



**Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of Billingshurst Parish Council
Wednesday 7 February 2024
7pm at the Billingshurst Centre**

Present

Cllrs Ken Peters (Chairman), Faye Algar, Edna Benger, Paul Berry, Phillip Day, Sandy Duck, Craig Gale, Trevor Leonard, Deepak Mahal, Caroline Beresford Pratt, Doug Waller and Sarah Wilson.

In attendance

G C Burt, Clerk to the Council

J Booth, Assistant Clerk

District Cllr John Milne, HDC Cabinet Member for Planning and Infrastructure

County Councilor, Amanda Jupp

District Councillor Mark Baynham

District Councillor John Trollope

Approximately 65 members of the public

14/24 Chairman's Announcements.

The Chairman advised that

1. The meeting was being streamed to the internet so please speak loudly and clearly.
2. Please raise your hand if you wish to speak.
3. The Council learned last week that sadly, Patrick Perks, a former Parish Councillor and previous Chairman had passed away. Residents may remember Patrick as, after leaving the Council back in 2003, he went on to play an active part in many community groups, most notably the Community Partnership, and was, therefore, well known to many in the community. Sympathies have been expressed to Patrick's widow June and their family at this time of loss.

15/24 Apologies.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs James Marchant, Roy Margetts and Steve Thomas due to prior engagements. On the proposal of Cllr Ken Peters, seconded by Cllr Doug Waller, **RESOLVED** that the apologies and reasons given be accepted.

16/24 To Receive Declarations of Interest and consider any requests for a dispensation.

None.

17/24 Presentation by Cllr John Milne, Cabinet Member for Planning and Infrastructure, Horsham District Council to *explain the background and reasoning for our decision to allocate East of Billingshurst in the Draft Local Plan.* To receive any questions.

Cllr John Milne explained that the Local Plan (LP) is a large and complex document which is required by Government. The Horsham District LP is out of date which makes it difficult for Horsham District Council (HDC) to defend the district against speculative planning applications. The developer contribution (Section 106 monies) is a strong motive to put development through the LP. A LP is put together mainly by officers but has to be approved by Councillors. Officers use objective planning criteria to assess sites.

Cllr Milne addressed the issue of housing target-setting and said that HDC has to use the Standard Method which gives a figure for house building. There have been three versions of the LP which were all cancelled before the new administration at HDC took office. To start again would cost around £1m which is a poor use of funds and would also take a very long time. HDC has, therefore, chosen from the same sites and has used the same rules to assess them. More consideration has been given to affordable housing, travel, nature recovery networks, etc. and HDC has the best eco build standards in the country – going above and beyond mandatory targets.

Water neutrality has meant a reduction in the number of houses for the district – under the Standard Method 1,200 homes per annum were required. This has now been cut to 480 per annum for 5 years and averages 777 per annum over the life of the plan. Infrastructure needs to catch up with build rates.

Cllr Milne said that there is no development for Adversane, so options for Billingshurst parish are East versus West. He said that Highwood (the developer of West) had not communicated with HDC and some information was missing or not in the format required. Officers have to look at feedback received from the Regulation 18 consultation. 6,000 comments were received – 11 supported West, with 243 objections. East had 31 responses in support with 279 objections. They are also bound by Government decree to use Ordnance Survey-based mapping which may be out of date. Figures for biodiversity net gain in the West are high but have not used the same matrix as everyone else. The West proposal is close to the Mens SAC but any impact has not been dealt with. Regarding schools and education, the West offer is at a relatively early stage. Officers have seen no clear evidence of agreement from WSCC of the land offer, nor evidence of suitability of the location and the site constraints. The East site has been around much longer and all those issues are well advanced. HDC is aware that West is offering more in benefits than is actually required and that the Parish Council has entered into a legal agreement for that provision with Highwood. Cllr Milne said that there is no precedent for this. HDC has not been included in discussions with WSCC on highways matters. All sites must be deliverable within the plan period and West is not. East is a single, compact site and can be delivered very quickly. Homes need to be delivered throughout the plan period and this means that early delivery ones are needed too. If West does not meet this requirement then Billingshurst could end up with East too. The strongest public wish was for low numbers of houses and this can be achieved as East is 650 houses and West is 1,000. More importantly, once you have breached the A29 barrier, you have opened up development. You are lacking any natural boundaries so you have effectively created a second scenario where another 1,000 homes is very possible. It would be high on the list for house building so breaching that boundary is significant. Cllr Milne noted that the Parish Council's commissioned, independent report said exactly that and he, Cllr Milne, agrees with pretty much everything in that report. In terms of the strongest wish that Billingshurst does not grow at an exponential rate, East gives the best chance of that happening. HDC is

committed to delivering more for Billingshurst in terms of benefits – Billingshurst has taken a lot of development and not got much out of it.

Finally, Cllr Milne said that the consultation is online and that questions will not be answered by HDC but will go to the Inspector in September time and the Inspector will consider all responses before finding the LP sound and legal or not. He added that the water neutrality defence is breaking down as developers find ways around it, so it is best for the district if the LP goes through and he, Cllr Milne, believes that it will go through.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Milne and asked if Parish Councillors had any questions.

Cllr Trevor Leonard asked why Billingshurst should have more development in the same place when the 475+ homes (now called Amblehurst Green) had not bedded in? If HDC feels that information on West was missing, why did they not ask for clarity?

District Cllr Milne said that infrastructure is a district and national issue and s106 monies come too late in the process, as do amenities. The delivery of schools and clinics is diabolical but HDC cannot control that. The 475+ did not go through the LP process and HDC has no control over it. Officers are not in favour of development at West because it will break the A29 barrier and is in too many parcels which will create a scattered settlement. East is the fastest of all of the sites in terms of delivery.

Cllr Sarah Wilson asked if the references to monies for Jubilee Fields relates to money that Billingshurst should have had from past developments or is it new money from either East or West going ahead.

District Cllr Milne said that HDC will bring together monies from new development and other funds, because Billingshurst has had a hard deal. It will not give the community a country park like West offers, but can improve Jubilee Fields.

Cllr Phillip Day raised the overloading of the sewage system which has not been mentioned in the proposals.

District Cllr Milne explained that statutory bodies contribute to LPs so, if Southern Water says that there is headroom, then HDC has to accept that. He suggested that the Parish Council could provide evidence of a shortfall in provision/capacity to the Inspector if the PC has any.

Cllr Deepak Mahal said that having no LP leaves us weak and asked when the LP would be signed off.

District Cllr Milne said that it is a lengthy and slow process. Examination will be in September 2024 at which point the LP will be given some weight and HDC can then defend against speculative development. It will be finally signed off in Spring/early Summer 2025.

Cllr Caroline Beresford Pratt asked if Billingshurst should take more development, would it get off taking more in the next round?

District Cllr Milne said that HDC felt that Billingshurst should get off (taking more) and so this LP will be the last development for Billingshurst. HDC feels that there is a point whereby adding housing to existing settlement in order to meet high housing targets has to be balanced against building new settlements as strategic development and leaving the rest to Neighbourhood Plans.

Cllr Doug Waller asked, if West finds favour, can we be sure that we will not get East as well?

District Cllr Milne replied that East is the best and most obvious site in planning terms and will always be a consideration. It is likely, therefore, that Billingshurst will get both.

The Chairman said that saying that money for Billingshurst is suddenly available sounds like a sweetener and asked District Cllr Milne to put a figure on it and tell the PC when it is going to come. He asked that the PC be part of consultation on the use of these funds.

District Cllr Milne said that it was agreed before HDC allocated sites and that New Homes Bonus has also accumulated but was unable to give details. The PC will be part of the consultation process and a proposal will come later this year following meetings between HDC and local groups.

Adjournment for

18/24 Public Session (Members of the Public INCLUDING DISTRICT AND COUNTY COUNCILLORS may speak for up to 3 minutes at the discretion of the Chairman).

The Chairman advised that some questions had been submitted in advance of the meeting and that these would be taken before opening the floor to others. All speeches were to be timed and must not exceed 3 minutes unless they have been given permission to speak for longer.

Mrs G Knight, representing the Billingshurst Community Partnership (BCP) spoke about the community infrastructure from each development. Some items are common to both East and West proposals, i.e. school, but BCP feels that West includes details that fit the “town’s” needs. As it has grown so much, Billingshurst needs the things that a town has and BCP feel that the things like a care home, community building for cross-generational use are things that developers for West are committed to whereas representatives of developers of East, when questioned about the provision of a bike club, shop, hall and ambulance hub, claimed that these were not known to them and suggested that they had been added by HDC.

Mrs Denise Campbell, representing Billingshurst Surgery Patient Participation Group (PPG) spoke about the lack of healthcare facilities in Billingshurst for an additional 2,000+ residents. She noted that there is supposed to be room at the surgery for all these new people but asked where the evidence is? The PPG consider the Regulation 19 consultation to be unsound as the evidence used is either too old to be relevant or is non-existent. HDC has a duty to co-operate with the community but has not done so – it does not comply with Government NHS Constitution for Healthcare Provision. Patients have the right to be involved but have not been.

District Councillor John Trollope read a statement from District Councillor Sam Bateman in which she said that infrastructure investment has not kept pace with development, however more houses are needed. The LP is now out of date and does not reflect current priorities. She said that tough action is required on climate change, but

speculative development does not care, whereas a LP will ensure that it is given due consideration. The contribution by Billingshurst will be smaller in this LP than in previous years. The A29 barrier must not be breached. She said that Liberal Democrat Councillors care about communities, are true to their word and will demand community engagement, infrastructure and that the best interests of Billingshurst will be served by voting through this LP.

District Councillor John Trollope said that the “town” needs new infrastructure and Jubilee Fields does need to be improved but not via the proposed West development which means an extra 350 homes, is too far from the railway station and, by crossing the A29, will create two communities. The PC has supported West and has entered into a legal agreement. He said that the vote is not for either East or West but on whether or not to vote the LP through. He added that the proposed development for West loses appeal when funds for improvements are available from other sources and he supports the LP as being in the best interests of Billingshurst and the district as a whole.

District Councillor Mark Baynham wanted to stress that the LP is not just a 5-year plan but looks further ahead. He noted that boundaries to the East can be defended in the future, but not boundaries to the West. He said that there is a £1.5 million earmarked fund for a Billingshurst infrastructure development fund, to which HDC wants to add a further £1m. HDC will have to consult on the best use of this fund and would like to conduct a parish-wide survey. He stresses that the proposals in the Draft LP are outline at present and so HDC does not have all the details yet – these will come when detailed plans are submitted. He noted that neither East nor West proposals include a GP surgery and said that this would have to come from the NHS not HDC or developers.

Melanie Holliker, representing Billigreen asked the PC to continue to support West over East for its greater percentage biodiversity gain. She felt that a fair site comparison on East and West needed to be done and asked how HDC had scored each site. She said that West is committed to net zero, but East is not.

Mr Mark Betts, representing Billingshurst Sports and Recreation Society (BSRA) said that Jubilee Fields no longer has enough room for all the people who want to use it and that some pitches are not up to standard. BSRA has supported West from the start as it will give upgraded pitches, improved drainage and a clubhouse, etc and links to a country park and will put Jubilee Fields right in the middle of the new town. He said that HDC has used old facts and figure in its site assessment and that development at East was just about houses. There are concerns about railway safety to the East and he asked HDC to look again at West which, he said, should be the preferred choice.

Mr Martin Hawthorne, representing Highwood (developers for the West) said that District Councillor John Milne has stated factual errors. He said that HDC had chosen to ignore the fully binding legal agreement which they have entered into with the Parish Council and others. Mr Hawthorne said that HDC would not engage with him, despite requests to meet with them. He said that Highwood would deliver 1,000 homes not working with other developers and that they, Highwood, had a better build rate than Bellway.

Mr Chris Henson said that HDC was asking Billingshurst to accept the LP rather than spending any more money on it. He suggested that the Draft LP appears unsound and

ineffective as the site assessments are inconsistent – East and West have not been assessed equally and fairly and that different criteria had been used for the same things. He said that the inconsistency of assessment will lead developers to complain that they have not been treated fairly and this will cost HDC more. He ended by saying that District Councillors represent Billingshurst, not HDC, in this matter.

Mr Graham Sharp felt that the Draft LP has not been presented to residents in an accessible, clear and concise way which would enable them to understand the proposals and communicate with HDC during the consultation. He said that many residents were being disenfranchised due to the difficulty of accessing the volume of the LP and supporting documents online. The public library has been given an incomplete set for residents to review but many residents are not aware that the consultation is in progress. He would like HDC to pause the consultation as it is currently not sound or fit for purpose, and to contact each household giving a short summary describing the options under consideration, together with impact and mitigation commitments, to at least maintain the current level of infrastructure and service for which residents currently pay.

Mrs Sarah Mahal had submitted a statement which was read by the Clerk. Mrs Mahal said that there are at least two speculative housing developments currently being proposed which could deliver around 180 homes. Neither of these are in the LP. Can HDC confirm when the LP will be approved and these speculative developments stopped?

Mr Richard Cordy representing Billingshurst Tennis Club had submitted a statement which was read by the Clerk. Mr Cordy said that the Tennis Club continues to support West with its offer of both new and enhancement to existing sports and recreation facilities that will be delivered via the investment that Highwood and Arun Estates have undertaken to make at Jubilee Fields. The addition of a nature reserve, the commitment to delivering a higher provision of social housing, education and medical facilities will better serve Billingshurst residents for longer than development to the East has to offer.

Mr Murray Hughes said that he was disturbed to hear the need for haste to adopt the Draft LP. He noted that previously approved development is still in construction and was concerned about increased level of traffic. He noted that the development at Platts Island is already outside the boundary of the A29.

County Councillor Amanda Jupp said that she did not favour one site over the other but noted that Billingshurst has expanded exponentially in recent years – the population was 6,000 according to the 2001 census and had increased to 10,000 by the time of the 2021 census. County Councillor Jupp felt that residents only have Jubilee Fields as a green space and that there are no others which HDC could buy that don't have "hope-value" (expectation of landowners that land prices will rise) as land is too dear for anyone other than developers to buy. She asked HDC to listen to residents and let them tell you what they want.

Mr Nigel Jupp said that he had been a District Councillor until May 2023 and objected to the LP. He referred to "dodgy money" and asked if District Councillor John Milne could direct us to the capital spend put in the budget for 2024/2025. He mentioned the £10.5m which has been earmarked for improvements at The Capitol building in Horsham and said that there was no new money for Billingshurst.

Mrs Bella Hingamp asked why HDC could not send housing development to areas other than Billingshurst. She noted that development to the East could be quickly achieved but said that there were areas where more information was needed so how can HDC assure residents that it would be done properly? She asked why there had been no local consultation before inclusion of East in the Draft LP and wanted to know how HDC can assure residents that the LP will protect Billingshurst from speculative development.

Mrs Deborah Marshall has been a resident of Billingshurst for 63 years but 2 of her 3 children have had to move away because they are unable to afford the houses which are being built. She asked how the proposed developments will allow local young people who want to stay in the village to do so. She said that there are too many market value homes and not enough affordable rentals.

Mr Jon Bray, representing Highwood (the developers for West) noted that development of East will provide just 650 homes, whereas development West will give 1,000 homes (including 123 affordable dwellings) and other benefits. With regard to the issue of protecting boundaries, he said that the West site has protections i.e. Rowner Road, which will stop development going West and there is also the river and canal which form a natural boundary.

Ms Sandra O'Donnell said that calculations in terms of health, education, etc. do not account for use by people from other areas.

Mrs Vanessa Jones asked why there were no officers from HDC at the meeting. District Councillor John Milne said that this was because HDC is in a pre-election period.

Mr Darrell Stone of BSRA said that we will get East and West regardless, but development East means that the village gets nothing, whereas development West gets something. He said that there was no plan with Network Rail for a rail bridge within the East development and that this proposal is not viable.

District Cllr Milne gave a round up, saying that if you build West then you will get East but that this was not the case in reverse. Clinics and schools are not in HDC control but can allocate land and predict need to some degree. The LP is robust as far as officers are concerned.

Adjournment for 10 minutes.

Resume Meeting.

19/24 Suspension of Standing Orders

At the suggestion of the Clerk, on the proposal of Cllr Ken Peters, seconded by Cllr Doug Waller, **RESOLVED** that Standing Order 3x, which limits meetings to 2 hours, be suspended accordingly.

20/24 To consider response to consultation on Horsham District Draft Local Plan Regulation 19.

Cllr Trevor Leonard said that although he agreed that a LP was needed, this version appears unsound in terms of water neutrality. He said that the Government has confirmed regulation for water use at 125 litres per person per day but that HDC is using a figure of

85 litres pp/pd which is unrealistic, unproven and unsound. The figure for Crawley is 135 litres pp/pd.

He went on to say that Bellway Homes is cutting jobs and developments and that Crest Nicholson are in financial crisis having issued a 3rd profit warning and being one of the biggest fallers on the FTSE 250 share price index. He cannot understand why HDC would want to with them on this project. He added that the site assessments lack consistency. Developers of West have fully engaged with the community and have promised to deliver. HDC is relying on out of date information. He felt that other sites in the draft LP will meet the government demand on the Horsham district and, therefore, Billingshurst can be left out. However, he then said that we can get something good for the village by going with West.

Cllr Faye Algar noted that there is land for schools to be built but asked, if HDC is unable to ensure that these are actually delivered, then who can?

Cllr Craig Gale said that he was concerned about the lack of engagement by developers of East and he wanted to support getting something for the village. He was glad to see that HDC is engaging with the Parish Council but has concerns about where the money mentioned for Billingshurst is coming from.

Cllr Deepak Mahal said that he had attended the meeting with Highwood and members of the public in November 2021 and was excited about the prospect of a countryside development with nature reserve, country park and sports facilities but then he became a Parish Councillor in May 2023. He read the 19-page report by the Planning Consultant commissioned by the Parish Council which clearly recommended East over West and then started to do his own research.

The northern part of the West development is allocated for retail. This is directly opposite the Lidl and Costa and is an area 3 times the size of the proposed McDonald's on the opposite site. This could result in another such drive-thru establishment or supermarket which will bring more traffic and means that there will be another exit on the new roundabout which already struggles with four exits. He highlighted that children will not be able to walk to school in the West. Neither of the two footbridges from Billingshurst enable them to do so. Children will have to be driven to school. In addition, the school is not expandable. The proposed country park is a bog on the best of days and on the worst it is flooded. People cannot walk to the country park but the developers have allocated a carpark so people can drive to it. The worst thing about West, Cllr Mahal felt, was that developers have already expressed interest in putting houses on adjoining land. Cllr Mahal agreed with Cllr Milne on most of what he said, except West is not about 1,000 homes growing to 2,000 – based on the expanse of open land around West, this is about West growing from 1,000 to 5,000 houses. There is nothing the developers of the West can do about that because they don't own all this adjoining land. As a village, this has to be considered. We may gain wonderful sports facilities but at what cost? Cllr Milne is also right when he said that, if we go for West, we will get East as East is technically a viable site with a defensible boundary and a school with land set aside for future expansion.

Cllr Paul Berry said that the Parish Council had democratically decided its position in November 2021 when it went against the Planning Consultant's advice. The PC has to take notice of residents and make decisions based on comments received directly from members of the public, not just based on personal views. The PC has heard from local organisations and residents who say that they want the PC to support West. There have been no such requests for East. HDC will allow both sites and more because they have failed to protect the village so far. The PC has been clear that it does not support any further large scale development in the parish but this is a rare opportunity to work with a developer who wants to engage and who is prepared to provide above and beyond what is required in terms of community benefits. The PC position is clear – it opposes development but, if HDC is going to allow development and had allocated either East or West, then the PC would have preferred West. He said that there has been a lack of consistency in the site assessments and that out of date information has been used. Additionally, local communities are supposed to have a say in shaping development and this has not happened. If East is to be HDC's final choice, then it should have reached that conclusion giving both sites fair and even consideration. He requested a recorded vote.

Cllr Caroline Beresford Pratt said that she felt that extra housing, people and cars is a huge price to pay for improvements to sports facilities. She asked how many local people use the existing facilities and noted that s106 monies could be used to make any improvements required.

Cllr Doug Waller said that he supported Mr Sharp's comments on the lack of a proper public consultation. He said that Billingshurst residents are not informed and we do not have a representative view.

The Chairman asked if any Councillor had a proposal.

Cllr Paul Berry proposed that the Parish Council objects to the draft Local Plan as the PC is not happy with the proposal or the way in which it has been reached. The challenge should be that it is not legal and sound for the reasons heard tonight from many speakers. Council Officers are quite capable of drafting a response. Cllr Sandy Duck seconded the proposal.

Cllr Deepak Mahal questioned whether the PC was able to vote for something as the PC has a contract on the land and, therefore, a conflict of interest.

Several Councillors were confused about what they were being asked to vote for and the Clerk explained that there were 2 options – to either make no response or to challenge the Local Plan on the grounds that it is not legal and sound.

For clarity, Cllr Paul Berry reiterated his proposal and the Chairman moved to a recorded vote.

In favour: Cllrs Faye Algar, Edna Benger, Paul Berry, Phillip Day, Sandy Duck, Craig Gale, Trevor Leonard, Ken Peters, Doug Waller and Sarah Wilson.

Against: Cllrs Caroline Beresford Pratt and Deepak Mahal.

The proposal was therefore **RESOLVED** accordingly.

District Cllr John Milne said that the Parish Council must evidence its reasons for challenging the Draft Local Plan.

21/24 Date of Next Meeting – 13 March 2024

The meeting finished at 9.30pm

Chairman

Date