



Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment and Leisure Committee** held on
Monday 15th April 2024 at 7.00pm
Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield

PRESENT:

Cllr. Spike Mayhew (Chair)
Cllr. Karen Bedwell
Cllr. Donna French
Cllr. Michael McClafferty
Cllr. Diane Ward

Cllr. Angie Smith (Vice-Chair)
Cllr. Duncan Bennett
Cllr. Val Frost
Cllr. Bernadette Reed

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Chris Macve

Holly Goring – Town Clerk
Rachel Newton – Senior Administrative Officer
Minutes taken by Rachel Newton

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. No declarations of interest were provided at this stage in the meeting.

Councillor Duncan Bennett declared an interest in items 5.3 and 9.1 as he had connections with the sports clubs and also had an allotment.

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

None.

3.0. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology was received from Councillor Bernadette Reed upon arrival, who had to leave early to attend another meeting.

4.0. MINUTES

4.1. Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on the 4 March 2024

EL.50.04.24 It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on the 4 March 2024 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4.2. Action list

Members agreed to remove the actions on:

EL.40.01.24 – A quotation for a like for like replacement of the zip wire to compare costs and options. This item had been superseded by the decision of the Environment and Leisure committee on 4 March 2024. The replacement equipment

would be quoted for and installed at the same time as the upgrade of Victoria Play Area.

EL.41.01.24 – To consider potential funding announced for Wealden orchards. This item had been superseded by the report being presented to Environment and Leisure Committee on 15 March 2024.

EL.42.01.24 – To consider proposals to improve safety at the lower end of Luxford Field – The youth shelter had been removed and a new flood light had been installed on the front side of the Community Fridge.

EL.48.03.24 – To consider initial quotations received for play area improvements. As above – EL40.01.24.

4.3. Project Monitoring List – for information only

Members noted the report and agreed to remove the actions on:

FC.86.01.23 – New trees purchased from English Woodlands for restocking in March 2024. The remainder can be requested to be carried forward for use in 2024-25.

FC.91.01.23 – Grass verge cutting contribution to East Sussex County Council. The invoice would be processed and paid wk beg 22 April 2024.

5.0. **FINANCE**

5.1. To note bills paid

Members noted the report.

5.2. To note the Income & Expenditure report ending 31 January 2024

Members noted the report. One item was raised in relation to the increased costs for the maintenance of machinery and equipment. Although the equipment was not necessarily in a bad condition, it was used frequently for open space grass cutting, so cost a lot for repair works.

The Estates team had already begun discussions about a possible five-year service plan to extend the warranty and protection of equipment, although they could also look into a monthly service plan. Any repair works or replacement parts, this would still be adhoc.

5.3. To consider and approve fees and charges for Sports facilities in 2024-25

A report from the Sports Fees and Charges Working Group had set out their full considerations and recommendations. A powerpoint presentation was also provided by the Town Clerk, to illustrate for members the longer term financial plan and what members wished to recommend.

Uckfield Town Council had four football grounds in use (Victoria, New Barn, West Park and Harlands) with six adult pitches and one junior pitch to maintain. With increasing demand for pitch hire, it was also important for the Town Council to understand that sports facilities needed to support future growth.

The Town Clerk highlighted the annual costs of maintaining and preparing the pitches over the last three years. This included the current maintenance costs versus income received.

The football season consisted of forty weeks (August to May) for league fixtures and training. The clubs also tended to extend the use of the pitches for training or friendlies, especially following the recent reconfiguration of football pitches at West Park to accommodate more teams.

The cost of football preparations over a season (40 weeks) was calculated at £2,484 for mowing, £5,791 for line marking and £794.88 for spiking/splitting. There were additional costs of line-marking paint at £4k per annum (paint prices are increasing) and fuel, which varied at £200 per annum. This didn't account costs for repairs, re-marking (lost lines), including man hours and materials, and equipment maintenance.

The total estimated annual cost for Uckfield football (without full renovations) was £13.3k per annum.

In addition, renovation of the pitches were required. The renovations were in the region of £25k.

If full renovations were undertaken every three years at £25k, this made the total cost in the region of £20-25k per annum to maintain football grounds; comprising maintenance costs of c£13.3k pa + renovations of £25k (split over three years, equating to c£8.3k pa).

For both football and cricket, our income was much less than this, ranging from £10.1k in 2019-20 (before the pandemic), £11.1k in 2021-22 (of which £2k was cricket) and £13.2k in 2022-23 (of which £2.5k was cricket).

Full proposal (Football):

It was evident that current hire charges did not align with the costs of maintaining and managing pitches for seasonal football. Based on the calculations, a proposal was made for sports fees and charges to rise by twenty-five percent year on year, over a four-year plan, to recoup the losses. It was suggested that this pricing pattern also be reviewed annually as market forces could change. Also, this could be reduced if the clubs were to propose any pitch improvements during that period from various funding options that were to become available.

Having been presented with a full breakdown of the figures, members agreed that this plan was the only way forward to address those losses, although it was also understood that this would have an impact on the sports clubs.

However, as with the full allotment review in recent months, the sports fees and charges had not been reviewed for many years, and the Town Council was working at a loss and felt that it had no choice but to increase the fees and charges at this level, to try and meet some of the current costs.

[Councillor Bernadette Reed left the meeting at 07:25pm]

Cricket (and stoolball):

The adult cricket season was 20 weeks (April to September) and juniors was 10 weeks although they did not use the grass pitch/wicket, just the artificial wicket for matches and wider outfield for training.

Members recognised that more investment was required to maintain the cricket pitch and outfield. The Town Council staff and the Cricket Club were planning to work closer together this year to increase the frequency by which the cricket wicket, artificial wicket and practice areas were being rolled, and it was therefore felt useful to monitor the costs and manpower required during 2024, before considering in detail the calculations for cricket maintenance for the 2025 season.

A licence agreement might also be proposed in the near future, but for 2024 the working group had recommended that seasonal fees be increased by four percent due to inflation, and the junior charges be reviewed. This figure also applied to stoolball, as they used the same pitch at Victoria. All members were in favour.

The Town Council had already committed to replacing the cricket nets, and to undertake improvements to the artificial wicket.

Keeping in touch:

Further to the feedback received from local sports clubs, it was evident that charging by season for the football clubs worked well and aligned with the requirements of the Sussex FA, in terms of how their leagues operated.

Members were keen to continue to maintain good levels of communication, and relations between the various sports clubs, and the Town Council invited all the club leaders to attend a meeting soon in person, to discuss the outcome of this review, and to ask for any ideas for future improvements of the pitches.

One member also suggested that clubs might also be more inclined to share costs if presented with these increased fees and charges, which may also encourage them to look into funding options.

Members had some of their own suggestions to increase revenue or save money, such as advertising with banners around the Victoria pitch, or looking to see if it would be cheaper to outsource the maintenance work for the cricket pitches.

Summary:

There were still some agenda items for the working group to be considered, such as the growth of the junior cricket section, West Park Pitches licence and recognising the variety of hirers.

The fees and charges needed to be set in time for the Cricket season commencing in April 2024 and for the new football seasons in August 2024, so it was important to get these fees and charges established.

EL.51.04.24 With five votes in favour, and one vote against (Councillor V. Frost) members

RESOLVED to

(i) agree to increase the cost of football fees and charges by 25% (Year 1 of a four year plan);

EL.52.04.24 With five votes in favour, and one member abstaining (Councillor V. Frost) members

RESOLVED to:

(ii) agree to a 4% increase in cricket and stoolball charges whilst a further review be undertaken on cricket pitch maintenance during 2024-25, and;

EL.53.04.24 Members **RESOLVED** to agree to a 4% increase on one-off hire charges and events hire of open spaces:

6.0. ADMINISTRATION

6.1 To consider Wealden District Council's Climate Change – Organisation Survey

Members were in favour of a proposal made by Councillor A. Smith to delegate the compiling of a response to the Climate Change Steering Group, on behalf of the Town Council.

Councillor D. Ward also asked if councillors could ask for individuals's to complete this questionnaire, as the more feedback received the better.

7.0 ENVIRONMENT

7.1 To note the current position of the Town Council's Estates

Members noted the report. No comments.

7.2 To consider an application for Wealden District Council's Community Orchards Grant Funding

Members agreed to the areas proposed by the Town Council: Ridgewood MUGA and Victoria basketball court, an orchard already planned at West Park and maybe the bottom of Hempstead Field.

Uckfield Green Partnership had also agreed that they would like to partner with the Town Council on this initiative.

EL.54.04.24 Members **RESOLVED** to agree to go ahead with the proposals to make an application, for grant funding through the Wealden District Council's Community Orchards Grant Funding programme, and proposed areas for planting.

7.3 To consider actions to reduce litter in the vicinity of new food outlets and retail businesses in Uckfield

The issue of litter being dumped on the streets had increased since the Co-op opened at the bottom of the Highlands car park, and also near the KFC shop in the southern end of the High Street.

It was both children and adults that had been seen throwing their rubbish out onto streets of Uckfield, and some dog walkers were also responsible for dumping their dog poo bags instead of taking them home, or putting them in the bin.

This was about trying to get the message across and to work as a community, and not just blaming one section of society or relying on the good nature of Brighter Uckfield to clean up the mess afterwards, in their own time.

Members proposed a few ideas to try to combat this problem, including the recommendation for staff to make contact with local schools, to find out if they would be interested in undertaking joint litter picks with students with Brighter Uckfield perhaps, to increase their awareness.

It was also felt that we could not ask people to use bins if there were not enough litter bins in the town, especially since Wealden District Council had taken away some litter bins, due to cost.

Members agreed to make contact with the Manager of Co-op, to ask if they could contribute to the placement of litter bin in the town, in close proximity to their new store off Highlands roundabout. They did have a litter bin, but this was kept inside overnight.

Councillor A. Smith also provided contact details for who was in charge of the Eco Club at Uckfield College. They were also the Duke of Edinburgh coordinator and apparently, their students regularly helped Brighter Uckfield as part of the award (mostly around Manor Park and may well still be the case) according to a previous councillor.

Another suggestion was to maybe ask Uckfield College if litter picking could be arranged for pupils, maybe during detention periods, or as a positive initiative for children who may wish to help out in their spare time, and to learn about caring for their own environment.

Other possibilities to look into: The National Citizens Award, key messages in The Voice, the local community radio station or developing our own Litter Campaign.

As Uckfield was developing over time and becoming more urbanised members felt the council could look at ways in which street rubbish also developed, which could also be linked in with the Local Plan with Wealden, as they were the responsible authority.

EL55.04.24 Members **RESOLVED** to agree for Uckfield Town Council staff to:
(i) contact the local schools, to find out if they would like to undertake joint litter picks with students and Brighter Uckfield, to increase their awareness, and;

- (ii) contact the new Co-op store off Highlands roundabout, to ask them if they would consider contributing to a litter bin in the town, and;
- (iii) look into other ideas mentioned above, and;
- (iv) continue to work with Brighter Uckfield on this matter.

8.0 LEISURE

Nothing to report.

9.0 REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

9.1 To note an update from the Joint Allotment Working Group

Members noted the report and members of the working group were keen to invite more entries to the Allotment Competition in July. So far, only one entry was submitted for the Children's Award, and one entry for the Scarecrow Competition!

The next Allotment checks were at the end of the month between councillors (members of the Allotment working group), site reps and Allotment Association. If tenants had anything to raise, they were asked to get in touch with your site rep Rachel at the council.

10.0 REPORTS FROM COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

10.1 Active Uckfield

Nothing to report at this time.

10.2 All Weather Pitch Operational Group

Nothing to report at this time.

10.3 Conservators of Ashdown Forest

Councillor D. French provided a verbal report on behalf of Councillor B. Reed (who had to leave the meeting earlier). Councillor Reed had an introductory conversation with the new Chief Executive Officer of Ashdown Forest (CEO), Mark Pearson, last week and had welcomed him to the area. They discussed landscape local nature recovery strategies and that as a Town Councillor, she personally fully supported the initiatives to protect wildlife corridors from 'Weald to Waves' and hoped that they could work together to connect our areas to nature recovery. It was a broad conversation, and they looked forward to meeting again in due course through the parish meetings.

Wealden DC Councillor James Partridge, had visited the Uckfield SANG, although they could not see the groups of dead trees referenced at the parish conference and would welcome feedback from residents in relation to parking and treescape as this need improving, to buffer the roads and landscape character.

10.4 West Park LNR and Hempstead Meadows LNR – Supporters Group

Nothing to report at this time.

10.5 Luxford Centre Management Committee

Members thanked Councillor C. Macve and noted this report.

10.6 Uckfield Railway Line Parishes Committee

Members thanked Councillor C. Macve and noted this report.

10.7 Uckfield Youth Club Board

Nothing to report at this time.

10.8 Wealden Bus Alliance/Weald Link

Nothing to report at this time.

- 10.9 Uckfield and District Twinning Association (AGM and events only)
Nothing to report at this time, although Councillor S. Mayhew mentioned that he was attending a meeting the next day.

11.0 CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair thanked all members for their hard work over the last three years since he had been Chair of the Environment and Leisure Committee, and wished his future successor all the best.

12.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

EL.56.04.24 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.

- 12.1 To consider a report on the Marketing programme
Members noted the report and thanked the Marketing and Community Engagement Officer for the information provided.

Members discussed ways in which the Town Council could connect and welcome local residents who had recently moved into the new developments just within the limits of town. It was felt that some residents might not know what the Town Council did for them and their local community. This was something to be further explored.

The meeting finished at 20:31pm.