

# WIVELSFIELD ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

## Draft Minutes of the Meeting Held Wednesday 5 May

7pm via the 'Zoom' Video Conferencing Platform<sup>1</sup>

**Present:** Parish Councillors I Dawson (Chair), N Dutt, I Haffenden, H Martin, R Morris, S Morris, E Pascoe.

Speakers as listed below, Liz Gander (Clerk) and eleven members of the public.

### 1. WELCOME TO SPEAKERS & INTRODUCTION

Ian Dawson (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting which, whilst normally held in March, had been delayed until now owing to covid.

### 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Sergeant Caroline Reynolds had sent her apologies, but PC Haffenden was thanked for stepping in at short notice and taking her place.

### 3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD THURSDAY 12 MARCH 2020

The minutes were agreed to be a true record of the meeting.

### 4. NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING TEAM – SUSSEX POLICE – PC HAFFENDEN

PC Haffenden apologised for not having a huge amount to say having stepped in as the Sussex Police representative for the meeting at the last minute. He advised that PCSO Nick Cox is our local point of contact and PC Haffenden could feed back to him any comments or concerns.

Looking at the area covered by PCSO Cox (Wivelsfield, Ditchling, Streat & Westmeston) there had only been 1-2 stop searches over the last twelve months. The most commonly recorded crime type locally is anti-social behaviour, and this can range from children making a nuisance of themselves to neighbour disputes. There have also been thirteen burglaries (from homes or outbuildings) over the last year.

PC Haffenden invited questions and the following matters were raised.

- Speeding through Wivelsfield Green, particularly along Green Road, South Road and North Common Road: has this been picked up by the police and what might they be able to do? Speeding often seems worse between 5pm and 7pm, is there anything that can be done to curtail people from speeding on their way home?
  - PC Haffenden felt that it would make sense to deal with this on a local level and suggested that it might be good for the police to occasionally have a presence alongside our existing Community Speed Watch team, to record data over a six-week period and feed back to Highways etc as appropriate.
  - John Wigzell (local Speed Watch co-ordinator) said that his team will try to get out during the early evening, to monitor speed when speeding along South Road has been noted. He advised that records from the three principal sites in the village showed 220 'miscreants' in the last three months. However, he also noted that, whilst speeds may feel high, this only equates to between 6 and 9% of motorists exceeding the speed limit.

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with [The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels \(Coronavirus\) \(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#)

- Operation Crackdown – it was said to be frustrating that people reporting vehicle/speeding related issues to Operation Crackdown do not get a notification of what happens. PC Haffenden was asked to follow up on a particular matter.
- PC Haffenden was asked whether he knew anything about the recent case in Wivelsfield where a man parked in a van had been particularly abusive to a lady outside the village shop. PC Haffenden was not familiar with this, but assumed that, as Sussex Police have been appealing for information, it is an active investigation. He advised keeping an eye on Sussex Police's social media channels for further information and will ask Sgt Reynolds to update the Parish Council.

## 5. OUSE & ADUR RIVERS TRUST – RACHEL PAGET

Rachel gave a very informative talk, with the aid of a Power Point presentation, entitled, 'Wivelsfield Flooding and the Future: Becoming a Climate Resilient Community'. She explained that the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust are working in partnership with Lewes District Council (LDC) to help with flood alleviation works in vulnerable communities.

LDC is worried about both historic flooding and future estimates of flooding. Rachel showed a map which indicated areas where they would anticipate flooding in 1 in 30 and 1 in 100 year events. There are several pinch points in the village where water is restricted by culverts and is backing up. The village is on a watershed (one way flows into the Longford stream and the Ouse, the other into the Adur), and clay soils and recent additional development can all contribute to the risk of flooding. At present, LDC considers around 90 properties to be at risk of flooding, but in future, with the trend towards heavier and more intense rainfall and more development, this figure could go up. Our drainage systems are really only built for the 1 in 30 year flood events and anything above this can cause problems.

Natural flood management is a relatively new idea taken on board by the Government and is a way of dealing with water very well. Natural features such as leaky dams, extra trees, swales and retention ponds can all be helpful and involve no hard engineering (although in Wivelsfield, Rachel acknowledged that perhaps some capital works on ditches may also be useful).

Rachel showed a map of places where water could be held back (the aim being to restrict its flow, so that the water can disperse more slowly, rather than risk rushing through and causing flooding). She has spoken to the new owner of West Wood who has agreed to have a number of leaky dams on the north side of the wood on a trial basis (he wants to be able to do coppicing, so doesn't want the woodland to lay wet). These will be put in in the summer and Rachel said they would be keen for local people to get involved, and/or to monitor their effectiveness. They may also put some measures in at the village school; taking rainfall in and putting into storage, to take the top off the flood peak.

Finally, Rachel invited anyone that is particularly interested or can contribute information about areas of flooding, to make contact with her and help feed into the next steps. Rachel's email address is: [rachel.paget@oart.org.uk](mailto:rachel.paget@oart.org.uk)

A number of queries and comments were made in response to the presentation:

- One comment was made about the double-edged sword of blocked ditches; on the one hand not allowing water to flow away freely, on the other helping to slow the progress of water to ease the risk of flooding.
- Another noted that it was interesting to hear that LDC is keen to protect Wivelsfield Green from flooding and felt that this should be noted in the Neighbourhood Plan and included in any objections made to development.
- In response to this, someone else raised the possibly 'slightly cynical' view that this isn't so much LDC trying to protect the village from flooding, but rather that, if they sort out the flood risk it will allow them to put more houses in. Notwithstanding this though, they felt that it was a great piece of work.

- It was noted that Blackmores has been identified on the maps as an area prone to flooding, but that the land behind here is looking to be developed.
- Others raised the issue of flooding in West Wivelsfield, particularly along Theobalds Road and adjacent land. One landowner has been liaising with Tim Bartlett from LDC because, with so much local development and increased surface water run-off, her fields are being flooded and tree roots are being washed away, causing them to fall into the river and bringing power lines down.
  - Rachel advised that she would be pleased to go and have a look.
- Lastly, it was noted that it would be interesting to ask Leigh Palmer what consideration is given to flood risk in the planning process.

## 6. LEWES DISTRICT COUNCIL'S PLANNING TEAM – LEIGH PALMER

With regard to Rachel's presentation, Leigh said that LDC welcomes initiatives around flood mitigation and reminded the Parish Council of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) pot that they may bid into to pay for this kind of infrastructure.

In respect of some 'general housekeeping', Leigh noted that LDC is moving to a monthly (rather than 3-weekly) cycle of planning committees and wanted to draw this to the Parish Council's attention in case it impacted on its meetings. He also apologised that there is currently a backlog of 3<sup>1/2</sup>-4 weeks in validating planning applications. The last quarter has been the busiest the planning department has seen for four years, having seen a big upturn in applications, but with the result that validations are taking a while. They do however now have a dedicated appeals officer in James Emery.

Leigh noted that we will have seen correspondence about the Lewes Local Plan on various platforms. In short they are preparing an 'issues and options' document which will be out for consultation in July. This is a high-level strategy document, which asks very broad questions about how best LDC should go about meeting the housing target it has been given. One option is to disperse housing between all towns and villages. Another is to look at one large settlement. Or there could be a mix between the two. The issues and options document will outline the positives and negatives of each scenario and they will welcome feedback as this will allow LDC to formalise the first stage of the Local Plan in Spring 2022.

Running in parallel to preparation of the issues and options document, LDC has the Land Availability Assessment (LAA) ongoing. They had a 'call for sites,' and officers are evaluating the sites received. The LAA is expected to be published on LDC's website ahead of spring 2022, but Leigh cannot confirm exactly when.

One of the assessment criteria when reviewing the sites is infrastructure, including the highway network, and flood risk. Leigh conceded that, with regard to overcoming the issues of flooding, yes, it can be a double-edged sword, however there may well be other issues such as landscape impact, traffic, archaeological notification and tree preservation which have an impact on the assessment of site suitability.

LDC is currently expected to accommodate 345 new dwellings per year. However, as a result of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), when the Local Plan reaches 'maturity' later this month (ie becomes five years old), the document is considered aged and therefore carries less weight. As such, the housing requirement will be determined by housing need calculations and will jump to 782. From this it is necessary to subtract the dwellings which the South Downs National Park (SDNP) would normally develop (approximately 70-150 dwellings per year) and we are therefore, according to Leigh, looking at an annual figure of around 610 for the rest of the district. Owing to the multiple constraints on development in the district however, including landscape character and flooding, there is a strong possibility that the higher target will not be able to be met.

Leigh acknowledged that people may be wondering why the Local Plan has not been updated in advance of its fifth birthday. He explained that the Local Plan is in two parts, and that the Local Plan Part 2, was only adopted in January 2020. They needed both parts together (not least because Part 2 was needed to give neighbourhood plans greater surety) and it took nearly two years from submitting it to the inspectorate, for the inspectorate to issue a decision letter.

Finally, Leigh said that we might be aware of two recent appeal decisions in Newick, where two residential schemes that had been promoted with developers playing loudly on the benefits of more housing to meet housing need, had been dismissed at appeal because the inspector gave greater weight to the issue of landscape character.

In response, Maria Caulfield pointed out that local plans are meant to be updated on an ongoing basis as live documents and that, if it had been kept updated, there wouldn't be an issue. She said that there is no Government target to increase housing numbers. 782 is the housing need target and if LDC believes that this cannot be met owing to constraints, the planning inspector may well accept the smaller number.

To counter this however, someone pointed out that they felt great sympathy for planners given ten years of austerity under the Conservative Government.

Leigh gave responses to a number of questions as follows:

- He confirmed that the landscape capacity study that was last revised in 2012 will be updated.
- There will be a three-month consultation on the issues and options document.
- The impact of significant development in neighbouring areas on local infrastructure will be taken into consideration, and this will be one of the questions within the issues and options study: is there any merit in apportioning more housing to existing towns?
- In reply to a question about when the new housing figures will take effect, Leigh's response was that they cannot stop anyone putting in an application at any time. However, although the Local Plan will garner less weight, things like landscape impact are still given significant weight as proven in Newick, and LDC has issued an Interim Policy Statement to give direction to planners as to what to look at.
- Leigh confirmed that there is not currently a neighbourhood planning officer in post, however they will be looking to recruit to this role.

The following general comments were also made:

- There has been a loss of use of amenities in neighbouring Mid Sussex, including GP surgeries and the tip, which are causing issues. One would expect facilities to be provided freely in the nearest town, without having to worry about them coming under a particular authority.
- The B2112 is currently closed for a period of around 3 months for water main works and therefore no traffic is able to travel north or south along it. The impact on surrounding roads has been huge, with four vehicles having hit the roof of the bridge on Rocky Lane, causing chaos. We cannot therefore understand why, when traffic surveys are done to support development proposals, it is possible for them to conclude that the local road network is able to take extra traffic, when there is clear evidence to the contrary.
- Finally, talking to estate agents reveals that most people buying properties here are those moving out of London. In many cases it is only people moving out of London who can afford houses here, so they are not meeting local need. Where therefore do these inflated housing needs figures come from?

## **7. MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR LEWES – MARIA CAULFIELD**

In terms of a national update, re covid, they are doing well with the vaccination programme and expect to have most people over the age of eighteen vaccinated by early July. The Government will announce the next stage of lifting restrictions from 17<sup>th</sup> May and details of international travel are currently being negotiated.



The local economy which is heavily dependent upon tourism, the service industry and the arts industry and has been heavily impacted by the pandemic. Over eleven thousand people in the Lewes constituency have been on furlough, and many who had quite a high income before have lost it, meaning there is a need for significant ongoing support.

The Government hopes that when they are able to lift restrictions, they will not need to reimpose them and we will be heading back to a degree of normality.

Maria recognises that access to the Burgess Hill tip is a big issue. The problem is that East Sussex and West Sussex use different contractors and the West Sussex contractors were not happy to take East Sussex waste. They have however come to an arrangement with Surrey County Council to allow some Surrey residents access, so Maria is hoping that they will be able to do the same thing for East Sussex. Maria will be pushing for this over the next few weeks and it is helpful that East and West Sussex County Councils now share the same Chief Executive, Becky Shaw.

Train timetables were severely altered due to covid, but are opening up again now, with extra services. Maria invited anyone whose service hasn't been reinstated to contact her as she is having regular meetings with Southern Rail.

The Neighbourhood Plan is really significant now that the Local Plan is out of date and, if the community is minded to update it, or need assistance, the Government is keen to support this. Neighbourhood plans have been given additional weight and Maria will give any support she can.

Attendees made the following observations and asked some questions:

- One Parish Councillor said that it is disappointing that we are no longer allowed to hold online meetings, particularly as we have experienced an increase in the number of people that have attended since holding them virtually. It seems a retrograde step to have to go back to face to face meetings. This was echoed by a member of the public who said it is brilliant to have 'Zoom' meetings.
  - Maria said that she has received a lot of feedback on this and most towns and parishes have found virtual meetings useful. The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick, would like to give councils the opportunity to use virtual meetings, and the Government is currently consulting upon it, but this will require a change to primary legislation. Maria is as frustrated as us, as it is beneficial to her too, allowing her to attend more meetings, than if having to travel to them in person.
  - Primary legislation *can* be changed in two to three months, however the speed at which this could go through will depend upon what other bills are ahead of it, as this will dictate the timetable.
  - When asked why it is that both Scotland and Wales had changed their laws in time to allow the continuation of virtual meetings, when England hadn't, Maria advised it is because they have a different mechanism for changing legislation (national assemblies) which allow for changes to be made more quickly than in England where laws that have to go through the UK Parliament.
- Someone asked whether, if the Chief Exec of East and West Sussex County Councils is the same, are there any plans to merge the two authorities?
  - Maria advised that in some parts of the country, including Brighton and Hove, there are unitary authorities where everything comes under the one administration, whereas here we have several different tiers of local government.
  - There is a feeling from some that the East and West Sussex areas are too large for a unitary authority to cover, however this is not something that would be imposed by Government, but rather is something that has to be suggested from the grass roots. Maria believes it would perhaps solve a number of problems around infrastructure and how we are impacted.

- It was pointed out that one problem for East Sussex is that, because so little of the road network is of a standard to be under the responsibility of Highways England, East Sussex Highways is responsible for a much bigger proportion of the road structure than authorities in other areas.
  - Maria agreed that this is true and noted that there are only 11 miles of motorway in East and West Sussex (M23), which is much less than, for example, in Surrey. There is little investment in our infrastructure in the South East, outside of London; our roads and railways are quite poor, as are our bus services. Transport for the South East is a new body being created to improve the transport network and grow the economy of the whole South East area, of which East Sussex County Council is a partner. They are asking the Government to take London out of the equation when looking at the South East, to see how poorly served we are.

#### 8. LEWES DISTRICT COUNCILLOR – NANCY BIKSON

Nancy noted that Maria and Leigh had covered so much, that she didn't have a huge amount to add. She wanted to thank Leigh and his planning team, because 80% of the questions she has on planning are answered quickly and effectively.

Nancy apologised that she cannot do anything about the situation with Slugwash Lane [the road surface of which was already in a terrible state and has been made worse by people using it as a detour owing to the Fox Hill water main works]. She explained that, as the Conservative party is not in power at LDC, she is not in the Cabinet, however Nancy is on the Policy and Performance Committee, which gets to scrutinise lots of different things and to make recommendations. A lot of what LDC does is based upon Lewes town and Wivelsfield is clearly very unlike Lewes. Nancy and others' jobs is therefore to fly the flag for the rural areas. Much of what Nancy gets contacted about by residents relates to planning, fly tipping and climate change.

#### 9. WIVELSFIELD VILLAGE HALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – PETER BURTON

Peter said he hoped that by now, most people knew a bit about the Hall Improvement Project and what it is going to do. The good news is that funding is in place, we have appointed a preferred contractor, are in the latter stages of finalising the contract and the work will hopefully start on 17<sup>th</sup> May.

They have been working very closely with Playgroup to try to keep them in the Hall, however for some asbestos removal work the Hall will need to be completely vacated, so Playgroup will move into the pavilion for the last couple of weeks of the summer term. The work is due to run for 24 weeks, from 17<sup>th</sup> May to the end of October, and they are very happy to be in the position they are in, thanks to the Parish Council's support and that of a number of residents.

There will be a number of amenities becoming available, including publicly accessible toilets. For more information, please see the most recent (May) copy of the Wivelsfield News, which outlines what the upgrades and improvements will be.

#### 10. WIVELSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL – CHAIRMAN, IAN DAWSON

The Chair introduced his fellow Parish Councillors and the Clerk to those present. He noted that the Council had seen a couple of departures in the last few months and would like to thank Nick Jackson and Bernard Rust for their involvement; they will be sorely missed.

Covid has had an impact nationally and in our area. The Parish Council has had to adapt and has held meetings over Zoom, as well as switching to making electronic payments. This is however the last meeting that we will be able to hold virtually (for now at least) and we will be returning to face-to-face meetings from now on.

Outside of the Parish Council, the Coronavirus Buddies group has stepped up and there has been a real effort from the people involved (with a little financial support from the Parish Council).

Putting in place the funding for the Hall Improvement Project has been a supreme effort from all involved. Funds have been raised through a fundraising group, a grant awards group, via a Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) application and through the Community Infrastructure Levy. Having all the funds in place is excellent as it will enable the Project to be completed as a single entity (rather than in stages as was originally envisaged) and this will mean a shorter overall timescale and lower cost. The Chair wished to extend particular thanks to Peter and Liz Burton, Sue Morris and Barbara Harty, as well as Gary Thompson, the very supportive architect, and Liz Gander who pushed through a number of funding applications, particularly that for the PWLB.

The Neighbourhood Plan (NP) now has increased weight as Maria mentioned, but to keep it current it needs to be regularly reviewed. We have recently undertaken a review to explore its currency and accuracy, looking at five key recommended areas. When LDC updates its housing figures we will take the opportunity to review the NP in more detail.

Fly tipping continues to be a problem. There were reports of an accident in the children's playground, which has been robustly discussed at meetings, culminating in the decision last night to remove one element of a piece of equipment.

Speeding traffic, the impact of the B2112 closure and lack of access to the Burgess Hill recycling site are points of frustration that have already been mentioned, which it would be nice to be able to sort out effectively.

**11. QUESTION TIME**

No further questions were asked.

**12. CLOSE**

The Chair summarised key points which had been made throughout the evening, thanked the speakers and everyone else for attending and the meeting closed at 8.40pm.