

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

THE VILLAGE HALL, ISFIELD

WEDNESDAY 21ST MAY 2025

MINUTES

Present:

Cllr's Sambrook, Keys, Mitchell-Cobb, Crammond and Roundell – Chair of Isfield Parish Council.

A Emery – Clerk/RFO to Isfield Parish Council.

Cllr Coleman (Wealden District Council)

Cllr Galley (East Sussex County Council)

1 member of the public

1. Annual Report: Cllr Sambrook, Chair of the Parish Council.

Cllr Sambrook welcomed all and reported as follows;

“May you live in interesting times.” This is - probably erroneously - often cited as a Chinese curse, although no Chinese source for it has ever been proved. In reality, it seems more likely to have emerged in various bits of correspondence by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century politicians, Joseph, Austen and Neville Chamberlain. They did live in interesting times, and I shall come back in a moment to the relevance of this curse to the community of Isfield.

Anyway, it has always been my contention that the primary function of the parish Council is to ensure that it is financially robust. We held the precept unchanged through the period of the pandemic and its immediate aftermath as we felt it was unfair to burden already strained household budgets. Since then, however, we have made some small increases, frankly because we face increased costs from the suppliers of goods and services which we need to ensure the smooth running of those issues which we have an obligation to maintain. I can confirm that our financial position remains robust.

During this year, we used some of the developer money (Section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy) which we hold to build a footway around the recreation ground; this has two purposes - first, it facilitates access without getting soaking wet feet in the winter to the children's play area, and secondly, it offers an alternative route, enabling the avoidance of part of Station Road which has no footpath. We owe Councillor Keys our thanks for his hard work in getting this project done.

There is another point concerning the recreation ground. There are numerous notices saying “NO DOGS”. This is not because of an anti-canine prejudice amongst the Councillors (most of us have dogs), but because adults and children play sports and games on the field, and the consequences of canine defecation are potentially both extremely unpleasant, and indeed possibly health threatening. The answer I was given when I pointed this out to one person - “I’ve always exercised my dog here - why should I stop” - is not acceptable. This is a facility for the sports clubs and the children.

So, what are the “interesting times”? Well, we see during the course of the year, numerous planning applications, and I hope that the majority of residents understand that our approach is broadly favourable to proportionate development, which largely maintains the rural environment in which people have chosen to live. However, for a variety of reasons (and I am not making any political point here) there are very large housing developments proposed which would potentially change the nature of Isfield and other Wealden villages out of all recognition. I do believe that over the course of the next year, this is going to be the defining issue on which the Council will have to focus. I do therefore urge any residents who have an opinion on these matters to make their comments known to the Councillors.

One other point I should make is that there is a threatened reform of local government in the offing, which is why you didn't get to vote for your County Councillors at the beginning of May. I'm not going to comment on that here, but since it will remove one layer of local democracy, it is possible that the responsibilities of Parish Councils may be widened. Currently, we have two vacancies on the Council; in these circumstances, we should be very pleased to welcome new members.

Finally, my thanks. First - and frankly probably most important - to Anita, who has stepped in as Parish Clerk, and does the job splendidly; she is helpful, knowledgeable, efficient and makes sure we follow the rules under which we have to play. Next, to my fellow Councillors, for their support and their hard work in getting things done. Then to our District Councillor, Christina, who is helpful, informative and very definitely fully engaged with the communities in her Ward. Finally, Roy, our County Councillor, who has dispensed knowledge and wisdom to us for many years. A sincere thank you to all of them.

2. Report from the County Councillor. – Cllr Roy Galley

1. East Sussex County Council. The Current Financial position

East Sussex like all other local authorities receives its income primarily from Council Tax and Business Rates. There are government grants from time to time for specific projects.

We are not a wealthy County with few big businesses paying tax,

Of the total net budget circa £550 million, 76% is spent on Adult Social Care and Children's care. With increasing demand for these services, we are having to use reserves and make cuts to services.

There has been a wide consultation and all councillors and officers are concerned about the impact on vulnerable people. As a result some proposed cuts have been amended or are being reconsidered. Nevertheless some cuts will have to go ahead because the money is just not available.

It is difficult to see a positive way forward. Council tax is already high and we cannot borrow more. Nationally we are in a fix. Spending as a proportion of our national wealth (Gross Domestic Product) is at historically high levels, we are borrowing almost as much as our total wealth (GDP) and taxes have never been higher.

The chance therefore of national government bailing out local government is not very high.

The Government are apparently looking at the criteria for children being given Education, Health and Care plans which is one of the drivers for increased spend on children.

The future looks a bit bleak.

2.LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION>

The government plan to have elections for a Sussex Mayor in May 2026 and preparations are being made for this.

The other big debate is about the size and shape of the Unitary authorities. Government criteria suggest half a million residents as a guide and East Sussex has a population of 560.000. The government are also concerned that existing services are not "disaggregated". In other words that successful services for adult and children's care are not split up unnecessarily.

The current boundaries of East Sussex seems to fit the criteria. Most District and Borough Councils seem to agree the County Council view that East Sussex should stay together. There is a lot of debate about what will happen to West Sussex and Brighton and Hove which will, of course, affect East Sussex.

There will be considerable financial problems for a new unitary authority. Eastbourne Borough Council is apparently in debt to the tune of £22 million. The finances of Hastings, Lewes and Rother are difficult. The only Council with any money is Wealden after 20 years -of good management. However, the current administration seems intent on spending this before local government is reorganised,

3.ROADS

In 2024 year we have managed to spend more on local roads although not as much as the previous year. I'm pleased to have made progress on a lot of small schemes as well as bigger ones in Maresfield High St, Nutley High St and Danehill.

3. Annual Report from the District Councillor. – Cllr Christina Coleman

Thank you! In May 2023, you elected me as your District Councillor, along with 11 other Green Councillors. Wealden Residents elected the Green/Lib Dem Alliance for Wealden with a mandate of hopeful change: to create a District where **People and Nature can Thrive Together**.

As we approach the **halfway stage of this administration** it is important to take stock of what we have achieved and assess the work that we have **in front of us**, over the next three years, before Wealden becomes extinct in 2028 (if all goes according to government plans)

We continue to face **unparalleled challenges** both in terms of cost of living; with **inequality, poverty and homelessness on the rise**, but also in terms of **climate change and nature loss**, with more than a million species being threatened with extinction.

We have been focussing on making **Wealden a place where People and Nature can thrive together**. Just some of the examples:

- **20% Reduction in carbon emissions** - facilities directly controlled by the Council
- Secured **Warm Homes Funding** - and improved the energy efficiency of over **1,000 Council owned homes**. (*Wealden has around 3,000*).
- Completed 20 new energy efficient Council homes - EPC A-rated and delivered 777 new affordable homes.
- Adopted a revised Council tax reduction scheme that offers **100% council tax reduction** for 4,000 eligible working age residents in Wealden.
- Funded **12 Community Orchards** (securing £128,000 from the Coronation Heritage Fund)
- Support for the **Wilder Ouse Project** - a collaboration with the Sussex Wildlife Trust, to create a nature recovery network and restore natural processes within the Ouse Catchment. Planting trees and hedgerows and restoring natural flow processes in the river
- Refurbished Hailsham and Uckfield Leisure Centres - Uckfield was facing **closure under the previous administration**.
- Invested £16 million in the Wealden Sports Hub - a not for profit, community benefit facility in **Hailsham, which is one of Wealden's most underserved communities**. The Hub provides improved playing pitches and state-of-the-art sports facilities to help thousands of residents stay healthy it is also designed to draw in harder to reach people and communities. 2000 new trees also planted and the whole facility will be powered by solar. Playpark for people with disability. Employing local people
- Bought land as the first stage in building a brand new £12 million **Medical facility in Polegate**
- Obtained planning permission for a new **medical centre and community facility in Mayfield**.
- Economic development team has supported attracted new businesses in Wealden - seeing a 15% increase in local employment.

- Making sure that Wealden DC buys local where it can - £39million or **40% of Council procurement** has gone to local companies over the last two years.
- Ran an award winning **“Have you been dumped?”** campaign which reduced the amount of fly tipping. 96% of respondents now check for a waste carrier license when using a third party to remove rubbish.
- Increased recycling participation.
- Extended the use of **Hydro-treated Vegetable Oil (HVO)** in the fleet of waste vehicles, which reduces emissions by 90% and improves air quality.
- Increased electric charging provision.
- Agreed allocations of over **£1 million for Community Grant Funding**, which will support partners to deliver projects for Wealden residents such as: Citizen’s Advice, Community Services, Youth Support, Environmental Projects, Health and Well-being, Employment, Training, Arts and Culture. With further increased funding soon to be released.
- Wealden Community Lottery raised over £100,000 and supported over 100 good causes in the District.
- Better engagement - we have run numerous consultations and implemented “Let’s Talk Wealden” online hub.

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation.

Greens protested at the County Council and called for an emergency meeting debate not putting Sussex forward for the Priority Programme. This plea was ignored and the County Council leaders voted for Local Government Reorganisation and “Devolution” to include a Sussex Mayor. This resulted in local elections being cancelled - a major democratic deficit during the largest change to local government in the region for 50 years.

There is a consultation for public and parish councils, which is running for 6 weeks. I have already shared the link. Wealden will submit a final response to the SoS in September.

It is important that PCs attend Parish Clusters. There are opportunities for engagement in deeper focus groups if desired.

Planning - Good and Bad News

* Grampian Conditions - Southern Water, Hailsham.

* Appeal upheld to protect Ancient Woodland - Decision to High Court

Owlsbury Planning Application - now validated. No pre-app and largest single planning application Wealden has ever had. Fairfax. Deadline 22nd June.

Goldbridge Farm - up to 250 new houses. Lewes application.

Local Plan - unrealistic and profoundly damaging housing targets. [2013 - 450](#) now more than 1,400. Vision-led approach to transport.

Demonstrate a 5-year Housing Land Supply. Presumption in favour of development.

Planning and Infrastructure Bill.

Oakleigh Garden Community (4,000+ houses) - not currently an application.

Additional Funding

Councillor Ward Funds: £10,000 per Councillor per ward for community projects. Scheduled to be early July. Minimum of £5K and maximum of £200K

CLIF - Community Led Infrastructure Funding

Funding of £1.5 million available from CLIF and a further £500,000 from climate reserves for eligible projects (£@ million in total). They should be:

For major Community Led projects in the District. Will require 20% match funding. Ideally for volunteers led organisations.

The CLIF will support applications for:

- a. Fit for multipurpose community buildings – construction, alteration, renovation, and improved fit out of multipurpose community buildings.
- b. Cultural infrastructure - creation of, or the improvement of, arts, heritage, culture and creative innovation spaces.
- c. Sustainable and warm community spaces - for example grants for insulation, green power, and/or heat or LED lighting in community facilities.
- d. Greening the district - examples can include projects improving informal open space, existing greening projects, access improvements and walking trails.
- e. Sports, Leisure and recreational infrastructure (that is outside of the scope of the Sports Infrastructure Fund) such as skateparks, multi-use games areas and BMX pump tracks.

Me:

Casework,

5 Parishes in my ward.

I am on 3 Outside Bodies: Court of the University of Sussex; UMIDB; Wealden FoodPartnership

4 Committees: Scrutiny and Performance; Audit and Governance; Standards (Chair) and Planning Committee Minors. attend Cabinet Advisory Groups, training and Full Council meetings.

Project Ripple Effect

4. Report from Clubs and Associations in the Parish

None received.

5. Open Forum

Nothing to note

Meeting closed at 19.30