

UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of **UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL** held
on Monday 6 March 2023 at 7.00 pm
in the Weald Hall, Civic Centre, Uckfield

PRESENT: Cllr. K. Bedwell
Cllr. J. Beesley
Cllr. B. Cox
Cllr. J. Edwards
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
Youth Member, Miss Hemming

IN ATTENDANCE:

County Councillor Chris Dowling
County and District Councillor Claire Dowling
Three members of the public (increased to four at 19:12hours)
Sarah D'Alessio Assistant Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer
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. None were forthcoming.

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

FC.91.03.23

Members **RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders to enable members of the public to speak. A resident wished to speak on agenda item 9.0 – Uckfield Leisure Centre.

The resident referred to the report in the Sussex Express and the situation with the Leisure Centre in Uckfield. The resident didn't feel that the County Council had helped the situation in the past and he was concerned that there were longer term plans behind the proposals such as making the college larger. Opportunities could have been made available near by the bypass with the Ridgewood Farm site but nothing happened. The swimming pool at the Leisure Centre had always been very well used.

The resident also stated that there were highway works outstanding from the Town Centre project, such as the bus station upgrade which had yet to be finished.

The Town Mayor thanked the resident for their comments before moving onto the next agenda item.

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

County Councillor Chris Dowling referred to Lewes Road and advised that he had been in touch with East Sussex Highways officers to understand when the planned traffic calming measures were due to be installed. He had been advised that they were waiting for road space which meant space within the permit timetable for the town. Once he was given indication of a date for the works, he would the council know.

County Councillor Claire Dowling referred to highway matters, including drain clearance and road repairs. Councillor Dowling provided a short update on Downsview Crescent. A letter had been sent by Wealden DC to the developers of the new college site, requesting that the repairs be carried out as soon as possible. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) had also followed this up but Wealden DC Planning department were currently dealing with the matter as part of the conditions of the build.

Councillor Claire Dowling referred to Uckfield Leisure Centre and the item later on the agenda. Councillor C. Dowling had worked hard in 2022, to obtain an extension to the current lease agreement between the district and county authorities. Councillor Dowling was pleased that both Uckfield College and Uckfield Town Council were considered key stakeholders. Although Councillor Dowling hadn't seen the consultation document and would only get to view it as a local ward member at the same time as Town Councillors and members of the public, she stressed the importance of having the leisure centre in the town. She also stressed how important it was that they worked together to ensure the consultation received a good level of response.

Referring to correspondence from Hadlow Down PC, which was later on the agenda, Councillor Dowling wished to clarify a few points within the letter. It had stated that she had dismissed correspondence from the parish council which was inaccurate.

A resident entered the meeting room at 7.12pm.

Councillor Dowling explained that cross-party councillors of the scrutiny committee at ESCC scrutinised the contract with ES Highways regularly. The importance of improving quality and getting it right first time, were two areas that they wished to focus on more closely in the new highway contract, which was currently under negotiation.

Presentations had also been given to local meetings with parish and town council representatives such as WDALC and ESALC. It was therefore suggested that if Uckfield TC had specific concerns that Environment & Leisure Centre invite ES Highways in to answer those questions.

The Town Mayor, Councillor J. Love referred to the WDALC meeting, and asked about the format of their presentation.

Councillor C. Dowling explained that the best way to repair a hole was to cut out a patch larger than the pothole, and refill. If the weather was poor however and the pothole was in a dangerous position or it was a major road sometimes contractors had to carry out an emergency repair which consisted of a quicker process. There had been occasions throughout the winter, where potholes had been repaired more than once. If this had happened, this would have been at the contractor's expense, not the tax payer. The priority was to make the road safe.

Councillor B. Cox referred to the Leisure Centre and sought clarity on Councillor Dowling's reference to the 'leisure centre.' He questioned whether she was championing public access to the pool, and not just the leisure centre. Councillor C. Dowling clarified that when she referred to the Leisure Centre, she spoke of the entire facility (wet and dry side) and not just one or the other.

Councillor J. Edwards referred to the road condition in Downsview Crescent. He sought clarity on whether the work undertaken would be repairs or a full resurface. Councillor Dowling reminded members that the developer of the College site had been tasked with completing a condition survey, but Councillor Dowling had not seen the outcome of this.

Councillor J. Edwards was also concerned about the need to meet national curriculum standards for pupils. Councillor Dowling reminded Councillor Edwards that she had worked with East Sussex County Council, Uckfield College and Wealden DC to extend the agreement. It was Wealden DC who no longer wished to be part of the lease agreement. ESCC were not a leisure provider.

Councillor D. French referred to the public consultation on the Uckfield Leisure Centre and raised her concerns with the wording of the survey, advising that sometimes questionnaires could ask leading questions or be slightly skewed. Councillor Dowling unfortunately wouldn't see the document any sooner than the public, but had stressed that the survey should set out the options available to the authorities.

Members asked questions with regards to the potholes such as whether there was a timescale for addressing failures. It was clarified that the contractors took photos before and after, so it would be apparent if the repair had not been carried out well.

Councillor Dowling reminded members that she had secured an additional £3.5million to fund patching across the county, as it was something she knew needed to be done. They were still waiting to hear from central government on the funds they would receive towards patching and repairs for the next financial year.

Councillor P. Sparks provided a District Council update advising that Wealden DC had agreed an increase of council tax by 2.99%, but there would be no increase in members' allowances. Voter ID was required in the forthcoming elections. In the recent full council meeting, a motion was passed for further action to be taken with Southern Water. Streets of Wealden were travelling around Wealden, and would be visiting Uckfield on Saturday 17 March, to entertain families on the High Street.

FC.92.03.23 Members **RESOLVED** to reinstate standing orders.

4.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillors D. Bennett, H. Firth and G. Johnson.

5.0 MINUTES

5.1 To resolve that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 23 January 2023 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

FC.93.03.23 Members **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 23 January 2023 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

5.2 Action List

Members confirmed that they were happy to remove the following actions which were now complete and subsequently noted the report.

FC68.12.22 – Consider a motion from Councillor D. Manvell

FC69.12.22 - Consider bid submission to purchase land known as the Dene

6.0 COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

(a) Plans Committee of the 30 January & 20 February 2023

FC.94.03.23 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Plans Committee of the 30 January & 20 February 2023.

(b) Environment & Leisure Committee of the 13 February 2023

FC.95.03.23 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Environment & Leisure Committee of the 13 February 2023.

(c) General Purposes Committee of the 27 February 2023

FC.96.03.23 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the General Purposes Committee of the 27 February 2023.

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

The Town Clerk explained that the working group were looking to host an event on the day of the Coronation on Saturday 6 May on Luxford Field, and they had also identified a couple of projects which could be undertaken on the 'Big Help Out' day on Monday 8 May, as part of the King's wishes for the Coronation weekend. Members noted the verbal update.

(iii) Uckfield Dementia Forum

Nothing to report at present.

9.0 TO CONSIDER A RESPONSE RECEIVED FROM EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL AND WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL RELATING TO UCKFIELD LEISURE CENTRE

A motion at the full Council meeting on 19 December 2022, requested that a letter be sent to East Sussex County Council, Wealden District Council and Wealden MP Nusrat Ghani. This report provided a copy of the response received from the Wealden MP, as well as a joint response from the county and district authorities. Since discussions before Christmas, a lead member report had been published by East Sussex County Council which sought to propose to hold a 10-week public consultation on the options for Uckfield Leisure Centre. This would commence in March 2023. Members were asked to note the update and advise the Clerk accordingly.

Members still raised their concerns that should the pool close, how would the local primary schools in the wider Uckfield catchment area meet their national curriculum targets for swimming. They would have to travel further afield to facilities in Crowborough or Hailsham and this would increase costs for the county council, as well as work against reducing vehicle emissions.

Furthermore, it was questioned that if the pool were to close, and the dryside facilities remained, would the public still have full access. Comparisons were made with facilities elsewhere in Lewes, Newhaven and Seaford that were still running and were operated by Wave Leisure.

Members felt that other services integral to the community had already been lost, it was important not to allow the loss or closure of this facility.

The Town Clerk recommended that members started to consider alternative options in all scenarios. East Sussex County Council had invited tenders in the previous 18 months, but it seemed none had been forthcoming or successful. Members however argued that they shouldn't accept any reduction in services. This was a case of choice.

It was stressed that planning applicants always referred to Uckfield Leisure Centre as a local facility.

Members recognised that there had been difficulties with the maintenance and upkeep of the pool for some time and that the pool was a leisure pool rather than a competition pool.

Councillor D. Manvell suggested calling a full Council meeting in the period leading up to the elections, to ensure that members could consider the consultation response in full and to be able to prepare a detailed response before a potential change in the council at the election in May 2023. Councillor A. Smith also felt that a compelling response needed to be formed to respond to the consultation, and suggested that the Infrastructure Working Group would be the best means of doing this.

The Town Mayor advised that the comments raised by members should be incorporated into the response provided to the public consultation.

Youth Member, Miss Hemming wished to stress the importance of having a

Leisure Centre. Having worked there she advised that the Leisure Centre was a key community facility. It provided a safe space and assisted with improving residents' health and wellbeing – being sometimes the only form of exercise they did that week. It was good for confidence, helped to build survival skills and a great way of maintaining good mental and physical wellbeing.

Hard copies of the consultation would be provided at the Leisure Centre and Uckfield Library. The Town Clerk would also be asking for hard copies to be made available at the Civic Centre.

Councillor D. Manvell proposed that individual councillors consider their responses, and if possible for the current council to formulate a response (*prior to the election whether that be by the Infrastructure Working Group or public meeting*) before the deadline. He proposed that Uckfield Town Council urge the District Council to find the means to retain the current services of Uckfield Leisure Centre. This was seconded by Councillor B. Cox.

FC.97.03.23 With all members voting in favour, it was **RESOLVED** for Town Councillors to consider their own response, and to work together to begin to formulate a response on behalf of Uckfield Town Council (preferably before the election in May 2023), to urge Wealden District Council to find the means to retain the current services provided by Uckfield Leisure Centre.

10.0 TO CONSIDER A LETTER FROM HADLOW DOWN PC IN RELATION TO ROAD MAINTENANCE AND TO REVIEW THE POLICIES OF EAST SUSSEX HIGHWAYS

Members had raised their concerns with highway maintenance at the previous council meeting in January 2023. The Town Clerk had also received a letter from Hadlow Down Parish Council in relation to road maintenance. A copy of the inspection manual for highway repairs, and full methodology for full repairs was also attached for members' reference.

The Town Clerk advised that there were two elements to the discussion – (i) whether the council wished to invite East Sussex Highways to attend a future committee meeting, and (ii) whether to provide a response to the letter from Hadlow Down PC.

Members made reference to repairs locally and the need to enforce the timeframes in which repairs were undertaken, inspected and the right materials used.

It was felt that there were wider matters relating to the public highways of importance as well – such as the strategy for highway infrastructure. Although both members of Plans Committee and Environment & Leisure Committee had concerns, the Town Clerk advised that these were separate issues and would require different expertise.

The Town Mayor agreed, and stressed the need to keep chasing for the statement of common ground between Wealden DC's planning department, East Sussex County Council and planning applicants of major applications within Uckfield.

One member questioned why if it was more cost effective to resurface sections of roads than repair potholes, why was this not being carried out.

Councillor D. Manvell summarised the discussions on this agenda item – recommending that Uckfield Town Council should stress its concerns with the work being completed, but for the council to decline involvement in taking legal action.

Councillor D. Ward wished to seek reassurance that the state of the highways would improve and for them to remain in good order. Councillor B. Cox suggested requesting a call for a review of their strategy to ensure best practice for everyone. It was a countywide issue. It was suggested that Uckfield Town Council should work with all councils in the local area, to call for a review of the highway strategy and lobby for improvement.

Councillor D. Manvell wished to second the amalgamation of the proposals put forward.

FC.98.03.23 With unanimous support, members **RESOLVED** for Uckfield Town Council to stress its concerns with the current levels of highway maintenance and work with all parish/town councils in the local area to call for a review of the current highway maintenance strategy, and to lobby for improvement.

11.0 TO RECEIVE A BRIEF UPDATE REGARDING THE PURCHASE OF THE DENE, UCKFIELD

The Town Clerk presented a short update, which members noted.

12.0 TO SIGN AND SEAL LEASE AGREEMENT(S) RECEIVED IN TIME FOR THE MEETING

Three lease agreements had been finalised further to previous correspondence with members. This included a lease agreement for West Park Pavilion between the Uckfield Grasshoppers Junior Football Club and Uckfield Town Council. Two lease agreements had also been prepared for the two cemetery chapels at Snatts Road Cemetery, which would be a renewal of the existing lease agreements with the current tenant.

The Town Council's solicitors had provided a response to points raised at the previous council/committee meetings.

FC.99.03.23 Members **RESOLVED** to appoint two Councillors to sign and seal the lease agreements for West Park Pavilion, and the Cemetery Chapels at Snatts Road.

13.0 TO CONSIDER THE RE-UTILISATION OF ROOMS ON THE FIRST FLOOR OF THE CIVIC CENTRE

Members received a short report, which suggested a move of rooms upstairs in the Civic Centre to respond to the current needs of hirers. It was thought that the proposals could also support workflow for the Town Clerk.

The report suggested moving the Town Clerk into the smaller Mayor's Parlour room, to enable the current long-term hirer in the Martlets room to move to the Town Clerk's office, where it was quieter. At present the room hired out on a longer term arrangement was located between two busy meeting rooms, and

had often caused issues with noise disturbance and access to catering. Members asked whether it easy to move all of the IT/telephone equipment that required moving. The Town Clerk thought there might be an old extension in the Mayor's Parlour and the cables were in the ceiling in the office adjacent to the Mayor's Parlour.

FC.100.03.23 Members **RESOLVED** to support the proposal to move the Town Clerk out of her office, to free this space up for a hirer who had a longer-term hire arrangement in the Civic Centre and subsequently enable the Martlets room to be available for day to day hire.

14.0 TO NOTE THE MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS

Members noted the engagements of the Town Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

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

Two deeds of grant had been received:

Frederick Bertram John Branson and Linda Ann Branson

Derek Adams

FC.101.03.23 It was **RESOLVED** for three councillors to sign the above deeds of grant.

16.0 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS PREVIOUSLY NOTIFIED

None received in time for the meeting.

17.0 TOWN CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Clerk advised members that Swish Fibre who had previously presented to Uckfield Town Council, had been taken over by Fern Trading Limited, to consolidate the fibre services of Jurassic Fibre, Swish Fibre, Giganet/Cuckoo and All Points Fibre into a single fibre to the premises (FTTP) operating entity to accelerate full fibre delivery in the UK.

On 23 February 2023, DWP Job Centre Plus held their Job Fair at the Civic Centre. Over 120 people attended. 24 employers and partners took up stands, which saw a number of sign-ups to the forces, 16 potential new volunteers, seven potential apprenticeships, 15 people following up with Plumpton College, and interest in specific job sectors. DWP Job Centre Plus had booked again to hold the event in September 2023.

The Town Clerk reminded members that the Annual Town meeting was due to take place on Wednesday 15 March 2023.

18.0 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair, Councillor J. Love reminded members that Councillor A. Smith had arranged a food collection that coming Saturday for the Uckfield Food Bank. Support was sought from councillors, their friends, family and colleagues.

The Town Council's Plans Committee had recently considered the application for the Ashdown Business Park. This application was of large scale, and had appeared fairly quickly in the public domain for consultation without prior discussion or consultation. Uckfield Town Council had been asked if they would support Fletching PC's desire for collective action. The Chair of Plans Committee

advised members of the details, which instigated discussion amongst members.

Members had mixed views on the proposed course of action that Fletching PC wished to take. Both avenues could pose a risk.

Councillor D. Ward noted the time, and requested that the standing orders be suspended to extend the meeting.

FC.102.03.23 With eleven members voting in favour, and one member abstaining, it was **RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders to extend the meeting by a further 30 minutes (to 9.30pm).

It was decided to bring the discussion to a close, and try and take a vote on the proposals that had been put forward during these lengthy discussions. The Town Mayor, advised that there were two letters. The first letter was a legal letter proposed to be sent to Wealden DC, regarding the application and why Fletching PC felt the planning application was unjust. Uckfield TC were being asked if they would support this.

The second letter was addressed to the Secretary of State, to take this application and make a judgement.

A vote was taken for Uckfield Town Council to support Fletching PC with the sending of the letter to Wealden DC. Eleven votes were in favour.

A vote was taken for Uckfield Town Council to support the sending the letter to the Secretary of State. With two votes in favour, five votes against, and four abstaining this proposal was not carried.

FC.103.03.23 With eleven members voting in favour, it was **RESOLVED** for Uckfield Town Council to support Fletching Parish Council with their intention to send a letter to the local planning authority, Wealden District Council, raising their concerns with the recent planning application for a large scale extension of the Ashdown Business Park.

19.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

FC.104.03.23 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.

19.1 To consider the tenders and parish/town council feedback in relation to the quotations for Internal Audit Service

FC.105.03.23 It was **RESOLVED** to appoint the second Internal Audit Service listed for the next 12 months with a view to extend for a two further years if all worked well for both parties.

19.2 To receive an update on the Harlands estate
Members were provided with a verbal update by the Town Clerk.

FC.106.03.23 Members **RESOLVED** to reinstate standing orders.

The meeting closed at 9.21pm.