

Meeting of the Environment & Leisure Committee

Tuesday 1 September 2026

Agenda Item 8.2

TO CONSIDER CONTRIBUTING TO A DISTRICT-WIDE SPRINGLE FESTIVAL

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Of the back of a festival commissioned and funded by Wealden District Council in Spring 2026, in the towns of Hailsham and Uckfield, the District Authority are making plans for Springle 2027.
- 1.2 The Springle Festival in 2026, saw an early evening parade through Hailsham High Street run by a renowned international company – Picto Facto. In Uckfield, a daytime event was arranged on Luxford Field, which was family orientated and focused on storytelling, dance and a school children's parade. Creative workshops were also held in the local Uckfield schools.
- 1.3 The above festival forms part of cultural programme of activities commissioned by the District Authority since 2023. Members may recall '18 Hours' who have delivered the Street performance programme over these years. The aims of these festivals have been, to:
 - (i) deliver free and accessible outdoor cultural experiences;
 - (ii) celebrate the arrival of Spring through creative and engaging public experiences, particular during the quieter months;
 - (iii) increase footfall within the town centre;
 - (iv) encourage residents to engage with their High Streets;
 - (v) bring inspiring cultural experiences to audiences who may not traditionally engage with the arts.

2.0 Plans for Springle 2027

- 2.1 The District Authority are looking to build on this work, and seek a cultural delivery organisation to develop, manage and deliver a vibrant district wide festival programme across the five towns of Wealden District (Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield & Waldron, Polegate and Uckfield) at the end of May 2027. They are keen to work with parish and town councils, and local Chambers of Commerce. The final festival programme, and locations will be subject to confirmation.
- 2.2 Requirements of the appointed organisation to deliver the programme, include:
 - develop Springle into a connected District-wide festival rather than a series of standalone events; giving each town its own identity whilst feeling part of one festival;
 - deliver a high-quality programme of free outdoor cultural activity across Wealden's main town centres;
 - create a festival identity that unites participating towns whilst celebrating the unique character of each town – working collaboratively with parish and town councils in the development and delivery of the festival;
 - increase footfall, dwell time and activity within the town centres;
 - support local businesses and the evening economy;
 - engage with local primary schools and young people;

- increase access to cultural experiences for residents, who may not normally participate in the arts;

2.3 The initial concepts for the festival are to include:

- to explore environmental and nature inspired concepts;
- support the economy with the increase in visitor spend (early evening or weekend trade) – road closure could be obtained for an early evening parade and associated activities such as Late Night Shopping but in the Spring);
- should incorporate other complimentary cultural or creative activities (for example artist open studios, exhibitions or markets);
- local school workshops to encourage participation.

2.4 The appointed organisation will be responsible for all aspects of event delivery, but not the event management plan and attendance of the Safety Advisory Group, road closures, event risk assessments and event staffing/crowd control/security.

3.0 Anticipated expenditure

3.1 The total budget available for the District-wide project is up to £100,000 inclusive of VAT. The total available budget will be dependent on the number of towns participating within the programme. Funding will be made up of a mix of the District Council, Parish and Town Councils, Chambers of Commerce and possible Arts Council England funding.

3.2 Wealden District Council are looking for a financial contribution from each of the towns of up to £5,000. This could be provided by the Chamber of Commerce or Town Council, or both. The Chief Officer (Town Clerk) has asked the Uckfield Chamber of Commerce to consider the request at their next Executive Committee which is due to take place early September.

3.3 The Town Council is about to commence work on its budget setting process for 2027/28, for consideration in draft by Full Council in December 2026, and adoption mid-January 2027. Typically, such proposals would be recommended to be submitted through the Town Council's Community Grants programme, but the timescales for this would mean a decision could not be provided until mid March 2027, which is too late to confirm our commitment to the project. Wealden District Council require an early indication of the town's commitment in September (from the Town Council/Chamber) to understand the funding they have available for the project prior to their publication of the tender process.

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 Members are asked to consider the proposal by Wealden District Council and whether Uckfield Town Council wishes to participate.

Contact Officer: Holly Goring