

Minutes of the **TOWN OF HAYWARDS HEATH ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2024** held at the Town Hall, 40 Boltro Road, Haywards Heath, RH16 1BA on Monday, 29th April 2024 at 7.30PM.

Minutes

Present;

Cllr Stephanie Inglesfield (Town Mayor)	Cllr AM Lucraft
Cllr Duncan Pascoe (Deputy Mayor)	Cllr P Lucraft
Cllr A Bashar	Cllr A Murray
Cllr N Chapman	Cllr D Nicholson
Cllr AM Cooke	Cllr A Rees
Cllr R Cromie	Cllr A Platts
Cllr S Ellis	Cllr S Walsh
Cllr B King	Cllr L Wilson
Steve Trice (Town Clerk)	Andrew Sturgeon (Deputy Clerk)
Helen Hewett (Assis to Town Clerk)	Tracy Cruickshank (Com Clerk)
Maria Horne (Mayors PA)	Imogen Wilson (ECO)
Karen Wallis (PO)	
98 members of the public	

1. Welcome from the Town Mayor

Cllr Stephanie Inglesfield (Town Mayor) opened the meeting by thanking those present for taking time to attend the meeting. The Town Mayor then referred residents to the Town Council's Annual Report 2023 - 2024, which was available at the meeting (as is now available on the Town Council's website). The Town Clerk ran through housekeeping matters.

2. Presentation by Mid Sussex Voluntary Action

Katie Rabone gave an update on the work and achievements of the organisation. She shared a presentation which can be obtained from the Haywards Heath Town Council offices and is also available on the Town Council website.

3. Haywards Heath Town Council Community Awards Presentation.

The Haywards Heath Community Awards recognise, celebrate and congratulate the unsung heroes of the town who work tirelessly to make a difference to our local community. This new award scheme is to recognise individual residents or businesses who have made a significant contribution to our local community, either from a specific action or event, or as a cumulative effect, over a longer period of time.

The Mayor and ECO presented the awards to the winners and runners up as follows.

The Mayors Award

WINNER – Roy Randall

Volunteer of the Year

WINNERS- Annie Lacey and Olly Challis

Highly Commended- Sharon-Jane Davis

Sportsperson of the Year

WINNER- Michael Wain

Highly Commended- Steve Isherwood

Outstanding Young Person

WINNER- Ben Wellen

Highly Commended- Thomas Cunningham Coleshill

Outstanding Adult

WINNER- Barbara Baldwin

Highly Commended- Robbie Randall

Business Award (Community Involvement)

WINNER- Nicola Bird

Highly Commended- Thomas Burns

4. Minutes

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting on 15th March 2023 were noted and approved.

5. Cllr Stephanie Inglesfield, Town Mayor Addressed to the Town Meeting.

Cllr Inglesfield addressed the meeting. Please refer to page 4 of the Town Council's Annual Report 2023-2024 to see the contents of her address.

6. Cllr Paul Lucraft, Leader of Haywards Heath Town Council Annual Review.

Cllr Paul Lucraft invited Haywards Heath Town Councillors to stand by way of introduction, along with MSDC and WSCC councillors in attendance.

Cllr Lucraft then presented an update on the strategic activities of the Town Council. Please refer to page 5-6 of the Town Council's Annual Report 2023-2024.

7. Public Question Time to receive questions from members of the public.

The Clerk advised that 4 pre-prescribed questions had been received in advance of the meeting and these would be taken first after which the floor would be open.

The Mayor introduced the first question by Cllr Sinead Walsh

Cllr Walsh introduced herself, she directed her question to Cllr P Lucraft. She advised that the previous day she had been concerned to read the article in the Observer Newspaper with the headline 'Tory Staff running network of Anti ULEZ Facebook groups riddled with racism and abuse', she noted the report alleges a member of Haywards Heath Town Council is the administrator of one of these groups which do not hold the standard expected of Haywards Heath Town Council. Cllr Walsh asked what action Haywards Heath Town Council was taking to ensure the Town Council is not brought into disrepute.

Cllr Lucraft advised there was another question on the same subject, and after the question had been heard the Clerk would give an answer.

Mr Billah explained that over the weekend he had read a newspaper article in the Guardian online about a series of anti ULEZ Facebook groups, which he quoted, 'Have been a forum for Islamophobic attacks on the Mayor of London'. He noted the article said one of the administrators of these groups was a member of Haywards Heath Town Council. Mr Billah asked if this was something the Town Council should be investigating.

The Clerk advised the previous two questions had been received by the Town Council before the 12pm deadline. The Clerk read the following statement.

'It must be appreciated that at the present time that these are unproven/alleged actions and no investigations have been undertaken by any authority or organisation.

However, the matter is very new news to the Town Council.

Obviously, at this juncture the Town Council is very concerned by the alleged actions and does not condone, as would be expected, any of the behaviours and contents within the allegations suggested by the press and those who have made the investigation.

The Town Clerk has been asked to speak to the Monitoring Officer at Mid Sussex District Council, which he has done and will take his advice if the matter progresses further. He will keep the Town Clerk updated where it is appropriate so the Town Council will have some oversight.

It must be appreciated that the matter is not directly related to the operations or services of the Town Council. Nor, has the Town Council had the opportunity as a collective to consider the allegations, so to decide if it wishes to take any course of action on the matter or make any formal comment.

There is no legal ability for a Town/Parish Council to consider if a Councillor has broken the Cllr Code of Conduct as prescribed under the LGA Code of Conduct as adopted by the Town Council and it cannot sanction a Cllr. This would be a function of Mid Sussex District Council.

So, in summary the matter would be subject to an organisational discipline procedure if they decide to investigate it. Locally it would be for the Monitoring Officer at Mid Sussex District Council who will decide whether the Cllr implicated in the matter should be taken through its standards board complaints procedure for potential breaking of the Cllr Code of Conduct - if a standards breach complaint is made.'

The Mayor thanked the Clerk for his statement and introduced the third pre-prescribed question.

Owing to a misunderstanding, Cllr Cromie felt unable to respond at the meeting to questions asked by Cllr Walsh and Mr Billah. She has subsequently provided the following statement in response to the questions raised.

"An article was referenced in the meeting, which mentioned that I was an admin of several Facebook groups in London and the surrounding area, with tens of thousands of combined members, dedicated to opposing the Mayor's ULEZ expansion. The article focused on comments from a small minority of individuals in these groups which were unacceptable, and I absolutely condemn them. There is no place for discrimination in our society, and these comments are not representative of me, or the Conservative Party more broadly.

"Whilst I was a member/admin of these groups, I did not have an active role in moderating them. I was also unaware of the offensive remarks being made due to the sheer volume of posts and comments being put up by people on a daily basis.

"It is deeply disappointing that a small group of people used the Facebook groups to express their inappropriate views which flouted the rules of the groups and the spirit in which they were created, which was simply to give people a platform to discuss and share information about the expansion of ULEZ in London."

Mrs Lesley Bright spoke to advise the alleyway behind Barclays Bank was still awaiting maintenance since WSCC repairs took place, which in her opinion had been left in a

dangerous and unsightly condition, she thought it was an idea for schools to sponsor local alleyways. Mrs Bright also noted the street lighting should be updated. *County Councillor S Wickremaratchi answered that the works were on the WSCC agenda to take place in March/April 2025 along with the South Road enhancements.*

The Mayor introduced the 4th question.

Michelle Burdis spoke about Grove Gardens explaining the gardens were left to the people of the community by Haywards Heath resident Joyce Grove. She asked if the Town Council could offer suggestions as how to fund new facilities at Grove gardens, there is currently no plumbing on the site. She said that long term goals were to have a meeting room, toilet facilities and signposting to the garden. Short term the garden needs temporary facilities to allow group visits and events. She also noted the state of the alley way behind Barclays bank. *Cllr Lucraft thanked Michelle for her question he said the Town Council would be interested in helping and this was something the Environmental and General Purposes Committee could look into.*

The Mayor announced the end of the pre-prescribed questions and the floor was then open to further questions.

Cllr S Wickremaratchi stated that in the Haywards Heath Town Councils vision document the council said they were going to revisit the South and Sussex Road free parking which was extended from half an hour to one hour last year in consultation with retailers and residents. He advised this had been well received by the shoppers and retailers to help small businesses in the town. Cllr Wickremaratchi stated that he could not understand why the Town Council would want to revise this, being that it is not under the remit of the Town Council. He also noted his dissatisfaction with the increase in parking charges, including Sundays made by MSDC which in his opinion undermines the high street. He wanted to ask MSDC Cllrs present to endorse that they voted against raising the parking charges. *Cllr Lucraft answered, regarding the parking times in South Road and keeping on street parking free, saying there was a need to ensure there was reasonable use of parking spaces to encourage more people to be able to use the shops and make sure the timing of charges is working for businesses. There is an intention to undertake a review. The MSDC policy in place (agreed in 2020) is to implement a more modern parking system. A report can be found on the district council website. This year the new MSDC administration has implemented the policy.*

Ruth De-Mierre spoke, firstly she wanted to thank the Council for publicising the 'Ride for a Reason' bike ride on the 19th May. She said there was still time to sign up to ride and marshals were still needed. Secondly, she asked if the council was undertaking a review on CPZ's (Controlled Parking Zones) and what the council's thoughts were. *Cllr Lucraft answered saying he was not aware of a review of CPZ's in Haywards Heath at this stage. So far there were no CPZ's present in Haywards Heath.*

Richard Goddard congratulated the councillors on their yearly attendance. He was disappointed to see the implementation of Sunday parking charges. He questioned why with the expansion of Haywards Heath there no extra parking provision which residents would appreciate. He asked would the Town Council look into increasing parking in the town centre? *Cllr Lucraft answered that currently the Mid Sussex District plan was going through review with the Planning Inspectorate, this should be formalised by Autumn 2024. The Town Councils Neighbourhood Plan will then be able to be reviewed, the Town Council can make sure it aligns with the district plan and pick up the carparking issues raised.*

Cllr Ellis said thank you to the new council administration for appreciating the work of Haywards Heath in Bloom. Cllr Ellis thanked all involved in Haywards Heath in Bloom and said she and the team were proud to be representing Britain in Bloom and this only happens with the help of volunteers. *The Mayor thanked Cllr Ellis for all her hard work on the Haywards Heath in Bloom Committee.*

Matt Mackay was also unhappy with the new Sunday parking charges and wanted to know when Victoria Park was going to be refurbished. *Cllr Lucraft advised these were both under the remit of the District Council. District Councillor Richard Bates advised work was about to start on Victoria Park.*

Mike Pulfer spoke, he complimented the Mayor on an outstanding first year in office. He was disappointed in the annual report document produced for 2023/2024. He said when the new administration took over at the Town Council it inherited an economically viable Town Council. He observed the comments on Hurst Farm which the current administration has also inherited. He wonders if the provision of the school will ever go ahead. He spoke of his disappointment in the raise in the councils precept noting that although only 64pence its still adds to residents cost of living. He also noted the previous administration undertook the administration of Hurst Farm without extra staff. He asked Cllr Lucraft to explain why the increase in staff was necessary and to clarify the comments made concerning the previous administration always underfunding and not raising the precept sufficiently each year. *Cllr Lucraft answered by saying firstly the councils staff cost rose in line with inflation and in addition to that the council decided to put money into extra staff resources. He noted that although Mr Pulfer said that the previous administration had a resilient structure, even now with an extra 2 part time members of staff and the council now has 15 staff (not full-time equivalents) there was little resilience in terms of back up. Two part time members of staff have been employed, one to support the work of the committees and the other to support the community and events. The Town Council is trying to offer more community support to bridge the gap where the County and District Councils are lacking in funding to give to local organisations. Across the country lots of councils are running into problems because of lack of funding from Government, and Cllr Lucraft felt this needs to be addressed in this Country. He said he believes in local government and feels we need to have strong local government so we can do more to support our communities, and that is the reason the Town Council put extra funds into the budget.*

Madeline Coulson wanted to ask that everyone show appreciation to Cllr Ellis for her incredible work on Haywards Heath in Bloom, she understands it's a team effort but Cllr Ellis goes above and beyond. *Cllr Lucraft agreed with the statement. He also asked if anyone had the time and energy, please get involved in local organisations to help improve our town.*

Mr AJ Pritchard wanted to know what was happening to Clair Hall, he had read reports saying the Town Council had aspirations to take over running Clair Hall. He wanted to know how the Town Council could do this. Secondly, he asked what is the plan for Clair Hall. *Cllr Lucraft said there were constraints on what he could say because there is still work underway at the district council regarding the future of Clair Hall. Clair Hall is owned by the District Council the Town Council have said they are there to support the future of Clair Hall if asked to. He was unable to say more.*

Clare Cheney asked about comments in the Town Councils Green paper about 15 minute cities, she wondered what this meant and if it would entail costs for motorists. *Cllr Lucraft answered by saying the green paper was looking at how to enable people to reach everything they need with less use of cars. Environment is a key issue. There was no intention as far as he understands to bring tax zones into Haywards Heath.*

John Sabin spoke and asked a question about Victoria Park, he said that the MSDC leader had stated that the District Council would not be handing over the park to the Town Council. So why is it still in the Town Councils plan for the future? How would ownership of the park be funded? *Cllr Lucraft explained in the Town Councils vision document it championed the view that the Town Council has a role in the future of Victoria Park and also Clair Park, the thinking being that it is a reasonable aspiration for the Town Council, it means the Town Council are trying to ensure that both parks are kept as vibrant parks for the community. As The Town Council do not currently own the park, they do not have the issue of how it would be funded. Cllr Lucraft said it's not unreasonable to champion the park and if in the future the Town Council were asked to own and manage the park it would be interested in doing so.*

The Mayor asked if there were any more questions, none were raised and so she thanked everyone for their attendance and **the meeting closed at 9.18pm**

Town Mayor