

Minutes of the Barns Green & Itchingfield Annual Village Meeting

Monday 31st March 2025 at 7.30pm

1. Parish Council overview;

Parish Council Chairman Alan Strudley gave a short introduction to the audience of approximately 100 residents. Alan started by emphasising that this meeting is not a Parish Council meeting, but a meeting for the village where residents can have their say on what things are important to them affecting the village.

The Parish Council call the meeting on behalf of the whole village.

Alan gave a brief update on what the Parish Council has been doing over this past year. Firstly, after last years meeting and call for new Parish Councillors, Alan said he was pleased to announce that for the first time in a long time, the Parish Council has been fully populated. Over the last six months many projects have been put forward including a new playpark, SID's and work on the pathway and car park by the tennis courts. A longer standing project is the proposed pathway that links the village hall car park to the Arboretum. These projects are being funded by the Parish Council, but of course this funding actually comes from the residents of the village by way of the annual precept that the Parish Council receives. Alan concluded by saying that if there are any projects that the residents would like to see their money spent on, then please come forward with your suggestions.

Report from Councillor Sarah Peay on Footpaths. Sarah said that one of her roles as a Parish Councillor is co-ordinating and dealing with any concerns to the footpaths and bridleways known as Public Rights of Way (PROW). Itchingfield Parish is very fortunate to have an extensive range of PROW's, more than any of the adjacent parishes. It is worth remembering that the Parish lies in the Weald which is predominately clay which is wet in winter and very hard in the summer. However, we are blessed to live in this lovely countryside and I hope you will all help to maintain it for everyone to appreciate and enjoy. If anyone has any concerns relating to these, whether it be a broken stile, damaged bridge, problem gate or dangerous ground, please get in touch with Sarah. Her email address is on the Parish Council website.

Report from Councillor Rob Fryatt on 'Greener Barns Green' - The Parish Council has recently established an environmental sustainability group which currently includes himself as well as Parish Councillors Elaine French and Jenny Cass. On behalf of the Parish Council, we are going to be looking at activities and new initiatives to enhance the environment and sustainability of our wonderful community and to promote more sustainable activities within and on behalf of the parish. Over the next few months we are going to be seeking your ideas throughout the village, from the parish and village facebook site, the parish council website and hold an evening meeting if there is sufficient interest to create a discussion forum. Hopefully with a wider group, the intention is to post a regular column in the BIG MAG. There are already some activities going on, but together we can make a 'Greener Barns Green.'

2. Village Trust update - Trust Chairman Jim Martin gave the following report:

The Village Trust owns and is responsible for the Playing Field, Jubilee Field, the Village Car Park and all the land that the Village Hall, Social Club and Tennis Courts are on. There are 2 sub-committees that answer to the Trust: the Field Committee and the Village Hall committee. The Trust looks after and oversees repairs to the Village Hall, keeping the Village Car Park swept, drains cleared and overseeing repairs to damaged lights. The fencing along Sandhills Road has been repaired or replaced. Many volunteers look after the Village Green. Unfortunately, we have lost a couple of long standing helpers recently. Ian McBean has had to retire from the field committee due to ill health and Keith Reynolds from the forge has, over the years, helped us out fixing a variety of items, gates and fences included. He will be much missed in the village. The Trust has been working to forge close links with the Parish Council, one of the results of that is that a small working committee has submitted plans to replace some of the large items in the playpark, have it re-floored and re-fenced. This work should be completed by the middle of May, ready for the children to use it in half term. Run Barns Green have generously donated two memorial benches to be placed in the playpark. They will have plaques on them to remember 3 stalwarts of the Run Barns Green Committee, Vernon Jennings, Den Critchley and Ray Fisher. It will be fitting that they will be placed at the start and finishing lines. Overall, I think that the recreational area is looking really good, ready for the end of the football season, the new cricket season, stoolball, planned walking rugby and charity rugby sevens events.

3. Barns Green Primary School – Headteacher Tracey Newbolt gave a presentation on what has been a very busy and productive year. In October 2024 Ofsted visited and the school is now considered to be a good school in every area that was measured, having been judged as requiring improvement on a prior visit. This community should be very proud to have this school at its heart. We are very proud of the school's results as our school is measured to be joint second best school in the whole of West Sussex and our reading results place us as one of the best schools in the country. Those results are due to the hard work and dedication to an amazing team of staff and commitment from parents to support the children. We have worked hard over the last few years to revitalise our curriculum. The school also organises a wealth of visitors to the school and also organises trips to broaden the children's experiences. The school excels at sport and does a lot of sport with locality schools. The school has recently become a Maths Hub being a specialist in the subject to be able to develop other schools. The school has just launched its new website. And finally, the school has launched today 'Wrap Around Care' so children can be dropped off at breakfast club at 7am and picked up at 6pm after attending after school clubs.

4. County Councillor Amanda Jupp gave the following update and her full report can be found on the Parish Council website:

I am sure many of you are aware of the Government's decision to introduce Devolution in the form of Mayoral and unitary authorities by May 2028. This was set out in the English Devolution White Paper which was published in December 2024 which states that Mayoral Strategic Authorities will bring funding and local decision-making powers from central government to deliver on economic growth, jobs and skills, housing and transport, as well as public health, police and the fire service.

The Government has made it clear that it wants unitary authorities to replace local authorities in areas which currently have a two-tier structure, i.e. County Councils and District or Borough Councils by May 2028.

At the invitation of Government, West and East Sussex County Councils and Brighton and Hove City Council applied at the end of January for inclusion in the Devolution Priority Programme for Sussex, as a whole to be considered as a Mayoral Authority.

The Government selected Sussex as one of six places to be selected for the priority programme which means that it is now on the fast track to receive additional powers that come with a strategic combined authority and elected mayor.

Everyone – including residents, businesses, local authorities, partners, stakeholders and other organisations can have a say in shaping the future of the Mayoral Combined Authority for our region through a public consultation which is currently being run by the Government until the 13th April 2025.

The Government made the decision to defer the forthcoming elections for County Council in May. This was requested as part of our bid to join the priority programme as we believed that we would not be able to meet the Government's timetable to deliver Mayoral elections next year.

Our application to be part of the change to mayoral and unitary authorities set out a willingness to look at the structure of local government in Sussex. We are working with all the District and Borough Councils and partners in both County Councils and Brighton and Hove City Council to develop proposals for the creation of unitary authorities and how these could be best configured based on the Government's criteria.

An initial outline of potential options was submitted to Government on 21st March following collaboration with colleagues in West Sussex. East Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove carried out the same exercise with their colleagues and partners. The options set out in the interim plan are (i) A county unitary or (ii) 2 unitaries on the county footprint or (iii) a reduced West Sussex footprint with Brighton & Hove City Council bolstered and the possibility of Crawley joining a new unitary arrangement with Surrey Districts and Boroughs. The Government expects full and final proposals to be submitted by 26th September 2025 and these will be evidenced based as per the Government's criteria. We understand that Town and Parish Councils will retain their important democratic role within their communities, and we will seek to champion this as a critical element of the model we pursue. We will also seek to maintain a collaborative approach to the work in developing how the Combined Authority will discharge its new powers and on how any Local Government Reform model will continue to meet the needs and aspirations of our communities. We will consult on reorganizational proposals once options have been confirmed by Government later in the year when a statutory consultation will also be undertaken by Government. It is going to be a busy time for all authorities, but we want to reiterate that this will not affect our "business as usual" and services will continue to be delivered as usual.

I will continue to keep your Parish Council updated with developments and would urge you to let your views be known in all the forthcoming consultations.

In answer to questions from parishioners Amanda said her major concerns are that this is happening too Quickly, because whether we are on a government priority programme or not, this will happen by May 2028 with Mayoral elections next May 2026. Her other concern was being able continue to deliver services with business as usual. With regard to choosing boundaries Amanda said that it is the government that will choose, with WSCC submitting a final proposal by September 2025. She hoped that this will make things more democratic. We will not know how this will affect Town and Parish Councils until the government sets out the roles of each. Martin Boffey, Leader of HDC said that there hasn't been any assumed expectations yet, but there will be an opportunity for Town and Parish Councils to look to take on roles.

Amanda finished by stating that this information is on the WSCC website.

Chairman Alan Strudley said that if you have an opinion then make your comments to WSCC so that you are heard.

5. Neighbourhood Plan update – Chairman of the Neighbourhood Steering Group - Ian Walker gave the following update: We had a date fixed for the Referendum on our Neighbourhood Plan – 31st January 2025. Shortly before that, HDC cancelled the Referendum as they did for three other parishes. The reason being that at the end of December 2024, the HDC Local Plan reached the stage of being examined by a government Planning Inspector and the Inspector during the course of open hearings decided the plan wasn't up to scratch and put a stop on the HDC Local Plan. HDC then stopped any Neighbourhood Plans going forward. So, the fact remains is that we still do not have a made Neighbourhood Plan after 10 years. The Steering is thinking about how to move forward but at the moment everything is stalled.
In answer to questions from parishioners, Ian said that the Neighbourhood Plan has to be in conformity with the HDC Local Plan, so we can't have included in the Neighbourhood Plan things that are against the HDC Local Plan so that is why HDC say that we can't move forward until they know what is going to be in their Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan has cost £37,000 to date, but if it finally gets made then it will be money well spent. Some of the money has been spent on Environmental and Biodiversity Reports which will be able to be used going forward.
The Chairman gave a vote of thanks to Ian and all members of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

6. District Councillor Kasia Greenwood gave the following update and her full report can be found on the Parish Council website:

HDC has moved offices from the previous address at Parkside. We are now at Alberly House, which is just above where the old Wilko shop was. The Council will be meeting later this week to vote on adopting a new constitution. This involves a variety of changes as to how things work and what committees there are, but most significant is how the planning committee will work. There are currently two planning committees - North and South. I sit on Planning Committee North, and the assumption from residents is that when on that committee I represent their views. However, this is not how it works. Councillors sitting on planning committee must work purely in the capacity of making planning decisions, considering planning rules and the planning framework. Under the new system there will be one committee and not all Councillors will sit on it. It will be made up of a smaller group of highly-trained Councillors who will be able to make more expert decisions on planning grounds. I will then be able to attend committee if there is an application in my ward and speak for or against, giving my honest opinion without being restricted by concerns of appearing biased or predetermined. This will mean I'll be better able to represent residents.

A new food waste collection scheme will be starting in spring 2026. Also, there are changes to our garden waste service, starting this month. When you pay to subscribe to garden waste collection you will no longer be sent a sticker on the back. The system in the waste collection cab will identify whether your house has subscribed to the scheme.

The Parish Council also asked me to address two main areas of concern for you:

(i) The Local Plan and the site allocations in that relate to Barns Green

(ii) The situation with unapproved development and the lack of enforcement on local traveller sites

I extended the invitation to HDC officers from both Planning and Enforcement to attend the meeting tonight, and unfortunately none could make it, but I can give you the latest updates from them.

The Local Plan - As you probably know, the Local Plan is currently paused and we're waiting to hear from the inspector. As such we can't really provide any further update on either the Plan or the allocated sites. Once we've heard back from the inspector, HDC will be briefing parishes on the next steps.

The two contentious Barns Green sites are the land south of Smugglers Lane, which is allocated to have fifty homes, and land south of Muntham Drive, which is set to have 25 homes. The Council held a number of consultation events leading up to the Local Plan going to examination, including meetings with Parish Councils and an open public consultation period. As the Local Plan is currently paused, it is still at examination phase, meaning that the only changes that can be made to the plan (such as the removal of a site) can only be done on the recommendation of the Inspector. I think it is worth adding that both of the Barns Green sites in question were in the draft Local Plan put forward by the previous administration in 2021.

Kingfisher Farm, Greenfield Farm and Greenacres – Traveller Sites

While compliance officers were not able to attend tonight, the head of compliance at HDC indicated they would be happy to brief the parish on this issue, should they wish. Officers can't comment or give a view on any live planning applications and have to ensure that all planning applications go through the same planning process. Officers stressed that a breach of planning control is strongly discouraged, but is not actually illegal, and that retrospective planning applications are a legitimate route in the process. Only once the planning process is concluded can HDC assess enforcement options, if the development is deemed unacceptable. The various enforcement options we have, none of which are ideal, are:

- Temporary Stop Notice/Stop Notice: This only prevents further development from taking place and doesn't undo development that has already occurred. This can be breached. If breached the Council can consider prosecution, but this takes time to get the court date
 - Injunction: This route costs the council a lot of money (in the region of tens of thousands of pounds). There is no guarantee of success because the applicant might not adhere to it. It is only temporary if granted. A judge may not grant it if an application is still pending and going through the planning process
 - Enforcement Notice: This would not immediately remedy the breach. There is a right of appeal. It can only be considered if the planning process has taken place. A further problem which exacerbates the issue is that in order to issue any legal proceedings you need to know who owns the land, which often isn't easy in these cases. So, as you can see, there's a lot going on and not necessarily any easy answers, but please consider me your voice to take issues to HDC and convey information from HDC back to you. So, if you need anything, please don't hesitate to get in touch. You can find my contact information online or on the HDC app.
- In answer to a question from Parish Cllr Brian O'Connor, Kasia said the two contentious sites in Barns Green are currently in the HDC Local Plan as they were deemed suitable versus other sites and it is now in the hands of the Inspector as it is at the examiner stage.
7. HDC Leader of the Council Martin Boffey addressed the parishioners and said that he would be happy to take questions. Martin said he understood the frustration with the Local Plan, but the Inspector had some concerns with the Plan so that is why he has paused it. The Inspector hasn't outlined what those concerns are yet and has yet to make a decision. What was clear is that he said that HDC is not meeting its housing needs and has a Duty to Co-operate. The Inspector also said he didn't seem to believe totally regarding the concept of Water Neutrality. So that is why HDC paused the Referendum on our Neighbourhood Plan as changes to the Local Plan could invalidate our Plan. Therefore, our Neighbourhood Plan doesn't have to wait until the new Local Plan is made. With regard to the three Traveller sites, further enforcement cannot be taken whilst there are live planning applications.

8. Open Session for Members of the Public

The following questions from parishioners were answered by Martin Boffey:

Q: Is HDC going to hold off permitting any large developments until the Local Plan is finalised?

A: At the moment anyone can submit a planning application in line with existing Local Framework. Every planning application is decided on a tilted balance.

Q: Is there anyway that development can go ahead at the old school site allocated in our Neighbourhood Plan over any other sites?

A: No, once sites are allocated they either get planning permission or not once planning applications have been submitted? However, if the Neighbourhood Plan gets made ahead of a new Local Plan, then there would be some protection for a few years.

Q: Who was consulted on the HDC Local Plan?

A: There was a public consultation. Regulation 18 – This is a draft format submitted in February 2020 which Requested responses. Regulation 19 – Plan submitted to Inspector with responses from members of the public. The Chairman said that the Parish Council did make a representation in writing and in person at the Regulation 19 stage.

Q: Parish Cllr Rob Fryatt: In our Neighbourhood Plan we had 29 sites submitted which after careful consultation and analysis with the whole village, two sites were chosen, Sumners Fields and the old school site. How then did two sites opposite the pub and shop get chosen as they were the least wanted by the whole village?

A: A Neighbourhood Plan is about picking up local factors that are not picked up in strategic planning. A Neighbourhood Plan goes to an Independent Inspector for examination and does not go through the same intensity and complexity of a Local Plan that is examined by a Planning Inspectorate. Neighbourhood Plans look at local needs whereas the strategic planning team at HDC look at housing needs across the whole district to feed into the Local Plan.

Q: The whole village still needs to know from HDC Strategic Planning team, why all the other sites in our Neighbourhood Plan were not chosen over and above the least favoured sites knowing that all the sites submitted were subjected to the same intensive scrutiny? We need to know that the team that made the decision had no connection with developers.

A: District Cllr Kasia said that when the community looks at sites, we may say we don't want development near a pub or local shop but when the strategic planners look at sites, they look at what sites are most sustainable, near amenities and near bus routes. Parishioners didn't seem to be very convinced by this explanation.

Q: Cllr Rob Fryatt - Why did HDC choose a site that floods every year, so it is not sustainable!!

Q: Ian Walker, Chair of NP Steering Group said it was interesting to note that one of the fields opposite the shop, in the 2016 SCHLAA was considered to be under developable. So why has HDC's view changed? Ian concluded that if HDC had consulted with the NP Steering Group and the Parish Council more closely then there may have been a different outcome.

Cllr Brian O'Connor pointed out that there are to be 142 units being built at Wellcross Grange, but because it is a retirement village, the units do not count against housing allocation that HDC have to fulfil.

The Chairman concluded that unfortunately Local Government operates under the rules that it is given to operate on. Unfortunately, these rules sometimes lead to outcomes that are less desirable. The only thing we can do as individuals is to make our points load and clear that we are not happy, to those people who have influence on what goes on. The Parish Council will continue to try to find as many ways as we can to make sure the views of the villagers and parishioners here are presented properly but that is not a guarantee of the outcome.

The discussion then moved onto questions regarding potholes and what the impact of a new development is on the roads with regard to potholes. County Cllr Amanda Jupp explained that WSCC Highways Stewards go out when a job is raised to inspect the potholes under certain criteria. If it is dangerous, then it is marked with a white line and repaired within 24 days. With regards to HGV's and large vans, we do not have adequate infrastructure for the increased volume of traffic and these vehicles are breaking up the edges of C and D roads, therefore Amanda said she would like to see developers putting in an infrastructure before the developers start building. WSCC could go to the developer to ask for reparation for damage to our roads, but proof is required so unless photos are taken, WSCC can't take any action. However, Amanda is currently working with the Parish Council to try to get a 40mph TRO (Traffic Regulations Order) on Bashurst Hill and West Chiltington Lane from the A264 by Toat Hill Garage right up to the A272, install Village Gateways and Speed Indicator Devices to try to slow up the traffic.

The Chairman Alan Strudley closed the meeting by thanking all those who had spoken at the meeting and he thanked his fellow councillors for the hard work that they have put in throughout the year and said that he would encourage anyone who has an interest in these matters to come along to a Parish Council meeting so that the Parish Council can then try to work on their behalf. Thanks were given to all attendees and Alan said that this is an indication of why this is such a great village to live in.

The meeting closed at 9.30pm.

