park, using the surplus from the 30-year maintenance replacement programme.

11.5 **Chairman's Reception**

It was reported the Chairman's Reception held the previous week had been received well, producing a lot of positive feedback, and a nice post was on the Council Facebook and website.

11.6 **Remembrance Sunday 10 November 2024**

Council had facilitated a meeting on 5 September with the local groups (Bonfire Society, Scouts, Church, Town Band) who helped organise last year's annual parade and event at the War Memorial. Members were advised much of the detail would be similar to last year's event, with a parade at 10.30 am leaving from Leathermarket car park to the old War Memorial Hospital, for a wreath laying service at 11.00 am. The Church would hold its special Remembrance Service in the afternoon at 2.30 pm. Local groups, services, schools and businesses would be encouraged to take part in one or both of the events.

There would be no parking available at the hospital and the Council would make enquiries for alternative parking. NHS Properties had confirmed that there would be access available for residents to gather around the War Memorial.

The Community Warden had submitted the road closure request, the Bonfire Society had confirmed it would arrange the marshals; the Royal British Legion would arrange the wreaths, Standard Bearer, and order of events at the Memorial; the Church would attend the 11.00 am event providing reading and prayers. The event would be published on the Council's website, Facebook and Noticeboards.

Councillors were requested to attend both events.

11.7 **Leases: to receive updates on the progress of:**

Members were reminded of the current Leases being updated or amended:

Forge Singers: The new drafted lease was sent in December 2023; Council May 2023 (agenda item 11.7.1)

Museum: This was due for renewal March 2025, reported to Council May and July, (agenda item 11.7.2)

Rugby Club: Council May 2024, Members had approved amendments to the Lease to accommodate and clarify the arrangements for a new heating system the Club wanted to install. The Council's solicitor had contacted with Club. As of 2 August, the solicitor had not heard back from the Club since initial acknowledgement of their letter; the Clerk had emailed 5 September. The Club had met with the Head Groundsman to confirm location of the external heater units, but it was not known if the works had commenced.

11.7.1 **Forge Singers new lease**

Up until last month, neither the solicitor nor Council had heard anything from the Forge Singers following the issue of a new draft lease in December 2023. In July, the solicitor advised that the Forge Singers were not very forthcoming with the information, as they did not want to bind themselves to a more formal arrangement than the one they currently have. The Singers do not currently hold a Lease of the Council land, simply a letter acknowledging that they occupy the land which was terminable on notice. As they are not occupying under any formal agreement, the Town Council now required that their occupation was regularised by way of a Lease. By agreeing to a Lease, the rights and responsibilities of both the Forge Singers as the Tenant, and the Town Council as the Landlord, would be clarified.

The Lease itself cannot be in the name of the Forge Singers as a group, as they are not a separate legal entity. The Council's solicitor advised that only an individual or group of individuals, a registered charity, limited company, or other incorporated organisation, can enter a Lease. This was why the Lease would need to be in the name of either the Chair of the Forge Singers, or the committee.

Members considered the options: to continue with the Lease as the best viable option in the name of an individual or group of individuals, or the Singers establish themselves as a registered entity,

or the Council serves Notice. After some discussion, which included acknowledgement that the process could appear daunting, and one Members suggested that the Forge Singers may be able to become a non-incorporated organisation (a comparatively simple process), it was unanimously,

Resolved: to invite the Forge Singers to come in to the office for a chat about the issues with Cllr Baker and the Town Clerk.

11.7.2 **Eden Valley Museum renewal**

Cllr Layland declared a non-pecuniary interest being a Trustee of the Museum.

Members were advised that an issue had become apparent regarding the Museum's constitution: the Trust was in the process becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), so the lease from April would need to be in the name of Eden Valley Museum Trust CIO instead of the individual trustees. Council cannot simply renew the existing lease, as the CIO will be a new legal entity, independent from the individual Trustees.

There were two ways in which to go forward:

Assignment then Renewal: The first option would be to assign the current lease to the CIO once it was created, and then grant the renewal to the CIO on 1 April 2025. This would be the more straightforward option, but depended entirely on how soon the CIO was created. The Trust would also need to deal with the registration of the Assignment at the Land Registry, to ensure that the Leasehold Title was held in the correct ownership.

Or, **Agreement to Surrender, Surrender and Grant of Lease:** The second option would be for the individual Trustees to enter into an Agreement to Surrender the existing lease on 31 March 2025, complete the Surrender on 31 March 2025, and then for the CIO to enter into the Lease from 1 April 2025. This option posed more practical issues, as the solicitor as agents for the Landlord would need to serve a Notice and Statutory Declaration on each of the four Trustees, who would each need to swear a Statutory Declaration before a Solicitor, and return these to Council. This also posed a problem should the CIO not be incorporated in time for the new Lease to be granted. A further complication was that the registered Trustees were no longer Trustees and were either very elderly, infirm or deceased. The solicitor had researched into how to proceed from a Charity Law perspective.

The Solicitor was currently working to advise and resolve these issues, and estimated costs for the work would be in the region of £2,000 to £2,500 plus VAT and disbursements. Members voted, with one Member abstaining from the vote, it was

Resolved: to confirm and ratify the expenditure of £2,500 for the Museum Lease renewal work.

11.8 **To ratify the annual Service Level Agreement grants for HOUSE and the expenditure of £9,000 for payment**

The annual meeting of the Town Council confirmed the Service Level Agreement (SLA) agreements and budgeting for 2024: Eden Valley Museum; and HOUSE. The interim report from HOUSE was due end of September. Members were advised there had been two progress meetings online, updating on the youth activities and other initiatives in Edenbridge. It was reported that HOUSE were able to deliver the SLA for the current year, but had lost funding from elsewhere. Its programme for the year beyond would be reviewed in the New Year. Given the importance of the Council's contribution for youth work in the town. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the SLA and payment for 2024-25 to HOUSE of £9,000.

12 **OTHER BUSINESS including items referred from Committees for decision**

12.1 **To receive the New Edenbridge & Districts Residents' Association (NEDRA) Constitution**

Members received a request from NEDRA to become a recognised body and to make representation on the Local Plan. They had also forwarded a copy of its constitution, and said its "key aims are to listen to and communicate with residents about the issues facing the town, to

challenge the inappropriate and disproportionate developments detailed in the Local 2040 Plan and to support initiatives that continue to provide the services and community people want for Edenbridge. Aims which are not far different from the work and focus the Town Council has. Both parties have the interests of Edenbridge at heart and work hard to achieve the best possible outcomes. For this reason, we would like to establish a productive working relationship with ETC".

Members noted that the Town Clerk had previously provided some advice, including how NEDRA could make representation on the Local Plan, that anyone or any group could respond to SDC on the emerging Plan and to the Inspectorate for the eventual Hearing, and information on how to register with the National Organisation of Residents Associations (NORA-UK).

Members discussed whether it was necessary to formally "recognise" local organisations in order to be able to co-operate/work with them, noting that they already had positive relationships with other groups, as well as partnership arrangements and agreements on specific matters. Members noted NEDRA had already been proactive organising public meetings, getting involved with some community activities and responding to planning matters; and how some of the local residents' views were represented by NEDRA as an independent lobby group. Council did not need to give formal 'recognition' to local organisations in order for it to co-operate and work with them. Members acknowledged NEDRA and its key aims, particularly to representation on planning matters relating to the emerging Local Plan. They also expressed appreciation for the work they had done for the town. Members unanimously,

Resolved: that Council did not need to formally approve/endorse local groups, and agreed to note NEDRA as a voluntary residents' association.

Members also noted some similarities in NEDRA's logo to the Council's own logo and colours, but also noted the 'bridge' is in the name Edenbridge.

12.2 To consider and approve use of the Council's TN8 events licence to:

Members noted the Town Council holds the events licence (this excludes alcohol licencing) for Edenbridge, cost to Council £1,070. Council can permit local groups to use this licence for events, should it be satisfied that there is a community benefit, and that the group takes the appropriate proper measures for organising and mitigating risks.

12.2.1 The Bonfire Society annual event and parade - Saturday 2 November

Cllr Jacques declared a non-pecuniary interest, being a member of the Bonfire Society

Resolved: to confirm Council's TN8 events licence for the Bonfire Society annual event and parade on Saturday 2 November.

12.2.2 Edenbridge Community Christmas Associate (ECCA) - Saturday 30 November

Resolved: to confirm use of the TN8 events licence for the Edenbridge Community Christmas Associate (ECCA) - Saturday 30 November.

12.3 To receive a request from the Rugby Club to consider a suspension of rent increase until 25 March 2027

The Rugby Club had written to the Council to formally request a suspension of rent increase until 25 March 2027. In their letter, they acknowledged a rent increase was mandated under the terms of the Lease, but the Rugby Club believed that these funds could be used elsewhere within the Club to help provide and maintain the Clubhouse as a community service. As illustration it noted the increases since 2022 had been over 19% and without noticeable improvement to the condition of the property.

Councillors noted its costs to provide and maintain the Recreation Ground pitches and the Pavilion, ranging from groundstaff time and materials, to vehicle costs and building insurance. The Council had also recently replaced the Pavilion windows and installing shuttering funded through CIL and had also set aside a CIL award for the Club towards refurbishment and internal improvements. The increase on the rent would be reviewed in November and based on RPI (most recently 3.6% in

July), likely in the region of £170 pa.

On the basis that Council was already supporting the Club, that any rent suspension would set a precedent, and the Club could apply for grants for projects, it was unanimously,

Resolved: not to suspend any rent increases or until 25 March 2027.

12.4 SDC and Town Council annual Liaison Meeting - Thursday 21 November 2024

Members noted the date and time of the annual SDC liaison meeting for councillors, Thursday 21 November 2024. The Local Plan would be an item for the Agenda, and other subjects could be suggested to the Clerk in the coming weeks up to early November.

12.5 To approve the office Christmas working arrangements

Members were advised that each year the office closed for the main Christmas week, with staff using the two statutory days, and the option to use annual leave for other dates or to work. As office staff had quite a few unallocated leave days and time owed, it was proposed this would be a good, usually quiet, time to use some of these. This year Christmas Day would fall on a Wednesday. Closure week would be Monday 23 December, returning Thursday 2 January, office last day open to the public - Thursday 19 December (closes 3.30 pm). On Fridays the office is closed though an officer may be working as their normal day (20 December). Given that this was a long gap, after some discussion it was unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the Christmas closure period Monday 23 December until re-opening Thursday 2 January. It was noted that the recorded phone message, and information on the website, would signpost residents to sources of help via the SDC emergency contacts.

13 Health & Safety Audit: To receive a report and note actions following recent audit by Worknest

Members noted the annual Health and Safety inspection and audit was carried out by Worknest on 16 July. Sites focused on this time included: Doggets Barn offices and meeting room; Church House Museum; Stangrove Park with pond, public gym equipment and children's playground; Blossoms Park; Mowshurst open space; Millennium Wood; Marsh Green open space with children's playground; Forge Green open space, Swan Lane Allotments; Forge Croft Allotments with tenant's building, Market Yard car park with public WC's. At the time of the visit the standard of health and safety management was generally satisfactory. By implementing the recommendations contained within the Action Plan, the standards of health and safety would be enhanced - there were no actions requiring immediate attention.

Items requiring attention were being worked through as referred to in the action plans. All buildings where there was a tap were noted to require legionella checks and clear allocation of management responsibilities. Stangrove Park pond was identified to have improved life saving apparatus (Open Spaces July meeting approved expenditure for new lifebuoys and signage). Members had no questions.

14 To approve the proposed Council and Committees Meeting schedule for 2025

Members confirmed the proposed Council and Committees Meeting schedule for 2025.

15 Consultations

15.1 National Highways and Transport consultation - closing date 25th February 2025

Noted.

15.2 Kent County Council Local Transport Plan consultation - closing date 8 October 2024

Noted.

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

Cllr McArthur had attended a training regarding sexual harassment in the workplace, as had the Clerk. The Council would need to form a policy on this issue.

Cllrs Baker and Layland had attended a Citizens' Advice meeting.

Cllr McGregor had attended a meeting of the Eden Valley Museum Trust.

Cllr Stockdale had attended an EGM of the WI Hall in which funding repairs to the hall floor was an issue.

Cllr Cummings had been asked to attend a meeting at St Paulinus Centre, considering works on the kitchen.

17 To consider any press releases

None.

18 Matters for future agendas

None were identified.

19 Date of next meeting - 28 October 2024

Noted.

The meeting closed at 8.55pm.