

## UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the **Annual Town Meeting**  
held in the Weald Hall, Civic Centre, Uckfield  
Wednesday 20 March 2024 at 7.00pm

<b>PRESENT</b>	Cllr. J. Love	Town Mayor
	Cllr. D. French	Deputy Mayor
	Cllr. K. Bedwell	Chair of the Plans Committee
	Cllr. S. Mayhew	Chair of the Environment and Leisure Committee
	Cllr. C. Macve	Vice-Chair of the General Purposes Committee

In attendance:-

Councillors D. Bennett, B. Cox, M. McClafferty, V. Frost, A. Smith, B. Reed and P. Selby.

27 members of the public

Holly Goring – Town Clerk

Sarah D'Alessio – Assistant Town Clerk & RFO

Rachel Newton – Senior Administrative Officer

Will Hugall – Marketing and Community Engagement Officer

Minutes taken by Rachel Newton.

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

Town Mayor and Chair of Full Council, Councillor J. Love introduced herself and welcomed everyone to the meeting. This was the Town Mayor's third year in the role of Chair and she had enjoyed every moment. When it came to her Mayoral engagements, her first priority was the town of Uckfield.

Chairs of the three standing committees, Councillor K. Bedwell - Chair of Plans Committee, Councillor S. Mayhew - Chair of Environment & Leisure Committee, Councillor D. French, Deputy Mayor and member of the Environment & Leisure Committee and Councillor C. Macve, Vice-Chair of General Purposes Committee were all introduced to the attendees, as was the Town Clerk, Holly Goring and Senior Administrative Officer, Rachel Newton.

**2. Apologies for absence**

Apologies had been received from Councillor D. Ward, Chair of General Purposes Committee. Vice-Chair, Councillor C. Macve was able to present in her absence. Apologies were also received from both County Councillors Chris and Claire Dowling for this evening and the PCSO, Sue Choppin. The Town Clerk advised that if there were any issues raised in relation to community safety, these would be referred back to Sussex Police the following day.

**3. Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of the 15 March 2023**

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on the 15 March 2023 previously circulated, were approved following a proposal by Councillor S. Mayhew and Councillor K. Bedwell seconding the proposal.

**4. Matters arising from the minutes**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting.

**5. Presentation of the Town Council's Annual Report 2023-24**

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

The Town Mayor, Councillor J. Love thanked everyone for their attendance and explained that as always, this meeting was a platform for our local residents to discuss issues that were important to them and also to neighbouring communities.

A moment was taken to remember a dear friend, Mr RA Blackford, who would always attend the Town Council's annual meetings to ensure that we were kept on our toes and looked after Uckfield. As a former Councillor, life-long resident and businessman within the town, he always had something to say and had the ability to talk about past and present in the town and would be truly missed.

Councillor Love applauded all of the Councillors and Officers who had worked hard to ensure all of the council's statutory duties had been fulfilled in the past year, and the council's forward planning took the town into the future.

The Town Council had published their business planning documents, which included the Strategic Plan, Annual Plan, Annual budget and Property Asset Management plans and these could be found on the Town Council's website. On behalf of everyone involved, this was by far the hardest budget setting process they had ever had to discuss as it posed many difficult questions and decisions on the council's plans for the next year.

Last May, five new councillors were welcomed onto Uckfield Town Council which was fantastic. Councillors thanked those that had stood before and for their active roles and enthusiasm to undertake new initiatives. It was hoped that others would step forward in the future to ensure Uckfield remained an incredible town. Being a Town Councillor was a rewarding position and there were many different aspects enabling people to follow particular subject areas of interest.

So much had happened in the last year within the business and voluntary sectors coming together to provide a variety of events and enabling residents to enjoy so much together.

One of the largest voluntary groups in Uckfield, Brighter Uckfield, were celebrated in recent weeks and awarded the Kings Award for Voluntary Services. Uckfield Town Council had the incredible honour of hosting this ceremony 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 to Brighter Uckfield.

Last year, it was reported that Uckfield Town Council would be taking ownership of the open space, known as the Dene, on Manor Park to ensure that it stayed an important green space in our community and when the white stuff fell from the skies, a place that children and adults could come together with their sledges for fun. This past year, the Town Council had been successful with registering Ridgewood Village Post Office and Uckfield Leisure Centre as Assets of Community Value within Uckfield. Going forward, the Town Council were keen to nominate the Highlands Inn, Family Hub on the Churchcombe estate, the Uckfield Rugby Club and the Oaks, AFC Uckfield site. If there were any other sites that local residents felt were important and could be considered, members of the public were asked to let the Town Council 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, concerns were raised about the reduction in High Street Banking Services. Town Councillors knew how important this was to residents. Through motions brought to Full Council, members were taking action through various means to raise these concerns. Motions had also been considered from Town Councillors on matters relating to the Uckfield Leisure Centre and the installation of a pedestrian crossing on London Road.

Work with Sussex Police continued. Work was still underway to monitor the issues raised on social media and ensure, where possible, that information be passed to Sussex Police alongside the reports made by residents. Uckfield Town Council staff had 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 in March/April 2024. This change would not affect the cameras themselves and what could be seen, it ensured that the technology remained up to date, and footage remained clear, effective and accessible to the Police.

Councillor Love hoped that this report, alongside updates from her colleagues would give local residents an insight into how hard the Town Council worked for their beloved town and its residents. Also that by standing with our residents, voices were being heard and action was being taken, and everyone was thanked for their hard work, dedication and commitment to ensure Uckfield worked for everyone.

Councillor C. Macve: Vice-Chair of General Purposes Committee

The Chair, Councillor D. Ward had provided an update within the annual report. Councillor Macve explained that the external audit for the period ending 31 March 2023 had been successful and that the auditor had written that the Town Council had successfully maintained a robust system of financial control, which was accolade indeed with thanks going to the Assistant Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer and all the staff for achieving that level of approval.

The Hospitality Manager had hosted a massively varied number of events over the year at the Civic Centre, and there were also a number of strong upcoming events for the forthcoming year. It was hoped that residents would support the Civic Centre with this.

Maintenance works continued to Town Council owned buildings. The demolition of the Hub and refurbishment of the Source and wider site was carried out with a huge amount of effort by the Estates and Facilities Manager and his team, in time for the Nativity Scene to be hosted by the churches of Uckfield at the Late night shopping event. Since then, there had been a succession of minor works to complete on that site.

Councillor K. Bedwell – Chair of Plans Committee

Councillor Bedwell advised that she had been Chair of Uckfield Town Council Plans Committee for three years, so would have to step down from this role in May. She was very proud of the committee and to be part of the council, and their hard work to represent the town and residents on Uckfield based planning applications and appeals.

The Town Council was a statutory consultee on all Uckfield-based planning applications and was therefore given the opportunity by Wealden District Council, who was the local planning authority, to provide a response on all planning

applications within the Uckfield parish boundary. This enabled 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, the Town Council's role was 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. The Town Council does not have the power to pass or fail planning applications but able to challenge, raise questions for consideration and support or object to planning applications that we considered did not meet the planning criteria. The Town Council had tried to build good communication with colleagues at Wealden District Council and as the planning authority, expected them to consider the council's response to any application, big or small, when examining the contents of a planning application.

Once again, 2023/24 had been a very challenging year for the Plans Committee. Many hours had 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 the 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 these applications. This created an enormous amount of work and placed a great deal of responsibility on members, to ensure that the concerns of both residents and the Town Council were heard. The Town Council was delighted when both speculative applications were dismissed by The Planning Inspector and members felt they had played a vital role in the decision-making process, especially for highlighting key features and characteristics of landscape and heritage in the area.

The Town Council's Plans Committee had 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 the High Weald geodiversity surrounding the site and the green infrastructure at Downlands Farm. They were currently waiting on the outcome and decision of the Inspector.

Growth for the town was inevitable and needed if the town were to continue to thrive. However, it was important that the right houses were built in the right places to avoid over-development. It was also important to find the balance of protecting the countryside which was essential in the current climate change emergency and stop new developments becoming isolated from the town. Councillor K. Bedwell explained that the Town Council was at the grassroots of local government and would continue to challenge large-scale developments to ensure that they brought the necessary infrastructure to the town as well. Plans Committee members would continue to respond to the UK Government and county and district council consultations to feedback the views of residents who would be living with these decisions, as the UK Government planned for 'levelling up' and increased housing provision.

The Town Council were just starting to digest the Local Plan that was out for public consultation. A public exhibition was due to take place on 13 April at the Civic Centre. This would provide residents with the opportunity to have a look and provide their feedback to Wealden District Council directly.

It had been an honour Chair the Town Council's Plans Committee and Council K. Bedwell hoped to continue to support the committee as it maintained this vital role in the community.

Councillor S. Mayhew – Chair of the Environment and Leisure Committee

Councillor Mayhew expressed his heartfelt thanks to all of the members of this committee, including Councillor A. Smith, the Vice-Chair, for their hard work and support over the last three years.

Many of the local events were a huge success and Councillor Mayhew hoped that these events would continue to thrive.

The Weald on the Field event last year, which yet again was attended by many of the town's residents, made the event probably the best one yet. This year, the event would be taking place on Saturday 10 August 2024 which should prove to be another success.

The Town Council had seen an amazing turn out for the King's Coronation event that took place on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2023. This was originally planned to be an outdoor event but as usual weather forced us to take the event indoors. This did not dampen everyone's spirits. Even a party from the twin town of Arques La Bataille joined in the fun. There were 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.

The Grounds staff had been incredibly busy keeping the town's open spaces and allotments in good condition and for completing the second year of works from the three-year woodland management plan to address the ash dieback in the ancient woodlands of both Boothland and Nightingale Woods. The restocking of new trees had started that month. The allotment working group had been working closely with allotment holders through the creation of site representatives. Regular inspections had been undertaken on all our sites with Rachel, joined on occasion by the allotment association, allotment reps and other town councillors. It was lovely chatting to some of the tenants. The allotment conference was again attended well, with prizes being received by the allotment competition winners. The competition was run in association with Staverton's Nursery and we were 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 had been maintaining since last March.

Further to the Town Council's successful funding bid to Fields in Trust, funding was now being received from Wealden District Council to enable the Our Parks initiative to run at Harlands Playing Field. This scheme now provided free fitness classes on a Saturday morning on Harlands Play Field. A second midweek session initially saw some teething issues but these were now up and running again as well.

To commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the D-Day landings, the Town Council's beacon would be lit and entertainment provided on the evening of Thursday 6 June 2024 at Victoria Pleasure Ground, which would also provide an opportunity to show off the newly refurbished Queen's Diamond jubilee sign.

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

**Q. What are Uckfield Town Council's three main priorities for the coming financial year and what steps are being planned to try and achieve them?**

- A. *The Town Clerk explained that from an officer point of view first and foremost and in line with the Town Council's annual plan for year ahead, the first and top three priorities for this financial year would be to upgrade Victoria Play area, finish drafting the Uckfield Neighbourhood Plan and mapping of infrastructure requirements, as well as undertaking important compliance and maintenance works being undertaken in response to current EICR outcomes and fire risk assessments.*

*Initial quotations were being sought for the play area, to ensure we had the right amount of funds available to undertake the project in 2024/25, before a more formal process of tendering would move underway. The process would also include engagement with the local primary school and the public. The funding of the play area would include past contributions from a Section 106 agreement and funding from the Town Council which had been saved over the past couple of years.*

*With the release of the draft Wealden Local Plan, the Town Clerk could now review the work of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and ensure that the Draft Uckfield Neighbourhood Plan aligned with the Vision and objectives of the Wealden Local Plan, that the evidence base was up to date, and it reflected the recently released census data. The initial draft would then be provided to Wealden DC for screening before they followed the formal routes of consultation. The idea being that the process would hopefully align with the adoption of their local plan.*

*The Town Clerk explained the importance of the Neighbourhood Plan, both in terms of providing local insight for planning officers at the local planning authority, but also that by having an adopted neighbourhood plan, a higher percentage of developer contributions could be directed to the local area. In Uckfield, it would not be possible to allocate sites but it would be possible to influence the design and characteristics of those developments.*

*In terms of maintenance, although a number of compliance improvements to keep up with regulations had been undertaken during 2023, more remedial works would be required in 2024, in response to electrical installation condition reports and fire risk assessments. A structural survey had also been undertaken of the Signal Box to plan the next steps of refurbishing for this heritage building and bring it back into use.*

**Q. Could the Council please give consideration to providing suitable lighting along Civic Approach between the High Street and the Civic Centre. Whilst attending a couple of meetings in the evening at the Civic Centre in the last couple of months, there appeared to be no lighting at all on this section and it can be quite unsettling for pedestrians who are of a nervous or vulnerable disposition going to and from either the Civic Centre or Luxfords Car Park along unlit sections of road.**

- A. *The Town Clerk agreed and advised that the Town Council had recently employed an electrical company to replace all of the lighting between the Civic Centre and Tesco, which had now lightened up the area substantially. There had been some confusion over the years as to who owned the lights because of how the land fell between both sites. However, the Town Council considered this a priority for residents' safety, particularly from Tesco up to Luxford field and up to the car park. They had also just obtained a for installing pillar lighting at the bottom of Luxford*

*Field - although not cheap it might be possible to obtain grant funding towards this, particularly as there was some anti-social behaviour in this area.*

**Q. I believe there are a number of CCTV cameras located in and around the town centre. Are the council able to advise as to who owns the system and do Uckfield Town Council make any financial contribution towards the running and upkeep of the system? Do the Council have any thoughts on whether the current cameras are suitably located or should additional ones be installed to cover certain areas which are not currently covered but have in the past been subject of anti-social behaviour or damage to council property?**

*A. The Town Clerk explained that the Town Centre CCTV consisted of six cameras. Although we could not divulge the exact locations, there were three in the High Street, two near to the industrial estate and one in the heart of the town. One of the cameras was funded by the Uckfield Chamber of Commerce and they continued to contribute to the costs of the camera in terms of maintenance, line rental and electricity supply.*

*The Town Council upgraded the Town Centre CCTV system in 2018 and joined the Sussex Police i-witness partnership. This meant that with a fibre connection to the Headquarters in Lewes, the Police could pick up footage live should they require it in an incident, or have easy access to handle crimes. The cameras in the High Street could pick up footage to a fair distance and had been used by the Police in past incidents to locate vehicles and individuals.*

*The infrastructure itself was owned by the Town Council, although Sussex Police were currently responsible for handling the footage. It was important to note that Uckfield Town Council did not have any access to this and that the cameras were only as good as the direction it was looking towards.*

*The systems across Sussex were undergoing a new upgrade and this included the Town Centre CCTV system within Uckfield. A third of the costs for funding the upgrade were secured by the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner through the Home Officer Safer Streets 5 programme, and it was estimated that the new system would save an average of fifty percent in annual maintenance costs.*

*The cameras would be upgraded to support digital functionality. With updated technology, the cameras would continue to be accessed by Sussex Police to support lawful purposes, and address crime and disorder.*

*The Town Clerk believed that the existing cameras were well located, and the new technology would be further improved. She had seen an example of the new infrastructure at Gatwick Manor Royal, and residents could zoom in with very good detail for a long distance.*

*There was scope to further increase the current system on the roads out of the town centre and near to our open spaces, but it was important that the current upgrade be undertaken, and associated information governance be addressed first.*

*In addition, the Town Clerk explained that the Town Council had cameras on the Civic Centre building and Victoria Pavilion.*

*Councillor Love wished to add that the relationship with Sussex Police had worked well. Councillor Mayhew agreed and expressed that a group had visited the headquarters to have a look at what the footage provided and it was amazing to see.*

## 7. Questions from the floor

Questions followed from some of the information provided by the Town Clerk.

One resident asked if he was right to assume that it was only Sussex Police who had access to the data. The Town Clerk explained that at present yes, only Sussex Police could access the data. As part of the review of the current system, there might be an opportunity for the Town Council to view the footage as a joint data controller but this was currently being explored. The Town Council had no reason to access the footage, and wished for the purpose of the cameras to remain as an important tool in law and enforcement.

Discussions centred around the lack of parking enforcement with a local resident raising their particular concerns about parking on pavements. The Town Clerk explained the current situation between Wealden District Council and Sussex Police and that this did not fall under the remit of the Town Council.

The Town Council tried to assist with this as much as they could, and explained that some years ago when the Police & Crime Commissioner was promoting the appointment of community wardens, the Town Council asked Sussex Police if the Community Wardens could be given a higher level of accreditation to be able to issue parking related penalty notices, but unfortunately this power was never given. As the Town Council already had a Grounds team, who were able to address broken equipment, and issues on Town Council land, it was not felt that appointing a Community Warden would be beneficial, as they had such limited powers.

The Town Clerk explained that behind the scenes, new Wealden District Council Councillors had been asked if the matter of civil parking enforcement could be explored once again to re-consider the options and associated costs. The new District Inspector of Wealden Police had also been asked to explore the current views of Sussex Police.

The Town Council were aware of the areas which saw most issues and were also aware of the vehicles on the High Street who were blocking the short stay parking bays and parking on the pavement. Town Council staff often placed notices on vehicles when they were seen to obstruct junctions, dropped kerbs or park on double yellow lines.

Councillor Love advised that at the moment the only measure to combat this issue, in addition to the walkabouts of Town Council staff was for residents to contact Operation Crackdown and to provide them with the details of the vehicle and report the offence <http://www.operationcrackdown.org/>

A resident also asked if the issues around pavement parking could be raised by the Uckfield Chamber of Commerce to their members. Parking on pavements by pedestrian crossings, loading bays and on yellow lines only made it more difficult for access to businesses on the High Street.

Councillor Smith also mentioned the environmental reasons behind trying to discourage people from parking outside shops and Councillor Reed re-iterated the importance for people to be considerate towards those with mobility scoots and prams.

In light of the resurfacing of the roads at Downsview Crescent and Southview Drive at Manor Park, a resident asked if it was the intention for double yellow lines to be



reinstated there, since to his knowledge it had cost £25k for the double yellow lines to be installed on the corners of the bends of Mill Drove in recent years and he felt that this was too much money, especially since there would be no enforcement. The Town Clerk explained that if an existing road had line markings and it was being resurfaced, the line markings would normally be replaced. Line markings would also feature within traffic regulation orders for new developments. But in the case of any new requests, such as that which the Town Council had been involved in on the junction of Snatts Road and London Road, or Regency Close, East Sussex Highways would not support the introduction of new double yellow lines for exactly this reason.

One resident asked for any aspirations that the Town Council might not have been able to pursue due to budget constraints. The Assistant Town Clerk mentioned that we had to be a little more restricted in what we were able to provide as costs had risen but we had still been able to plan for a lot in 2024-25. The Town Clerk agreed stating that it had meant that the purchase of new grounds equipment was possible, but some of the larger pieces would be paid for, over two years rather than one. Town Council staff were also aware that they needed to place more focus on exploring grant funding opportunities.

Councillor Bennett explained that it was a good sign that the council had been realistic and could achieve most of the things that we had set out to do.

Councillor Cox explained that the council needed to be financially prudent and Councillors Mayhew and Bedwell had done a lot of work to try to balance the fees and charges for allotments and sports facilities.

Councillor Macve referred to the vehicles that needed replacing, and said that we had had to keep the old vehicles running as example of one of the items we needed put on hold.

One resident asked if the CCTV system would be cheaper than they were originally and if the standard would suffer as a result. The Town Clerk explained that as we did not have the fibre connection or paying the current company for line rental, this would save around £1k a year. Also, the checks and maintenance would now be more robust compared to the last contractor.

The resident then referred to a number of vehicles jumping red lights which was considered to be a problem by a few attendees. This was becoming increasingly evident in locations such as the Bell Lane junction and Church Street junction. Councillors advised that this matter would be raised with Sussex Police. Councillor Mayhew also mentioned that the Town Council had a monthly section in Uckfield Matters so this issue could be highlighted in the Town Council's Voice pages.

Councillor Bedwell explained that one of the reasons we had the draft Local Plan for Uckfield was because there were going to be huge changes in Uckfield with new housing developments around the town. There were currently 15,000 people in the town so it was about changing people's mindsets and try to persuade friends and family to do the right thing.

One resident thanked the Town Clerk and her team for all of their hard work for the town which was recognised by the residents. The Mayor also thanked the local residents and councillors for attending the meeting.

The meeting closed at 8:36pm.