



**Minutes of the Meeting of Billingshurst Parish Council  
Wednesday 3 September 2025  
7pm at the Billingshurst Centre.**

**Present**

Cllrs Paul Berry (Chairman), Faye Algar, Edna Benger, Phillip Day, Sandy Duck, Craig Gale, Jeremy Harris, David Hingamp, Craig Jones, Trevor Leonard, Anna Rhodes, Kate Rowbottom, Steve Thomas and Doug Waller.

**In attendance**

G C Burt, Clerk to the Council  
R Plant, Assistant Clerk  
Cty Cllr Mrs A Jupp  
Dis Cllr M Baynham  
Dis Cllr J Trollope  
Approximately 17 Members of the Public

**58/25 Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman advised that:

1. The meeting was being streamed to the internet.
2. Cllrs wishing to speak should raise their hand and speak loudly and clearly.
3. Mobile phones should either be switched off or silenced.
4. He was attending The Weald School on Friday with Cllr F Algar to discuss civic affairs.

**59/25 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr James Marchant, for approved reasons. On the proposal of Cllr Doug Waller seconded by Cllr Craig Gale **RESOLVED** that the apology and reason given be accepted.

*Adjournment for*

**60/25 Reports from:**

a. District Councillors

Dis Cllr Mark Baynham had submitted a report in advance, copied to all Cllrs, attached Appendix A, which he then spoke to. He was able to update the meeting in that Adur DC had decided to go with the proposed western unitary, rather than east; the Government would now consult on the two preferred options, probably next Spring. He cited ongoing work to monitor the former vape shop premises, and the draft Local Plan.

Dis Cllr John Trollope had submitted a report in advance, copied to all Cllrs, attached Appendix B.

b. County Councillor

Cty Cllr Mrs Amanda Jupp had submitted a report in advance, copied to all Cllrs, attached Appendix C and highlighted the official recognition of the improvements in the County's social care services. She was currently chasing the completion of the signage following the reduction of the speed limit south of the Billingshurst and through Adversane.

c. Council Representatives on Outside Bodies

Cllr K Rowbottom reported that the Billingshurst Community Partnership was holding its AGM the following evening.

**61/25 Public Session (Members of the Public may speak for up to 3 minutes at the discretion of the Chairman).**

Prior to inviting the public to speak, the Chairman read out the following statement:

*The matter of the trees in Willow Drive has become, understandably, very complex and very controversial. The Parish Clerk's most recent report summarises the situation the Council finds itself in but cannot currently give all the answers to all the questions raised. I hope that the fact that some questions cannot be fully answered yet, highlights that people's concerns are being taken seriously by the Council and its insurers and that they are being fully investigated. I personally feel, and I am sure others agree that even if ultimately the trees cannot be saved, it is important that people are informed as fully as possible why this is the case and why things which people thought might help save the trees, could not. Any questions which remain unanswered at this stage may form part of a future update. It is worth considering certain roles. One of the roles of the Parish Council's insurers is to protect the Council from risk. In turn, that is also one of the roles of the Council's Clerk, who also acts as the Council's Responsible Financial Officer. It is also perhaps worth mentioning that the Council has an audit process in place where the Council's activities and policies are reviewed to ensure that the Council is managing risk correctly. The purpose of this item tonight is to give residents an opportunity to have their views heard. I cannot guarantee that the Clerk will be able to answer any further questions which arise this evening. All I would add this evening to the Clerk's report is that the advice from the Council's insurers to grant landlord's consent to remove the trees is backed up from other sources. District Cllr. Bateman heard from HDC Officers why given current legislation they felt they had no choice but to grant permission for the trees to be removed. The Council's own commissioned review and report also concurs with the advice being given by the Council's insurers. The advice is also backed up by case law. Even our MP acknowledged the situation the Council finds itself in when he said "I understand why local councils find it difficult to resist felling applications. If they do so, they make themselves financially responsible for the consequences, which can amount to tens of thousands of pounds. All sides – homeowners, councils and insurers – are getting caught in a legal trap." Perhaps this point is the most pertinent and summarises the position the Council finds itself in the best. I hope that those with knowledge of the facts will not see the Parish Council as the enemy here. Our enemy is a system which exists which allows, even perhaps encourages, insurance companies not to*

*take the best option to solve potential matters relating to trees, but to take the cheapest option. A system where Tree Preservation Orders, which you would think should protect trees, are seemingly worthless. Although overall the situation is complex, the position the Council finds itself in is fairly simple as things stand. It either grants landlord's consent to remove the trees now, at no cost to the council or the public purse or ignores its insurers and others' advice and allows the trees to remain in place and potentially faces a legal case later which the Council is told that based on the current system, it would most likely lose. It has been suggested that such a case could involve costs over £100,000. This would be over £100,000 of local taxpayers' money. Before adjourning the meeting and giving members of the public an opportunity to speak, I would just like to correct some inaccurate information which I understand has been shared by the media, and on social media. It has been stated that Billingshurst Parish Council agreed to remove the Tree Preservation Orders which the trees are covered by. This is incorrect. It is not in the Council's gift to either put in place, or remove TPOs, it has not got the powers to do so. It was Horsham District Council who as the planning authority granted permission for the trees to be felled with TPOs in place. Furthermore, the Parish Council objected to the planning applications. It is perhaps easy to be critical of HDC for granting permission to remove the trees, but I think HDC officers probably felt that they were in the same impossible position that the Parish Council currently finds itself in.*

*As part of this process, an agreement needs to be drawn up between the Parish Council and the homeowner's insurers. The Clerk, and I understand the Council's insurers are currently very unhappy with the wording of that agreement. If it does turn out that the trees are to be felled, this will not happen until a suitable agreement is agreed which protects the Council from any possible further difficulties in the future. The subject of the agreement may have to form part of an extraordinary meeting of the Council in the coming weeks.*

Sarah Medes da Costa read out the following which she had previously submitted:

*I am going to talk about bats and their relationship with the oak trees on Willow Drive, and the urgent need for a bat survey. I have been out bat detecting since the end of July, at random times between just before dusk until about 3am. So, what we have is just a snapshot of bat activity! The 576 bat recordings were made either under or close to the oaks on Willow Drive, and all within 50 or 60 meters of the oaks. Most of the bat activity was around the oak trees! (I have sent details of the first 369 recordings to the Parish Council already.) There are 17 species of bat that breed in the UK, my snapshot has revealed that we have at least 11 species here... what a privilege! Of these 11, 3 are red-listed species: The Serotine, Western Barbastelle and Leisler's bat. These are just 11 of the possible 2300 species sustained by oak trees! The oaks on Willow Drive provide insects for bats – moths, spiders, beetles, and so on. A pipistrelle can eat 3000 insects in one night! These oaks are key mature trees on this part of the estate and provide a green corridor – bats use them not only for food, but also for shelter, navigation and protection. Sadly, bat populations are in decline – mainly caused by habitat destruction on a massive scale, and by the use of insecticides in agriculture, industry, and gardens. In September, our local bats are building up fat reserves ready for hibernation, they will be mating and also looking for suitable hibernation sites. The loss of these oaks would have a devastating impact on our bat population here! I have seen common pipistrelles emerging from the trees just before dusk – before the rooks have settled. This leads me to*

*believe they are roosting there. I have seen common pipistrelles flying under the canopies at dusk. Of the 11 bat species recorded, 9 are known to roost in oak trees. All bats are protected by law. A tree cannot be felled if bats use, or have used, the tree as a roosting site. Hence the need for a survey... The bat survey needs to be thorough. Pipistrelles are very small, about 5g, and can roost in tiny spaces – in old woodpecker holes, under loose bark, in small crevices, under dense ivy... So there are plenty of potential roosting sites in the oaks on Willow Drive. Evidence of a roost that is currently not being used – for example a maternity roost, still affords protection to the trees. So I'm asking the Parish Council to have a proper bat survey done. I think my evidence suggests that bats are roosting in the veteran oaks on Willow Drive, albeit a small number, and my observations and research show how important these oaks are for our local bat population!*

Mela Davison said that AXA had quoted numerous reports all saying the same thing, however she was only aware of the report commissioned by the Parish Council and that accompanying the planning application to Horsham District Council. Where were all these other reports? How could we access them?

Trevor Chittenden quoted many of the corporate and green mission statements from the claimant's insurers (AXA) website. He felt they should live up to their admirable mantras.

Barry Dickinson reiterated the many questions that residents would like answers to: Is pruning an option? Would root barriers work? Why had the householder only / been allowed to install such inadequate foundations in an area renowned for its Weald Clay which is so susceptible to heave and shrinkage? What about underpinning?

### *Resume Meeting*

#### **62/25 To receive an update on the situation regarding trees at Willow Drive.**

The Clerk had circulated a detailed report updating Members on the situation since the first report to Councillors in May. What had changed is that the issue was now in the public domain, attracting considerable local interest and both local and national media interest. This had generated many questions and solution-ideas, all of which had been sent to the Council's insurer. The Chair and Clerk had met with the Council's insurer, and as a result the Council commissioned its own independent arboricultural report, so it wasn't relying solely on reports by insurers. This was received at the end of July, and broadly agreed with the approach taken by insurers, i.e. to fell. This had been made public and posted on the Council's website alongside a press release setting out the Council's position on the matter. The current status is that the claimant's insurer has tabled an agreement setting out the terms whereby the Council agrees to the felling of the trees in exchange for the claimant's insurer meeting all costs. The Council is insisting that it would expect to be indemnified by them against all future claims from them or their successors relating to this matter. Once a revised agreement has been received, it is the Clerk's intention to present this to be Council for consideration. In the meantime, answers to the many questions asked are still being sought and it is hoped that these could be presented simultaneously at any such meeting.

Cllr P Day asked for more details about one of the bats mentioned.

Cllr D Hingamp, himself an architect, wanted to know how such inadequate foundations had been permitted? Why were they not installed to industry standard? Where were the building regulation inspectors?

Cllr T Leonard who had worked in the insurance industry, thanked Council officers for their efforts in this matter. He said this issue had been ongoing for several years. He referenced the various questions that others had asked including locations of test bore holes and root barriers but said that insurers' mindset needed to change such that they weren't opting for the cheapest course but the best.

Cllr K Rowbottom cited a root barrier being installed successfully to protect her previous house from a similar problem.

NOTED.

### **63/25 Approval of the Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 July 2025.**

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2025, previously circulated, were taken as read. On the proposal of Cllr Paul Berry, seconded by Cllr Doug Waller **RESOLVED** that the minutes be accepted and signed as a correct record accordingly, subject to the replacement of *Robin Chittenden* with *Trevor Chittenden* in Min **49/25**.

### **64/25 Clerk's Report**

None

### **65/25 Better Billingshurst Fund – to receive any updates.**

The Clerk reported that he had met with counterparts at HDC yesterday. It was agreed that the Parish Council would consider in due course any landlord consents required for those projects on Council land BEFORE the projects went to the Better Billingshurst spending panel at HDC. This would save the panel wasting time on projects that were unlikely to proceed. It was understood that the panel hoped to meet for the first time this autumn. NOTED.

### **66/25 CCTV – to receive an update**

The Clerk reported that progress on gaining permissions from third parties to host CCTV equipment on their land or properties etc was complicated and time-consuming, as such certain sites may have to be rethought or deleted. He envisaged that some sites may be delivered this year and some next. NOTED.

### **67/25 To consider the future of Adversane Hall, recently returned to the Council.**

Members received a report setting out options for the future of Adversane Hall, the lease of which has expired and had therefore returned to the Council. Sadly, efforts to seek new management, new hirers, or use by community groups had been to no avail. The hall leaked, with toilets and a kitchen that was reached via steps. The lack of parking appeared to put off enquirers. Councillors were concerned that the condition of the structure and lack of interest could mean the Council having to spend money on maintaining it should it be kept in the Council's estate. On the proposal of Cllr Doug Waller seconded by Cllr Steve

Thomas **RESOLVED** that the Clerk instigate the disposal of Adversane Hall in its entirety, via specialist agents. [Clerk to report further on offers, disposal of proceeds etc.]

**68/25 To review appointments to Committees and outside bodies etc. including consideration of proposal from Cllr Phillip Day to amalgamate some working parties, plus replacement of Cllr on Friends of Station Road Community Gardens.**

On the proposal of Cllr Doug Waller seconded by Cllr Anna Rhodes **RESOLVED** the revisions as set out in Appendix D.

**69/25 To receive the External Audit Report 2024-25 and refer any matters requiring attention (none!) to the F&GP Committee.**

On the proposal of Cllr Paul Berry seconded by Cllr Phillip Day **RESOLVED** that the External Audit Report for 2024-25 be received. No matters were raised requiring onward consideration by the F&GP Committee.

**70/25 Local Government Reorganisation and asset transfers.**

Councillors receive a brief summary on Local Government Reorganisation in West Sussex, where existing councils had now honed the options down to just two: a single West Sussex unitary or two unitaries, broadly east and west. **NOTED**

HDC had now approved its Asset Transfer Policy, which set out how parishes might apply for assets to be devolved to them in advance of the pending Local Government Reorganisation. A list of HDC land holdings in the parish had been received, however some of the descriptions made trying to identify them was difficult, a point echoed by the Chairman who has asked to see the list. Officers suggested that if the Council wished to take advantage of the devolution opportunity, then obvious candidates were those which fitted with the Council's existing assets and services, namely bus shelters and play areas. The transfer of Cedars Farm Pond had previously been agreed by both councils and the addition of the adjoining former orchard was also suggested for completeness. [The possible transfer of car parks was being looked at separately by a possible consortium of parishes.] Councillors recognised that there would be no commuted sum to accompany any transfers and stressed the requirement that any transferred assets be in good order at time of transfer. On the proposal of Cllr Paul Berry seconded by Cllr Craig Jones **RESOLVED** that officers be authorised to seek the transfer of the following assets: Playgrounds (x4) at Roman Way, Ostlers View, Parbrook and Forge Way (Sadlers Close).

Bus Shelter (x1) in High Street outside Morrisons Local.

Cedars Farm Pond + Orchard

**71/25 To consider the 2026 draft calendar of meetings**

On the proposal of Cllr Doug Waller seconded by Cllr Anna Rhodes **RESOLVED** that the calendar of meetings for 2026, subject to the suggested amendments, be approved.

**72/25 To receive Minutes as approved by the following Committees:**

- a) On the proposal of Cllr Doug Waller seconded by Cllr Faye Algar **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Planning & Environment Committee of 1 & 8 July and 5 August 2025 be received.
- b) On the proposal of Cllr Phillip Day, seconded by Cllr Craig Gale, **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the F&GP Committee of 25 June 2025 be received.
- c) On the proposal of Cllr Craig Gale, seconded by Cllr Craig Jones **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Property Committee of 20 May 2025 be received.

**73/25 Neighbourhood Wardens** - to receive Wardens' Report for June - previously circulated. NOTED

**74/25 Date of Next Meeting – 5 November 2025.**

*Meeting finished at 8.21pm*

**APPENDIX A**

**District Cllr Report from Cllr Mark Baynham**

**Local Government Reorganisation**

A public engagement with residents across West Sussex was carried out over the summer on the Government's intention to create Unitary Councils to replace the existing two-tier system. Residents in Horsham District overwhelmingly supported a two Council split rather than a single county-wide Unitary. This was replicated across all the other Districts and Boroughs. HDC has been working closely with all the other Councils prior to submitting our proposals later this month.

While WSCC are so far favouring a single county model, all the other Councils are seeking to agree the same 2 council split. This would be an East/West arrangement with the East being HDC, Crawley and Mid-Sussex, and the West being Chichester, Arun and Worthing. We have not yet finally agreed whether Adur would sit in East or West. Our proposal would mean 140 councillors split across the two unitaries (roughly 2 per current county division). The WSCC proposal is for a total of 96.

The government (MHCLG) will make the final decision after carrying out their own public consultation in the new year.

**Local Plan**

HDC continues to challenge the Planning Inspector on his refusal to approve the Local Plan. His principal reason for rejection was that we had failed in our legal duty to co-operate with neighbouring Councils in housing provision. We have submitted further evidence to refute this, which is supported and corroborated by Crawley, Mid-Sussex and Chichester. Furthermore the Minister responsible, Angela Rayner, has indicated that this duty to co-operate will be removed in the upcoming new version of the NPPF and will thus negate the Inspector's objection. Watch this space...

## **Billingshurst specific**

### **Smoke World vape shop**

Following the unwelcome arrival of this gaudy addition on our High Street and concerns raised by many residents of illegal sales, HDC (Planning and Environment departments) have been working closely with partners including Billingshurst Wardens, Police, Trading Standards and Fire & Rescue to address the issue. There have been two separate seizures of suspected illegal materials and these will likely lead to prosecutions. In the meantime the shop has renamed itself as a convenience store although it is not currently trading. We will continue to closely monitor the situation and take action as appropriate.

### **Playgrounds**

One of the main structures in the Parbrook playground was recently removed as the wood had rotted and it was no longer safe. Your District Councillors have met on-site with Parks and Countryside officers to agree the planned revamp of the playground and surrounding area. Work on this is being timetabled.

### **Better Billingshurst Fund**

The public consultation resulted in 769 responses, which is a good response for a single parish area. Officers are currently compiling a subsequent options report and a meeting of the spending panel, to decide on projects to support, will be held over the Autumn. In the meantime officers have held a meeting with the Parish Clerk in relation to works on Parish owned land.

### **Anything else?**

I will be open to any questions on the above, or any other matters at the Council meeting.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **District Cllr Report from Cllr John Trollope**

#### **Billingshurst Pastors**

I would like to thank Craig Gale for facilitating me being an observer with the Billingshurst Pastors last Friday. Armed with lollipops, a dustpan, their distinctive jackets and a lot of love and goodwill, and a prayer to send us off, I accompanied the three volunteers on their walk around of the pubs on the High Street as well as the train station looking out for anyone in trouble or just needing some company. The feedback and the interactions from the public was brilliant and I would like to thank them for allowing me to gain further insight into our village and for the great work that they do. I am happy to report, as I am sure will come to news to no one, that the Billingshurst Pastors are much loved and a valued part of our community.

#### **Oak trees on Willow Drive**

There is considerable local interest concerning the felling of these two trees in Billingshurst which was reported on by BBC Sussex and several other news organisations. As part of my councillor duties, I have been involved with an informal



group of local residents who want Axa insurance to fix their policy holder's subsidence affecting their extension without felling the trees which are at least 200 years old and home to over 1000 species. Nationwide, insurers are, according to Suella Braverman, "taking advantage of councils' liability" but councils and individuals are fighting back and insurance companies are beginning to back down. For John Milne, who wrote about this nationwide problem in his weekly piece to the West Sussex County Times after having visited Willow Drive and spoken to many local residents at his Billingshurst surgery, and Suella Braverman to be in agreement shows that this issue is not party political but pure common sense and decency. In the case involving Braverman, Direct Line backed down from felling 6 trees opting instead for a root protection barrier which is what we are also advocating. In another case in Exmouth, LV General Insurance agreed to find an alternative solution after a family led a tireless campaign to protect an ancient oak tree. So come on Axa, whom I fervently hope are listening to this either in person or on YouTube, keep up with your competitors(!) and do the right thing: show us that your promise of being "committed to addressing climate change through [your] its own operations" is not corporate green washing hypocrisy. I urge Axa to show Billingshurst that, again in its own words, they really "want to do business in a way that's good for people and good for the environment."

I am happy to report that John Milne is fully supportive of HDC's and BPC's efforts in finding a better outcome as is Colette Blackburn, the Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Nature recovery, who also recently visited Willow Drive and is now fully up to date on the facts of this case and is currently working behind the scenes to see what, if anything, can be done for these trees and how this might be prevented in the future. In particular, I wish to thank the Parish Clerk for his tireless efforts in dealing with this matter and his hard work in trying to get the best outcome for our community and for the homeowners and also to Cllr Leonard for his support which is very much appreciated by those residents wanting to preserve these trees for future generations

## APPENDIX C

### County Cllr Report from Cllr Mrs Amanda Jupp

#### Adult Services

The County Council is celebrating news that its Adults Services have been rated 'good' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in its report published on 29<sup>th</sup> August.

Following its assessment of the council earlier this year, the regulator found strong leadership within adult social care teams and effective support that enables people to live healthier lives.

While further improvements to address gaps in service are needed, the findings evidence the progress made and the council's effectiveness at making a real difference to people's lives.

### **Economy and Skills**

The County Council has launched Skills Bootcamps, a new initiative designed to help people gain in-demand skills that local employers are actively seeking. The program offers access to industry-recognised, flexible training courses tailored to meet current workforce needs. Skills Bootcamps, which are funded by a £4.3m grant from the Department for Education, are open to anyone aged 19 or over who lives or works in West Sussex, whether employed, unemployed or self-employed. The courses last up to 16 weeks and have a guaranteed job interview or career progression opportunity at their conclusion. Participants gain both technical and soft skills relevant to local industries, helping them secure employment, start an apprenticeship or advance their careers. Employers play a vital role in the program, actively shaping course content to meet real-world needs, mentoring participants throughout their training, offering hands-on experience and facilitating interview opportunities. In turn, they are supported to address skills and recruitment gaps within their workforce, which helps boost productivity and drive business growth. Training is targeted at addressing local skills gaps across the county's key employment sectors and supporting employers of all sizes. More information on the website.

### **Highways - How often do the verges get cut?**

Cut times vary each year to suit growing conditions. It takes about 4-7 weeks to cut all grass across the county.

Urban cuts - In towns and other built-up areas, we cut and maintain grass verges during the growing season, which is typically between March and November.

Rural cuts - In the countryside, or where there are no pavements, we only maintain the verges from a highway safety perspective. Verges in rural areas receive cuts in the following order:

- one visibility splay cut for safety - five weeks during April and May
- one 1-metre-wide cut to stop grass and vegetation overhanging the road - from July to September
- one overall cut a year - from end September to beginning of December.

**Greenprint** is an exciting 3-year project to test if grass cuttings collected from mowed verges can be converted into biofuels and a material called biochar, a carbon-rich substance that is like charcoal. We are also measuring how changes to the way we cut the grass can give nature a boost, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and capture carbon in the ground. We are trialling a new way of managing grass verges to reduce the carbon footprint associated with highways maintenance.

# APPENDIX D

BILLINGSHURST PARISH COUNCIL	
COMMITTEES, WORKING PARTIES AND REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES	
2025-26	
(The Council has set the max. membership for Committees to 10 members.)	
<b>COMMITTEES</b>	
Planning & Environment	<b>DW</b> , <b>FA</b> , KR, DH, AR, JH
Property	PB, SD, <b>PD</b> , ST, EB, <b>CG</b> , CJ, DW, DH
Finance & General Purposes	PB, <b>PD</b> , EB, <b>CG</b> , ST, JH, CJ
Working Practices	DW, <b>ST</b> , <b>CG</b> , KR, AR, CJ, SD, JM,
Billingshurst Centre	PB, SD, <b>PD</b> , EB, JH, <b>CJ</b> , TL
Complaints (5 members Max)	PB, SD, TL, CG
Complaints Chairman	<b>SD</b>
<b>WORKING PARTIES</b>	
Neighbourhood Plan	In abeyance
Internal Audit	PD, CG
Traffic Calming	PB, JM, TL, ST
Sustainable Energy Efficiency	PD, CG, CJ
Mission & Vision	CG, PD, CJ, PB

**Bold** indicates Chairman/Vice Chairman

REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES	
B'hurst Sports & Recn. Assn. (BSRA) x2	CG, SD, ST (To ensure that two can always attend)
CPRE	DH
Friends of Station Road Gardens x1	CJ
HALC (H'ham Assn Local Councils)	PD, SD
N'hood Warden Steering Group x2	SD, KR
Parish and Neighbourhood Climate Action Network	PD
Rural Market Towns Group (RMTG)	SD
Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) W/Group + S106 meetings. <b>This will wind-up once the BIF is operational.</b>	CG, SD
Better Billingshurst Fund (BIF) x3 + officer.	CG, DW, CJ. (PD = RESERVE)
Trustee of Dauxwood Pre-School x1	SD
West Sussex Association Local Councils (WSALC) AGM x2	PD, SD
Community Partnership x1	KR
Youth liasion - all matters	CG

Updated 04/09/2025