

UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of **UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL** held
on Monday 19 December 2022 at 7.00 pm
in the Weald Hall, Civic Centre, Uckfield

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

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

IN ATTENDANCE:

One member of the public
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.

Councillor P. Sparks declared a prejudicial interest in agenda item 15.0 (*SLA agreements with Uckfield Volunteer Centre and Wealden Citizen's Advice*) as a result of being the Chair of the Uckfield Volunteer Centre.

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

District updates were provided by Town Councillors.

Councillor H. Firth advised that with the festive season near, there were not many issues to report back, but she was very pleased to see the letter from the Rt Hon Michael Gove with regards to housing supply and targets. This was a positive step forward.

Councillor P. Sparks wished to raise some green issues. Wealden DC had installed 184 air pumps into their housing stock. Vehicle electric charging points were being installed in car parks across the district including Luxfords, Uckfield. These were not fast chargers but designed for residents in the town who didn't

have their own so would support those in particular in the town centre without driveways etc.

Wealden DC were introducing a revised pay structure particularly for legal and planning staff. This would incorporate a 3% pay award, but the whole salary structure had been improved. Often these specialist roles, were difficult to recruit to, due to the large differences between public sector and private sector. This would hopefully reduce the employment of agency staff.

Councillor D. Ward asked if leniency had been given to someone leaving their vehicle in the 10 hour parking bays, wishing to leave the vehicle overnight charging. Councillor Sparks advised that when the vehicle had finished charging, the vehicle owner would get an automated phone call/message. The issue with regards to the timing of the use of these charging points in relation to the car parking hours, was still being resolved.

Councillor D. French referred to the letter that had been prepared as part of Councillor D. Manvell's motion with regards to Uckfield Leisure Centre. An article had been released in the media which suggested that Wealden District Councillor P. Lunn had referred to opportunities for the Leisure Centre site, if facilities such as the pool had to close. Councillor French wished to seek clarification on the this.

Councillor P. Sparks explained that the article in the media had been picked up from the webcast of a meeting. He believed the meeting had been part of a wider discussion on the current provision for sports and leisure facilities and longer term needs in relation to the Local Plan. Although Councillor Sparks was not privy to the detail, he reminded members that concerns had been raised previously about the swimming pool because it had experienced leaks in the past, and now there were likely to be additional costs to heat the pool.

Councillor B. Cox reflected on the energy crisis, and recognised the impact this would have on such facilities, but he thought that most schools had swimming within their curriculum, so it would not just affect Uckfield College but also the primary schools in Uckfield and the surrounding villages.

Members agreed that discussions on the Leisure Centre could continue under agenda item 9.0.

4.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillors D. Bennett, J. Edwards, G. Johnson and S. Mayhew due to a mixture of work commitments, sickness and personal commitments. County and District Councillors Claire and Chris Dowling also sent their apologies for the meeting.

5.0 MINUTES

5.1 To resolve that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 17 October 2022 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

FC.64.12.22 Members **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 17 October 2022 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.17.05.22 – Grant of discharge of water

6.0 COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

(a) Plans Committee of the 24 October, 14 November and 5 December 2022

FC.65.12.22

It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Plans Committee of the 24 October, 14 November and 5 December 2022.

(b) Environment & Leisure Committee of the 7 November 2022

FC.66.12.22

It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Environment & Leisure Committee of the 7 November 2022.

(c) General Purposes Committee of the 21 November 2022

FC.67.12.22

It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the General Purposes Committee of the 21 November 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

Members noted the report.

9.0 TO CONSIDER A MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR DAN MANVELL

Councillor D. Manvell presented his motion and accompanying draft letter which he wished to send to lead representatives of East Sussex County Council and Wealden District Council.

Councillor Manvell explained that he understood discussions needed to take place in a confidential setting to discuss finances and commercially sensitive information but this was such a huge discussion and only Uckfield College appeared to be involved in the conversation. The town needed dialogue.

Councillor D. Ward wished to fully support the motion. She felt it was deplorable that there had been meetings and Uckfield Town Council had been forgotten. This was a town resource, a resource that belonged to the people of Uckfield and people who were not from Uckfield appeared to be making the decisions.

Councillor C. Macve reiterated the necessity of children learning to swim. He wished to strengthen the first bullet point within the letter.

Councillor B. Cox agreed, recommending that other community

stakeholders should be identified and involved in the process.

Councillor K. Bedwell also supported the motion, and thought that swimming was mandatory on the school curriculum for all junior schools. With the risk of losing Uckfield, schools would have to travel much further. What happened to the climate emergency?

There were also in the region of 8,000 homes passed for planning in Wealden District, so resources were required to support this population growth.

Councillor J. Beesley spoke of the timing of this issue and Councillor A. Smith considered whether the four addressees of the letter should be invited to a meeting. The Chair, Councillor J. Love advised that she had heard that MP Nusrat Ghani had been liaising with the CEO of Freedom Leisure.

Members suggested two alterations to the letter to reflect the correct addressees and to strengthen the first bullet point, and to cc the local MP for Wealden.

FC.68.12.22 Subject to the two changes proposed, members **RESOLVED** to support the motion set out by Councillor D. Manvell and for the letter to be sent to the lead representatives identified at East Sussex County Council and Wealden District Council, with a copy to be sent to the local MP Nusrat Ghani.

“The Town Council is dismayed that while more (much needed) housing is built, our public services are not just failing to keep up, they are shrinking. Uckfield Leisure Centre is the latest example of a much-loved and well-used community asset facing cuts or closure over the last decade, after the Youth Centre, Post Office, Library, and Children’s Centre. We are disappointed that our request to be involved in these discussions in January 2021 (FC.58.01.21) has not been respected.

Indeed, it is frustrating to learn about the future of Uckfield’s public services through the local media, rather than through proper channels. This is a matter of both public importance and common courtesy.

In these circumstances, Uckfield Town Council resolves to:

- *strongly and publicly urge Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council to retain Uckfield Leisure Centre and the swimming pool for public use, in the absence of any upgrade or replacement;*
- *send the attached letter to the Leaders of Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council, as well as the cabinet members and portfolio holders responsible, outlining our opposition to any proposal to close Uckfield Leisure Centre and swimming pool, and;*
- *add the issue of the Uckfield Leisure Centre to the Town Council’s Action List, to ensure:*
 - *communication with Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council on this issue is started and maintained with the initial suggestion of a meeting;*
 - *responses to the Town Council’s letter are received, and;*
 - *the strength of feeling among councillors is recorded for the public’s benefit.”*

10.0 TO CONSIDER THE SUBMISSION OF A BID TO PURCHASE LAND KNOWN AS THE DENE, BROWN'S LANE

The Town Clerk brought members up to speed on the full moratorium period which had been undertaken as a result of the Dene being registered as an asset of community value. This period allowed any interested community groups to investigate the site and consider if they wished to submit a bid for the land. The deadline to submit a bid would fall on 20 December 2022, which was the day after the Full Council meeting.

Members discussed the advantages of the Town Council purchasing the land, as this was an important community asset for the town, and for residents on Manor Park. Manor Park estate had won awards for its open garden estate design and layout.

Members discussed the value of the bid to be submitted, and came to a decision. **FC.69.12.22** Members **RESOLVED** to authorise the Town Clerk to write to Buxted Parish Council and Wealden District Council, and express the Town Council's interest in purchasing the land known as the Dene, Brown's Lane with a bid of £5,001.

11.0 TO NOTE THE RECENT INSPECTION OF TWO MATURE TREES ON TOWN COUNCIL LAND

Members were presented with a report from a arboricultural specialist, who carried out a tree inspection on two mature trees in Uckfield, located on Town Council land. One tree was located on West Park Recreation Ground, and the second was located on the Town Council owned strip of land within Downlands Copse.

Members noted the contents of the report.

12.0 TO CONSIDER THE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES WITHIN WEALDEN DC'S DRAFT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023-2033

Members were advised that Wealden District Council had been working with consultants to prepare a draft Economic Development Strategy for Wealden District. Uckfield Town Council had been involved in the consultation process with the external consultants.

Members recognised the hard work that had been put into the document, and as representatives of the Town Council had fed back during the initial consultation process, the overall themes of the strategy aligned well with the priorities for Uckfield and local area.

The main comments raised by members during the meeting included:

- there needed to be greater mention and reference to housing, planning and transport as important factors affecting the local economy;
- there was a question on the figures in particular the GVA figures on page 7 – they needed more context. Were these figures related to the working population or gross population?
- the document talked a lot about the lack of labour/working population. Reference needed to be made to the provision of affordable housing and the importance of retaining the affordability housing ratio of 35% in approved planning permissions;
- the strategy noted the shortage of commercial property in the district. Uckfield had been very keen to retain commercial properties within the town centre.

Unfortunately Uckfield was seeing this on the periphery of the High Street, such as the upper High Street area that some of the previous commercial premises were now being converted into residential;

- it was very encouraging to see the digital age, and improvements to fibre connection, so this is a positive step forward for the district;
- Uckfield needed better co-ordination with public transport and connectivity between different public transport companies to support young people with access to work experience, apprenticeships and work. UTC were aware that Wealden Works for example had struggled with this previously. Fantastic opportunities had been made available for their students by Wealden based businesses but if they were located on a rural business park or industrial estate, it made it very difficult for the young person to access the work placement with no vehicle. Members felt that reference should be made to the ESCC Bus Service Improvement Plan. In the main, councillors were keen to see radical ideas.

After providing their feedback, members subsequently noted the contents of the strategy and report.

13.0 TO CONSIDER THE RE-ALLOCATION OF PROJECT FUNDING WITHIN THE 2022-23 BUILDING MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

Members were provided with a report which presented an update on the delivery of the Building Maintenance Programme 2022-23. Recent compliance audits had identified remedial works which were necessary to ensure the Civic Centre and Foresters Hall remained up to date and compliant with fire safety regulations. A number of improvements had also been highlighted by the new Estates & Facilities Manager to improve fire safety, lighting and safety within these buildings.

A number of the projects identified for delivery in 2022-23 had been delayed under this programme, as a result of the complexity of the projects, availability of contractors and resource internally. It was therefore proposed that the funding allocated for external projects at the Civic Centre and Foresters Hall be re-allocated for compliance remedial works. This would result in the re-allocation of £3k which was previously set aside for Foresters Hall render repairs, £7.5k previously set aside for Civic Centre parking resurface and drainage repairs, and £4k set aside for Foresters Hall kitchen.

FC.70.12.22 Members **RESOLVED** to authorise the Town Clerk to reallocate the sums above within the Building Maintenance Programme for 2022-23 to address important compliance remedial works.

14.0 TO CONSIDER THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WEALDEN PARISH REMUNERATION PANEL ON TOWN AND PARISH ALLOWANCES FOR 2023/24

Members were presented with the outcome of the Independent Remuneration Panel who had met to discuss parish and town council member allowances and expenses. The report recommended that a 3% increase be placed on the member allowances of 2022/23.

Uckfield Town Council had previously resolved to freeze member allowances for

2021/22 and 2022/23, which resulted in allowances still being paid at the 2020/21 rate.

Members discussed the proposed increase at length. They recognised the importance of encouraging candidates to stand for election, with some not realising prior to election that there was an allowance and some feeling that this should reflect the work of the councillor role within the community. A self-employed member of the council also noted that whilst attending council business they were unable to work, so consideration for this should also be given. Members recognised that they had frozen their allowance previously for two years during the pandemic and it was important to increase on a year by year basis to reduce the risk of a larger uplift needing to be made.

Members were torn between increasing to the recommended level of £1,426 per annum basic member allowance, continuing to freeze allowances or finding a middle ground.

FC.71.12.22 With some difference of opinion, six members voted in favour, two members voted against and two members abstained, it was **RESOLVED** to increase the member allowance for Town Councillors by 5% which would increase their current annual allowance from £1,284 (basic allowance) to £1,348.20 and from £1,773 for the Mayoral allowance to £1861.65.

15.0 TO CONSIDER THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS WITH UCKFIELD VOLUNTEER CENTRE AND WEALDEN CITIZEN'S ADVICE FOR 2023/24

A report was presented which explained that the service level agreements put in place with Uckfield Volunteer Centre and Wealden Citizen's Advice for 2022-23 were in need of review in time for the budget setting process.

Both service level agreements for 2022-23 had been signed and services delivered, with Uckfield Volunteer Centre receiving £8,000 for services, and Wealden Citizen's Advice, £19,000.

Members referred back to the recommendation of General Purposes Committee in October 2021, which suggested that a two year agreement now be formed due to the elections and possible changes in the council. Members supported this suggestion, as it would give the council time to review these agreements in more detail before the next renewal period.

FC.72.12.22 Members **RESOLVED** to renew the service level agreements with Uckfield Volunteer Centre and Wealden Citizen's Advice for a period of two years, with the financial contribution remaining the same for both organisations as the current amount - £8,000 for Uckfield Volunteer Centre and £19,000 for Wealden Citizen's Advice.

16.0 TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2023-28

Members reviewed the contents of the draft strategic plan, and provided some suggested amendments.

Councillor C. Macve suggested that a phrase be incorporated in the strategic objectives to say '*we manage and operate our property portfolio for the best*

commercial practice for the benefit of the community.'

Councillor P. Sparks was pleased to see that a strategic objective was incorporated which reflected our support to the continuation of the Uckfield Youth Club. Councillor B. Cox provided a further update on this to members.

Councillor D. Manvell suggested including an objective around exploring opportunities to provide new space and facilities for the town and its community groups.

The Chair, Councillor J. Love asked members to review the document over the Christmas break and to provide any further feedback to the Town Clerk.

17.0 TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT ANNUAL PLAN FOR 2023/24

Members reviewed the draft annual plan and were asked, similar to the Strategic Plan, if they could provide any further feedback to the Town Clerk over the Christmas break. Members subsequently noted the report.

18.0 TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT ANNUAL BUDGET FOR 2023/24

Members reviewed the draft annual budget. Members were disappointed that the tax base had only increased by 111, when the town had seen quite a substantial increase in new homes.

Members discussed a couple of service areas, before being advised to feed any specific questions to the Town Clerk over the Christmas break. The report was noted.

FC.73.12.22 Further to a proposal by Councillor D. Ward, which was seconded, members **RESOLVED** to extend the time of the meeting, by a further 30 minutes, to 9.30pm.

19.0 TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR 2023-28

Members felt this was a good document, and well prepared before subsequently noting the report.

20.0 TO NOTE THE MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS

Councillor D. French wished to make an amendment. She was unable to attend the Remembrance Service due to sickness. Members noted the change and contents of the report.

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

Five deed of grants had been received:
Angela Paul, Michelle Wilkie and Heather Smith
Nick Dubery
Mrs Unmara Wright
Sophie Lloyd
Julia Hobbs

FC.74.12.22 It was **RESOLVED** for three councillors to sign the above deeds of grant.

22.0 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS PREVIOUSLY NOTIFIED

None received.

23.0 TOWN CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Clerk updated members on the previous two weeks, in terms of staffing and issues within the buildings. Issues had arisen during the freezing temperatures and caused leaks in the Signal Box, West Park Pavilion and Hub. The Town Clerk advised members on their proposed next steps.

24.0 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair, Councillor J. Love wished to thank everyone across the staffing teams for their hard work and everything they had had to deal with during 2022.

25.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

FC.75.12.22

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.

25.1 To consider the draft lease agreement between Uckfield Grasshoppers Football Club and Uckfield Town Council for West Park Pavilion

Members asked the Town Clerk to raise a couple of queries with regards to the wording of the agreement with the Town Council's solicitors, before they could sign and execute the lease agreement.

25.2 To consider proposals from Sussex Police for the renewal of the contract for the Town Centre CCTV transmission and equipment changes.

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.26pm.