



Uckfield Town Council Annual Report

2022-23

**Council Offices
Civic Centre
Uckfield
TN22 1AE**

Our Town Mayor's Annual Review of 2022-23

Welcome to our Annual Town meeting where we can join together and work for our town and surrounding communities.

As we have all found, this past year of life has been very busy and we've had to take on board increases in the cost of living that have given cause for some to struggle. Once again though, we have come together as the amazing community we are and helped so many others through the warm spaces, the Food Bank, the Community fridge and in so many other ways. To everyone that has followed this town's incredible ethos, thank you so very much.

Amongst the day to day running of the Town Council and the town, we have been busy ensuring our town works.

We have been lobbying to keep our treasured Leisure Centre; improve road maintenance; policing, infrastructure improvements and facilities for Uckfield. We have to ensure residents have access to required infrastructure and that requires us to keep asking and lobbying the appropriate authorities and groups. We lobby through our meetings and highlight issues through our planning meetings and various consultations.

This year we've responded to the Transport for South East's Draft Strategic Investment plans, Wealden District Council's Corporate Plan, Wealden District Council's Economic Development Strategy and East Sussex County Council's Transport Plan.

Last year we as a Country lost our beloved monarch Queen Elizabeth II. As a nation we mourned her passing and came together to remember her incredible life. At this sad time I heard some incredible memories from residents of Her Majesty visiting our Town, her visits to Holy Cross and Little Horsted Church, waving to her Godson as he was being educated at Spring Cottage on the London Road, a copy of the Sporting News appearing at a local News Agent and her kindness and incredible ability to talk to so many during her visits.

We also came together for the Proclamation of King Charles III. I have to admit this was an incredible honour yet a very nerve-racking moment for me. To read the proclamation with its historical and important role was very humbling. I would like to personally thank our High Sheriff of East Sussex Jane King for her support.

We've enjoyed all the events that have returned to our town over the past year. It's fantastic that we can all come together again. We do have to note though the sad loss of the Uckfield Festival. The Town Council organised the lighting of the Beacon for the Queens Jubilee and of course a firm favourite, Weald on the Field. This year this event is on the 12th August 2023 and we look forward to welcoming you to this growing event.

Paperwork is being completed as I type to confirm the purchase of the Dene from Buxted Parish Council. This is a registered asset of community value and enjoyed as an important open space and key vista by many, especially when it snows!



We have also completed all of our official documents including setting our priorities and budget for the new financial year and beyond. All of our key strategic documents are available to view on our website <https://www.uckfieldtc.gov.uk/key-documents/>

We've appointed new internal Auditors for 2023 to ensure we meet the necessary regulations and requirements. We've reviewed the maintenance agreement for the Town Centre CCTV system and held consultation sessions for our draft Neighbourhood plan.

As you can see from the above and from the reports of my colleagues, being a Town Councillor is a busy role. We as town councillors would like to take this opportunity to thank our team of staff for everything they do. They really are at the heart of everything that happens within the Council.

Councillor Jackie Love

**Town Mayor
Chair of Full Council**

General Purposes Committee



I am very proud to have been elected as the Chair of General Purposes last year.

General Purposes Committee look after our buildings and our finances amongst other things.

We have once again received excellent external and internal audits for the year 2021-22. Our thanks go to the Responsible Financial Officer for her hard work to ensure our governance and finances remain sound. Also thank you to the Town Clerk for her assistance in this.

We have allocated monies to groups and societies to assist them in their work to support communities within Uckfield. For the Councillors on this committee, the annual Grants meeting is both one of the most rewarding meetings but at the same time one of the hardest meetings of the year.

We only have a certain allocation of funding for our annual community grant programme and receiving applications from so many worthwhile causes we sometimes wish we had a bottomless pot, but unfortunately this isn't the case.

We continue to carry out work to ensure our buildings remain compliant with the latest electrical and fire regulations. Thank you to our Estates and Facilities Manager for ensuring that compliance is adhered to.

We are gradually changing the lighting in our buildings to LED, most recently Foresters Hall. This is a cost saving, as we all know we need to try to reduce our bills and also this helps to meet our Climate Change Policy and green agenda throughout the Town.

We have upgraded the Town Council's IT security and we have plans to upgrade the Wi-Fi in the Civic Centre in 2023-24 to improve facilities for our hirers.

We have also reviewed the utilisation of our buildings. With the Uckfield Grasshoppers Junior Football Club using West Park Pavilion over the course of the week, a full repairing lease agreement has been put in place for the Pavilion to commence Spring 2023.

Understanding the importance of safety to the land adjacent to our buildings, we have been reviewing for some time now, the need to resurface Ridgewood Village Hall car park. The difficulty with this site is the surface water run-off from New Road, and the recreation ground onto the car park. We have therefore funded detailed topographical and drainage surveys for this area to inform us of the best options for the area to improve drainage and resurface the car park with a more permeable material.

The Committee have had to look at the fees and charges for all of our buildings. Like all residential and commercial premises, we have had to increase the charges with the increase in utility bills and waste collection. We did not undertake any increase in 2022 and have tried to keep the increases for 2023-24 minimal.

I would like to thank all the Officers and Staff who work for the Town Council. Without their hard work we would not be able to achieve what we have. This year we have seen some of our staff leave, most of them through retirement. We have welcomed new staff, including the new Head Caretaker and new Estates & Facilities Manager, but are still recruiting for Ground Staff. This has not been easy but we hope to have these positions filled soon.

Councillor Diane Ward
Chair of General Purposes Committee

Environment and Leisure Committee



For the Environment and Leisure Committee, the past financial year has seen us move forward and start to put the pandemic behind us.

However residents and businesses alike, the council has been faced with new challenges, such as the rise in the cost of living, which has affected energy prices, fuel costs and material costs.

The Town Council is not immune to these issues and has seen an increase in expenditure as a result of the increased costs to run its vehicles, purchase and repair equipment and undertake the delivery of key works and projects on the Town Council's grounds.

The Town Council had also previously funded a three-year programme of tree surveys which identified that a number of trees on Town Council owned land and within our ancient woodlands had ash dieback.

Unfortunately some trees have had to be felled or substantially worked upon to ensure the safety of pedestrians and adjacent properties. The Town Council's Tree Policy has ensured that money has been placed in the Town Council's budget to fund the planting of new trees, and hedgerows. During the winters of 2020/21 and 2021/22 the Town Council planted 630 trees in Uckfield, we recognised that some would be lost through extreme weather but the intention was to increase the town's leaf coverage. This winter we planted further trees in the region of West Park.

This work and our engagement with the Sussex Flow Initiative to consider natural ways to reduce flood risk has been of great help to support the delivery of our five-year management plan for Hempstead Meadows Local Nature Reserve.

Uckfield Town Council continues to contribute funds to East Sussex Highways to retain five to six cuts of the urban grass verges in Uckfield Town. We have this year agreed to join a trial in the reduction of rural verge grass cutting in 2023. Within the Uckfield town boundary there are only a few verges classified under the rural grass verge cutting programme which sit on the periphery of the town.

The Grounds team have been busy reconfiguring the football pitches at West Park to help with the rising interest and demand for our sports pitches. We have also committed to upgrade the cricket pitch and have recently funded the resurfacing of the practice cricket nets. New mowing equipment has been purchased and a number of the tools have been upgraded such as the chainsaws for modern electric or battery-operated alternatives.

Town Councillors and staff have spent a great deal of time reviewing the rules and regulations for the cemetery and the Town Council's allotments. These documents have not been reviewed in detail for a number of years, and it was important to do so, to ensure we were meeting best practice. Copies of these will be sent to all allotment

tenants and funeral directors/memorial masons in due course.

I am pleased to say that with the hard work of the officers and the Civic Centre team, a fantastic events programme has seen some amazing artists and performers bringing income to the council. The hard work is continuing with many more acts to come over the next year. The Civic Centre is a great facility for room hire and functions, with free parking in Luxfords car park, level access, catering and free Wi-Fi. Keep an eye on the Civic Centre web site or sign up to the e-bulletin to find what's going on at www.civiccentreuckfield.com

We are keen to improve signposting to the Town's facilities and key sites. The Town Council has been reflecting on the lack of tourist signage leading people into the town, and will be liaising with East Sussex Highways on the council's desire to update the large brown sign on the A22 by-pass heading south, as well as introducing one on the by-pass for northbound traffic.

We are proud of our town and keen to promote what it has to offer!

Councillor Spike Mayhew
Chair of Environment and Leisure Committee

Plans Committee

The Town Council is a statutory consultee on all Uckfield-based planning applications and is therefore given the opportunity by Wealden District Council, the local planning authority, to provide a response on all planning applications within the Uckfield parish boundary.

The Plans Committee have had a busy year at Uckfield Town Council.

As consultees to planning applications it is our role to represent the views of the residents on planning applications whether big or small and to make sure that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Wealden District Council's adopted planning policies from the most recent Local Plan are adhered to. We do not have the power to pass or fail a planning application but we can support or object to applications that do not meet the planning criteria and we would expect our colleagues at Wealden District Council as the local planning authority to consider these views when considering the contents of a planning application.



This year more than any other has been very challenging. Hours and hours have been spent by councillors that sit on the Town Council's Plans Committee reading the accompanying documents to some very large-scale development applications. These developments will put pressure on the infrastructure of our town and surrounding areas and change the fabric of our community. Without an up to date Local Plan in place for Wealden District and subsequent five-year housing land supply, there has been a lot of speculative planning applications, seeking to develop in and out of the agreed development boundaries. This includes the sites of Bird in eye South, Downlands Farm, Horsted Pond Farm, Land North of Eastbourne Road and more recently Ashdown Business Centre. Being such large applications, each one has required scrutiny and discussion. Uckfield Town Council's Plans Committee is here to represent the views of the community, provide insight on local knowledge and history of the sites and if concerns are raised about an application, to set out the reasons for these concerns and evidence to justify this. Growth is inevitable but the district needs the right type of housing in the right places with the right support and as a Town Council Plans Committee at the grass roots of local government, this is exactly what we are doing.

The Secretary of State Rt Hon Michael Gove provided an opportunity to consult with the public and key stakeholders on the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy which will create the framework for the way housing and infrastructure is developed UK wide over the next decade. Every Councillor on the Town Council's Plans committee has contributed to the council's response to this consultation.

I will step down this year after three years as Chair of Plans Committee and whilst we still do not know the outcome of many of these planning applications or the detail of the new Local Plan, I am proud that I have chaired a committee who have risen to the challenge, and laid the groundwork for the committee for 2023/24 and beyond.

**Councillor Karen Bedwell
Chair of Plans Committee**

Allowances paid to Councillors

ALLOWANCES PAID TO COUNCILLORS			
IN 2022-23 per annum (1 Apr 2022 – 31 Mar 2023 before tax)			
	Allowances	Expenses	Notes
	£	£	
Cllr. Karen Bedwell	£1,284.00		*Denotes Town Mayor. (An additional allowance is payable to the Mayor in connection with the duties of the position).
Cllr. Jeremy Beesley	£1,284.00	-	
Cllr. Duncan Bennett	£1,284.00	-	
Cllr. Ben Cox	£1,284.00		
Cllr. James Edwards	£1,284.00		
Cllr. Helen Firth	£1,284.00	-	
Cllr. Donna French	£1,284.00	-	
Cllr. Gary Johnson	**		
Cllr. Jackie Love*	£1,284.00	£1,773.00	
Cllr. Chris Macve	**		
Cllr. Dan Manvell (from 11 July 2022)	£928.00		The allowances are from the financial year 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023
Cllr. Spike Mayhew	£1,284.00		
Cllr. Angie Smith	£1,284.00		
Cllr. Colin Snelgrove (until 4 April 2022)	£14.11		
Cllr. Paul Sparks	**	-	
Cllr. Diane Ward	£1,284.00		

**N.B. Councillors can choose to receive the allowance if they wish.
Councillors Gary Johnson, Chris Macve and Paul Sparks did not claim for their allowance.

Financial Summary for 2022-23 (early predictions at 31 Jan 2023)

INCOME and EXPENDITURE SUMMARY 2022/23 by COMMITTEE			
Committee	Budget set for 2022/23	Projected outturn at year end	Variation from budget set
	£	£	£
Environment and Leisure			
Expenditure (Revenue)	285,967	278,373	(7,594)
Expenditure (New Init)	22,356	19,901	(2,455)
Expenditure (EReserves)	25,250	96,843	71,593*
Income	95,145	107,666	(12,521)
General Purposes			
Expenditure (Revenue)	770,720	757,405	(13,315)
Expenditure (New Init)	78,754	29,252	(49,502)
Expenditure (EReserves)	43,300	13,826	(29,474)
Income	177,515	185,482	(7,967)
Luxfords			
Expenditure (Revenue)	193,389	227,881	33,992*
Expenditure (EReserves)	500	0	(500)
Income	164,500	181,756	(17,256)

N.B. Year-end financial processes need to be completed before the above figures can be finalised.

Councillor Attendance

ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS (14 March 2022 to 10 March 2023)					
Councillors	Full Council (9 meetings)	General Purposes (8 meetings)	Environment and Leisure (7 meetings)	Plans (13 meetings and 3 cancelled)	Overall Attendance %
K. Bedwell	7 out of 9	-	5 out of 7	11 out of 13	79.3%
J. Beesley	8 out of 9	-	6 out of 7	9 out of 13	79.3%
D. Bennett	5 out of 9	-	5 out of 7	10 out of 13	70.0%
B. Cox	8 out of 9	1 out of 6	5 out of 7	7 out of 13	60.0%
J. Edwards	7 out of 9	6 out of 8	3 out of 7	-	66.7%
H. Firth	6 out of 9	5 out of 8	1 out of 2	-	63.2%
D. French (Deputy Mayor)	9 out of 9	-	6 out of 7	-	93.8%
G. Johnson	3 out of 9	6 out of 8	-	-	52.9%
J. Love (Town Mayor)	9 out of 9	8 out of 8	-	12 out of 13	96.7%
C. Macve	8 out of 9	8 out of 8	-	13 out of 13	96.7%
D. Manvell	5 out of 6	-	-	-	83.3%
S. Mayhew	8 out of 9	-	7 out of 7	6 out of 13	72.4%
A. Smith	8 out of 9	6 out of 8	6 out of 7	-	83.3%
C. Snelgrove	0 out of 1	0 out of 1	-	-	0.0%
P. Sparks	8 out of 9	8 out of 8	-	-	94.1%
D. Ward	8 out of 9	8 out of 8	4 out of 5	-	90.9%

N.B. Attendances are from the 14 March 2022 to 10 March 2023.

- Not all Councillors sit on all or the same committees every year.
- The Town Council also has both Finance and Personnel Sub-committees which meet as necessary.
- In addition, Councillors sit on working groups, steering groups and also represent the Town Council on a number of outside bodies.

* The above table runs for the 12 month period from mid-March 2022 to mid-March 2023, but committee appointments are agreed at the Annual Statutory meeting of the Council in May each year, so some members changed committees after 23 May 2022.

Our Community Grants Programme for 2022-23

Each year the Town Council sets a budget for the provision of community grants within its budget setting process.

The Town Council received fewer applications for grant funding in 2022-23, compared with the previous year and for 2023-24. Typically the council receives in the region of 20 applications, with this year being no exception at 22. However applications for 2022-23 were much lower, likely to be as a result of the pandemic and changes in ways activities were being delivered or organisations still holding unspent monies from previous fundraising initiatives.

The following grants were awarded by General Purposes Committee in March 2022 for payment in the financial year of 2022-23:

GRANTS AWARDED BY UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL FOR 2022-23	
Uckfield Theatre Guild	£600.00
The Royal British Legion	£200.00
Uckfield Bonfire & Carnival Society	£1,278.75
St. Wilfrid's Hospice	£1,100.00
St Peter & St James Hospice	£1,000.00
HM70 – Her Majesty's 70 th Celebration	£1,150.00
Manor Park & Hempstead Fields Residents' Association	£299.00
Ridgewood Village Hall Management Committee	£1,505.72
Uckfield Community Fridge CIC	£1,200.00
Ashdown Radio Ltd (Uckfield FM)	£2,500.00
Uckfield Festival Association	£3,500.00
Total General Power of Competence Grants	£14,333.47
Service Level Agreement for Wealden Citizen's Advice	£19,000.00
Service Level Agreement for Uckfield Volunteer Centre	£8,000.00



Annual Plan 2023/24 PRIORITIES

PEOPLE and PROVISION

COMMUNITY GRANTS

We will award up to £54,566 of community grant funding to local groups and charitable organisations for the period 2023/24 (£27,566 to community groups, and £27,000 through service level agreements)

PUBLIC EVENTS AND ANNIVERSARIES IN THE TOWN

We will work alongside the local business community and local community groups to deliver two free public events within the town; King's Coronation and Weald on the Field

POLICY REVIEW

We will be undertaking a full review of the Town Council's policies in respect of personnel (staffing matters), GDPR and respect in the workplace.

TECHNOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENTS

We will look to upgrade our server and office IT to ensure our software and infrastructure remains secure. We will upgrade our Wi-Fi within the Civic Centre and seek to undertake further improvements to meet hirer needs.

ELECTIONS

We will support elected councillors with their role in the community and provide them with opportunities to engage with residents and learn about the Town Council's day to day work, and projects.

PLACE

UPGRADING GROUNDS EQUIPMENT & FACILITIES

We will upgrade equipment to ensure the Grounds team have safe functioning apparatus to undertake open space grass cutting and maintenance for sports and leisure. Work will also be carried out to clean and refurbish the rainwater harvester.

WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

We continue our work to deliver our 10-year woodland management plan to ensure ongoing maintenance and tackle diseased trees affected by ash dieback.

GRASS VERGE CUTTING

We will continue to contribute to the costs of the East Sussex County Council's grass verge cutting contract to retain a good standard of service, and ensure visibility is maintained on pavements and highways.

TOWN COUNCIL BUILDINGS

We will focus our attention on the Civic Centre, Foresters Hall, Victoria Pavilion and West Park Pavilion and ensure we are compliant with the latest safety regulations. We will upgrade flooring, redecorate the Weald Hall and explore initiatives for upgrading older heating and plumbing systems.

INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

We will work with local partner agencies, residents and local businesses to understand the infrastructure requirements for Uckfield, in regards to sport, leisure, recreation and community facilities and future impact on the Town Council's provision of allotment and cemetery space.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

We will support the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to prepare a draft Uckfield Neighbourhood Plan ready for submission to the local planning authority.

CLIMATE CHANGE

We will host an educational activity with primary schools, consider alternative fuel supplies in our wider building portfolio, consider adding insulation within our buildings, review the equipment we purchase, and manage our land for nature, with a continued focus on conservation and tree planting.

Did you know?

Your County Council looks after:	Your District Council looks after:	Your Town Council looks after:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highways maintenance (road repairs, verge cutting, pavements, most street lighting); • Highway emergencies; • Winter gritting; • Rights of Way; • Public transport; • Adult Social Care (<i>carers, services for older people, learning disabilities, physical/sensory impairments</i>); • Children's services (<i>child protection, support for families</i>); • Education; • Leisure and culture; • Libraries; • Trading standards • Registration of births and deaths; • Waste disposal (<i>including household waste recycling centres</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Tax collection; • Local planning as your local planning authority; • Development control; • Building control; • Waste collection and street cleansing; • Environmental health (<i>including licensing, environmental protection – air quality, noise, food safety, health and safety and currently Covid safety</i>); • Housing advice; • Homelessness; • Business rates; • Housing benefits; • Leisure Centres; • Wealden car parks; • Supporting economic development, local businesses and tourism; • Community toilet scheme; • Community and capital grants scheme; • Conserving biodiversity assets, conservation areas and designated sites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of Uckfield's green parks and open spaces; • Snatts Road Cemetery; • Upgrades and maintenance of Uckfield play areas, sports pitches and skate park; • Maintenance and management of Allotments; • Conservation of our nature reserves and conservation areas; • Floral displays and hanging baskets; • Christmas lights; • Town Centre CCTV; • Community grants; • Some street lighting; • Maintenance of Town Council owned buildings which includes Civic Centre, Foresters Hall, sport pavilions, and lease agreements with tenants of Signal box, Bridge Cottage, Osborn Hall, upstairs of Victoria Pavilion, Ridgewood Village Hall etc. • Hire of rooms at the Civic Centre, Foresters Hall and Sport Pavilions; • Events held within the Civic Centre and through the summer on Luxford Field; • Luxfords Restaurant; • Events held within the town to educate, mark special occasions, and celebrate Uckfield.

To report issues:

<https://www.eastsussexhighways.com/report-a-problem>

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/>

<https://www.wealden.gov.uk/>

www.uckfieldtc.gov.uk