



Our Strategic Plan 2021-2026



Uckfield Town Council

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Uckfield Town Council

Our five-year strategic plan sets out the direction for Uckfield Town Council between 2021 and 2026. It helps us to understand where we are today, where we want to be in the future and the steps we will take to get there. The plan therefore sets out a number of objectives, that we wish to achieve within this period.

The plan takes on board the current situation within which we are working, in particular the challenges and opportunities for Uckfield. It also reflects on the feedback we have received from both our residents and partners, about what matters.

The financial situation remains challenging, particularly with the impact of the pandemic, but the Town Council is committed to doing the very best for the town, its residents, local businesses and visitors. We will work in partnership with the right agencies and community groups to do this, and ensure that Uckfield remains a beautiful place to live.



				
Cllr Jeremy Beesley (Ridgewood Ward)	Cllr Karen Bedwell (Ridgewood Ward)	Cllr Duncan Bennett (New Town Ward)	Cllr Ben Cox (New Town Ward)	Cllr James Edwards (Ridgewood Ward)
				
Cllr Helen Firth (New Town Ward)	Cllr Donna French (East Ward)	Cllr Gary Johnson (West Ward)	Cllr Jackie Love (Deputy Mayor) (North Ward)	Cllr Chris Macve (East Ward)
				
Cllr Spike Mayhew (Town Mayor) (New Town Ward)	Cllr Angie Smith (North Ward)	Cllr Colin Snelgrove (North Ward)	Cllr Paul Sparks (East Ward)	Cllr Diane Ward (West Ward)

Uckfield is one of five market towns located within the Wealden District. Its facilities serve not only the residents of the town but also the residents of its neighbouring villages.

The attractive setting of Uckfield brings both new residents and visitors to the town. Its location in the heart of Wealden and close proximity to the Ashdown Forest provides plenty of opportunities for leisure and recreation, in addition to the beautiful green open spaces and woodlands located within the town itself. Here are a few key statistics. The 2021 census in March 2021 will provide an up-to-date and accurate profile of our population.

15,108 residents

(2019 small area population estimate)



Living in just over 6,000 households

(2011 census)



Younger age profile is greater than District average in the wards of Uckfield New Town, North and Ridgewood

(0-15 years + 16-29 years)
(2019 small area population estimate)



Older age profile is less than District average in the wards of Uckfield New Town, North and Ridgewood

(65 years and over)
(2019 small area population estimate)



Good level of education

(81.7% of working age population have qualifications)
(2011 Census)





High rate of economic activity

(over 75.5% economically active)



Wealden has a high percentage of home ownership

(78.7% owner occupied)
(2011 Census)

~~Unemployed~~

Low rate of unemployment

(rate of Job Seekers Allowance claimants is slightly greater in three wards of Uckfield compared to Wealden (average 4.2%))



15.4% of the population have a limiting long term illness

(less than District average – 17.5% and County average – 20.3%) (2011 census)



High house prices

(the mean average house price reached £328,000 in 2019 and higher than £364,000 in Uckfield Central and Ridgewood Wards)

Turning Challenges into Opportunities

Challenges

Opportunities

Limited infrastructure to support future development

With an increase in the population and plans for further development within the town boundary, it is important for the key agencies to consider where improvements are required in terms of infrastructure – education, health, transport, sewerage capacity, water supply, broadband coverage and mitigation of flood risk.

Covid-19 Pandemic

With the national lockdowns and Covid restrictions, businesses in Uckfield will have had to face a number of financial pressures in 2020 and 2021.

Proposals for growth

Plans have been put in place to build a further 1,000 homes in the Ridgewood area of Uckfield Town. This reflects proposals within the Wealden Local Plan for growth and increasing housing stock

Range of facilities

The town has a substantial range of facilities, with its own independent cinema and leisure centre. High performing schools, free parking, a diverse selection of shops and nearby Ashdown Forest are a big draw for residents and visitors.

Retaining our highly educated workforce

Uckfield has high levels of educational attainment but with good and improving transport links to Brighton, East Croydon and London mean much of the town's working age population are attracted to work out of the town.

Central location within South East

Being in the heart of the Wealden District, the town is centrally located within the South East between London and the South Coast. Its close proximity to Gatwick Airport and Newhaven port provides job opportunities and ease of travel.

Flood risk

The River Uck runs through the middle of the town which could place the town at risk of fluvial flooding. Mitigating measures are in place but the town is also susceptible to surface water run-off in heavy bouts of rain as a result of the undulating landscape of the town

Our green spaces

Uckfield is fortunate to have two nature reserves, green open spaces and allotments. We need to encourage greater use of these spaces and continue to maintain them to a high standard.

Addressing traffic congestion

The road network through Uckfield Town and the A22 by-pass are heavily used by traffic. Although recent works in the High Street have improved accessibility for pedestrians and vehicles, there are still a number of pinch points on the corridors to the town, which could benefit from improvements.

Improvements to transport links

The train station platform has been extended, carriages increased and a new station car park created which will support an increase in rail users in the future. The Council also supports any future opportunities to re-establish the rail line between Lewes and Uckfield and build a new rail link between Uckfield and Brighton via Falmer.

Limited financial resources

The Town Council along with other tiers of local government (District and County Councils) are being placed under increasing financial pressure. Despite this, the Council still needs to deliver the services for which it has responsibility and consider taking on services devolved from other tiers of local government under financial restraint. This may require the Town Council to be innovative and/or make difficult decisions.

Partnership working

As with all local authorities, the Town Council is in a strong position to work closely with its partner agencies to retain good quality services for residents. Partnership working can provide good value for money and increase opportunities.

Asset management

The Town Council has responsibility for a number of assets that could assist in generating higher revenues in the future. It would be prudent for the Town Council to develop an Asset Management Plan now, to effectively prepare for the future.

Our Vision

Preserving heritage,
providing for the future

Our Mission

Working with our partner agencies to provide a high standard of service delivery for residents, businesses and visitors to the town.

Our Corporate Priorities

People

- Cultural and Related services
- Luxfords and Civic Centre

Place

- Environmental and Regulatory Services
- Planning and Development Services
- Highways and Transport Services

Provision

- Central Services

Our Strategic Priorities - People

In addition to agreeing a set of specific priorities each year, the Town Council has set out a number of medium term aspirations for the town.

Cultural and related services

By 2026 we will have

- Supported local community and voluntary organisations and sought to assist them with their positive work within the town;
- Explored options for the facilities provided at two town council buildings – Foresters Hall and West Park Pavilion, to see how these buildings can better meet the need of Uckfield's residents and organisations,
- Improved the facilities and surfacing at the Town Council's play areas with plans to upgrade at least one further playground;
- Introduced a number of initiatives to increase the use of our open spaces, and encourage greater physical activity (distance markers, fun games and activities which encourage movement);
- Worked with our partner agencies to increase opportunities for residents of all ages to take part in activities which improve their health and wellbeing;
- Organised events which assist in attracting visitors to the town and support local businesses;
- Established a list of special and important dates or individuals within the town's history and commemorated these on heritage plaques;
- Investigated the viability of providing additional public convenience facilities within the town centre and seeking to obtain a changing spaces facility;
- Restored the traditional red telephone box and brought back into use in a prominent location as a community facility;
- Continued to maintain, improve and protect all of our natural areas to accommodate the demands of future growth of the town; encouraging community involvement;
- Explored whether there are opportunities for adding to or improving the existing skatepark facilities, and the drainage in the vicinity of the skate park;
- Supported the partnership work and continuation of the Uckfield Youth Club;
- Explored the issues around food poverty, particularly youth food poverty in Uckfield, and worked with the relevant authorities to try and tackle these local issues;
- Worked with partner agencies, to identify future options for providing more community space within the town to meet the needs of local community groups and organisations.

Luxfords Restaurant and Civic Centre

By 2026 we will have

- Increased the capacity of the pellet hopper for the Civic Centre's Bio-mass boiler to reduce increasing costs in the purchase of wood pellets;
- Removed the window area in the Civic Centre atrium to reduce water ingress;
- Made improvements to the decoration and flooring within the main corridors and meeting rooms;
- Decorated the Weald Hall and undertaken improvements to the venue's performance facilities;
- Considered options for providing a temporary but sound proof partition within the Green Room;
- Updated room facilities in line with the latest modern technologies, continued to improve WI-FI connections and ensured networking ports are of good quality;
- Made improvements to air conditioning within the Civic Centre building;
- Installed a new internal booking system for use by the Civic Centre for all venue and room hire;
- Explored and implemented (if cost effective) the introduction of an online booking facility on the Civic Centre website for the purchase of event tickets;
- Developed and implemented a communications and marketing plan for the Civic Centre, in addition to an annual calendar of events;
- Introduced a number of initiatives and increased takeaway options for customers in Luxfords Restaurant;
- Built a good online and social media presence for both the Civic Centre and Luxfords Restaurant;



Our Strategic Priorities - Place

In addition to agreeing a set of specific priorities each year, the Town Council has set out a number of medium term aspirations for the town.

Environmental and regulatory services

By 2026 we will have

- Maintained a good standard of grounds maintenance within the town to ensure Uckfield remains an attractive place to live;
- Maintained good quality floral displays within the town centre, to ensure Uckfield town centre remains an attractive place to live, work and visit;
- Financially contributed to East Sussex County Council's grass verge cutting contract in 2021/22, to retain a good standard of service and ensured visibility is maintained on pavements and highways;
- Considered in detail, whether the Town Council could undertake its open space grass cutting contract in-house rather than contracting out;
- Completed an audit which has assisted with calculating our carbon footprint;
- Implemented ways in which we could further reduce our impact on climate change; focusing on contracts, buildings, vehicles and equipment, energy sources and management of nature and waste disposal;
- Implemented a tree planting scheme so that for every tree that has been removed, another tree has been planted. We will have also identified suitable sites where additional trees can be planted on Town Council land;
- Supported the set up of the Community Fridge initiative and community herb garden project to encourage the reduction of food waste;
- Led by example, to deliver a project with Brighter Uckfield and Uckfield Chamber of Commerce to encourage Uckfield's businesses and organisations to reduce their use of single-use plastic and undertake a review around recycling and re-use;
- Continued to provide burial authority services with responsibility for the maintenance of the Cemetery at Snatts Road and Holy Cross churchyard;
- Continued to work with East Sussex County Council to gradually review street lighting and replace with new columns and LED lighting where necessary;
- Considered whether the Town Council is the right service and has the funds available to take on services devolved by the District and County Councils, to ensure residents retain a good level of service provision.

Planning and development services

By 2026 we will have

- Worked closely with the planning authority, Wealden District Council, to understand the latest legislative updates and guidance;
- Fed into Wealden District Council's Local Plan development process, as part of cluster meetings to respond to consultations and raise issues relating to Uckfield;
- Supported the development of a Neighbourhood Plan and worked with Action in Rural Sussex and the local Planning authority to enable this plan to be adopted and utilised alongside the Wealden Local Plan by developers;
- As a member of Uckfield Town Centre Regeneration Committee, we will have worked with our partners (Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council) to explore options for regeneration within the centre of the town, and possibility of expanding the retail and business offer;
- Promoted the need for affordable housing within Uckfield Town, to support those in housing need and first time buyers;
- Worked with Wealden District Council to ensure the Town Council is fully engaged in other regulatory matters such as licensing;
- Developed an annual process by which the Town Council reviews its assets and strategic asset management plan and consideration is given to each of the Town Council's buildings to improve the efficiency and use of these properties;
- Delivered a ten year programme of maintenance and decoration to all of the Town Council community buildings through schemes of major and minor works;
- Reviewed the condition of car parks adjacent to Town Council owned buildings and agreed a programme of repairs or resurfacing;
- Arranged an annual display of Christmas lights;
- Worked with the Chamber of Commerce to engage with High Street landlords (commercial and residential) to promote and secure improvements to street frontages.

Our Strategic Priorities - Place

In addition to agreeing a set of specific priorities each year, the Town Council has set out a number of medium term aspirations for the town.

Highways and Transport services

By 2026 we will have

- Identified potential areas within the town which required improvements to pedestrian safety and worked with the relevant agencies to lobby for enhancements;
- Worked with our partner agencies to feed into improvements to the bus station area, to improve accessibility, signage and provide improved facilities such as real time bus information and public convenience(s);
- Worked with our partner agencies to identify highway issues within the access corridors into the town centre and utilised S106 developer contributions or Community Infrastructure Levy to improve the infrastructure and address matters relating to traffic congestion, traffic calming and road safety;
- Worked with the relevant partner agencies to address the danger of speeding vehicles and the possibility of extending the 20mph town centre speed limit;
- Introduced speed reduction initiatives including community speedwatch and behaviour change campaigns, and explored the introduction of installing permanent speed indicator devices;
- Worked with partner agencies to identify and implement solutions for introducing parking controls within the town centre;
- Engaged in discussions to actively promote the re-opening of the Uckfield to Lewes railway line, and a direct route into Brighton;
- Worked with partner agencies to explore whether electric car charging points can be introduced in Uckfield town;
- Organised an annual day with partner agencies to educate young people about key issues – climate change and safety – potentially alternating the subject matter each year;
- Worked with partner agencies and landowners to explore the possibility of improving footway links between Ridgewood Farm, the SANGs and the nature reserves, and explored the possibility of creating a riverside walk;
- Created up to date street maps of the town, which highlight our open spaces and footways including the alleyways and twittens.



Our Strategic Priorities - Provision

In addition to agreeing a set of specific priorities each year, the Town Council has set out a number of medium term aspirations for the town.

Central Services

By 2026 we will have

- Improved communication with residents, businesses and visitors to the town through enhancements to the Town Council website and social media accounts;
- Improved the condition and display of existing noticeboards, and undertaken a review of their location to ensure they are clear and visible;
- Produced the Town Calendar in-house for 2022; working with local businesses to provide greater advertising opportunities and information about voluntary and community organisations;
- Improved accessibility to committee meetings by installing an additional hearing loop in the Council Chamber;
- Increased promotion of the town's key facilities;
- Reviewed our existing financial processes – including changing from the existing cheque payment method to dual authorisation BACs payments for suppliers, and digitalised our purchase order and invoicing process;
- Encouraged applications from local traders and organisations in the Town Council's procurement procedures for contractual work within the town;
- Provided training and briefings for the Town Councillors and staff, to support them in their learning and development;
- Undertaken an annual review of all key policies to ensure they remain up to date with the latest guidance and best practice;
- Reduced our use of paper within the Town Council office, by reviewing our working practices and procedures with regard to file retention, purchase orders and invoicing and record management;



Delivering our Objectives

Overview of the Town Council

The Town Council has 15 Town Councillors, who are elected every four years. The last set of town council elections took place in May 2019. The next set of local elections will therefore take place in May 2023.

The positions of Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor are elected by the Town Councillors each year at the start of the annual statutory meeting of Full Council which takes place in May. However, due to the pandemic, Councillors continued in their roles in 2020/2021.

All Town Councillors meet in the format of Full Council at least six times a year, and the town council's three main standing committees, are:

- General Purposes Committee (9 members)
- Environment and Leisure Committee (9 members)
- Plans Committee (7 members)

We also have two sub-committees responsible

for dealing with specific matters related to finance and human resources, called Personnel Sub-Committee and Finance Sub-Committee, which report their recommendations back to General Purposes Committee. These sub-committees meet on an ad-hoc basis when further detailed work is required.

Normally, formal committee meetings are held in the Council Chamber of the Civic Centre, Uckfield. During the pandemic meetings have been held remotely on Zoom. Residents are welcome to attend these public meetings and make statements in relation to items on the agenda of that committee, subject to the Chairman's discretion. Under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, members of the public are able to film and record during a committee meeting to report on the meeting.

Financial information

General finances

Town Councillors are required to start the process of budget setting within the autumn, for the following financial year. This provides time to review our income and expenditure, the priorities of the Town Council, the priorities within the Town and the costs associated.

The precept is the local tax levied by the Town Council and collected on our behalf by Wealden District Council as the rating authority.

The precept for 2020/21 was agreed by the Town Council on 20 January 2020 at a figure of £942,405.

Capital expenditure

The Council adopts a balanced approach to its capital expenditure in respect of the

procurement of new assets and the maintenance of its existing assets. The first priority should however focus on developing and maintaining existing assets for the benefit of the community. Additional income may also be generated, where appropriate, through renting or leasing of these assets.

Reserves

The Council adopts a risk based approach to its level of reserves which will be reviewed annually or more frequently if necessary. Currently the minimum level of general reserves will be set at approximately three months gross operating costs. Reserves will only be held above the minimum level for specific, earmarked purposes.

Delivering our Objectives

Organisational structure

Delivery of the Town Council's functions is overseen and managed by the Town Clerk, who is the Town Council's proper officer and required to support and advise members in their role and issue any statutory notifications.

The Town Clerk is supported by a team of nearly 30 members of staff who are responsible for maintaining the town's grounds and open spaces, buildings, facilities, and providing services to our customers within Luxfords Restaurant and the Civic Centre.

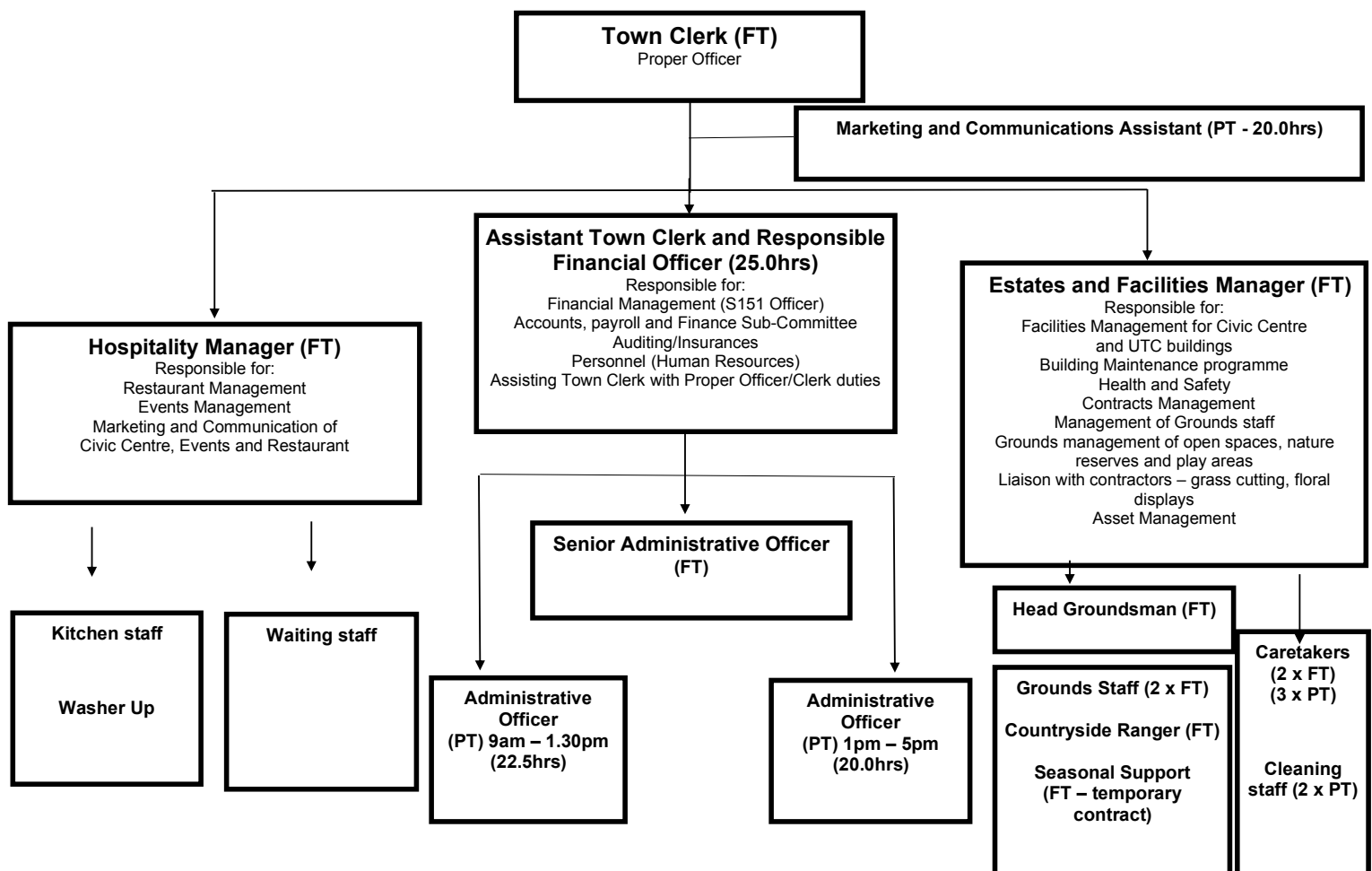
The Assistant Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer is responsible for managing the

Council's finances, human resources and Council administration.

The Hospitality Manager is responsible for managing the restaurant, Civic Centre room hire and hospitality, and Civic Centre events programme.

The Estates and Facilities Manager is responsible for managing the maintenance and repair of the Town Council's key buildings, liaising with external contractors, managing health and safety and our caretaking and cleaning staff as well as having responsibility for our open spaces and grounds management and grounds staff.

The following organisational chart presents the current staff structure:





Uckfield Town Council Offices
Civic Centre, Uckfield, TN22 1AE