

PARISH OF BILLINGSHURST
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
OF ELECTORS
BILLINGSHURST CENTRE
WEDNESDAY 5 MARCH 2025, 7.00PM

Present:

Cllr Doug Waller Chairman of the Parish Council

G C Burt, Clerk to the Council

R Plant, Assistant Clerk to the Council

23 Members of the public, incl. 10 Parish Councillors and 2 District Councillors.

1. **The Chairman welcomed** all those present, explaining that the meeting was being streamed live to the internet. Mobile phones should be turned off or silenced.
2. **Presentation - Dr Roger Smith of Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)** gave an overview of the current situation with regard to the Draft Horsham District Local Plan (LP) including comments by the Inspector when the current LP was approved, suggesting that Billingshurst by way of settlement hierarchy and infrastructure could take much more development. The examination of the current Draft LP had been halted by the Inspector after 3 days of hearings, who had (still to be announced) concerns about the Plan which coincided with a major announcement by the Government on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Dr Smith felt that the delay in giving reasons was unprecedented and discourteous to HDC. Nonetheless, Horsham District was likely to see one of the largest increases in housing numbers to be delivered in West Sussex, driven by geographical constraints of some neighbouring local authorities and a misconception that Horsham District by virtue of its size and relative sparse density could accommodate lots of housing. This ignores the fact that much of Horsham District is in the SDNP. Dr Smith said CPRE was concerned at Government plans to permit developers to dilute their current responsibility to mitigate damage to biodiversity on site, by paying into a fund to help biodiversity off-site, wherever that may be. He cited a nationwide study which showed that in some instances, no one was checking to see if developers were complying with biodiversity related planning conditions; this was often due to under-resourced compliance teams within planning authorities.

Caroline Beresford Pratt asked if HDC was unusual in being asked to take slack from other places. Dr Smith confirmed that this wasn't unusual.

Dis Cllr John Trollope was concerned at the compliance issue relating to biodiversity and would follow this up at HDC. Dr Smith suggested drones were a good way of monitoring such issues.

Dis Cllr Mark Baynham commended the presentation as fair and balanced. He commented that HDC had been penalised for not meeting housing targets, which had in large part been driven by the Water Neutrality edict from Natural England restricting new development.

3. **Presentation - Jack Thompson of Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT)** gave an overview of the life cycle of swifts. They were believed to be one of the oldest creatures on the planet. Apart from being an fascinating bird, they made a positive contribution to biodiversity including eating thousands of insects! Residents could do much to encourage them,

Annual Parish Meeting 5th March 2025

including putting up swift boxes and having plants etc that encouraged insects. There was *swift app* so you could plot sitings and see where they reside.

Liz Berry asked what the best height was for swift boxes? Over 5metres, but never south facing as it was too hot for them.

Cllr James Marchant asked if SWT proved advice etc on other birds. Yes.

Caroline Beresford Pratt asked if they tended to prefer, town, coast or countryside? They could live anywhere; he knew of many living in Brighton but travelled to the South Downs to feed.

4. **Approval of the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting on 6 March 2024.**

The draft minutes, having been circulated previously, were taken as read and it was **RESOLVED** that they be accepted and signed as a true record.

5. **To Receive the Annual Report of the Parish Council.**

The Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr Doug Waller, reported on the activities of the Council over the past year, attached.

6. **To Receive the Audited Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2024.**

The Clerk to the Council, G Burt, gave an overview of the Council's finances over the past year and looked to the year ahead, attached.

6 **Question and answer session with Electors.**

- a) Paul Nind commented that several suggestions for street names, incl. the late Paul Leaney, had been made, but had not been enacted as it was dependant upon developers deciding to use them. Could the Parish Council take a more proactive role in trying to ensure such names are used? The Clerk advised that this name, along with the late Dave Homer had indeed been put forward. He suggested that future meetings with developers, where they were looking to work with local communities, might be ideal opportunities to ask that these names be incorporated.
- b) Paul Ripplingham asked for an update on plans for traffic calming through Adversane? The Clerk advised that there are some proposals before WSCC at the moment to reduce the speed limit through Adversane to 30mph, continuing a suggestion to lower the speed limit between Adversane and Billingshurst. There had been a suggestion to ensure the limit be reduced past Brinsbury College also.
- c) Hilary Phillips asked when the replacement of bollards around Adversane Green was due to be completed? The Clerk advised that previous stages had mainly been funded by CIL of which little remained. He would see what other funds might be available.
- d) Catherine Hilliard spoke in support of the site known as *East of Billingshurst* being acquired for use as a country park. It made sense to set out this site as a country park, as it already had many natural well-established attributes (trees, wildlife, x2 ROW etc.), rather than build on it and try to create new man-made country park elsewhere!

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and the meeting finished at 8.44pm.

ANNUAL REPORT
2024 –2025
Cllr Doug Waller, Chairman of the Council

As usual, I begin with an update on any changes in Councillors over the last year; we started the year with one vacancy which was added to following the resignations for various reasons of Caroline Beresford Pratt, Roy Margetts, Sarah Wilson and Ken Peters. We welcomed, following co-option David Hingamp, Kate Rowbottom, Jeremy Harris, Anna Rhodes and Craig Jones. I had the privilege of being elected Chairman of the Council in September following Ken Peter's resignation. A full list of all Councillors is on the website.

During the past year, the Council was saddened to hear of the death of two of its former Councillors, both of whom stepped back at the end of their terms of office in 2023. David Homer, who had been a councillor for 20 years, passed away last August and at the end of February, Barry Barnes who had been a parish councillor for a staggering 55 years also passed away. Both Councillors had contributed a huge amount to the community over their years in office and their knowledge and input are sorely missed. Condolences were sent to the families of both gentlemen.

We also said goodbye to our Assistant Clerk, Jo Booth who had been with the Council for 16 years; her wealth of knowledge will be greatly missed, particularly by the Planning & Environment Committee which she clerked. Locum Clerk Sarah Linfield helped that Committee in the interim, and we are delighted to welcome Richard Plant to the role who we look forward to working with.

Our Councillors, who all give of their time freely, supported by Officers, run much of the day-to-day affairs of the Council through our **COMMITTEES** which all meet in public and to which anyone is always welcome to attend. In addition, we continue to stream meetings to the internet via Facebook, which seems to work well, but we are looking to see how we can make this more accessible including restarting our YouTube account.

During the course of 2024 the **PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE** was happy to welcome new members Kate Rowbottom, David Hingamp, Jeremy Harris and Anna Rhodes. Membership currently stands at seven persons. New members will be made very welcome to the maximum of ten.

The Committee met on 14 occasions in the last year – including two extraordinary meetings to consider planning applications whose deadlines for comment might otherwise have been missed.

Through the fourteen meetings, the Committee considered and responded to 85 planning applications. Of these, the Committee did not object to 64 applications. Of the 20 that the Committee did feel it right to object to, just eight were subsequently permitted by Horsham District Council (HDC), and one was later withdrawn by the applicant. Just one application was strongly objected to. Over the course of the year, planning applications included applications such as six garages, 26 applications relating to trees, 5 changes of use, 6 variations of conditions, 17 extensions and 18 applications for the building of new dwellings plus several large commercial applications.

We have continued to welcome the developers of the new Trade & Business Park to our meetings periodically, whose updates have been most appreciated.

Horsham District Council submitted its Draft Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate last summer and the Examination in Public commenced just before Christmas. The Clerk appeared on our behalf. The following week we were advised that due to the Inspector's concerns about the Plan, the rest of the hearings were cancelled. We are still waiting to hear of his detailed reasons and what happens next. In the meantime, having a Local Plan (whilst still valid but out of date), does nothing to ward off speculative large applications, which can result in developments which neither councils nor communities want.

The **PROPERTY COMMITTEE**, meeting approximately bi-monthly, oversees the management of the Council's various sites and other equipment and street furniture in its care.

At Jubilee Fields:

- We were delighted to finally unveil the long-awaited new skatepark last summer. This has proved very popular and received much praise from far and wide.
- We continue to support the Billingshurst Sports and Recreation Association (BSRA) to realise their ambitions to improve the facilities using existing S106 funds.
- We have worked with the BSRA and Angling Society to open up views across the lake to reduce anti-social behaviour.

Elsewhere the public conveniences in Mill Lane are now in the Premier League of Local Authorities in the 2025 *Loo of the Year* Awards.

Last year Station Road Community Gardens, village and St Mary's Churchyard all did well in the South & South East in Bloom competition.

We are grateful to all the volunteers who help look after the Gardens, Jubilee Fields, Churchyard and other sites across the parish.

We have supported the Billingshurst Allotment Society (BAS) with improvements to fencing to make the site more secure and to also construct raised beds for gardeners with mobility problems, both utilising s106 developer contributions.

Last autumn, lots of new trees were planted across the parish both on council-owned sites and highway land.

We plan to extend the Christmas Lights in the village next season as far as West Street.

The **FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** continues to keep a close eye on the Council's finances. The Clerk will say more about this later, but in the financial year about to start, an average Band D property will contribute 2.24% per annum more to fund Parish Council services which equals 7.3 pence extra per week or £3.77 extra for the whole year.

We are currently putting the finished touches to internal improvements at *The Depot* at 83a High Street, which we hope will make it more attractive to local groups wishing to run predominantly youth-orientated activities.

Following the cessation of funding by Horsham District and West Sussex Councils, we took on the funding of the very popular youth boxing sessions held after school at The Weald School.

We also support other voluntary organisations in the parish by way of our **GRANTS** programme and a full list is on the website.

The Council welcomes grant applications and for the 2025 – 2026 financial year onwards these, will be considered twice per year, at the April and September meetings of the Finance & General Purposes Committee. Details and an application form is available to download on the Council Documents page of the website and it is the Council's intention to award 50% of the available budget on each occasion. We have also continued to allocate Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds to infrastructure projects, many to local good causes. Again, a full list is on the website.

The Council has agreed to take forward some traffic calming measures in the parish; these will take the form of village gateways and Speed Indicator Devices (SIDS) at all the main entrances into the village. Simultaneously, we will be applying to WSCC to introduce a 20mph limit in the High Street from West Street to Hilland roundabout, plus some adjoining roads. We have supported separate applications from residents to lower speed limits between Billingshurst and Adversane and through Adversane itself.

The Billingshurst Community Speedwatch Group continues to do excellent work and always needs more volunteers. Anyone interested in becoming a Speedwatch volunteer or wishing to know a little more about the scheme may telephone the administrator on **07768 081745**. Alternatively, you may join the local group by going online www.communityspeedwatch.org and clicking on the “register” icon and follow the joining instructions.

The Council organises several events which help bring the community together:

- The Billingshurst Showcase, showcasing all the many groups and societies in the parish which will be held on **Saturday 5 April**.
- We will be lighting the beacon again on **Thursday 8th May** to mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day and other activities for the day are still to be finalised.
- In the summer holidays, date to be decided, we plan to repeat last year's Family Activity Day at Jubilee, working with our Neighbourhood Wardens.
- We continue to undertake the administration for the Annual Remembrance Day Parade working with the Royal British Legion.

The **BILLINGSHURST CENTRE COMMITTEE** continues to meet monthly to oversee the Billingshurst Centre of which the Parish Council is the Sole Managing Trustee (and meets as Trustee approximately 6 times per year.)

Daily management is left to an excellent team lead by Manager Sarah Newell. Bookings remain healthy and during the year, the unreliable gas boiler was replaced. More recently lighting has been improved inside and out not only to save energy but to improve security. In early December, the Centre hosted a fantastic Christmas Fayre which is a highlight of the village year and always very well attended.

The Council continues to fund the Neighbourhood Warden Scheme, and we have recently said goodbye to Julie Green and Barry Faust – but their legacy is being

continued by Maria Colenso and Louisa Hull who are very experienced having been wardens elsewhere in the Horsham District.

The Wardens' monthly updates are posted on the Council's website highlighting their activities and the wide variety of the tasks they undertake.

Next week the Council will be considering a report on CCTV for the parish and will hopefully give the green light to this long-awaited project.

Local Government Reorganisation is once again on the horizon, and although there are no plans to reorganise or replace parish and town councils, it does present an opportunity for those councils that wish to, to take on more local amenities from principal councils. This is something we are looking at, together with the all-important question of funding.

I would like to thank the Council's staff for all their hard work. These include the Clerk and his team in the Parish Office, the Billingshurst Centre Manager and her team and the Council's Environmental Operatives.

Please consider following the Council's social media accounts on X, Facebook and Instagram or otherwise sign up to the Council's email subscription service. You can do this by visiting the Newsfeed section of the Parish Council's website and following the instructions on the section relating to E-Newsletter sign-up. It also only takes a few moments each week to visit the Council's website to see if any new agendas have been added and what items are due to be discussed and decided upon. The excellent local Village Tweet magazine also includes monthly updates from the Council in the centre page spread. I know many parishioners have a real interest and passion for matters relating to Billingshurst and the Parish Council offers more ways than ever to be kept updated, as do HDC and WSCC. The Council works closely with our District and County Councillors and has representation on a number of other local groups.

Thank you.

REPORT OF THE RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER 2024-25

Points to highlight are:

For the year coming to an end.....

1. Salaries includes paying those permanent members of the Centre's staff for ease of pension contributions, via the Council's own payroll. These are subsequently reimbursed by the Centre.
2. The Council continues to receive CIL funds, which it is obliged to account for and report on separately and are detailed on the website.
3. The Council has benefitted from high interest rates on its considerable deposits, but as interest rates start to drop so will our income.

4. The Council is audited twice per year and continues to receive clean bills of health for the way it conducts its affairs.

Looking to the year ahead.....

5. Overall, the Council will be asking for an extra £20,806 to fund its services. This is 4.06% more than last year. Once again, because there are more properties than last year, the overall take is spread over more payers, thus the extra per typical average Band D payer, is £3.77 or 3.36%.
6. The Council continues to undertake significant projects only where the majority, if not all, funds can be secured from grants and other sources. For example, the new skatepark and fencing at the allotments has all been funded from s106 developer contributions.

G C Burt
11/02/2025