

**Minutes of the Meeting of Open Spaces held in Rickards Hall on 4 November 2024 at 7:30 pm**

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Present: Cllrs. Jon Aldridge, Angela Baker (*Chairwoman*), Sarah Compton, Carey Jacques, Alan Layland, Stuart McGregor  
In attendance: Town Clerk, Head Groundsman and Minutes Clerk - no members of the press or public.

**1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received, noted, and accepted from Cllrs Cummings, Gemmell Smith, and Sumner. Cllr Streets was absent.

**2 Declarations of Interests, or Predeterminations**

Cllr Jacques declared an interest as a member of the Bonfire Society, ahead of Item 3.

**3 Public Questions**

19:33 *The Chairman closed the meeting.*

Cllr Jacques on behalf of the Bonfire Society thanked the Head Groundsman for his team's support during the preparations for the fireworks display at the Recreation Ground 02 November. She thanked the Council for its support in organising the Sevenoaks District Council's (SDC) street cleaning team for the post-parade High Street clear-up early on the following Sunday morning. The Town Clerk reported that damage noted after the weekend was a broken window casement on the museum building Church House (now boarded over), and the Head Groundsman reported one of the planters had been trampled, requiring re-planting.

19:34 *The Chairman re-opened the meeting.*

**4 To Receive and Sign Minutes of the Open Spaces Committee 16 September 063/1-7**

**Resolved:** the minutes of the Open Spaces Committee meeting of 16 September to be signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record of the meeting (063/1-7).

**5 To Receive Analysis of Receipts and Payments to 31 October 2024**

Members noted the income and expenditure to 31 October, seven months of the financial year, including:

Income:

Rents: On target plus additional £1996 generated from two children's fair bookings.

Waste Services: this was a new heading to show costs for additional waste bins provided for and paid by the Market fruit & veg stall.

Grass Pitch Grant: Received from Kent FA £5332 new grant for Mowshurst; yet to be received second payment for the Recreation Ground pitches grant £3520.

Expenditure:

Staff costs: salaries under budget due to the Open Spaces vacancy; and the decision to hold off the replacement of a groundstaff employee to April.

Sports Pitch Maintenance (grant): Budget had allowed for football pitch work at Recreation Ground, will now include additional expense for Mowshurst (covered by grant).

Annual Maintenance: included street furniture 4-yearly repaint (£6686); 2-year tree survey (£5090); plus some tree works; repairs to Doggetts Courtyard; and a Churchyard wall repair.

Vehicles: previously noted, the new Kubota (£25k); insurance and fuel re tractor supply (expenditure and budget overspend approved by April Committee).

Public Street Lighting: Looking at current spend (without the winter months) of £11k, or £1572pcm, it was likely this would be over budget. (Members may at some point want/need to consider reducing the hours lit if energy costs continue to soar).

It was noted that as street-lighting was being converted to LEDs using less power, the Council should ensure that the UMS (unmetered supply) certificate for the number and type of street

lights provided to the energy supplier was updated, to reflect the reduction in energy used. Forecast for the Open Spaces year-end would be presented to Finance Committee.

## **5.1 To review annual subscriptions to Open Spaces organisations**

It was noted Committee had considered the below subscriptions last November, and Council confirmed May this year, together with all its subscriptions. Invoices have been received for the current year and processed for 2024-25.

### **5.1.1 Open Spaces Society Membership renewal £45**

**Resolved:** to confirm continued membership of the Open Spaces Society and the annual subscription fee of £45 for 2025-26.

### **5.1.2 Kent County Playing Fields Association £20**

**Resolved:** to confirm continued membership of KCPFA, and approve the annual subscription of £20 for 2025-26 budget.

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

### **6.1 SALTEX Exhibition: To ratify the expenditure for Head Groundsman, and Supervisor attending the exhibition up to £200**

The Head Groundsman and Supervisor, had attended the SALTEX Exhibition at Birmingham NEC on Thursday 31 October (free entry). As this was a full day, overnight accommodation was necessary, cost £102 including breakfast; plus £25 pp evening meal allowance (HMRC approved subsistence). Travel utilised the Council's van so expenditure was just the actual fuel cost (est. £45) and parking (£15). This groundscare industry Exhibition provided several workshops, plus an opportunity to meet suppliers and networking. The Head Groundsman confirmed it had been an interesting and worthwhile day. Members,

**Ratified:** the expenditure of £212 for attendance at the SALTEX exhibition.

## **7 Correspondence**

Members had been circulated with a resident's e-mail regarding a request for metal-detecting on Council sites, and noted that the reply had conveyed the previous decision made at June committee refusing permission; noting the difficulty of preventing metal detecting generally, once any person had permission, and the likelihood of damage to grass surface from accompanying digging for finds.

## **8 Head Groundsman's Report**

Members noted the report, including routine seasonal work:

- Grass cutting - all sites
- Weed & moss treatment
- Maintaining planters through town, including Doggetts Barn, and beds in the Cemetery
- Topping up sunken graves, Rose pruning
- Flail mowing Water Meadows and Town Field
- Pruning of shrubs and bushes
- Pitch marking
- Leaf clearance

The team had recently installed two new lifebuoy rings at the pond in Stangrove Park, and replaced the ring in the Millennium Wood that was lost to vandalism. Winter pitch maintenance programme had begun, which included slitting, brushing, and rolling, drag matting, also some top dressing and mowing. Having met with a member of Edenbridge Cricket Club, regarding the placement of a memorial tree at Blossoms Park (previously supported by committee), it was agreed that the new tree will be placed in the vicinity of the pear tree that had recently been

felled after a recommendation from the independent tree inspection. The team had spent some time clearing out ditches across a number of the Council's sites. The winter plants had now been planted through the town, and in the Courtyard at Doggetts Barn.

A date had been set (15 January) for the grounds team to attend a one day training course on the safe use of a chipper (approved at September committee). Going forward this should permit making some use of the brush from winter tree pruning. The chip produced will be used to suppress weeds across the Council's flower beds, and to create paths etc. across various wet and worn areas on the Council's open spaces. Some more time would be spent this winter replacing/renovating some of the bench bases across the Council's sites. The team had recently aided the Bonfire Society with installation and removal of some fencing for the firework display at the Recreation Ground.

**8.1 Slitter maintenance: To consider and approve expenditure for remedial repairs - £412 plus vat to replace the brush; and £987 plus vat to replace the tines**

Members were advised the slitter attachment for the tractor was in need of some remedial works requiring a replacement brush, cost of £412 plus VAT. Members,

**Resolved:** to approve the expenditure of £412 plus VAT for the replacement brush.

The tines on the slitter at some point would also need replacing, at a cost of £987 plus VAT. It was not urgent, and could be scheduled for some time in 2025, but as there was funding currently available in the equipment budget, it was

**Resolved:** to approve the expenditure of £987 for current budget, rather than delay until 2025-26.

**8.2 Trailer maintenance: To approve expenditure for remedial repairs of £750 plus vat**

Members were advised the trailer used to tow with the Land Rover was in need of some remedial works. The quote for these works was estimated costing £700-£750 plus VAT. As the existing trailer was fine for the foreseeable future, and a replacement cost would be £3,700, it would make sense to maintain existing trailer for now. Members,

**Resolved:** to approve the expenditure of up to £750 plus VAT for the maintenance works to the trailer.

**9 To receive and update on the 2-yearly tree inspection report work**

Members noted the grounds team continued working through recommendations from the 2-yearly report, with larger works contracted out for three trees (previously approved by Committee).

**10 Open Spaces Business**

Members noted the following updates:

**Byelaws:** the accompanying report summarising Council's reasons for the updates to the Byelaws was submitted recently to Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

**Recruitment for the Open Spaces Officer:** the Town Clerk was delighted to report that Daniel Strugnell would be joining the team from 3 December (Council ratified October).

**Risk Assessments (RA):** The Head Groundsman had been working through the RAs and updating. The annual health and safety audit in July was satisfied with the RAs and regular H&S checks. Action points from the audit, such as the lifebuoys (now done), were being worked through.

**Stangrove Park new planting programme** The Head Groundsman, Community Warden (CW) and Town Clerk, met recently to discuss the project. The CW was successful with a grant from the Great Stone Bridge Trust (GSBT) to help fund additional bulb planting and some funding towards planting for this project. It was agreed to plant bulbs along the line of the fencing that runs parallel to Station Road (from traffic lights towards Stangrove Road). The Groundstaff would create some raised planters to be sited either side of the main pedestrian entrance to the

Park (opposite the traffic lights). Bulb planting likely to start mid-November.

**Seesaw replacement Stangrove Park:** installed September, and publicised on Facebook.

#### **10.1 To receive the Burial Report**

Member noted the report:

October: 2 burials; 3 ashes interments

November: 3 ashes; possibly 2 burials

The Planning and Admin Officer had been working through some anomalies on Epitaph system, researching and updating records.

#### **10.2 Cemetery matters - update**

Members were advised that there was one burial from May which had not paid, though there was a funeral plan paid to the funeral directors. The office was chasing this payment, in the meantime the client had been advised that until the invoice was settled, the memorial headstone could not proceed.

It was hoped new signage for the Cemetery (approved Council February and September) would be ordered over the coming weeks. Christmas wreaths and tributes would be removed from the graves mid-January. At that time there would be a full audit of the cemeteries and anything not within the permitted rules would be removed from the graves to maintain the standards of the cemeteries and consistency with the rule book and the memorials going forward. Where there were outstanding issues with a small number of graves not compliant, further letters would be sent to those Grant of Right (GOR) holders, advising no exceptions. There remained two matters likely to require further solicitor's letters to GOR holders re non-compliant memorials.

Members had no questions.

#### **10.3 Allotment matters**

There was nothing to report, other than that the replacement doors to the stores/garage at the Forge Croft allotments (approved Committee July 24) had been fitted on the day of the meeting. The Head Groundsman and the voluntary plot officer were present when the contractors arrived.

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

Members noted the routine annual works carried out:

Pump annual serving for Mill Leat and the Pavilion took place in September (cost £400). Unfortunately, at the Pavilion, the engineer found the sewage chamber at high level, and controls not in Automatic mode. Visual inspection of the pump revealed evidence of a foreign object having gone through the pump, which had dislodged the impeller and possible water inside the pump. Electrical tests showed current running satisfactory, but the pump failed its insulation resistance test, possibly due to water ingress caused by the dislodging of the impeller. Tested controls were all working well, parameters set to correct values. Controls left in Automatic mode. Urgent requirements to replace failed pump was advised, cost £4,797 plus VAT. Council had approved this (October meeting). The pump had been replaced previously September 2023.

Clock Service: Bracket Clock Edenbridge High Street, same as last year £265 plus VAT, booked October.

Playground Inspections: The annual playground inspections for Council sites had taken place at the end of October. The reports had identified several maintenance issues, mostly surface wear and tear and some play equipment parts to replace. The Head Groundsman would work through these.

Gully pots: Annual clean for Market Yard car park (MYCP), and east car park at the Recreation Ground (committee September) was booked for 12 November.

Interceptor tank at MYCP: Booked for early December; budget £898.

The 10-year plan schedule also included Blossoms Park skate park chainlink fencing replacement (budget £5,600); this was unlikely to be considered this financial year, with inspection of existing fencing to be done first. Proposal was to move to Earmarked Reserves (EMR).

#### **10.5 Vandalism report**

Some small graffiti on noticeboards, cleaned by the Community Warden. Nothing else to note other than the post-weekend damage reported at Item 3.

#### **10.6 South & South East In Bloom results and note recommendations**

Members noted and were delighted with the results of the Council's three entries in this year's South and South East in Bloom competition. Cllrs Layland and McArthur attended the awards ceremony at Wisley in September, collecting Gold Award for Stangrove Park in the Parks category; Silver-Gilt for the Cemeteries category; and Silver for the Millennium Wood in the Conservation category. Details were publicised on the website.

#### **10.7 Bulky Waste collections - Saturday 16 November**

Members noted the next collection would be 16 November, at the usual 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).

#### **10.8 Spitals Playground relocation: To receive an update following the recent movement of the playground**

Committee September meeting had received a report advising Members of the disappointment with the relocation installation of the Spitals Cross playground, and that the Town Clerk, Head Groundsman and the Open Spaces Committee Chair and Vice-Chairman were not satisfied with the condition of the installation and Council should not accept responsibility for the playground from SDC until the concerns had been addressed. The Chair reported that SDC had responded to her e-mail regarding the issues about the playground, and they had accepted that the works had not been carried out to standard as required, and corrections were needed to rectify this. The Town Clerk confirmed that she had still not accepted handover of the facility back to the Council. Issues in dispute included: play equipment installed on grass and not wetpour as previously; benches installed on grass and not concrete plinths; location of the benches; the slide ending on a slope and close to a bench; surface at the gate area was grass and should have been wetpour. Members reiterated that they required the playground elements to meet the previous standard and quality of the playground, and further response from SDC was awaited.

#### **10.9 Market activity update**

Members noted Council had received a couple of emails recently asking "what does the Council do for the market?". Council took over from the market operator/licensee in 2021. In 2022 Council recruited a Market Officer to help grow and sustain the market, and it regularly has around 10 traders, with some weeks 15 (traders do come and go for various reasons).

Market activity was usually reported within the Clerk's report to full Council, but as funding was within Open Spaces budget, the committee received an update on budget and activities over the past two years. It included:

- Dedicated website and Facebook and Instagram. All with weekly posts promoting the market and the individual stalls.
- Facebook specific advertising funded.
- Banners (currently on GSBT land by the river, Gabriels Farm Mill Hill, and seeking a location at the north end of town).
- Advertising included several editions of the Edenbridge Magazine (delivered to every

household in Edenbridge and surrounding area six times a year). Council's own newsletter also often featured the market; and other local village parish magazines.

- Membership of National Association of British Market Authorities (NAMBA), using NABMA 'Love Your Market' campaign materials; featured in its magazine looking to attract new traders.
- The Council has invested in activities to attract people to the market, for example, last summer there was a magician and balloon modelling, music, cupcake decorating. At Christmas there was a 'letters to Santa' post box; and Santa and his elves also visited the Market.
- Promotional rates for traders.
- 2024 Christmas includes front cover Edenbridge Magazine, hamper draw, letters to Santa, and "Santa and his elves" will be at the market on 19 December.

The Market Officer and Communications Officer produced a traders' newsletter to inform traders what the Council is doing to help promote the market, and how the traders can also help such as advising of their promotions or specials to be included with Council's social media posts.

Looking forward, the Council was currently investing time in a project that may result in a new market archway to help identify and promote the market. This project would be grant-funded, but there were a few obstacles to overcome before this could hopefully be realised.

Finances (noted 2024-25 income is six months whereas expenditure is seven months):

Market	2023-24 ACTUAL	Budget 2024-25	Actual to date	Forecast YE
<b>Income</b>	£8,485	£9,000	£4,926	£9,300
<b>Market Rates</b>	£898	£898	£523	£898
<b>Other Expenditure</b>	£8,795	£11,816	£5,428	£9,648
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	£9,693	£12,714	£5,951	£10,546
<b>Budget Net total</b>	<b>-£1208</b>	<b>-£3714</b>	<b>-£1025</b>	<b>-£1246</b>

It was noted all of the above did not include the time that the Communications Officer and the office staff put into supporting the market. It was proposed to consider market fees within the annual fees and charges review, as they had remained the same since 2021.

Members had no questions.

#### 10.10 Winter Maintenance plan

Kent Highways had confirmed its offer for one tonne bag of salt/sand mix, which parishes could use on the public footpaths/highway. Acceptance had been confirmed to Kent Highways and delivery awaited.

#### 10.11 Kent FA Grass Pitch Maintenance Grant: To receive an update on works

Recreation Ground: An audit of works was in the process of being confirmed for Kent FA, with the second release of the grant payment due December £3520.

Mowshurst pitches: The first grant payment was received October £5332.

#### 10.12 Unauthorised gates on to Council owned open spaces

Members noted the update, as reported to Council the previous week:

Recreation Ground: There had been one potential new gate reported, which was being investigated. A routine audit would be carried out and any unauthorised gates, residents would receive letters. Currently, there were no matters outstanding on this with the solicitor, and was therefore being referred back to Committee to monitor.

Stangrove Park: During the spring tree survey it was noticed that a resident had created an

unauthorised gated access at the rear of their property and on the boundary with Stangrove Park (Council registered land), gaining access directly on to Stangrove Park. This prompted an audit of gates, which found there was eight others. Letters had now been sent to all. Two had since been blocked off, one had confirmed that they would remove the gate but asked for some time, two are with West Kent Housing (WKH). Two letters of objection had been received. Advice had been taken from the solicitor, and a response (from the Clerk) was being drafted. Members had no questions.

#### 11 **Update on Streetlights 2024-25 replacement programme**

Members were reminded the confirmed replacement programme 2024-25 (budget £45k) now had a total spend of £36,606, reported June meeting. Council has approved to include column 110 MYCP, cost £3,492. UKPN and Streetworks had been working through the programme and should complete by end of November.

#### 12 **To confirm the proposed replacement columns for 2025-26 and to advise the budget for 2025-26**

Following the 2024-25 replacement programme, all concrete columns would have been replaced - with the exception of Cedar Drive (8 columns) and Park Avenue (2 columns), due to works on Stangrove estate these were on hold until the building works on the estate were completed. The next tranche of works was to complete the replacement of the old steel columns 1975-80. There were seven remaining, plus three pole-mounted boxes. It was proposed to aim to complete these in the 2025-26 programme (see below). This would then leave 21 of the steel columns from 1985 for replacement. Conversion to LED remains about 100.

Column No.	Road	UKPN costs £	Streetlights £	Total £
55	Four Elms Road	2574	1450	4024
229	Stangrove Road	3,922	1450	5,372
230	Stangrove Road	1600	1450	3050
231	Stangrove Road	1600	1450	3050
232	Station Approach	1800	1450	3250
233	Station Approach	2000	1450	3450
82	Hilders Lane		700	700
85	Lingfield Road		700	700
87	Lingfield Road		700	700
		13496	10800	24296

Budget for 2025-26 in the 30-year maintenance plan was £25k. Proposed columns for replacement with estimated costs. UKPN quotes last only 90 days. Members unanimously,

**Resolved:** to confirm the proposed streetlight replacements for 2025-26 (subject to actual UKPN quotes) and the expenditure of up to £25k for 30-year maintenance project works.

#### 13 **10-and-30 Maintenance plans proposed projects for 2025-26**

Members received a verbal report on the one-and-10-year maintenance plans, with some update of prices to reflect 2024-25 costs. The 30-year plan had £63k budgeted, but the proposal was to move some of those works back a year or two, thus requiring 30k to allow for the streetlight replacement programme (had budgeted £30k proposing £25k) and £5k playground maintenance contingency. Members had no questions or other proposals.

#### 14 **To consider and confirm budget recommendations for 2025-26**

Members received an initial draft budget for the committee for 2025-26, with the following considerations:

1. April 2024 committee agreed to purchase a new ride-on mower, at £25,100. It was noted that the Open Spaces EMR had already allocated £3572 which was released

towards the cost of the Kubota, and Members had agreed the new budget to recuperate this unbudgeted cost, of £21,528. A four-year plan to recover proposed £5382 per year; or five-year plan of £4305.60 per year.

2. Business rates for some of the open spaces sites were currently included with the utilities (code 3010). The proposal was to separate the costs with new codes. The committee draft budget had assumed the below proposed: (3014) Rates - MYCP rates & other expenditure; (3015) Rates - other (Depot, Mowshurst). It was noted the rates for the public toilets were included under 'public toilets' in Central Services. The Government's new budget had referenced 'rates' but yet to clarify how this could affect the rate charges and budgets. Advice had been sought from SDC and feedback was awaited.
3. Market budget for advertising, training, PPE etc and rates, current year was £4600. Proposed for 2025-26 to include advertising, banners, signs £1200; uniform and PPE £150; subscriptions £500; other costs & training £300; and rates £1,100. Total Market other expenditure of £3250, plus salaries and costs (recommended by Personnel Committee).

**Resolved:** to support a four-year spread in the budget to recoup the vehicle cost, and make recommendation to Finance Committee to allow for £5,382 for the next four years to be included with a new heading a new code for this item (3075).

**Resolved:** to support the additional budget codes, to help provide clarity and transparency with the budget costs.

**Resolved:** to support the Market expenses budget of £3250.

Reserves movements:

Members were advised that at this stage it was difficult to confirm which projects may not be completed in 2024-25 budget year, and to recommend movement at year-end into the EMR to ensure future completion of works, or to release into General Reserves (GR). Any budget overspend/underspend to individual codes was also considered against the overall Net result for Open Spaces before release to GR. The current budget position was:

Interim tree works: £4320; committed so far £2000 (but there was potential further winter work).

Playground inspections: £350; actual expected £475.

Skate park repairs: £6393; spent £1856.

Kent Brook: £2160 (this was an "in case" sum, and to build-up reserve if not used).

Chainlink fencing Blossoms Park: £5600.

Having considered the draft budget recommendations, noting the salaries and staff costs were to be recommended by Personnel Committee, and the Precept income by Finance Committee, Members unanimously,

**Resolved:** to confirm the draft budget recommendations to Finance Committee: income £55,955; expenditure £182,016.

## 15 **News Release**

Noted that the South and South East in Bloom awards had already been publicised.

## 16 **Date of next meeting - 03 February 2025**

Noted.

The meeting closed at 8.10pm.