

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

Present: Cllrs. Jon Aldridge, Angela Baker (*Vice-Chairwoman*), Sarah Compton, Bill Cummings, Michael Gemmell Smith, Carey Jacques, Alan Layland, Vince Parker, Angela Read, Jeff Streets, Stephen Sumner, Bob Todd (*Chairman*)

In attendance: Town Clerk, Open Spaces Officer, Minutes Clerk, four members of the public and no members of the press.

1 To Receive Apologies for Absence

The Chairman opened the meeting and advised those present of the points of procedure for conduct of Public Questions and Statements at Item 3.

Apologies were received noted, and accepted from Cllrs. McArthur, McGregor, and Stockdale.

2 Declaration of Interests or Predetermination

Cllr Layland declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 11.3.2, as a Trustee of the Eden Valley Museum.

3 Public Questions and Statements

19:34 The Chairman closed the meeting.

A member of the Forge Singers highlighted a failure of communications regarding the proposed new lease for the storage hut on Council land adjacent to Doggetts Barn. She felt that the Council's solicitors were not local and did not know the site or the community nature of the group, and stated individual members were not willing to take on the proposed lease. The Council's solicitors had advised that the Singers needed to become a constituted organisation, and should consult a solicitor themselves. The Singers did not have funds to pay a solicitor, and had failed to find anyone who would help *pro bono*. The original agreement was one page, and the proposed lease was too long and complicated. The singers were not refusing to meet with the Council to discuss the issue, and requested the Council not to serve Notice, as there was no other location to store props and costumes for the shows, and to consider a simpler lease. A second member of the group supported the comments and expressed she was furious by the situation, given the group's long history of 70 years in the community.

The Chairman thanked the speakers for their comments, and said he would propose to bring forward Item 11.3.1 on the Agenda for discussion when the meeting was re-opened.

Another member of the public spoke on behalf of the Eden Valley Chamber of Commerce, seeking Council support for the organisation's with is planned event in March 2025 designed to boost footfall in the High Street. The Chamber proposed to organise and promote a "Love Edenbridge" day, building on the existing Loyalty Card project launched 12 years ago. They did not wish to close the High Street, but use adjacent spaces for stalls and activities, alongside the established businesses. They were asking for Council permission to use the Market Yard car park access off the High street, also Doggetts Courtyard, and Rickards Hall, at no charge, for Saturday 22 March.

The Chairman thanked the Chamber, and said the proposal would be an item for discussion on the January Council meeting Agenda.

19:45 The Chairman re-opened the meeting.

4 To receive, adopt and sign the minutes of the Council meeting held on 28 October 2024 (2023-070/1-9)

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Council meeting on 28 October 2024, and that the Chairman should sign them as a true and accurate record; (2023-070/1-9).

5 To receive County and District Councillors Reports

There was no Kent report as the County Councillor was not present.

Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) Councillors Layland and Baker confirmed that debate on proposals from the Boundary Commission to adjust the number of District Councillors from and re-draw some boundaries had not yet concluded, but appeared not to affect Edenbridge representation. The boundary between the two Edenbridge Wards was likely to be adjusted to rebalance the population in each, as the northern end of the town had increased in residents. Cllrs Baker mentioned she (and Cllr McArthur) had attended a SDC Development and Management Committee meeting recently and praised the New Edenbridge and District Residents Association (NEDRA) members who had spoken against the emerging Local Plan proposals for the increase in housing provision in Edenbridge.

6 To adopt the following reports/minutes of meetings

6.1 Planning Committee 11 November 073/1-4; 02 December 077/1-3

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held 11 November 073/1-4; and 02 December 077/1-3.

6.2 Open Spaces Committee 04 November 071/1-8

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Open Spaces Committee meeting held 04 November 071/1-8.

6.3 Personnel Committee 05 November 072/1-3

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Personnel Committee meeting held 05 November 072/1-3.

6.4 Finance & Governance Committee 18 November 074/1-3

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Finance and Governance Committee meeting held 18 November 074/1-3.

6.5 Charities and Grants Committee 25 November 075/1-3

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Charities and Grants Committee meeting held 25 November 075/1-3.

6.6 CIL Board 25 November 076/1-3

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the CIL Board meeting held 25 November 076/1-3.

*The Chairman proposed at this point to bring forward agenda Item 11.3.1 for discussion following the procedural items, as the Forge Singers representatives were present. Members agreed unanimously and **resolved** to bring forwards agenda item 11.3.1 Forge Singers new Lease. Details are minuted subsequently (item 11.3.1).*

19:53: Four Members of the Public left the meeting.

7 To receive recommendations from the following Committees:

The new Open Spaces Officer (Daniel Strugnell) was invited to introduce himself to Members.

7.1 To receive recommendations from Personnel Committee

7.1.1 To support increasing the Communications Officer's pay scale in line with others to SCP level 16 (rising on increments to LC2 23), from 1 December

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the pay increase for the Communications Officer as recommended by the Personnel Committee, to SCP level 16 (rising on increments to LC2 23), from 1 December.

7.1.2 To move two employees to the next pay band: one employee to move up from LC1 (7-12) to LC1 (13-17) band; and the other from LC2 (29-32) to LC3 (33-36). The scale increments would be from 1 April

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm movement of two employees to next pay bands as recommended by the Personnel Committee; one employee to move up from LC1 (7-12) to LC1 (13-17) band; and the other from LC2 (29-32) to LC3 (33-36). The scale increments would be from 1 April.

7.1.3 To move the year-end salaries budget surplus into the earmarked staff reserves

Having received an updated view of the budget for 2024-25 with the NJC pay award (effective 1 April 2024, issued October 2024), Personnel Committee noted that as a result of the lower than budgeted pay award, and the two staff vacancies (one recently filled), the estimated budgeted surplus was likely to be in the region of £26-28K. Committee also noted inflation rates, future unpredicted pay awards, pension contribution rates possible increase, costs of locum officers if needed, and had agreed to recommend to Finance Committee and Council that the staffing earmarked reserves should be strengthened using the staffing surplus from 2024-25 budget. Finance Committee subsequently supported the recommendation. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to support the recommendation to move the staffing surplus of £26-28K from 2024-25 budget to strengthen staffing earmarked reserves.

7.1.4 To support the 2025-26 staffing budget proposals of £516,563.62

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to support the 2025-26 staffing costs budget proposals of £516,563.62.

7.2 To receive recommendations from Finance and Governance Committee

Members noted Budget proposals for 2025-26 would be considered under agenda item 10.

7.2.1 To increase the fees and charges 2025: Rickards Hall hire, allotments, garage, and market fees in line with the RPI rate 2.7% (as published September); and cemeteries, services and staff costs as per the proposed Precept percentage (item 10.3)

The Finance and Governance Committee had received and reviewed the proposed fees and charges for 2025. It was agreed to recommend the RPI rate for September (the October RPI was not known at the time of meeting; previous RPIs had usually used October rate. The October rate was released two days later 20 November, at 3.4%).

Recommendation from Committee:

- Fees to increase by RPI (assumed September rate 2.7%) Rickards Hall hire, allotments, garage, and market fees.
- Fees for services to external organisations, fairground/circus use of open spaces, staff time, and cemeteries, to increase in line with the Precept percentage increase.

Resolved: to confirm the fees and charges recommended increases using the September RPI rate of 2.7% for Rickards Hall hire, allotments, garage, and market fees; for services to external organisations, fairground/circus use of open spaces, staff time, and cemeteries, fees to increase in line with the Precept percentage increase.

7.2.2 To confirm the Lease rents for 2025

Members noted Leases for each Club differed slightly. Actual invoicing changes were effective from 1 April due to the invoicing dates in two equal payments:

- Cricket – annually on review date (1 January) by RPI at the rent review date
- Nomads – two yearly review February (month agreement made) by RPI published in the month preceding the review date – last increase was 2023, so 2025 increase
- Rugby – increase annually by RPI at the rent review date

Resolved: to confirm the rent increases by 2.7% RPI (September rate) and as recommended by Finance Committee.

7.2.3 To confirm the Service Level Agreements for HOUSE £9,000; and Museum £6,500

Resolved: to confirm the ongoing SLAs at £9000 for HOUSE, and £6,500 for Eden Valley Museum for 2025 budget.

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

8.1 Clerk's report

Members noted the content of the Clerk's report, including the staff working and office hours over Christmas, anticipation of marking the Council's 130th anniversary in 2025, plans for additional promotion of the Market, support for a citizen science project proposed by NEDRA to monitor River Eden water quality for pollution issues. Also the recent Planning Committee decision not to support a further outline planning application for increased number of dwellings from 340 to 443 on land south of Four Elms Road. Councillors who are not members of the Planning Committee were encouraged to attend meetings where significant applications were being considered.

8.2 To receive the Internal Auditor's interim report

Members noted receipt of the Internal Auditor's interim report from his attendance in October, which was overall positive. Councillors wished to record their thanks to the Town Clerk and Responsible Officer/Deputy Clerk for their work in preparation, and subsequently, for the audit.

9 Draft Local Plan - update

Members noted at the SDC Liaison meeting it was reported that no final decision had yet been made on sites for inclusion in the final draft of the Local Plan (Reg.19), as there are likely to be additional sites which will need to be considered, particularly in relation to the new concept of 'grey belt'. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation had set out a 58% uplift in the housing target for Sevenoaks District (from 704 to 1113 units per year) and this clearly represents a significant challenge for such a constrained district. SDC hoped to be able to proceed with a further Regulation 18 consultation in 2025, followed by the Reg 19 in 2026.

10 Budget 2025-26

Members had received financial reports as presented to the Finance Committee (18 November). Finance Committee had considered the draft budget proposals for 2025-26, which included recommendations from the Forward Planning Steering Group (FPSG), Personnel, and Open Spaces Committees. Finance Committee considered the current reserves position and view at the end of the financial year, as well as the forecasted year-end position, proposed budget for 2025-26 and impact on the Precept and Band D households.

The conclusion and recommendation from Committee was to continue to precept sufficiently to support a balancing budget, not to draw down on the reserves which had taken several years to strengthen and bring back to a stable level, and to precept for the full deficit of expenditure over the anticipated income.

In addition, it supported the recommendations from committees and the FPSG to set up a new earmarked reserve, and precept to allow funding to help towards enabling some of the projects in the Council's strategic plan and objectives.

The proposed draft budget suggested a Precept of £780,301 would be needed to achieve a balanced budget. However, this only allowed for the budgeted income and expenditure to achieve a balanced budget, and without drawing down on the General Reserves (GR) - an area council has worked hard to restore to a healthier level. Recognising unforeseen building maintenance for the Pavilion, and the need to increase the buildings' Earmarked reserves (EMR) to address other

maintenance needs, as well as the £10k towards strategic projects, Committee asked Council to be mindful of these factors when considering the draft budget and precept.

Members noted the draft budget for 2025-26 would be published on the Council's website following Council's recommendation and resolution on the draft budget. This would be presented to the January Council to confirm the Precept and Band D payment.

10.1 To receive an update on the Council's income and expenditure 2024-25, Earmarked Reserves and General Reserves

The reports as presented to the Finance Committee's November meeting were noted; there were no questions.

10.2 To consider the full draft budget for 2025-26

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the draft budget for 2025-26 as presented for each cost centre; total expenditure £904,252.62 and budget income £123,951.12.

10.3 To consider the Precept for 2025-26

At the time of preparing the budget, the tax base (the number of Band D equivalent properties in a local authority's area used to calculate the precept) was not confirmed by SDC. Therefore, Council could only make its best estimated calculations when considering the Precept, and reflection to the Band D calculation. Members noted the Finance Committee recommendations to Precept for the budget deficit of £780,301.50 plus to allow £10k towards strategic projects as recommended by the FPSG, and noting unplanned building maintenance to the Pavilion the Precept would need to be in the region of at least £804,054. The Finance Committee had considered a 6.75% increase on the Precept (Band D £203.18 or £14.86 per year), but there had been a calculation error, and to achieve the recommended Precept level it should have actually shown 7.9% (the Band D increase was slightly lower at £13.95 per year). Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm recommendations for the Precept increase of 7.9% to achieve £804,054 and to be able to maintain services. With the assumed tax base of 3975.11 (0.46% increase on 2024-25), the Band D Council Tax would be £202.27 or £13.95 increase for the year. Members noted the tax base would be notified in December and confirmed at its January meeting.

10.4 To confirm the recommendation for the Earmarked Reserves for 2025-26

Having considered the budget, Members were asked to confirm earmarked reserve levels for 2025-26, noting these may change with projects not completed in 2024-25, with the spend carried over in to the following year and added to the EMRs. Appendix to minutes copy of spreadsheet summary. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the EMR levels as presented: as of 1/04/24 opening total £953,946 (GR £320,058, EMR £477,794 CIL funds £156,094); closing forecasted for 31/03/25 £997,213 (GR £323,058, EMR £497,693 and CIL funds £175,716).

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

11.1 Pavilion: To receive an update on the current position of heaters and boilers, and to approve the expenditure/revised cost for an independent investigation and report of £2,195

October Council confirmed the expenditure of £800 for an independent heating engineer's report. The surveyor who carried out recent building surveys had recommended a specialist able to provide a condition survey and technical appraisal of the heating and hot water system. In the meantime, they had referred this to another specialist, having viewed photographs and discussions on what the investigations and report would involve, the allocated funding was not sufficient. The investigation would included would involve survey of the existing boiler installation, including ancillary plant at the Pavilion, reporting on the overall condition, standard of installation, suitability of application, plus life expectancy and possible replacement. Members considered the detailed

scope of the investigation and report, and the proposed expenditure of £2,195 plus VAT, and it was unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the expenditure of £2,195 plus VAT for a full investigation and report on the boilers and heaters at the Pavilion, to help ascertain the issues and life expectancy of the current system.

11.2 To receive an update on the project for new Market Archway at Market Yard car park access road

Members were advised that a planning application was submitted in November as the car park is in a Conservations Area, and the wording 'Edenbridge Market' comes under advertising regulations. The application did not met the validation process and required:

- an alternative Site Location Plan
- the Block Plan to be at a scale commonly of 1:500, 1:200 or 1:100
- drawings showing the arch elevations to be drawn to a set scale, with an associated scale bar, so that planning officers can accurately scale the drawings. Scaled drawings for the proposed bollards also required
- a Heritage Statement to provide an assessment of the significance of heritage assets and/or their settings within a Conservation Area which could be affected by the development, and of the impacts of the proposal upon them.

A local architect was engaged to assist, having confirmed with SDC that funding from UK Shared Prosperity Fund (via SDC) could be used to cover these costs. There could be some additional costs if SDC Planning requested a more comprehensive appraisal, and possibly employing a Heritage Consultant for that element.

SDC was keen to release the funding for the project, but the Town Clerk asked to wait until Council knows if the planning application is successful. Meanwhile, the contractor was finalising the costs of the bollards so that the submission to SDC to claim the project funding was ready by end of February.

Members had no questions.

11.2.1 To ratify the expenditure for engaging an architect to complete the necessary map drawings for the planning application (funded from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund); expenditure £743 plus vat

Members noted the additional information SDC Planning had requested:

- New OS map
- A 1:100 scale plan of the existing access from High Street to Market Yard, based on the above OS map, with additional check dimensions to plot the existing street furniture. Elevations of the buildings along both sides of the access for context.
- Providing 1:100 drawn information of the proposed arch, and proposed removeable bollards; this information can be added to a proposal, adding this information to a proposed version of the drawing writing a straightforward heritage statement which will address the main points of the application – but SDC may ask for a more comprehensive appraisal.

Members unanimously,

Ratified: the expenditure of £743 plus VAT for architect support.

11.3 Leases: to receive updates on the progress of:

11.3.1 Forge Singers new lease

The matter to provide the Forge Singers with a proper lease for their hut on Council land, had been ongoing for over a year; Council May 2023 (agenda item 11.7.1) confirmed a formal lease should be provided to protect both parties, and a draft lease was sent December 2023. Council had received ongoing updates, but the group seemed reluctant to engage with the Council's solicitor, officers or Councillors - Council had recommended a meeting be arranged with Cllrs Baker, Layland and the Town Clerk, with Cllr Layland to speak to the Singers representative. The purpose was to discuss

the Lease which would need to be in the name of an individual or group of individuals, or the Singers establish themselves as a registered entity. Failing this the Council would need to serve Notice.

In view of the statement from the Forge Singers under agenda Item 3 (above) and their willingness and availability to meet, it was unanimously,

Resolved: that the Town Clerk would arrange a meeting on a Monday in the New Year between the Forge Singers and members of the Lease Negotiation Group.

11.3.2 Eden Valley Museum Lease renewal

This was due for renewal March 2025. The Lease Negotiation Group and Town Clerk had met to review the Lease drafted by the solicitor. The Clerk had submitted their comments and was awaiting feedback. Once the Lease Negotiation Group had seen the updated draft lease and was satisfied, a copy would be submitted to the Museum.

11.3.3 Rugby Club licence for alterations and deed of variation

Members noted that following last meeting of Council, the Town Clerk had written to instruct the Rugby Club to halt any proposed work, and advised that Council would obtain further clarification on the heating and hot water issues. The Clerk had also advised Council's solicitor.

12 OTHER BUSINESS including items referred from Committees for decision

Members were advised items 12.1-12.3 covered unbudgeted expenditure. Whilst each would need to be funded via the corresponding cost code (buildings), Council held a contingency in the current budget of £10k which as yet, had not been committed in the budget year. Assuming this was not required, the expenditure below should not significantly change the forecasted net difference.

12.1 Church House: to receive a Damp Report and recommendations for initial works and expenditure of £5,885; and then to include in the planned maintenance programme drainage and extraction systems

It recently came to officers' attention that there was a notable damp issue in part of the Museum. Having engaged a damp expert (recommended by the buildings surveyor) to investigate, the summary of recommendations included:

- Application of Watertite to the damp affected internal walls of the Museum.
- Repointing of the external brickwork on the front elevation.
- Application of Storm Dry Masonry Cream on the exterior front elevation.

Quoted costs £5,885 plus VAT.

The recommendation also included future proofing with installation of a proper drainage system along the exterior wall and floor junction. Specialist contractors had been suggested for an accurate quotation. In addition, improving extraction inside should be investigated rather than relying on dehumidifiers. These works could be significant and would require budgeting for. In the meantime, Members were asked to approve expenditure for the initial interim recommendations, it was unanimously,

Resolved: to approve the expenditure of £5,885 for Church House to address the damp issues in the Museum; and to obtain quotes for works to include in the maintenance plans and future budgeting.

12.2 Church House: upgrade to the fire alarm panel and additions expenditure £2,750 plus vat

Council's September meeting approved the expenditure of £325 to fit interface from the fire alarm panel to enable automatic closure of the new fire shutter in Rickards Hall. Members were advised that Besure had attended but were unable to carry out the works as the fire alarm panel in the Museum was too old and would need to be replaced. Part of the fire risk assessments carried out in February 2023 identified that there must be a fire shutter at the kitchen. A new shutter has been installed but is currently only manually operated and relied on hirers to leave it in the down/closed position. Members received a report and quote for installing a new alarm panel. It was unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the upgrade to the fire alarm panel and additional expenditure of £2,750 plus VAT.

12.3 Legionella Surveys for Council owned buildings: To consider and approve the expenditure of £2,520 plus vat for seven sites

At the July Health and Safety audit visit, it was noted that the council did not have legionella reports for its buildings. Water temperature checks were carried on some locations, and we were advised that all locations must have an audit of checks. It was strongly advised to have Legionella assessments for each building: Doggetts Barn, Church House, Rickards Hall, Depot, Forge Croft Allotments, Market Yard Public WC's and mess room, and the Pavilion.

Members received a copy of the assessment proposal, and it was unanimously,

Resolved: to approve the expenditure of £2,520 plus VAT for seven sites.

13 Consultations

13.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England - Sevenoaks District reduce from 54 to 48 councillors - closes 20 January 2025

Members noted that District Councillors for Edenbridge had considered the proposals from the Local Government Boundary Commission to reduce the number of councillors in Sevenoaks District from 54 to 48. This would not affect Edenbridge representation, as both Wards had sufficient population to continue as two-member Wards. There was likely to be a small alteration to the Ward boundaries to re-balance the number of residents in each ward, as the northern ward had increased in population. The District members would share their comments (due 20th January) with Town colleagues.

13.2 A Strategy for the Future of Education in Kent 2025-2030 (Kent County Council) - closing date 11 December 2024

Noted.

13.3 Edenbridge Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (Sevenoaks District Council) - closing date 16 December 2024

Members were encouraged to promote the consultation regarding the Walking and Cycling plan and share the link, through which anyone could comment.

13.4 Enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings (.gov.uk) - closing date 19 December

Members were encouraged to reply as individuals to this Government consultation, as personal circumstances affected the varied responses.

13.5 Proposed Changes to Wellbeing Services in the Community (Kent County Council) - closing date 27 January

Members were encouraged to share information, and the link to respond, for this consultation, through social media and as widely as possible. Kent County Council (KCC) was proposing to cut its funding provided to wellbeing contracts, cutting Wellbeing Services in the Community and Community Navigation which are funded by KCC's Adult Social Care and Health Directorate and delivered by Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations. This would include funding to Involve, who provide a support grants for many VCSEs, including the support the Council receives to facilitate the Games Club on Mondays in Rickards Hall.

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

Cllrs Baker and Layland reported that they had attended the AGM of Edenbridge and Westerham Citizens Advice.

15 To consider any press releases

Members suggested publicity should be given to the current Consultation, and for the decisions taken for the Town Council's 2025-26 Budget.

16 Matters for future agendas

In view of the confidential nature of the Agenda Item 17 to be discussed, the Chairman moved that the press and public be excluded from the Chamber. Public Bodies (admission to meetings) Act 1960 and the Local Government act 1972 s100 and s102. There were no public present.

17 To receive a letter from the Rugby Club: Replacement Heating and Hot Water System and request for reimbursement of its costs

Members had received a copy of a letter from the Rugby Club, regarding replacement heating and hot water system and a request for reimbursement of its costs. A copy had also been sent to Council's solicitor - a response was awaited.

Resolved: to bring the matter back to Council in January.

18 Date of next meeting - 20 January 2025

Noted.

Meeting closed at 21:10