



EAST GRINSTEAD TOWN COUNCIL

Council Offices, East Court, College Lane, East Grinstead, West Sussex, RH19 3LT

www.eastgrinstead.gov.uk

Phone: 01342 323636

Town Clerk: Samantha Heynes BA (Hons), FSLCC

Email: townclerk@eastgrinstead.gov.uk

EAST GRINSTEAD TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

**Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held at 6pm
on Tuesday 21st April 2026 in the Meridian Hall, East Court**

Present: Cllr J Belsey (Town Mayor)
Cllr S Reeves (Deputy Town Mayor)
Cllr M Belsey*
Cllr H Farren
Cllr L Gibbs
Cllr I Gibson**
Cllr T Hughes
Cllr J Mockford*
Cllr S Ody
Cllr C Pond
Cllr R Whittaker*

*Town & District Councillor
**Town, District & County Councillor

District: Cllr L Farren
Cllr D Sweatman

District & County: Cllr J Russell

In attendance: Mrs S Heynes (Town Clerk)

22 Members of Public

1 Welcome from the Mayor

Cllr Belsey opened the meeting and welcomed all to the 2026 East Grinstead Annual Town Meeting.

This year two guest speakers were present; Nick Hodges, Chair of East Grinstead Town Twinning Association and Roger Everitt of WSCC's Waste Prevention Team.

There would be an open forum to ask questions regarding any town matters after the presentations had completed.

2 To confirm the minutes of the 2025 Annual Town Council Meeting

It was resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 25th March 2025.

3 Mayor's Update and Business Plan

Cllr Belsey reviewed last year's minutes to assess progress made on the promised actions for the year, and expressed his thanks to Councillors for their work over the past year on both committee and community matters. He also thanked the team at East Court and the Library for their hard work.

Updates regarding Council priorities and achievements for the year were provided:

- **Banking** – A permanent banking hub would be moving into the old Bath Store shop in town later this year, with the temporary hub already running at Glen Vue.
- **Mount Noddy** – Council had agreed to purchase and install columbaria at Mount Noddy cemetery to extend our ashes interment provision by several years.
- **Bee Friendly** – The Council had been successful in their application to become a bee friendly town, with a competition running now to design a garden space closing on later this month.
- **Town of Culture** – an application had been submitted to be considered for the UK Town of Culture 2028. Lots of work had been done to understand the good parts of our town as well as improvements we'd like to see. There is huge competition for this first time award, however we believe we can hold our head high through sharing the great aspects of our town together with our ideas and proposals for future development, which we are exploring further whether successful in our application or not.
- **Queens Road Cemetery** – goats had been installed on the lower section to reduce the level of vegetation in the cemetery and, several escapes aside, this had seen the successful reduction of the overgrown area. A flail had now been purchased to further tackle the remaining overgrown areas.
- **Town Improvement Consultation** – in partnership with MSDC and EGBA, this successful initiative had identified high, medium and low priorities for further exploration. A review of the improvements suggested for further feasibility study was underway, recognising that whilst some could be delivered locally by the Town Council subject to prioritisation and funding, others would require substantial input from WSCC and MSDC before any progress could be made.
- **St Margaret's Loop** – the analysis of the project had demonstrated that the costs to implement the scheme far outweighed the benefits of delivery, leading the Council to resolve to list the site for auction later this year, in order to reduce the risk exposure to the Council.
- **Pump Track** – the temporary pump track would return to King George's Field this summer. The Council was exploring ways to improve the leisure facilities in the town and were liaising with MSDC regarding the future of King George's Field – would love to see a splash pad there!
- **Mount Noddy Play Area Improvements** – these have been undertaken by MSDC and were almost finished, creating a much better asset within the town.

- **Events Programme** – regular events would continue, including the Classic Car Show, Armed Forces Day, East Court Lives, Big Reveal, Christmas Market and others, all of which make our town so special.
- Thanks to all staff who work so hard all year round, the Outdoor Services Team keeping the town and estate looking so well, and the community team who organise our events.
- Councillors, thanks for all you do throughout the year. A reminder that all meetings are moving to Thursday evenings at 7pm.
- A special recognition of the hard work from Councillors and our MP during the water issues experienced at the start of the year, especially attempts to hold SEW to account. The Town Council was initially excluded but once East Court was set up as a water site this made an immediate improvement to the logistics of water collection for residents. Thank you to all involved in supporting this crisis.
- The efforts of the Mayor's charities nominated this year, Age UK and EG District Scouts, are greatly appreciated in dealing with the challenges of dementia and the offering of a respite service to those in need. The Mayor was proud to support the scouts, raising funds to enable training for young leaders and seeing their growth through learning new skills. Thank you to all those who have supported these charities over the past year.
- This year also saw the start of Hermove, a charity to encourage girls in sport with the first Sackville v Imberhorne girls match taking place recently.

The Mayor expressed his appreciation of the support received from those here in the room as he entered his final few weeks as Mayor, now looking forward to passing the baton to Cllr Reeves who would take over in May.

4 East Grinstead Town Twinning Association

Nick Hodges opened with congratulations to the Mayor on all he had achieved over the past year, explaining that his involvement with Town Twinning started when he was a fledgling Councillor - and that he had remained involved ever since.

Town Twinning was a reciprocal partnership between towns or local communities to endorse partnership, promoting cultural exchange and friendship. It became more popular after World War 2, and by 1962 there was 192 twinned places; now there is over 1700.

East Grinstead was twinned with Bourg-de-Péage (France), Verbania (Italy), Mindelheim (Germany), Sant Feliu de Guíxols (Spain), and Schwaz (Austria), with the first agreement with Bourg-de-Péage made on 21/1/1962 here at East Court.

Town Twinning was very proud of the active links with our twin towns, who were described below.

Bourg de Peage was a town in the Drone region of France, close to Lyon; with a population of 10k it was situated close to a fine red wine region. Famous for knitwear and shoe manufacturing, the Tour de France passes through the town.

Mindelheim was a town in Bavaria, 56 miles away from Munich. Every 3 years they have Frundsbergfest, which was celebrated over 10 days and was next taking place this year.

Verbania, on Lake Maggiore close to Milan in Italy, was the largest of our twinned towns with a population of 31k. The Olympic torch passed through this year for the winter Olympics.

Schwaz, known as the silver city for its silver mining heritage, was located in Austria; crystal was still mined here.

Tramin was our friendship town, meaning we did not have official charter with them, Located in the Tirol in Italy but speaking German not Italian, this was another town famous for wine production.

Town twinning enabled us to enjoy different cultures and traditions, linking youth and older people together via school penpal schemes and encouraging visits between the towns.

The next fundraising activity was a quiz evening with fish and chips being donated by the Harbour, everyone was invited to come along and join in at a cost of £15 a head.

Every year there was a youth in Europe event hosted on rotation by one of the twinned towns. Starting in 1976, typically 6 children from each town attended along with 4 adults to take place in a 3 day event of sports and games.

East Grinstead was hosting this event on 24th – 26th June 2027. There were plans for a Mayor's reception as well as visits to Kingscote winery, Bluebell railway and other local activities. This would take a lot of organisation, time and money. The current very active membership was aging, so this was an appeal to more people to come and get involved, whether by fundraising, sponsorship, volunteering etc.

In the past you could have host families, but now hotels were required meaning costs were increasing. Whilst the Town Council provided some grant funding this didn't cover everything, so even if you just came along to events to support the fundraising efforts that would be much appreciated. Anyone interested in joining the Association and becoming a member should look at our website for further details: egtwinning.org.uk/home.

East Grinstead Bonfire Society explained they fundraise for 2 new charities each year and they suggested EGTTA applied to be one of these for this year.

Cllr Ody asked about the impact on the young people attending these events, including the benefits of the camaraderie he had witnessed as Mayor during the 2024 event. It was explained how whilst young people initially weren't necessarily keen to join in, you could see within half a day how they would be interacting with others and some made new lifelong friends who continued to visit each other in the future. The benefits of building on language skills and cross border friendships were rewarding to see.

The Town Mayor thanked Nick Hodges for his interesting and informative talk.

5 West Sussex County Council Waste Prevention Team

Roger Everitt introduced himself as a member of a team of 6 who support waste prevention across the county - recycling, reusing, reducing.

West Sussex was very good at recycling, and processed over 90% in West Sussex thanks to the sorting done by householders. A lot of typical things were recycled; by the time you recycle a jam jar it had probably already been 6 other items in the past. Tin cans, glass, aluminium; 84% was repurposed into other products e.g. a coke could become a chair leg or part of a car.

Paper use had reduced significantly over the years, books had declined in popularity and were being pulped into packaging materials.

Plastics were not a generic item as there were so many varieties, and were handled in different ways. Soft plastics were now collected by supermarkets and recycling facilities had been created by supermarkets for processing these into items such as pellets, which, for example, could then be converted into table tops.

Plastic bottles – bottled water companies were actually in the business of making bottles rather than producing water, so please take your water out and about with you in a reusable bottle rather than purchasing a new one. These bottles could be turned into fleece clothing.

Reuse was very important, taking an item as it was and reusing it in the same format. Examples were children's books, toys, clothing; this saved resources by reducing the need to create new ones.

Maintenance and repair of items was another area of saving as it had become too cheap and easy to throw items away and replace them with new ones. Repair cafes were supporting this and should be encouraged further. A typical kitchen may have matching items and if one item broke, all items would then be replaced. Items were relatively inexpensive so it was too easy to purchase new items.

Recycling and reusing are dealing with problems, reducing would remove the problem at source.

Reducing was becoming more important. We used to be a nation who excelled at this, but times have changed and habits had been lost. Nitrates were not coming into the UK so we were not putting fertilizer on the fields, meaning next year's crops would be expensive. There was no forward thinking regarding our reliance on importing items, this needed to improve.

The following questions were asked:

- Sainsbury's seemed to have withdrawn their soft plastics recycling, could be a local issue but nationally this is still very much taking place. It was noticed that B&Q was also offering a recycling station.
- Buy items from charity shops as they were often in good condition and there was a broad range available. The younger generation were more sensitive to being green, using Ebay and Vinted. Clothing was an issue and fast fashion made it too easy to buy items and then throw them away. Christmas themed clothes were a particular issue as designed to be worn just one day a year!
- Black take away plastic trays – can these be recycled? They can be, as can other black plastics, the scrunch test will assist – if an item stays scrunched it's probably recyclable, if it bounces back into shape then best to bin it.

- Packaging, this has masses of tape around it, better to peel this off and put into general waste, only the cardboard can be recycled. However the weight of the tape is so light the impact of leaving it on is negligible.
- Food waste collections allowed there to be a slimmer bin for general waste. General waste was now cleaner and neater as the food waste was no longer included, leading to a better job of disposing of general waste as a result.

Food waste was being converted into biofuel and used to provide approx. 10k homes with electricity in Horsham. Now there is more food waste being collected, it would be possible to generate more electricity and sell this back into the grid.

Methane was created to macerate and heat food waste to enable it to rot faster and kill bacteria, meaning food waste broke down in just 63 days before it was moved onto the next stage. Turned into sludge, this was then sold to farmers locally to use as compost, which assisted with making the country more independent. Only the purest food waste was being used in this way.

Other less pure compost was sold to councils which still have holes in the ground/quarry, and used to keep the rubbish warmer, keeping vermin out and enabling rotting to take place faster.

The final product remaining would be squeezed into dry, burnable fuel (RDF), and then was sold to councils who still have incinerators.

In conclusion, four products had been made out of the waste, which were sold for use as described.

The further questions were then asked:

- Do not know the split of the waste being created, statistics not yet available.
- Use newspaper or magazines or compostable bags to help keep the bins cleaner.

The average household in the UK wasted £80 per month on food. With a bin beside the sink it becomes clearer what is being thrown away and it's hoped this awareness will cause people to think more.

Across Britain 1m loaves of bread were baked a night; we know that 40% of this was thrown away. Bread was cheap so it's easy to do this, but these habits have to change. Most flour used to come from the Ukraine, this stopped almost overnight 4 years ago and alternative suppliers are needed.

Whilst there have been teething problems with the new waste collection process, the benefits were clear to all.

The Town Mayor thanked Roger Everitt for attending the meeting and explaining the fascinating process of recycling across the county.

6 Public Questions

The first question asked was a request to meet the Mayor to discuss local concerns; the Mayor reminded the questioner that this request had already been responded to several times over the past year.

The final question was to enquire whether there was a formal organisation who supported Town Twinning Associations, as there was a French town interested in finding a twinning partner but who didn't know where to begin. EGTTA offered to try and assist them with this.

As there were no further questions the Town Mayor thanked all for their attendance, invited everyone to stay for refreshments and closed the meeting at 7.26pm.

DRAFT