

UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the **Annual Town Meeting**
held in the Weald Hall, Civic Centre, Uckfield
Tuesday 9th April 2019 at 7.00pm

PRESENT	Cllr. S. Mayhew	Town Mayor
	Cllr. J. Love	Deputy Town Mayor
	Cllr. J. Beesley	Chairman of the Environment and Leisure Committee
	Cllr. D. Ward	Chairman of the General Purposes Committee
	Cllr. C. Macve	Chairman of the Plans Committee

Councillors:-

D. French, D. Bennett, P. Meakin, I. Smith and P. Sparks.

2 members of the press

Holly Goring – Town Clerk

Angela Paul – Administrative Officer

Minutes taken by Angela Paul

PCSO Sue Choppin and Inspector Jonathan Gross (Sussex Police) were both in attendance from 6.30pm to 7pm to meet councillors and members of the public to discuss any of their concerns.

1. Welcome and introductions by the Town Mayor

Cllr. Spike Mayhew introduced himself and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Cllr. Mayhew advised all those attending the meeting of the death of Cllr. Keith Everett who had passed away suddenly on the evening of Wednesday 3rd April 2019. Cllr. Mayhew wished to send the Town Council's condolences to Cllr. Everett's family, he stated that Cllr. Everett would be sorely missed by all who knew him.

The Chairmen of the three main committees Cllr Chris Macve, Chairman of Plans Committee, Cllr. Jeremy Beesley, Environment & Leisure Committee and Cllr. Diane Ward, Chairman of General Purposes Committee and Holly Goring, Town Clerk all introduced themselves to the attendees.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from Cllr. Mick Dean, Cllr. Dan Manvell, Mr Chris Lawson (President of Chamber of Commerce) and Mr Alan Blackford (Mr Blackford arrived partway through the meeting)

3. Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of the 10th April 2018

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on the 10th April 2018 previously circulated were proposed and approved by Cllrs P. Meakin and D. French as a true record.

4. Matters arising from the minutes

Mr Fennings asked for an update on progress made with the policing in the town since last year.

The Town Clerk advised that due to problems with a few offenders Uckfield has over the past year received more attention than some other towns within the Wealden area.

The Town Clerk reported that the Police and Town Council had been working closer together over the past year and there had been some very positive work being carried out behind the scenes, with monthly meetings had been held with the police and other interested parties e.g. Town Council, Tesco, McDonalds, small business, the Chamber of Commerce and other community agencies to find ways to reduce the incidents of anti-social behaviour. The Clerk advised that it had been a small core group involved and a lot of focus had been placed on those individuals and their families.

The Town Clerk advised that when incidents or issues were reported to the Town Council the PCSO's were always informed so they were very aware and able to identify hot spot areas and these had been targeted with regular patrols by the police.

Residents and businesses had made use of the 101 telephone report line but it was recognised that the response times had not always been good. The Town Council and Chamber of Commerce would continue to work with the police to ensure they were kept informed of problem areas.

Attendees were also informed about the Sussex Police Weekend Operation Blitz – an operation which saw the presence of Sussex Police officers across Wealden District in the weekend evenings to tackle and reduce anti-social behaviour. Any resident could sign up for the email notifications, and the telephone number.

A further result of this partnership working had been the project to re-open the Youth Club in Downsview Crescent.

There has also been a full upgrade of the town's CCTV system with new cameras installed. The Chamber of Commerce funded the purchase of an additional camera for the western end of the town, near to the Bellbrook Business Park. The CCTV system had a 24hr direct feed to the Sussex Police Headquarters in Lewes; providing very clear footage and surveillance, and an excellent system for the town.

Cllr. Mayhew advised that some councillors had the opportunity to visit the Sussex Police Headquarters and the quality of the pictures were excellent.

Cllr. Bennett advised that the regular meetings with the agencies were proving to be invaluable and a definite way forward as the Town Council had been able to provide direct intelligence to Sussex Police who were working closely with the British Transport Police concentrating on the "county lines" network of people coming from outside the town using the railway hub to move between the local towns. The British Transport Police were able to work out travel patterns of the perpetrators.

Mrs Dann asked how the general public could sign up to obtain the telephone contact number or details of the email address.

Residents were advised that if they contacted the Town Clerk she would be able to provide the information. The number has since been provided – 07770700642.

Cllr. Mayhew reported that he was very pleased with the combined work that had been undertaken by all those involved in getting the new upgraded CCTV system installed in the town.

Cllr. Mayhew also praised the Town Council staff for all their hard work with the successful completion of the recent upgrade of the Luxford Restaurant.

5. Consideration of the Town Council's Annual Report

General Purposes Committee Report from Chairman, Cllr. Diane Ward.

Cllr Ward advised that a number of projects had been undertaken in the past year to improve the town council's facilities and assets, and strengthen the town council's policies.

Cllr. Ward advised that due to cost restraints the Town Council has to save up before any major works can be undertaken. A new Facilities Manager was employed in the summer of 2018 and a significant amount of work got underway to push forward with the decoration of the main building, the Civic Centre. Improvements had been made to the lighting, signage and the general condition of the building, alongside a full refurbishment of the Luxfords restaurant and bar area.

The Town Council's annual maintenance programme prioritised work for minor repairs and decoration for some of the Town Council's other assets - the cemetery wall at Snatts Road, the Signal Box and at Foresters Hall and Victoria Pavilion. In the past 18 months the Town Council has been considering how better value may be obtained by using a large tendering process for some works and using local contractors for smaller or more specialist projects.

A review had also been undertaken of the Town Council's service contracts. With the portfolio of buildings, the Town Council has historically worked with a number of contractors on a variety of contracts and utility/maintenance agreements. These have been reviewed, aligned and the detail of the contracts re-established which has saved the Town Council in the region of £2,500. The Town Council's insurance cover was reviewed in June 2018, which also resulted in a reduction in cost to the Town Council and leaseholders.

Cllr Ward advised that the Council was very proud to be able to have a grant scheme for local community and local organisations and last year provided £41,285 in grant funding.

Cllr Ward thanked all of the Uckfield Town Council staff for their hard work, dedication and support.

Environment & Leisure Committee Report from Chairman Cllr. Jeremy Beesley

Cllr. Beesley thanked the grounds staff for their brilliant job every day to ensure the town remained clean, green and the open spaces, nature reserves and play parks were well managed. Staff were always first on the scene and their dedication was much appreciated.

Cllr Beesley advised that it had been a particularly busy year and a number of projects had been completed with new play equipment installed at Hughes Way play area in the spring of 2018 with the support of Church Coombe Residents' Association. An allotment competition had been introduced working in conjunction with Staverton's Nursery, which saw prize winners selected for various categories including the tallest sunflower for the young person's award.

The Town Council continued to support Brighter Uckfield and would like to thank them and the individual residents who use their own time voluntarily to keep Uckfield clean and attractive.

The Town Council agreed in 2018, to work with a company called Tikspac to provide ten dog bag dispensers in our open spaces to provide bags to dog owners whilst they are out walking. The Town Council also launched a campaign to advise that 'any bin will do.' to dispose of dog waste i.e. any general litter bin will do. The bag dispensers were currently being installed.

Safety on the roads had continued to remain a priority for the Town Council and the past year had seen a working group set up to try and re-instigate the speed indicator device SID, and to hold a further Safety Day in Luxford Field for children from the local primary schools.

Further enhancements had been made to some of the green open spaces including a new boundary fence between Ridgewood Recreation Ground and the Millennium Green.

The Town Council continued to be involved and support the various events within the town. The Council held another successful Weald on the Field Day in August 2018 with the support of Wealden District Council, Uckfield Chamber of Commerce and Food Rocks. Plans were already underway for this year's free event on 3rd August 2019.

Plans Committee report from Chairman Cllr. C. Macve

Cllr. Macve thanked his fellow council members for their considered valuable contributions and their commitment to attendance as their committee had more meetings to attend than some others and in between meetings they also reviewed further planning applications which fell outside the normal cycle of meetings.

Cllr. Macve explained that the Plans Committee was classed as a statutory consultee on all Uckfield- based planning applications and were therefore required to offer comment on the individual planning applications and submit these comments to Wealden District Council.

One of the most important consultations of 2018-19 was the proposed submission document for the Wealden Local Plan. A full consultation process commenced in September 2018, and required detailed consideration of each section. The Town Council asked for the views of all Town Councillors and then a small working group compiled their feedback into themed responses specific to key paragraphs and sections within the main document. The final submission document was submitted to the Planning Inspector in January 2019.

The Town Council has also supported the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group with the development of a Neighbourhood Plan for Uckfield.

Cllr Mayhew took the opportunity to thank all his fellow Councillors for their dedicated commitment and hard work and also thanked all the residents, business, local organisations and charity groups for their continued support over the past year.

6. Topics and questions raised by residents in advance

No questions were received in advance of the meeting.

7. Questions from the floor

Ian Noble advised that he had received a telephone call from a local business asking if the Town Council when putting out to tender had a policy for using local businesses.

The Town Clerk advised that when looking at the annual maintenance programme for the Town Council's buildings (five to ten year plan of works) Councillors had requested that local contractors were utilised as much as possible and in fact the recent refurbishment of the restaurant was a fantastic example of a project which used mostly local contractors. With the project being managed in-house the Town Council had also been able to keep costs down and within budget.

The Facilities Manager had found that it was very cost effective to use local contractors for other small projects and minor works however, for some larger projects if over certain amounts there was a legal requirement for the project to be put out to tender on the central government website Contract Finder in line with procurement guidance and the Town Council's financial regulations.

Peter Selby advised that he had two questions regarding the new development on New Road, Ridgewood

1. Mr Selby advised that there was still a problem with the speed of the traffic along Lewes Road and wanted to know what steps were still to be taken to reduce the speed whilst the development was being built. He had recently noticed that there was now a Banksman sitting in the entrance.

Mrs Sweetland advised that she had spoken to the person and he had advised that it was to assist with the traffic when the slow-moving larger vehicles were entering and leaving the building development.

The Town Clerk advised that she was not aware of the person on site by the gate but she had attended many meetings with ES Highways, Sussex Police and local bus company to discuss the various traffic calming options that would reduce the speed of traffic but would not affect the bus service and traffic flow in Lewes Road. Speed surveys had been undertaken and monitored at five points along the road and in fact most traffic did not exceed the 30-mile speed restriction. It was the southern end of Lewes Road where the speed was currently derestricted that needed attention to ensure speeds reduced near to the entrances of the new development.

2. Mr Selby advised that there was still concern about the 60 mile per hr stretch of road where there is access to the site.

The Town Clerk agreed that this was a valid point regarding safety which she would raise with ESCC and the developers and to check the Section 106 stipulation.

Mrs Sweetland advised that she had heard that a grant of £200,000 had been applied for from the Town Council for the extension and refurbishment of the

Ridgewood Village Hall but she had understood that a community hall was included for the new development plan.

The Town Clerk advised that no decision had yet been taken on supporting the extension and redevelopment of Ridgewood Village Hall. The Town Clerk had been tasked by members, with exploring the various options available to secure a large amount of funding to deliver the project – this including reviewing grant funding opportunities such as the National Lottery. The Town Clerk also advised that she was not aware of any community building being included within the development proposals. The only facilities the Town Council was currently aware of being provided were the green open spaces and corridors, which would be managed by management company(s).

Questions were asked about the Neighbourhood Plan and the Town Clerk briefly outlined the background and reasons for a Plan.

The Town Council has supported the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group for a number of years to see the development of a plan for Uckfield Town. The documents had now reached the stage where they were being prepared for a scoping process with key partner agencies before being updated for public consultation. Once the plan had been adopted, future developments in Uckfield would attract a greater proportion of Community Infrastructure Levy funding, which in turn could be used for improving the local infrastructure. The policies identified within a Neighbourhood Plan would be used by planning officers and developers for consideration in planning applications, but also assist with lobbying on specific issues such as infrastructure.

Mr Fennings stated that he had seen a recent report from a previous meeting regarding the possible introduction of parking permits for Selby Rise, but he suggested that this would only move the problem elsewhere.

The Town Clerk advised that Members were aware of the 'hot spot' areas around the town and the problems that many residents were experiencing. ESCC had prepared a report for Wealden District Council back in late 2017 regarding the introduction of charges but this would have also meant that charges would have to be introduced throughout the whole of the Wealden District (including some villages). This could have placed pressure on small rural businesses and Wealden District Council therefore decided to put the decision on hold.

The Town Council had been pursuing the need for some form of enforcement and have kept bringing the problem to the forefront of discussions as Councillors also want to find a solution and with this in mind discussions were taking place with regard to introducing a role with some sort of enforcement in the Town Centre, New Town and near to the schools.

Cllr. Bennett stated that there were two types of problem parking - one by inconsiderate residents and two, illegal parking - it was the illegal parking that required a solution.

Mr Hubbard reminded residents that when Lewes initially introduced charging the contract had not made a profit, solving the issue is a difficult task but there would be a way, it just takes time to educate people and to ensure that any measures are not bad for commerce.

Mrs Dann suggested that there should be more disabled parking spaces spread along the High Street as the two at the bottom of the High Street were not sufficient

and for any disabled person who needed to visit shops or banks higher up the road, it was too far to walk.

The Town Clerk advised that comments had previously been received in relation to this matter. A public notice was due to be issued shortly, for the traffic regulation order for the parking bays in the High Street. This would provide an opportunity for the public to put forward their views and the Town Clerk could notify any interested residents, when the notice was published.

Mrs Dann advised that the railway car park only had a couple of spaces by the railway station and no other spaces in the large station car park on the opposite side of the road.

Mr Hubbard advised that there was legislation in place for how many spaces theoretically should be provided and there was a national process for the design of car parks and provision for the disabled.

The Town Clerk advised that she would follow up with her contacts with APCOA, the parking company.

Mrs Macve asked if more disabled spaces were to be provided in the High Street could consideration be given to removing some of the spaces currently provided in the Luxford Car Park, "there was nothing more frustrating than trying to find a parking space in the car park at busy times and all the disabled bays were standing empty and not used to their full potential"

The Town Clerk advised that due to the different authorities involved in terms of ownership – ES Highways were responsible for the on-street parking bays (High Street) and Wealden District Council owned Luxford's car park – it may therefore be difficult to change the provision but she would pass on the comments made.

Cllr. Bennett asked in view of the elections shortly taking place and it was unknown who may be elected/re-elected as councillors, he asked if a similar bench to those being donated by the Lions Club could be installed in memory of Cllr. Keith Everett perhaps at Ridgewood Recreation Ground.

Mrs Sweetland asked that the bench not be installed near to the village hall due to the anti-social behaviour that already took place there. She suggested that perhaps a preferred site would be somewhere in Ridgewood near to the bus stop or half way up the hill from the town for those people who had difficulties walking up the hill.

Mr Selby thanked the Town Council for return of the Bow Bells sign.

The Town Clerk advised that it had not been the Town Council but a local individual who had kindly restored the local Bow Bell Marker signs and re-installed them.

Mr Blackford asked if the Town Council could do anything about getting the bus route Uckfield to Eastbourne reinstated on a Sunday, he suggested that with the area growing so fast people would be interested in going on the bus, especially youngsters.

The Town Clerk advised that she was a great supporter of public transport but some struggling routes had been cut substantially which is why the Town Council decided to contribute to the No. 262 bus service on a Saturday between Heathfield and the

Ashdown Forest via Uckfield. If there was sufficient demand when the Ridgewood development was complete, the local bus companies may review service provision. The Town Clerk advised that she did have contact with the bus companies but she did stress that if the demand was not there, realistically the route would not be implemented.

The Town Clerk advised that part of the Neighbourhood Plan included public transport and road infrastructure and as previously explained, the policies within the Neighbourhood Plan could be used as a lobbying tool. It could therefore be possible, once the Ridgewood development was complete that sufficient demand could see some services re-instated.

Mr Blackford asked if a Doctors Surgery was to be provided on the new estate? as residents should not have to wait until the completion of the whole estate as these services should be in place from the beginning. He stated that with the increase in population many residents were concerned about the lack of a provision of a Doctors surgery and other services. Should not the Town Council be lobbying now to put pressure on the developers?

The Town Clerk re-iterated that health services/public transport infrastructure were included within the Neighbourhood Plan as a lobbying mechanism. This view had also been put forward in the consultation of the recent Wealden Local Plan Proposed Submission Document.

Mrs Hughes asked for clarification about Plastic Free Uckfield.

The Town Clerk advised that last year the Town Council agreed to commence an audit on current usage of single use plastics and explore alternatives with becoming a plastic free Town Council. The audit covered all areas of the Town Council including the Civic Centre and the events. As part of the process investigations were made into the cost implications of making simple changes and to reduce the use of single use plastics e.g. using alternatives perhaps changing to vegware cups, to change from the use of plastic to paper straws, and different recycling methods. It was hoped that this would lead the way forward working with Chamber of Commerce and other local bodies in making Uckfield a plastic free town.

The Town Clerk advised that on 27th March 2019 Brighter Uckfield, and the Town Council had two free public information sessions which were both very well attended and Brighter Uckfield had approximately 21 people interested in signing up to be involved in the town campaign.

The Town Council's audit to reduce the use of single use plastics, also included the proposal to install some form of drinking water supply to enable the Civic Centre to become a refill station as part of a national initiative to reduce the use of plastic bottles. The Town Clerk was pleased to advise that a water cooler refill station connected directly to the water mains would be installed within the Civic Centre in the near future.

The Town Clerk advised that the public could download a mobile app (refill.org) which would highlight the main refill stations in the Uckfield area.

Mrs Hughes asked if there would be a charge for refilling bottles.

The Town Clerk advised that there would not be a charge for refilling bottles but there would be a charge to the Town Council for providing the service but Councillors

had agreed to put aside a small budget to fulfill their decision to work towards a plastic free Uckfield.

Residents might also have seen the the new dog poo bags dispensers being installed around the town's open spaces and recreation grounds - these bags were bio-degradable.

There being no further questions Cllr. Mayhew thanked everyone for their attendance, their interest and support and closed the meeting.

Meeting closed at 8.00pm.

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