

Minutes of the Isfield Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 15th December 2020. This meeting was held on Zoom.

54. Present

Cllrs G Sambrook, R Levett, A Keys, T Mitchell-Cobb, K Meakin and S Cramond.

County Councillor and District Councillor Roy Galley, Alison Stevens (Clerk) and one member of the public were also in attendance.

55. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

56. Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 23rd November 2020

The Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 23rd November 2020 were read, confirmed and signed as a true and accurate record by the Chairman.

57. Clerk's Report on Matters Arising not covered elsewhere on this agenda

All matters arising relevant to this meeting were covered elsewhere on the agenda.

58. Disclosures of Interest.

There were no declarations of interest nor were there any changes to the Register of Interests.

The meeting was then suspended.

59. Report from the County and District Councillor Roy Galley

District Councillor Galley said Wealden;

- Will not be increasing its share of the precept for 2021-2022 because too many people are currently experiencing hardship. Members' allowances or staff pay will also not increase.
- Has started its Local Plan – the Direction of Travel Consultation runs until 18th January. Details of the consultation can be found at <https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/wealden-local-plan-direction-of-travel-consultation/>

District Councillor Galley also;

- Explained what happens when the Parish Council disagrees with a Decision made by the Planning Officer. He said the application is referred to him for a decision so the responsibility ultimately lies with him but officers do always try and take the Parish Council's comments into account.
- Said that planning application WD/2020/1711/F (Culpepers, Buckham Hill) has been approved as long as it has adequate screening.

60. Questions from Members of the Public.

There were no questions from any members of the public.

The meeting was then reopened.

61. Planning Report – the following planning applications were considered;

WD/2020/2289/F - The Old Chapel, Station Road, Isfield, TN22 5XP - Two storey side extension and addition of dormers – Isfield Parish Council has no objections on any planning grounds to this application.

WD/2020/2170/LDE - Brook Lodge Farm, Rose Hill, Isfield, TN22 5UH - The use of the static home and lean-to extension at brook lodge farm as a separate self-contained residential unit – Isfield Parish Council has no objections to this application.

62. Wealden Local Plan Direction of Travel Consultation – Having carefully considered the Wealden Local Plan Direction of Travel Consultation Councillors resolved to send the following response;

Introduction

Isfield Parish Council's comments on the Wealden Local Plan - Direction of Travel document are, we trust, clear. However, we also feel that there are some broader philosophical issues that should be addressed.

Wealden is a rural district, and one has to accept that the inhabitants have made a conscious decision to live in such a rural environment. There has to be an understanding that communities grow organically, and that in assessing possible development it should be clear that unilaterally turning small villages into large ones, large ones into small towns, and small towns into - effectively - dormitory lands risks changing peoples' lives by government/planning authority diktat.

This is an important principal, and the needs of existing inhabitants should not be trumped by those of putative new ones. Large-scale developments with SANGS bolted on to pay lip service to idea that the area remains rural would result in a significant imposed change to the lives of many inhabitants of the District.

We trust that this will be at the forefront of the next stage of the development of the Local Plan.

Question 1: Tackling Climate Change:

- 1: Are there any issues or challenges that we have missed?

- The problem of continual building on flood plains has been missed. There is a need to exclude areas where you can't build from the plan and this may lead to ever smaller areas for development with much higher densities.
- There is no mention of (a) low carbon building techniques or (b) low energy house design.

- 2: Do you agree with the proposed policy options?

- 3: Do you disagree with any of the options?

- Option 6 (enabling carbon sequestration) should be removed

- 4: Are there any other policy options we should be considering?

- There should be a ban on use of gas or oil (heating, cooking, etc) in new housing development.

- There must be i) advisory and financial assistance with installation of renewable energy solutions and ii) sufficient infrastructure to enable green energy solutions to be fully available.
- Consider tools for reducing carbon emissions – eg; amended business rates and council tax
- Include stipulations in development contracts to reduce emissions
- Reflect the need for off-site parking for any new development (one per bedroom?) including mandatory charging points
- Building should be close to work (ideally) and not increase commuting.

5: Do you have any other comments in relation to how we plan to combat climate change?

Question 2: Infrastructure to Support Growth:

6: Are there any issues or challenges that we have missed?

- The section on social care is extremely important – provision for social care homes needs to increase, as the problem of adequacy of social care places is getting worse.
- The problem of infrastructure coming *after* development and from other sources is not really addressed. The only 'tool' appears to be CIL to mitigate infrastructure developments

7: Do you agree with the proposed policy options?

8: Do you disagree with any of the options?

- Directing development to 'sustainable locations' will concentrate development in fewer places and favour large developments
- How will 'require & ensure' that infrastructure components are delivered and be legally enforceable?
- 'Sustainable settlement' – school, pub, shops, - live under lockdown with facilities available – appears totally subjective with no formal meaning.

9: Are there any other policy options we should be considering?

- S106 is a contract that can be enforced; if CIL is not paid, developments can be enforced – consider use of Performance Bonds – problem seems to be willingness to enforce, rather than lack of enforcement mechanisms.
- Rates of CIL should be tailored to the quality of development – higher CIL for poorer quality development
- Rural areas must have reliable superfast broadband if working from home/working locally is ever to be viable long term.

10: Do you have any other comments in relation to how we can support the delivery of infrastructure within Wealden?

Question 3: Housing:

11: Are there any issues or challenges that we have missed?

- We should emphasise our agreement to protect the rural environment.
- The statutory duty to enhance and conserve AONB's appears to be overlooked – these legal obligations are legally enforceable and should come first as the housing target alone is not legally binding
- Where is desire to build 1 or 2 bed properties, building for key workers? This area of need is not explored.
- There is no mention second homes – why should WDC provide 2nd homes?

12: Do you agree with the proposed policy options?

- Clarification needed on the number of houses where planning has been granted but building is (a) not complete or (b) not started; is the 1,200 target for 'builds' or for 'planning grants'?
- What does 'consider the housing need for' actually mean?
- 'Housing requirements for designated neighbourhood areas' – what does this mean – development boundaries?

13: Do you disagree with any of the options?

- The need to support other areas was somewhat vague and we're not clear whether the Plan covers the Eastbourne issue. If not, it seems quite remiss. New housing targets don't make much difference to Wealden (the target is not legally binding) – Eastbourne and Lewes may be after help with their numbers (which have gone up)

14: Are there any other policy options we should be considering?

- The Brownfield site register is not used enough nor rigorous enough, are there powers for the compulsory purchase of brownfield sites for housing development?
- Assess the impact on 'brownfield sites' if office and redundant retail sites are no longer required due to changes in patterns of work
- The planning committee can refuse a plan with the wrong housing mix – once in the policy, then the planning committee can refuse it

15: Do you have any other comments in relation to how we can plan to deliver housing, including the range, type, size and tenure.

- Policy on down-sizing to deal with empty rooms – what is it?

Question 4: Affordable Housing:

16: Are there any issues or challenges that we have missed?

- Under-occupation and lack of affordable housing in the north of the district suggests that permission for large dwellings is not meeting the needs of local people. WDC should be far more ambitious in the build and provision of social housing, given the high unaffordability of WDC housing as a proportion of the total.
- Lack of affordable housing for local workers close to their place of work is a real threat to the rural economy.

17: Do you agree with the proposed policy options?

18: Do you disagree with any of the options?

19: Are there any other policy options we should be considering?

20: Do you have any other comments in relation to how we can plan to deliver affordable housing, including the range, type and tenure.

- Consider Minimum density target for housing – this would help in the building of smaller houses, avoiding large under occupied houses.
- Renting – if WDC can't get the right mix through planning, then they need to do it themselves (ie WDC social housing)

Question 5: Our Local Economy:

- 21: Are there any issues or challenges that we have missed?
- Almost nothing in the consultation document about the role of agricultural and rural workers contribution to the local economy
- 22: Do you agree with the proposed policy options?
- 23: Do you disagree with any of the options?
- 24: Are there any other policy options we should be considering?
- Energy requirements on businesses as well as on housing
 - Scope for adding in climate change mitigation (solar panels, tree planting., etc) – needs to be in the document
 - Doesn't all need to be concrete between buildings.
- 25: Do you have any other comments in relation to how we can plan for employment within the urban and rural areas of our district?
- Local economy & the growth of small businesses needs to be supported; this fits with the dispersed housing option

Question 6: Our Town and Local Centres:

- 26: Are there any issues or challenges that we have missed?
- 27: Do you agree with the proposed policy options?
- 28: Do you disagree with any of the options?
- Chasing large retailers for out of town and in town developments seems highly speculative and to be discouraged
 - It is time to recognise that online shopping is here to stay and accept more town centre development plans instead of an 'ad hoc' approach
- 29: Are there any other policy options we should be considering?
- 30: Do you have any other comments in relation to how we can plan for retail in our town and local centres?

Question 7: Tourism:

- 31: Are there any issues or challenges that we have missed?
- More information is required on tourism – eg what are the biggest tourist draws in Wealden?
 - Equestrian activities (and use/maintenance of bridleways) as a tourist opportunity has been completely overlooked
- 32: Do you agree with the proposed policy options?
- 33: Do you disagree with any of the options?
- 34: Are there any other policy options we should be considering?

35: Do you have any other comments in relation to how we plan for tourism and culture within the district?

- We'd expect to see more details of types and locations of tourism before going into details on accommodation (which seems to be a fixation of this section).

Question 8: Our Natural Environment:

36: Are there any issues or challenges that we have missed?

37: Do you agree with the proposed policy options?

38: Do you disagree with any of the options?

39: Are there any other policy options we should be considering?

- 10% increase in bio-diversity required for all new developments (following Government guidelines) – bonds, trees, thick hedges, bat boxes, etc
- 1,000 seedlings for every tree chopped down?

40: Do you have any other comments in relation to how we can plan for biodiversity within the district?

Question 9: Our Natural Environment Cont....

41: Are there any issues or challenges that we have missed?

42: Do you agree with the proposed policy options?

43: Do you disagree with any of the options?

44: Are there any other policy options we should be considering?

45: Do you have any other comments in relation to how we can plan for green infrastructure and green/blue spaces within the district?

- "Legal duty to enhance and conserve the AONB" – please do not equate mitigation with 'enhance and conserve' as it is incorrect and intellectually dishonest.

Question 10: Our Landscape, Heritage and Cultural Assets:

46: Are there any issues or challenges that we have missed?

- East Sussex has the largest amount of ancient woodland in the UK and is second only to Surrey in the amount of wooded area in any county. An acknowledgement of this in a policy such as 'Developments cannot occur within a certain distance of ancient woodland' would be welcome.
- We'd expect to see something stronger than 'consider' with regard to protecting and enhancing the rural landscape - at 74%, it is the largest component of Wealden's landscape and bio-diversity

47: Do you agree with the proposed policy options?

48: Do you disagree with any of the options?

49: Are there any other policy options we should be considering?

- Allotments and community orchards required for all large developments

50: Do you have any other comments in relation to how we can plan for landscape within the district?

- The section on Landscape is pretty woolly and the links with building seem tenuous.

Question 11: Our Landscape, Heritage and Cultural Assets:

51: Are there any issues or challenges that we have missed?

52: Do you agree with the proposed policy options?

53: Do you disagree with any of the options?

54: Are there any other policy options we should be considering?

55: Do you have any other comments in relation to how we can plan for heritage and cultural assets within the district?

Question 12: Design:

56: Are there any issues or challenges that we have missed?

57: Do you agree with the proposed policy options?

58: Do you disagree with any of the options?

59: Are there any other policy options we should be considering?

60: Do you have any other comments in relation to how we can plan for high quality development through good design within the district?

Question 13: Health and Well-Being:

61: Are there any issues or challenges that we have missed?

- The health aspects have not been properly dealt with and that obesity is an out of control health epidemic. The options in question 13 seemed decorative, ticking boxes – space in the development rather than space outside?
- The 'Healthy Wealden' and policy options seem to be drawn from a very small and narrow activity base and type of facility. Where are rights of way, bridleways and other open spaces (eg; National Trust) as they do not appear in the consultation document. The focus seems limited to 'country parks' yet there are many other open spaces and methods to get to them throughout Wealden.

62: Do you agree with the proposed policy options?

63: Do you disagree with any of the options?

64: Are there any other policy options we should be considering?

65: Do you have any other comments in relation to how we can plan for health and wellbeing within the district? Wealden, ESCC and the NHS/PHE should be coordinating healthy living activities, as the combined efforts are puny in relation to the scale of the problem, not least among children.

Question 14: Our Growth Options:

66: Are there any spatial distribution options we have missed?

- Problem last time was of drawing development boundaries too tightly around existing settlements

67: What is your preferred option or combination of options in order of preference?

- The aim should be to avoid 'shock' growth and avoid disproportionate growth being placed on Isfield, which suggests Option 3. The impacts of the acceleration of online shopping and the availability of brownfield sites in towns suggest Option 2.
- WDC has approximately 70,000 dwellings. The annual obligation of 1,200 is 1.7%; that's theoretically 4 houses a year for Isfield under Option 3.

68: Do you disagree with any of the options presented?

- The multiple cross dependencies of infrastructure, water scarcity, lack of scalability, (for small villages like Isfield) makes the report read like sections that are talking past one another; the options are not 'either/or' but should be considered as a blend.

69: What views do you have about the possibility of a new settlement somewhere in the district to provide a large proportion of development needs?

- Legal constraints not taken into account – legally cannot build in the AONB – option 4 is rubbish – again approaching it from the wrong end of the matter. (it is unlikely that there would be any new railway stations in WDC, bus services are in a poor state and this option would increase the number of car movements on the poorly maintained roads).

70: Where do you think a possible new settlement could be located and why? It follows on from our previous comments that this suggestion is ill considered. It would increase travel to work, as there is no major employment in the area, with all the concomitant environmental damage.

63. Parish Council Website – Councillors resolved to set up a new website to meet the requirements of the latest Accessibility Regulations. Councillors agreed to appoint Narkedesign because they offer a user friendly design which does what the Parish Council needs at a very competitive price. They also have experience of working with other Parish Councils and offer a support service.

Councillor Levett will now look into changing domain names.

64. Questions from Parish Councillors.

Councillor Meakin asked if it is possible to put up signs asking drivers not to follow their sat navs, to help reduce the number of heavy lorries driving through the village and in particular through Buckham Hill. Councillor Crammond suggested weight/width restriction signs might be more effective. The Clerk will ask Highways. Ideally signs will also be placed at the A26 junctions with Old Ship, Horsted lane, Kiln Lane and the Peacock/Buckham Hill.

Councillors asked for 'allotments' to be an item on the January agenda.