

Minutes of the Meeting of Full Council held in Rickards Hall on 20 January 2025 at 7:30 pm

Present: Cllrs. Jon Aldridge, Angela Baker (*Vice-Chairwoman*), Sarah Compton, Michael Gemmell Smith, Carey Jacques, Alan Layland, Margot McArthur, Stuart McGregor, Michael Stockdale, Jeff Streets, Stephen Sumner, Bob Todd (*Chairman*)

In attendance: Town Clerk, District Cllr J Morgan, and the Minutes Clerk - no members of the press or public

1 To Receive Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received, noted, and accepted from Cllrs Cummings, Parker, and Read.

2 Declaration of Interests or Predetermination

Cllrs Layland and McGregor declared non-pecuniary interest in Item 10.3.2 - Cllr Layland as a Trustee and Cllr McGregor as the council's representative for the Eden Valley Museum.

3 Public Questions and Statements

19:32 *The Chairman closed the meeting, and invited any questions or statements.*

None.

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

4 To receive, adopt and sign the minutes of the Council meeting held on 09 December 2024 (2023-078/1-9)

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of Council meeting on 09 December 2024, and that they be signed by the Chairman as a true and accurate record; (078/1-9).

5 To receive County and District Councillors Reports

5.1 County Councillor

County Cllr McArthur advised that Kent County Council (KCC) had voted to combine with Medway Council to apply to the Government for inclusion in the Devolution Priority Programme, on the basis of the county's particular issues with national borders and transport routes. The Government policy to reorganise local government in England into Mayoral Strategic Authorities had yet to clarify the implications for district and borough councils within counties. KCC had voted to cancel the County elections due in May 2025 if Kent with Medway were accepted for the priority programme.

On a lighter note, she highlighted the competition being run by KMFM radio station to choose a punning name for a further gritting lorry within the County fleet. She announced the five name candidates, and encouraged Members and local residents to vote for their choice on the KMFM website. Already named gritters included Eddie Bl-izzard, Snowbuster, Get a Grit.

5.2 District Councillors

Cllr Morgan reported growing concern among local councils regarding the future demise of district/borough councils, and the control of their assets located within communities - for example, if there emerged a single authority which included the current Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, and Tunbridge Wells authorities. A number of local councils were already engaged in seeking to retrieve assets from Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) ahead of any future changes. He asked if the Town Council could provide a collective view on the issue.

The Chairman advised that this could emerge from later discussion under Item 13 on the Agenda regarding local government reorganisation.

Cllrs Baker and Layland added that the main topic at district had been matters around devolution.

6 To adopt the following reports/minutes of meetings

6.1 Planning Committee 16 December 077/1-3; 13 January 080/1-3

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held on 16 December 2024 077/1-3; and 13 January 2025 080/1-3.

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

7.1 Clerk's report

Members noted the report, referencing the recent Health & Safety audit, council had previously been commended on its operational standards, but due to staff changes and other workloads the recording and record keeping using SafetyNest system needed some updating. The minutes from the SDC Liaison meeting in November had been circulated to members. The Chairman raised concerns with what appeared to be a lack of enforcement on the Seven Acre site following last year's appeal and enforcement notice, and asked the Town Clerk to follow this up, members,

Resolved: to request an update from SDC, and to seek the Police view on the matter from the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner.

Other updates received included Spitals Estate Playground, following a complaint to SDC about the standard of the reinstatement of the playground, SDC had agreed to extend the wetpour surfacing under the children's apparatus that currently had grass beneath it, and the entrance from the west will also have wetpour, as well as relocate one of the benches and other landscaping improvements; the new walks leaflets project continued and was with the designer; and a grant application had been submitted to Your Station Your Community Fund for new planters and flower displays at both stations.

7.2 Community Warden

Members noted the Community Warden's detailed report of his work in the past six months. They wished to record their appreciation of the quantity and wide range of activities Kevin McGovern had carried out, contributing to the well-being of the community in many ways. Summary of activities included:

- Seven volunteer litter picks around the town
- Four bulb planting sessions including planting bulbs along the fence line at Stangrove Park (about 2500 bulbs) and Millennium Wood. The Great Stone Bridge Trust (GSBT) provided a grant to fund the spring bulbs; this funded approx.4000 bulbs
- Portable Speed Indicator Device (SID) had been out eight times in the town; and Speedwatch had done five speed sessions
- Graffiti, vandalism and fly-tipping included four cases of graffiti; sixteen cases of fly tipping which was dealt with by SDC; nine cases of vandalism
- Ongoing developing relationships and working with local police, attending events and we had two cases of knives and ball bearings being handed in to the office which were then handed into to the police
- Two cases of abandoned vehicles
- Remembrance Sunday service and parade – submitted the road closure, ordering and setting out the street signs for road closures leading up to Remembrance Sunday and attended the event
- Working with officers from West Kent Housing and Moat

8 Draft Local Plan - update

There were no current updates to report.

9 To approve the Budget and Precept 2025-26

Since the December Council meeting which it had previously considered a draft budget, SDC had

confirmed the tax base for 2025-26 at 3998.66 (1.05% increase on 2024-25, which had been 3957.01). This was reflected in the draft budget statement published on the Town Council's website 20 December.

Members were asked to confirm the budget for 2025-26, at total expenditure £904,252.62 and budget income £123,951.12, and therefore, the Precept recommendation of £804,054 to ensure sufficient funds to balance the expenditure to maintain services, and allow a surplus towards building maintenance costs in the knowledge that some of its buildings required maintenance repairs, and continue with its aim to maintain financial stability with its reserves. Members voted 11 in favour with Cllr McGregor abstaining, and thus,

Resolved: to confirm the budget for 2025-26: total expenditure £904,252.62 and budget income £123,951, thus Precept needed £804,054.

Given the confirmed Council Tax base figure of 3998.66, Members voted to confirm the Band D tax level for 2025-26, 11 voted in favour with Cllr McGregor abstaining, and

Resolved: to confirm 2025-26 Band D tax level of £201,08, an increase of £12.76 per year, or £1.06p per month (Band D figure in 2024-25 was £188.32).

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

10.1 Pavilion: To receive an update on the current position of heaters and boilers

Members were advised of the latest update regarding issues raised by the Rugby Club re the heating and boilers at the Pavilion, ongoing since May. In December, members had supported an independent professional survey of the heating system, which took place on 14 January. The awaited report would set out what should have been taking place, statutory servicing and documentation, and provide proposals and recommendations. As soon as the report was received, it would be forwarded to the council's Lease Negotiation Group to consider along with the solicitor's advice. A meeting with the Rugby Club would then follow. Council's solicitor had replied earlier on the meeting day, on the matter of the club's and council responsibilities under the Lease for the heating and maintaining the service media for the premises - that the club was responsible for "a fair proportion" of repairs and maintenance costs; a fair proportion" was yet to be advised on. Members had no questions or further comments.

During the replacement of the damaged sewage waste pump in December, the engineer carrying out the work reported that the extended cabling had heavily corroded and disintegrated, with no earth present. The Town Clerk with the Vice-Chairman had approved expenditure of £592 plus VAT for new switch and cabling, and trenching costs of £1,620. Members were advised the works were awaited, and they had no questions. Members,

Ratified: the expenditure of £592 for new switch and cabling, and trenching costs of £1,620 to enable the replacement cabling and switch for the sewage pump.

10.1.1 To confirm gas boiler inspection and assessment of repair works

The independent boiler and heating engineer on 14 January noted that one of the gas boilers was not working. It was recommended that a full GasSafe inspection be carried out to ascertain the repairs and costs. The costs for the recommended GasSafe engineer was £1,200. This would then form part of the final engineer's report. Members,

Resolved: to confirm to proceed with the GasSafe boiler engineer inspection, at a cost of £1,200 plus VAT.

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

Members were advised that the planning application for the archway 24/03000/FUL was validated 16 December and was awaiting decision. The second aspect of the application was the wording 'Edenbridge Market' as this needed to meet the advertising regulations and there was a further application 24/03001/ADV; decision was expected by 04 March.

The architect had made some slight changes to the original archway drawing, and the additional

bollards reduced to two (from four) but different locations. The ironmonger had been asked to check his quote but was not expected to be significantly different and still within the project grant funding being sought through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (via SDC). Any surplus grant would be considered for market branded gazebos. It was hoped to be able to claim the funding by end of February. It was noted an application towards gazebos had also been submitted to the County Councillor for a grant from her Member's funds. There were no questions.

10.3 Leases: to receive updates on the progress of:-

10.3.1 Forge Singers new lease

Following Council December meeting, a meeting had taken place with Cllr Baker, Town Clerk and three members from the Forge Theatre Group (FTG; formally referred to Forge Singers). Some progress had been made, and it was clear there had been misunderstanding how the Lease would operate for a group where individual member roles could change. It was agreed that some of the language in the Lease was hard to follow, and some points needed clarification. These would be re-drafted and the Lease re-presented to the FTG for comments. Members were content for the process to continue with re-draft.

10.3.2 Eden Valley Museum Lease renewal

The Lease was due for renewal March 2025. The Lease Negotiation Group and the Town Clerk had met to review the Lease drafted by the solicitor. The Group's comments had been submitted to the solicitor and feedback awaited, which had been chased. Once the Lease Negotiation Group had seen the updated draft lease and were satisfied, a copy would be submitted to the Museum. There were not many changes, and it was proposed to send the first draft to the Museum meanwhile for their views.

Members had no questions.

10.3.3 Rugby Club licence for alterations and deed of variation

The Rugby Club had been instructed to halt any proposed work that they may have intended. Update on the current situation with the heaters etc. was provided earlier under agenda item 10.1.

10.4 Food Bank: to receive an update on the Food Bank, to confirm Council's ongoing support to the Food Bank and the arrangements to run out of Rickards Hall on Tuesday mornings

Cllr Jacques declared a non-pecuniary interest as she was a Food Bank volunteer.

In January 2021, council agreed to allow Food Bank use of Rickards Hall on Tuesday mornings free of charge; this was to be reviewed annually and each year (so far) Council had confirmed its arrangements.

An update from the Food Bank was provided for councillors, noting that a number of local referral agencies provided vouchers to clients, and there were regularly representatives from financial advice/money management agencies present to give direct support to clients - anyone arriving without a voucher will be helped but also connected to an agency to receive on-going support, to move on from their difficult situation. A significant number had been helped, and no longer needed food bank type of support. The number of clients was lower over the year, but a notable increase occurred in December, and was continuing into January, so no festive season lull. An average of 13 households a week had been provided with food over the past 12 months, with a number of new-to-help clients seen each month. Reports about former clients illustrated how the food bank attendance had set off positive changes in their lives. Food donations had remained plentiful, the project was well-supported financially, and there was a full team of dedicated volunteers, with reserves, so it had a sound basis to continue the work. Member unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm continued support and the current arrangements with the Food Bank, and free use of Rickards Hall on Tuesday mornings.

10.5 **Church House: to receive update on proposed damp works interventions; and the replacement fire alarm panel**

Council (December) approved the expenditure of £5,885 for works to address the damp issues in the Museum. Before the works could be commissioned, the Town Clerk had looked at the English Heritage guidance for Grade II* listed buildings maintenance repairs. This indicated that where the fabric of the original materials may change a Certificate of Lawfulness may be required. An request for planning advice had been submitted (a fee has had to be paid for this of £73.25).

The instruction to replace the fire alarm panel in the Museum was issued to Besure in December following council meeting. Once this had been installed, they should be able to link up the fire shutter in the Rickards Hall kitchen.

Members had no questions.

11 **Events**

11.1 **VE Day 80 - Thursday 8 May**

Following the success of the D-Day 80 commemorations last year, the Royal British Legion (RBL) was working with the Government and stakeholders to develop national plans for VE Day 80. Local councils and others within their community were encouraged to take part in this 'shared moment of celebration' on Thursday 8th May with the lighting of Beacons and Lamp Lights of Peace at 9.30pm, the raising of a unique VE Day flag at 9.00am and, where possible, holding parties of celebration throughout the day in the streets, gardens at home, churches, villages, town halls, pubs, clubs, hotels and all manner of locations throughout 2025. (Thursday 8th May was not a Bank Holiday day.)

Members were advised that the council office had registered on the official site, confirming the Beacon lighting. The office could replicate the D-Day 80 event, but there are factors of light and weather to consider. Stangrove Park was usually still quite wet early May, daylight hours are 05.30-20:30, and the weather (rain) is unpredictable at this stage. A smaller scale Beacon lighting to mark the occasion could still take place, also other activities, but council would need to consider hiring some proper outdoor event lights (with generator power). Other suggestions included themed Thursday market, decorated with flags and bunting, extend the market day in to the afternoon/early evening and invite the Town Band to perform; flag-raising at 9.00am; church bell-ringers could ring out the bells again at 6.30pm. The past couple of years the Council had hosted an afternoon tea for the older members of the community; 2023 was funded through a grant to support re-integration in to the community following the pandemic, and 2024 was part of the D-Day 80 commemorations, and another could be hosted for VE Day 80.

Members were reminded that the Council's events budget for 2025 was £5k, and it was

Resolved: to form a working group to work with council officers; members appointed were Cllrs Baker, Compton, Gemmell Smith, Layland and Todd to prepare a programme and report back to council.

Cllr Compton since requested to not be on the events working group, but would help if required.

11.2 **Celebrating 130 years of Edenbridge Town Council**

Members received a draft paper setting out suggestions for a programme of celebrating 130 years of the Town Council throughout 2025. In 1995 a centenary brochure was produced as a celebration of the Town Council and Edenbridge. Some of those achievements could be reviewed, also those of the past 30-years, as well as a look to the future as the first quarter of the 21st century was completed.

A possible programme had been prepared by the communications officer, with some help and suggestions from the council office. Many of the proposals could link into existing events and activities, and together it could raise the council's profile and increase engagement with the community. Members,

Resolved: to proceed with developing a programme of events, the council logo being adapted for the year to reflect the anniversary.

11.3 Chairman's Reception

Council used to support an annual reception, but since the pandemic this has been a biennial. However, with the 130 years anniversary the reception could be part of the programme of events to celebrate. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to support a Chairman's Reception for 2025.

11.4 Edenbridge Gardens in Bloom competition

Following the pandemic, council organised a gardening competition, which has now been supported for the past four years specifically for the residents of Edenbridge. This event is overseen by the Open Spaces Committee, but for information:

Edenbridge Gardens In Bloom competition has about six categories ranging from best allotment, garden, youth/school groups, young gardener, window boxes & hanging baskets - and last year the strangest/unique space to create a colourful display was introduced. A presentation event is organised for the entrants to attend, this year's awards would be presented on Wednesday 03 September 2025. Members commented that it might be possible to incorporate the 130 years anniversary into the displays.

12 OTHER BUSINESS including items referred from Committees for decision**12.1 Games Club: future of the Club following Involve Kent and KCC funding cuts**

Councillors were advised that members of the Monday morning games club were very upset to learn that grant funding from Involve Kent (a charity funding community-led initiatives supporting wellbeing projects) was being withdrawn, and they feared for the future of the club. The grant funded the use of Rickards Hall specifically for the club without losing potential income; covered some costs towards the Community Warden's time; and provided refreshments, games and other activities.

Involve Kent's funding was provided by several sources including KCC who provided them with over £1million. As part of KCC's proposed changes to wellbeing services in the community, and its funding cuts across the county, which would impact also on many other wellbeing services across the districts and councils, Involve Kent were no longer able to provide a grant towards the running costs of the Games Club, which now regularly had 10-15 people attending weekly (some weeks more). The club enabled a group of residents who were lonely, low in confidence, all impacted by the pandemic, and some with mental health issues, to have a safe place to come. Many had developed new friendships and support, improved their mental health and grown in confidence and wellbeing. The club had also won an SDC award in 2023 in the older persons' group category. Members had been forwarded emails from residents who had raised their worries, expressing how valued this club was to its members and families.

Members considered a request to allow the club to continue on Mondays at Rickards Hall, the Community Warden to support the club, to provide some refreshments (members were already paying a small contribution towards other refreshments) and ongoing promotion of the club. Without a grant to fund the Hall, there could be a potential hall hire income loss, but officers were looking at other grant opportunities, and should a booking enquiry come forward for one Monday, maybe games club could not run that week or run in the afternoon for example; or if a repeat booking came forward, then this could be re-considered at the time accordingly. Members voted 11 in favour with one abstention, and

Resolved: to continue supporting the Games Club operating in Rickards Hall, provided it did not become too much of a burden, and to be reviewed if the booking situation required.

12.2 Love Edenbridge Day 22 March 2025: Request from Chamber of Commerce to Council for support and to provide free use of Rickards Hall and courtyard

Cllr Layland declared a non-pecuniary interest, being a member of the Chamber of Commerce.

At the December meeting, Eden Valley Chamber of Commerce (EVCC) sought council support for

its event on 22 March 2025 "Love Edenbridge" day. The idea was to promote the local businesses in the High Street and build on the existing loyalty card project launched 12 years ago. There was no plan to close the High Street, but use adjacent spaces for stalls and activities, alongside the established businesses. EVCC wanted to use all of the open spaces in the town to encourage small craft/business and gift stallholders, as well as local organisations, to set up stalls for the day.

EVCC was asking for Council permission to use the Market Yard car park access off the High Street, Doggetts Courtyard, and Rickards Hall at no charge, on Saturday 22 March. Members,

Resolved: to support the event with free hire of Rickards Hall and the courtyard, and use of the access road leading to Market Yard car park.

It was agreed to consider a councillors table at the March council.

12.3 To consider Council CIL bids to submit to the February CIL Board

12.3.1 Pavilion gutters and pipes repaint

Following the installation of the new windows and shutters at the Pavilion in July, it highlighted the condition of the paintwork on the gutters and downpipes and that they would benefit with a repaint, also to match-in with the new pine green shutters. A specification to clean, rubdown and repaint the red gutters and pipe work to match the new shutters had been sent to four contractors. While two quotes were still awaited, it was expected the total cost would be in the region of £4-5k. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to support submission of a bid to the February CIL Board to cover the Pavilion gutters and pipes repainting work as infrastructure maintenance, costing in the region of £4-5k.

12.3.2 Pavilion boilers and heating maintenance

Subsequent to Item 10 earlier, covering the Pavilion boilers and heating maintenance, members unanimously,

Resolved: to submit an application to the February CIL Board for funding for the work as infrastructure maintenance.

12.3.3 Rickards Hall floor repairs

Members noted some repair works were required to Rickards Hall flooring, quotes were yet to be considered, but unanimously,

Resolved: to submit an application to the February CIL board for the Rickards Hall floor repair works as infrastructure maintenance.

13 Devolution and local government reorganisation

Kent and Medway councils had been considering devolution and local government reorganisation since the Government published its White Paper on 16 December, and on 11 January KCC voted to join the Government's Devolution Priority Programme and, at the same time, commit both to local government reorganisation in Kent and Medway. They had also requested the cancellation of the county council election in May. Should Government accept the request to join the Devolution Priority Programme, it would commit Kent and Medway to elections for a Mayoral Strategic Authority in May 2026, and the implementation of local government reorganisation – most likely from April 2028 at the earliest.

Members were advised it was too early to know exactly how this would effect district level, or to gauge the impact that this could have on town and parish councils. It would mean a reorganisation of the current 12 district councils in Kent, and how this will look for Sevenoaks was not yet known (but mean a larger region, for example the west region merging with Tonbridge, Malling and Tunbridge Wells).

Concern amongst town councils over the future of district and county council assets in the towns would be raised with two meetings that the Town Clerk was attending over the coming weeks, and

would be reported back. Other matters to watch included possible changes to Council Tax, and other services that may be expected to be picked up at local parish and town level. This issue would remain an agenda item with updates reported. Following some discussion, members,

Resolved: to request details of SDC assets in Edenbridge and meanwhile to form a Working Group. Cllrs Aldridge, Baker, Compton, Layland, McArthur and Stockdale were appointed, and to look at the future and possibilities of transferring land from SDC to the Town Council as a result of devolution and the cessation of the district council in the future.

14 Annual Town Meeting - Monday 31 March - to agree the agenda, invited speakers and set a date to review the content

20:57 Cllr Morgan left the meeting.

Members considered and confirmed a first draft agenda for the Annual Town Meeting which followed a similar format to last year, and noted requests from local groups. The Town Clerk was asked to liaise with the speakers.

15 Consultations

15.1 Kent County Council Proposed changes to wellbeing services in the community - closing date 27 January 2025

Noted.

15.2 Sevenoaks District Council Big Waste Conversation - closing date 3 February

Noted.

Members commented on the cardboard waste containers removed from Waitrose car park, noting these had been removed on health and safety grounds, and were unlikely to be replaced.

15.3 Strengthening The Standards and Conduct Framework For Local Authorities in England - closing date 26 February 2025.

Noted.

15.4 Transport for the South East: Draft Transport Strategy Consultation - closing date 07 March 2025

Noted.

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

Cllrs Baker and Layland had attended a Citizens Advice (CAB) meeting. Town Council members were saddened to hear of the unexpected death of the CEO Sian Hiller in December; they noted that she had been a fantastic ambassador for the CAB and was a wonderful person having given a lot of time to the organisation and residents of Edenbridge.

17 To consider any press releases

None specified.

18 Matters for future agendas

As noted above.

19 Date of next meeting - 03 March 2025

Noted.

The meeting ended at 21:07