

FRANT PARISH COUNCIL

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THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING HELD AT BELLS YEW GREEN VILLAGE HALL ON 21st FEBRUARY 2024 AT 7.00PM

Present: Cllrs Crookshank (Chair), Steadman, Macdonald-Brown, Best, Park, Miles, Davies
County Cllr B. Standley, District Cllr J Howell, District Cllr S Glynn-Ives, District Cllr I Tysh
Ms R Barnes (Clerk & RFO)

Mr J Baum – on behalf of Inspired Villages
4 no. attendees

- 1. Enquire whether anyone present intends to film, photograph and/or record the meeting.** None.
- 2. Receive apologies.** Cllr W Rutherford.
- 3. Receive declarations of interests on items on the agenda and changes to the Register of Interests.** None.

Cllr Crookshank brought forward agenda item **7: Public Forum** and invited general comments. Mr D Huskisson noted that he had advised the Parish Council about the work needed along his boundary with the green. He said he may need to erect one or more buttresses and install foundations to support the wall and as these would be on the Council-owned green, he asked what, if any, legalities and paperwork would need to be considered. Cllr Steadman noted that there were already buttresses in place along this boundary so an additional buttress(es) would not be out of place. Cllr Crookshank suggested that Mr Huskisson come back to the Parish Council with more detail about the proposed works once firmed-up.

Mr Huskisson raised the issue of the Heras fencing still in situ at the Sussex View development along the boundary with the A267 and asked if the Parish Council could seek its removal. **ACTION: Clerk**

Mr Huskisson asked whether the Parish Council had received further information from Orchard Landscapes re: their quotations for maintaining the green spaces in the parish. The Clerk said she had not and would follow this up. **ACTION: Clerk**

4. Wealden Draft Local Plan – Q & A with Wealden District Councillors

Cllr Crookshank thanked the District Councillors for attending. Cllr Standley started the discussion by noting his surprise at just how much new housing was proposed for the parish,

particularly in the AONB, noting that government numbers were advisory, not mandatory. Cllr Crookshank agreed, noting that a distinct boundary should be maintained between Tunbridge Wells (in Kent) and the north of Frant, inside the East Sussex border. He said that to allow development in this location, setting aside the harmful impact on the AONB, would be to encourage urban sprawl while piggy-backing off the infrastructure in Tunbridge Wells. Cllr Best added that the allocation of housing in the north of Frant is proposed on high ground which would be very difficult to screen, further diminishing the character of the AONB. Cllr Park said that the allocation here was an easy win for Wealden in that it could take advantage of the infrastructure in Tunbridge Wells; with that said, a considerable burden would still fall on Frant, itself already deprived. She noted the loss of the only doctors' surgery in the parish some years ago and the one primary school with a limited intake of 100. Such a large allocation would double, if not more, the size of Frant and completely alter its character.

Cllr Glynn-Ives responded noting that Wealden had tried to balance new allocations and find compromise and suggested that it was about finding the positives in new developments when they come up. Cllr Park noted that there already large developments underway in the parish and the consequences of these were becoming readily apparent. Cllr Best queried this high-risk strategy by Wealden, suggesting that the Draft Local Plan could fail once again, with the various impacts and costs that would ensue as a result.

Cllr Tysh said that 53% of Wealden is AONB; of that, 10% was being proposed to be built on. He said that some 80% of SHEELA sites had been rejected by Wealden following an assessment of them. He confirmed the proposed allocations for the parish as follows: a total of 745, comprising 247 which already have planning permission, 477 new allocations and 21 expected from windfall sites. Cllr Tysh suggested that the failure of the 2019 Draft Local Plan had led to unsuitable sites being approved for development, including the over-provision of large family homes, rather than the smaller 2/3-bedroom homes that the county needs. Thus, as well as providing smaller dwellings, Cllr Tysh said the new plan would seek to achieve carbon neutrality, the coordination of new houses with the provision of infrastructure and a biodiversity net gain. He noted further that a certain number of houses needed to be allocated to get the Plan through. He added that one reason for the failure of the 2019 Plan had been the lack of cooperation with neighbouring authorities; Wealden had now persuaded these authorities that it does not have the land capacity.

Cllr Tysh addressed the idea that Wealden might be able to reduce housing numbers on the basis that it is considered 'exceptional'. He said that advice from counsel was sought in May 2022 and that this advice confirmed that Wealden could not argue it was 'exceptional'. Cllr Tysh said that, at present, 94-95% of land in Wealden was not built on; after the Plan's 16 years, only 93% of land would be developed. He added that new development would not be allowed to be occupied until the necessary infrastructure had been provided. Cllr Howell said this was in no way a new idea, recalling that some 16 years ago, she had attended an officers' presentation at which it was declared that development should not go ahead without infrastructure provision.

Cllr Best asked what percentage of allocated sites could Frant lose while still meeting the required numbers. Cllr Tysh said that the Plan was already delivering 20% below the 1,200 new dwellings/year target.

Cllr Park noted that all parties often worked hard to achieve sustainability objectives in new developments, only to find them scrapped once development began. A case in point was the new Inspired Villages development in the parish. Cllr Tysh said there was no current Wealden policy to oblige developers to deliver on these actions; rather developers have been agreeing voluntarily to them. However, he said the Planning and Energy Act 2008 allows for building standards to be exceeded and that the Draft Local Plan makes use of this.

Cllr Tysh said that 8-week consultation period would start on 15th March and a dedicated website called 'Let's Talk' would be available. He asked that as well as giving planning reasons as to which policies the Parish Council (and others) did not agree with, it would also be helpful to indicate which policies it/they were in favour of.

Cllr Tysh noted that there was an in-person event at Frant Memorial Hall on 23rd April (to be confirmed by Wealden DC). Cllr Crookshank suggested that the Parish Council advertise this through posters, website, etc. **ACTION: Clerk**

(Cllrs Glynn-Ives and Tysh and one member of the public left the meeting)

5. Approve the Minutes of the meeting on 13 December 2023 as a true and accurate record.

The Minutes were approved and duly **adopted**.

6. To determine matters arising from the previous Minutes for updating and noting.
On the agenda to discuss.

7. Public Forum (time limit to be extended only at the discretion of the Chairman)
As above.

8. Receive reports from County and District Councillors
County

Cllr Standley noted he had submitted his report to the Parish Council prior to the meeting (Appendix 1). He said that the Flexi buses now had a greater facility to cross zones, making the service more accessible.

Referring to recent legal advice from NALC about the proposed pedestrian crossing, Cllr Crookshank asked Cllr Standley if a meeting could be set up with all parties to take this forward. Cllr Standley agreed and said he would liaise with Highways. **ACTION: BS**

Cllr Macdonald-Brown noted that a light needed replacing on the refuge on the A267 in Frant. **ACTION: Clerk**

District

Cllr Howell said there was £4.99 budget increase on Band D properties. She said that Cllr Collins had declared that the previous administration had been fiscally sound.

9. Planning

9.1 To consider licence and planning applications received:

9.1.1 WD/2024/0172/F – 1 Cokers Down Cottages, Dundale Road, TN3 0AG

Conversion of existing garage and adjoining stables to habitable space, new roof to existing garage and adjoining stables, raised rear patio and landscaping which includes swimming pool. Erection of rear outbuilding.

Councillors **agreed** to recommend **APPROVAL**.

9.1.2 WD/2022/2027/MRM – Little Mount Farm, Benhall Mill Road, TN2 5JW

Reserved matters pursuant to outline permission WD/2019/1648/MAO – appearance, landscaping, layout and scale of phases 2 & 3 comprising the erection of 90 no. units of accommodation (C2 Use) and other ancillary structures, parking, landscaping, SUDS and other associated works.

The representative for the application, Mr Baum, said that it had gone out to tender with an expected start date for Phase 1 of May/June this year. Cllr Howell, referring back to Cllr Park's comments about the development, said that the Parish Council had accepted the application in good faith, including the promises concerning sustainability which had now been u-turned upon (e.g. provision of solar panels).

Mr Baum suggested he could arrange transport for any councillors who might like to visit another Inspired Villages development near Leeds Castle.

Councillors **agreed** to recommend **APPROVAL**.

9.1.3 WD/2023/2280/F – Woodside, Down Lane, Frant, TN3 9HW

Conversion of the former stables building to the south of Woodside to form a new detached dwelling. Construction of a rear extension. Internal alterations and adjustments to fenestration. Associated landscaping works.

There was some discussion around the proposals but councillors considered that their original objections still stood and **agreed** to recommend **REFUSAL**.

10. Consultations

10.1 East Sussex Draft Local Transport Plan

Cllr Macdonald-Brown noted that the Plan did not refer to EV or hydrogen vehicles.

It was **agreed** that there was little relevance of the Plan to the parish and that a formal response was not needed.

11. Environment and Green Spaces**11.1 Approve quote for preparing drawings for Albert Well application**

The Clerk asked that the quote be approved in principle so that when a decision was forthcoming from Historic England about whether to delist the Well, a listed building application could be quickly submitted to Weadlen DC if necessary. The quote from CTP Engineering was duly **approved**.

11.2 Approve quote for installing bollards along Frant green boundary with A267

The quotation from Mr S Bowie was **approved**.

11.3 Consider and select from ESCC rural grass-cutting options

Councillors **agreed** to select Option 1: Standard Cuts.

11.4 Agree responsibilities for monitoring of assets in the parish

It was **agreed** that the Clerk would circulate the asset register and that councillors would indicate which assets they would monitor.

ACTION: Clerk

12. Finance**12.1 Approve payments**

Approved.

12.2 Approve the bank reconciliation

Approved.

13. Urgent issues at the discretion of the Chairman, for discussion only

Cllr Crookshank said that Mr Payne had thanked the Parish Council for purchasing and installing a replacement bench for the green.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 9.05pm.

Appendix 1**County Councillor Report**

Frant Parish Council Feb 24

Budget Council Tax

As reported in previous months local government is facing considerable budget challenges. The Autumn statement brought no new money to the table. The sector continued to lobby the Treasury for additional funding and welcomed the additional £660m of which ESCC will receive approx. £5.3m

ESCC for the first time for many, many, years will be reliant on using reserves to balance the budget. £14.3m will be used but of course reserves can only be used once.

Again, as in previous reports the pressures are on Childrens Services and Adult Social Care. An additional £19m of base funding has been allocated to Children Services with the pressure on Looked After Children. It is not just a question of numbers but the complexity of cases – hence the £1m year cost in some cases.

The increase in minimum wage has had a significant impact on social care costs.

A recent resident survey concluded the county should spend less on ASC and CS and more on roads. However, that sentiment changes when they need assistance with ASC or their children need the specialist help of CS.

Council Tax, including the additional ASC precept of 2%, is proposed at 4.99%. The increase for a typical Band D is 97pence a week (Band A 64p and Band H 1.98).

Net expenditure is £538.1m of which 70% is raised via council Tax.

Despite the pressure the council continues to provide high quality services as recognised by the LGA Peer Review last year.

It will also deliver a capital programme of over £800m in the period to 2033.

Our lobbying has had some success with an additional £660m being allocated to local government with £5.1m to ESCC.

Scrutiny Review of Pothole Management

The committee undertook a study of the pothole repair management and agreed a number of recommendations which have been accepted by the Lead member and Director of Transport Economy and Community.

Potholes within the criteria are repaired within the terms of the Highways contract. Patching is an additional cost and is funded through the capital programme.

Funding boost to bolster green skills.

Council bosses have welcomed funding that will help boost green skills and support the county's move to net zero. East Sussex County Council's Employability and Skills Team successfully bid for £240,000 from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) to launch the Retrofit Skills East Sussex project.

Updates on the project as it progresses can be found on the council's website.

Cost of living payment set for February.

Eight million people on means-tested benefits will receive a cost-of-living payment in February to help with high bills. Those on low incomes and receiving benefits such as universal credit are eligible but should be wary of scams – on legitimate payments, there will be a reference on a recipient's bank account of their national insurance number, followed by DWP COL, or the reference HMRC COLS for those who are eligible through tax credits.

The £299 payment will be made directly into bank accounts, without the need to make a claim, between 6 and 22 February.

Wealden Local Plan

I was shocked to see so many proposals for 100's of houses in Frant within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty especially given the comments made by what is now the Green/Lib Dem coalition. It is not clear what effect this will have on primary school places given the limited capacity at Frant Village School.

RWS Feb 2024

The draft Local Plan regulation 18 was unanimously approved by 26 members at the Extraordinary Full Council meeting on 8th Feb. It will now go out to consultation for eight weeks from early March. Comments need to be recorded via the Consultation portal which, whilst not yet open, people can register using the portal at <https://consult.wealden.gov.uk/kse/>. An in-person exhibition will take place in Frant Memorial Hall, date yet to be confirmed. The documents that make up the draft Local Plan Regulation 18 are now available on the Wealden District Council website at: <https://council.wealden.gov.uk/mgChooseDocPack.aspx?ID=5650>

Community Led Housing

At the beginning of the year I met again with Action in Rural Sussex (AiRS) and learnt more about Community Led Housing – a way of providing affordable housing for local people through schemes such as Community Land Trusts (CLTs). In the draft Local Plan the council recognise that the majority of residents are concerned about the delivery of affordable housing and noted that Community Led Housing schemes were supported and seen as a significant provider of affordable housing, particularly in rural areas (pg 190, point 8.8). On page 207, point 8.66, the council again demonstrates its support for CLTs, “CLTs provide an opportunity to develop affordable housing through local communities and ensure that such homes are permanently and genuinely affordable. For more information on Community Led Housing and how AiRS can provide advice and support, please see their website: <https://www.ruralsussex.org.uk/what-we-do/affordable-housing/> or contact:

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‘Eat Well, Move More’

The Council have launched an eight-week ‘Eat Well, Move More’ campaign which started on Monday 22nd January. Listen out for adverts on Ashdown Radio and Hailsham FM as well as social media messages and articles in Sussex Living Magazine, including this month’s: <https://sussexliving.com/features/downtime/be-well-move-happy/>. There are a number of free health & wellbeing courses delivered through the Street Learning Programme. These courses are free to Wealden residents aged 19+. More information can be found here: <https://www.wealden.gov.uk/community-and-safety/street-learning/?RD=True> Hard copies of their new booklet can be requested by emailing: streetlearning@wealden.gov.uk

Frant Post Office

We have learnt that the Post Office in Frant closed temporarily on Monday 12th February due to the resignation of the postmaster. I’m sure residents are very much aware of this situation and I hope service is resumed promptly. Does the Parish Council have an update?

Clr Sarah Glynn-Ives