

Uckfield Leisure Centre: Supporting Briefing Document

Long-term issues, structural barriers, and community need

(Factual, neutral, evidence-based)

1. Purpose of this document

This briefing summarises the long-term issues affecting Uckfield Leisure Centre and highlights key areas not addressed in recent public communications. It is designed to support media, councillors, parish councils, ESCC, Wealden District Council and residents in understanding the wider context behind the community's concerns.

The aim is not political. It is factual, evidence-based, and focused on community need.

2. Twenty years of under-funding

Over the past two decades, Uckfield Leisure Centre has received approximately £50,000 per year in support — almost entirely operational, not capital.

During the same period, £450,000 per year has been spent on the Winnie-the-Pooh visitor attraction.

This disparity matters because Uckfield Leisure Centre:

- ***is a core community asset***
- ***serves multiple parishes***
- ***supports health, education, youth welfare and NHS rehabilitation***
- ***has no alternative provision***
- ***is under pressure from population growth***

The evidence shows Uckfield has not received the level of investment required to maintain, modernise or expand its facilities.

3. Operational spend vs capital investment

Most funding allocated to Uckfield has been:

- ***operational***
- ***maintenance-based***
- ***short-term***
- ***reactive***

Very little has been:

- ***capital investment***
- ***infrastructure development***
- ***long-term planning***
- ***capacity expansion***
- ***modernisation***

This is why:

- ***the building is ageing***
- ***the sports hall is oversubscribed***
- ***the swimming pool is at capacity***
- ***fitness classes are full***
- ***youth provision is limited***
- ***accessibility is constrained***
- ***community groups struggle for space***

Refurbishment is welcome, but refurbishment is not capital development.

4. Funding has not been direct — it has been shared, grant-based and reactive

Uckfield has not received:

- ***direct capital investment***
- ***direct infrastructure funding***
- ***direct long-term development funding***

Instead, it has relied on:

- ***shared funding***
- ***partnership grants***
- ***Sport England grants***
- ***Freedom Leisure contributions***
- ***reactive refurbishment funding***

Grant-based funding is not a substitute for strategic investment. It does not modernise infrastructure or expand capacity.

5. Past funding restrictions: austerity, COVID and historic strategy

Historic decisions were shaped by:

- **austerity reducing capital budgets**
- **COVID forcing emergency spending**
- **leisure not being recognised as health infrastructure**
- **a strategy focused on “north and south only”**
- **a plan to close two centres in the middle**
- **lower demand at the time**
- **limited recognition of health and youth dependency**

These decisions made sense at the time, but the world has changed:

- **demand has increased**
- **health dependency has grown**
- **youth need has risen**
- **housing growth has accelerated**
- **Uckfield’s catchment has expanded**

The old strategy is now outdated.

6. Split Ownership: The Structural Funding Problem Between ESCC and Wealden

This is the central structural barrier behind 20 years of under-investment.

Who owns what?

- **East Sussex County Council (ESCC) owns the land and the school.**
- **Wealden District Council (WDC) leases the building and is responsible for maintenance and improvements.**
- **Freedom Leisure operates the service.**

What this means in practice:

No single authority is responsible for:

- **capital investment**
- **infrastructure**
- **modernisation**

- *long-term planning*

This split ownership has created:

- *delays*
- *confusion*
- *stalled projects*
- *reactive refurbishment*
- *lack of accountability*
- *lack of strategic development*
- *long-term paralysis*

The pool closure example

A pipe failed. The pool had to be drained. Repairs were delayed for months. ESCC and Wealden disputed responsibility. Residents lost access for six months. The issue was governance, not cost.

This is the clearest illustration of the structural flaw.

Statement from Councillor Kelvin Williams

Wealden Councillor Kelvin Williams, Alliance for Wealden (Liberal Democrat) and Lead Councillor for Public Health and Asset Management, has acknowledged that long-term capital investment is complicated by the split responsibilities between East Sussex County Council and Wealden District Council. He noted that clarity over future governance structures is important when considering major funding commitments.

This reflects the structural reality without political interpretation.

Why Lower Dicker received funding

Lower Dicker sits within one authority's remit, making capital investment straightforward. Uckfield's split ownership makes capital investment difficult.

This explains the disparity.

7. Issues not addressed in the recent press release

The press release published on 26 August 2026 did not address:

- *the long-term leisure contract*
- *the procurement timeline*

- *the operator selection process*
- *the future service model*
- *catchment pressures*
- *population growth*
- *infrastructure needs*
- *youth welfare*
- *education dependency*
- *NHS dependency*
- *transport hub role*
- *impact of Heathfield's closure*
- *housing expansion*
- *school capacity pressures*
- *accessibility challenges*
- *community group demand*
- *long-term investment strategy*

These are the core issues affecting Uckfield.

8. Uckfield's role as a transport hub

Uckfield is the north–south–east–west transport hub for Wealden.

It serves:

- *Buxted*
- *Maresfield*
- *Framfield*
- *Halland*
- *Ridgewood*
- *new housing developments*
- *rural villages with no leisure provision*
- *Heathfield*

This means Uckfield carries far greater catchment pressure than Hailsham or Crowborough.

9. Impact of Heathfield Leisure Centre closure — Uckfield now serves TWO towns

The closure of Heathfield Leisure Centre has:

- ***displaced thousands of users***
- ***increased demand on Uckfield***
- ***reduced local options***
- ***created pressure on swimming lessons***
- ***increased sports hall demand***
- ***increased gym usage***
- ***increased youth activity demand***

Uckfield now serves two towns, not one. This was never planned for. It is not addressed in the press release.

10. Housing growth and population expansion

Uckfield is experiencing the fastest housing growth in Wealden, including:

- ***Ridgewood Farm***
- ***Bird in Eye***
- ***Pine Grove***
- ***multiple infill developments***
- ***surrounding parish expansion***

This growth increases demand for:

- ***swimming***
- ***fitness***
- ***youth programmes***
- ***school partnerships***
- ***NHS rehabilitation***
- ***community space***

Future demand is not addressed in the press release.

11. School pressures and education dependency

Uckfield College is:

- ***one of the largest schools in the district***
- ***growing***
- ***under pressure for space***
- ***reliant on the leisure centre for sports provision***
- ***dependent on shared facilities***

Future growth will require:

- ***more sports hall access***
- ***more pool access***
- ***more community space***
- ***more youth provision***

This is not addressed in the press release.

12. Multi-age dependency — from very young to very old

Uckfield Leisure Centre supports:

- ***early years swimming***
- ***children's holiday activities***
- ***teen fitness and youth programmes***
- ***school partnerships***
- ***adult fitness***
- ***NHS rehabilitation***
- ***Stronger for Life***
- ***long-term condition support***
- ***older adult programmes***
- ***social connection for isolated residents***

Uckfield is not just a leisure centre — it is a multi-generational wellbeing hub.

13. Health has become a core component

Uckfield supports:

- ***NHS rehabilitation***
- ***Stronger for Life***
- ***long-term condition management***
- ***mental health activity***
- ***Active Sussex partnerships***
- ***Health education (One You)***

Cancer rehabilitation is at Hailsham, not Uckfield.

Health is now a central function, not a side activity. This requires:

- ***investment***
- ***space***
- ***staffing***
- ***long-term planning***

The press release mentions NHS partnership but does not address the scale of need.

14. Why Uckfield deserves more

Based on the evidence:

- ***largest town***
- ***fastest growth***
- ***multi-parish catchment***
- ***transport hub***
- ***no alternative provision***
- ***youth deprivation***
- ***school dependency***
- ***NHS dependency***
- ***housing expansion***
- ***infrastructure strain***

- *historic under-investment*
- *impact of Heathfield closure*

Uckfield is the highest-need leisure centre in Wealden.

15. A cross-party opportunity

This is not political.

It is an opportunity for councillors of all parties to:

- *put differences aside*
- *support a community asset*
- *deliver what residents expect*
- *create a modern leisure and wellbeing hub*
- *set an example for the district*
- *show leadership*
- *demonstrate unity*
- *deliver long-term value*

Everyone can win.

16. A model for the future

Uckfield has the opportunity to become:

- *a modern leisure centre*
- *a wellbeing hub*
- *a youth support centre*
- *an NHS partnership site*
- *a community anchor*
- *a district-wide example*
- *a national model for integrated leisure and health*

This is the moment to plan for the next 15 years.

17. Evidence base

All supporting evidence, data, investment analysis and catchment information is available at:

**Website: <https://sites.google.com/view/uckfieldleisurecentrecampaign>
([sites.google.com](#) in Bing)**