

Berwick Parish Council

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting of Berwick Parish Council held on the Thursday 16th December 2020 at 7:00pm. This was a virtual meeting held on Zoom.

49. Present

Cllrs K Winter (Chairman), B Smith and D Robinson.

Mr Chris Bending (Head of Policy and Economic Development, Wealden District Council and Alison Stevens (Clerk). There were no members of the public present.

50. Apologies for absence

Cllrs V Burrough and S Carnie sent apologies for their absence which were duly accepted by the Parish Council.

District Councillor Watts also sent apologies for his absence.

51. Declaration of Interests

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

The meeting was then suspended.

52. Report from the District Councillor

There was no report from the District Councillor on this occasion.

53. Public Question Time

There were no questions from any members of the public.

The meeting was then re-opened.

54. Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 26th November (previously distributed).

The Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 26th November 2020 were read, confirmed as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

55. Clerk's Report on Matters Arising from those Minutes

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

56. Planning Applications

There were no planning applications for consideration at this meeting but it was noted the following application has been withdrawn.

WD/2020/0966/F - Gatehampton, Station Road, Berwick, BN26 6SZ - Demolition of garage and summer house to the existing property and construction of 6 no. semi-detached dwellings.

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57. Wealden Local Plan Direction of Travel Consultation

Mr Bending explained the rationale to the Wealden District Council Local Plan Consultation. He said;

- The Local Plan is the key planning document for the District. It will set out the policies to shape our places, plan and manage growth and guide development across the District over a 15-20 year period.
- The previous Plan was not passed by the Inspector.
- In developing the Local Plan we need to set out a vision and framework for the future development of the area, address needs and opportunities in relation to a wide range of issues, make decisions on the location, amount and type of development needed and also identify places to be protected and how places will change. Ultimately, the Local Plan will be the main document against which we assess and make decisions on planning applications, which will, alongside other strategies, facilitate growth and change that will support both our new and existing communities.
- The Direction of Travel document is the first stage in our engagement process with residents, businesses and other stakeholders. We want to hear your views as to how the District should accommodate growth and what our future strategic vision should be. The District is facing a number of key challenges, opportunities and critical planning issues and this document sets out what we think they are, and how they could be included in a new Local Plan.
- The document sets out a number of key themes that we think are important to address in our Local Plan. Only some of the chapters may be of interest to you. That is perfectly fine and we have structured the document in a way that you can respond to on a theme basis. Under each theme/chapter we have asked a series of questions presented in coloured boxes. Please let us know if you agree, disagree or if we have missed any issues, opportunities or challenges that we can address through the Local Plan by responding to these questions.
- Full details of the Consultation and how to respond can be found at <https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/wealden-local-plan-direction-of-travel-consultation/>
- A plan led system is needed and quickly because otherwise development will be developer led.
- It is planned to submit the Plan in Spring/Summer 2023.

In answer to Councillor's questions he confirmed;

- There is a need for high quality affordable housing but the only way to meet the housing numbers is to accept larger developments. If Wealden doesn't meet the numbers, the Plan will fail. The Government believes larger developments are realistically the best way of keeping house prices down.
- It is too early to know what the effects of Covid-19 will be, but there will be a constant review process and the effects of Covid-19 are expected to be known by the first stage.
- A key consideration for the Local Plan will be the spatial distribution of new development within the district, particularly housing and economic development. Four broad options are presented. Although there are four possible options, it could be that a combination of several of these options will form the final Plan.
- One option in effect includes a 'new' freestanding settlement(s). Depending on the final location, this option could also include the very significant expansion of an existing settlement(s). This option would be based on a potential settlement or settlements of around 2,000 to 5,000 homes plus other business, employment, community and leisure uses. Any proposed settlement would include an agreed set of design principles and would be led through a unique master plan that would form part of the Local Plan. Berwick could be one of those settlements because it is considered to have good communication links and easy

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access to the Downs. Expanding the existing industrial facilities at Lower Dicker might be more attractive to new employers. Nothing has been decided yet.

- Major growth could make the dualling of the A27 more likely but the dualling is dependent on Government funding. The plan is predicated on its delivery.
- Adding hundreds of houses to each existing settlement would not meet the housing number.
- Any development will need to be sensitive to the South Downs National Park.

Mr Bending then left the meeting.

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

Tackling climate change.

We think it is good that the District Council is considering the promotion of climate-positive interventions. The safeguarding of land at Arlington to expand existing water storage will greatly affect the parish, whilst we support this, the subsequent traffic will require appropriate management. A concern is a general trend to reduce parking spaces. Rural areas are often too far from population centres for cycling or walking to be realistic options for regular travel. Meanwhile rural public transport services are being reduced with increasing prices, this places higher reliance on the principal travel method being the private motor vehicle. Reducing parking allocation in rural areas is often damaging to safe traffic management, where sustainable travel methods are not provided.

Infrastructure to support growth

As per the comments above a general trend of reduction in rural public transport services and walking/cycling not being viable options, the District Council has little impact on the running of privately owned public services or existing public facilities and should not suggest policies they cannot reliably enforce. Protection of village shops, public houses and rail services are based on attraction to the area, little a policy on retaining them can directly affect.

The rural parts of the county are generally woefully underinvested in infrastructure in particular for education and medical services, often villages have been promised these facilities through Section 106 agreements which do not come to fruition. We would like to see how the council would enforce these agreements or appropriately use CIL to achieve this infrastructure. Also noting that development is required to generate CIL but the infrastructure is required before the development being occupied. CIL seems to be an ineffective tool at meeting the community requirements.

Localised improvements in telecommunications would greatly improve the attractiveness of the area, but we are interested to understand how the district council would achieve this without significant development.

All of this growth is predicated on significant improvements to the A27 the council should be clearer on what is meant by this, there are several improvements proposed and all are unviable at this stage, delivery of significant growth would be undermined without improvements to the A27/A22 yet delivery of many of the proposed improvements to the A27/A22 would undermine many of the positive elements of the proposed policies such as biodiversity, landscape and heritage protection. This then has the potential to be compounded with the growth the improvements would enable.

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Housing

The number of houses required to be provided appears to be high in comparison to the number of existing households. Given the lack of allocation in areas outside of Wealden with better infrastructure, this appears to be a dumping of housing in Wealden far greater than what is sustainable for the county.

Generally, we would agree there is a requirement for housing nationally but that should be spread across the country and would apply a similar sentiment to houses across the county. Any new houses should be spread in proportion to the existing settlement size. Where larger developments are required, the District Council has a responsibility to communicate the potential impacts and manage those appropriately with the existing local community.

There is a lack of good quality affordable housing across the county, the council should focus on delivering this and promoting a reduction in under-occupancy of houses, we believe this is best done by providing excellent quality houses.

The definition of affordable housing also requires review, 80% of the market value promotes poor quality and potentially values still higher than the average household can afford. This is not a sustainable policy. Equally nor is the blanket policy of affordable housing at all major sites, some simply do not support quality housing at that price point.

Local economy

The promotion of the local economy is welcomed. We would note the reliance within the proposed policy on commercial and industrial uses, in a county where a significant proportion is AONB, National Park or agricultural land. Might it be more suitable to assist existing businesses in particular agricultural businesses to improve profits, rather than attracting new?

Generally, the pandemic appears to be increasing online working and shopping investment in telecommunications might be better placed than new commercial shopping outlets.

Policies that promote local business over attracting new business would be more welcome. In particular, those areas that are rural require special protection.

Town centres

Improvements to existing town centres, in particular around public transport would be welcomed more than the creation of new town centres.

Tourism

Whilst we welcome tourism as a way to boost the economy previous policies on the local economy, infrastructure and housing appear to be at odds with promoting tourism based on the natural environment.

In Berwick we are likely to be affected by the proposed new reservoir significantly and whilst it has the potential to be a great tourist attraction a lack of improvement to local infrastructure mass tourism would not be suitable at that location. We fear the council will reduce parking in an attempt to promote sustainable travel options which will lead to roads being blocked making them unsafe, as they have been of recent.

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Biodiversity / Natural environment

The protection of biodiversity and the natural environment is welcomed but the policies appear to refer to the protection of existing areas and generation of buffer zones, suggesting large scale developments. There is no mention of how to improve biodiversity above the notion of further research, should it not be imperative that this is a priority rather than increasing the built environment. Else it appears all policies on biodiversity are notional rather than deeply considered.

Landscape, heritage and cultural assets

This is all welcomed, we would note that some heritage assets have been left to degrade due to councils and Historic England not permitting appropriate uses previously.

Policies to protect landscape only appear to promote existing national protections, not protecting the others seems at odds of increasing biodiversity and the natural environment.

Design

This is welcomed but more detail is required.

Health

The policies are generally welcomed, we note this is generally funded by the CIL and Section 106 agreements which are often not timed appropriately, equally concerns about the lack of health care provision in rural areas, and the inability to attract medical staff to the area is concerning with such an increase in population proposed.

58. Questions from Parish Councillors

There were no further questions.

Signed:

Chairman

Date:

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