

Minutes of the Meeting of Open Spaces held in Rickards Hall on 3 February 2025 at 7:30 pm

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

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

1 Apologies for Absence

None, all members in attendance.

2 Declarations of Interests, or Predeterminations

None.

3 Public Questions

Chair closed the meeting 19:35

None.

Meeting opened 19:35

4 To receive and sign minutes of the Open Spaces Committee 04 November 071/01-8

Resolved: the minutes of the Open Spaces Committee meeting of 04 November to be signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record of the meeting (071/1-8).

5 To receive analysis of receipts and payments to 31 January 2025

Members noted the income and expenditure to 31 January 2025, including:

Income: On target, though cemetery fees were expected to be down slightly; rents benefitted from two additional children's fair bookings; and Grass Pitch Grants had two grants from Kent FA including a new grant of £5332 for Mowshurst.

Expenditure:

- Staff costs under budget due to the open spaces vacancy; and the decision to hold off the replacement of a ground staff employee to April.
- Small projects showed no expenditure, the new cemetery signage and planting at Stangrove Park would be allocated here.
- 10-year and annual maintenance includes street furniture 4-yearly repaint (£6686); 2-year tree survey (£5090); plus some tree works (£2k); repairs to Doggetts courtyard; and Churchyard wall repair (£465). Total expenditure between the two codes is £24,529 plus £1995 for the hedge cutting (February). Committee had also approved £2350 for the replacement doors to the stores at the allotments; this work had been done but not finished; invoice would be paid when work completed.
- 30-year maintenance plan had £45k streetlight replacement and £5k playground repairs (replacement seesaw).
- OS Vehicles included insurance and fuel re tractor supply, and previously noted the unbudgeted new Kubota (£25k).
- Public Street Lighting was expected to be slightly over the £20k budgeted.

5.1 End of year update on scheduled works

Members noted the update on scheduled works, which included the below: 2-yearly tree inspection report and some other identified tree works, £2000 of tree works had been carried out (budget had allowed £4320); the pumps at the Mill Leat and Pavilion were serviced; 4-yearly street furniture repaint in the High Street completed (this was over budget £6686 budget £4958); amenity weed spray to the open spaces was completed; and the other

routine maintenance.

Included in the budget was Blossoms Park skate park chainlink fencing replacing (£5,600); Kent Brook stabilisation allowance to be allocated in the event of works needed under riparian ownership (£2160); and similarly for cemetery memorials and walls (£1300). These funds had not yet been needed and were recommend to allocated to earmarked reserves (item 5.2).

Members had no questions.

5.1.1 To approve the budgeted expenditure of £1600 to replace two new waste bins at the Recreation Ground outside the Pavilion

Members were advised that this year's one and 10-year projects had included £1600 to replace two waste bins outside the Pavilion. Both of these bins were tired with damaged lids. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to approve the expenditure of £1600 to replace two waste bins at the Recreation Ground outside the Pavilion.

5.2 To confirm movement of funds to earmarked reserves for carry over projects

Members noted budgets: 1&10-year maintenance budget (£19,244) and annual inspections (£14,835) total £34,079. The planned works were mostly completed (excluding hedges, stores doors at allotments and bin purchases). Forecast surplus £3604. Proposed to move to earmarked reserves, members unanimously,

Resolved: to approve the movement of £3600 into open spaces earmarked reserves, and can be increased if end of year is higher than forecast.

6 To Ratify Operational Decisions for Open Spaces Activity

Repairs to the Landrover following recent service; MOT, full service, shock absorbers, rear brake pads, front break pads, and labour. Totalling £760.04. Members,

Ratified: the expenditure of £760.40.

7 Correspondence

7.1 Residents correspondence re litter in town and lack of bins at north end of town

Members noted email and phone correspondence from residents regarding the amount of litter and dog fouling in town, especially the north end of town. Members discussed the issue and recognised that there was a problem. Unfortunately, when this was raised previously it had not been viable for a bin to be sited on private landed offered by a resident as Sevenoaks District Council would not empty the bin. Several solutions were considered, including improved signage and possible areas to install new waste bins, but the council did not own land in the north end of town other than the Swan Lane allotments. The allotments were for the use of plot holders and did not have a right of way through them, and nor were they to be used for dog walkers - an issue the plot holders have tried to manage. Members asked for the boundary of the site to be considered and to see if there was a possible suitable location for a bin and to investigate if SDC would empty or would it be for the groundstaff team. Members,

Resolved: to bring to the April agenda to reconsider viability for a bin outside the Swan Lane allotments and to investigate costs associate to providing the bin and emptying.

8 Head Groundsman's Report

Members noted the report, including routine seasonal work:

- Weed & moss treatment
- Maintaining planters throughout the town, including Doggetts Barn, and beds in cemetery
- Topping up sunken graves

- Winter pitch maintenance
- Pruning of shrubs and bushes
- Pitch marking
- Leaf clearance
- Tree work

The team had attended a day's training course on the safe use of a wood chipper and groundstaff received an accreditation for their efforts. The machine was used to clear large amounts of tree brush that was stockpiled from storm damaged trees in Stangrove park and the Millenium Wood. The chip would be used across the councils sites for various tasks. The winter pitch maintenance programme continued with the aeration of the playing surfaces when weather allowed. Sand and soil top dressing mix was applied to worn areas on the councils football pitches at the Rec and Nomads. The top dressing was purchased as part of the FA Kent grant. Two new sleeper planters have now been installed at Stangrove Park and would be planted with assistance from the community warden and some volunteers. Groundstaff also assisted with the bulb planting along the railings. The winter tree report had been completed with any issues either address by the tree surgeon or team, or been reported to the Open Spaces Officer. All smaller machinery had been serviced, with the larger machinery being sent away to be serviced externally.

Fuel Store: The July Health and Safety (H&S) audit raised concerns with the fuel store advising this should be serviced annually. The store was at least 20 years old, but was fine and there were no visible issues. The annual serving cost would be in the region of £700 upwards, or a new tank £1600. A second quote had been requested and an enquiry made to find out if a servicing a new tank would be less cost and/or frequency - to be reported to the next committee.

Members praised the wood chipping work the groundstaff had recently undertaken and noted the qualifications they had received following woodchipper training.

8.1 To receive an update on moving from white diesel to a more greener sustainable fuel, Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO)

Members had resolved to switch from white diesel to HVO as a greener sustainable fuel at the September open spaces meeting, subject to checking this would not affect the servicing, nor the warranty for the new Kubota. It had since been confirmed that servicing and warranties would not be effected. The switch would be made once the current supply of white diesel has been used up.

Members had no questions.

8.2 Memorial tree for 130 years of Edenbridge Town Council: to approve the expenditure of up to £450

Members noted that as part of proposals to mark 130 years of Edenbridge Town Council, a commemorative tree was suggested at recent council meeting. A local expert had recommended three options: two different varieties of Liquidambar which had been planted successfully in the past across the council's sites; or a Redwood which would be in keeping with the variety of evergreen trees on council sites. Prices for the above range from £300-£450 as they varied in size. Members:

Resolved: to approve the expenditure of up to £450 for a Liquidambar memorial tree to mark 130 years of Edenbridge Town Council. Location yet to be confirmed.

9 FA Kent PitchPower Grant update

Members noted that pitch de-compaction works were completed on five pitches at the Recreation Ground and two pitches at Mowshurst in late May 2024 at a cost of £2880. The first year audit and expenditure of £3520 had been confirmed to FA Kent, with the second year funding released and received.

9.1 To confirm the expenditure of up to £2500 for additional pitch decompaction as recommended in the FA Kent report

A further two pitches at the Recreation Ground and two at Mowshurst were planned for spring 2025, pricing to be confirmed. This would be funded through the PitchPower grant funding. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to approve the expenditure of up to £2500 for additional decompaction work.

10 Open Spaces Business

Members noted the following updates including:

Allotment Renewals: Currently in the process of sending renewals for the Swan Lane Allotments, whilst the Forge Croft renewals are being handled by EAGA.

Edenbridge Gardens In Bloom competition: 2025's competition would continue with the 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. It was proposed to have a category to mark 130 years of the council as well as a 'peoples choice' category to engage with the public more. Further details would be presented to the April meeting. The presentation event would be Wednesday 03 September 2025.

Market: January is always a quieter month with some traders taking this month off after the Christmas period, and of course challenges with weather. This said 30 January had 11 stalls, including three new stalls, which was a big positive. The balance sheet costs against income had approximately £1k deficit. With three months salaries and rents to be added, this was estimated to be £4k deficit. Market fees were on the annual fess and charges review, with first increase applied in January. A policy for gazebos and adverse weather had been drafted and presented to governance committee.

Summer Play Scheme: Awaiting details from Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) and would be reported at the April meeting.

10.1 Cemetery signage: Update

Members noted that cemetery signage outlining the rules and regulations had been ordered and delivered (approved by members in September). A purpose designed frame and posts is being quoted for and ordered. In addition, new 'dogs and lead' and 'bag it and bin it' signage were ready to be displayed on A5 and A4 signs.

Members had no questions.

10.2 To receive the Burial Report

Members noted the following burial report:

November: 1 burial; 3 ashes interments.

December: 0 burials; 0 ashes interments.

January: 1 burial; 1 ashes interment.

10.3 Playground annual inspection reports

Members received and noted the summary report for the annual playground inspections carried out 30 October. Most comments were of low and very low risk items highlighted which needed to be monitored with some actions. There had been one high Risk at the Recreation Ground which the groundstaff had rectified.

Members had no questions.

10.4 Spitals Playground relocation: To receive an update following the recent movement of the playground

Members noted that following a report to committee in November, and subsequent

communications to SDC assets team expressing the council's disappointment with the standard of the playground reinstatement, works had been carried out to rectify this. This included wetpour in the area by the children's apparatus (previously left with grass underneath it). In addition the entrance to the park from the west with wetpour. The relocation of one of the benches with wetpour; and one with a concrete plinth. In addition, SDC had suggested that the remaining strip of grass between the new wetpour and the fence be lined with bushes instead of grass. Committee and the Head Groundsman were asked to consider and provide feedback as to leave grassed or hedging. The town clerk, head groundsman, open spaces officer and chair of open spaces had visited the site before confirming handover back to the council and whilst noted efforts had been made to rectify the issues, and it was better, they were still not satisfied. In particular, the resiting of one of the benches was peculiarly position leaving a small patch of grass area, levelling not finished near the entrance gate and bench, and the slide still ended on a slope. Members unanimously,

Resolved: a response to SDC should set out committee's concerns and request these be addressed. In the meantime, council to engage its own independent playground inspection.

10.5 Hanging Baskets: To approve the expenditure of £6029.10 plus VAT, for the 2025 hanging baskets for the High Street and Doggetts Barn

Members were advised Amethyst had provided its annual quote to supply and maintain the summer High Street hanging baskets display, for 58 baskets. It was over budget (£6k); 2025-26 expenditure. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to approve the expenditure of £6029.10 and the overspend of £29.10 for hanging baskets.

10.6 South and South East in Bloom 2025: How many categories would members like to enter this year

Members were reminded that last year council had entered three categories in the South and South East in Bloom (SSEIB) competition, achieving the Silver Award for Small Conservation Area (Millennium Wood), Silver Gilt for Small Cemeteries, and Gold for the Parks category (Stangrove Park). These categories were included in the budget for 2025-26. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm to enter the three sites once again in to the SSEIB competition, with a total expenditure for all three of £230 (£95 for Small Cemetery, £60 for Small Conservation, and £75 for Park)

Members were presented with other categories that were open for entry, Town Centre (up to 1km radius from a self-determined point) - £165 and Town of the year - £175. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm to enter the two additional categories, Town Centre, and Town of the year with a total expenditure of £340.

Members discussed the positive benefits of awards and suggested a press release for the town to encourage other businesses to consider their own additional floral displays.

10.7 Bulky Waste collection schedule 2025/26, to approve expenditure of £2546.20 for five collection dates

Members noted that SDC had confirmed five dates for Bulky Waste collections for 2025/26, increasing from the usual four. The total cost for five collection dates is £2546.20. There has been an increase per collection point of £5.85; the budget overspend for the five dates would be £46.20. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to approve the expenditure of £2546.20 and the budget overspend of £46.20 for five bulky waste collections.

The five dates: Saturdays 3 May 2025, 19 July 2025, 20 September 2025, 22 November 2025, and 14 March 2026. Locations would remain the usual: Church Street, Skeynes Road, Stangrove Estate, and Spitals Cross Estate.

10.8 Vandalism Report

Members noted the vandalism report including trees at Millennium Wood cut down and used to start a fire and a memorial tree cut down in the Water Meadows owned by Great Stone Bridge Trust (GSBT).

11 Streetlights maintenance replacement programme

11.1 2024-25 programme: update

Members noted the budget for 24-25 £45k. Programme update: Approved replacement total £42,528 plus MYCP 110 £3393, total £45,921. However, UK Power Networks have refunded some of the traffic management costs, new total costs £43,250. This left a surplus of £1750 which could allow for five LED replacements.

Streetlights 126, and pole boxes 85 and 87 were yet to be completed otherwise the other columns are all complete.

One member asked about the unmetered energy supply agreement, in which council gets billed on the power consumed in a period based on the information council provides. The last update to include the new conversion to LED was in 2023, but an update should have been sent after last year's LED upgrades. Members requested an update at the next committee meeting in April 2025.

11.1.1 Streetlights LED Replacements: To use the surplus of £1750 from the streetlight replacement budget for five LED replacements.

Members noted that since the papers were prepared the cost for LED has increased from £350 to £365, total £1825.

Resolved: to confirm to use the surplus from the 30-year streetlight maintenance replacement budget to fund five LED replacements; expenditure £1825.

11.2 2025-26 programme: update

Members noted that the committee's November meeting confirmed 2025-26 budget of £25k and the next columns for column replacements (old steel ones 1975-80). Proposed replacements based on UKPN quotes (valid for 90 days so could change) and estimate form Streetlights £24,296. Works would be instructed from April 2025 with committee kept updated.

Members had no questions.

12 News Release

Members suggested news releases for the following:

- Extra bulky waste collection date.
- South and South East in Bloom 2025

13 Date of next meeting - 14 April 2025

Members noted the date of the next meeting.

Meeting closed 20:21