

## UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the **Annual Town Meeting**  
held in the Weald Hall, Civic Centre, Uckfield  
Wednesday 13 April 2022 at 7.00pm

<b>PRESENT</b>	Cllr. J. Love	Town Mayor
	Cllr. S. Mayhew	Chair of the Environment and Leisure Committee
	Cllr. P. Sparks	Chair of the General Purposes Committee
	Cllr. K. Bedwell	Chair of the Plans Committee

Councillors:-  
Cllrs. D. French and H. Firth

Holly Goring – Town Clerk  
Rachel Newton – Senior Administrative Officer

Minutes taken by Rachel Newton

PCSO Sue Choppin and PCSO Rosie Farrance were both in attendance from Sussex Police to meet councillors and members of the public to discuss any of their concerns

**1. Welcome and introductions by the Town Mayor**

Town Mayor, Councillor J. Love introduced herself and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The Chairs of the three main committees Councillor K. Bedwell, Chair of Plans Committee, Councillor S. Mayhew, Chair of Environment & Leisure Committee and Councillor P. Sparks, Chair of General Purposes Committee and Holly Goring, Town Clerk all introduced themselves to the attendees.

**2. Apologies for absence**

Apologies had been received from Councillor J. Beesley and County Councillors Chris and Claire Dowling.

**3 Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of the 9 April 2019**

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on the 9 April 2019 previously circulated were proposed and approved by Councillors J. Love and S. Mayhew as a true record.

**4. Matters arising from the minutes**

The Town Mayor advised that any questions would be taken from the floor later on in the meeting.

**5. Consideration of the Town Council's Annual Report 2021-22**

Councillor J. Love (Town Mayor) – Chair of Full Council

The Town Mayor advised that a number of projects had been undertaken in the past year to improve the town council's facilities and assets and to strengthen the town council's policies. She thanked the office staff and ground staff who had worked hard to keep the town and council running smoothly, especially for keeping distance and work balance, so everyone stayed safe during the pandemic.

The Town Council were still liaising with Sussex Police to ensure that comments or matters raised by local residents were forwarded to them directly. Local residents were also encouraged to contact the town council office at any time, to raise issues or concerns, which could then be fed onto the local PCSOs.

With utility prices increasing, the Town Mayor advised that the Town Council were trying to work with the various agencies and Uckfield Food Bank to make sure that people did not go without, as the number of people struggling with affordability was increasing in the local area.

The Town Council's Plans Committee were also working very hard to monitor major planning applications being submitted for consultation, to make sure they were in the right places, and that consideration had been given to the impact of these developments to the town's infrastructure. It was important that decisions made now by the local planning authority looked after our existing and future residents. Councillor J. Edwards had also written to Wealden DC regarding Community Infrastructure Levy funding (developer contributions) from developments to ensure that benefited the town.

Councillor S. Mayhew – Chair of Environment & Leisure Committee

Councillor Mayhew advised that one of the biggest areas of work over the past year which might have affected residents was the review of the Town Council's allotment fees and charges. This had been necessary as these were running at a substantial loss. During this review however, a lot of additional work had been carried out to improve two-way communication between the Allotment Association, allotment holders and the council. This was hopefully improving and resulted in good feedback from allotment holders at the allotment conference.

Since the last Annual Town meeting, the Town Council tragically lost the Council's Ranger, Geoff Pollard. His successor, Neal worked extremely hard and had undertaken a fabulous tree planting programme, planting in the region of 630 trees over the two winters.

Unfortunately tree surveys had identified the trees on Town Council owned land, that had ash dieback or other forms of diseases. Sadly a very large oak tree within the southern part of the cemetery had to be carefully cut back due to its close proximity to a property and power line. If it had fallen in bad weather it could have caused further destruction within the cemetery. This was a particularly delicate matter for relatives as ashes were interred around the base of the tree. A monolith of the tree was able to be retained.

Councillor K. Bedwell – Chair of Plans Committee

Councillor Bedwell advised that the past year, the Plans Committee had been relatively quiet, with the largest application relating to the site at Bird in Eye Farm.

In the coming year, the committee was aware however that it was going to have the most challenging job within the Town council. The UK Government had set quite

high housing targets for Uckfield. Annually, Wealden's District's quota was just over 1200 houses to be built per year on top of the 8,500 houses that had already been passed and have yet to be built.

They were therefore expecting some very large applications which would impact Uckfield and the surrounding villages. Later this year, Wealden DC would produce their Local Plan which was the document that controlled where the housing should go and confirm the SHELAA (Strategic Housing & Economic Land Availability Assessment) the document which would show where land owners offered land to purchase and where developers would consider building over the next 10-15 years. Both documents would be weighty and would need to be studied very carefully to gauge the plans for the future of Uckfield.

Councillor Bedwell advised that a lot of this was out of the town's control. The reality was that a certain proportion of the housing in the town would need to be accepted to meet the government's targets so it was important to ensure that the infrastructure was in place to support this.

Uckfield was unique to Wealden, with the railway line and river that divided the parish in half; there was one road network and all of the buildings in the area pretty much came through Uckfield, so the challenge for Uckfield was going to be huge.

The Town Council was a statutory consultee and had no jurisdiction for planning but the Town Councillors did know Uckfield and knew the history and ecology of the land, so the Plans Committee went through those documents and planning applications very carefully, visiting sites before informing Wealden what was needed in the town.

Councillor Bedwell also stressed that this remit did not come from Wealden but from the UK Central Government. If the town council were just to let this happen, without commenting, then they would not be doing their duty.

Plans Committee members were doing a lot of work behind the scenes and were keen to hear from local residents about what they needed. Council members were already aware, for example, that many residents could not get a doctor or dentists appointment easily, which was fed back through the system.

Councillor Bedwell remarked that the committee did take residents' views into account when feeding back to the local planning authority.

Uckfield Town Council's Plans Committee had written to the Rt Hon Michael Gove, The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, and advised him that Wealden and Uckfield needed to have special consideration in his levelling up plan, as Wealden District was a rural community, being turned into an urban sprawl.

Next year, there would be lots of planning applications and members on the committee would represent residents as best they could.

#### Councillor P. Sparks – Chair of General Purposes Committee

Councillor P. Sparks advised that the past financial year had posed a number of challenges to the town council, but that when you looked back at the work undertaken it had been a very productive year.

The Town Council was very pleased to receive another clean bill of health for its annual governance and accountability returned for 2020/21. Managing the finances

of a large town council such as Uckfield had always been a difficult task, but this became far more challenging as a result of the pandemic, with the impacts of lockdown and staff sickness/ absence.

Councillor Sparks advised that the Town Clerk and all council staff had responded in an excellent manner, to minimise the financial impact and to ensure that the Town Council continued to operate as well as could be expected.

The result of all this work was that for the council's budget for 2022/23, the council tax element only required a very modest 1.5% increase.

A number of improvements had been made to Foresters Hall with a new air conditioning heating system having been installed to heat the building. In the long term, this would help to reduce carbon emissions and in the short term would enable the council to have more control over the temperature of the main hall on a day-to-day basis. A similar heating system had also been installed in the signal box.

Councillor Sparks explained that the Town Council ran an Annual Community Grants Programme. The Town Council had received a large number of applications for the financial year 2021/22. A total of £27,500 was available and the full amount was granted to a total of twenty-two organisations. The full breakdown was set out in the report received.

Councillor Sparks thanked all of the teams working for the Town council, including grounds, caretaking, cleaning, restaurant and office staff for their dedication and hard work over the last year, and for delivering such a great service regardless of the difficulties.

## **6. Topics and questions raised by residents in advance**

1. One local resident had asked when Downsview Crescent and Southview Drive, leading up to it, would be re-surfaced.

The Town Clerk had highlighted that this was something that the Town Council had also raised with Uckfield College and their contractors. It was understood that the works would be done following the completion of the rebuild of the College and that there would be a requirement due to the amount of construction vehicles and wear and tear on the road, for the road to be re-surfaced or at least be made good.

Having not received much of a response last year, the Town Clerk advised that the council had since been advised by both the planning authority and East Sussex Highways that the developer/contractors would be undertaking a survey in May/June time once the rugby pitch work had been completed and all HGV movement from the construction had ceased. Also, that any damage caused due to construction vehicles would be rectified.

It was understood that the East Sussex Highways Steward went out regularly to monitor issues within the town and if they identified any significant defects to the road in the interim repairs would be undertaken by the developer.

Councillor Sparks added that some of the pot-holes were extremely deep, so short-term repairs were required, which had been put in place, although the road needed to be re-surfaced eventually.

2. In relation to a more recent matter in the media this year, one local resident had asked why members of the public could not ask questions at any open committee or full council meeting, although they appreciated that they could make a statement.

The Town Clerk advised that residents were able to make a representation, ask a question or make a statement relating to anything on the agenda at the Town Council's Full Council and standing committee meetings.

The Town Clerk advised that the standing orders had been updated in January in line with the National Association of Local Council Model Standing Orders and legislation and guidance updates, and the time limit had increased from two minutes to three minutes and that a lot of this was based on case law.

The Town Clerk clarified that it was not possible to have an open floor for every meeting because it would be very hard to manage a meeting if a number of issues cropped up in that one night and would digress from urgent matters that required a decision to be taken.

For members and the public to have full attention, a meeting should not last longer than two hours (as set out in the standing orders), although meetings did go beyond this time, standing orders had to be suspended to do so. So it was really important that the committee members remained focused and that the right decisions were made within the time frames given.

Residents could ask a question at any time or contact the town council office via email, phone or come in and see the staff, and they would always try to help, even if it was not within the town council's remit. The various statutes were there just to control a meeting efficiently.

3. Another question had been raised by the same resident in relation to the Jackie Weaver case at Handforth Parish Council and asked what the possibility was of that happening here.

The Town Clerk advised that unfortunately, when that became viral on social media and in the national media, although it did increase interest in local parish councils, it did place the Town council and its proceedings in the spot-light. The Town Clerk explained that like any organisation, you are required to work within a number internal controls in terms of code of conduct, finance and governance and these guidelines and legislation were there to not just ensure sound and effective management of the council but also to protect councillors and staff in their work.

The Town Clerk advised that these procedures and internal controls managed the running of the organisation with our council members, in terms of committee and chair appointments, registers of interest, casual vacancies, mayoral elections and that we had to remain accountable to the town and its residents.

The Town Clerk advised that as a local authority, they had to remain transparent and members had to abide by a code of conduct in terms of their behaviour although, whether you have those controls or not, sometimes relationships may break down which is what happened at Handforth.

The Town Clerk advised that many of us had learnt from this situation and with our own experiences, that sort of behaviour should not happen in a public committee meeting. Issues such as those should really be dealt behind the scenes because it could damage reputations.

The Town Clerk said that she did not feel that we would reach that situation as we were all working well within a framework to deliver the best for Uckfield.

4. A question had been asked from Cornerstone Church to advise that they had a hall available for community use and that now they were out of covid, wondering if there was any interest out there in terms of usage.

The Town Clerk advised that the Town Council knew that there were a number of community groups in the town that were really keen to look for space. The Youth Club for instance was now going to be opening up at The Source, although it was known that ideally they were keen to obtain a larger space in the future, as well as the Model Railway club.

The Town Clerk also knew that Uckfield Phab had a number of difficulties a couple of years ago finding a suitable venue and there were a number of theatre groups and young people with activities out there who were struggling for space.

The Town Clerk asked for anyone who was struggling for space, to get in touch with the Town Council and the council could pass their details on to Cornerstone Church.

## 7. **Questions from the floor**

A resident advised that he had a couple of questions to ask. He also thanked all the council staff for the work they were doing and that the residents had really appreciated this. He also said that initiatives such as Brighter Uckfield were making a difference to the town.

Q. One point raised was about the convenience store at the Highlands and that drivers came off that roundabout at 50-60mph. He said that to build a convenience store at that location was difficult to understand.

**A.** Councillor Bedwell advised that herself, the Town Mayor and Deputy Mayor had seen the article about this and checked the Wealden website, as they had not received any information. Although the Town Council's Plans Committee had formally objected, there was a possibility this application could go through.

The convenience store application had come for consultation to the Town Council a few months ago for use of the car park. The application was not approved for many reasons (*they had also wanted to move the Eugene Seghers memorial*). The application was turned down based on the look of the building, it was not sympathetic to the Highlands pub, but there was a risk, that if the design was altered, given the reasons the inspector provided, it could pass.

The East Sussex Highways report of the plan from Wealden was not on the website yet. A lot of these applications were being held back as they could not agree them until they knew what was going on with the highway network.

The Town Mayor added that if residents visited the Wealden District Council website for planning, there was more evidence of correspondence with ES Highways that was quite interesting to read.

Q. The tarmac outside Bridge Cottage: the Town Council wrote back to him and said that it was snagging, which he accepted, but that he did not see any project being worked on. He said that to have paving worse than it was on those two spaces, on our main tourist spot, the Yorkshire stones had gone and there was no sign of them being replaced. He said that to be fair, the one by the pub had been fixed, and it took four men four days to lay fifteen paving stones, but nevertheless it had been done.

A. The Town Mayor advised that the reason why it took so long to lay the cable and the tarmac spaces at the front of Bridge Cottage, was due to discussions between ES Highways and UKPN and Kier. ES Highways wanted to ensure that they would not cause too much disruption in Uckfield again.

The Town Mayor advised that she had also noticed an area coming into town that was still tarmac and had not been reinstated, so she would speak to the County Councillor, Chris Dowling, to get this work moved along.

Q. The same resident said that he had carried out his own investigation and found that there were seven cars untaxed, which were youngsters going up and down the road. He asked if a Police Officer could monitor this at some point as this was a problem.

A. The local PCSO advised that although there was not enough staff, she would raise this. She advised that there was a north team, six PCSOs, one PC, one Sergeant who covered the whole of north Wealden.

The local PCSO advised that at any one time, their team might be the only team on duty and had to cover jobs in the south of Wealden too. She advised that at the start of the day, they had a briefing and discussed reports that had come in the day before or overnight. This set up their work schedule for the day, but their job was responsive so if a road traffic incident occurred or they had to attend to a missing person, that would take priority. So whilst their days were planned, monitoring the above would not be straight forward.

The local PCSO advised that they were doing their best with the resources they had, but now they were aware of this issue, they could do a day of action in collaboration with the DVLA. She said that it was always good to hear about this kind of situation from members of the public and thanked the resident for letting them know.

Q. A resident of Church Coombe Estate asked on behalf of her disabled partner (who was partially sighted) whether anything could be done about cars and trading vans park which park on the pavements. Also, a request was made for a pelican crossing rather than just traffic lights at the top of the High Street/Church Street.

A. The Town Mayor advised that the issue of disabled parking bays on the High Street has been brought to our attention and the council had a good working relationship with Sussex Police who tried to monitor as much as possible. Unfortunately, due to their time limits and parking restrictions sometimes it was not always easy for them to deal with, but the council was aware that this was happening and advised the relevant authorities - working in close partnership to get a result.

The resident was asked to use the 101 system and provide them with the relevant data so Police officers could follow up on this matter.

The Town Clerk echoed that point and emphasised that there were two main areas of concern, one was the parking bay opposite Waitrose which was often used by vehicles who did not hold a disabled badge. The organisations often placed notices on vehicles when seen, but could not be everywhere. Residents were asked to drop a line if they saw anything untoward. However, this was an ongoing issue as well as trading vans parking. A lot of the businesses on the High Street did not have a loading bay, so to avoid congestion they simply parked on the High Street pavements to avoid congestion.

The Town Clerk advised that she could contact the Uckfield Chamber of Commerce as although they have more dealings with the independent businesses.

Councillor Sparks had every sympathy with this aspect of parking in the town and explained that Wealden District were one of the few local authorities in the country who did not have civil parking enforcement and the Police simply just did not have the resources to deal with pavement parking, parking on double yellow lines or corners and so on. Wealden District Council were concerned about imposing parking enforcement fees in high streets and market towns which would dissuade visitors at a time when we businesses were trying to recover from the pandemic. However, there were ways and means by which this could be addressed, one of which could be residents parking permits, but it was recognised that it would need to be considered with an open mind as this would not be straight forward or easy to resolve.

The Town Mayor would raise the idea of the pelican crossing with ES Highways and with the local County Councillor. This would depend on the potential for additional traffic moving in and around Uckfield, but it could be considered.

Q. A resident from Manor Park raised an issue regarding the noise levels of speeding cars in the High Street. He said that he understood this there was not an easy solution but asked if anything could be done and if this was a bigger issue.

A. The Town Mayor advised said this had been raised before at parish meetings with Sussex Police but that she would raise this again. Sussex Police had carried out some work concerning vehicles going up and down the by-pass and industrial estate, but this could be brought up at the next engagement meeting to include the high street.

Q. A resident from Rocks Park estate said that it was a great shame that we did not have our representatives here from Wealden DC and ESCC who would probably be able to answer this question. On social media, this area was likely to have a bin strike soon and Uckfield was going to be included in this so she wanted to know how long the strike would be for.

A. Councillor Firth advised that Biffa had given a pay rise to some areas but not others, so she knew this was a risk. The strike was supposed to have been starting on 15 April 2022 for two weeks, however Wealden DC were working hard to try and ensure that no problems occurred for the residents of Wealden.

The Town Mayor invited residents to contact the office by email or telephone if they had any questions or to raise any issues. She expressed how proud she was of the team we had at the moment and hoped that by the time of the elections next year, this team and the councillors would take this town forward for our awesome

community.

The Town Mayor thanked everyone for coming and announced that this town had always stood up and helped local residents and we had seen that recently with the sunflowers made to raise money for the different charities supporting Ukraine.

The Town Clerk also said thank you to everyone for attending and to announce that a new vacancy would be advertised on the Town Council for Uckfield North. This would be publicly advertised the following day and dependent on when the by-election was called before 14 July 2022, the Town council would be running with just fourteen councillors for a short period of time.

Meeting closed at 8.28pm