

Berwick Parish Council

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting of Berwick Parish Council held on the Thursday 22nd July 2021 at 7:30pm. This meeting was held at Berwick Village Hall.

21. Present

Cllrs K Winter (Chairman), B Smith, S Carnie, V Burrough and T Mills.

Kathy Martyn (Cuckmere Community Solar Project), County Councillor N Bennett, Alison Stevens (Clerk) and three members of the public were also in attendance.

22. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from District Councillor D Watts.

23. Signing in and Introduction of a new Parish Councillor

Tom Mills officially signed in and was welcomed to Berwick Parish Council by the Chairman.

24. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Winter declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in planning applications WD/2021/1403/F and WD/2021/1404/F. He left the room whilst discussions and the vote took place.

The meeting was then suspended.

25. Report from the County Councillor

County Councillor Bennett sent a written report which said;

Significant uncertainty continues to dominate the context within which we are working. The ongoing impact of Covid-19 remains hard to predict in terms of the potential for further waves of infection, and the scale and nature of the implications for our us all. The financial outlook remains unclear with a further one-year financial settlement anticipated for 2021/22 and key national reforms having been subject to further delay. The national policy agenda continues to evolve rapidly, with legislative and policy changes that respond to the UK's departure from the EU and new global positioning, societal changes brought and exacerbated by the pandemic, and the climate emergency. This is alongside a range of public service reforms signalled by Government, the impacts of which are not yet fully clear.

The Council spends over £800m gross each year (£400m net) and it is vital that these resources are deployed, in partnership with others, in the most effective way to support our priorities and core service provision. We have a limited window of opportunity now to consider any further preparations we can make for the period ahead, including any areas for one-off investment which would help us better manage future demand for services.

The County Council plays a key role in the quality of life of the residents, communities and businesses of East Sussex through services, employment, purchasing and how we work in partnership with others. In developing our plans we need to have regard to the context in which we will be working. This includes:

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- The impact of operating in an economy recovering from the Covid driven recession. The Government will have to consider how it begins to pay off the borrowing it has undertaken during the pandemic – this could mean a mixture of higher taxation, with possible impact on economic recovery, and reductions in public service expenditure. Both would impact on the Council's income and ability to spend.
- The shape of the post-Brexit economic and policy agenda, the impact of new post-EU funding regimes, and the Government's Levelling Up programme.
- Specific uncertainty over the future of local government funding, and delays to key reforms. The level of Government funding that ESCC will receive from 2022/23 onwards is not confirmed.
- The lasting impact the pandemic will have on young people in terms of education and employment opportunities.
- The growing impact of climate change, the national and local commitments to achieve carbon neutrality and the introduction of a range of new measures through the Environment Bill.
- The impact of Government reviews and reforms of public services – for example legislative developments in health and social care integration, measures to support NHS recovery post-Covid, structural changes in Public Health, reviews of children's social care and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), and the nature of planned reforms to Adult Social Care and the role of local government in the future.
- Significant national policy developments related to infrastructure, transport and planning and, locally, the re-procurement of our highways contract and refresh of our Local Transport Plan.
- The opportunity to build on positive work with our public and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) partners during the pandemic.

Demand Changes

- Older People - form a high proportion of the population of the County which has an impact on the demand for services and the Council's finances.
- Children and Young People – since 2018 our numbers of looked after children have remained fairly stable, however our active participation in the National Transfer Scheme has seen a rise in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children looked after by the authority. The number of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) has continued to increase over the last six years, the majority of the increase is due to increasing numbers of young people in the Key Stage 5 and post 19 age groups with EHCPs.
- Economy- the percentage of people claiming unemployment benefits has risen due to the pandemic and its impact on the economy. Younger adults have been particularly affected, with 10.2% claiming unemployment benefits. Parts of the County have higher percentages of people employed in the retail and wholesale and accommodation and food sectors than the national average, these are sectors that have been more affected by both Covid-19 restrictions and the impact of Brexit.
- Climate change – CO2 emissions were falling in all sectors in East Sussex except transport before the pandemic. Although we had the lowest emissions of carbon dioxide per person of all the County Council areas in England, further reductions will be needed.
- Priority basic need including highways, Environmental and Social Governance (ESG), school places and SEND provision.

I hope this report is helpful, the full 'State of the County' report will be presented to Cabinet on 13 July. Please let me know if you'd like a copy.'

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26. Report from the District Councillor

District Councillor Watts sent a written report which said;

- ‘1: With Covid 19 restrictions ending on Monday the 19/7/21 there will be some increase in cases and this is expected. However the hospital admissions are still relatively low, but may increase. 85% of residents have been vaccinated with one jab and 69% with two jabs. This now may be slightly higher due to the continuation of the vaccine programme. Forest Row has the lowest uptake of vaccination in the district as a whole. The call centre remains operational with the contact numbers previously given.
- 2: Leaders of South East Councils met Robert Jenrick, the Housing Minister, about the planning issues ie that the numbers are too high. 8 leaders met including the leader of WDC. All the leaders stated the same and there are on-going discussions with the Housing Minister and MPs Nus Ghani, Huw Merriman, María Caulfield and Caroline Ansell.
- 3: The Hailsham Aspires Project is being looked at again re: the current proposals about size, mass and requirements around the development of the Hailsham site where the District Council offices are.
- 4: The District Council has received a Highly Recommended Award at the Local Data Land Charges Awards for 2021.
- 5: Later this year it is expected that the updated SHELAA - Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment will be published, but no date has been given as yet.
- 6: Waste management remains strong, although “Biffa” the contractor has informed the Council that there is a national shortage of HGV drivers, which may have an impact later on to services. There are now 25,000 subscribers to the garden waste service.

Our recycling rate has dropped slightly from 49.5% to 48.4%.Covid may have had an effect on that, but it is difficult to tell.

- 7: The Safer Street Fund is a home office programme to be spent on crime prevention activities, Wealden’s bid of £309,000 was successful. The money will be used to tackle specific crimes, robbery, burglary, theft from vehicles and rural crimes.

The local police group now comprises of 2 Sergeant’s, 8 Constables and 6 PCSOs.

- 8: Wealden has mobilised the first of three long term maintenance contracts for housing that comes under their direct control. Work starts on the repair programme very soon.

The ban on evictions from rented properties in Wealden came to an end on the 1/6/21. The ban was put in place to protect tenants from being evicted during the pandemic. It now means that both private and social housing providers are able to apply to the courts for processing notices to be issued. There is a backlog of work in the courts, so it has not as yet been seen to be a problem at this stage, however there has been a rise in numbers of tenants from the private sector who are seeking advice from the Council on housing issues after receiving notices.

Wealden is watching this closely to identify the surge in demand and is working closely with the Homelessness Team under the council’s homeless prevention duties’.

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27. Public Question Time

Members of the public asked;

- why housing numbers are hugely disproportionate in Wealden and how the Planning Inspector can override decisions made by elected members.
- Who wrote the Village Plan Survey
- Why it didn't include the question – 'Do you think there should be any more housing?'
- Why it seems to take residents down a pro-development route.
- For the Parish Cluster Meetings to be minuted.

Councillor Bennett said;

- the Planning Inspector can only apply laws and regulations.
- Local control was promised but never materialised.
- The south of the country is more attractive to developers because the land here is cheap and house prices are high.

The Village Plan Survey was written by Berwick Parish Council after the last meeting where it was clear the village did not feel properly consulted. Councillors took that on board and, using the Village Plan as a baseline, drafted a survey. The survey was a genuine attempt to get the views of the whole Parish and once the consultation deadline has expired, the views will be collated and taken forward. The survey was not intended to take anyone down a pro-development route and residents are asked to take the survey in the spirit it was intended.

Mr Bending at Wealden who arranges the Cluster Meetings asks anyone who has any questions about the meetings to direct their questions to him.

Kathy Martyn from the Cuckmere Community Solar Project said;

- The Solar Farm received planning consent back in 2017 and is now preparing the project to be built early next year, with minimal disturbance to the area.
- Another planning application has been submitted to Wealden, this one is for the cable route.
- It's a very exciting community led renewable energy project that will directly connect to and power the railway.
- There will be a Community Benefit Fund, people will be able to invest in the project and there will be six acres of community space for use by all.

The meeting was then re-opened.

28. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 27th May 2021 (previously distributed).

The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 27th May 2021 were read, confirmed as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

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

Councillor Winter has been to look at the broken gates at the Berwick Way which were reported at the last meeting and the Clerk has asked the County Council to replace them. She will ask officers for an update.

Councillor Smith said the burst water pipe which was reported at the last meeting has now been repaired. The road is lower as a result but has been marked out for repair.

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30. Planning Applications

WD/2021/1404/F and WD/2021/1403/F - Stonery Farm, Common Lane, Selmeston, BN26 6SU - Conversion of existing chicken shed into 2 no. 3 bed dwellings including erection of greenhouse and provision of solar pv panel array (21 no. Panels). Revised designs to approval WD/2020/0112/ - Berwick Parish Council noted the changes proposed and has no objections to these applications on any planning grounds.

Village Plan Survey

This had already been covered in Minute 27.

31. Reports from Parish Councillors

i: Berwick Playing Field – Councillors resolved to;

- Ask the Clerk to bring prices for a new goal post to the next meeting for their consideration.
- Allow Hailsham football team to dispose of the white lining machine because it no longer works and is beyond repair.

ii: Highways and Transport Matters –

- The County Council is holding a consultation on changes it would like to make to the A22. Details of the consultation can be found at https://consultation.eastsussex.gov.uk/economy-transport-environment/a22-a2290-improvements/consult_view/
- Results of the recent Traffic Survey – Councillors deferred this item until the next meeting to allow them more time to consider a way forward.

32. Reports from Outside Bodies

- i. Village Hall Committee – There was nothing new to report on this occasion. The next Village Hall Committee Meeting has been arranged for the 28th July.
- ii. Cuckmere Community Bus (CCB) – There are now seven buses all of which are fairly new with minimal upkeep. The CCB service is now back to operating at pre-Covid levels. John Bunce, the Operations Director, died in June. He had been with the company for 22 years and will be very much missed.
- iii. Tree Warden – Mr Carnie sent a written report in which he said ‘Wealden have this week cleared the Vanguard Way through Berwick’. There was nothing else to report.
- iv. Cuckmere Community Flood Forum – The field next to 14 Downsway still floods so the Clerk will press the appropriate authorities for action.
- v. South Downs National Park – The latest newsletter will be sent out shortly.
- vi. Parish Planning Cluster – There have been no Cluster Meetings since the last Full Council Meeting.

33. Finance

i: Approval of payments and receipts – Councillors approved the following payments;

		£
101206	Champagne Trees – Grass Cutting	392.00
101207	ESCC – Traffic Survey	492.00
101208	Mass Media – Website	100.80

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101209	Royal Mail – Postage for Survey	105.60
101210	PlanAHead – Printing	115.40
101211	A Stevens - Salary – May	460.06
101212	A Stevens - Salary – June	460.26
101213	HMRC - PAYE	775.57
101214	ESCC - Pension	329.96
101215	ESALC – Training	48.00

ii: Councillors resolved to approve the accounts to 30th June 2021.

iii: Councillors agreed to wait until the new section of the Berwick Way is finished and consider ideas on how best to spend the bequest then.

34. Questions from Parish Councillors

Councillor Burrough said the footpath which runs behind the houses between Berwick Station and Ludlay Drive had a lot of dog mess on it and asked the Parish Council to put signs up at each entrance. The Clerk will ask Rights of Way for permission. The Berwick Way was reported to have the same problem so the Parish Council will consider putting up signs there too.

Councillor Smith asked the Parish Council to;

- Consider applying to nominate the village pubs as Assets of Community Value at the next meeting.
- Ask residents whose properties border public paths to cut their hedges back to their boundaries to make it easier for those with walking frames, wheelchairs and pushchairs to get past.

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 8.30pm

Signed: _____
Chairman

Date: _____

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