

FRANT PARISH COUNCIL

Serving the communities of Frant, Bells Yew Green & Eridge

clerk@frant-pc.gov.uk / 07903 661581 / www.frant-pc.gov.uk

THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL HELD AT THE STABLES, FRANT ON 31st MAY 2025 AT 11AM

Present: Cllr S. Crookshank (Chair), Cllr D. Park, Cllr A. Macdonald-Brown,
Cllr C. Steadman
Ms R. Barnes (Clerk/RFO)
CCllr Bob Standley
DCllr S. Glynn-Ives

21 members of the public

1. Welcome from Cllr Stuart Crookshank, Chair

Cllr Crookshank welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for coming. He said that the Parish Council works hard all year on an assortment of different issues, from streetlighting to maintaining the parish's green spaces. He noted that there were a few ongoing projects that the Parish Council had been focussing on.

Firstly, the development of a pedestrian crossing in Frant – a delay at ESCC in the production of the detailed design had now been rectified and, with the funds already in place, it was hoped that construction would begin early next year. He thanked Cllr Standley for all this help in moving the project forward.

Secondly, the ongoing repair works to both the Albert and Victoria Wells. Ceded to the Parish Council in the early 1900s, Cllr Crookshank noted that the Parish Council was responsible for their upkeep and maintenance; being listed structures made this task particularly important, challenging and costly.

Thirdly, Cllr Crookshank said that, as Trustees of the Bells Yew Green Village Hall, the Parish Council had been approached by the hall's committee to help with turning around the outlook of the hall. A small loan from the Council helped to tide the hall over while the committee successfully generated more bookings and streamlined its expenses.

Cllr Crookshank said that the submission of the major application by Esquire to develop 400+ homes in the parish and to relocate the Tunbridge Wells Rugby Club to Bunny Lane were likely to be submitted in July. He thanked Cllr Park for her work in collating information about the proposals and liaising with the pressure group, the Green Weald Alliance. He said that Esquire were holding a public exhibition on 16th July at the village hall in Frant and urged parishioners to go and have a look at the proposals for themselves and to submit their views to Wealden DC once the application was submitted.

Cllr Crookshank raised the issue of devolution, which will affect both Wealden DC and ESCC, but not the Parish Council, and said that CCllr Standley would speak about it shortly.

Lastly, Cllr Crookshank raised the problem of increasing instances of crime in our rural areas, largely involving gangs stealing farm equipment, such as quad bikes and tractors. He said that with the help of our District and County Councillors, the issue had been escalated to the Police and Crime Commissioner.

2. Approve Draft Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 25th May 2024

The Minutes were **approved** as a true and accurate record.

3. Comments from County Councillor Bob Standley

CCllr Standley gave some detail about the proposals for devolution, noting that elections for a Mayor for Sussex would take place in May 2026. Three unitary authorities would be created – East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton & Hove – with strategic responsibility for various services and involvement from representatives from their constituent parts. He said there are guidelines as to the level of population each new unitary authority would serve and, as such, Brighton & Hove might need to take over Worthing and Adur to ‘balance’ the numbers. He noted that some were in favour of five unitary authorities; however, he considered this would be unworkable and unwieldy as it would end up with five Chief Executives, five Head of Children’s Services, etc.

CCllr Standley noted that the Mayoral office would be able to raise its own precept. To avoid a burden on the tax payer, he said he was advocating for assurances that Council Tax would not be unduly impacted upon.

Turning to the County budget, CCllr Standley said that the majority was spent on Children’s Services and Adult Social Care, at some 67%. He suggested that this amount would likely increase with the ageing population. He said that SEN may need to be redefined, more funding identified, or both, otherwise the system was at risk.

With respect to the repair of the highways and potholes in particular, CCllr Standley said that some 15,000 potholes were fixed in the last year; he noted that if the repair fails within two years, Balfour Beatty bears the cost. He said that ‘patching’ is a better option for repair with increased longevity. In all, it is estimated that it would take £400 million to bring all the roads up to standard.

A resident asked CCllr Standley his view about the changes and how they might impact the planning process and whether local residents’ views would continue to be heard. He responded that the new East Sussex Unitary would become the planning authority and would be subject to the now mandatory need to provide a defined number of new homes in a five-year period. Cllr Park said that it demonstrated the conflict of localism and centralised government and an emphasis on ‘town’ and not ‘rural’.

CCllr Standley said that there were no plans for changes to parish councils although some powers may be devolved down to this level.

In response to a question about how much devolution was expected to cost, Cllr Standley said it was anticipated to be approximately £35 million, with central government bearing this cost. Anyone will be able to run, but the cost of the campaign for an independent candidate could be in the region of £100 – 200,000.

4. Talk by Sgt Carter and PCSO Skerman from the Rural Crime Team, Sussex Police

Sgt Carter and PCSO Skerman introduced themselves and explained the way the Rural Crime Team for Sussex is set up, with 21 officers dedicated to it. It was noted that some 62% of Sussex is defined as rural. The following was given as a breakdown into the main areas of concern that the intelligence-led Rural Crime Team focus on:

Agricultural crime

Items being stolen include farming plant, tractors, quad bikes, etc. The Rural Crime Team are going farm to farm and security-marking farm kit. They make use of various legislation, including the Wildlife and Countryside Act, to tackle incidents of disturbance to badger setts, fish and deer poaching and hare coursing. The latter is now an organised crime, livestreamed globally with bets being placed and money transferred via Western Union and similar. The team make use of eight vehicles and drone capability with thermal imagery.

Marine crime

Theft from war graves and shipwrecks. An equivalent neighbouring police team regularly share information and resources, including their underwater drones. There is currently an ongoing project to security-mark site under the sea.

Environmental crime

The team works with the Environment Agency (EA) on matters such as fish poaching and contamination of water courses. The two-tier offence of fly-tipping is undertaken by local authorities (for the fly tipping on the highway) and the EA, who will pick up more than 20 cubic tonnes of waste. The Rural Crime Team assist with licence plate tracking, drones, photogrammetry, etc. Cllr Park asked about the law around the use of CCTV systems. Sgt Carter said that private CCTV circuits can operate without a need to tell people they are being filmed and the footage can be used in court. Commercial operations which use CCTV must have a data security/GDPR policy in place. Police need a reason to access CCTV footage (for example, in response to a particular incident). Cllr Standley said some parishes use ANPR, which is less intrusive. He suggested the law needs to change in terms of the owner being required to pay for the removal of fly tipping on their land.

Heritage Crime

A good example of heritage crime was the theft of lead from the roof of St Albans church in Frant.

DCllr enquired about how to report crime for those residents who are not 'online'. PCSO Skerman responded that if it is an emergency, call 999; if not, then report incidents by calling 101. Sgt Carter said that a lot of money had been spent on improving the #101 call

centre and it is now the third highest performing call centre, with the majority of calls being answered in under 30 seconds. Sgt Carter said that 999 calls cannot be pinned to the exact location and What Three Words is now a useful aide. Local crime statistics can be accessed for 'recorded' crime; some crimes, such as livestock worrying, are not 'notifiable' and therefore not recorded.

Mrs Pybus thanked Sgt Carter and PCSO Skerman for all the work that the Rural Crime Team do.

5. Concluding remarks

Cllr Crookshank thanked the speakers for their interesting and engaging talk. He also thanked parish councillors for their work throughout the year on behalf of the parish.

Cllr Crookshank noted that the rewilding of the green in Frant had been recognised by the Sussex Botanical Society as one of the best examples in the county. Cllr Crookshank thanked Mr Huskisson and the Friends of Frant Green Spaces for all their efforts in this regard.

Finally, Cllr Crookshank thanked the Clerk for her work supporting the Parish Council throughout the year.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 12.40pm.