

TOWN COUNCIL



ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Wednesday 19 March 2025

Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield
at
7.00 pm

AGENDA

Prior to the start of the meeting you are invited to have tea or coffee
from 6.30 pm

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Apologies for absence

Looking back

3. Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of the 20 March 2024
 4. Matters arising from the minutes
 5. Presentation of the Town Council's Annual Report 2024-25
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Looking forward

6. Topics and questions raised by residents in advance
7. Questions from the floor



Councillor Karen Bedwell
Town Mayor



Uckfield Town Council Annual Report

2024-25

**Council Offices
Civic Centre
Uckfield
TN22 1AE**

Our Town Mayor's Annual Review of 2024-25

Welcome to the Annual Town meeting.

This is a chance for residents and Town Councillors to come together to raise and discuss issues affecting our Town as well as the surrounding communities that use Uckfield as their Hub for services.

Councillors and officers work hard every year to ensure that our statutory parish duties are met, and strive to support our residents to make Uckfield the strong vibrant community that we want it to be.

Details of all our councillors, committee meetings, agenda's, minutes and all legal documents including our strategic plan, property asset management plan and annual budget can be viewed on the Town Council website.

This year we have taken the hardest decision as a Town Council and substantially raised our precept. This reflects the large portfolio of assets that we own and manage including 10 buildings, 17 open spaces, 8 play areas, 7 recreation grounds which include football and cricket pitches ,4 woodlands, including 2 ancient woodlands, 2 local nature reserves, 192 streetlights, 70 litter bins and other street furniture. Some of our key priorities this year will include upgrading our play areas, improving our sports facilities, installing welfare facilities at some of these sites, and continuing our building maintenance improvements to bring our properties up to standard. We also need to restructure our staffing as our wonderful team of officers and ground staff need to grow to support the expansion of the town and continue to maintain and provide facilities both now and in the future. As residents ourselves, understanding the financial challenges we are all facing, political differences were put aside to come together to make this decision.

It has been an honour to be elected Mayor this year and see first-hand the amazing work from volunteer and charity groups in Uckfield and the surrounding areas. The organisation's I've visited support all ages with many varied difficulties and challenges. Uckfield is a town with a village soul and time and time again, when people reach out, help is offered by so many. I hope that the 'People need People' project launched at the end of January with the support of Chamber of Commerce and Wealden Volunteering will grow to support those community volunteer and charity groups by connecting local businesses to them for mutual growth and support. The Mayor's Reception on 26th April 2025 at the Civic Centre is open to all and will help raise money for the project. Details are on the Civic Centre website.



As we prepare for the start of the new financial year it is a chance for us all to look back and review what we have achieved in 2024. Just a summary of some of the works we've undertaken in addition to the day to day service provision, include:

- new plumbing and heating systems installed in Victoria Pavilion, Foresters Hall and Foresters Chapel;
- pillar lighting at the bottom of Luxford Field;
- large scale planting of tree saplings and community orchard areas;
- purchase of electrical grounds vehicles to replace existing vehicle, which have reached end of life;
- repair to cricket facilities (practice nets and bowler ends);
- Beacon lighting event to mark anniversary of D-Day;
- Weald on the Field
- Residents survey to hear from residents direct;

As a consultee in the planning process, we also continue to push back against large developments which seek to change the rural nature of our Town and District, and press for smaller affordable housing that our children can afford to live in so they can stay in the area and work. We also press developers and the Planning Authority to provide the infrastructure and finances we need in Uckfield to improve the infrastructure we do have to support our growing town.

2025 will bring new challenges as we see the plan for devolution unfold and as Councillors we will continue to represent the views of all our residents to the best of our ability.

Councillor Karen Bedwell
Town Mayor, Chair of Full Council



General Purposes Committee

This is my third and last year as Chair of the General Purposes Committee. I am very proud and honoured to have held this position for the past three years.

General Purposes Committee is responsible for finance, buildings and personnel. As we all know costs have been escalating over the year, and we as a Town Council are no different. We have had to keep on top of the costs and remain within our budget. This could not be possible without our Responsible Financial Officer, along with our Town Clerk and members of the office staff. For this I thank you.

Again our Community Grants Scheme gave just under £23k to 16 organisations ranging from the Uckfield Bonfire Carnival Society, local hospices, Uckfield Theatre Guild, Uckfield Housebound Club and Uckfield Music Club to name just a few. Again this is the longest committee meeting of the year, but I find that it is both the most difficult and rewarding meeting of them all. It is invaluable listening to what some of our local groups do for our community and how we can assist them in continuing to maintain these activities and services. It all adds to what makes Uckfield such a great community and a great place to live. Along with the community grants we also gave Wealden Citizens Advice and Wealden Volunteering a combined total of £27k under their service level agreements.

We own a number of buildings and we have completed our five yearly Market Valuation for our Asset Portfolio in the past year.

Amongst our buildings we have completed many projects including completing a replacement heating system at Foresters Hall Chapel. We have replaced the rear of Foresters Hall's plumbing and heating system, with air source heating. We are trying to be a greener council and now only use gas at The Civic Centre and Victoria Pavillion. Victoria Pavillion has also had a full overhaul and new plumbing and heating installation. Within the Civic Centre we have upgraded the lift and all of the Fire doors and emergency lighting are being upgraded.

We have configured our Caretakers office, which has resulted in an additional room for hire. This is a small room but would be perfect for but not limited to having interviews or possibly needing somewhere to work away from the office, but please ensure that you contact the office to prebook this. We have also had new signage placed up within the foyer to the Civic Centre to assist visitors more clearly.

We have hosted a full entertainment schedule, including murder mystery dinners, tribute bands, mediums, afternoon teas. This has been assisted by the new online event ticketing system that is now up and running.

We have also installed a new booking system to manage the hire of our rooms and sports pitches, which aligns closely with our finance system, and completed phase 2 of our computer upgrade, which is scheduled in, every few years. These changes help to improve staff efficiency.

Our entertainment programme and restaurant have been working well and this is under the leadership of our Hospitality Manager. Within the Civic Centre we can hold so many events, from a training session within the workplace, AGMs, weddings, celebration of life and many more. Refreshments are available. As someone who uses the Luxford Restaurant on a regular basis, I must confirm that this is a great place to go for a quick coffee, a breakfast, lunch or maybe a sweet treat - who can refuse a cuppa and a slice of cake. If you haven't used it or if it's been some time since you last used it, please try.

As you can see this is just a snapshot of what has been going on within the Council under the responsibility of the General Purposes Committee. Can I just finish to say thank you to my fellow councillors, thank you for your support to me over the past three years.

Thank you to all the Council staff, without you we cannot do what we do. Thank you to the Town Clerk, Responsible Financial Officer, Hospitality Manager, Estates and Facilities Manager, all the office staff, the ground staff, the restaurant staff, the caretakers and the cleaners.

Councillor Diane Ward
Chair of General Purposes Committee

Environment and Leisure Committee



As we come to the end of my first year as Chair of the Environment and Leisure Committee, I would like to thank the Vice-Chair, Councillor Bernadette Reed, and the Committee members for their support, hard work and some lively discussions.

I would also like to thank our Clerk, Rachel Newton who does a great job of driving our work forward.

The Environment and Leisure Committee deals with important considerations relating to matters such as buildings, council equipment, leisure activities and open spaces.

Therefore, decisions made by the Committee impact on the lives of all of us, as residents of Uckfield.

In terms of local events, this was a special year, since we commemorated the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings, back in June. Local performers gave a musical accompaniment to the lighting of the beacon at Victoria Pleasure Ground.

This year also saw another successful Weald on the Field delivered in August. This event is an annual fixture in the calendar, that can only happen because of the hard work of Council staff, aided by Councillors. This year's Weald on the Field was the eighth annual festival, and was boosted by beautiful, sunny weather. Visitors crowded around the stage, enjoying food and drink from a range of local providers, and music from acts including Fat Freddie and The Queens, Dynamite and The Carnaby Brothers.

Looking after the town's parks and sporting facilities is part of the Committee's role. This year the Council replaced the cricket nets at Victoria Pleasure Ground, began the process of replacing the outdated play area, also at Victoria Pleasure Ground, and planted community orchards, with the aid of local volunteers, at three of our open spaces: Ridgewood Recreation Ground, West Park and New Barn. This project was supported by a grant from Wealden District Council. Our wider tree planting programme, designed in part to replace some of the trees lost from Ash Dieback, has been continuing apace, with 680 trees planted in the last 18 months. To enable us to look after our trees effectively, the Council is now using new software to facilitate robust record keeping.

Climate change and biodiversity loss are important considerations for the Committee and drive work such as our tree planting programmes. The Committee works closely with outside bodies such as the Conservators of Ashdown Forest; it also works internally

to find green solutions where possible, supported by Council's Climate Emergency Steering Group. For example, this year has seen the Council purchase two electric vehicles for the Grounds staff team, as older vehicles have reached the end of their lives. In February the Council staged our first Green Shoots upcycled fashion show, where entrants modelled outfits created from charity shop purchases. Hopefully this will be the first of many such events.

We are grateful to have the support of the Council staff, the Hospitality team at Luxfords restaurant, the Town Ranger, and the Grounds staff in pursuing a green agenda.

Councillor Angie Smith
Chair of Environment and Leisure Committee

Plans Committee

Uckfield Town Councils Plans Committee are still working hard as a statutory consultee within the planning system to ensure that all aspects of an application are scrutinised and assessed alongside planning policy and local knowledge.

We continue to include in our responses, that ‘the right housing in the right place’ must be considered for this area within all applications.

Unfortunately planning policies don’t cover many of the infrastructure issues we are experiencing. Nevertheless we will keep raising them within consultations to ensure everyone is aware of the impacts new housing brings forward.

We are having to read a large amount of additional paperwork to ensure we fully understand changes being made by the new UK Government, especially within the National Planning Policy Framework which has been amended to head their new proposals regarding housing targets.



After a recent meeting held by Wealden District Council, we understand that they will be bringing a second regulation 18 consultation forward of their draft local plan with the amendments the UK Government have made. So many of you came to the first consultation (Uckfield had the highest attendance) to give your thoughts and we would please ask you to do the same with the next consultation because we do need your input with regards to the National changes that need to be made to ensure we have a local plan that works for us.

We have another planning inquiry ahead of us for the Bird in Eye South Site (Bird in Eye Farm). We are gathering our evidence and will present a speech at the inquiry.

We also have seen planning consultations for the land behind Victoria Pleasure Ground (behind the football pitch) coming forward. 100 dwellings proposed alongside the planning application for the 750 houses (Phase 2) of the Ridgewood Farm application. The work for these continues for both Uckfield Town Council and Wealden District Council with Redrow.

We saw that many of you attended the consultation for the land known as Owlsbury Farm on the other side of the bypass and we thank you so very much for attending and giving your thoughts.

Please do continue sharing your thoughts on applications through consultations, the Wealden online system and with members of Uckfield Town Council. That way, together, we can continue to rise to challenges with passion and integrity and ensure our town works for us now and in the future.

**Councillor Jackie Love
Chair of Plans Committee**

Allowances paid to Councillors

ALLOWANCES PAID TO COUNCILLORS			
IN 2024-25 per annum (1 Apr 2024– 31 Mar 2025 before tax)			
	Allowances	Expenses	Notes
	£	£	
Cllr. Karen Bedwell*	£1,415.56	£1,711.89	*Denotes Town Mayor duties (An additional allowance is payable to the Mayor in connection with the duties of the position).
Cllr. Duncan Bennett	£1,415.56	-	
Cllr. Ben Cox	£1,415.56	-	
Cllr. Donna French	£1,415.56	-	
Cllr Val Frost	Co-opted member	-	
Cllr. Jackie Love*	£1,415.56	£275.11	
Cllr Michael McClafferty	£1,415.56	-	
Cllr. Chris Macve	**	-	
Cllr. Dan Manvell	£1,415.56	-	
Cllr. Spike Mayhew	£1,415.56	-	
Cllr. Bernadette Reed	Co-opted member	-	The allowances are from the financial year 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025
Cllr. Peter Selby	**	-	
Cllr. Angie Smith	£1,415.56	-	
Cllr. Peter Ullmann	Co-opted member	-	
Cllr. Diane Ward	£1,415.56	-	

N.B.

* Councillor Love was Town Mayor until the Annual Statutory meeting of 20 May 2025 so the additional allowance reflects the period of 1 April to 20 May 2025 until the Mayoral role was handed to Councillor Bedwell.

**Councillors can choose to receive the allowance if they wish.

Councillors C. Macve and P. Selby did not claim for their allowance during the past financial year.

Financial Summary for 2024/25 (early predictions at 31 Jan 2025)

DRAFT INCOME and EXPENDITURE SUMMARY 2024/25 by COMMITTEE			
Committee	Budget set for 2024/25	Projected outturn at year end	Variation from budget set
	£	£	£
Environment and Leisure			
Expenditure (Revenue)	379,496	375,049	4,447
Expenditure (New Init)	10,786	11,617	(831)
Expenditure (EReserves)	43,000	76,630	(33,630)
Income	115,304	127,701*	12,397
General Purposes			
Expenditure (Revenue)	888,248	882,569	5,679
Expenditure (New Init)	123,945	88,932	35,013
Expenditure (EReserves)	10,500	89,547	(79,047)
Income	242,180	259,551	17,371
Luxfords			
Expenditure (Revenue)	258,957	287,191	(28,235)
Expenditure (EReserves)	500	1,266	(766)
New initiatives	0	0	0
Income	230,600	229,028	1,572
<p>N.B. Year-end financial processes need to be completed before the above figures can be finalised so these figures are likely to change. Overspend of earmarked reserves is reflective of delivering projects in 2024/25 for projects or monies set aside or scheduled for previous years.</p> <p>* includes grant funding received for footway improvements in woodlands, community orchard planting and pillar lighting in Luxford Field.</p>			

Our Community Grants Programme for 2024-25

Each year the Town Council sets a budget for the provision of community grants within its budget setting process.

A total of 16 organisations were awarded funding through the Town Council's Annual Community Grants programme for 2024-25. The recommendations of Finance Sub-Committee were ratified by General Purposes Committee in March 2024.

Community Grant Funding under the General Power of Competence	
1. Family Support Work	£2,255
2. Uckfield & District Preservation Society	£1,000
3. St Wilfrid's Hospice	£1,100
4. Ashdown Radio Limited	£1,000
5. The Luxford Centre	£2,000
6. Proms on the Pitch	£1,000
7. Uckfield Bonfire & Carnival Society	£4,000
8. Royal British Legion – Uckfield Branch	£200
9. Uckfield Music Club	£450
10. Uckfield Theatre Guild	£1,000
11. East Sussex Hearing	£694
12. Uckfield Community Orchestra	£400
13. Sussex Support Service CIC	£800
14. Care for the Carers	£2,500
15. Ridgewood Village Hall	£4,134
16. Uckfield Housebound Club	£245.62
TOTAL	£22,778.62

Councillor Attendance

ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS (13 March 2024 to 12 March 2025 inclusive)							
Councillors	Full Council (7 meetings of which one fell before Annual Statutory in May)	General Purposes (8 meetings of which two fell before Annual Statutory in May)	Environment and Leisure (7 meetings of which one fell before Annual Statutory in May) 1 further meeting was cancelled	Plans (14 meetings of which three fell before Annual Statutory in May) 3 further meetings were cancelled	Finance Sub-Committee (5 meetings)	Personnel Sub-Committee (2 meetings)	Overall Attendance %
K. Bedwell (Town Mayor)	6 out of 7	-	7 out of 7	14 out of 14	-	<i>Attends as Mayor</i>	96.4%
D. Bennett	6 out of 7	-	4 out of 7	7 out of 14	-	-	60.7%
B. Cox	4 out of 7	2 out of 8 (1 of 2 sub)	-	-	4 out of 5	-	50.0%
D. French	7 out of 7	-	6 out of 7	-	-	5 out of 5	94.7%
V. Frost	5 out of 7	4 out of 6	4 out of 7	-	-	-	65.0%
J. Love	7 out of 7	7 out of 8	-	13 out of 14	-	5 out of 5	94.1%
M. McClafferty	5 out of 7	-	6 out of 7	-	-	5 out of 5	84.2%
C. Macve	6 out of 7	8 out of 8	6 out of 6	14 out of 14	-	-	97.1%
D. Manvell	5 out of 7	8 out of 8	-	-	5 out of 5	-	90.0%
S. Mayhew (Deputy Mayor)	7 out of 7	-	7 out of 7	13 out of 14	5 out of 5	-	97.0%
B. Reed	6 out of 7	-	5 out of 7	-	-	-	78.6%
P. Selby	7 out of 7	7 out of 8	-	-	-	-	93.3%
A. Smith	6 out of 7	6 out of 8	7 out of 7	-	-	5 out of 5	88.9%
P. Ullmann	7 out of 7	2 out of 6	-	10 out of 14	4 out of 5	-	71.9%
D. Ward	5 out of 7	6 out of 8	1 out of 1	-	5 out of 5	5 out of 5	84.6%

N.B. Attendances are from the 11 March 2024 to 12 March 2025.

- Not all Councillors sit on all or the same committees each year. Committee appointments are reviewed each year at the Annual Statutory meeting of the Council. Last year's meeting took place on 20 May 2024.
- The Town Council holds Finance and Personnel Sub-committees which meet as and when necessary. In addition, Councillors sit on working groups, steering groups and also represent the Town Council on a number of outside bodies. The above table summarises attendance for the 12-month period prior to the Annual Town meeting in March 2025.



Uckfield Town Council's Annual Priorities 2025/26

CONSERVATION	
<p>ROBUST APPROACH TO ARBORICULTURE We will address the remainder of ash dieback, and continue to record and map the results of our rolling tree surveying programme to ensure the safety of the public. We will re-plant trees and restock areas of our woodlands, alongside new community orchards where trees have been removed and disease has had an impact.</p>	<p>UPGRADING OUR ASSETS We will seek professional expertise to explore and deliver options for key buildings in the Town Council's portfolio – Osborn Hall/Signal Box. We will continue to improve the condition, safety and decoration of buildings we manage day to day – Civic Centre, Foresters Hall and Victoria Pavilion.</p>
<p>PROTECTING OUR NATURAL HABITATS We will commission ecological appraisals and wildlife monitoring of our ancient woodlands and local nature reserves, and seek to separate areas from the public to preserve the flora and fauna and protect key species.</p>	<p>UPGRADING OUR SPORTS PITCHES We will arrange for and fund: - the replacement of the artificial cricket wicket; - full pitch renovations of our football pitches between May and July; - the installation of maneuverable goal posts for the football pitches at New Barn and Harlands; - welfare facilities at Harlands Recreation Ground. In addition we will also apply for grant funding to undertake more substantial improvements to the grounds and facilities, and explore options for a future upgrade of the Skate Park.</p>
<p>EDUCATION AND CONSIDERATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE We will host an Eco EXPO to promote alternative technologies to local residents, and continue to consider alternatives in our purchases and management of Town Council land, with a continued focus on conservation and tree planting.</p>	
COMMUNITY	
<p>COMMUNITY GRANTS We will award up to £22,000 of community grant funding to local groups and charitable organisations for the period 2025/26, alongside the provision of £23,000 to Wealden Citizen's Advice and £9,000 to Wealden Volunteering through service level agreements.</p>	<p>PUBLIC REALM Work with the Uckfield Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to review the contract for festive lighting for the town centre in preparation for Christmas 2025, and work with local contractors to provide a beautiful floral display in our town centre.</p>
<p>UPGRADING PLAY AREA FACILITIES We will see delivery of the upgrade to Victoria Play Area, and make mid-term upgrades to equipment at Hempstead Recreation Ground. Funding will also be put aside for future improvements to West Park play area.</p>	<p>PUBLIC EVENTS AND ANNIVERSARIES IN THE TOWN We will organise and deliver the annual day festival Weald on the Field, an event to mark VE Day and support the preparations for the annual Remembrance Parade and Services.</p>
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT	
<p>PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE We will utilise the assistance of professional expertise to project manage major projects and assist with the review of specialist policies and procedures.</p>	
<p>FORWARD PLANNING We will work with local partner agencies, residents and local businesses to understand the infrastructure requirements for Uckfield. We will also consider the future impact of growth on the Town Council's provision of allotment and cemetery space. This information will also be utilised to inform the finalisation of an Uckfield Neighbourhood Plan and our position in the midst of devolution at the higher level of local government.</p>	

Did you know?

Your County Council looks after:	Your District Council looks after:	Your Town Council looks after:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highways maintenance (road repairs, verge cutting, pavements, most street lighting); • Highway emergencies; • Winter gritting; • Rights of Way; • Public transport; • Adult Social Care (<i>carers, services for older people, learning disabilities, physical/sensory impairments</i>); • Children's services (<i>child protection, support for families</i>); • Education; • Leisure and culture; • Libraries; • Trading standards • Registration of births and deaths; • Waste disposal (<i>including household waste recycling centres</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Tax collection; • Local planning as your local planning authority; • Development control; • Building control; • Waste collection and street cleansing; • Environmental health (<i>including licensing, environmental protection – air quality, noise, food safety, health and safety and currently Covid safety</i>) • Housing advice; • Homelessness; • Business rates; • Housing benefits; • Leisure Centres; • Wealden car parks; • Supporting economic development, local businesses and tourism; • Community toilet scheme; • Community and capital grants scheme; • Conserving biodiversity assets, conservation areas and designated sites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of Uckfield's green parks and open spaces; • Snatts Road Cemetery; • Upgrades and maintenance of Uckfield play areas, sports pitches and open spaces; • Maintenance and management of Allotments; • Conservation of our nature reserves and conservation areas; • Floral displays and hanging baskets; • Christmas lights; • Town Centre CCTV; • Community grants; • Some street lighting; • Maintenance of Town Council owned buildings which includes Civic Centre, Foresters Hall, sport pavilions, and lease agreements with tenants of Bridge Cottage, Osborn Hall, upstairs of Victoria Pavilion, Ridgewood Village Hall, the Source and West Park Pavilion etc. • Hire of rooms at the Civic Centre and Foresters Hall, as well as hire of our open spaces and sports grounds; • Events held within the Civic Centre and through the summer on Luxford Field; • Luxfords Restaurant; • Events held within the town to educate, mark special occasions, and celebrate Uckfield.

To report issues:

<https://live.eastsussexhighways.com/>

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/>

<https://www.wealden.gov.uk/>

www.uckfieldtc.gov.uk