

UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of **UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL** held
on Monday 7 April 2025 at 7.00 pm
in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield

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

IN ATTENDANCE:

County Councillors Claire & Chris Dowling
District Councillor K. Williams
1 member of the public
Holly Goring, Town Clerk
Minutes taken by Holly Goring

The Town Mayor, Councillor K. Bedwell, wished to express her condolences to Cllr Val Frost on the recent loss of her husband, on behalf of the Town Council.

Councillor Bedwell also wished to remember former Town Councillor Paul Meakin who very sadly passed away. His funeral took place early March. Some of the Town Councillors attended with the Town Clerk. It was a really lovely service.

The Town Mayor also noted that there had been a nasty accident that past weekend, so wished to send condolences to the families of both parties involved.

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 Manvell enquired as to whether an interest needed to be declared for agenda item 11.0 as the motion called for action from Wealden District Council. This would subsequently affect all District Councillors present – Cox, French and Manvell.

Councillor Bennett declared that he was Chair of the Wealden Line Campaign. On the basis that further background to his motion in agenda item 11 may be required, it was suggested that Councillor Bennett could speak to assist with answering questions on the motion, only, but not vote.

Councillor Macve declared that he was the Town Council representative on the Uckfield Railway Line Parishes Committee. The Town Clerk confirmed that this was a personal interest and it would be prudent to judge the matter when full Council reached that item on the agenda, to ensure the meeting was quorate.

Councillor Bedwell declared an interest in agenda item 10.0. As Chair of Ridgewood Village Hall, the Village Hall Committee would be affected by any change to the Village Green status on Ridgewood Recreation Ground. The Town Mayor would therefore pass this item to the Deputy Mayor to chair, and Councillor Bedwell would remain silent.

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

There were no statements from members of the public.

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

FC.94.04.25 It was **RESOLVED** to suspend Standing Orders to enable updates to be provided by County and District Council representatives.

County Councillor Claire Dowling provided an update on highway matters and advised that she would keep the Town Clerk updated on any potential highway works scheduled or planned for the town over the next few months based on the current partial road closure in the upper section of the High Street. For example the proposed works by SGN in Snatts Road had been cancelled.

They were awaiting dates for a couple of surface dressing schemes. Further works were due to be undertaken in Lashbrooks Road to address the quality of previous work completed. This would be undertaken in April 2025. Councillor Love had previously reported evidence of concrete in the drain in Bell Lane. Councillor Love clarified that it was foliage not concrete.

Councillor Dowling also explained the early considerations for devolution, which might inform agenda item 12.0. The five districts and one county council would form a single unitary authority, based on the geography of East Sussex. This was based on the criteria of 500,000 population. If the criteria were to change, they would need to come together to reconsider.

Councillor Macve wished to congratulate East Sussex Highways for works undertaken to make an area around a chamber near to Cedars Close, safe.

Councillor Manvell advised that there was no dropped kerb on the High Street near the partial road closure to assist those with pushchairs or wheelchairs to safely move about.

Councillor Manvell also enquired about lane rental charging. Councillor Dowling advised that the criteria for this meant it could only be applied to around 5-6% of roads in East Sussex. It was intended to reduce utility companies undertaking works at the most sensitive times, to carry out work quicker, and encourage more joined up working between utility companies. The funds received would go back into the pot for roads.

Councillor Selby added that the adjacent car parking bays further up from the Old Maidens Head may need to be closed off to restrict on-street parking whilst any works were undertaken. District Councillor K. Williams advised that prior to the contractor, they would have to meet CDM regulations and consider the safety of the site. The Town Clerk further added that they were closely monitoring the temporary traffic lights and traffic movements, and were informing East Sussex Highways when issues were being experienced.

County Councillor Chris Dowling had received requests from residents in Framfield Road to look at speed reduction initiatives for Framfield Road. He had spoken to the road safety team. The statistics were very low for this area. Having said that the road safety department have offered to put up some temporary 30mph black and yellow signage.

In Ridgewood, he had asked the Highway steward to keep an eye on access to the new development off Lewes Road. He also referred to the temporary traffic lights in Eastbourne Road.

Councillor Bedwell added that she had been advised by those working onsite that the works on Eastbourne Road were already three weeks behind, so were very likely to go past their original nine-week permit.

Councillor Selby added that there was a small sinkhole appearing in a footpath in New Road outside property numbers 20-25.

District Councillor K. Williams advised that the District Council had been successful in defending its position on a Grampian condition relating to sewerage issues on new developments, and the capacity of the system. This decision had national significance, and it was now being added to a number of applications. He believed they may see further challenge down the line, but for now Planning and Legal officers should be congratulated for their hard work.

Councillor Williams referred to the Local Plan, and advised that he had been visiting the larger towns and parishes to discuss the Outdoor Play Space Strategies. Work to sign off the contract for the three leisure facilities in Wealden was nearing completion. It had been delayed due to a couple of legal technicalities. The District Council was also carrying out a detailed review of its asset portfolio.

FC.95.04.25 Members **RESOLVED** to reinstate Standing Orders.

Councillor Manvell advised that residents would be moving in shortly to the new Coronation Place development off Southview Drive. He was aware a couple of the Town Councillors had visited the site. These would be homes for local people and the two accessible properties were designed with specific families in mind. The Occupational Therapist had worked with them to design it. Councillor Bedwell agreed, the attention to detail was excellent within the properties.

Councillor Cox updated members about the external review of the direct debit issue that occurred over the Christmas period. The review proved helpful and constructive, and the District Council had already taken on board actions to mitigate similar issues occurring again.

Councillor French echoed the comments on Coronation Place. She was really impressed. The only concern she had was to ensure that the woodland behind the site was well looked after – perhaps signage and education for the new community moving in, would be beneficial.

4.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillors Reed, Ullmann and Ward due to personal commitments, work commitments and sickness, respectively.

5.0 MINUTES

5.1 To resolve that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 13 January 2025 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

FC.96.04.25 Members **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 13 January 2025 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

5.2 Action List

Members noted the action list. Councillor Selby sought clarity on the wording relating to access to the Victoria Pleasure Ground toilets. The Town Clerk clarified that the action list was purely a reference to the full minutes for the benefit of officers and members, not the full detail.

5.3 Forward plan

Members noted the proposed forward plan for future Full Council meetings.

6.0 COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

(a) Plans Committee of the 27 January, 10 and 31 March 2025

FC.97.04.25 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Plans Committee of the 27 January, 10 and 31 March 2025.

(b) Environment & Leisure Committee – 20 January and 3 March 2025

FC.98.04.25 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Environment & Leisure Committee of the 20 January, and 3 March 2025.

(c) General Purposes Committee of the 3 February and 17 March 2025

FC.99.04.25 It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the General Purposes Committee of the 3 February and 17 March 2025.

7.0 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE BODIES
(None received).

8.0 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM FULL COUNCIL WORKING GROUPS
(None received).

9.0 TO RATIFY DOCUMENTATION CONSIDERED BY STANDING COMMITTEES:
General Purposes Committee

(i) Management of Sickness Absence Policy – No. 14

FC.100.04.25 It was **RESOLVED** to ratify the decision of General Purposes Committee on 17 March 2025 and to adopt the updated Sickness Absence Policy.

(ii) Annual Investment Strategy – No. 45

FC.101.04.25 It was **RESOLVED** to ratify the decision of General Purposes Committee on 17 March 2025 and to adopt the Town Council's Annual Investment Strategy.

(iii) Annual Leave Policy – No. 85

FC.102.04.25 It was **RESOLVED** to ratify the decision of General Purposes Committee on 17 March 2025 and to adopt the updated Annual Leave Policy.

10.0 TO CONSIDER LEGAL ADVICE ON THE VILLAGE GREEN STATUS OF RIDGEWOOD RECREATION GROUND

Deputy Mayor Councillor Mayhew chaired this item due to the declared interest of the Town Mayor.

Members were presented with legal advice relating to the Village Green status of Ridgewood Recreation Ground. At present a large area but not the full area of Ridgewood Recreation Ground was designated Village/Town Green Status. The area to the east of the recreation ground which currently contained the Mixed Use Games Area (MUGA) and recent orchard planting, was previously allotment land and not part of the Village/Town Green designation.

In planning ahead for the future, the Town Clerk explained within her covering report, that she had sought advice from Solicitors to understand if the shape or positioning of the Village/Town Green Status could be adapted. A large number of homes were being built in the south of Uckfield, and in particular in Ridgewood Village, off both Lewes and Eastbourne Roads. This would be likely to result in increased footfall through open spaces like Ridgewood Recreation Ground. She was also aware that the applicants for the Horsted Pond Farm site, were seeking to utilise the Millennium Green as a SANG, so footway links would be expected between the SANG and New Road/Lewes Road.

All Town Councillors were aware of substantial drainage works being required in the car park, and possibly need to slightly expand or change the shape of the car park in the future, to better accommodate vehicles, and was also aware of a previous planning application by the Village Hall to marginally extend the hall in the future.

It was clarified that any changes to the status were not to encourage building, or use of this recreational space, but merely correct the positioning of the designation on the land which should be protected. At present the designation covered an area which incorporated a building and a car park, which didn't seem appropriate.

To change the positioning of the status could take some time, as it would need to be considered by the Secretary of State. It was therefore important to plan ahead for the future, not just consider the present day. Ridgewood Recreation Ground would remain an important green space for residents in Ridgewood.

Points noted by Town Councillors included:

- (i) if required to register replacement land, could the Millennium Green Trust be approached to see if some of their area could be registered as a Village Green. Members weren't sure if this was possible if it was already registered as a Millennium Green or SANG. The first consideration was the picnic field;
- (ii) based on the legal advice, the scale of the proposed re-positioning would affect the process taken i.e. whether you had to remove altogether and reinstate, or whether you just adjust the current shape;
- (iii) could alternative sites be considered as well such as New Barn, and was this dependent on whether it was in a village or town. Another site to consider registering

was the Dene.

It was proposed to proceed and to start exploring the de-registration of the western side of the recreation ground. This was seconded.

Members suggested a further addition to the proposal, based on conversations to explore options for Millennium Green and The Dene.

It was also noted that 'Ridgewood Village Green' had a much nicer tone to it than 'Ridgewood Recreation Ground.'

FC.103.04.25 With 9 members voting in favour and one member abstaining, it was **RESOLVED**

to agree to:

- (i) proceed with exploring the re-positioning of the village green status on Ridgewood Recreation Ground and preserve the correct areas of the open space for the future,
- and;
- (ii) to seek further information on the proposed changes to the Millennium Green (as a SANG) and consider this within the investigations.

11.0 TO CONSIDER A MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR D. BENNETT RELATING TO THE TRACKBED OF THE UCKFIELD TO LEWES RAILWAY LINE

The Chair asked for comments from members, and did suggest that if they felt they required more information to consider the motion, a meeting or presentation could be arranged with the Wealden Line Campaign.

Cllr Manvell felt there was unanimous support for the reinstatement of the railway line. It was referenced within the draft Wealden Local Plan. However he wasn't certain of the ask of the planning department. The current Local Plan referenced track protection and the draft Local Plan also referenced the reinstatement of the railway line. The consultant's feasibility report hadn't yet been received for the Greenway.

Councillor Bennett clarified that in order to fully protect the track bed, track protection would be required from fence to fence (i.e. double track).

Councillor Macve advised that the Railway Line Parishes Committee felt the same. It would need to be a double track down to Lewes and be a proper functioning transport system. It therefore needed to be electrified and be a double track. The Town Clerk clarified that a similar issue had occurred elsewhere. In Scotland they placed a greenway adjacent to the track bed, not on the track bed.

Two proposals were placed on the table:

(i) Councillor Cox supported the motion, but proposed to recommend that a decision be postponed, to enable more information to be obtained. This was seconded by Councillor Manvell.

(ii) Councillor Macve supported Cllr Bennett's motion. This was seconded by Councillor French.

A vote was taken on the first proposal. This resulted in four votes in favour, three votes against, and one member abstaining.

FC.104.04.25 It was therefore **RESOLVED** that a decision be postponed until further information had been received from all parties.

The Town Mayor felt that the two projects were intertwined. The Town Clerk also reminded members that there were two matters here to be considered: improved transport access for the future, and improved pedestrian/cycle links for leisure and recreation.

For the purpose of the minutes. Following the meeting, the Town Clerk was unhappy with the outcome of this item based on the interests first declared by members at the start of the meeting.

Since the meeting a presentation has been given by Mr Hart of the Wealden Line Campaign. Further information would also be obtained from Wealden District Council prior to the meeting of Full Council on 25 June 2025.

12.0 TO CONSIDER THE TOWN COUNCIL'S VIEW ON THE SUSSEX AND BRIGHTON DEVOLUTION CONSULTATION

Members were initially uncertain as to whether to provide a response.

FC.105.04.25 Members **RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders to enable the County Councillors and District Councillor K. Williams to speak from the audience on this item, briefly.

County Councillor Claire Dowling provided more clarity on the proposals. District Councillor Kelvin Williams added to this in terms of the proposals for local government re-organisation.

FC.106.04.25 Members **RESOLVED** to reinstate standing orders.

FC.107.04.25 Members **RESOLVED** for Town Councillors to respond to the consultation individually, but to send a copy of their response to the Town Clerk, to enable the Clerk to create a response on behalf of the Town Council before the deadline.

13.0 TO NOTE THE END OF YEAR PROGRESS UPDATE ON UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL'S ANNUAL PRIORITIES FOR 2024/25

Members noted the report.

14.0 TO REVIEW A SNAPSHOT OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S BUDGET AND BALANCE SHEET POSITION FOR Q3 OF 2024/25

This would be circulated by the Assistant Town Clerk by email.

15.0 TO NOTE THE MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS

Members noted the report.

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

Two deed of grants had been received:

Mrs Jane Beeney

Mrs M. Horsman

FC.108.04.25 It was **RESOLVED** for three councillors to sign the above deeds of grant.

17.0 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS PREVIOUSLY NOTIFIED

None received.

18.0 TOWN CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None received.

19.0 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair, Councillor Bedwell, reminded members of the Mayor's reception on Saturday 26 April. The event would celebrate volunteering and fundraise for the 'People need People' project.

The meeting closed at 8.48pm.