



Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment and Leisure Committee** held on
Tuesday 27 May 2025 at 7.00pm
Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield

PRESENT:

Cllr. Angie Smith (Chair)
Cllr. Karen Bedwell
Cllr. Val Frost
Cllr. Chris Macve

Cllr. Bernadette Reed (Vice Chair)
Cllr. Donna French
Cllr. Michael McClafferty

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Peter Selby
Tom Woollard – Countryside Ranger
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.

A declaration of interest was raised by Councillor K. Bedwell in relation to agenda item 6.1. This would be a prejudicial interest as Chair of Ridgewood Village hall. Councillor Bedwell would therefore leave the meeting for this item.

A declaration of interest was also raised by Vice Chair Councillor B. Reed in relation to item 6.3 (bus shelter on London Road). This was a personal interest, and Councillor Reed would refrain from voting on this item.

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

None received.

3.0. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Two apologies were received in advance of the meeting from Councillors D. Bennett and S. Mayhew who were both unable to attend due to personal reasons.

4.0. MINUTES

4.1. Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on the 14 April 2025

EL.03.05.25 It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Committee held on the 14 April 2025 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4.2. Action list

Members noted the report and asked for the following item to be removed from the action list:

EL42.03.25 – To consider actions to reduce litter in the vicinity of new food outlets and retail businesses in Uckfield.

The litter bin campaign to address dog fouling in public spaces was in progress with posters and ongoing support from litter pickers, including Brighter Uckfield and community involvement with Uckfield College. Allotment tenants on the Bird in Eye allotment site were also recently advised to keep the entrance gate shut to the site, as it was fitted with a new locking system and code to prevent dog walkers using this growing space as an access route into town.

EL37.01.25 – To consider the commemoration of the VE Day 80th Anniversary. This event was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone who attended and the Chair thanked staff and volunteers for their invaluable help on the day.

EL38.01.25 – To establish a working group to organise a showcase event to promote the various Community groups and activities in Uckfield.

The next Events Working Group would be held in mid-June. The Town Clerk felt that the remit of this event would be picked up by the Health and Wellbeing event organised by the Ageing Well Forum on 18 September 2025.

4.3. Project Monitoring List – for information only

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

FC.91.01.25 – Artificial Cricket Wicket Resurfacing/Replacement.

This work was completed.

FC.91.01.25 – D-Day Anniversary activities.

This event was held on the Bank Holiday Monday 5 May 2025 and was a huge success.

4.4. Forward plan – for information only

Members noted the report.

5.0. FINANCE

5.1. To note bills paid

Members noted the report.

5.2. To note the Income & Expenditure report ending 31 March 2025

Councillor C. Macve remarked how the income had increased and that expenditure had fallen so this was a positive step.

In relation to tree works, the Town Clerk advised that there had been a more robust programme of surveying and recording the detail of tree surveys during the past year which would protect the Town Council as an authority, going forward. Earmarked reserves had been identified to cover this overspend.

6.0. ADMINISTRATION

6.1. To consider further drainage works at Ridgewood Village Hall

[Councillor K. Bedwell left the room at 19:10pm for remaining members to discuss this item in her absence]

Ridgewood Village Hall was still experiencing water ingress from Ridgewood Recreation Ground and a quotation had been presented to E&L Committee from a local contractor. The Village Hall Committee requested the need to get these works carried out prior to the winter season.

Uckfield Town Council had initially offered to split the costs equally, but the Village Hall Committee wished to see the council fund the works in full, as a result of being the landowner. Members acknowledged the full repairing lease agreement and

reasonable amount of charitable grant money awarded for renovation works to the building.

Discussions centred around the difficulties being faced with water ground levels in this particular area. It was hoped that the recent highway works would reduce some of the run-off from New Road into the recreation ground.

Members tried to consider whether surface water run-off and drainage on the recreation ground would have been of impact to the hall after it was first built. It was also recognised that the building was lower in the landscape, and that over the years there had been various concerns which may have altered or impacted the flow of ground water levels.

During the refurbishment works in 2020-21, flooding to the basement was thought to have been caused by works to the car park, and yet it was also discovered that water was also coming off New Road into the Recreation Ground and car park.

The reconfiguration of the Ridgewood Recreation play area in autumn 2016 may have also contributed.

The Town Clerk advised that there were a number of factors that could be contributing to the drainage issues in this particular area and due to the geology of the area, it may never be possible to fully resolve. She also added that members needed to consider their responsibilities as owners of Ridgewood Village Hall, the recreation ground and subsequent impact on the hall.

In relation to the proposed drainage works, Councillor C. Macve said that the proposed shingle drainage system would still not encapsulate the water. He felt that a French drain being installed at a half metre depth may not be adequate enough, as it was not understood if the ground water levels under the recreation ground and basement floor of the building would be more than this, in which case excessive water could still percolate above this level.

An alternative idea could perhaps involve tanking the building to stop water coming into the building, and a french drain along the basement floor level.

In terms of liability, the Town Clerk explained that there should be no blame to any party given that this situation could indicate years of monitoring different water flows, and that whilst things altered on the ground, the structure of the building had also changed. The Town Council may also be responsible for structural repairs to the building within the lease agreement as the owner, so members were being asked to consider if they wished to support this request by making the building watertight.

Whilst discussing the funding, it was clear that the main difficulty members were facing was that this was a large sum of money that had not been budgeted for, whilst the Town Council was also having to look at drainage systems for the adjacent car park that could far exceed existing budget allocations.

Members were inclined to help and to maybe offer funding in place of grant money over the next couple of years, equalling this out.

The Town Clerk agreed that this could be a reasonable suggestion considering this needed sorting out sooner than later, especially if a request was made to extend the building in future.

EL.04.05.25 With seven votes in favour, and one vote abstaining due to a conflict of interest members noted the report and **RESOLVED** to agree to request:

- (i) for more precise and accurate information to be provided within the quotation (*since the surface water levels were not yet fully understood*);
- (ii) to consider the alternative of tanking to stop water coming into the building;
- (iii) to bring this item back to a future committee meeting for members to make a more formal decision in relation to this application for costs, and;
- (iv) for the Estates team to arrange to have test pits installed onsite to assess current drainage and soil conditions on Ridgewood Recreation Ground.

6.2 To request items for the Strengthening Local Relationships (SLR) meeting with East Sussex Highways on 1 July 2025

Councillor D. French requested for the disabled parking bays in the High Street to be re-marked and more prominent.

Councillor B. Reed also requested a dropped kerb for wheelchair users.

Local residents had reported that on leaving Batchelor Way on to Bell Farm Road, and Meads Surgery that visibility was poor whilst looking west towards the A22 roundabout. There was also a camber in the road between this area and the A22 bypass Copwood roundabout. This required a swathe cut at these junctions for the purpose of road safety. This would be addressed more urgently via with the Stakeholders at East Sussex Highways.

A query was raised in relation to the new design layout of roads leading towards the A22 Copwood Roundabout and Budletts Roundabout, as it was not clear which lane drivers should be going straight ahead.

A bollard and sign had been introduced towards the lower end of Lewes Road as a new safety feature, although this was thought to be dangerous and not in the correct place for oncoming traffic, and a lack of alternative solutions had been offered for the town.

Some of the pavements were in an appalling condition for and were blocking access routes for wheelchair users and mobility scooters.

Councillor C. Macve was concerned about tree roots just south of the Natwest Bank in the High Street which was a potential trip hazard.

The powder coated paint on the s-shaped seating outside the Card Factory needed to be re-treated as there were a lot of sharp edges and potentially dangerous to sit on.

The Town Clerk pointed out that those last two points raised about the tree and seat in town were part of the old Highways Project Board and that these items could be raised with them directly.

EL.05.05.25 Members noted the report and agreed for those issues and any further items (received no later than 17 June) to be raised at the Strengthening Local Relationships meeting with East Sussex Highways on 1 July 2025.

6.3 To consider the design of a new bus shelter to be installed on London Road

The contractors, Vine Consulting Engineers, were keen to understand if the Town Council had any design preferences and placement for the new northbound bus shelter on London Road associated with the land at Mockbeggars Farm Development.

Members were also being asked to consider if they wished for some signage to be moved and a litter bin adjacent to the bus shelter.

Members were keen on the 'Friend Oak Frames' design for a bus shelter as this was very traditional and in keeping with the bus shelters on Eastbourne Road and at Ringles Cross, and would also be protected from the elements.

However, there were some concerns about there being adequate space within the existing lay-by and if the design suggested needed to be made narrower to ensure good visibility for adjacent residents and businesses to see up the road when leaving their premises (e.g. White House Farm, Spring Cottage etc).

There was also a concern about buses stopping if the space was too narrow and vehicles overtaking, as this was a fast road.

With regard to signage, The Town Clerk advised that this may also be a good opportunity to decide whether or not to move the 'Welcome to Uckfield' and 'Ringles Cross' signage, or to reinstate them exactly where they were.

Members were keen to meet officials from East Sussex Highways onsite, to air any of these concerns and proposals.

- EL.06.05.25** With six votes in favour, members noted the report and **RESOLVED** to agree to:
- (i) meet with East Sussex Highway officials onsite in order to discuss views on visibility and the location of the bus stop;
 - (ii) to ask for a bus stop in a similar style to the one at Ringles Cross (pending further discussion on the final design and in alignment with that proposed by Buxted Parish Council), and;
 - (iii) to support the siting of a litter bin adjacent to the bus shelter.

6.4 To appoint a representative for the Local Nature Reserve Supporters Group

- EL.07.05.25** Members **RESOLVED** to agree for Councillors D. French and B. Reed to continue as the representatives (one and one substitute) for the Local Nature Reserve Supporters Group.

7.0 ENVIRONMENT

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

The Town Clerk welcomed back the Ranger who was thanked by Councillor B. Reed for arranging the test pits in the balancing pond, which helped with the Nature pledge. More test pits were due at West Park Local Nature Reserve early June.

The Town Clerk reminded members that if there were particular areas of the town that required attention – in terms of a project or clean up, groups such as the Scouts, Guides or Brighter Uckfield could be interested in supporting the delivery of this work. Members were asked to let the Clerk know.

The tree orchards were a working success and the bluebells were also showing that Boothland Wood would eventually revert back to woodlands. Some of the tree trunks were placed across to block access temporarily to prevent access to motorbike riders who were ruining the ancient woodland.

Members subsequently noted the report.

7.2 To consider a request from a local resident in relation to coppiced trees to rear of property

A local resident who lived in Calvert Close, Uckfield had asked about the recently coppiced trees along the perimeter garden line to Hart Close. They understood that these were a low priority in terms of expenditure but were still concerned about the

size and proximity of the trees on the boundary of their garden. They asked about having the trees at the rear of their property, on Town Council land, cut back.

The Ranger had specified that all boundary trees were subject to independent inspections and should any concerns be raised this would have been addressed. As a matter of policy, the Town Council would typically only carry out works on trees which were classified as dead, dying or dangerous.

Even though trees needed to be reduced at times, the Town Council were planting a large number of trees in order to try to mitigate what was disappearing, especially with ash die-back.

The Ranger confirmed that the trees on Town Council land could be coppiced under the recommendation of an approved list of contractors, and as stated any tree works would need to be carried out to British Standards.

As most of the Town Council's trees were already surveyed to determine whether they were veteran or young trees, this may include an administrative cost if those works were not deemed necessary.

It was also vital to understand the effects of local trees on ecology and biodiversity in our designated landscapes, such as nature reserves.

EL.08.05.25 Members noted the report and **RESOLVED** to agree for the tree policy to be reviewed and be brought back to the next meeting.

7.3 To provide feedback for the Ashdown Forest Woodland Management Plan Consultation

Members noted the report. Councillor B. Reed would liaise with the Conservators of the Ashdown Forest at their meeting the following day and ask if they had policies for wet woodlands and freshwater migratory species.

EL.09.05.25 Members noted the report and supported the expertise of the Conservators of Ashdown Forest in managing the forest. Councillor B. Reed would find out if they had policies for wet woodlands and freshwater migratory species, and also, if there were any alternative methods of managing the deer population.

8.0 LEISURE

8.1 To note an update on the Our Parks Fitness Sessions
Members noted the report.

8.2 To consider the feedback from service users for Victoria Play Area and initial designs
The Town Clerk provided a verbal update in relation to the tender process for the play area upgrade. Five companies had responded within the time specified and a public exhibition was due to be held at the Civic Centre that Saturday, with selected companies attending to present their designs to the public.

This upgrade would not include any large additions at this stage but requested the design, supply and installation of a package for a play area that would meet the childrens' needs and get them playing again.

There was a lot of work put in by all these companies for their layouts in terms of age, gender and accessibility. The Town Clerk suggested having a small selection of committee members to look at those designs in more detail, as there would be a lot to digest.

The poster competition with St Philip's Primary School would be revealed on Saturday.

EL.10.05.25 Members RESOLVED to:

- (i) form a working group to review the designs and complete the tender scoring process in more detail, and;
- (ii) appoint Councillors M. McClafferty, D. French and A. Smith to meet with the Estates & Facilities Manager and Town Clerk.

9.0 REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

- 9.1 To receive an update from the Climate Change Steering Group

EL.11.05.25 Members RESOLVED to:

- (i) note the content of the story mapping completed, and;
- (ii) approve the incredible work done on the mapping by Councillor B. Reed for the 'Weald to Waves' pledge.

Thanks was given to Councillors A. Smith, D. French and M. McClafferty for their support with this project.

10.0 REPORTS FROM COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

- 10.1 All Weather Pitch Operational Group

Nothing to report at this time.

- 10.2 Conservators of Ashdown Forest

Members noted the report and thanked Councillor B. Reed.

- 10.3 Local Nature Reserve Supporters Group

Nothing to report at this time.

- 10.4 Luxford Centre Management Committee

Members noted the report and thanked Councillor C. Macve.

- 10.5 Uckfield Railway Line Parishes Committee

Members noted the report and thanked Councillor C. Macve.

- 10.6 Uckfield Youth Club Board

Nothing to report at this time.

- 10.7 Wealden Bus Alliance/Weald Link

Nothing to report at this time.

- 10.8 Wealden Food Partnership Advisory Group

Nothing to report at this time.

11.0 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Climate Change Steering Group were holding an a Eco Expo on Saturday 27 September whereby local businesses and community groups would be able to promote products that support local people in tackling climate change and considering environmentally friendly alternatives. If anyone knew anyone who wished to have a stall, they were asked to pass their details to Councillor K. Bedwell for her to make the initial contact.

12.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

- EL.12.05.25** 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.

The meeting finished at 20:54pm