

FRANT PARISH COUNCIL

Serving the communities of Frant, Bells Yew Green & Eridge

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THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL HELD AT FRANT MEMORIAL HALL ON 21st MAY 2025 AT 7.30PM

Present: Cllr S. Crookshank (Chair), Cllr W. Rutherford, Cllr D. Park,
Cllr S. Davies, Cllr C. Steadman, Cllr A. Macdonald-Brown
Cllr S. Davies, Cllr A. Oram, Cllr A. Best

Cllr B. Standley, DCllr S. Glynn-Ives

Members of the public

1. Elect a Chair

Cllr Rutherford proposed that Cllr Crookshank continue in the role of Chair. This was seconded by Cllr Park and **agreed** unanimously. Cllr Crookshank thanked the Council.

2. Enquire whether anyone present intends to film, photograph and/or record the meeting

None.

3. Receive apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr G. Taylor, DCllr J. Howell and DCllr J. Hulbert.

4. Receive declarations of interests on items on the agenda and changes to the Register of Interests

None.

5. Approve the Minutes of the meeting on 16th April 2025 as a true and accurate record

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

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

Cllr Crookshank thanked Mr. Andy Wilford of Esquire Developments for attending the meeting and invited him to address the Council. Mr. Wilford said that work was still

continuing on the development of the proposals for 400+ new houses and the relocation of the Tunbridge Wells Rugby Club to within Frant parish. He said that various surveys, including of ecology, were being conducted; he noted that Wealden DC, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and the Secretary of State had determined the proposals did not require an EIA.

Referring to the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) that would accrue as a result of the development, Mr. Wilford suggested this would be in excess of £9 million. Cllr Rutherford noted that because the Parish Council did not have a Neighbourhood Plan, the percentage that would come to the Parish Council would be capped.

Mr. Wilford said Esquire had spoken with Mike Martin MP about the proposals, but that Nus Ghani MP had declined to engage with them.

Cllr Crookshank asked what the benefits of the scheme would be for the parish. Mr. Wilford said it was a case of what the parish wants or needs. He noted the scheme now included a dual use space for a GP's surgery and a children's nursery; he noted that while a GP's surgery could be provided, recruiting GPs could prove difficult.

Mr. Wilford said the application would be submitted in mid-July.

Cllr Park noted that the scheme did not provide for any connectivity to the three villages in the parish, nor with the railway station. Mr. Wilford responded that the scheme would sit on the edge of Tunbridge Wells and would be an extension of it. Cllr Park asked if Mr. Wilford could comment on hydrology issues, given the ongoing issues with existing aquifers and drainage. He responded that there was a SUDS hierarchy to adhere to and drainage ponds would be incorporated into the scheme; he noted the existing ditch network at Chase Farm.

Asked about the status of the Rugby Club and Pinewood Farm, Mr. Wilford said the options had been agreed and signed. Cllr Best enquired about the status of the field immediately north of Bunny Lane. Mr. Wilford confirmed that there was no option on this land and the landowner would be retaining ownership. He said that there was an opportunity to use this land for bio-diversity gain, with a 30-year management regime. He stated categorically that this land would not be developed and that he understood this to be Wealden DC's position too. He said that if the landowner did not cooperate to allow such a regime to operate on this land, purchasing off-site credits would be considered.

CCllr Standley said he regarded, as do many, the development site to be in the northern part of rural East Sussex, not an extension of Kent's Tunbridge Wells.

When asked about the junction with Bunny Lane and the impact the re-siting of the Rugby Club would have on it, Mr. Wilford said that ES Highways had indicated that they did not foresee any issues. Councillors were surprised by this, given the existing difficulty in navigating this junction and the speed of traffic coming down Frant Hill and from the Tunbridge Wells direction.

Cllr Davies pointed out that the Rugby Club regularly hold festivals and queried how the new site would accommodate the additional cars. Mr. Wilford said there would be overflow parking and it was proposed to put in a footpath from near the existing rugby club down toward to the new site. Cllr Park said she knew this area well and did not consider there was capacity for a new footpath. She also raised the associated issues with the new site, including the impact on the ancient woodland, impact of floodlighting in this rural area, impact on bats and other wildlife, impact on drainage, etc.

The Q&A came to a close and Cllr Crookshank thanked Mr. Wilford for coming to the meeting and speaking to the Council.

(post-meeting note: the date for Esquire's public exhibition in Frant is now confirmed for 16th July to be held at Frant Memorial Hall).

Ms. Warwick asked whether there had been any progress with the proposed highways measures on the Bells Yew Green Road. The Clerk confirmed that the licence application for the new village gate was ready to be submitted by Monson. She added she had been trying to contact the Traffic and Safety Manager at ESCC for an update on the other measures, including the 30mph roundel for the road surface, but had not yet had a return call.

Mr. Payne enquired about the timescale for the proposed pedestrian crossing. Cllr Crookshank said that, following a delay at ESCC regarding the production of the lighting design, it was now back on track and March 2026 was now considered to be a realistic end date.

One attendee noted that the steps from the Bells Yew Green Road up onto the green were too shallow and were difficult to use safely. It was agreed to ask the Council's contractor to have a look and see what improvements could be made.

ACTION: CS

7. Receive reports from County and District Councillors

County

Cllr Standley gave an update on current local government reorganisation and also the proposed devolution measures. On the latter, he said the plan was to have three unitary authorities (East and West Sussex and Brighton & Hove). He said some were in favour of five authorities but he considered that economies of scale could be lost in terms of service delivery.

Cllr Standley said he attended the reopening of the post office and shop in Frant and was pleased to see it back up and running.

District

DCllr Glynn-Ives said that each district councillor was being allocated a sum of £10,000 to be used in their ward. The idea was that individuals or groups in the community could apply for sums between £250 and £5,000 to assist with projects that would benefit the community.

8. Planning

8.1 To consider planning and licence applications received:

8.1.1 Application No: WD/2025/0868/F

Manor Farm, Bells Yew Green Road, Frant, TN3 9BH

Proposed single-storey contemporary side extension to the existing house and proposed extension to the existing garage outbuilding

Councillors **agreed** to recommend **approval**.

8.1.2 Application No: WD/2025/0869/F

Manor Farm, Bells Yew Green Road, Frant, TN3 9BH

Proposed single-storey orangery extension to the existing house and proposed extension to the existing garage outbuilding

Councillors **agreed** to recommend **approval**.

8.1.3 Application No: WD/2025/0996/O

Buckhurst Works, Bells Yew Green, TN3 9BP

Outline application for proposed erection of 4 no. dwellings

Councillors **agreed** to recommend **refusal** of this proposal once again and on the same grounds, including highways matters associated with the proposed access, impact on the local economy, impact on the AONB and sustainability of the site.

8.2 Applications determined by Wealden District Council

8.2.1 Application No: WD/2025/0506/F

9 Broomfield, Bells Yew Green, TN3 9AF

Single-storey rear and side extension.

Approved.

Noted.

9. Approve Section 1 of the Annual Return: Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

Section 1 of the AGAR was **approved**.

10. Approve Section 2 of the Annual Return: Accounting Statement 2024/25

Section 2 of the AGAR was **approved**.

11. Note Internal Auditor's conclusions for the financial year ending 31st March 2025

The Auditor's conclusions were noted and the Council thanked the Clerk.

12. Approve and adopt:

12.1 Financial Regulations

The Financial Regulations were duly **adopted**.

12.2 Standing Orders

The Standing Orders were duly **adopted**.

12.3 Risk Assessment and Management

The Risk Assessment and Management arrangements for the Parish Council were considered in detail and councillors' roles were reviewed. The arrangements were agreed as being sound and appropriate and the policy was duly **adopted**.

13. Finance

13.1 Approve payments

The payments were **approved**.

13.2 Approve the bank reconciliation

The bank reconciliation was **approved**.

14. Approve quotation for annual Parish Council insurance

The quotation was **approved**.

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

Cllr Best asked that the Clerk press ESCC about cutting back the overgrown verges along the A26 in Eridge.
ACTION: Clerk

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.20pm.

Appendix 1

Report from District Councillor Johanna Howell

Wealden District Report - Cllr Johanna Howell, May 2025

We had Full Council this month and we now have a new Chair, Cllr Blake Coggins. A big thank you to Cllr Jessika Hulbert for all her hard work over the past 15 months.

We also have a new leader, Cllr James Partridge. Cllr Millward will take on the duties as Deputy Chair.

The cabinet will remain the same with all previous portfolio holders as before.

As I have stated before there is a new constitution which was passed at Full Council. The documents have gone through many modifications and even as late as Saturday the documents underwent another change, which is somewhat concerning. The working party did not reach a consensus and many changes not agreed.

Bewl Water

I attended the meeting at Bewl which showed the future plans for the site. In many respects there seemed to be no change from their previous plans. There are some additions which were not expected and somewhat concerning. I am aware that Wadhurst have done a lot of work on the impact of future development in Bewl and I must thank them for their hard work.

VE Day 80th Anniversary Event

In conjunction with our neighbouring authorities (Lewes and Eastbourne, ESCC, Hastings and Rother) we held an event last night at Michelham Priory to mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day. We were honoured to host the Lord-Lieutenant, Mr Andrew Blackman, along with veterans, cadets, Mayors, Chairs and Councillors from East Sussex.

Well done Jess!

Thank you to everyone who sponsored our Chair, Councillor Jessika Hulbert, on her recent trek. She successfully completed the challenge in aid of Hospice in the Weald and has so far raised £2,094 for this wonderful charity. Well done Jess!

An appeal decision on a proposed development in Hellingly has been challenged in the High Court by Wealden District Council.

The ruling means that ancient woodland at Wellshurst Golf and Country Club in Hellingly has been saved from development for the time being.

A planning application was submitted to Wealden Council in 2022 from Downsview Leisure Ltd for a proposed development, which consisted of camping facilities in the form of pods,

caravans and a site office on land owned by the golf club to add to the leisure facilities already in place.

The application was refused by the council because of environmental impacts on designated ancient woodland and landscape.

The Wealden Community Infrastructure and Spaces (Round 2) programme was made available through the Government Rural England Prosperity Fund. The England-wide fund is an £110million, capital fund from Department for Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), complementary to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund - run by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. It is a top up for eligible authorities, such as Wealden District Council, which have already submitted an investment plan for UKSPF, to address the extra needs of rural areas.

We were pleased to award a total of £42,878.86 through the Wealden Community Infrastructure and Spaces Programme (round two) to support the projects within your ward between April 2024 – March 2025, which are now completed.

Wadhurst Parish Council	Improving the area for residents/visitors to be able to enjoy the woodland. Funding to purchase benches and install bird and bat boxes.	1479.5
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A project started 5 years ago:

Coronation Place, a former retirement living scheme in Southview Drive known as Streatfeild House, was demolished to provide the new affordable carbon zero ready homes – 18 for social rent and two for purchase on a shared ownership basis. Two homes have been built for wheelchair users and the remainder built to accessible standards.

The new development was completed by local contractor Trinity Homes Ltd.

All of the new homes are highly energy efficient with high levels of insulation and heat pumps have been installed alongside photovoltaic solar panels to generate energy. This will see a reduction in energy use and cost for the occupier. Each home has achieved an EPC A rating and has an electric vehicle charging point.

Wealden councillors to receive ward budgets to help communities

The creation of dedicated ward budgets for councillors to spend on supporting improvements within their communities has been approved by Wealden District Council.

Each of the 45 councillors will be allocated £10,000 to fund projects and initiatives that directly benefit their wards. The funding, totalling £450,000, will come from General Fund reserves and represents a cost-effective mechanism for addressing local priorities identified by residents and councillors alike.

Councillor ward budgets have been successfully used by councils across the country to support grassroots initiatives that may otherwise lack financial backing. This approach strengthens community engagement and empowers local representatives to drive meaningful change.

Councillors will be able to collaborate within their wards, combining their allocations where appropriate, and will assist community groups in submitting funding applications. They will also be responsible for ensuring that funds are used in accordance with approved projects.

Appendix 2

Report from District Councillor Sarah Glynn-Ives

District Councillor report – Frant & Wadhurst Sarah Glynn-Ives

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Southern Water and foul drainage update

In my report last month I mentioned an appeal raised by Chailey Homes against a Wealden policy to impose a condition forbidding occupation of new housing in Horam until Southern Water had done all necessary upgrade works. I am pleased to report that Chailey Homes has not appealed against the planning Inspector's decision. Southern Water has now agreed to meet relevant Council Officers and Ian Tysh (portfolio holder for Planning and Environment) to discuss how it is going to improve its upgrading of waste handling facilities in the district.

Ward Budgets for Councillors

Building strong, mutually supporting communities which are actively engaged in their own future is one of Wealden District Council's priorities. With this in mind, Wealden has decided to give each councillor £10,000 to spend supporting their community for this financial year. The aim of the scheme is to support community groups with grants between £250 and £5000. There will be a simple application process which will go to the ward councillor(s) for consideration and a decision.

Numerous councils around the country of different political persuasions and none, have been doing this successfully for some years.

The full details of the scheme are yet to be confirmed but the intention is that it will start in early July.

Local Government Reorganisation update

Wealden and the other district and borough councils in East Sussex submitted a joint response to the Government's proposal. We have expressed reservations about the lack of detail to date and about the government's plans. We feel that larger authorities with a more urban bias are less likely to be sensitive to the complexities of service delivery in rural areas than existing authorities and that smaller unitary areas will be closer to their populations and therefore more democratic.

Your voice is needed: The councils in East Sussex want to listen to and work with local people, residents, stakeholders, and partners whilst making these changes. Please go to <https://www.eastsussexcouncils.org/> to contribute your opinion.

Rural Business Grants Programme (RBGP)

I am delighted that a Frant business received a grant through the above scheme: A bespoke joinery manufacturer applied for a grant for a wood waste burner, briquette maker and

window production equipment. The burner will allow the business to use the energy from burning waste wood & shavings (the shavings processed into briquettes using the briquette maker) to heat their workshops rather than relying on traditional heating and the waste going to landfill. The project is currently being delivered and will see the creation of a new job, increased business growth and increased productivity.

The RBGP was available to small and medium sized businesses in Wealden; businesses were able to apply for a grant of up to 50% of the cost of capital projects. Grants were available from £2500 up to £35,000 with the business needing to match the grant awarded.

The grant is designed to fund capital projects that will strengthen the rural economy. Examples of eligible expenditure include:

- Purchasing new machinery, tools or production equipment
- Farm diversification projects (excluding agricultural production)
- Refurbishing or extending business premises
- Creating or expanding rural tourism and leisure services
- Investing in green technologies or more sustainable operations
- Acquiring commercial vehicles linked to rural service delivery

The next round of funding is now open for applications through <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/support/grants/ruralbusinessgrants/rural-business-grants-guidance-note>

Reopening of Frant Post Office & Store

I was delighted to visit the store yesterday after its recent refurbishment. Great to see local produce on sale and lots of community posters up in the window. Let's Talk Wealden - <https://letstalk.wealden.gov.uk/> If residents want more opportunity to engage with what's happening across Wealden, register with Let's Talk Wealden at Let's Talk Wealden and have your voice heard. Or simply visit the webpage regularly - you can put questions to the Leader of the council and the Planning Development Team as well as find out about the latest