

Minutes of the Meeting of Forward Planning held in Rickards Hall on 14 October 2024 at 7:30 pm

Present: Cllrs. Jon Aldridge, Angela Baker, Michael Gemmell Smith, Alan Layland, Margot McArthur, Vince Parker, Angela Read, Michael Stockdale, Stephen Sumner, Bob Todd
In attendance: Town Clerk; RFO/Deputy Clerk.
Meeting opened at 19:30.

1 Appointment of the Chairman/Chair for the Forward Planning Steering Group

1.1 To appoint the Chairman/Chair for the meeting and ensuing year for the Forward Planning Steering Group

Cllr Todd proposed Cllr Aldridge, seconded by Cllr Baker; Members unanimously,

Resolved: to elect Cllr Aldridge as Chairman of the Forward Planning Steering Group (FPSG).

1.2 To consider recommending to Council to amend the Terms of Regulations so that the FPSG appoints a Chairman for the Council term (4-years) for continuity

The FPSG meets usually only annually, it was proposed it may be better to have a Chair appointed for the Council term (this had already been done for the Emergency Planning Committee). Members agreed and,

Resolved: the Chair should be appointed for a Council term (4-years). Committee recommend to full Council to support this and amend the Terms of Reference accordingly, to: The Chairman of the subcommittee is to be elected by the Committee at the first Committee meeting following the first meeting of the newly elected Council, in accordance with Standing Orders, and be in post for four-years (Council term). Should the Chairman resign from post, their replacement will be elected at the next meeting of the Committee and will hold the post for the remainder of that Council term.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received, noted and accepted from Cllrs Compton, Cummings and Streets.

3 Declarations of interests or predetermination

None.

4 To receive the minutes of the Forward Planning Steering Group meeting held on 23 October 2023, 023/01-5

Resolved: the minutes of the Forward Planning Steering Group (FPSG) meeting held on Monday 23 October 2023, be duly signed by the Chairman as a true and accurate record pages 023/1-5.

5 The Strategic Plan and Objectives 2024-27

5.1 To receive the Strategic Plan and Objectives 2024-27 as adopted by Council July 2024

Members noted the Strategic Plan and Objectives 2024-27, adopted by Council July 2024 which was the outcome of last year's Visioning training and subsequent FPSG meeting which had agreed to support developing a Strategic Forward Plan and include a list of projects from the then Forward Plan, and to include more detail including project costs, and categorise into Community Enhancement, Council Operations, and External Influence.

5.2 To confirm additional projects to be included in the Strategic Plan

Members noted the Open Spaces Committee (September 2024) had agreed to investigate costs for pond clearance and cutback of trees. This would be a significant project if Open Spaces Committee considered making recommendation to proceed. Members discussed if it was appropriate to add to the Strategy and Objectives at this stage without the costs and commitment confirmed. However, it

was noted that this should be kept on the agenda as a future project, and if the conclusion was not viable then that was fine but it would have been considered. Members concluded and,

Resolved: to add to the Strategic Plan and Objectives projects as a medium term.

Other projects for a future plan, Council 2027, were noted:

- Cemeteries - new site/solutions for when cemetery 4 is full
- Vehicles - upgrades & eco vehicles
- Buildings - energy eco upgrades

5.3 To receive updates on the projects

Updates on the list of Council projects were received, noting:

- Street Lighting replacement programme: As of Oct 24, 50 of 249, remaining to be replaced under currently programme
- Tourist Information updated walks leaflets with GPS routes and integrated third party Apps: All 10 routes have been walked and mapped; leaflets and artwork next phase
- Council Website – Accessibility & design review: New design, layout and pages established. Content being reviewed and written currently. Estimated launch early 2025
- Neighbourhood Plan: Currently on hold until the emerging Local Plan concluded. Members noted NPPF proposed changes responded to September 2024.
- Market and High Street improvements: Plan for an archway funded by UK Prosperity Fund, to be submitted to planning permission; and costs being finalised.

Members noted the Secondary School site had been secured through an outline planning application at Four Elms Road; this application had been proposed for changes by the developer but still maintained the school. The Town Council had met with Kent County Council (KCC) in May, and would continue to keep this on the agenda to help ensure the realisation of the school.

6 To make recommendation to the Finance Committee any additional increases to the budget and Precept to cover any proposals or projects in the Strategic Plan

Members were asked to consider the timescales and planning for projects, and should funding be allocated in the new budget for 2025-26 to help deliver these projects. This could be for short-term or long-term funding, and budgeting implications for the new budget, and longer term.

Members received a presentation from the Town Clerk looking at the 10-and-30-year maintenance plans including projects which were scheduled for 2025-26. They also received a reminder of Council's closing position 31 March 2024, total assets £953,946: General Reserve £320,058; allocated reserves £477,794; CIL funds 156,094.

Members discussed at length the impact that projects can have on budgets and the Precept, and how planning for projects over a period of time could help to lessen any future impacts and stabilise future budget planning. It was also mentioned that without raising the Precept, Council would be restricted on what it could provide for the community. Members noted that the Council had previously agreed and set its goal to ensure stable General Reserves, noting that closing financial year was £320,058 and ideally this should be closer £350-400k, 6-months (50%) of annual expenditure. Members, noted the 2025-26 projects in the 10-and-30 year maintenance plans did not look to exceed previous budgets, and these would be considered by the Finance Committee in its budget preparations. They also referenced the CIL funds, and that bids should be submitted for infrastructure and maintenance projects, this could help to reduce budgeting pressures. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to create a new allocated reserves for 'strategic projects' to help towards future delivery of projects in the new Strategy and Objectives Plan.

Resolved: to instruct the Finance Committee in its draft budget preparations to consider including £10k for the new 'strategic projects' reserves.

7 Date of next meeting - 29 September 2025

Noted.

Meeting closed 20:37.