

# BERWICK ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY

Minutes of the Berwick Parish Assembly held at the Berwick Village Hall on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2024 at 7:00pm

## Present

Cllrs Keith Winter, Tom Mills, Beryl Smith and Victoria Burrough

County Councillor Nick Bennett, District Councillor Alison Wilson, John Jefkins of the Vanguard Way Association and Lynette Kemp (Clerk). One member of the public was also in attendance.

### 1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Sally Carnie.

### 2. Annual report by the Chairman of Berwick Parish Council

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and said that the Parish Council had a good year and thanked everyone for their hard work.

### 3. Speaker John Jefkins of the Vanguard Way Association

Mr Jefkins informed the meeting of the history and formation of the Association. In the 1960's a group of walkers, based in London who met at the Berwick Inn (known then as The Fullers Arms) found there were no seats on the train home and had to travel in the guard's van, hence the name. The Vanguard Way starts in East Croydon and finishes in Newhaven. Mr Jefkins explained the signs to be found on the route, which must comply with the colours designated by local authorities for footpaths, bridleways, etc. The route, although starting in urban East Croydon, soon follows rural footpaths through wood and heath land. There are many splendid views on the route which passes through the South Downs National Park, two areas of outstanding national beauty (the Surrey Hills and High Weald), the Sussex Heritage Coast, and three sites of national or regional interest, Nore Hill Chalk Pinnacle, Haxted Mill and Dry Hill Camp. The comprehensive Vanguard Way Photoguide App provides guidance and 3,000 photographs, information on links with public transport is also provided. The Association relies on donations and membership, the fee for membership is £7 per annum.

Detailed information about the Vanguard Way can be found at [www.vanguardway.org.uk](http://www.vanguardway.org.uk)

Councillors thanked Mr Jefkins for his interesting and informative presentation.

### 4. Annual Report from the County Councillor

County Councillor N Bennett sent a report which is attached to these minutes, and highlighted the following points:

- Like every authority in the country ESCC has had to use reserves to provide a balanced budget. Using £1m from reserves in the year 2023/24 and £14m in the current year. The Council's gross revenue budget for 2024/25 totals over £1bn, with 74.3% of all planned expenditure providing Adult Social Care, Public Health and Children's Services.
- Climate change – emissions of the main greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), in East Sussex fell by 42% between 2005 and 2021, while the population grew by about 8%.
- Local Nature Recovery Strategy - ESCC, as the Responsible Authority for developing the LNRS for East Sussex and Brighton & Hove, is engaging with Parishes on ecology. Cllr Bennett will support apolitical groups with re-wilding/ecological initiatives.

5. Annual Report from the District Councillor

District Councillor Wilson said:

- Draft Local Plan - The Regulation 18 consultation on the Draft Local Plan has now concluded, and responses are now being loaded to the consultation portal. The Regulation 19 consultation will take place in 2025. There will be news updates during the process.
- Climate Strategy - the consultation period has been extended and will close at the end of May. Responses can be made via the Let's Talk Wealden web page. There are questionnaires for individuals and businesses.
- Cycle Route – it is possible that the disused Uckfield to Lewes railway route will be opened as a cycle route. A feasibility study will be undertaken to ascertain if this is an option. ESCC and WDC encourage sustainable travel.
- The leader at Wealden DC is now Rachel Millward of the Alliance for Wealden group.

6. Reports from Clubs and Associations

There were no reports from any Clubs and Associations on this occasion.

7. Open Forum

A member of the public asked ESCC Cllr Nick Bennett for an update on the condition of the roads.

There was no further business and this meeting closed at 7.45pm

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_

Chairman

Date:

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## Report to Parish Councils

May 2024

Nick Bennett

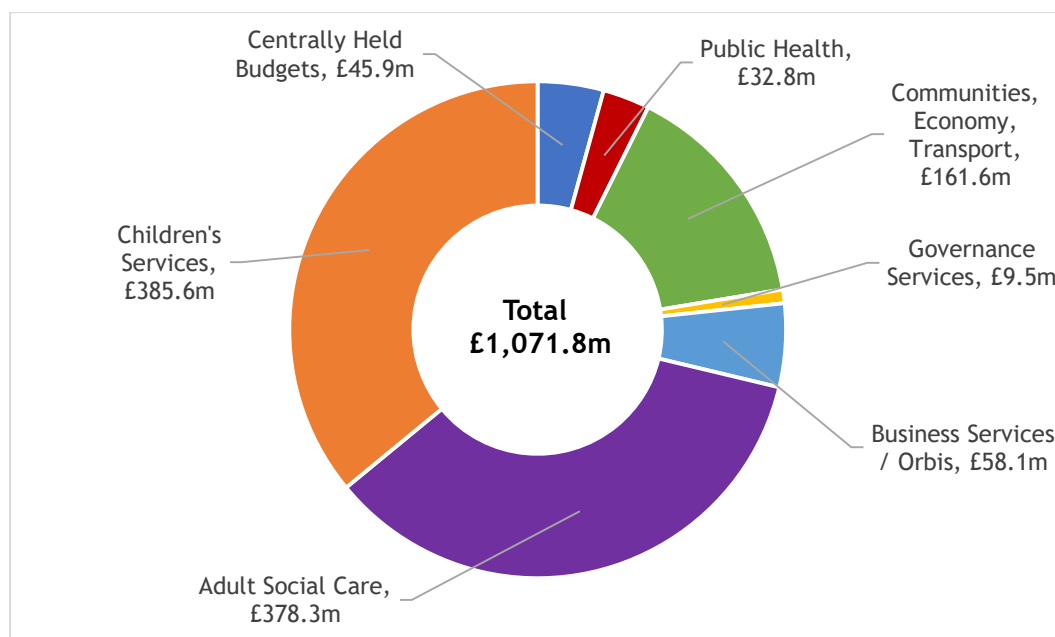
Dear All,

My previous report to the Parish Councils was in preparation for the annual budget setting so I hope you find this update helpful. I have set out the two principle areas of my portfolio; finance and Carbon reduction.

### Revenue Budget 2024/25

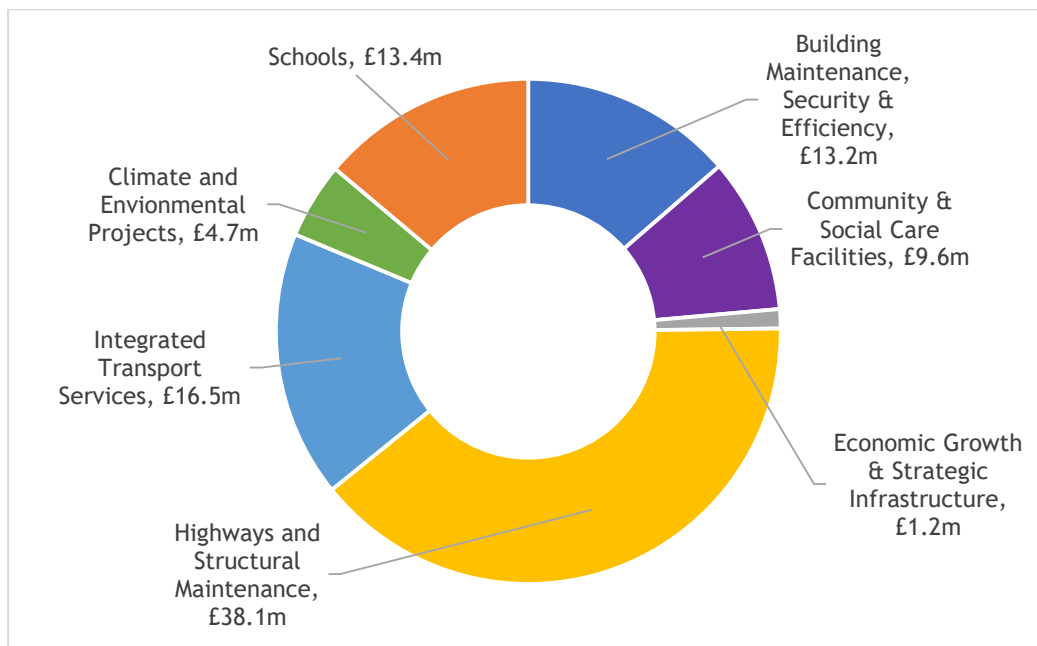
In meeting service pressures and impact of inflation, the Council made additional investments into services of £51.5m, when the 2024/25 budget was set in February this year. Whilst Council Tax (including Adult Social Precept) was increased by 4.99%, the level of additional income required to support the increased investment and set a balanced budget was not sufficient. A £14.3m draw from reserves was required for 2024/25 to set a balanced budget.

The Council's gross revenue budget for 2024/25 totals over £1bn, as set out below; with 74.3% of all planned expenditure providing Adult Social Care, Public Health and Children's Services.



**The 2024/25 Capital Programme** The Council is planning to make capital investments of £837.7m over the next 10 years; with a focus on highways, transport, school places and property maintenance. In contrast to the revenue budget, which is driven mainly by costs in Adult Social Care and Children's Services, over half of the Capital Programme (56%) is planned to be invested in highways and integrated transport services. The planned investment for 2024/25 is set out below:

## Programme Investment 2024/25 (£96 m):



## 4. Medium Term Financial Plan - 2025/26 and beyond

The Council maintains a revenue Medium-Term Financial Plan that reflects the latest assessment of pressures across all budgets, including the impacts of modelled future service demands, inflation (including pay awards) and local and national policy objectives.

The position for the medium term is challenging. 2025/26 is showing a projected budget deficit of £45.3m, increasing to £61.8m in 2026/27. Given the level of unallocated reserves is projected to be £25.0m as of 31 March 2028, this is a challenging position, and not sustainable.

### Climate Change

There is a huge amount of work nationally and in County that reflects our targets in terms of Carbon neutrality and the move to Net zero. This effort is integrated into wider national policy, for example in areas such as housing, transport and public procurement. The UK's primary climate change legislation is the Climate Change Act of 2008, which was amended in 2019. The Act:

- sets a legally binding carbon reduction target of net zero by 2050, in our case 'as soon as possible and in any event by 2050'. The Act includes a system of five-year carbon budgets, forming a pathway to net zero. Budgets are set at least twelve years in advance of the budget period to allow time for planning and investment. The budgets are developed with the guidance of the Committee on Climate Change, an independent body established by the Act, who also monitor and report on progress towards targets.
- requires the Government to prepare for a changing climate. Every five years the Government has to produce an assessment of the risks and opportunities from climate change and how it plans to adapt. The current report, the National Adaptation

Programme 3, explains the government's plans to adapt to climate change during 2023 to 2028.

So on our own doorstep, emissions of the main greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), in East Sussex fell by 42% between 2005 and 2021, while the population grew by about 8%. This excludes emissions that occur outside the area due to demand for goods and services that are consumed in the county. This reduction is similar to the decrease seen nationally and driven by the same changes (e.g. the switch from coal to gas and renewables to generate electricity).

In 2021 the Council worked with its partners on the East Sussex Environment Board to produce a **Climate Emergency Road Map** for the whole county. Happy to share this with you if you can't find it! The road map summarises many areas of work that the Council leads, or collaborates with partners on, to mitigate and adapt to climate change, as well as programmes and projects being delivered by third parties. These include programmes to support more walking, cycling and local bus services, address fuel poverty, support residents to invest in renewable energy and to manage flood risk to homes and businesses.

We have also commissioned modelling work to identify the most cost-effective options to reach net zero. It concluded that the cost for ESCC to get to net zero for building and transport emissions (scope 1 and 2) could be approximately £200m between now and 2050, largely due to the investment needed for decarbonising heat in buildings, including schools. ESCC has secured over £1.9m of external funding to contribute to covering these costs. But there remains a very large gap between the resources available and the resources required to get to net zero.

## **Air Quality**

The UK has an extensive body of environmental legislation, including on air quality. Under the Environment Act 1995, lower-tier and unitary authorities are required to assess air quality levels in their area for 7 pollutants that impact on health and the natural environment. For areas where health-based standards are not being met, authorities must declare Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) and prepare Air Quality Action Plans setting out measures to come back into compliance with those standards.

The most recent legislation on air quality is the Environment Act of 2021. This Act adds to existing environmental legislation. it:

- 1) Reiterates the main principles that underpin most environmental legislation (eg. the polluter pays principle).
- 2) Establishes the Office for Environmental Protection (the "OEP"), which is independent from government and is charged with monitoring and reporting on the compliance of government, its agencies and other public bodies with environment laws. The OEP is separate from, and in addition to, the Environment Agency, which will continue to regulate private actions.
- 3) Focuses on 4 areas:
  1. Air quality. The Act:

- requires the government to set targets on air quality and update the National Air Quality Strategy.
  - requires all tiers of government to co-operate in the development of action plans where Air Quality Management Areas have been declared.
2. Waste and resource efficiency. The Act:
- introduces charges for any single-use plastic item and efficiency standards for non-energy related products;
  - requires producers to pay the full net costs of managing their products at 'end of life';
  - introduces the standardisation of waste and recycling across local authorities, stipulating specific materials that must be collected individually from households and businesses, including food waste;
  - introduces deposit return schemes.
  - introduces electronic waste tracking, to deter waste crime.
3. Water. The Act:
- clamps down on water companies that discharge sewage into rivers, waterways and coastlines.
  - requires water companies to reduce the adverse impacts of discharges from storm overflows.
4. Biodiversity. The Act:
- introduces a mandatory minimum 10% biodiversity net gain requirement for all new planning applications.
  - Requires public authorities to have regard for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.
  - Requires Responsible Authorities (RAs) to produce Local Nature Recovery Strategies. ESCC is the RA for East Sussex and Brighton & Hove.
  - Requires Local Authorities to consult on street tree felling.

In East Sussex, the three main pollutants of concern for health are nitrogen dioxide, particulates and ozone. These are monitored by a small number of automatic monitoring stations in the county and the data are published on the Sussex Air website. The latest available data are from 2022. Waiting for an update!

**Nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>):** the main sources of NO<sub>2</sub> are road vehicles and domestic combustion. In 2022 the levels of NO<sub>2</sub> monitored at all sites in East Sussex were compliant with the short and long term health-based national air quality strategy objectives. Annual mean NO<sub>2</sub> has trended downwards over the past 5 years, largely due to effective controls on newer road vehicles (see figure 3).

**Particulate matter:** particulate matter is everything in the air that is not a gas and so consists of a wide range of chemical compounds and materials. The main sources of particulates are road vehicles and solid fuel combustion, notably wood burning. Particulates are measured as either 'PM<sub>10</sub>' or 'PM<sub>2.5</sub>', which refers to the diameter of the particulates; the smaller they are the further they can penetrate into the lungs and, potentially, the blood stream. There are no safe levels of particulates.

**Ozone (O<sub>3</sub>):** ozone is a secondary pollutant, created when other pollutant gases react in sunlight. It is a long-lived pollutant and tends to affect urban background and rural locations, rather than roadside sites. Annual mean concentrations of O<sub>3</sub> levels have shown

no clear trend between 2018 and 2022, albeit with significant year-on-year variation, largely due to the impact of the weather on O<sub>3</sub> formation.

There are two air quality management areas in East Sussex, one covering a part of Lewes town and one covering part of Newhaven. Lewes District Council produced Air Quality Action Plans, as required by the Environment Act 1995, with input from ESCC. The Sussex Air partnership, currently hosted by ESCC, brings all local air quality data and reports together on the Sussex Air website and leads on various projects to improve air quality across Sussex (eg. work delivered by Sustrans to encourage more walking and cycling to and from school). These projects complement the much more extensive work carried out under the banner of the Local Transport Plan (eg. investment in walking and cycling infrastructure, bus improvement plans and electric vehicle charge points).

### **3. Biodiversity**

As with air quality, there is an extensive body of legislation covering biodiversity, mainly in recognition of the critical goods and services that a healthy natural environment provides. The Environment Act 2021 has brought in two main additional responsibilities for ESCC. These are:

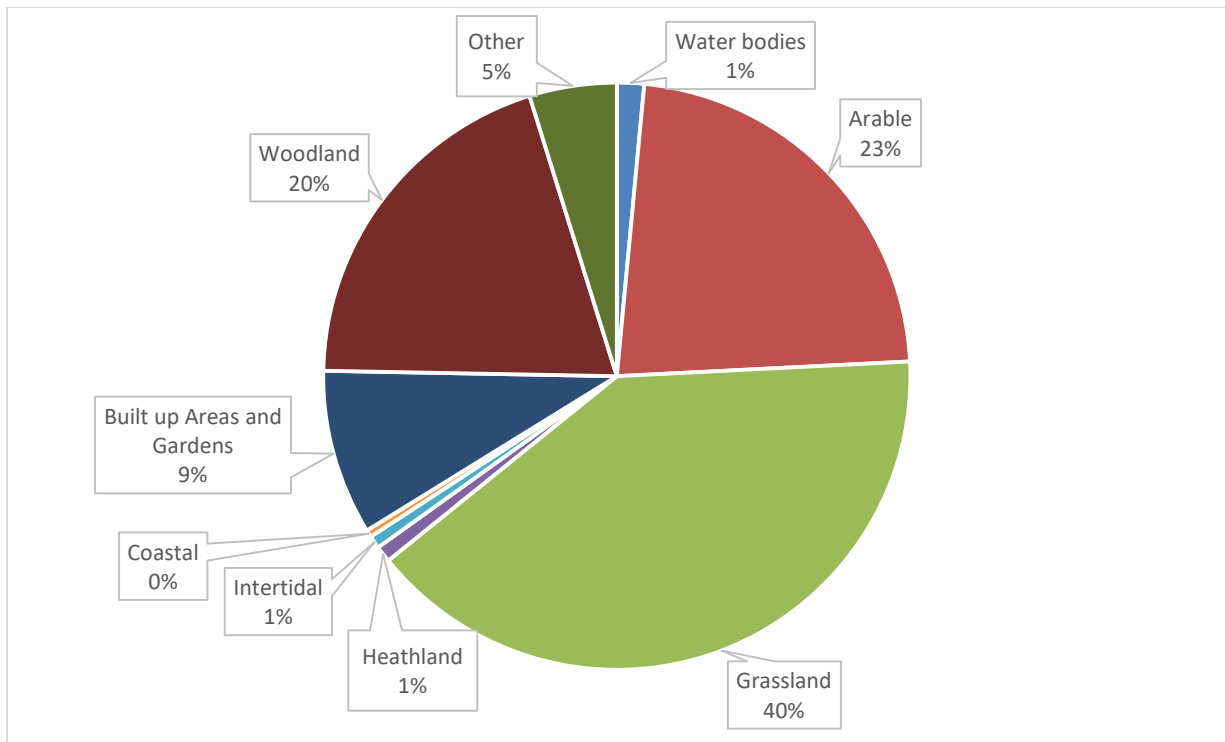
- 1) To produce a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). ESCC has been appointed as the Responsible Authority (RA) to produce a LNRS for East Sussex and Brighton & Hove. LNRSs are a means to identify and agree, at the local level, the priorities and actions needed to drive nature's recovery and the wider environmental benefits that will arise from a healthy natural environment. They are intended to direct future effort and funding for nature recovery. The LNRS must be developed in line with secondary legislation and statutory guidance. Additional burden monies have been provided by government for 2 years to help pay for the cost of developing the LNRS. It's currently unclear how the cost of implementation will be covered or the 3 to 10 year reviews of the LNRS that ESCC is expected to carry out.

ESCC is working closely with WSCC to share expertise and resources and to reduce the impact on shared stakeholders. Together, we are carrying out extensive stakeholder engagement, including via webinars, surveys (there are currently 3 'live' surveys on the LNRS website, one for the public (c. 1000 responses to date), one for landowners (41 responses) and one for green and community groups (47 responses)). This will be followed by a public consultation at the end of 2024, with publication of the final Strategy in summer 2025. Delivery of the LNRS will lie with a range of stakeholders, including ESCC.

- 2) To implement Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in planning: the Environment Act 2021 has placed a requirement for new developments to deliver a minimum of a 10% gain in biodiversity. BNG became mandatory for nearly all developments from April 2024. The delivery of BNG is intended to be guided by the LNRS. All off-site BNG and any 'significant on-site' BNG must be maintained and monitored for at least 30 years following development, secured through planning conditions and/or legal agreements. The government has provided additional burden monies to help assess and monitor the implementation of BNG. ESCC has been actively upskilling relevant Local Planning Authority officers and teams, primarily through the Sussex Nature Partnership, which is hosted by ESCC, and through Service Level Agreements with the Districts and Boroughs for the provision of ecological advice for planning.

East Sussex has a rich natural environment, with over two thirds of the county covered by one or more environmental designations. Two of the main types of designation are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs). About three quarters of SSSIs are in favourable or favourable recovering condition and the rest have either been partially destroyed or are in unfavourable condition. About half of the LWSs are currently known to be in positive conservation management.

### The key habitats in East Sussex



**Things to do** For Parish and town Councils that may wish to embark on eco/ wilding projects, my recommendations would be to:

- Identify and designate local wildlife sites in neighbourhood plans.
- include policies for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity within neighbourhood plans.
- consider management of local green spaces for biodiversity. More information and advice is available from the likes of the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

Finally, just to let you know that ESCC, as the Responsible Authority for developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for East Sussex and Brighton & Hove, is engaging with Parishes on ecology. We ran a **webinar for parish and town councils** on 26/02/24 (60 attendees). One of the specific asks of them at the webinar was to promote this survey to their networks and communities, which is designed to let us know whether they have particular plans and/or projects that we should include in the LNRS. This should give us a better insight into eco/ wilding projects being led by, or considered, locally.