



**The meeting of Egerton Parish Council was held on Tuesday 8 July 2025
7pm Committee Room, Millennium Hall, Egerton**

Present

**Cllrs: John Lawton, Peter Rawlinson, Jeff Hopkins, Claire Foinette, Richard Wall, Susan Stone, John Harper and Simon Palmer. Clerk Sonia Young.
Borough Cllr Kayleigh Brunger-Randall and Kent County Cllr Jeremy Eustace.
PC Darren Laker**

Twelve members of the public were present.

Chair John Lawton welcomed Borough Cllr Kayleigh Brunger-Randall and gave her the good wishes of EPC on the safe arrival of her baby. He also welcomed new KCC Cllr Jeremy Eustace. Cllr Lawton said he looked forward to a constructive relationship with Mr Eustace, who agreed, and stated his intention to ignore past differences and to work his best for Egerton parish.

Apologies

Cllr Pat Parr

1) Declarations of Interest

Cllrs Palmer and Harper: neighbours to the Orchard Nurseries site proposed for development and neighbour to one site put forward for consideration for the Ashford Borough Council Local Plan 2041.

2) Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 3 June 2025

The minutes were approved and signed as a true record of the proceedings.

Proposed: Cllr Foinette. **Seconded:** Cllr Wall. **All in agreement.** Cllr Stone abstained as not present at the 3 June meeting.

3) Matters Arising from 3 June 2025 (not covered by the agenda below).

i) Installation of a bike rack on the Glebe

The rack has arrived. It will be installed later in the week.

ii) Overgrown hedge/stone wall damage lower Rock Hill Road

Cllr Harper said that he had been in contact with the landowner. The hedge has been given an emergency cut. The encroachment of the verge onto the highway will be dealt with in the autumn by the landowner.

iii) Revaluation of the Games Barn

Chair Cllr Lawton confirmed the cost of the revaluation report as £180.25

Action: Chair Cllr Lawton to organise and provide the details to Egerton Sports and Playing Fields Association (ESPFA) so that the Pavilion can be revalued.

iv) Reliability of pop-up Post Office (PO)

Cllr Harper has had a meeting with the manager. He said that there are no plans to close the pop-up service by the Headcorn PO - the office that delivers Egerton's outreach service - even though only four or five people are using the service on the days that it opens. New staff members have been employed and trained so reliability is expected to improve.

v) Request to Southern Water to leave storage unit and temporary path

Cllr Hopkins has talked to Egerton ESPFA to investigate any planning issues that would arise if SW were to leave its storage unit behind at the end of their works for Egerton Cricket Club to utilise. No update as yet.

4) Chair to close the meeting for public discussion

Meeting closed at 19.08

Meeting re-opened at 19.48

5) Footpaths Report 181 (See Appendix 1)

Report circulated in advance of the meeting to all Cllrs.

6) Highways Report

Cllr Harper confirmed that he has been in touch with East Kent Highways team and added a review of the average speeds along Mundy Bois Road to the EPC HiP, with the longer-term consideration of reducing the limit. Cllr Stone has been in contact with KCC Streetworks as recent diversion signs have been confusing regarding what route drivers were expected to take. Recent rains have also demonstrated that the flooding problem at the junction of Harmers Way and New Road has not, as hoped, been rectified.

8) Planning and Development

Planning applications submitted to Ashford Borough Council this month for Egerton Parish Council to consider, details of which may be accessed online at:

<http://www.ashford.gov.uk/onlineplanning/>.

Applications submitted

Case Reference:	NOT/2025/0975
Location	Woodlands Farm, Newland Green Lane, TN27 9EP
Proposal	Conversion of first floor of the garage from a games room to an incidental annexe to support the main house. .

EPC view: EPC agreed that ABC planning officers should always consider likely extensions to requested permission at the time the original permissions are applied for to avoid opportunistic, retrospective permissions later being sought.

Proposed: Comment only.

Proposed: Cllr Wall. **Seconded:** Cllr Foinette. **All in agreement.**

Case Reference:	NOT/2025/0893
Location	Poplar Farm, Forge Lane TN27 9EJ
Proposal	Listed building consent to re-bed ridge and bonnet hips. Re-position existing eave tiles over gutter.

EPC view: EPC agreed that maintenance to a Listed building is essential and would rely on the judgement of ABC's conservation officer on the suitability of materials proposed for the works.

Proposed: Support.

Proposed: Cllr Wall. **Seconded:** Chair Cllr Lawton. **All in agreement.**

- **Other Egerton Planning and development updates**

No updates available.

9) Chair's Statement on the First-Tier Tribunal (General Regulatory Chamber) Information Rights – Case Reference FT/EA/2024/0362

It is with considerable regret that I feel obliged to make this statement. However, in view of activity on social media, it is important for fairness, balance and transparency that the position of Egerton Parish Council is put in the public domain.

Mr Jonathan Elworthy has placed several posts on social media concerning the outcome of his appeal to the First Tier Tribunal against the Information Commissioner's Office's (ICO) determination that his Freedom of Information (FOI) request to Egerton Parish Council (EPC) in February 2024 was vexatious.

The First Tier Tribunal has upheld Mr Elworthy's appeal and has determined that his FOI request in this specific instance was not vexatious.



The ICO had agreed with EPC's original conclusion that Mr Elworthy's request was vexatious, and EPC presented a significant body of evidence to the ICO and then to the Tribunal in support of the position that Mr Elworthy's behaviour over 3 years amounted to a vexatious campaign against the council.

The following is a summary of some of the evidence, but not all, provided to the First Tribunal:

- 1) Mr Elworthy has sent dozens of emails to the EPC clerk in the three years since his wife resigned from EPC in August 2021.
The emails cover at least 15 different topics.
- 2) Mr Elworthy, on a number of occasions, has refused to accept the answers provided by EPC in response to his emails and has then followed up with further emails and posts on social media.
- 3) Mr Elworthy had, at the time of the FOI request, originated over 20 posts on two social media platforms which are critical of EPC. The majority of these posts were concerning topics about which Mr Elworthy had made no prior enquiry of EPC.
- 4) Mr Elworthy had added approximately 150 comments to social media posts relating to EPC matters. These posts are consistent in being critical of EPC.
- 5) The social media posts cover over 17 different topics related to EPC
- 6) On at least 2 occasions, Mr Elworthy complains about EPC actions that were in fact required to comply with the law or required to meet other legal obligations.
- 7) In excess of 25 times, Mr Elworthy makes untrue statements in social media posts about EPC business.
- 8) In response to a request from Mr Elworthy, the Clerk provided the costs of the Judicial Review process. Mr Elworthy challenged the figure provided by the clerk. The figure was then checked by the Chairman and confirmed to Mr Elworthy as correct. Mr Elworthy has continued to state on social media that the figures are incorrect.
- 9) Mr Elworthy has made several accusations that impugn the competence, honesty and integrity of the Clerk and the proper running of the Parish Council by the elected members. Some of these comments caused offence, reputational damage and distress to the Clerk and Councillors.

The following is a summary:

- He has accused EPC of a lack of openness and transparency
- Mr Elworthy has made several egregious accusations about EPC finances
 - The EPC budget process is flawed and
 - EPC is "harvesting money from parishioners".
 - EPC is padding the budget and not being prudent
 - EPC has hidden accounts
 - Mr Elworthy accuses EPC's monthly accounts of not balancing
- Mr Elworthy objects in social media, and without any prior reference to EPC, to EPC transferring money legitimately from its account to the account of the village hall to whom the money belonged.
- Mr Elworthy objected to EPC using funds which were given for a specific purpose, being used for that specific purpose.

I now want to deal in detail with the events leading up to EPC refusing Mr Elworthy's FOI request of the 20th of February and the reasons why the Council decided it was time to draw a line.



- This commenced on the 12th December with a request by email for the Court papers and judgments in relation to the Judicial Review application and appeal. The clerk responded on the 19th December, advising that the documents are available from the Court.
- Despite this, Mr Elworthy served an FOI request for the information on the 23rd January. The clerk responded on the 20th February, following a period of illness, with a refusal under S 32.1 of the FOIA because the information was protected by the Court but available from the Court on application.
- On that same day, 20th Feb, Mr Elworthy made a formal complaint about the refusal of his FOI request and served a second FOI request for the legal advice the Council had received in relation to the Judicial Review application.
- At this time, EPC were arranging for the next day, 21st February, a single-issue EGM to discuss village projects and funding. Mr Elworthy, in conjunction with his wife, intended, before understanding the purpose of this meeting, to propose that the Council, which was only elected in May 2023, stand down and have a new election.
- EPC received a complaint the day after the EGM from Mrs Elworthy about the conduct of the Clerk at the EGM. The Chairman, having investigated the complaint after speaking to Councillors and members of the public present, was not able to uphold the complaint.
- A further complaint was made at the same time to the Monitoring Officer by Mrs Elworthy under the Code of Conduct for Councillors about the alleged conduct of a Councillor. The Monitoring Officer determined no further action in relation to the Code of Conduct complaint.

On the 4th of March, as a result of the accumulation of all of the above, the Clerk was signed off sick initially for 2 weeks and then for a further 2 weeks, returning to work on the 2nd of April.

On the 23rd April, the Clerk logged an impact statement with the Chairman, which made it crystal clear the impact on her health and wellbeing as a result of the above and the actions of others.

The Parish Council has a primary duty of care for its employee, and it was of paramount importance that the Council took reasonable steps to protect the Clerk from any more stress.

With this background, the Council decided that enough was enough and it was time to call out this behaviour as vexatious. The FOI request was refused on the 17th April under S14.1. Following the decision in the First Tier Tribunal, the information Mr Elworthy requested has been provided to him within the time scales required by the Tribunal, and the matter has now been concluded.

EPC Comment.

1. Openness and Transparency

All EPC meetings are held in public, minuted, and the minutes are published on three village noticeboards and on the EPC website.

The only meetings of the Parish Council that are not open to the public have been held to discuss personnel matters or commercial issues, which were necessarily confidential. This is in accordance with the rules.

Any member of the Public can contact a Councillor or the Clerk. Contact details are available on the EPC website.



Sub-committees of EPC meet to discuss specific topics and make recommendations to the Council. Sub-committees report to the full Council, who then debate and votes on the recommendations of the Sub-committee.

The Clerk receives a large volume of email, and the extraordinary additional volume of emails from Mr Elworthy distracts and prevents the Clerk from carrying out other vital work for the benefit of the village. This also impacts volunteer councillors and has resulted in costs for the parish.

2. **Appropriate use of EPC resources**

Parishioners may justifiably ask why public resources are being expended on answering queries when the council's responses are not accepted as being correct.

3. **Social media**

EPC does not participate in social media, as in the past, this has led to a 'pile-on' of councillors, EPC, and the Clerk, and EPC lacks the resources to manage it. It should be questioned why Mr. Elworthy would post on social media without first seeking information from EPC on the issues he claims to be concerned about.

4. **EPC Finances**

EPC has had to take action to restore the finances of the Council. EPC needed to meet the rules requiring minimum levels of reserves, and at one point, cash flow was such that the Clerk had to delay taking her salary. At the same time, costs have increased for EPC as they have for everyone.

EPC Budget is set annually and published on the EPC website

It is a fundamental responsibility of the council to budget prudently and to ensure that parishioners' money is properly spent. The Financial Regulations (available on the parish council website) set out how EPC is to do this, and the regulations are followed to the letter.

- a. All expenditure over £1,000 is approved by the full Council and reported in the minutes.
 - b. All other expenditure requires 2 signatures - of the Clerk plus one of the Chair or Vice Chair.
 - c. Another councillor has to agree to all of the bank transactions.
 - d. EPC does not have 'hidden' accounts.
 - e. EPC is required to balance its monthly account to within £1.
EPC accounts are balanced to the penny.
 - f. EPC Accounts are audited annually by both an internal and an external auditor.
 - g. EPC Accounts have always been passed by both Audits
5. It is quite bizarre that EPC should be criticised for transferring money to the village hall on whose behalf it was holding the money, and similarly for using funds for the purpose for which they were collected.

Chair's statement ends

At the conclusion of the Chair's statement, a member of the public addressed the Chairman and asked if it would be possible to hear the Clerk's impact Statement. The Chair addressed the Clerk and asked if the Clerk would be comfortable – and give their permission – for that statement to be read and added to the public record.

The Clerk said that it was her strong personal feeling that people in public office should not comment on social media in spite of intense provocation. However, she said that earlier in the week she had received an email from somebody which stated – and she said she was



paraphrasing – that it was her job to put up with this behaviour; that the Clerk was paid to do this and that this person fully intended to continue in their behaviour. As such, she gave her permission for the Chair to read the statement.

The Chair read the Personal Impact Statement of the Clerk as follows:

Personal statement re my recent absence

Dear John

I would like to put on record the reasons for my four-week signed-off absence from my role as Egerton Parish Clerk.

As you are aware, I have previously held down a very senior role within large organisations over a 35-year period and never, fortunately, been signed off from work; in fact, I had hardly ever have a day off sick.

However, a campaign of sustained and unrelenting harassment from a small group of parishioners and one non-parishioner over the past three years (which has been well documented by EPC) has made me, as Parish Clerk, a prime target for their unreasonable behaviour. This has been via excessive and persistent emailing, questions and demands for information (with threats for non-compliance), a refusal to accept when a matter is closed, a refusal to accept that information sought cannot for any number of legitimate reasons be circulated, excessively critical posts on social media sites, complaints to the Monitoring Officer (none of which have been upheld) and via direct complaints to you, as chairman. One example of where I have had to take action to limit my exposure to unwarranted stress is where one of the critics was told that they must not visit the clerk's office without an appointment and that a councillor must also be present as an observer because their previous behaviour in visits to the office was aggressive, threatening and ill-mannered. One such visit being witnessed by the former clerk, Heather James. This same person, plus their partner, also threatened to disrupt a recent parish council meeting that I had organised for the village on Future Projects - a single-issue meeting - to which I had invited many village organisations to pitch their project plans. Their clear plan was to derail a legitimate Parish event that had taken a great deal of time to organise.

It has seemed to me that the critics involved in this harassment view it as some kind of a "game" and feel that I have become their "prey"; the suggestion of their behaviours is that if they wear me down sufficiently, then I will resign. This has caused me much distress and has had a detrimental impact on my health and well-being. As a result, my blood-pressure was measured at the GP to be 'dangerously high' and I was subsequently signed off for an initial 2 weeks. During the time that I was signed off, an automated email reply message stated that I was not available, as did the Parish Council website, yet the same two people continued to send emails demanding replies for information - in fact one of them emailed the clerk's office 8 times in the space of 45 minutes. At my follow-up meeting with the GP, I was subsequently signed off for another 2 weeks as the harassment was clearly continuing. My GP stated that she was appalled at the extent of the harassment sustained over the 3 years and commented that 'most people would not have lasted a week' under such relentless and targeted attacks. She advised that even hugely resilient people would eventually reach a crisis point. I am also Parish Clerk for XXXXXXXX and do not experience anything remotely like the behaviours levelled at me at the same role in Egerton.

However, on the positive side, during this time, not only I have I received tremendous support from members of the Parish Council but also concerned members of the Parish. I



thoroughly enjoy the very positive aspects of the role, and I would hope to have made a positive contribution to the village - not only within my role as clerk but also via the voluntary committees that I am a member of.

I absolutely appreciate your support during this period, including advising that I should not attend the April 2nd EPC meeting. I also wish to thank the other Parish Councillors who stepped in to take over my duties in the meeting.

I very much welcomed the straightforward discussion led by yourself and vice chairman Peter Rawlinson at the Parish Assembly on 17 April about how the actions of a few residents and one non-resident have adversely impacted on Cllrs, myself as clerk, the Parish purse and our ability to get on with the many positive and large-scale projects on our plate over such a sustained period. I sensed an overwhelming sense of horror and sadness among those residents present at how the actions of these few people has sought to harass over such an extended period of time. My hope is that now it is more widely known about, and as the negative questioning and vexatious social media posts continue, residents will call them out on their behaviours and refuse to tolerate it.

As I have said John, I am immensely grateful for all of your support at this time and for working to protect me from their continuing campaign of vexatious emails, demands and questions.

End of Impact Statement

10) Correspondence

No update to report.

11) Accounts

No unbudgeted spend to approve.

12) Parish Plan and Future Projects Working Group

A meeting is diarised.

13) Ashford Local Plan 2041 Working Group update

ABC is continuing its work on the Local Plan 2041 with the aim of getting it in place before any change by central Government to move Kent into a number of Unitary Authorities. It is believed ABC will discuss the next moves relating to the Local Plan 2041 at its meeting on 31 July and outline the period and dates for public consultation.

14) Village Websites Working Group – update

No update to report.

15) Asset of Community Value Working Group – The George Public House

The renewal document is ready for submission.

Action: The Clerk

Residents have been in contact with Borough Cllr Kayleigh Brunger-Randall about the dust and dirt of lengthy repair works at The George (formerly the Barrow House) public house. The Borough Cllr has asked ABC Planning for an update on the works and when they expect them to be completed.

16) Playground

Cllr Foinette circulated revised quotes from three potential suppliers to replace the playground swings plus carry out necessary allied groundworks.

Cllr Foinette proposed Caloo as the preferred supplier to replace the swings and undertake new groundworks.



Proposed: Cllr Foinette. **Seconded:** Vice-Chair Cllr Rawlinson. **All in agreement.** Cllr Palmer abstained until he had made a detailed comparison of the drawings supplied.

Cllr Palmer will email Cllr Foinette with his view. His decision will be ratified at the next meeting and minuted.

17) Proposal to refresh the agenda

The Clerk will circulate a proposed refresh of the EPC agenda to all Cllrs for consideration ahead of the next meeting.

18) Additional items

i) Welcome packs

Cllr Parr has delivered two packs.

ii) Replacement trees at Elm Close

The field maple is suffering from the recent heat event though a resident of Elm Close waters them regularly. Tree warden Graham Howland will mulch the maple in the first instance before considering whether the tree needs to be replaced.

iii) Village Hall outdoor area

Cllr Harper suggested that EPC reconsider the charge for use of the outside space. Cllrs wanted detail on what impact the charge is having but no detail was available. Cllr Harper will investigate further and report back.

iv) Orchard Nurseries

Vice-Chair Cllr Rawlinson said that for transparency and openness it was important that all residents knew the true facts relating to the legacy left by Derek Marks. He said it was important for the facts to be known as all sorts of inaccurate speculation had been rife on social media.

Cllr Rawlinson read the following statement from the solicitor who acted on behalf of Derek Marks on the gift of land at Orchard Nurseries to Egerton Parish Council.

"I confirm that I acted for Derek Marks when he transferred land to Egerton Parish Council in 2017. I have reviewed my file and confirm that there is nothing in my notes or in the correspondence and documentation to suggest that Mr Marks wished to impose any conditions on the gift of the land to the Parish Council. I had extensive contact, both in person and in correspondence, with Derek at the time and, had he wished to have imposed conditions, I would have been aware of that".

V) Local Government – Code of Conduct complaints and behaviour of the public

Vice-Chair Cllr Rawlinson attended a meeting held by Kent Association of Local Councils and the ABC Monitoring Office that regulates and deals with complaints by members of the public about parish councils. The meeting took place because ABC has been forced to toughen up on its procedures given the tremendous rise in such complaints and the cost of managing these complaints at an average of £4,000 each time.

Cllr Rawlinson also met with Matthew Scott, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Kent, to discuss a campaign that Mr Scott is mounting to combat cyber bullying. Although primarily focussed on the cyber bullying of young people, the discussion also covered the growing prevalence of the cyber bullying and harassment of those in public office – such as Clerks – and community volunteers such as Parish Councillors, particularly through malicious communications.

vi) Gale King

EPC expressed its condolences to former EPC Chair Richard King on the sad passing of his wife Gale. Chair John Lawton said Gale had made a huge contribution to the fabric of community life in Egerton, not least as an active member of Egerton WI.



vii) August meeting

Chair Cllr Lawton proposed that EPC Cllrs needed to hold a number of special committee meetings and that a break from the normal monthly meeting would allow time for those meetings to take place and progress important EPC projects. He proposed that EPC should not hold an August meeting.

Proposed: Chair Cllr Lawton. **Seconded:** Cllr Palmer. **All in agreement.**

viii) Recreation

Chair Cllr Lawton said that he felt EPC should consider undertaking a survey of the recreational facilities provided for residents of all ages in the village as new sports like Padel and Pickle Ball had become very popular. He said that while there was no appetite to produce a new Parish Plan, he suggested a survey of recreation could be undertaken. EPC will revisit this at the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 21.09pm.

Next meeting: Tuesday 2 September 2025.

Appendix 1

Report No. 181 of the Egerton footpaths representative for July 2025 Meeting

- 6 Outstanding Issues remain from the June 2025 report.
- 0 Closed Items
- 0 New Issues

The outstanding items below are listed with the KCC Reference, the date reported, the footpath number, the location, the difficulty experienced and the status of action.

1. **PROW211126930.** 09/11/21. Part of AW87 to the west of the church behind the Glebeland houses where the path is quite narrow has collapsed due to badger activity. Status: Still In Progress.
2. **PROW230732955.** 28/07/23. AW96. Barhams Mill Road, before Frasers, on the right-hand side from Egerton village end. Broken stile at the entrance to the footpath from the road. Status: Still Awaiting Allocation.
3. **PROW240835559.** 04/08/24. AW74 Wanden Lane. Reported by Egerton Running Club. Obstruction at both ends of this short footpath. Status: Still Awaiting Allocation.
4. **PROW241298717.** 03/12/24. Part of AW87 to the west of the church. Further subsidence at the edges of the rubber matting placed there in 2021. Because of the danger it has been reported to KCC. Status: Still In Progress.

UPDATE 25/2/2025: Residents have not actually taken down the taped closure of this short section of path but are using the path anyway and have filled the two large holes with stones under the rubber matting as they want it reopened. Cllr Parr will contact KCC again and try to get some action on this problem.

UPDATE 11/3/2025: KCC replied that they will put up some sterner signage/warning tape and some posts. It's not a cliff edge so a metal barrier is not needed. The big issue is that a licence from Natural England is needed to work on the path as the badger and sett are protected. Natural England have indicated they will give a licence to complete works, but work cannot be done until July due to the breeding season!

NEW UPDATE 20/ 5/2025: KCC have advised that they have been working on this one and decided a raised wooden board walk with a handrail over the top is the best way forwards and a design is currently being looked at. It's not straightforward as permission from Natural England is needed for a licence. This has been agreed in principle, but an ecologist may be



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needed on site to assess whether the badgers need to be permanently or temporarily evicted which will cost £££££. KCC do not foresee that it will be sorted in July, but are working hard to get it sorted

5. **PROW250339948.** 11/03/25. AW68 Rockhill Road, opposite Buss's Farm Shop. Broken stile. Status: Still Awaiting Allocation.

NEW ISSUE:

1. **PROW250549477.** 20/5/25. AW73 Newland Green Lane. Rambler reports that *"the landowner of the land on which AW73 runs over has put up rope fencing surrounding and blocking the footpath. The footpath runs up the east side of Acorn Woods to the west of Newlands Green.*