

Barns Green and Itchingfield Village Meeting Report 31st March 2025

Here are a few updates on what is happening at HDC:

Office Move

As some of you may already know, HDC has moved offices from the previous address at Parkside. We are now at Albery House, which is just above where the old Wilko shop was. This is a more accessible location, based in the town centre, as well as being a more cost effective and environmentally friendly space.

New Constitution

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. What I think is probably most significant to you is how the planning committee will work.

At the moment there are 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, at the moment 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. This means that when residents come to me expressing their concern about a planning application I can't fully engage with them because I am required to remain neutral and to come to committee without any predetermined views.

I'm not allowed to make pre-written speeches at committee, speak against an application based on what residents views are, or make decisions based on local feeling. I am obliged to work on a purely planning basis, meaning that I often have to vote in favour of things I don't necessarily agree with because there are no valid material planning reasons not to.

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.

Waste Collection

Just so you know, 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 to place on your bin. You now only need to label your bin with your house name or number on the back. The system in the waste collection cab will identify whether your house has subscribed to the scheme.

With the Council not having to produce and send out thousands of stickers, this is a more environmentally-friendly system and is also cost saving.

Further Matters

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

1. The Local Plan and the site allocations in that relate to Barns Green
2. 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.

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's 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, which also provides other useful information such as dates of bin collections, ways to report fly tipping, local news, etc.

Thank you very much for listening.