

UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of **UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL** held
on Monday 15 January 2024 at 7.00 pm
in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield

PRESENT:

Cllr. K. Bedwell	Cllr. D. Manvell
Cllr. B. Cox	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

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor K. Williams Wealden DC
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.

Councillor C. Macve declared a personal interest in agenda item 23.3.

Councillor K. Bedwell declared an interest if discussions became detailed on specific objectives/projects within the Strategic Plan (agenda item 11.0) and the Annual Plan (agenda item 12.0) due to her role as Chair of Ridgewood Village Hall Committee.

Councillor D. Manvell declared an interest if discussions became detailed within the Annual Budget (agenda item 13.0) due to his role on the board of the Uckfield Community Fridge CIC.

Councillor J. Love declared a personal interest in agenda item 23.1 should discussions move to discuss Victoria Pavilion due to her work for a business which leased part of the building.

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.83.01.24

Members **RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders to enable District Councillor K. Williams to provide an update.

Councillor K. Williams believed that Wealden DC would be in a position to appoint a new contractor to redevelop the Streatfeild House site in the next seven to ten days.

Discussions were still continuing between Wealden DC and East Sussex CC with regard to Uckfield Leisure Centre. Progress had been slow but was moving in the right direction. A grant application had been submitted for energy improvements for all three leisure centres (Crowborough, Hailsham and Uckfield).

The play space strategy had been published on Wealden DC's website. This report would form part of the Planning Policy department's evidence base for the Local Plan.

Licensing conditions were currently out for consultation. With the District Council's move towards a net zero approach, they were keen to see events and licenced businesses making efforts towards alternatives. The consultation had been extended to 11 February 2024.

Wealden DC Planning Committee South were due to sign off the new Sports Hub near to the Boship roundabout, which would be funded by a mix of grant funding and developer contributions (Community Infrastructure Levy). The establishment of a new medical centre was moving forward in Mayfield.

Wealden DC had commissioned a tree survey of its tree stock, which had been positive, and no issues were of concern at this point in time. An audit of the Food Service, also found no issues.

An extraordinary meeting of Wealden DC had been called on 8 February 2024, to consider the draft Local Plan and to give approval to go out for Regulation 18 (public consultation on the draft Local Plan).

Councillor K. Williams explained that within his portfolio he covered the areas of public health, crime and disorder, assets, special projects, licensing, emergency planning, the voluntary sector and wellbeing.

Councillors requested clarification on the Play Space strategy, to which Councillor Williams explained that it looked at current availability and condition of sports facilities including football pitches, tennis courts, etc. It was undertaken by external consultants and looked at the whole district.

Councillor D. Manvell asked what Councillor Williams would like to see in Uckfield in terms of special projects. Councillor Williams explained that Wealden DC would be preparing a commercial strategy to ensure the organisation was

proactive rather than reactive to opportunities with an associated plan for funding. An example of this could be if a parish had play areas which were unusable due to drainage issues, that perhaps the two organisations could join together to take improvements forward. A draft strategy would be presented to Cabinet before Full Council, once ready.

Councillor S. Mayhew explained that a decision had been taken by the Planning Inspectorate to overrule the refusal of the planning application for a new build in Sycamore Close. He was aware that Uckfield TC's Plans Committee would be disappointed with this outcome.

Councillor D. Manvell added that the changes to the NPPF could be important in relation to the Neighbourhood Plan and Local Plan. The local planning authority may only have to provide a four-year housing supply rather than a five-year.

Councillor B. Cox added that he had taken a motion to full Council which was carried, to call the Environment Agency to account and work with them and other key partner agencies to clean up rivers and waterways within the district.

Councillor B. Reed had circulated a written update to Town Councillors prior to the meeting, which members referenced.

FC.84.01.24 Members **RESOLVED** to reinstate standing orders.

4.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillor D. Bennett due to another commitment and apologies were also received from County Councillors Chris and Claire Dowling.

5.0 MINUTES

5.1 To resolve that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 11 December 2023 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

FC.85.01.24 Subject to an amendment being made to confirm that the Sports Hub for Hailsham would be funded by grant funding and developer contributions as expected (no other forms of funding) it was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 11 December 2023 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

5.2 Action List

Members noted the report.

6.0 COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

(a) Plans Committee of the 8 January 2024

FC.86.01.24 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Plans Committee on 8 January 2024.

(b) Environment & Leisure Committee – no meeting held

(c) General Purposes Committee – no meeting held

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

Members noted the report.

8.0 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM FULL COUNCIL WORKING GROUPS

(i) Civic Centre Working Group

Nothing to report at present.

(ii) Uckfield – Events Working Group

Nothing to report at present.

(iii) Uckfield Dementia Forum

Nothing to report at present.

(iv) Infrastructure Working Group

Nothing to report at present.

9.0 TO CONSIDER THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WEALDEN PARISH REMUNERATION PANEL ON TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILLOR ALLOWANCES FOR 2024/25

Members were presented with the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel who met on 12 December 2023. This report recommended a 4.6% on the figures recommended for 2023/24. Uckfield Town Council had not followed the recommended increases for around three years, which meant that the starting position was different to that within the Panel's report for 2023/24.

It was suggested by the Town Clerk to keep discussions contained, that members consider three to four options. These were:

OPTION	DESCRIPTION	BASIC ALLOWANCE	CHAIRMAN'S ALLOWANCE
A	Freeze member allowances at the current rate	£1,348.20	£1,861.65
B	Increase the current rate of allowances by a further 5%	£1,415.61	£1,954.73
C	Increase member allowances to the rate recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel	£1,492.00 (10.67%)	£2,060.00 (10.65%)

A fourth option was proposed by a member, which suggested that new councillors did not receive an allowance in their first year.

Members discussed the agenda item at some length before the matter was taken to a vote.

FC.87.01.24 With 10 votes in favour and two members voting against, it was **RESOLVED** to agree to an increase of the basic member allowance and the Chairman's allowance by 5% which would set the basic allowance at £1,415.61 and the Chair's allowance at £1,954.73 for 2024/25.

10.0 TO APPROVE THE RE-ALLOCATION OF EARMARKED RESERVES FOR PRIORITY PROJECTS IN 2024/25

Members were provided with a report which set out a request to re-allocate sums of funding from earmarked reserves to fund certain large expenditure in the next 12-18 months. These re-allocations would help to attend to ash dieback in winter 2024, resolve the ventilation system issue in the reconfiguration of the Caretaker area, and purchase a new ride on mulcher 4WD and tractor for the Grounds and Ranger team. The funding would fund year one of a two year payment plan for these latter grounds machinery items.

FC.88.01.24 Members **RESOLVED** to approve the re-allocations of earmarked reserves for priority projects in 2024/25 as per the report.

11.0 TO FORMALLY ADOPT THE TOWN COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PLAN 2024/29

Members considered the contents of the Strategic Plan 2024/29, which set out the priorities for the next five years.

Councillor C. Macve requested that reference be made to the footpaths on Manor Park, and an intention to address some of these issues with the relevant residents or partner agencies.

Councillor K. Bedwell wished to make reference to '*protect the green space between Uckfield town and neighbouring villages.*'

Councillor D. Manvell wished to change the phrase 'Our Corporate priorities' to 'Our Council's priorities' on page 7.

Councillor B. Reed wished to include the phrase '*natural*' burials on page 13 and not just woodland burials. The Town Clerk noted this inclusion and explained that perhaps 'woodland' should be replaced with 'natural' to open up the scope of this project. Councillor B. Reed wished to see intentions to work with the relevant authorities to make improvements to Uckfield's watercourses. It was also thought that reference should be made to meet the 30for30 UN policy and see that 30% of Uckfield's green spaces were protected.

FC.89.01.24 With these additions, members **RESOLVED** to adopt the Strategic Plan 2024/29 for Uckfield Town Council.

12.0 TO FORMALLY ADOPT THE TOWN COUNCIL'S ANNUAL PLAN 2024/25

Members considered the Annual Plan for 2024/25 which set out the priorities of the Town Council over the next financial year.

Councillor C. Macve wished to add a priority or make reference within the plan, for the Town Council to purchase equipment locally, and use local suppliers. The Town Clerk explained that this was already an objective within the Town Council's Strategic Plan, but she would find a way of referencing this within the annual plan as well.

A couple of suggestions were made for further priorities, but the Town Clerk felt that these were the responsibility of external parties such as the County or District Council, and there were already a number of priorities set out within both the Annual Plan and Strategic Plan which were outside of the Town Council's

remit and would involve working with partner organisations such as the higher tier authorities. It was important with the funds the Town Council had available, and limited staff resource, that it paid attention to the priorities of its own assets (in terms of land and buildings).

Councillor A. Smith suggested that the Town Council incorporated a priority '*to hold developers to account, to ensure that the conditions of planning applications were adhered to and the environmental impact on adjacent land was taken into consideration.*' A discussion followed as to whether this should be included in the Strategic Plan or Annual Plan, and members felt it should be incorporated in both.

FC.90.01.24 Subject to these additions, members **RESOLVED** to adopt the Annual Plan 2024/25 for Uckfield Town Council.

13.0 TO FORMALLY SET THE ANNUAL BUDGET (PRECEPT) FOR 2024/25

Members were presented with two options for the budget for 2024/25 – one proposed a 6.08% increase for a Band D household for council tax, and one proposed a 7.02% increase based on discussions at Finance Sub-Committee on 9 January 2024.

Members talked at length about the advantages and disadvantages of both proposals for 2024/25, and thanked the Assistant Town Clerk & RFO, and Town Clerk for their hard work in preparing the budget papers.

FC.91.01.24 With 10 votes in favour, three members voting against, and one abstaining it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the annual budget for 2024/25 with a 6.08% annual increase for a Band D household, with a precept of £1,127,348.

14.0 TO FORMALLY ADOPT THE PROPERTY ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024/29

Members considered the contents of the Property Asset Management Plan for 2024/29.

FC.92.01.24 Members **RESOLVED** to adopt the Asset Management Plan for 2024/29.

15.0 QUARTERLY PROGRESS UPDATE ON UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL'S ANNUAL PRIORITIES FOR 2023/24 (Q3)

Members reviewed the progress that had been made towards the 2023/24 priorities and subsequently noted the report.

16.0 TO CONSIDER THE RESPONSE FROM THE LLOYDS BANKING GROUP TO THE LETTER SENT BY UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

Members agreed that the response received from Lloyds Banking Group was weak, and did not answer a number of points within the Town Council's correspondence.

FC.93.01.24 Members **RESOLVED** to:

- (i) approve the submission of a formal complaint to the Financial Ombudsman;
- (ii) to send a response to the Lloyds Banking Group;
- (iii) to send a letter to LINK in relation to banking hubs, and;
- (iv) to send a letter to the MP expressing our concerns of both the loss of face to face banking services, and ATMs.

FC.94.01.24 Members **RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders to enable the meeting to continue until 9.30pm, due to the agenda items still to be discussed.

17.0 TO REVIEW THE CONSULTATION ON EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL'S LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN (2024-2050)

Members were advised that there was an opportunity to respond to the consultation on East Sussex County Council's Local Transport Plan until 25 February 2024. Members were encouraged to respond individually as residents, but were asked if they wished to send a collective response on behalf of the Town Council.

There were a mix of views from members as to their position on some of the previously discussed issues – such as the proposed railway line extension between Lewes and Uckfield, and the dualling of the A22 Bypass.

The Town Clerk therefore offered to consider to review the Transport for South East Plan to 2050 alongside the ESCC Local Transport Plan, but suggested that members responded individually. One point to note, was that all members agreed that the regularly referenced Sustrans report needed updating as it was undertaken in 2018 (now five to six years out of date).

18.0 NOTE THE MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS

Members noted the update.

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

Two deeds of grant had been received with the same names for pre-purchases: Sarah Elliott and Maria Blackford

FC.95.01.24 It was **RESOLVED** for three councillors to sign the above deed of grant.

20.0 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS PREVIOUSLY NOTIFIED

None received in time for the meeting.

21.0 TOWN CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Clerk advised members that Wealden DC were running their annual Parish Conference on 14 March between 10am and 3pm, and the Town Clerk would be looking for two representatives to attend.

The Town Clerk also advised that the office had been contacted by ESCC with regards to an independent fostering association who had been making contact with parishes. These independent associations competed with the county council's fostering services. The Town Clerk would share the information with councillors.

The Town Clerk advised members of the proposed changes to the Saturday 262 bus service, and that it would be starting again at the end of January, having sought funding from a variety of means including local parishes, and the Sussex Community Rail Partnership.

22.0 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair, Councillor J. Love advised that the Uckfield Food Bank had been nominated for The King's Award for Voluntary Service, and wished them well with

their nomination.

23.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

FC.96.01.24 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.

23.1 To consider works associated with plumbing and heating improvements at Foresters Hall and Victoria Pavilion

Members focused on Foresters Hall only at this meeting and the need for a new heating system at the rear of the building. Despite the recommendations of officers to install a gas boiler at the cost of £2k whilst a more holistic approach to all of the building's plumbing and heating issues were identified (and maintenance works to address heat loss) and be planned for thoroughly, using a renewable energy option, members voted in favour of a reactive approach, by installing a renewable option now, for just the rear of the building.

FC.97.01.24 With six members voting in favour, five voting against, and two abstaining, it was **RESOLVED** to install a renewable energy option for heating the rear of Foresters Hall.

23.2 To consider the recommendations of Finance Sub-Committee

FC.98.01.24 Members **RESOLVED** to approve the addition of Cyber Cover to the Town Council's Buildings Insurance policy.

23.3 To consider a proposal by the Uckfield Grasshoppers Junior Football Club

This item was deferred to Environment & Leisure Committee on 22 January 2024, due to time restraints.

The meeting closed at 9.30pm.