

## WARTLING PARISH COUNCIL

### DRAFT MINUTES OF THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING OF

6<sup>th</sup> January 2021

This meeting was a virtual Meeting held via Zoom

65 Present

Councillors K Stevens (Chairman), C Paterson, E Ashley and W Reid.

County Councillor B Bentley, District Councillor R Cade, District Councillor P Doodes, A Stevens (Clerk) and two members of the public were also in attendance.

66 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

67 Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

The Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 2020, were read, confirmed as a true and accurate record, and signed by the Chairman.

68 Minutes of the Meeting held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020.

The draft Minutes of the Meeting held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020 were adopted by the Full Council.

69 Clerk's Report on Matters' Arising

At the December Meeting Councillor Reid and Councillor Stevens agreed to meet up to risk assess the defibrillator at The Bull's Head. As the restrictions have changed since then, Councillor Stevens will monitor the defibrillator for now until it is safe for them to meet.

70 Disclosures of Interests

There were no disclosures of interest on any items on this agenda nor were there any changes to the Register of Interests.

The meeting was then suspended.

71 Reports from the County Councillor on matters from the County Council affecting this Parish.

County Councillor Bentley said;

- A major incident has been declared in East Sussex this afternoon as rising coronavirus infections see the county face 'unprecedented pressures'.
- He reminded residents there are reasons for the lockdown, so please stay safe and exercise safely.
- Kent County Council is proposing to increase its precept by just under 5% for 2021-22. East Sussex County Council is currently working on its budgets and has yet to agree its precept.

72 Report from the District Councillors on matters from the District Council affecting this Parish.

District Councillor Cade said;

- The coronavirus situation is now very serious and he encouraged residents to keep checking the Wealden District Council website for updates. Business and benefits grants, for example, keep changing.
- The Wealden Hub is continuing to operate.
- Wealden District Council has teamed up with Wealden Dementia Action Alliance to support the Sunflower Project to help those with mental health problems feel more confident going into the community again.
- Wealden has launched the 'Next Steps Programme' to protect some of the most vulnerable and make sure they have a safe place to stay.
- There will be a mobile coronavirus testing site in Mill Road, Heathfield the weekend of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of January for those who have symptoms.
- If anyone needs help with any coronavirus issues or planning applications he is always available to help.

District Councillor Doodes said;

- Wealden is not increasing its share of the council tax. Staff salaries and councillors allowances will not increase.
- The latest lockdown will see the number of staff in the council's offices reduced from 50 to 15. Reception will remain closed.
- An official decision on the May elections has not yet been made.

73 Questions from Members of the Public

There were no questions from members of the public on this occasion.

The meeting was then re-opened.

74 Reports

a) Planning – There was nothing new to report.

b) Environment North

Roadworks have been taking place at Boreham Street and are expected to last approximately two to three weeks.

c) Footpaths

Councillor Ashley said a stile is missing on one of the footpaths. She will look up the stile number and report it to Rights of Way to repair.

d) Environment South

There was nothing new to report on this occasion.

e) Highways

A resident has raised concerns about traffic speeds in Wartling Road. Councillors agreed to put this back on the agenda for the next meeting.

f) Police

There was nothing new to report on this occasion.

g) Communication

Councillor Reid said he has added an Accessibility Statement to the Parish Council website.

h) Speedwatch

Speedwatch sessions have been put on hold again in Wartling because of the Coronavirus situation.

i) Trees

A tree came down in Comphurst Lane in the latest stormy weather and has since been removed. Another tree is down at Wartling Hill and will be reported to Highways.

75 Reports from outside meetings and courses attended

Councillor Stevens said;

- He attended the latest ESALC Board Meeting. The West Sussex Association is looking into breaking away. If it does, East Sussex and Surrey may have to follow their own paths too.
- He is attending the Strategic Partner's Budget Meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> January which is being held to discuss the financial situation at County.

76 Finance Report

Councillors resolved;

- To agree the payments list to the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and also pay for a copy of Local Council Administration.
- To agree the accounts to date.
- To allow more time to get residents views on how the £12832.25 Community Infrastructure Levy the Parish Council has received, might be best used.

77 Wealden Local Plan Direction of Travel Consultation

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

Climate Change

We support the District Council's proposals to promote climate-positive interventions. But the theory is not always wholly practical in rural areas.

For example here in Wartling there are many older and listed properties which rely on log burners or oil fired central heating as there is no direct gas supply. The reduction in public transport means there is a higher reliance on the usage of private cars in rural areas.

### Infrastructure to support growth

More support for the proposed housing numbers would be forthcoming were the necessary infrastructure to be in place. Too often residents are told that the infrastructure will follow the housing but this is just not happening especially in rural areas in terms of education, doctors, dentists and roads. The existing train services need to be urgently reviewed and it is questionable whether or not Polegate station is fit for purpose. As housing numbers grow so does the need for good train services with good bus services or at least adequate parking. Obviously the A27 needs to be improved but what finally happens will be a determinable factor in the proposed future growth of business and in terms of protection for biodiversity and landscape plans.

### Housing

We appreciate that new housing numbers are dictated by government but they need to be applied in areas of Wealden proportionate to existing numbers. Many areas of Wealden contain large under-occupied properties where owners would move if they could only find good quality smaller properties in the same location. It is not always affordable housing that is needed. What is affordable housing? People hold differing views on this and often affordable housing does not end up in the correct ownership. Land prices and the desire to move in to areas of Wealden makes it difficult to determine exactly what is affordable. There are too many poor quality, badly designed new builds in our area and the situation is worsened by the lack or reduction of gardens and trees. The need for gardens has surely been highlighted during the Covid pandemic. Residents remain concerned that we continue to build on flood plains. It is appreciated that Wealden is often overruled by Government but in more and more cases flooding is becoming an issue as earlier predicted by local residents.

### Local Economy

The promotion of the local economy is supported but more emphasis needs to be placed upon supporting existing agricultural businesses especially because of Wealden's restrictions in terms of AONB and the National Park.

Whilst telecommunication has improved there are still areas where broadband is inadequate and this needs to be resolved. Good local economy helps attract more tourism. With 76% of Wealden being farmland it is important that the Local Plan takes in to account the effects of Brexit on our farming industry. The loss of direct support means that farmers and landowners will be looking to restructure their businesses. In some cases this might mean embracing environmental projects or even "rewilding" which is good for biodiversity but there will also be a temptation to sell land for development. With so much of our district being classified as AONB there is a concern that some parishes will be over developed.

### Town Centres

Before jumping in to improve existing town centres a study is needed to determine what will be needed from town centres in 5/10 years. It is all well and good to talk about our market towns but does the definition need to be changed. Are plans to improve town centres what planners want rather than what shoppers want? Post Covid will people return to town centre

or will they continue to shop on line? Again a problem arises with inadequate public transport which means that more cars come in to town centres thus adding to parking and climate problems.

### Tourism

Tourism is vital to Wealden and it is a crucial part of the East Sussex jigsaw of tourism. The problem is that the new housing programme and lack of good infrastructure is at odds with tourism which for the most part is attracted by our natural environment. It is appreciated that responsibility for public rights of way falls upon the County Council but new developments in villages can have a significant effect on the usage of rights of way. It would be good if their protection could be taken in to account in the Plan as our footpaths attract many visitors in to Wealden district.

### Biodiversity

We support the protection of biodiversity and the natural environment but the plans refer to existing areas and the generation of buffer zones presumably between large scale developments. We need to expand this more rather than just use it as a tool to separate developments.

### Landscape/Heritage/Cultural Assets

All the proposals are welcomed but rather like biodiversity it seems to refer to sites and properties with existing protection. We need to consider what other sites and properties need to be safeguarded for the future. Much of Wealden's landscape is suitable only for livestock grazing due to soil, topography and historic field layouts. Farms that involve grazing sheep and or native cattle breeds are entirely appropriate for the area and help maintain its unique character. Local producers should be encouraged particularly those that supply customers direct or through the market towns. It needs to be acknowledged that this type of farming is not the intensive "feedlot" enterprise seen in other areas and countries that is so demonised by the media.

### Health

The policies are welcomed but it must be questionable that much will be funded by CIL and Section 106 agreements especially as these sources of income are currently under review by the Government. You state (under 5.7) that "the capacity of existing GP surgeries is also dependent on the number of new houses built". GP surgeries grow in size and partner numbers depending upon the number of patients. New surgeries or medical centres (such as Herstmonceux) can be built with financial help from central government. To help attract good medical services suitable land needs to be identified in conjunction with the existing CCG when identifying new building sites. Not just for the surgery but also in terms of housing to attract the medical staff in to the area.

## 78 Questions from Parish Councillors

Councillor Paterson reported a recent power cut which is believed to have originated from Herstmonceux.

Councillor Ashley suggested ways the church could help the community such as by hosting a second hand bookshop or a small art show. She will put her suggestions to the church.

79 Planning Applications

There were no planning applications for consideration at this meeting.

There being no further business, this meeting closed at 7.40pm.