

UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of **UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL** held
on Monday 30 October 2023 at 7.00pm
in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield

PRESENT:

Cllr. K. Bedwell	Cllr. D. Manvell
Cllr. D. Bennett	Cllr. S. Mayhew
Cllr. D. French (Deputy Mayor)	Cllr. B. Reed
Cllr. V. Frost	Cllr. P. Selby
Cllr. J. Love (Town Mayor)	Cllr. A. Smith
Cllr. M. McClafferty	Cllr. P. Ullmann
Cllr. C. Macve	Cllr. D. Ward
	Cllr. B. Cox

IN ATTENDANCE:

County Councillor Chris Dowling
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. No interests were forthcoming.

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

None received.

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

FC.55.10.23 It was **RESOLVED** to suspend Standing Orders to enable updates to be provided by County and District Council representatives.

Councillor Chris Dowling started his update by reading out a statement from East Sussex Highways which related to the recent traffic calming improvements on Lewes Road. The works had been assessed under a number of safety audits and the Stage 3 audit had just been completed. This confirmed that the build out was deemed to be safe and reference was made to speed data.

Temporary signage was due to be placed on the lamp columns along Framfield

Road (black and yellow signage) which reminded drivers of the 30mph speed limit. These temporary signs could be installed for a three-month period, and were due to be installed in response to an enquiry from the Newtown Action Group. The action group were also keen to start a community speedwatch scheme in this area.

Councillor D. French referred to the works on Lewes Road and advised that in the recent weather the road had flooded just the other side of the chicane which had added to the hazards that drivers needed to take into account.

The Town Mayor explained that she had recently liaised with the Town Council's contacts at East Sussex Highways and asked for the drains and gullies to be checked on the High Street to mitigate the risk of surface water in this heavy rain. It was noted that the tree pits were full of sediment and also needed cleaning out.

Members asked for a copy of the full speed data for Lewes Road, which had since been provided and circulated to members.

Councillor D. French also advised that there was a huge dip on Bell Farm Road near to the roundabout (on both sides of the carriageway). This needed to be investigated.

District Council updates commenced with an update from Councillor B. Reed. The application for nine properties on the site of Ridgewood House had been approved by the local planning authority. Councillor Reed had asked the applicant to meet with a local ornithologist specialist.

Councillor Reed advised that new Grampian conditions were being applied to applications affecting water. And the revised National Planning Policy Framework was due to be released soon.

Councillor Reed had visited the Millennium Green, New Road/Lewes Road, Ridgewood Place and the Redrow site whilst in the ward area with senior officers of Wealden District Council. The Millennium Green Trust held regular volunteer sessions.

Councillor D. Manvell explained that Wealden DC were unsuccessful with the first round of grant funding for Wealden based Leisure Centres but there was a larger pot of funding available in the second round. Councillor Manvell referred to the recent nomination of the Leisure Centre as an Asset of Community Value by the Town Council and clarified that a decision was still awaited on this.

Councillor Manvell advised members that Wealden DC's Corporate Plan had recently been adopted and would be circulated to members.

In addition to the other points above, Councillor S. Mayhew had attended a seminar as part of the Health & Wellbeing Board for Wealden District Council which sought to improve relationships between the district authority and the NHS.

FC.56.10.23 The Councillors were thanked for their input and update, and subsequently **RESOLVED** to reinstate Standing Orders.

4.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was advised that Councillor B. Cox would be late to the meeting, and apologies were received from County Councillor C. Dowling who was unable to attend due to another commitment.

5.0 MINUTES

5.1 To resolve that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 18 September 2023 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

FC.57.10.23 It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of Full Council be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

5.2 Action List

Members requested that the following action be removed and thanked the Town Clerk for her involvement in the legal paperwork to complete this purchase:
FC82.01.23 - To consider a response from Buxted PC re: the Dene

6.0 COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

(a) Plans Committee of the 25 September and 16 October 2023

FC.58.10.23 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Plans Committee of the 25 September and 16 October 2023.

(b) Environment & Leisure Committee of the 9 October 2023

FC.59.10.23 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Environment & Leisure Committees of the 9 October 2023.

(c) General Purposes Committee of the 23 September 2023

FC.60.10.23 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the General Purposes Committees of the 23 September 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

A meeting was due to be held on 6 November to start planning the event for August 2024.

(iii) Uckfield Dementia Forum

A poster advertising the 'Ageing Well – Information Day' on Thursday 7 November was circulated under this item. A large number of organisations would be displaying their activities, services and offering their professional advice, in

addition to three talks on powers of attorney, dementia awareness and financial advice for your later years.

(iv) Infrastructure Working Group

Nothing to report.

**9.0 TO RATIFY DOCUMENTATION CONSIDERED BY STANDING COMMITTEES:
General Purposes Committee**

(i) Town Council's list of Direct Debits and Standing Order

Councillor C. Macve felt that an extra level of approval was required for any supplier payments made by Direct Debit. The Town Clerk advised that she would seek the advice of the Internal Auditor when they visited on 7 November 2023. Members noted the list provided.

(ii) Members Audit Policy – No. 63

FC.61.10.23

It was **RESOLVED** to accept the recommendations of the General Purposes Committee and adopt the revised Member Audit Policy.

Environment & Leisure Committee

None.

10.0 TO NOTE THE REPORT OF THE EXTERNAL AUDITOR FOR 2022/23

Members were presented with a copy of the Notice of conclusion of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for the year ended 31 March 2023 which included the response from the External Auditor. A question was clarified before members thanked all office staff for their hard work and contribution to this, and noted the positive outcome of the external audit, and confirmation of sound governance.

11.0 QUARTERLY PROGRESS UPDATE ON UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL'S ANNUAL PRIORITIES FOR 2023/24 (Q2)

Members reviewed a report which highlighted progress towards the Town Council's annual plan for 2023/24. There was some discussion regarding the Neighbourhood Plan, and need to keep progressing with this. The Town Clerk has since put time aside in the week before Christmas to update the documentation ready to submit to Wealden DC. Members noted the report.

12.0 TO CONSIDER A MOTION BY COUNCILLOR P. ULLMANN

In response to the news that both the branches of Lloyds and Halifax in Uckfield (both form part of the Lloyds Banking Group) would be closing in 2024, members were very concerned. This would leave only Santander and Nationwide left in Uckfield and Nationwide was not a clearing bank, but a building society.

Councillor P. Ullmann had prepared in his motion suggested wording for a letter to Lloyds Banking Group relaying the concerns of the town. There had been talk by LINK that they may seek to set up a banking hub in Uckfield but there had been nothing formally put to the Town Council or Chamber of Commerce about this nor would it solve the social issues created by these closures. Councillor C. Macve added that Barclays Bank had closed some years ago, so these two would be the fourth and fifth banks to close after HSBC and NatWest and when closures had occurred residents had often moved to another bank within the High Street.

Members were concerned with the lack of banking solutions in the town, and understood that the Post Office would be in even more demand. With the closure of the banks, the High Street was seeing fewer ATMs for local residents or businesses to withdraw cash.

Members felt the letter should be clearer – a call to action, that they should reconsider the closure and if the closure was going to go ahead, that the banks provide the town with a facility to retain similar facilities.

It was questioned whether a parallel course of action would pre-empt a response. It was asked if there was a way of requesting access to information such as a Freedom of Information request on footfall in Uckfield branches. Being a private company the Town Clerk didn't believe this was possible but would investigate in what way this information could be obtained. In particular – when the snapshot was taken of statistics to inform these branch closures, what data did they refer to, what was the trend as anecdotally this did not align with the local experience of residents and businesses banking in Uckfield.

FC.62.10.23

Subject to the above four suggestions, members **RESOLVED** to accept the contents of the motion and for the following letter to be sent to the Lloyds Banking Group.

“Dear Sir,

RE: Proposed closure of two branches in Uckfield, East Sussex

We are writing to you to express our disappointment and concern in relation to your recent announcement of the closure of both the Lloyds Bank and Halifax Building Society branches in our town. We note that there was no advance warning to the Town Council, nor are we aware of any attempt to consult with local stakeholders. These closures come in the wake of similar decisions by HSBC, Barclays, and NatWest, leaving Santander as the only physical banking presence on our High Street. We note with concern that these closures have always been accompanied by loss of access to an ATM.

Your decision raises the following, serious, issues for our town and community:

- A) The significant cohort of older and digitally inexperienced people living in Uckfield will in effect be disenfranchised from the banking system. Your announcement made no mention of how long your community banker will remain in place, nor does it propose a definite location;
- B) the offices of both branches will now presumably be vacant, thus threatening to deplete the attractiveness and vibrancy of our town centre;
- C) the decision appears to have been taken on the basis of a point-in-time statistic that is completely meaningless: those clients that do visit both branches clearly need to be serviced in a face to face manner. We would urge you to make further disclosures, indicating the exact statistical trend over the past 36 months. Anecdotal evidence suggests a strong increase in footfall over the past months; Your announcement also made no mention of the possibility of a creation of a banking hub in concert with your competitors, which would go some way to mitigating some of the concerns raised above. We understand that this approach has been used elsewhere.

We would point out that the population of the Town is growing quickly, with new housing developments leading to an influx of people from outside the area. In that light, your decision would seem to be ill-advised from a commercial point of view. We would urge you to reconsider your decision, or at least to support and help execute the establishment of a Banking Hub in our Town.”

13.0 TO RECEIVE A RESPONSE FROM EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL TO A PREVIOUS MOTION SUBMITTED REQUESTING THE INSTALLATION OF A PEDESTRIAN CROSSING

The Town Clerk clarified that the letter received from East Sussex County Council was written by Council officers and was not from elected members.

It was suggested that an alternative approach be explored. First the Town Council should consider where would be the most appropriate place for a crossing should one be considered a viable option. A member of the Road Safety team should come out and walk the stretch, and the Town Council pay for a feasibility study. This could require speed surveys to be carried out.

The Town Clerk reminded members that East Sussex County Council ran a community match scheme where any works of this nature, if considered viable, may require investment from both the Town Council and County Council. The Town Clerk asked whether members would be supportive of spending these initial funds. Funds were available in Earmarked Reserves under the title of 'Speed reduction initiatives.'

Members discussed the right place for a crossing and had seen students walking from Churchcoombe and crossing at the natural opening onto London Road from North Row. Members recognised that there was a bus stop there and that vehicular movements were increasing.

Councillor D. Manvell wished to propose an amendment to the original motion, which was seconded by Councillor Bennett.

FC.63.10.23 Members **RESOLVED** to accept the proposed amendment to Councillor Bennett's original motion and set out to:

"maintain this as the ideal site and the path that students were taking to reach school, in order to emphasise the views of the young people.

Uckfield Town Council would be very happy to explore the option of community match funding and fund a feasibility study, as the Town Council felt it was important to concentrate on this area, and not further north of the town. It was also suggested that any data or feedback from the feasibility study and associated speed surveys, should be reflected in any future updates to the Sustrans report."

14.0 TO PROVIDE INPUT INTO THE DISTRICT WIDE REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

Members reflected on the practicalities of using various halls and buildings as polling stations in Uckfield.

Uckfield Town Council provided the following feedback to the Town Clerk to submit to Wealden District Council:

Existing venues

Members discussed the existing venues used in Uckfield for polling stations. Manor Primary School was thought to be ideal and central for that ward area, and had disabled access, but it was recognised that this could be impacting on

education or the normal school day. It was questioned why the Youth Centre wasn't utilised for this purpose (on the Uckfield College site).

Ridgewood Village Hall was ideal for the south of the town. Although it was recognised that the south of Uckfield was due to see a substantial increase in population with a number of developments approved in that area, so it may be that a further venue would be required in the coming years.

The other existing venues – Foresters Hall and Civic Centre worked well, although the Town Clerk noted that it would be beneficial to install wi-fi into Foresters hall, for the benefit of elections staff.

Alternative or additional venues

The Childrens Centre (or now known as the Family Hub) on the Churchcombe estate (Manor Close) may provide a suitable venue also for members of that ward area.

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/children-families/childcare/familyhubs/local-childrens-centre/uckfield>

The Luxford Centre was considered an ideal town centre location at the top of Luxfords car park

<https://www.luxfordcentre.org/index.html>

These were other options for venues, in addition to the Belmont Centre which the council was aware was sometimes used for by-elections or smaller elections when the Civic Centre couldn't be available.

Members subsequently noted the report and confirmed they were happy for the Clerk to share these views.

15.0 TO REVIEW THE 2024/25 PROPOSAL FROM EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL ON THEIR GRASS VERGE CUTTING CONTRACT

Members were presented with a short report which provided three options for parish/town councils to choose from for the next financial year for grass verge cutting arrangements. East Sussex County Council took a decision back in 2018 to reduce urban grass verge cutting along the public highway to twice a year. This meant the verges would be cut less, if no further contribution was made, the Town Council could pay a contribution to retain five to six cuts per annum or take over the contract entirely for a very small fee. The latter option however would require a great deal of extra work, to plan, obtain machinery, consider staffing levels and take on liability alongside the public highway.

FC.64.10.23

Members **RESOLVED** to advise East Sussex County Council that Uckfield Town Council would be selecting Option 2 for grass verge cutting in 2024/25:

*“**Option 2 – Extra cuts:** Town Councils may fund an additional four cuts to be carried out by ESCC, totalling six cuts (two standard and four extra) over the course of the year. This would cost the Town Council a total of £5,686 for the year.”*

16.0 TO CONSIDER A PROPOSED STREET NAME FOR A NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENT OFF LEWES ROAD, UCKFIELD

Developers of the site known as Siggs Yard, had proposed a new name for the

development of nine properties on this site. The name they had proposed was Wildernesse.

Members were not favourable at all to the suggested name of 'Wildernesse' – for a number of reasons, one being that it was not that easy to spell – something that's set out in the Street Naming policy.

Members preferred a name in-keeping with the previous use of the site, and history of the Ridgewood area, in keeping with the policy criteria: "*Wherever possible, street names should reflect the geography or history of the site or area.*"

They would ideally have liked it to be kept as Siggs Yard, as this was how local residents referred to the site. But, they understood the policy would not support this, in light of it being a family name still in existence in the area.

The site was a wood yard and for that reason a number of members were keen for this to be reflected in the street name either directly or through wood related terms:

The Woodyard

Woodyard Place/Court/Cottages

Fencers

This side of Lewes Road was also more heavily linked to the agricultural history of Ridgewood/Uckfield.

Just a little way down the road, off New Road, Ridgewood had a brickworks, so although this was near to Ridgewood Recreation ground, terms such as the following would also reflect local history:

Fletton

Brickmakers

Or a combination of the two:

Brickwood

Councillor B. Cox joined the meeting at approximately 8.30pm.

Members welcomed the opportunity to comment and were happy for the Clerk to feed the above back to Wealden District Council.

17.0 TO CONSIDER THE DISPLAY OF A LARGE WOODEN PLAQUE IN THE CIVIC CENTRE HONOURING THE MEMORY OF THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES WW1, WW2 AND ALL OTHER ACTIONS

Members were provided with photos of a large wooden plaque that the Uckfield branch of the Royal British Legion were looking to find a home for.

There were mixed views as to whether the Civic Centre should be the place for the plaque and if somewhere like Holy Cross Church would be more suitable due to the rolls of honour placed there. One councillor did however recognise that perhaps it shouldn't be religiously based.

There were mixed views and concerns regarding the weight of the plaque which would determine its placement.

Members agreed to defer the item until further information had been obtained on which walls would be able to hold the plaque within the Civic Centre.

18.0 TO NOTE THE MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS

Members noted the report.

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

Four deed of grants had been received:

Catherine Johnson

Scott McCarthy

Shirley Ann Skinner

Susan E. Goldsmith and Sally Bland

FC.65.10.23 It was **RESOLVED** for three councillors to sign the above deeds of grant.

20.0 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS PREVIOUSLY NOTIFIED

None received.

21.0 TOWN CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Clerk had a few updates on matters for members attention. She reminded members of the following:

- a small French market was coming to the station car park on 11 November;
- the deadline to respond to East Sussex County Council's Priorities Survey was 10 December 2023. Members were encouraged to respond individually;
- Ash dieback works were commencing in Nightingale Woods 6-9 November;
- Redrow Homes had arranged to present to Uckfield Town Council on Monday 13 November at 6.00pm for Redrow Homes for the remainder of the Ridgewood Farm site;
- an update was provided on the current review of Town Centre CCTV contract arrangements;

The Town Clerk then explained that there was a requirement to make a transfer of land – tidying up compartments at the back of Eagle Close, where the land registry deed was not correct to the lay of the land. The Town Clerk requested two members to review the documents in detail and sign these on behalf of the Town Council.

FC.66.10.23 It was **RESOLVED** for the Town Clerk to circulate the papers regarding the transfer of land at the rear of 12, Eagle Close and for members to approve and nominate two councillors to sign the papers, before the Clerk returned these to the solicitors.

FC.67.10.23 In response to a proposal by Councillor D. Bennett, members **RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders and extend the meeting for a further 10 minutes to 9.10pm to enable the remaining items on the agenda to be dealt with.

22.0 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor, Councillor J. Love reminded members of the next budget meeting on 20 November 2023.

The Town Mayor advised that there were three services over Remembrance weekend that members would be welcome to attend, (i) the gathering outside Holy Cross Church at 11am on Saturday 11 November, (ii) the service at Eugene Seghers Memorial in Highlands car park on the morning of Sunday 12 November and (iii) the Remembrance parade and church service on the afternoon of Sunday 12 November, which required members to gather in Luxfords car park

from 2.15pm onwards.

The Town Mayor advised that a decision had been reached for the appeal of the Land at Bird in Eye Farm, and the Town Council had been informed that the appeal had been dismissed by the Inspector.

Councillor J. Love advised that concerns had been raised with regard to the Royal Mail sorting office in Uckfield and the staffing difficulties they were experiencing. Councillor Bennett explained that some households were not receiving post and when they did a large bundle was being delivered once a week or once a fortnight. Members were particularly concerned for staff welfare and for the upcoming Christmas season which would place additional pressure on the service.

FC.68.10.23 Members **RESOLVED** to support postal workers and write to Royal Mail to ask how they were going to address the current shortfall in staffing levels and support residents and households of Uckfield.

The meeting closed at 9.09pm.