

TOWN COUNCIL



ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Wednesday 20 March 2024

Weald Hall, Civic Centre, Uckfield
at
7.00 pm

AGENDA

Prior to the start of the meeting you are invited to have tea or coffee
from 6.30 pm

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Apologies for absence

Looking back

3. Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of the 15 March 2023
 4. Matters arising from the minutes
 5. Presentation of the Town Council's Annual Report 2023-24
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Looking forward

6. Topics and questions raised by residents in advance
7. Questions from the floor



Councillor Jackie Love
Town Mayor



Uckfield Town Council Annual Report

2023-24

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

Our Town Mayor's Annual Review of 2023-24

Welcome everyone to our Annual Town meeting. As always, this meeting gives us the chance to come together and discuss issues important to you and also to our neighbouring communities.

Before we go any further, I would like to just take a moment to remember a dear friend, Mr RA Blackford. Mr Blackford always attended our annual meetings to ensure we were on our toes and looking after Uckfield. As a former Councillor, life-long resident and business man within our town he always had something to say! I for one will miss him and our chats about issues past and present.



All Councillors and Officers have worked hard to ensure all our statutory duties have been fulfilled in the past year and our forward planning takes us as a town into the future ensuring all aspects are met.

We have published our business planning documents, which includes our Strategic Plan, Annual Plan, Annual budget and Property Asset Management and these can be found on our website. I would like to say on behalf of everyone involved this was by far the hardest budget setting process we have ever had to discuss as it posed many difficult questions and decisions on our plans for the next year.

Last May we welcomed five new councillors to Uckfield Town Council which is fantastic. We thank those that have stood before and thank the new councillors for their active roles and enthusiasm to undertake new initiatives. We hope that others will step forward in the future for these roles to ensure Uckfield remains an incredible and busy town. Being a Town Councillor is a rewarding position to take on. There are many different aspects to the position so you can follow the subject areas that interest you and bring vibrancy to the role.

We have seen so much happen in the last year with many businesses and voluntary groups coming together to bring you a variety of events thus enabling us to enjoy so much together.

One of the largest voluntary groups in Uckfield, Brighter Uckfield, were celebrated only the other week for their success in being awarded the Kings Award for Voluntary Services. Uckfield Town Council had the incredible honour of hosting this award with His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex Mr Andrew Blackman present, alongside the Vice Lord-Lieutenant and his deputy Lieutenants to present the Crystal award.

Last year we reported that Uckfield Town Council would be taking ownership of the open space, known as the Dene on Manor Park to ensure it stayed an important green space in our community and when the white stuff falls from the skies, a place that children and adults can come together with their sledges for lots of fun. This past year we have also been successful with registering the Ridgewood Village Post Office and Uckfield Leisure Centre as Assets of Community Value within Uckfield. Going forward we are keen to nominate the Highlands Inn, Family Hub on the Churchcombe estate, the Uckfield Rugby Club and the Oaks, AFC Uckfield site. Are there other sites you feel are important and could be considered? If so, please do let us know.

<https://www.wealden.gov.uk/partnerships-and-localism/town-and-parish-councils-ordnance-survey-mapping/community-right-to-bid-assets-of-community-value/>

On the subject of Assets, we have all raised our concerns about the reduction in High Street Banking Services. We have lost (along with many other towns) a number of our banks and we know from talking to you this is a major issue. Through motions brought to the Council we are taking action through various options to ensure yours and our thoughts are sent to the appropriate people.

We have also considered motions from Town Councillors on matters relating to the Uckfield Leisure Centre and the installation of a pedestrian crossing on London Road.

Our work with Sussex Police continues. We are still monitoring the issues raised on social media and ensuring where we can, information is passed to Sussex Police alongside the reports made by residents directly through the different means of communication, to ensure an action is taken where it can be. Town Council staff have been working with the Police to review the maintenance contract and infrastructure for the Town Centre's CCTV system, with an upgrade due to be undertaken at the end of March 2024. This change will not affect the cameras themselves and what can be seen, it ensures that the technology remains up to date, and footage remains clear, effective and accessible to the Police.

I hope this report alongside updates from my colleagues will give you an insight into what we do and how hard we work for our beloved town and its residents. We hope that by standing with our residents, voices are heard and action is taken. I'm sure you will all join me in thanking everyone for all their hard work, dedication and commitment to ensure Uckfield works for everyone.

Councillor Jackie Love

**Town Mayor
Chair of Full Council**



General Purposes Committee

I am very proud to be the Chair of General Purposes at Uckfield Town Council. This is my second year and hopefully my fellow councillors will vote for me to be the Chair for the year 2024-2025.

General Purposes Committee are responsible for finance, buildings and personnel. Just like all of our residents we have found that costs have been rising and therefore we too, like most of our residents have had to be careful with our expenditure. Our staff, especially our Responsible Financial Officer with the help of our Town Clerk have managed to do this.

We have once again granted over £27,000 through our annual Community Grant Funding Scheme, this has included The Bee Keepers, Uckfield Theatre Guild, Ashdown Radio and Uckfield Bonfire and Carnival Society. Further to this, funding is also provided to Wealden Citizens Advice (£19,000) and also the Uckfield Volunteer Centre (now called Wealden Volunteering £8,000), through a Service Level Agreement. Thank you to all the groups that assist Uckfield, we are all very proud of you. This meeting is the hardest, and longest meeting in the committee calendar, that we have throughout the year, but in my humble opinion the most rewarding meeting, listening to all that you do throughout the year and how you wish to continue is most humbling. Once again thank you.

We received a clear external audit of the Town Councils finance and governance, which demonstrates sound workings and controls. We also engaged a new Internal Auditor who as well as carrying out the end of year audit for 2022-23 has completed two interim audits since then.

We have reviewed our Town Councils investments and risks, to ensure all necessary internal controls are in place, along with increasing our insurance cover to further protect the Town Council.

We have hosted many different events here at the Civic Centre including the Annual Model Railway Exhibition, tribute acts, themed restaurant evenings, Chamber of Commerce breakfast and evening meetings, the Christmas Pantomime thanks to Uckfield Theatre Guild, the BBC Radio 4 Any Questions show and celebrations of life and private functions for local residents.

Within the Civic Centre we have undertaken a programme of refurbishment works including a full redecoration to the Weald Hall, redecoration and flooring within the Ashdown Room, redecoration, new flooring and installation of a new cooker and new coffee machines within Luxford Restaurant. We have also had new lighting installed

outside the Civic Centre. We have carried out further work to strengthen our compliance with fire regulations including upgrading doors and emergency lighting, and we are in the midst of completing the Electrical Installation Condition reports across all buildings due for their certification.

We have upgraded the Wi-Fi within the Civic Centre and undertaken a computer upgrade and server upgrade within the offices. We are in the process of introducing a new booking system to manage room and open space hire. This should improve the functionality for customers and staff.

The largest project of the past year included the demolition of the Hub on the site behind the Civic Centre, which had reached the end of its life, as a post war pre-fabricated building. Council staff and external contractors worked hard to undertake improvements to the grounds and the remaining Source building in short timescales before Late Night Shopping for the benefit of the community.

As you can see we have been busy during the year. We would not be able to do as much as we do without all of our staff. I would like to thank The Town Clerk, Responsible Financial Officer, our Hospitality Manager, our Estates and Facilities Manager, all of our office staff, caretaking staff, our staff in Luxford Restaurant, our grounds staff and our cleaners.

We really appreciate all of your hard work.

Councillor Diane Ward
Chair of General Purposes Committee

Environment and Leisure Committee



As we draw to the end of another year for the Environment and Leisure Committee, this being the last year of three that I have been Chair I would first like to thank all the members of this committee for their hard work and support.

Since last year we held another very successful Weald on the Field event which yet again was attended by many of our residents making the event probably the best one yet. Roll on Saturday 10 August 2024 when we get to do it all over again!

We also had an amazing turn out for the King's Coronation event that took place on the 6th of May. This was originally planned to be an outdoor event but as usual our weather forced us to take the event in doors but this did not dampen our spirits even a party from our twin town of Arques La Bataille joined in the fun. We had a variety of entertainers which included Uckfield Concert Brass, Debs Dancers, Uckfield Soul Survivors, Rosie Ann Page and Holy Cross Youth Choir making it a really memorable day.

Our Grounds staff have been incredibly busy keeping our open spaces and allotments in good condition and completing the second year of works from the three-year woodland management plan to address the ash dieback issue in the ancient woodlands of both Boothland and Nightingale woods. The restocking of new trees will begin this March.

The allotment working group has been working closely with allotment holders through the creation of site representatives. Regular inspections have been undertaken on all of our sites with Rachel joined on occasion by the allotment association members and town councillors. The allotment conference was again attended well, with prizes being received by the allotment competition winners. The competition is run in association with Staverton's Nursery and we are very grateful for their support with this initiative.

A great purchase for us this year was the purchase of the land known as the Dene from Buxted Parish Council which our grounds staff have been maintaining since last March.

Another year of funding has been received allowing us to continue to work with Our Parks to provide free fitness classes on a Saturday morning on Harlands playing field. A second midweek session initially saw some teething issues but these are planned to start again in the coming weeks.

To commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the D-Day landings, the Town Council's beacon will be lit and entertainment provided on the evening of Thursday 6 June at Victoria Pleasure Ground, which will also give us the opportunity to show off the newly refurbished Queen's Diamond jubilee sign.

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, who is the local planning authority, to provide a response on all planning applications within the Uckfield parish boundary. This enables the Town Council to represent the views of local residents and share local knowledge pertinent to the site, surrounding areas and impact to green and grey infrastructure.



As consultees our role is to ensure that 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 planning applications but we can challenge, raise questions for consideration and support or object to planning applications that we consider do not meet the planning criteria. We have tried to build a basis of good communication with our colleagues at Wealden District Council and as the planning authority, we would expect them to consider our response to any application, big or small, when examining the contents of a planning application.

Once again, 2023/24 has been a very challenging year for the Plans Committee. Many hours have been spent by members of the Plans Committee reading accompanying documents to large and small-scale planning applications. This year for the first time in our history the Plans Committee also prepared for and attended two public Planning Inquiries for Land at Bird in Eye Farm and Land at Downlands Farm; supporting Wealden District Council in their refusal of the applications. This created an enormous amount of work and placed a great deal of responsibility on plans committee members, to ensure that the concerns of both residents and the Town Council were heard. We were delighted when both speculative applications were dismissed by The Planning Inspector and felt we had played a vital role in the decision-making process, especially for highlighting key features and characteristics of landscape and heritage in the area. We have also challenged Wealden District Council and stood alongside residents at the Planning Hearing for Land at Mockbeggars Farm, facing an eminent KC, in order to highlight the very real concerns of residents about Highway safety, flooding, impact on High Weald geodiversity surrounding the site and the green infrastructure at Downlands Farm. We are currently waiting on the outcome and decision of the Inspector.

Growth for our town is inevitable and needed if we are to continue to thrive. However, it is important that the right houses are built in the right places to avoid over-development, the loss of our rural nature to protect our countryside which is so essential in the current climate change emergency and to stop new developments becoming isolated from the town which in turn could see increased traffic congestion and anti-social behaviour. The

Plans Committee will therefore be very involved in the consultation process for the new Local Plan currently being prepared by Wealden District Council. We are at the grassroots of local government and we will continue to challenge large-scale developments to ensure that they bring with them the necessary infrastructure and we will continue to respond to the UK Government, county and district council consultations to feedback the views of residents who will be living with these decisions as the UK Government plans for 'levelling up' and increased housing provision are likely to continue following the upcoming elections.

It has been an honour to be Chair of the Town Council's Plans Committee and we have risen to the challenges that have faced us with passion and integrity. We believe we now have a strong basis to continue the work as the Local Plan sites are developed. As I step down in the position of Chair this year after three consecutive years, I hope to continue to support the committee as it continues to hold this vital role in our community.

Councillor Karen Bedwell
Chair of Plans Committee

Allowances paid to Councillors

ALLOWANCES PAID TO COUNCILLORS			
IN 2023-24 per annum (1 Apr 2023– 31 Mar 2024 before tax)			
	Allowances	Expenses	Notes
	£	£	
Cllr. Karen Bedwell	£1,384.20	-	*Denotes Town Mayor. (An additional allowance is payable to the Mayor in connection with the duties of the position).
Cllr. Duncan Bennett	£1,384.20	-	
Cllr. Ben Cox	£1,384.20	-	
Cllr. Donna French	£1,384.20	-	
Cllr. Jackie Love*	£1,384.20	£1,861.65	
Cllr. Chris Macve	**	-	
Cllr. Dan Manvell	£1,384.20	-	
Cllr. Spike Mayhew	£1,384.20	-	
Cllr. Angie Smith	£1,384.20	-	
Cllr. Diane Ward	£1,384.20	-	
Town Councillors who joined the Town Council in May 2023 (started in position from 9 May 2023)			
Cllr Val Frost	Co-opted member	-	The allowances are from the financial year 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024
Cllr Michael McClafferty	£1,213.17	-	
Cllr. Bernadette Reed	Co-opted member	-	
Cllr. Peter Selby	**	-	
Cllr. Peter Ullmann	Co-opted member	-	
Former Councillors who did not stand for election for the new term of 2023-27, so only received allowance for the period 1 April 2023 to 8 May 2023.			
Cllr. Jeremy Beesley	£134.81	-	
Cllr. James Edwards	£134.81	-	
Cllr. Helen Firth	£134.81	-	
Cllr. Gary Johnson	**	-	
Cllr. Paul Sparks	**	-	

**N.B. Councillors can choose to receive the allowance if they wish.

Councillors G. Johnson, C. Macve, P. Selby and P. Sparks did not claim for their allowance during the past financial year.

Financial Summary for 2023-24 (early predictions at 31 Jan 2024)

DRAFT INCOME and EXPENDITURE SUMMARY 2023/24 by COMMITTEE			
Committee	Budget set for 2023/24	Projected outturn at year end	Variation from budget set
	£	£	£
Environment and Leisure			
Expenditure (Revenue)	330,499	344,478	(13,979)
Expenditure (New Init)	23,492	12,482	11,010
Expenditure (EReserves)	49,500	23,548	25,952
Income	97,195	117,634	20,439
General Purposes			
Expenditure (Revenue)	778,665	831,713	(53,048)
Expenditure (New Init)	102,650	123,171	(20,521)
Expenditure (EReserves)	31,300	26,238	5,062
Income	200,140	219,186	19046
Luxfords			
Expenditure (Revenue)	221,380	252,395	(31,015)
Expenditure (EReserves)	0	4,100	(4,100)
New initiatives	3,500	3,040	460
Income	192,500	215,500	23,000
<p>N.B. Year-end financial processes need to be completed before the above figures can be finalised so these figures are likely to change.</p>			

Councillor Attendance

ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS (11 March 2023 to 12 March 2024 inclusive)					
Councillors	Full Council (7 meetings)	General Purposes (7 meetings of which one before election)	Environment and Leisure (8 meetings of which one before election)	Plans (17 meetings of which three before election)	Overall Attendance %
K. Bedwell	7 out of 7	-	7 out of 8	15 out of 17	90.6%
D. Bennett	3 out of 7	-	5 out of 8	10 out of 17	56.3%
B. Cox	6 out of 7	<i>3 out of (7) Substitute – attends when can from May 2023</i>	1 out of 1	2 out of 3	81.8% (not including sub work)
D. French (Deputy Mayor)	7 out of 7	-	8 out of 8	-	100.0%
J. Love (Town Mayor)	7 out of 7	7 out of 7	-	16 out of 17	96.8%
C. Macve	7 out of 7	7 out of 7	-	17 out of 17	100.0%
D. Manvell	7 out of 7	7 out of 7	-	-	100.0%
S. Mayhew	6 out of 7	-	6 out of 8	13 out of 17	78.1%
A. Smith	6 out of 7	7 out of 7	4 out of 8	-	77.3%
D. Ward	7 out of 7	7 out of 7	7 out of 8	-	95.5%
Town Councillors who joined the Town Council in May 2023					
V. Frost	7 out of 7	-	7 out of 7	-	100.0%
M. McClafferty	5 out of 7	-	6 out of 7	-	78.6%
B. Reed	7 out of 7	-	4 out of 7	-	78.6%
P. Selby	7 out of 7	5 out of 6	-	-	92.3%
P. Ullmann	7 out of 7	-	-	11 out of 14	85.7%
Former Councillors who did not stand for election for the new term of 2023-27					
J. Beesley	-	-	1 out of 1	3 out of 3	100.0%
J. Edwards	-	0 out of 1	1 out of 1	-	50.0%
H. Firth	-	0 out of 1	1 out of 1	-	50.0%
G. Johnson	-	0 out of 1	-	-	0.0%
P. Sparks	-	1 out of 1	-	-	100.0%

N.B. Attendances are from the 11 March 2023 to 12 March 2024.

- Not all Councillors sit on all or the same committees each year. Committee appointments are reviewed each year at the Annual Statutory meeting of the Council. Last year's meeting took place on 15 May 2023.
- The Town Council also holds Finance and Personnel Sub-committees which meet as and when 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 summarises attendance for the 12-month period prior to the Annual Town meeting in March 2024.

Our Community Grants Programme for 2023-24

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

A total of 21 organisations were awarded funding through the Town Council's Annual Community Grants programme for 2023-24. The recommendations of Finance Sub-Committee were ratified in March 2023.

GRANTS AWARDED BY UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL FOR 2023-24	
Family Support Work	£2,000.00
Children with Cancer Fund	£591.30
St Peter & St James Hospice	£1,000.00
Uckfield College Counselling Service	£2,500.00
Ashdown Radio Limited	£1,500.00
Uckfield & District Preservation Society	£1,100.00
Uckfield Community Orchestra	£400.00
Uckfield Allotment Bee Club	£1,224.80
Manor Park & Hempstead Fields Residents' Association	£250.00
Uckfield Housebound & Friendship Club	£224.00
Royal British Legion – Uckfield Branch	£300.00
Uckfield Foodbank	£2,160.00
Uckfield Theatre Guild	£1,000.00
Uckfield Bonfire & Carnival Society	£3,000.00
Brighter Uckfield	£1,500.00
Uckfield Rotary Club (Kit Car Grand Prix)	£1,800.00
Uckfield Green Partnership	£500.00
Ridgewood Village Hall Committee	£1,250.96
Sussex Support Service CIC	£1,500.00
Uckfield Millennium Green Trust	£800.00
Proms on the Pitch	£2,500.00
Total General Power of Competence Grants	£27,101.06
Service Level Agreement for Wealden Citizen's Advice	£19,000.00
Service Level Agreement for Uckfield Volunteer Centre	£8,000.00



Uckfield Town Council's Annual Priorities 2024/25

COMMUNITY	
<p>COMMUNITY GRANTS We will award up to £52,000 of community grant funding to local groups and charitable organisations for the period 2024/25 (£25,000 to community groups, and £27,000 through service level agreements).</p>	<p>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; D-Day Anniversary Beacon lighting and Weald on the Field.</p>
<p>UPGRADING PLAY AREA FACILITIES We will undertake a full upgrade of Victoria Play Area, and seek to replace pieces of equipment that have reached end of life in Hempstead Recreation Ground and Oakwood Drive play area.</p>	<p>FESTIVE LIGHTS Work with the Uckfield Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to review the festive lighting for the town centre, in preparation for Christmas 2024.</p>
CONSERVATION	
<p>PROTECTING NATURAL HABITATS We will place greater focus on wildlife monitoring in both our ancient woodlands and local nature reserves, and separate areas from the public to preserve the flora and fauna and protect key species.</p> <p>We will also hold developers to account to ensure they meet planning conditions and have consideration for adjacent land and wildlife/vegetation.</p>	<p>IMPROVEMENTS TO TOWN COUNCIL BUILDINGS We will continue to improve the standard of our buildings and ensure efficient use of utilities and the health and safety of our service users, staff and leaseholders. This will include LED lighting and compliance works, and new tables and table racks for the Civic Centre. Works will also commence to the Signal Box, to enable this to be returned to use.</p>
<p>WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLAN We will undertake the third year of works within our Woodland Management Plan, to address ash dieback. We will re-plant trees and restock areas of our woodlands where trees have been removed and disease has had an impact.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>GRASS VERGE CUTTING We will continue to contribute to the costs of East Sussex County Council's grass verge cutting contract to retain a good standard of service, and ensure visibility is maintained on pavements/highways.</p>	<p>NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN We will prepare a draft Uckfield Neighbourhood Plan ready for submission to the local planning authority.</p>
<p>CLIMATE CHANGE We will host an educational activity with primary schools, consider alternative fuel supplies in our wider building portfolio, explore additional insulation within our buildings, review the equipment we purchase, use local suppliers, and manage our land for nature with a continued focus on conservation and tree planting.</p>	
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT	
<p>POLICY REVIEW We will commission an organisational review to ensure we are resilient and prepared for a growing town population.</p>	

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 open spaces; • 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 Bridge Cottage, Osborn Hall, upstairs of Victoria Pavilion, Ridgewood Village Hall, the Source and West Park Pavilion etc. • Hire of rooms at the Civic Centre and Foresters Hall, as well as hire of our open spaces and sports grounds; • 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