

UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the **ANNUAL TOWN MEETING** held in the Council Chamber
Uckfield Civic Centre, Tuesday 11th April 2017 at 7.00pm

PRESENT	Cllr. L. Eastwood	Town Mayor
	Cllr. Mick Dean	Chairman of the Environment and Leisure Committee
	Cllr. D. Ward	Chairman of the General Purposes Committee
	Cllr. B. Mayhew	Deputy Chairman of the Plans Committee

Councillors:-

P. Sparks, P. Meakin, D. French, J. Love, K. Everett, H. Firth
C, Macve and I. Smith
Owen Coleman (Youth Member)
District Councillor Claire Dowling, County Councillor Chris Dowling
3 members of the press
24 residents and organisation representatives

Holly Goring – Town Clerk
Angela Paul – Administrative Officer

Minutes taken by Angela Paul

- 1.0 Welcome and introduction by the Town Mayor**
Cllr. Louise Eastwood welcomed everyone and stated that she and the Councillors appreciated residents supporting the meeting and then introduced the Chairman of each of the three main committees.
- 2.0 Apologies for absence**
Apologies for absence received from Cllrs. D. Bennett, J. Anderson, J. Beckford, Mr J. Molesworth Edwards and Mrs Dorothy Sparks.
- 3.0 Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of the 13th April 2016**
After an amendment to Cllr. Dean's Christian name which should be Cllr. Mick Dean not Mike, the minutes of the Annual Town meeting of the 13th April 2016 previously circulated were approved as being a true record.
- 4.0 Matters arising from the minutes**
None.

5.0 Topics and questions by residents previously notified

Cllr. Eastwood read out the questions previously notified and provided responses:-

Question 1 from Mrs Boniface

(Luxford Field)

"Following a question to the Town Council about five years ago, asking for an upgrade/redesign of the playground on Luxford Field, I was told that it would not happen as there was an Uckfield Town Plan due to be implemented which would mean the reorganisation of the Town centre. Given that this plan has now been shelved can we now look forward to our town centre 'village green' having a playground worthy of its position. The equipment in the present playground is dire, old and very sparse. As it stands it is not a good reflection on the town's ability to provide suitable recreation for its people. I know you have developed other play areas for which the townsfolk are very grateful but surely it is now time to enhance the 'village green' the centre of our lovely town!"

Response:

- The Town Clerk advised that the Town Council quite agreed that Luxford Field was a valuable space within the centre of the town and great for town events and activities. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints and as a result of potential regeneration plans for the town centre, any improvement works to the play area were put on hold until more was known.
- On 27th January 2017, the Uckfield Town Centre Joint Regeneration Committee at that time resolved to (1) keep the potential to redevelop and regenerate Uckfield town centre under review; and (2) to hold a further Joint Committee made up of ESCC, WDC and UTC to meet in Summer 2018 to provide an update on the project on that point.
- This meant that we were no closer in knowing what the economic situation would be at that point in time.
- The Town Council's Strategic Plan for 2017-2022 does recognise the need to upgrade the council's play areas and funding has been allocated for improvements to be made to Hughes Way in the next 12-18 months.
- It would be unwise to move forward with any substantial improvement plans to Luxfords play area before the next meeting of the Joint Committee is held in 2018, nor would we have the funds to make improvements to the play area at the present time.
- In the meantime, the town council will consider what interim repairs can be undertaken this year and as part of the budget setting process for 2018/19, consider which play area should be prioritised next for improvement.

Question 2 from Mr Woodham

(Pigeons)

Ongoing issues with pigeons resulting in the new pedestrian paving slabs becoming stained, unsightly mess for residents/visitors and shopkeepers alike in these areas.

Potential health and safety issue if children were to fall over in these areas and touch the droppings. Pedestrians are walking through this mess and it does adhere to the soles of their footwear.

UTC and partners are dealing with the effect on what would appear an ad hoc basis but the cause is not being dealt with i.e. removal of these birds.

For consideration! At Kings Cross station in London the rail authority have brought in a falconer with a harrier hawk on a regular basis during the working days to deal with a similar problem.

What is the future for Uckfield High Street regarding these unwanted pests?

Response:

The Town Clerk agreed that it was a pity that after all the hard work undertaken by ESCC and Colas installing the new paving that they were now being spoilt.

- The Clerk advised that the pigeons and pigeon mess were assessed by an officer of Wealden District Council's Environmental Health team before Christmas. At that point in time, it was not considered to be a health and safety hazard nor deemed bad enough to take enforcement action.
- At that time, the Town Council also made contact with a number of local businesses who specialised in pest and bird control to explore what options would be available to the town. Costs varied and consideration of the central high street location would also need to be taken into account.
- Unfortunately despite properties opposite the old post office covering their premises with netting, the pigeons had still found a home there. This suggested that basic pest control options were not necessarily the answer.

In the last couple of weeks the Town Council had become aware that some residents were encouraging the pigeons by feeding them. We had therefore purchased signs which would be placed in Elizabeth Gardens to advise against feeding the birds;

- The Town Council had also liaised with tenants in the old post office building and provided a copy of the options available, which I believe had been passed onto their landlord/the property owner to take action – and we understand measures were going to be put in place.
- The Town Council had also arranged for Grounds staff to undertake deep cleans of the area as build-ups arise;

- The Town Clerk advised that she had been in contact once more with the Environmental Health Team at WDC and sent further photographs of the number of pigeons on the roofs requesting that they re-assess the situation which they have agreed to do.
- The Town Clerk also advised that WDC and their contractors were the responsible authority for the cleaning of the pavements but it was regrettable that they were not currently taking responsibility.
- Please note these are private properties and therefore other than liaising with those concerned and providing the relevant information, we have limited powers.

Question 3 from Mrs Frost

(Parking and Woodlands)

"I would like to raise the following points:

Lack of sufficient disabled spaces in the High Street, as well as loading and unloading bays, and pull ins for the buses.

The two current disabled spaces need to be clearly marked up with yellow hatchings to dissuade able bodied parking, with signage too.

Luxford car park is one way on both sides in the 3-hour area, and I have seen vehicles going the wrong way on several occasions.....it needs to be marked much more clearly, and signage too.

Have seen a concerning post on social media when some bike jumps were removed from some local woods that are now under private ownership. The young people who posted on the thread are left with the impression that Uckfield does not care about its younger members. Is there some suitable woodland in the ownership of the Town Council, where they could re-build their jumps. Apparently it took a long time to build the jumps (as in several hours), and had been there for at least one generation, and it would be a nice touch to find them another suitable site so they can build some more."

Response

(1) Parking

- The Town Clerk advised that the scheme was developed under an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order which provided the town with time to review how the scheme was working and provide feedback to ESCC.
- A time schedule is given to enable the scheme to settle and then ESCC will undertake a review of how the space is used – this is typically 18 months after the work has completed;
- In regards to accessibility within the High Street, the Town Clerk had met with a local disability group shortly after the reopening of the High Street to listen to any concerns that they wished to raise e.g. trip hazards, parking spaces etc. The issues raised at the time were incorporated in the snagging list, which Colas will be addressing shortly on their return. This included clearer marking up of the two disabled spaces at the bottom of the High Street.

- In terms of longer term proposals, such as increasing the number of disabled bays - this would be fed into ESCC's review.

If residents had further comments they were asked that any comments be passed to the Town Clerk to collate.

With regard to the allocation of loading bays this is not straight forward, as with other towns, these bays were often misused and blocked by normal vehicles. Therefore until civil enforcement was in place, it would be difficult to be on hand to regularly enforce these bays.

- Luxfords car park is the responsibility of Wealden District Council and the Town Council has also noted and received reports about the markings in the car park and have passed on the concerns to WDC.

(2) Jumps in woodland

- The Town Clerk confirmed that the Town Council was keen to support its younger generation and was already working with Uckfield Community Technology College to involve young people and receive their views. Recently two Youth Members joined the Town Council and would have an opportunity to take part in discussions and express their opinions.
- The Town Council provides spaces for a variation of sports within the town but unfortunately any woodland owned by the Town Council was protected either as an ancient woodland such as Boothland Wood or as Nightingale Wood had a number of Tree Preservation Orders. These woodlands were also heavily used by members of the public so unfortunately they would not be the best locations for jumps to be built.

Question 4 from Mrs Sparks (Room hire – Civic Centre)

'Uckfield Town Council is giving discounts to prospective new hirers of the Civic Centre as set out in your Civic Centre and Foresters Hall venue hire charges 2017/18 to encourage them to make a booking. I can appreciate why you are doing this, but I am involved in several groups that hire the Civic Centre, including the Decorative and Fine Arts. This group has booked the Weald Hall for the last 21 years for their monthly meetings. Not only showing you loyalty but quite a number of our members use the Luxford Restaurant for lunch prior to the meeting, giving you their custom and more revenue.'

Perhaps you would consider giving a discount to long term hirers to encourage them to continue using the facilities, or a special offer?'

Response:

- Cllr Ward advised that the Civic Centre Working Group undertook a full review of its fees and charges for the hire of the Civic Centre and Foresters Hall for the forthcoming year which was approved by General Purposes Committee in October 2016.
- As part of this review, members discussed the importance of recognising the loyalty of regular room hirers in addition to attracting new community groups and organisations. The Civic Centre Working Group and the Town Council were to continue to explore various options over the next few months and any decisions taken will be advertised.

6.0 Consideration of the Town Council's Annual Report

The Mayor introduced the reports from the Chairmen of the three main committees which had previously been circulated and asked if there were any questions arising from the reports.

None were forthcoming.

7.0 Questions from the floor

Mrs Frost advised that as many people were aware she was against the Highway improvements from the start and the question regarding pull ins for the buses had still not been resolved, due to lack of space on the road traffic was brought to a halt every time the buses were in the High Street especially at school time.

Mrs Frost asked what ESCC was doing to mend the many pot holes in and around the town and when they were going to spend some money on the repairs.

Cllr Eastwood advised that the meeting was a Town meeting and everybody was aware that there was a problem with potholes, Central Government had recently announced that there would be some monies available for Councils to assist with the repair of pot holes.

Mrs Frost advised that she knew it was a Town Council meeting but she noted that County Councillors were in attendance and asked if they would take the opportunity to respond.

Cllr. Chris Dowling agreed to respond and noted that pot holes were a problem nationally not just in East Sussex and were taken seriously by the County Council. The Highways Department was spending 90 million pounds on the repairs over the next 7 years and was working with their new contractors on the best and efficient way to carry out the works.

Cllr Sparks advised that when he was a County Councillor 4 years ago he argued that the most effective way was to initially repair the potholes properly rather than just carrying out patching which did not last and meant that the same holes were having to be repaired.

Mr Firth asked if consideration had been given to employing a Traffic Warden and sharing the costs with other Councils as illegal, inconsiderate and the 1 hour parking limit was not being policed and although there was a large car park for the railway, commuters were still parking and blocking up nearby residential roads. If the Police were not going to carry out enforcement they should not receive any of the money from collected fines.

The Town Clerk advised that WDC had resolved recently at Cabinet to keep off-street parking free and explore options with ESCC for civil enforcement of on-street parking. WDC and Town and Parish Councils were continuing to talk with the Police and had been monitoring the situation and exploring interim measures.

Mr Selby asked why the signs for Ridgewood had disappeared from the road signs and also did the Council have any powers to do anything about the road surface in Mill Lane he was aware it was a private road.

The Town Clerk advised that when the new town twinning signs were erected the Ridgewood signs were removed which was not expected or planned by the Town Council but ESCC had been contacted and Ridgewood Village signs would be put back in place in due course.

Cllr. Firth advised that she was also aware of the concerns of residents regarding Mill Lane and had made enquiries but the problem was that the lane was private and that many people were involved including a Trust and the residents at Millington Court.

Mr Selby advised that he would make further enquiries regarding the ownership of Mill Lane.

Mr S. Colvin advised that he raised the question last year regarding the number of advertising hoardings on the roundabouts and he wanted to thank Cllr. Anderson for all his work with ESCC in arranging for the advertising hoardings to be removed from the roundabouts.

Mr Colvin was disappointed to see that following work carried out by Open Reach they had used the correct man holes covers on the new paving slabs but had spoiled the look by using tar rather than replacing the York stone slabs. He also wanted to know when the trees would be replaced.

The Town Clerk advised that the Town Council was also very disappointed to see that the work had been allowed to be carried out as it was understood that any works were subject to a Section 58 for 3 years. She understood from ESCC that the company was allowed a 6 month period for them to make good and she would be monitoring the situation.

With regards to the replacement trees we were waiting for new tree guards and again she was liaising with ESCC to be addressed..

Mrs Venables (representative of Buc Up) reported that since the toilet block in Luxford Car Park had been removed by WDC an old metal 'T' shape bar had been left sticking up from the ground and the top with sharp edges was at eye level of a small child and she was concerned it could cause a serious injury.

Cllr. Eastwood and the Clerk noted the report and would pass to WDC as urgent request to have removed.

Mrs Venables also advised that she was still very concerned about the possibility of flash flooding in the High Street due to the large amount of grit and sand accumulating in the gutters and drains especially the drains near to St Philips Church/school where the recent building work has taken place and a lot of mud/sand has run off from the building site. Mrs Venables had reported the problem before but ESCC were still not cleaning the gutters.

The Town Clerk advised that this would be followed up with ESCC.

Mr Firth advised that he had correspondence going back 9 years regarding the cemetery and for 5 years he had been asking for the wall to be repaired and he also wanted to know why a dog walker was still allowed to enter the cemetery by a gate as it was not very pleasant to find dog mess on the War Graves where he had planted daffodils.

The Town Clerk advised that there was a 10 year maintenance programme and the wall had been prioritised when budget setting for this financial year but the Clerk explained that before the programmed work could take place it would have to go out to Tender therefore would not take place until late 2017, early 2018.

Mr Blackford wanted to know why the grass at Ridgewood Play area and Luxford Field had not been cut as they both looked a mess, was it due to budget cuts?

The Town Clerk advised that the Grass Cutting contract had been awarded to new contractors and they were due to start work this week.

Mr Blackford also reported that it was not just the drains in the High Street that were blocked but the drains in Ridgewood and elsewhere in the town were terrible and he did not know why Councillors had not noticed or appeared to be doing anything about the situation.

Mrs Frost thanked the Town Councillors for all the hard work they undertook for the Town.

Mr Woodham referred to page 2 question 1 of the Minutes of the 2016 meeting regarding the southbound traffic slowed down at Church Street traffic lights by cars turning right into Church Street and asked if a solution was being considered for this dangerous junction as cars jumping the red traffic lights had been observed on many occasions by residents.

Cllr. Eastwood advised that the Town Council and ESCC were aware of cars jumping the red lights at Church Street and phasing of the lights and possible solutions to the problem was currently being considered and reviewed.

Mr Blackford advised that he had noticed that the old metal rings had appeared on the kerbs by Waitrose and asked if anybody knew why they were there.

Cllr. Eastwood advised that as they were part of the history of the old town and they should remain on the kerbs.

There being no further questions Cllr. Eastwood thanked everybody for attending and their interest and also thanked the Councillors and Officers for all the hard work they undertook for the Town.

The meeting closed at 7.50pm.