

UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of **UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL** held
on Monday 26 February 2024 at 7.00 pm
in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield

PRESENT:

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

IN ATTENDANCE:

Six members of the public
County Councillor Chris Dowling
County Councillor Claire Dowling
Sarah D'Alessio Assistant Town Clerk & RFO
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 S. Mayhew advised that he had a personal interest in agenda item 10.0 as a result of living on the residential estate affected.

Councillor M. McClafferty advised that he also had a personal interest in agenda item 10.0 for the same reason.

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

FC.99.02.24

Members **RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders to enable residents and County Councillors to speak

Two members of the public wished to speak in relation to agenda item 10.0. Both residents lived on the estate affected by the flies.

Resident 1 – a resident of Bridge Farm Road advised that their road was the worst affected with the woods behind. The flies were attracted to the tall trees. It made even simple things like cooking a nightmare, as you couldn't have the window open due to the flies, and if the lights were on in the house, it would attract them further. It was a health concern and disgusting when handling food. The resident wished to know what the longer-term plans were for the flies. Since 2018 it had been really bad.

Resident 2 – this resident had been involved in the campaign group since May 2020. The residents had to wear masks in their gardens when it was bad. The resident had a good relationship with onsite staff, and understood that they undertook counting and monitoring of the flies. The site staff were good and engaged with the residents, but higher up, the response had been poor such as on the TV. Longer term there would be more houses in the vicinity of the waterworks. They understood that there was only one insecticide available to Southern Water because the flies became immune to the products. It was vital that a longer term plan be identified to give quality of life to local residents.

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

Councillor Claire Dowling, spoke of the highway works being undertaken in Downsview Crescent, Southview Drive, and updated members to explain that the first phase was complete in Rocks Park Road. The resurfacing of London Road was due to commence on 11 March, and would be carried out at night.

Councillor Dowling updated members on the council tax increase agreed by East Sussex County Council (a total of 4.99% - 2.99% general precept, and 2.0% Adult Social Care). This was the first time they had ever had to use reserves to balance the budget. They were not looking to make any cuts in 2024-25.

The previously discussed pressure on expenditure around Looked After Children continued, with costs increasing. East Sussex County also had one of the highest proportions of elderly population.

Questions from members referred to the council tax increase, and the roadworks on Rocks Park estate. Councillor Frost advised that the parking issues at school times was becoming more of a problem, with vehicle owners parking on the verges and blocking driveways, as well as parking on corners. Councillor Dowling advised that the condition of the first phase of the roadworks was good, but the matters regarding the poor driver behaviour and parking was a matter for Sussex Police, and vehicles doing this should be reported to Operation Crackdown.

Councillor French asked if any feedback had been received regarding the dip in the road of Bell Lane.

Councillor Chris Dowling referred to matters in the south of the town, also mostly relating to highway safety and highway works. The concerns raised by residents in the new development of Red Clover Road were being looked into.

Works to install new kerb sets in New Town were taking place the following week. Councillor Reed reminded both County Councillors that the Sustrans report needed updating, and wanted to ensure that when this was refreshed, that the

Town Council be given an opportunity to contribute.

Starting the Wealden DC updates, Councillor Mayhew advised that a by-election would be taking place in April, for the election of a new candidate for his seat on Wealden District Council for Uckfield New Town ward.

Councillor Reed advised that there had been quite a bit of activity, and concern raised with regards to an oak tree on the site of Horsted Pond Farm. The Tree Officer at Wealden DC thought that the recent activity near the tree may have related to a bat survey but would investigate further.

Councillor Manvell advised that the Uckfield public consultation event for Wealden DC's Draft Local Plan was due to take place at the Civic Centre on 13 April 2024. Wealden DC had adopted a budget which would see a 2.99% increase in council tax. He also advised that the Uckfield Volunteer Centre had been given £7k through a grant funding programme led by Wealden DC. It was thought that the Local Plan would be out for consultation between 15 March and 10 May 2024.

Councillor Cox had attended a number of meetings and was happy to help with any enquiries.

FC.100.02.24 Members **RESOLVED** to reinstate standing orders.

4.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None recorded.

5.0 MINUTES

5.1 To resolve that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 15 January 2024 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

FC.101.02.24 It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 15 January 2024 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

5.2 Action List

Members wished to remove FC62.10.23 – the letter to Lloyds Banking Group and noted the contents of the action list.

6.0 COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

(a) Plans Committee of the 29 January and 19 February 2024

FC.102.02.24 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Plans Committee on 29 January and 19 February 2024.

(b) Environment & Leisure Committee of the 22 January 2024

It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Plans Committee on 22 January 2024.

(c) General Purposes Committee of the 5 February 2024

It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the General Purposes Committee on 5 February 2024.

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

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 RATIFY DOCUMENTATION CONSIDERED BY STANDING COMMITTEES:

General Purposes Committee

(i) Annual Investment Strategy – No. 45

FC.103.02.24

After seeking clarification on a couple of matters, members **RESOLVED** to:

(i) adopt the Annual Investment Strategy – No. 45 with the proposed revisions incorporated;

(ii) confirmed that they were happy for officers to proceed with the recommendations of the General Purposes Committee for the proposed movement of £400k into the 95 day account, and £100k into a 35 day account to generate more interest, whilst the Assistant Town Clerk & RFO explored other banking options, and;

(iii) confirmed that they were happy for officers to create the bank feed between the Town Council's banking services and finance system.

10.0 TO CONSIDER A MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR JACKIE LOVE

Councillor J. Love prepared a motion for members to consider, which asked that the Town Council write to the CEO of Southern Water. The letter would be on behalf of the Town Council and the local residents affected by the flies from the water treatment works. The letter would ask for a way forward.

Members were concerned that this issue was all year round, and not just during certain seasons or weather. If the flies were in a restaurant it would be closed, and members were also concerned about the contamination risk, both to householders and the River Uck.

Councillor French wished for something to be included in the letter in relation to the impact this was having on residents' mental health and anxiety.

Councillor Bennett thought that the letter should give more pressure on the last question which asked when Southern Water would be providing hoods on the settling tanks. A specific answer was needed to this question.

It was also noted that the flies were reaching a large distance, as far as the south of the town in Ridgewood, and sometimes as far as North West towards Newick.

Councillor Manvell thought that the evidence and issues being experienced should be shared with a representative of the Southern Water Stakeholder Group

at Wealden DC (Rachel Milward). The Town Clerk and Town Mayor were also in liaison with a representative of the Environmental Health team at Wealden DC in regards to the matter.

The netting system hadn't worked and members noted that the fly traps in the trees in the access road were very dilapidated. This needed to be flagged up in the letter to the CEO.

Councillor D. Bennett proposed that subject to the additions put forward by members, and inclusion of Councillor Reed's suggestion to request that the CEO come and visit, that the following resolution be put forward. Councillor B. Cox seconded the proposal.

FC.104.02.24 With unanimous support, members **RESOLVED** to approve that the Town Mayor and Town Clerk liaise to prepare and send a letter to the CEO of Southern Water, which reflected the concerns of members and local residents of the flies from the water treatment works.

At 7.54pm Councillors D. Bennett, P. Selby and P.Ullmann left the room briefly. Councillor D. Bennett returned at 7.56pm, P. Ullmann and P. Selby at 7.58pm.

11.0 TO REVIEW A SNAPSHOT OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S BUDGET AND BALANCE SHEET POSITION FOR Q3 OF 2023/24

Members were provided with a report from the Town Council's finance system which provided a snapshot of the headline budget figures for all three committee areas and the balance sheet position at 31 December 2023. Members noted the contents of the reports.

12.0 TO NOTE THE TOWN COUNCIL'S LIST OF STANDING ORDERS AND DIRECT DEBIT PAYMENTS

Members were provided with a brief update of the changes to the Town Council's list of standing orders and direct debit payments.

Councillor Macve asked once more for these to be incorporated in the audit process when two members visited the office to undertake the fortnightly BACS supplier payment runs. The Town Clerk advised that this hadn't been forgotten but would be introduced from April onwards. Members noted the report.

13.0 TO RECEIVE A SHORT BRIEFING ON THE TOWN COUNCIL'S MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Members were presented with a copy of the Media & Communications Policy and the Town Clerk gave a short speech on her expectations of how media and communications should be handled by staff and councillors representing the Town Council.

The Town Clerk advised that the local authorities usually held training on media and communications but other priorities had taken precedent such as planning inquiries and Wealden DC's Local Plan.

The policy hadn't been updated for some years and would be looked at in the coming months. The key bit that members should refer to was Section 4 – Contact with the Media.

The Town Clerk clarified that she wished to be advised if members had been approached by the media. She was not able to closely follow the movements of 15 Town Councillors all the time, but what she could do and would continue to do was manage the reputation of the Town Council.

In her eight years, the Clerk had experienced some really difficult times with some incredibly sensitive matters. By managing communication in relation to those issues closely, she was able to keep everyone safe, and protected; having considered ALL of those affected or involved.

The procedures were there for this reason. If the Clerk or Marketing Officer knew that a Councillor or staff member had spoken to the press – whether it be local or national, they were ready and prepared to manage any follow up communications. And if something was particularly sensitive, it also helped to streamline comms.

When the Clerk started in 2016, the Town Councillors were free to do as they wish whereas with her background of working in district authorities, it was important that the Town Council followed suit, and all press enquiries were channeled through the Town Council office.

The second point related to social media – back in 2016 two former Councillors experienced a very difficult time on social media. The Town Clerk wanted to remind members that social media was a very complex world - some days it was great, some days it wasn't. The Town Council couldn't always correct inaccuracies, but it was important that any messaging remained positive and both staff and members thought twice before posting comments or posts.

The Town Clerk reiterated that:

(i) the Town Council office should be kept in the loop on media approaches and liaison, and;

(ii) members needed to take care with social media to avoid being at the wrong end of trolls/personal attacks. In their frontline roles, they needed to think twice on what they proposed to write, and to take care.

Members noted the update from the Clerk.

14.0 TO CONSIDER THE ISSUES BEING EXPERIENCED WITH PARKING AT VICTORIA PLEASURE GROUND

The Town Clerk provided an update to members on the issues experienced with parking at Victoria Pleasure Ground. Complaints had been received from local residents who were unable to park to walk their dog, or use the local facilities and the business located at the ground had also experienced difficulties.

It was proposed to:

(i) place letters on the windscreens of vehicles politely reminding those who parked there that the car parking spaces were for users of the pleasure ground;

(ii) to deliver letters to the businesses on the hill of New Town to advise the same - the spaces were not intended for long-term parking;

(iii) monitor vehicle registration plates, to understand whether the same vehicles were parking there each day Monday to Friday, and for how long;

It was considered important to update the signage for the Pleasure Ground to

stress that parking was for users of Victoria Pleasure Ground only. A number of options were also considered such as setting time limits, which have been further explored since by office staff.

FC.105.02.24 Members **RESOLVED** to give permission for officers to proceed with the above three proposals for monitoring vehicles parking at Victoria Pleasure Ground, and to also replace signage which emphasised the purpose of the car parking area.

15.0 NOTE THE MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS

Members noted the update.

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

One deed of grant had been received:

Sylvie Helene Ngangonda Garnett

FC.106.02.24 It was **RESOLVED** for three councillors to sign the above deed of grant.

17.0 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS PREVIOUSLY NOTIFIED

None received in time for the meeting.

18.0 TOWN CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Clerk advised members that they had received information from the family, to advise that former Clerk Mrs Joan Stocker had passed away. A memorial service was being arranged at Holy Cross Church on 15 March 2024 and a Celebration of Life at the Civic Centre would follow. Once further details were available, the office would share these with councillors.

19.0 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair, Councillor J. Love wished to congratulate Mark Pearson, the new Chief Executive Officer of Ashdown Forest Conservators on being appointed to the position.

Councillor Love also wished to thank the residents who attended the planning hearing with the Planning Inspectorate and appellants for Land at Mockbeggars Farm. She wanted to acknowledge all of their hard work.

Councillor D. Ward further added a big thank you to Councillors K. Bedwell, J. Love, B. Reed and the Town Clerk for all their hard work with the recent Planning Inquiries and hearings.

20.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

FC.107.02.24 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.

20.1 To confirm the final quotations for the plumbing and heating improvements at Foresters Hall

FC.108.02.24 With nine votes in favour, three members voting against, and two abstaining, it was **RESOLVED** to proceed with the revised quotation for the installation of a renewable energy system for heating the rear of Foresters Hall.

The meeting closed at 8.52pm.