

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

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

In attendance: Town Clerk; County Councillor R Mayall; District Councillor J Morgan; and one member of the public. There were no representatives from the press.

19:30 The meeting opened.

1 To receive Apologies for Absence

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

2 Declaration of Interests or Predetermination

Cllrs Baker, Layland and Stockdale declared a non-pecuniary interest in items 10.1 and 11.2.1 as Trustees of Eden Valley Museum; and Cllr McGregor as Council's representative. Cllr Jacques declared an interest in the item from the Food Bank as a volunteer (item under public questions). Due to what could be perceived as a potential conflict of interest, previous advice from the Town Clerk is to withdraw from voting.

3 Public Questions and Statements

19:32 *The Chair closed the meeting.*

Representation was made on behalf of the Food Bank. The Council already accommodates its main food storage shed (agreed by Council January 2021, with planning approved June 2021), which the Food Bank is most grateful for as well as the weekly use of Rickards Hall. However, its other storage, which is in a container housed at St Laurence's Church, has become no longer viable and they are now looking for a suitable location for a smaller second shed to be used as an overflow of donated items which happens at times such as Easter, Harvest, and Christmas. Ideally this would be sited next to the larger shed (behind Doggetts Barn), would be a temporary structure of approximately 4 metres by 3 metres, and 2 metres high. They also request if permission would be given to extend a cable from the existing shed to allow for lighting (if not they would look into other lighting options). The Food Bank would pay all costs. Request: permission to erect a temporary small garden shed in the space next to the current foodbank storage shed.

The Chair apologised for this being missed off the agenda, and because of this, members were unable to formally consider and approve. However, members did discuss and asked some questions. It was noted that the rear of Doggetts is in a conservation area, but the shed would be a small temporary shed and met the permitted development permissions in height, under 2.5 metres. It was not thought that planning permission would be needed. Members agreed they would be happy to support in principle, but would be formally considered at the September meeting. In the meantime, the Town Clerk would confirm if a connection for lighting was viable.

19:40 *The Chair reopened the meeting. Member of the public left the meeting.*

4 To receive, adopt and sign the minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 12 May 2025 (pages 2023-094/1-19).

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Council meeting held on 12 May, and that they be signed by the Chairman as a true and accurate record, 094/1-19.

5 To receive County and District Councillors Reports

5.1 County Councillor

Cllr Robert Mayall provided an update on the new Kent County Council (KCC) committees membership noting with 57 new councillors this had taken a little longer for the new Council to confirm. He mentioned that he had received correspondence from several residents regarding

highways concerns and was working through these, and also had a meeting scheduled with the Highways Community Engagement Officer for the area. Main areas raised included crossings for Station Road and Four Elms Road; and traffic speeds particularly for Mill Hill. The Town Clerk said that these were already on the Highways Improvement Plan (HIP), and would arrange for a meeting for the three of them (Community Engagement Officer, Cllr Mayall and Town Clerk).

5.2 District Councillors

Cllr Baker confirmed she had been appointed to the following committees: Development and Infrastructure Advisory Committee, Health Liaison Board, Improvement and Innovation Advisory Committee (Vice-Chair), People and Places Advisory Committee. Cllr Layland confirmed he was on Audit Committee, Development Management Committee, Scrutiny Committee, Standards Committee. Cllr McArthur is appointed to Cleaner and Greener Advisory Committee (Vice Chair and Portfolio Holder), Community Infrastructure Levy Spending Board, and Housing and Health Advisory Committee (Portfolio Holder).

Cllr Morgan, sits on Finance and Investment Committee, and Improvement and Innovation Advisory Committee. He mentioned the new Solar Farm, Hilders Lane, which has had to submit further detail to Planning regarding surface water management. He said that Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) was proceeding with its updates to the Local Plan and upcoming Reg 18 consultation which would be going before Council. There had also been considerable work reviewing its assets and establishing procedures for parish and town councils to consider taking on local assets.

19:48 Cllr Mayall left the meeting.

6 To adopt the following reports/minutes of meetings

6.1 To receive and adopt the minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held 19 May (pages 2023 095/1-3) and 09 June (2023-097/1-8); and Planning and Transport Committee (2023-099/1-2)

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of Planning Committee meetings held 19 May 095/1-3 and 09 June 097/1-8; and Planning and Transport Committee 099/1-2.

6.2 To receive and adopt the minutes of the Open Spaces Meeting held on 2 June 2025 (pages 2023-096/1-11).

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of Open Spaces Committee meeting held on 02 June 2025 096/1-11.

6.3 To receive and adopt the minutes of the Personnel Meeting held on 13 June 2025 (pages 2023-098/1-4).

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of Personnel Committee meeting held 13 June 098/1-4.

7 To receive recommendations from Committees

7.1 Personnel Committee Recommendations

7.1.1 Subject to the return date of the Community Warden, to advertise for a temporary person on a 6-month fixed contract 11 hours per week.

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the recommendation to advertise for a temporary person on a 6-month fixed contract 11 hours per week, subject to the return date of the Community Warden and for the Town Clerk to oversee if to proceed.

7.1.2 To confirm the estimated expenditure of £600 for an occupational health assessment for Community Warden for a return to work.

Resolved: the expenditure of £600 for an occupational health assessment for Community Warden for a return to work.

7.1.3 To ratify the pay scale increment for the Open Spaces Officer from 17 to 18 in recognition of the ILCA qualification.

Ratified: the pay scale increment for the Open Spaces Officer from 17 to 18 in recognition of the ILCA qualification.

7.1.4 To ratify the additional hours (to date 27) for the Tourism Officer to help cover in staff absence; and flexibility to cover as needed over the coming months staff shortage.

Ratified: the additional hours (to date 27) for the Tourism Officer to help cover in staff absence; and flexibility to cover as needed over the coming months staff shortage.

7.1.5 To confirm a request for a six-week sabbatical period of leave for one of the grounds personnel.

Resolved: to support and confirm the request for a six-week sabbatical period of leave for one of the grounds personnel (October to December).

7.1.6 To confirm Ian McPherson permanent contract and align the scales for a skilled grounds person starting at SCP level 7.

Resolved: to confirm Ian McPherson be given a permanent contract and align the scales for a skilled grounds person starting at SCP level 7.

7.1.7 Kent Pension Fund - Pooling of Town & Parish Council - Formal Consultation - Deadline: 4 August. Members are asked to consider Council's response regarding pooling of funds for town and parish councils.

Members noted the information provided by Kent Pensions on its proposals for pooling of town and parish councils pension funds. In preparation for the 31 March 2025 triennial valuation results, the Kent Pension Fund (the Fund) was formally consulting with town and parish councils currently participating in the Fund, and other interested parties (e.g. borough, district and city councils), on proposals to form a Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) funding pool (the Pool) specifically for town and parish councils as at 31 March 2025, with a possible universal LGPS pooled employer contribution rate for all involved, operative from 1 April 2026.

Members agreed with the Personnel Committee that they did not understand it sufficiently to comment and that the concerns were whether the changes would safeguard the pensions for those employees in Local Government Pension Schemes. The Town Clerk was asked to respond to the Kent Pension consultation, following feedback from KALC.

8 To receive reports and recommendations from the Town Clerk and Officers; Working Groups; and Delegated Reports

8.1 Clerk's Report

Members received the Town Clerk's report. Of note,

Church House damp works interventions: The Buildings Manager and Town Clerk were monitoring. Once quotes for the works were received these would be presented to Council.

Legionella reports: Seven of the Council's buildings had had legionella risk assessment surveys carried out in March. The full set of reports had now been received but were yet to be reviewed and the recommendations.

Rickards Hall redec and repairs work: Following March Council confirming contractor to carry out the work, the appointment had been made with works booked to take place from 04 August, expected to take two weeks.

SDC CIL Bids: Two bids had been submitted: (1) Bandstand at Stangrove Park; (2) Pavilion heating and hot water system replacement. The former did not pass validation, but was selected for consideration under SDC's 15% allocation fund – additional information had been submitted and awaiting feedback. The latter bid for the Pavilion passed validation and was successful at the CIL Board meeting on 02 July – this needed to be ratified by Cabinet on 15 July.

8.2 Community Warden

Members noted the Community Warden (CW) was on long-term leave (since March) so the office and groundstaff had been covering some of the work such as reporting fly-tipping, graffiti, liaising with the police and agencies, and volunteers. One of the volunteer litter pickers had volunteered to run the litter picks, there were two in June and a couple more scheduled for July. The Groundstaff had started to rotate the portable Speed Indicator Device (SID) between the five approved locations. It was hoped that Speedwatch would start up soon - Cllr Stockdale had offered to work with officers to co-ordinate sessions and upload data. The new speed device was expected in August. The application to the Great Stone Bridge Trust was up for renewal with an application to be submitted.

9 Draft Local Plan - update

Members received feedback following last month's meeting with SDC officers, attended by Cllrs Aldridge, Baker, Layland, McArthur, Stockdale, Town Clerk and Planning and Admin Officer, to discuss the emerging Local Plan and site allocations and Infrastructure Development Plan (IDP).

The meeting focused on Edenbridge's Local Plan and the IDP, noting the new local plan program resulting from changes in government policy and the amended National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in December. This had quite a few fundamental changes. For Sevenoaks District this meant, a new housing target which had increased by 63% - increasing to 17,235 units over 15 years (was 16,000). Represented annual this was 703 to 1149 dwellings. New concepts with Green Belt introducing grey belt, and other elements such as a different approach to transport, and focus on health and well-being.

Concerns were raised about the impact on local infrastructure, including pedestrian crossings and leisure centre provision. The need for updated evidence bases, such as green belt assessments, and the importance of securing funding for infrastructure projects were emphasised.

April 2025 SDC held a further call for sites; it was quite specific asking for brownfield, urban or potential grey belt which was defined as being in a sustainable location. These were in the process of being assessed.

An updated timetable was submitted to government in the spring, and the key milestone dates were now:

- Reg 18(C) consultation this autumn. Already been Reg 18 twice before, but none of those previous options met the new targets.
- Reg 19, summer 2026.
- Submission for examination end of 2026 to meet the December 2026 deadline.

After this, the planning system changes will come into effect and SDC wanted to ensure a Plan within this current planning system.

Housing allocation and Local Plan priorities discussion included the importance of meeting housing targets and the challenges of finding suitable sites, with a focus on grey belt and non-AONB sites. Concerns about the housing allocation numbers from the previous Reg 18 and the impact on Edenbridge was raised, including defending some sites. New housing numbers for Edenbridge was not yet determined, but it was noted previous Reg 18 was over 1,600.

Pedham Place had an allocation of 2,500 but this is set in the National Landscapes which government are keen to protect, but is likely to have to be included in the Plan to meet the numbers.

It was noted the importance of sequential development, with larger towns like Sevenoaks and Swanley expected to take a larger share of the housing need. However, it was emphasised at the meeting, that this did not necessarily reflect the percentage increase on an area, Edenbridge was looking at close to 50% increase. There is something in the NPPF that says if there was a lower housing requirement, the district would need to demonstrate that it really cannot meet the numbers and that these then need to be accommodated in neighbouring area, but those neighbours also say there is not the capacity.

There were constructive conversations including discussion for infrastructure needs for the town.

10 Service Level Agreements (SLA) payments for 2025-26: to confirm release of funds

It was noted Council currently had two ongoing SLA agreements which have been budgeted. Both SLAs do need updated Agreement terms prepared for future which will be looked at later this year, and presented to Finance and Governance Committee. The Museum had requested Council confirms its commitment and review dates, which came up during the Lease negotiations.

10.1 Eden Valley Museum £6,500

Members unanimously,

Resolved: the payment of the annual SLA payment of £6,500.

10.2 HOUSE £9,000

Members unanimously,

Resolved: the payment of the annual SLA payment of £9,000, subject to new progress report received and clarification of services for the current year. It was proposed that councillors Baker and Todd, (Youth reps), be satisfied with the report.

11 Matters arising from the minutes for report and not elsewhere on the agenda**11.1 Insurance****11.1.1 To confirm Council arrangements for insurance cover in respect of all insurable risks and the annual expenditure (2025-26) of £16,217.27.**

May Council meeting approved an estimated expenditure of up to £18,217.27. As the three-year agreement with Gallaghers (broker) and Hiscox (insurer) ended this year, efforts to obtain three new quotes were made.

Gallaghers had been able to secure a similar fee arrangement, based on a Long Term Agreement Option (three-years) with Hiscox Insurance Company Limited, at an LTA premium of £16,217.27 - saving on the above resolution of £2,616.73.

Hiscox's agrees not to increase the annual insurance premium, except for the following reasons:

- When there are changes to the material facts concerning your policy.
- Policy changes where the sums insured for assets covered against loss or damage are increased or decreased.
- The annual inflationary increase (index linking) applied to the sums insured for the assets covered against loss or damage. *The above fee will increase each year accordingly.
- The imposition by the Government of a higher rate of Insurance Premium Tax (IPT).

Members unanimously,

Resolved: its insurance cover for Council liabilities, assets cover and including buildings, and the expenditure of £16,217.27.

11.1.2 To confirm a new three-year agreement with Gallaghers (broker) and Hiscox (insurer) insurance.

Members unanimously,

Resolved: a new three-year agreement with Gallaghers and Hiscox Insurance Company for its Council insurance needs including buildings cover.

11.2 Leases: to receive updates on the progress of:-**11.2.1 Eden Valley Museum Lease renewal.**

Members noted that the preparations and drawing up a new Lease for the Museum had been a long drawn out process. Since the last Council meeting (May) representatives from the Lease

Negotiating Group and the Town Clerk had met with representatives from the Eden Valley Museum to discuss the new Lease and finalise outstanding queries. The outcome of the meeting and changes were submitted to the Council's solicitor for inclusion in the updated final draft together with new layout drawings for Church House, clearly defining the areas included within the Lease.

The Museum had requested, if possible, for the Lease to be completed and signed by 13th June, to meet its deadline for Arts Council accreditation. This was achieved.

Post-Signing Matters Raised by the Museum's Solicitor

The Museum was responsible for registering the new Lease with the Land Registry. They had engaged a commercial property solicitor after the lease negotiations, who since raised three key issues:

1. Old Lease Cancellation

- The previous Lease, which expired on 31st March 2025, named trustees who are now deceased.
- The Eden Valley Museum Trust, the named tenant in that Lease, was dissolved on 31st March 2025.
- To tidy up the legal position, an application must be made to the Land Registry to cancel the registration of the old Lease against both the leasehold and the landlord's freehold title.

Action Required: As landlord, the Town Council must initiate this cancellation process. The Council's solicitor had been instructed accordingly and advised the Museum that there was a £20 Land Registry fee for this process.

Decision point: The Council was asked to consider whether the additional legal fees associated with cancelling the old Lease should be paid by the Council or passed to the Museum.

2. Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) Return

- In order to register the new Lease, the Museum (through their solicitor) was required to submit an SDLT return to HMRC.
- Although no SDLT is payable on the passing rent, submission of the return is a legal requirement where there is any transaction for value.
- The Land Registry will not register the new Lease without confirmation that this has been completed.

Current Status: It was understood that this return has been submitted by the Museum.

Note: Responsibility for registering the new Lease rests with the Museum.

3. Charity Provisions in the Lease

- The Museum's solicitor had advised that the new Lease does not contain specific "charity provisions" normally required to satisfy the Charity Commission's requirements for charities holding an interest in land.
- In particular, they reference the need for a statement under Land Registration Rules 2003, Rule 179, recently modified to include:

"The land transferred will as a result of this transfer be held by a charity and the restrictions imposed by sections 117 - 121 of the Charities Act 2011 will apply to the land (subject to section 117(3) of the Act)."

The Town Clerk had sought clarification from the Council's solicitor as this wording implies a transfer of land, which is not the case - the Museum is a tenant, not being granted ownership of the land or building.

Council's Solicitor's Response: While the term "transfer" was used in error, the grant of a Lease is classed as a "disposal" of land, similar to how taking out a mortgage is considered a disposal. There are various standard clauses applicable when a charity takes property, depending on the charity's constitution. However, as the Council's solicitor does not act for the Museum, they are not in a position to advise on the Museum's internal governance or confirm which charity-specific clauses are appropriate.

Additional Legal Work: To accommodate the requested charity provisions, a Deed of Variation to

the Lease would be required, incurring further legal fees.

Summary of Current Position

- New Lease signed and master copy sent to Council's solicitor.
- Instruction given to Council's solicitor to cancel the old Lease with the Land Registry. Museum notified of the £20 Land Registry fee for cancellation.
- Town Council's legal fees for the new Lease to date: £4,415.
- Deed of Variation could be prepared to include charity provisions if required.

Council was asked to consider:

1. Who should bear the legal costs of cancelling the old Lease?
2. Whether to proceed with a Deed of Variation to incorporate the charity provisions, and accept any further legal costs?

Members discussed. Noting its support for the Museum and the importance for the town to have such a facility, it was agreed and,

Resolved: to proceed with ensuring the Lease meets the needs of the Museum's charity provision but ensuring the Council's asset remained firmly in the Council's name, and

1. That the Council would cover the legal costs of cancelling the old Lease; and to express that any future legal costs in relation to Lease amendments initiated by the Museum would be their responsibility.
2. To support the Deed of Variation to incorporate the charity provisions subject to a request to the new clause 52 'this does not entitle the tenant to claim any ownership over the freehold or the building in any capacity'.

An update was to be reported to the Planning Committee August meeting, with delegated authority to confirm the details for clause 52.

11.2.2 Forge Musical Theatre Group new lease.

It was noted the edited lease had been sent to the Forge Musical Theatre Group in May and were still trying to confirm a date to meet and discuss the draft Lease again.

11.3 Pavilion update on works:

20:26 Cllr Morgan left the meeting.

11.3.1 New replacement heating and hot water boilers.

Members noted, Intrinsic (appointed contractor to oversee the preparation of the tender specification, tender process, and implementation) had attended last month to undertake its survey. Once the specification had been prepared, tender timescales would be confirmed - likely early September - and advertising of this including on the .gov Contract Finder site.

Members were delighted that SDC CIL Board meeting on 2 July, had approved Council's application of £110k towards the Pavilion upgrade including the replacement heating and hot water boilers.

11.3.2 Water tanks and legionella controls.

Council had previously approved expenditure for sample testing of the five water tanks at the Pavilion for legionella. Following this, the attending engineer reported that the tanks were significantly stagnated. The quotation to clean and disinfect the tanks was £1,439 plus VAT.

The engineer has also recommended that the Council consider commissioning a site survey to assess the feasibility of converting the Pavilion's water supply to a direct mains feed. This would eliminate the risk of stagnation and remove the need for legionella testing of the tanks in future.

Given the scope of the upcoming heating and boiler survey, it was considered both timely and practical to explore the conversion to mains water alongside that work. An initial estimate for this additional survey was in the region of £1,500, which was presented to the Open Spaces Committee in June. Committee approved the expenditure to coincide the two surveys.

However, in the meantime Intrinsic had provided a quotation of £4,325 for a more comprehensive feasibility study and option appraisal. This would cover both the conversion to mains water and a review of the existing domestic cold-water storage and distribution system.

It was understood that a mains feed already supplies the water tanks, but the water mains pipe would need to be wider to be able to replace the tanks and a report would look at if this was possible and if it would be able to do away with the tanks and still supply adequately the Pavilion's 40 showers operating simultaneously. It is thought the current mains is not able to do this hence the water tanks.

Members noted the above, and concluded,

Resolved: the need to explore the potential to move to mains feed water sufficient to operate the showers, with a view to do away with the water tanks, and expenditure of £4,325 plus VAT to Intrinsic to carryout a feasibility study and option appraisal. Funding was to come from Buildings Reserves.

Resolved: the expenditure of £1,439 plus VAT for the cleaning and disinfecting of the water tanks, but to hold off until the feasibility study was completed to ascertain the viability to move to mains water and potential removal of the water tanks.

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

The Blacksmith had started the construction of the new archway - it was hoped to be installed early autumn. The gazebos were yet to be purchased.

11.5 Events updates

11.5.1 Chairman's Reception

Members noted the preparations for the Chairman's Reception. This year's theme was celebrating the work of local organisations, the power of partnerships, and the Council's 130th anniversary.

11.5.2 VJ Day 15 August - Flag raising

Preparations to commemorate VJ Day on 15 August - end of World War II in Asia, marks the day on which Japan surrendered to the Allied forces on 15 August 1945 - with a similar flag raising event to the VE 80 commemorations. Cllr Aldridge, would give a reading and a representative from the Town Band would be playing the bugle - Last Post and Reveille, and the RBL would be there with its Standard. A two minute silence to remember those who fought bravely and made sacrifices for freedom, those who were lost loved ones and those who survived. Members of the public were invited to join the flag ceremony event.

11.5.3 Edenbridge Gardens In Bloom - presentation Wednesday 3 September

It was noted the Edenbridge Gardens In Bloom presentation was planned for Wednesday 3 September.

11.6 Walks leaflets wallet - to consider the expenditure for bespoke wallets or DL envelopes to hold up to 10 walks funded through CIL Tourism and Walks award - budget for 500 wallets £1,250 or 1,000 DL envelopes £510

The 10 new walks leaflets were proving very popular. Work to update the three trails and incorporate the new banding had started.

When we first looked at revamping the walks leaflets, it was decided to maintain the individual leaflets providing the option of just have one or two or several leaflets, which are also suitable to take out on the walk. It was discussed at the time if they should be presented in a branded wallet similar to that for the Darrent Valley walks leaflets. Now that the leaflets are in use, residents are varying their walks and taking several leaflets. Quotes have been obtained for:

- Wallets/walk holders based on 200 holders - between £350-£450, plus an additional £150 to make the dye. Potentially, each holders could cost £3, though less for more printed

(£2.50 approx. for 500).

- DL envelope (bespoke artwork) - £509.20 per 1,000 (50p each). Artwork would need a 4-5 mm white boarder round the edge; cost would be more for artwork running off the edge.

The benefit to be able to provide an option to keep the walks leaflets together and be able to issue them in neat packs, kept together, is more professional, and useful to those who collect and use several of the leaflets.

Members were asked to confirm if they supported this and which option wallets or DL envelopes. There was much discussion which finally went to vote and concluded by majority,

Resolved: the expenditure of £509.20 plus VAT for 1,000 bespoke DL envelopes to fit 10 walks leaflets.

12 OTHER BUSINESS including items referred from Committees for decision

12.1 To ratify the expenditure for AI web-based apps

12.1.1 ChatGPT - business annual membership three users £452.45

Members noted the advances with AI technology and its applications across business. The office had used ChatGPT - a standalone application - recently to help provide some useful summaries of reports and transcript of the Annual Town Meeting. During this learning process it became apparent that there were various limitations without the business model. ChatGPT Business enhances the Open Platform by providing organisations with secure, enterprise-grade AI tools that integrate seamlessly into their workflows. It offers advanced conversational AI with robust data privacy, administrative controls, and the ability to customise AI behaviour to suit business needs. Microsoft Copilot is designed for integration within the Microsoft 365 and Sharepoint, this was not the preferred AI option.

Benefits of using an AI platform:

- Improved productivity.
- Maintaining control over data - ChatGPT promotes data protected and privacy controls.
- It is web-base app, and is not integrated in Microsoft Sharepoint so council files are not shared on it unless we choose to upload them.
- Enables colleagues to work on same document thus able to share ideas with work helping to develop new ideas and improved processes.

We are all learning with AI, but importantly Council needs to ensure it follows processes and procedures to ensure safe use and that these are reflected in policies.

It was noted that the actual subscription for three users on business licences was £668.60. Members unanimously,

Ratified: the expenditure for a ChatGPT three-user business annual licence, £668.60 plus VAT.

12.1.2 Otter annual subscription £375

Members noted ChatGPT did not provide audio transcripts. Otter was also a web-base app providing a solution for recording, transcribing, and summarising meetings and conversations. It saves time, improves accuracy, and ensures important information is captured and easily accessible; it also links to online meetings and webinars automating note-taking and producing real-time transcripts. The office had already found this useful. Whilst it was not always quite accurate, it provided a good starting point saving officers time. Recordings are deleted once no-longer needed.

Ratified: the annual subscription for five users of £375 plus VAT.

12.2 To receive amendments and adopt the updated Digital IT Cyber Security Policy and Strategy to reflect use of AI

With the growing use of AI technologies (like ChatGPT, Otter, and emerging planning application tools) Council needed to include formal recognition in both policy and strategy to address privacy,

GDPR compliance, ethical use, and cybersecurity risks. 12.1.1 and 12.1.2 included amendments to recently adopted Digital IT and Cyber Security policy and strategy to incorporate AI governance, data protection, and security assurance into the current documents.

12.2.1 Digital IT and Cyber Security Policy

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to approve the amendments to the Digital IT and Cyber Security Policy to reflect the use of AI.

12.2.2 Digital IT and Cyber Security Strategy

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to approve the amendments to the Digital IT and Cyber Security Strategy to reflect the use of AI.

12.3 To receive and adopt the new Code of Conduct

Parish and towns often follow the district council's code of conduct policy. The Town Council currently used a previous SDC code of conduct dated 2016 (read adopted annually). Having contacted the Monitoring Officer at SDC, he confirmed this year the Council adopted the Local Government Association's (LGA) Code in full. The Town Clerk had reviewed the LGA model code which was much clearer on councillor conduct and provides clarity for of declarations of interests and representation at meetings. This had been adapted for the Town Council and Members were asked to to adopt the new Code of Conduct. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm and adopt the new Code of Conduct reflecting the LGA model code.

12.4 To consider piloting an AI planning platform - Gpeto - initial monthly expenditure £25 (restricted to officer users; additional costs for all councillors)

The Town Clerk mentioned a planning aid which was being promoted by a company called Gpeto. The planning aid/app was designed to help parish clerks and councillors deal with planning applications more easily. It would allow users to upload application documents into the platform, which then checked the documents against a large number of criteria for issues and errors. For example:

- See exactly where any application sits within your parish.
- Instantly overlay key layers like conservation zones, flood risk, listed buildings, Green Belt (60 Data layers).
- AI Validation: Automatically checks if the application meets validation rules.
- AI Assessment: Flag policy conflicts (national, local, and your own Neighbourhood Plan). Answering 'Does it match against the LDP, NFFP, NP policy etc'.
- Drawings and Reports: Labels and Identifies drawings clearly. Creates clear, planning-based PDF outputs in just a click.

When dealing with several planning applications each week, Gpeto aims to save time for parish clerks and councillors hours each week, giving them additional clarity and a stronger voice in the planning process.

Cllr Aldridge, the Planning and Admin Officer and Town Clerk had attended a demo, which highlighted the useful mapping tool. It had the potential to collate the planning documents and reference local areas planning policies and concerns. It would also be an excellent planning training tool getting to understand nuances of planning.

The AI platform had already been successfully piloted with several parishes. However, as a larger council, they are keen to expand the selected trials to aid development - we have already identified a couple of possible changes which they would consider. The offer is at a discounted rate of £25pcm (£300 annually). If after a few months use, we would like to move to a yearly subscription for budget purposes it was recommend discussing it between 3-6 months, to negotiate and confirm the annual fee.

Initially, the pilot would be officer use (though we can share the access with nominated councillor/s

but this would not generally be good practice going forward). If after the pilot, it was considered a useful tool, a user licence for the councillors on the planning committee could be set up for a one off fee (cost to be confirmed approx.£250-500 for 12 members), plus a monthly read only fee of £35.

Total monthly cost, if extended to councillors, £60 pcm. This was a heavily discounted fee as part of a few selected trials to aid development.

Members discussed. It was noted that Gepto presented to be able to provide a lot of information, highlight conflict with local policies and the NPPF which would be helpful with large application, but not sure if efficiencies would be improved. Members were unsure, but noting the advances of AI technologies and that the town was likely to be facing some large applications in the future, this type of AI platform could have potential, members,

Resolved: to pilot Gepto with a monthly subscription of £25 for the planning officer (and shared to Town Clerk and Chairman and Vice-Chair of the planning committee); and to be reviewed in three to six months.

12.5 **Spatial Settlement Plan - to consider the expenditure of £4,950 to create a specific SSP for Edenbridge to help support responses to the emerging Local Plan (and possible integrate with a future Neighbourhood Plan)**

The Town Clerk recently attended a NALC event, where ONH (O'Neil Horner Planning Specialist) had presented. They specialised in helping communities with settlement spatial planning; neighbourhood plans; design codes; planning appeals and applications; council land and asset management; and many other planning matters. Spatial Settlement Plans (SSPs) are strategic land-use planning documents that help to guide how areas are organised, developed, and managed within a specific geographic area. They also provide a useful tool for responding to planning applications and the emerging Local Plan. In addition, if a Neighbourhood Plan was considered in the future, it would be a supporting evidence document.

Key Features of Spatial Settlement Plans

- **Settlement Hierarchy:** They often define a hierarchy of settlements — for example, identifying key towns as growth hubs, while protecting the character.
- **Land Use Designations:** Specific zones may be allocated for residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, or conservation uses.
- **Infrastructure Planning:** Plans consider necessary transport, utilities, schools, healthcare, and other essential services. Looks at transport links (roads, paths, cycleways) connect different parts of the area and helps avoid problems like overcrowding, traffic congestion, or environmental damage.
- **Environmental Considerations:** They incorporate policies to protect landscapes, biodiversity, flood plains, and heritage assets.
- **Community Vision:** Ideally, SSPs are shaped with community input, ensuring they reflect local needs and aspirations.
- **Views on infrastructure needed with the associated development.**

Members discussed at length, including raising the considerable work previously to its draft NHP. Though, it was noted that the NPPF and government's housing targets had changed considerably and that there new supporting documents and evidence would be needed for preparation of any new NHP. It was noted that there was no longer any government funding towards NHPs but CIL funding could be considered. Returning back to the potential of a SSP, members noted that this could be helpful with its Local Plan response and its NHP, but concluded it was premature.

Members **agreed**, it could be helpful to develop a relationship with ONH and asked the Clerk to discuss with the Council's planning consultant and his views on SSP, and

Resolved: to refer to the Planning Committee to receive an updated from the Planning Consultant on his views for a SSP, and to consider whether to proceed with an SPPS, or to defer until after the Reg 18 (C) consultation, and if there was value in the interim to consider building a relationship with a second planning consultant to support future NHP work and Regulation 19 preparations.

13 Devolution and local government reorganisation

Members noted the update from SDC on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), and that Kent County Council had requested to Government for an extension to the deadline for submitting local government reorganisation plans for Kent & Medway. It was expected that this would not be accepted. Work was underway to procure a strategic partner to support all of the Kent & Medway authorities, to produce and submit their plans in accordance with the requirements the Government had set out. It was increasingly clear that work required to manage the LGR process would need greater investment of Council's resources in terms of both staff and money.

In terms of progress in the wider Kent area on geographies that they are willing to support and put forward to Government, progress had been limited. As set out in the report to Council in March this year, reorganisation in West Kent continued to be focussed on a three unitary council model, with a West Kent area of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone. This remained subject to the data and evidence that would arise with the support of the strategic partner, the views collected from consultation with residents, the decisions of Councillors and ultimately the decision made by Government.

On 23 June the Town Clerk and Deputy Clerk attend the NALC event on devolution and reorganisation - Powershift 2025. It was an informative event with a good selection of speakers from Baroness Sharon Taylor, and representatives from research analysts, other councils and NALC. To summarise briefly, they stressed the importance of communication between parish/town councils and principal authorities, urging councils to report issues to NALC and the government. There was discussion around the complexities of asset transfers during the formation of unitary authorities, suggesting that local management of assets may be more effective.

Yeovil Town Council presented its evolution and devolution journey over the past five years, highlighting the council's expansion from managing community events to taking on additional services, including the Oval Recreation Centre, Westlands Entertainment Venue, Yeovil Country Park, and open spaces. The Council faced significant challenges, including tight timescales, budget constraints, and legal complexities. Despite these, they successfully transferred services, maintained community engagement, and improved local facilities. The Council's budget increased significantly, over £8m.

Members noted that it had already looked at the local assets of SDC. It was keen to ensure statutory services provision remained and was positively looking at this. The Clerk was asked to ensure the Council's website and Facebook kept residents informed.

14 SDC Assets - to note update

Members noted Council May meeting had requested several assets in the town to be submitted to SDC for the Community Asset Register. This had not yet happened.

15 Infrastructure Development Plan and needs for Edenbridge

Members received an update following last month's meeting with SDC officers, to provide input to the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) - this identifies strategic infrastructure needs to support growth.

Existing infrastructure would be covered in community facilities policy in the Local Plan. These should be retained wherever possible, unless there was a very good reason not to, in terms of improvements to and new infrastructure. New projects would be identified in the IDP. This sits outside of the Local Plan almost as a sister document to the Plan, but each go hand in hand, so they're intrinsically linked. The IDP sets out the infrastructure projects that are needed to support the growth.

Infrastructure need takes a baseline view of existing and what needs improving. This then forms projects, working with the infrastructure providers and finding other funding opportunities as well. Developers are expected to fund any funding gaps through S106 agreements if it's new infrastructure. Ideally though, the developer would provide it on site, so to provide the land and the facility.

The Council was asked to provide SDC:

- List of infrastructure priorities for Edenbridge to inform the IDP and ensure that key projects are considered.
- View to be included in the IDP and the importance of identifying strategic infrastructure needs, such as roads, railways, and community facilities.

A meeting had already been set up with the Council's Planning Consultant to discuss this, mindful of sites proposed in the Reg 18 (B) consultation and the changes to the NPPF. Only a short timeframe had been provided so that this could be considered with the next Reg 18 consultation. Members,

Resolved: working with the Town Clerk, the Local Plan Working Group to make representation to SDC on infrastructure.

16 To resolve delegated powers to Planning and Transportation Committee for July and August

Members unanimously,

Resolved: delegated powers over the summer period to Planning and Transportation Committee for July and August.

17 Consultations

17.1 Proposal to expand provision at Broomhill Bank School, Tunbridge Wells - Kent County Council - deadline 18 July.

Noted.

17.2 National Highways and Transport Survey 2025-26 - Kent County Council - February 2026

Noted.

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

None.

19 To consider any press releases

Reorganisation updates.

20 Matters for future agendas

Review Council and Committee meeting frequency.

In view of the confidential nature of the Agenda Item 21 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.

21 Land outside Old Police Station: to receive an update on the Transfer of part of registered title and Deed of Covenant

June Open Spaces Committee was asked to confirm that the Chair of the Council to authorise and sign: the Transfer of Part of Registered Title, and the Deed of Covenant for Title Number K781417 (Kent Police Station, TN8 5AB), and the section of land in front of the new flats and gardens. Transferor: Findley Developments Ltd Transferee: Edenbridge Town Council

All parties had signed and final confirmation of completion was expected imminently.

22 Date of next meeting - 08 September 2025

Noted.

Three items had missed the agenda and were asked to be considered outside the meeting to be reported back

to Council in September.

1) To approve additional hours for the Communications Officer to complete the new website ready for early autumn:

There had been significant work over the past year with the developing of a new website. It was hoped to complete in September, but would require some extra hours - estimated 6-20 hours; approx. budget £400-500.

Resolved: to approve the additional hours for the Communications Officer and expenditure of £500.

2) To approve the children's fun fair return to Stangrove Park – open 8 August two weeks.

The children's fun fair was keen to attend again this summer for two weeks.

Resolved: to confirm the children's fun fair for two weeks, opening 8 August.

3) Request for the Council office to sell charity post cards with all the proceeds to the Museum

A resident has produced postcards with paintings of various buildings in the town, they would provide free, sell at £1.50 each; all proceeds to the museum.

Resolved: these one-off postcards reproduced to sell with all proceeds to the museum, selling on behalf of the museum at the council office.

21:28 The meeting closed.