

UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of **UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL** held
on Monday 6 December 2021 at 7.00 pm
in the Weald Hall, Civic Centre, Uckfield

PRESENT:

Cllr. J. Beesley	Cllr. J. Love (Town Mayor)
Cllr. D. Bennett	Cllr. C. Macve
Cllr. B. Cox	Cllr. S. Mayhew
Cllr. J. Edwards	Cllr. A. Smith
Cllr. H. Firth	Cllr. P. Sparks
Cllr. D. French (Deputy Mayor)	Cllr. D. Ward
Cllr. G. Johnson	Emily McHale (Youth Member)
	Becky Ikeson (Youth Member)

IN ATTENDANCE:

1 x member of the press (recorded)
5 x members of the public
County Councillor Chris Dowling
County & District Councillor Claire Dowling

Mark Francis Estates & Facilities Manager
Sarah D'Alessio Assistant Town Clerk & RFO
Holly Goring Town Clerk
Minutes taken by Holly Goring

1.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members and officers were reminded to make any declarations of personal and/or prejudicial interests that they may have in relation to items on the agenda. They were advised that notice should be given at this part of the meeting of any intended declaration and that the nature of the interest should then be declared later at the commencement of the item or when the interest became apparent.

Only one declaration was put forward – Town Mayor, Councillor J. Love wished to note that her employer Sussex Support Services was referenced within the budget papers as a leaseholder of the Town Council.

2.0 STATEMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON MATTERS ON THE AGENDA AT THE MAYOR'S DISCRETION

None received.

3.0 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL AND WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

FC.58.12.21 It was **RESOLVED** to suspend Standing Orders to enable members of the public to speak.

Councillor Chris Dowling discussed one main item which related to the utility company UK Power Networks. With works nearly a week overdue in November, it was a relief that contractors had been able to leave site to enable traffic flows to return to normal in the lead up to Christmas and in time for Late Night Shopping. They were not due to return until the New Year, and at that point the temporary tarmac infills near to the bridge would ensure that the York stone pavement is reinstated.

Councillor Claire Dowling reminded members that East Sussex County Council was waiting on the local government settlement figures to inform their budget setting process for 2022/23. This was anticipated next week. They were hoping for a three-year local government settlement, so the county council could plan longer term, but more information would be known in the following few days.

Councillor P. Sparks provided a district update, having attended a public health briefing the previous week. The requirement for members of the public to wear face masks was not just compulsory now in retail businesses but also within Estate Agents, Banks and Building societies as just some examples. There were high rates of Covid, with Willingdon and Uckfield which were particular hotspots in Wealden District. It was found that mainly those aged 40-49 years and secondary school age children had been most affected. This meeting also reflected on Freedom Leisure services which were all now back open but only at 65% of pre-pandemic levels in terms of service users. It was advised that East Sussex County Council would hold a briefing on the Uckfield and Heathfield Leisure Centres before financial year end.

Councillor H. Firth did not have much more to add, but wished to reference the letter that had been sent to the Secretary of State (Rt Hon Michael Gove) by a consortium of parish councils from Hellingly up to East Hoathly and Heathfield, regarding the housing numbers being imposed by the UK Government on rural areas such as Wealden District.

Councillor G. Johnson reminded members of the timescales for the draft Local Plan, with the draft expected to be published for consultation Spring 2022. Wealden DC too had been engaging government representatives including local MPs to discuss the issues facing Wealden District. It was hoped that the numbers could be reduced, and if applications that had gone through could be included in those numbers, before the Draft Local Plan has to be finalised.

FC.59.12.21 With no questions, Councillors were thanked for their input and updates, and members subsequently **RESOLVED** to reinstate Standing Orders.

4.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillors K. Bedwell and C. Snelgrove. Councillor J. Love advised members that Councillor C. Snelgrove was currently in hospital and very poorly. She hoped Town Councillors would join her in wishing him a speedy recovery.

5.0 MINUTES

5.1 To resolve that the minutes of the meeting of the Full Council on 25 October 2021 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

FC.60.12.21 It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of full Council on 25 October 2021 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

5.2 Action List

Members requested that the following actions be removed as they had now been completed:

FC46.09.21 – West Park Pavilion

Members subsequently noted the action list.

6.0 COMMITTEE MINUTES

6.1 To note the acts and proceedings of the following committee meetings:-

(a) Plans Committee of the 1 and 22 November 2021

FC.61.12.21 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Plans Committee of the 1 and 22 November 2021.

(b) Environment & Leisure Committee of the 15 November 2021

FC.62.12.21 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Environment & Leisure Committees of the 15 November 2021.

(c) General Purposes Committee of the 8 November 2021

FC.63.12.21 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the General Purposes Committees of the 8 November 2021.

7.0 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE BODIES

(i) The Uckfield Town Centre Regeneration Joint Committee

Nothing to report at present.

(ii) Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

Nothing to report at present.

(iii) Gatwick Airport Consultation Panel

Nothing to report at present.

8.0 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM FULL COUNCIL WORKING GROUPS

(i) Civic Centre Working Group

Nothing to report at present.

(ii) Uckfield Dementia Forum

Councillor P. Sparks wished to raise awareness of the Dementia friendly Christmas event planned for the afternoon of Wednesday 15 December 2021, at the Luxford Centre, which would include a screening of an Andre Rieu festive performance, festive treats and refreshments and raffle prizes. He asked members to spread the word. Members noted the report.

(iii) Uckfield – Events Working Group

Councillor D. French confirmed that Weald on the Field 2022 would take place on Saturday 6 August, and the Uckfield Revival would be moving to a weekend in May, with a date still to be confirmed, whilst the group checked that the event did not clash with any other local classic vehicle events. Members noted the report.

9.0 TO CONSIDER WORKS TO AN OAK TREE IN THE OLD SECTION OF SNATTS ROAD CEMETERY

Members had been presented with a report which explained the background work that had been undertaken by officers to assess the extent of decay within an oak tree in the old section of the Snatts Road Cemetery. Unfortunately surveys had highlighted that the tree was in poor health, and in its very sensitive setting within the cemetery and in close proximity to a sub-station, a telephone line, a residential property and road (Snatts Road), some or all of the tree needed to be removed to reduce the risk of impacting the resting place of loved ones' interments within the cemetery.

The Town Clerk explained the current situation and the level of contact that had been made with relatives who had loved ones laid to rest around the base of the tree. Understandably when contact was first made with relatives early summer it was a shock and the method of communication could have been improved, but working relationships had been strengthened since then, and recent correspondence with the majority of the relatives that had been traced, had helped to identify a way forward.

Members agreed that option 2 to reduce the tree to a specific and safe height, preferably 3.5metres would be the most appropriate option, to ensure that a memorial can be retained but reduce the risk. They were also keen to encourage wildlife to utilise the trunk of the tree and what remained, with the potential for new wildlife habitats to flourish.

One member recalled a tree that had come down in a storm in Holy Cross Churchyard in 1984, which had caused great upset, so it was prudent to avoid this scenario. It was suggested that any wood left over be put to a satisfactory use. The wood from the tree in Holy Cross Churchyard had been used to make the pigeon coop.

A suggestion was put forward for use of any surplus wood, in addition to the stacks of wood for wildlife habits, offer of pieces of wood to the relatives for their home or garden, and for the creation of benches. The suggestion was that of bird boxes, which could perhaps be supported by the Men's Shed, who were very good at woodwork.

FC64.12.21

Members **RESOLVED** to agree for the Town Council to remove the branches and height of the oak tree in the old section of Snatts Road Cemetery to a height of 3.5metres and retain as a wildlife monolith, with part of the wood being retained for relatives' personal use, ecological wildlife areas, seating and birdboxes.

10.0 TO CONSIDER THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WEALDEN PARISH REMUNERATION PANEL ON TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILLOR ALLOWANCES FOR 2022/23

Members discussed this matter at length. They understood the current difficulties that the pandemic had placed on many households and businesses but also recognised that having not taken an increase in the previous year and only a marginal increase the year before that they were now some way behind recommended figures.

A first vote was taken on a proposal for Town Councillors to take an increase of 2.5% on their allowances in 2022-23, however this vote could not be carried with only four votes in favour and eight members abstaining.

Discussions continued with a second proposal put on the table for a 2% increase. This was also not carried due to lack of interest from members.

Members challenged each other on the benefits of member allowances, and how if the process was inclusive the allowances did help provide an incentive for people to become Town Councillors, but they also recognised that the financial situation was difficult for residents, businesses and the Town Council.

A proposal returned to freeze member allowances at the current rate which was seconded, and taken to a vote.

FC65.12.21 With ten votes in favour, and one member voting to abstain it was **RESOLVED** to freeze member allowances for 2022/23, and retain member allowances at the 2020-21 rate previously agreed by Uckfield Town Council (£1284.00 basic member allowance and £1773.00 for Chairman's Allowance per annum respectively before tax).

11.0 TO CONSIDER WHETHER THE SANITISATION OF PLAY AREAS IS REQUIRED DURING THE 2021/22 WINTER SEASON

Members were presented with the findings of a swab test on all of the play areas which had been undertaken at the end of November 2021. Members had previously agreed to halt spraying of the play areas during the summer months and for a review to be undertaken in the winter, when covid rates were likely to be higher. There had been no changes to the UK Government guidance on play areas in 2021, and it was therefore at the Town Council's discretion as to how it wished to move forward.

FC66.12.21 Members **RESOLVED** to continue to review the situation during the winter months based on current UK Government guidance but not to instruct any further spraying at this time.

12.0 TO REVIEW THE 2022/23 PROPOSAL FROM EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL ON THEIR GRASS VERGE CUTTING CONTRACT

Members were presented with a brief report which provided three options for parish/town councils to choose from for the next financial year. East Sussex County Council took a decision back in 2018 to reduce urban grass verge cutting along the public highway to twice a year. This meant the verges would be cut less, if no further contribution was made, the Town Council could pay a contribution to retain five to six cuts per annum or take over the contract entirely for a very small fee. The latter option however would require a great deal of extra work, to plan, obtain machinery, consider staffing levels and take on liability alongside the public highway.

FC.67.12.21 With 11 votes in favour, members **RESOLVED** to advise East Sussex County ~ Council that Uckfield Town Council would be selecting Option 2 for 2022/23: *Option 2 – Extra cuts: Parish/Town Councils may fund an additional four cuts to be carried out by ESCC, totalling six cuts (two standard and four extra) over the course of the year.*

This would cost the Parish/Town Council a total of £4,356 for the year.

13.0 TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT ARRANGEMENTS FOR SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS WITH UCKFIELD VOLUNTEER CENTRE AND WEALDEN CITIZEN'S ADVICE FOR 2022/23

This item was deferred to the next meeting of full Council on 17 January 2022.

14.0 TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-27

The report was felt to incorporate the many issues and initiatives that Town Councillors and local residents had discussed in the previous 12 months. Staff were thanked for the work they put into this every year.

Councillor C. Macve thought that mention needed to be included on the considerations required on future cemetery expansion. The Town Clerk felt this had already been referenced within the draft document but would strengthen this further.

Councillor A. Smith wished for the work on the Green Partnership and work with the town's organisations on the green agenda to be reflected.

It was clarified that the blue plaque project had not been removed but would be placed on hold until a later date.

Councillor D. French suggested that the statement on page 3 under environmental and regulatory services regarding the climate change action plan needed rewording.

Members were satisfied with the draft Strategic Plan 2022/27 at this stage and wished to note the report, for consultation.

15.0 TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT ANNUAL PLAN 2022/23

Members felt that the Draft Annual Plan 2022/23 was very comprehensive and were satisfied with the current draft at this stage. Councillor P. Sparks wished for reference to be made to the importance of insulation when looking at climate change and energy efficiency in our buildings. Subject to this addition, members noted the report, for consultation.

16.0 TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT ANNUAL BUDGET 2022/23

Members reviewed the first draft of the Annual Budget for 2022/23. The Assistant Town Clerk & RFO advised that staff had looked closely at all codes and budget lines, to consider where increases may arise (utility costs etc), where savings could be made and also reminded members that the council tax base had not yet been agreed, so this was only a guide. The Assistant Town Clerk & RFO welcomed ideas and feedback from members, before the final draft papers would be presented to Full Council on 17 January 2022 for adoption.

Members noted that despite the challenges, that the Town Council was still able to deliver a great amount of services which was remarkable.

Members noted the contents of the draft budget and wished to await the revised council tax base and impact this would have on the overall budget.

17.0 TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR 2022-27
Members were satisfied with the draft report at this stage and subsequently noted the contents.

18.0 TO NOTE THE REPORT OF THE INTERNAL AUDITOR (NOV 2021)}
Members were presented with the report of the Internal Auditor who had carried out a two-day visit in person in November 2021. Subject to the three points being addressed at future Full Council meetings, members were content with the outcomes of the report, and wished to thank office staff for all their hard work on retaining good sound governance and financial procedures.

19.0 TO UNDERTAKE A REVIEW OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S STANDING ORDERS
This item was deferred to the next meeting of full Council on 17 January 2022.

20.0 TO CONSIDER THE ADOPTION OF A NEW CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY FOR THE TOWN COUNCIL
The Estates & Facilities Manager had prepared a climate change policy for the Town Council with input from the Climate Change Steering Group. It was important for the Town Council to set the scene and explain to its residents and local businesses, the intentions of the Council and plans to tackle climate change.

Councillor P. Sparks advised that he was very pleased with this report, and wished to thank the officer for their work. There was still a great deal to do, but this was a great start towards delivery.

Councillor D. French echoed these points and wished to thank the officer involved and wished to thank Councillor P. Sparks for moving the motion in the first instance. With more frequent storms and bad weather, this was an important issue both locally, regionally and nationally.

Councillor D. Bennett referenced the previous Agenda 21 which used the phrase of "act local, think global" – i.e. if everyone did something and demonstrated their commitment we still had a chance.

FC.68.12.21 Members **RESOLVED** to adopt the Town Council's Climate Change Policy.

21.0 TO CONSIDER A RESPONSE TO THE WASTE & MINERALS LOCAL PLAN – REVISED POLICIES WINTER 2021/22
Members were advised that East Sussex County Council, the South Downs National Park Authority and Brighton & Hove City Council had reviewed their Waste & Minerals Local Plan, and were now asking key stakeholders and members of the public to review the contents of these documents.

Councillor C. Macve thought it was very pleasing to note on page 2 of the information sheet on the consultation that they referenced marine dredged aggregate, and use of existing railheads. He felt anything that could be done to support the rail network and protect the railways was of benefit.

There were no further comments, so members noted the report, and the Town Clerk advised that she would feed the above comment back within the consultation process.

County and County/District Councillor Dowling, left the meeting at this stage (8.01pm).

22.0 TO CONSIDER THE REMOVAL OF A SIGN USED FOR FLOOD NOTIFICATIONS BY THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

The Town Council had been asked by the Environment Agency if they wished to take on the Flood Warning sign which was installed within the pavement outside Best Health food shop/Peacocks, or if they would support the removal of the sign, as a result of it being out of action for a number of years.

Members felt in the main, that most residents were now signed up to the flood warnings and alerts direct with the Environment Agency via their home telephone or smart phones/tablets. They also felt that as the sign had not worked for a number of years that it would not be missed. A couple of members questioned whether the sign could be used for another form of advertising but knowing it needed repair, no one was certain of the costs involved.

FC.69.12.21 With 12 votes in favour, members **RESOLVED** to support the Environment Agency's request to remove the sign from Uckfield High Street.

23.0 TO NOTE THE MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS

The Town Mayor advised that two further engagements had been attended – on Remembrance Sunday (Sunday 14 November), the Mayor had attended the Eugene Memorial and had attended the Community Leaders Lunch on 1 December with Father John Wall. The Deputy Mayor, Councillor French had also attended the Community Leader's lunch.

24.0 SIGNING OF GRAVE CERTIFICATES AND TO NOTE TRANSFERS OF DEEDS OF GRANT

One deed of grant had been received:
Damian Thompson

FC.70.12.21 It was **RESOLVED** for three councillors to sign the above deed of grant.

25.0 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS PREVIOUSLY NOTIFIED

None received.

26.0 TOWN CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

27.0 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor, Councillor J. Love wished to congratulate everyone who came and everyone who organised the Late Night Shopping event on Friday 3 December. People were very considerate of each other, and it was great to see so many streetholders busy, with some sold out of produce on the night. It was a great festive event which saw the town come together.

28.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

FC71.12.21 It was **RESOLVED** that pursuant to Section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted it was advisable in the public interest that the public be temporarily excluded and they were instructed to withdraw.

28.1 To consider an update on legal advice received for the renewal of the lease agreement for the signal box

FC72.12.21 Members **RESOLVED** to proceed with the legal advice provided and for the Town Clerk to take forward the next steps.

28.2 To consider the implementation of the WPA Programme (NHS Top-up)

FC73.12.21 Members **RESOLVED** to implement the WPA Programme (NHS Top-Up) for Town Council staff and for the financial support required to be reflected in the 2022-23 budget. They were also keen for this benefit to form part of the induction training for new staff.

The meeting closed at 20:17hours.