

UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of **UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL** held
on Monday 17 October 2022 at 7.00 pm
in the Weald Hall, Civic Centre, Uckfield

PRESENT: Cllr. K. Bedwell
Cllr. J. Beesley
Cllr. D. Bennett
Cllr. B. Cox
Cllr. H. Firth
Cllr. D. French (Deputy Mayor)

Cllr. J. Love (Town Mayor)
Cllr. C. Macve
Cllr. D. Manvell
Cllr. S. Mayhew
Cllr. A. Smith
Cllr. P. Sparks
Cllr. D. Ward

IN ATTENDANCE:

County Councillor Claire Dowling
County Councillor Chris Dowling
Sarah D'Alessio Assistant Town Clerk & RFO
Holly Goring Town Clerk
Minutes taken by Holly Goring

Before the meeting started, the Town Mayor led the Town Council in a one minute's silence as a mark of respect for the loss of Mr Mike Skinner.

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. No interests were forthcoming.

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

There were no statements from members of the public.

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

FC.55.10.22 Members **RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders to enable County and District Councillors to speak.

Councillor Claire Dowling referred to a question that had been submitted by Councillor D. Manvell about providing assurances for the Leisure Centre due to recent concerns following the decision at Heathfield. Councillor Manvell was advised to direct these concerns to Wealden DC and East Sussex CC as a Town Council. Councillor Dowling wanted to reassure members that she would

do everything she could as a local member but needed the Town Council's support as well.

Councillor Manvell felt that Wealden DC's decision to not renew the contract for the Leisure Centre felt short-sighted particularly when larger scale projects were being considered to improve facilities in Crowborough and Hailsham. All members agreed that the indoor sports facilities currently within Uckfield were limited and would not support the level of population growth anticipated for the town. Councillor Macve also reminded members that a large amount of money which paid for the original construction of the pool at Uckfield Leisure Centre, was contributed by the local community. So the local community had a vested interest in the future of the Leisure Centre, and pool in particular.

A second question was submitted by Councillor D. French who had asked what plans were in place for the Ukrainian refugees in East Sussex whose hosts would not be able to accommodate them after the initial six months. Currently there were 1,235 guests in East Sussex staying with 533 hosts. The support to enable the guests to lead the most fullest of lives whilst here in East Sussex was important. Support was being provided by the County Council to provide them with English language classes, supporting their access to employment and ensuring they had safe and secure accommodation. In response to this, the lead for Adult Social Care agreed a £1.38million package of support back in September, to support those who would be coming to the end of this initial six month period between now and Christmas. The package of support was being developed in association with the borough and district councils. This would involve encouraging hosts to continue providing accommodation with financial incentives (*£1k if they continued to host for a further 12 months, and a further £500 for over 18 months*), if the guest had to find alternative accommodation, the council would provide a number of support measures such as paying for the deposit and the first months rent and acting as a guarantor where necessary. Councillor Dowling referred to the latest e-bulletin from East Sussex County Council which the Town Clerk would circulate to members that evening.

Councillor D. French noted her concerns around the challenges of renting privately and the increasing costs, so there could be difficulties for refugees trying to find suitable accommodation and this was her main concern.

A third question was raised for the attention of District Councillors regarding Southern Water by Councillor D. French. It was advised that the regulators with powers to enforce the actions of Southern Water would be the Environment Agency and Ofwat. Wealden DC invited Southern Water to their Overview & Scrutiny Committee and were due to return, and East Sussex CC had also invited them to their Overview & Scrutiny Committee in November 2022. Councillor Dowling encouraged members to invite Southern Water to a committee meeting, so they could question them direct on issues within the town.

Councillor Chris Dowling wished to mention that the work by South East Water in Lewes Road was due to finish on 21 October 2022. He was told they were on schedule. The contractor due to carry out the traffic calming works was not able to carry out the works now whilst South East Water were still onsite, which was disappointing.

Councillor Bedwell raised her concerns once more for Ridgewood Village Post Office and their difficulties in obtaining compensation from South East Water. Support had been provided but it had not been forthcoming.

A question was asked by Councillor French, regarding Changing Places, to which the Town Clerk clarified that Wealden DC had just launched a funding round, but the Town Council and East Sussex County Council were not ready with the required detail and associated costs required to make an application. Work was therefore underway to prepare for a future round hoped to be opened in 2023.

Councillor P. Sparks wished to follow up on the issues relating to Southern Water. Since the all-party motion was passed at the Wealden DC meeting, dialogue had improved with Southern Water. There were now regular meetings planned with Wealden DC and far more information was coming through. Wealden DC Councillors were still not fully content however with the amount of information coming through planning application statutory responses. Particularly in regard to understanding the water and sewage capacity for new developments. Councillor P. Sparks reminded members of the complexities with the handling of planning applications, and referred to a recent case which had gone to the Planning Inspectorate for appeal.

Councillor P. Sparks advised that the planning application had been approved for the development at the Streatfeild House site. The bulk of the scheme had been approved and they hoped to start work on the scheme next year.

In reference to the recent Wealden DC press release on compliments received. Wealden DC had received 246 compliments in the last financial year, the highest individual category was Waste and Recycling (70), Planning and Building control, (50) and Housing recorded 30. Only 135 complaints had been received, with 98 of those regarded as not justified.

Councillor K. Bedwell noted that she was of the understanding that work had been halted on the Local Plan, whilst Wealden DC awaited further guidance from central government on housing numbers. She had also heard that the Bird in Eye South application had been submitted for appeal direct by the developers, despite not being considered formally at a Wealden DC Planning Committee North meeting. The Town Clerk corrected Councillor K. Bedwell to advise that actually the Planning Policy team at Wealden DC were working incredibly hard behind the scenes on the evidence base documents and studies to support the policies within the Local Plan so it was not accurate that work had been halted. It would be a decision for the District Council as to whether the authority pushes ahead with the Local Plan consultation in its current form or await guidance from the UK Government.

Councillor H. Firth invited feedback from residents that members may have received with regards to water and sewage capacity so she could take this to the Overview & Scrutiny discussions with Southern Water.

FC.56.10.22 The Councillors were thanked for their input and updates, and subsequently **RESOLVED** to reinstate Standing Orders.

4.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillors J. Edwards and G. Johnson who due to work commitments and annual leave.

5.0 MINUTES

5.1 To resolve that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 5 September 2022 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

FC.57.10.22 Subject to a slight amendment raised by Councillor Manvell on a description used by Wealden DC in their consultation, members **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Full Council be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

5.2 Action List

Members agreed to remove the following actions and noted the report:

FC.32.06.19 – Public Space Protection Orders

FC.47.09.21 – Footway links to ‘Land off Mallard Drive’

6.0 COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

(a) Plans Committee of the 26 September 2022

FC.58.10.22 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Plans Committee of the 26 September 2022.

(b) Environment & Leisure Committee of the 28 September 2022

FC.59.10.22 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Environment & Leisure Committee of the 28 September 2022.

(c) General Purposes Committee of the 3 October 2022

FC.60.10.22 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the General Purposes Committee of the 3 October 2022.

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 – Events Working Group

Nothing to report at present.

(iii) Uckfield Dementia Forum

Nothing to report at present.

9.0 TO NOTE THE REPORT OF THE EXTERNAL AUDITOR FOR 2021/22

Members were presented with a copy of the Notice of conclusion of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for the year ended 31 March 2022 which included the response from the External Auditor. Members felt it was very satisfying that it had all been accepted. Congratulations were to be given to the Assistant Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer and wider team.

Members noted the outcome of the conclusion of the Audit.

10.0 QUARTERLY PROGRESS UPDATE ON UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL'S ANNUAL PRIORITIES FOR 2022/23 (Q2)

Members were presented with an update report from officers on the annual priorities of the Town Council and the progress that had been made towards achieving these priorities.

Members were pleased to see that everything was still moving forward and progress being made, despite some of the challenges that had been experienced with staffing levels during the past year. Members subsequently noted the progress made and contents of the report.

11.0 TO REVIEW THE 2023/24 PROPOSAL FROM EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL ON THEIR GRASS VERGE CUTTING CONTRACT

Members were presented with a short report which provided three options for parish/town councils to choose from for the next financial year for grass verge cutting arrangements. 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.

In 2022/23, members had approved the payment of £4,356 for additional cuts to be funded to maintain service standards. The quotation for this option in 2023/24 was £4,442. Members found it most gratifying that the cost increase had only risen by 5%.

FC.61.10.22 Members **RESOLVED** to advise East Sussex County Council that Uckfield Town Council would be selecting Option 2 for grass verge cutting in 2023/24:

Option 2 – Extra cuts: 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 Town Council a total of £4,442 for the year.

12.0 TO RECEIVE A LETTER OF CONDOLENCE FOR HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN FROM QUICKBORN, GERMANY

The Town Twinning Association had received correspondence from the Mayor of Quickborn, Germany who wished to give their condolences to the Town Mayor and residents of Uckfield following the passing of Her Majesty the Queen.

Members were very grateful to receive this letter and wished to thank Quickborn for their thoughts and condolences.

13.0 TO NOTE PROPOSED TELECOMMUNICATIONS UPGRADE ON RIDGEWOOD FARM SITE

Members had received a report which highlighted that further improvements were due to be undertaken to the base station on the Ridgewood Farm site (south of Boothland Wood). The letter had been received from Waldon Telecom on behalf of Cornerstone. The upgrade would seek to improve communications for 3G, 4G and 5G network coverage. It would also include the replacement of the existing

20m monopole, see the addition of six antennas, two 300m dishes and the removal and replacement of a ground level cabinet and ancillary work.

Members felt that the proposals would not have a huge impact on the skyline as the proposals would fall at the same height. It was also fairly tucked into the corner of the site. It was recommended that the information be sent to the residents closest to the mast.

FC.62.10.22 Subject to clarifying the county area from Waldon Telecom, members **RESOLVED** to respond with no objection.

14.0 TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON THE DENE, BROWN'S LANE

Members were presented with an update from the Town Clerk. This advised that investigations were being undertaken before presenting back to members in December. Members noted the contents of the report and update provided.

15.0 TO NOTE THE MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS

Members noted the report.

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

Three deed of grants had been received:

Mrs Amber Maclean

Mrs Margaret Patricia Grant

Mr Steven John McIntosh

FC.63.10.22 It was **RESOLVED** for three councillors to sign the above deeds of grant.

17.0 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS PREVIOUSLY NOTIFIED

None received.

18.0 TOWN CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Clerk wished to say a very big thank you to the Assistant Town Clerk & RFO for her hard work in preparing the end of year accounts and financial statements with the Accountant and Internal Auditor, for consideration by the Town Council and External Auditor. This involved having to provide detail for a number of variances between the financial years, and the Town Clerk noted that this past year had seen a number of parishes experience issues with their External Audit, so this was a great achievement. Thank you!

Town Councillors were reminded of their new pigeon holes in the foyer by the Civic Centre lift, and were reminded to check these. The Town Clerk also updated members on staff recruitment.

19.0 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor, Councillor J. Love wanted to say a big thank you to Councillor Smith for arranging the Food Bank collections. The Town Mayor had participated in one of the collections and it had been absolutely incredible to see the response. Every item on the list had been given by shoppers and Councillor Love wished to formally thank Cllr Smith and Lorraine at the Uckfield Food Bank for their hard work. It was hoped that another campaign could be run in six months time.

The meeting closed at 7.58pm.