

Wealden News

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from the



Conservatives

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Email us: office@wealdenconservatives.com Telephone us: 01273 937661

WEALDEN'S LOCAL PLAN

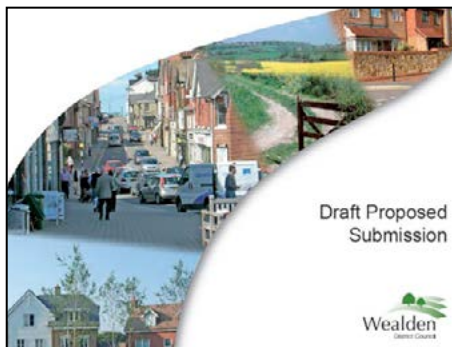
An update and explanation of its importance and progress by Cllr Ann Newton, Cabinet member for Planning and Development at Wealden District Council.

THE Council is aiming to take the Local Plan to the July meeting of the Full Council for adoption, to allow the document to go out for formal representation or consultation.

Then, once any representations have been taken into account, all being well we hope to have the document before a Planning Inspector early next year.

In line with our previous Core Strategy we do have obligations under the Habitats Regulations with regard to special areas such as the Pevensey Levels and Ashdown Forest which means our housing numbers are constrained. As an update, the advice from Natural England in relation to the Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) was received on 16 February.

The advice concludes from modelling work undertaken by Wealden District Council that air-quality-impacts from Wealden District Council's Local Plan will have a likely significant effect on the Ashdown Forest SAC alone or in combination with other plans and projects and further assessment is required under the Habitats Regulations. This further work is in the form of an Appropriate Assessment.



Wealden District, as a 'Competent Authority' under the Habitats Regulations, is responsible for undertaking Appropriate Assessments, and Natural England is a statutory consultee. We are continuing to progress the Appropriate Assessment which examines in more detail the level of impact that the pollution deposition is having on the ecology of the SAC. The Appropriate Assessment feeds into the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) for the District as a whole and is required to progress the Local Plan.

We will report as the Plan progresses, meanwhile you can access more details on the WDC website.

From the Chairman

Welcome to the second edition of Wealden News, the newsletter published by the Wealden Constituency Conservative Association.



The feedback received on the first edition of our newsletter was positive, for which we are grateful.

At the recent Association AGM a member asked me whether we would print letters and comments by members; whether we were really interested in views which may be contrary to those expressed in the newsletter. The answer to that is a resounding YES.

Of course, we cannot promise to print every comment and letter but we will do so if possible so long as the content is not racist, sexist, offensive or inappropriate.

With very best wishes
Helen Galley, Chairman WCCA

Fire Service – shifting priorities *By Cllr Roy Galley*



THE Fire and Rescue service is one we almost take for granted. We just expect it to be there whenever it is needed – and it is but, as with all public services, it is facing change and challenge.

The service is a victim of its own huge success. Fire! Fire! is called much less frequently than it was. In the last twenty years the number of fires has more than halved. When they do happen, as with Grenfell Tower, they are dramatic and dreadful – but the numbers are going down. A lot of firefighter-time is now spent on fire prevention. We, that is The Fire and Rescue Service, put a lot of effort into home safety visits and we increasingly target those in vulnerable homes. We are rolling out a more ambitious business safety programme.

The end result of this will be even fewer fires. Nevertheless we need to keep up the numbers of firefighters to cope with fires when they arise. We are currently recruiting more staff: they are all highly trained and need to be up to date with

their training as equipment improves and new dangers such as chemical incidents occur. Some are also trained in large animal rescue, based in Crowborough, and in maritime and water rescues.

Fully trained firefighters are expensive so the real conundrum is keeping a very professional group in operation against a background of fewer fires. So the Fire Authority's focus is very much on availability and readiness combined with greater efficiency.

East Sussex has what is called a Combined Fire Authority. The County Council area along with Brighton and Hove is served by one Authority appointed by the parent bodies: the County Council and Brighton and Hove Council. It is an independent organisation. West Sussex, on the other hand, is a Fire service run directly by the County Council. Arrangements vary up and down the country.

I sit on the Fire Authority as one of 16 members. The Scrutiny and Audit Panel which closely monitors the finances and overall performance is chaired by me.

Our current performance activity is concentrating on:

- Reducing the number of Accidental Dwelling Fires
- Home Safety Visits
- Business Safety Audits
- Reduction in unnecessary Automatic Fire Alarm calls
- Limiting Staff Sickness.

Political Discussion Evening - NHS and Adult Social Care

by Phil Dixon

The Association held its first political discussion meeting on 7th March, when we discussed the NHS and Adult Social Care, and whether we should raise taxes to pay for it.

The debate was lively and brought up many interesting points, and we were pleased to welcome a number of new faces.

In general, the group was against raising taxes and felt more could be done to control costs and look for other sources of revenue; also Social Care should be paid for by central government.

The discussion group is intended to be a monthly event where we will cover a whole range of topics and may, in the future, invite guest speakers. Forthcoming topics include: 9 May: University Education; 6 June: Defence; 11 July: Nanny State; 8 August: Immigration and 12 September: Privatisation. Details on our website.



 Wealden Conservatives

Meeting New School Needs



by Cllr Bob Standley -- ESCC Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability

IN recent years education in East Sussex has changed significantly with the introduction of academies and free schools.

Academies and free schools are similar in that they are not run by the local authority, can set their own term times and can also set their own teachers' pay. Academies are normally converted from local authority schools whereas free schools are new schools. These schools do not need to follow the national curriculum but still have to follow the same rules on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions as state schools.

They get funding directly from the government, not the local council. Some academies have sponsors such as businesses, universities, other schools, faith groups or voluntary groups.

Central Government did suggest that all schools become academies or free schools, which would have largely removed local authorities from the equation, but had a change of heart after the General Election and decided against the forced-academy route. The current mix is not ideal as it is neither one thing or the other, with a mix of maintained (council-run), academies, and free schools. Councils have retained responsibility for overall school performance but without the tools to enforce.

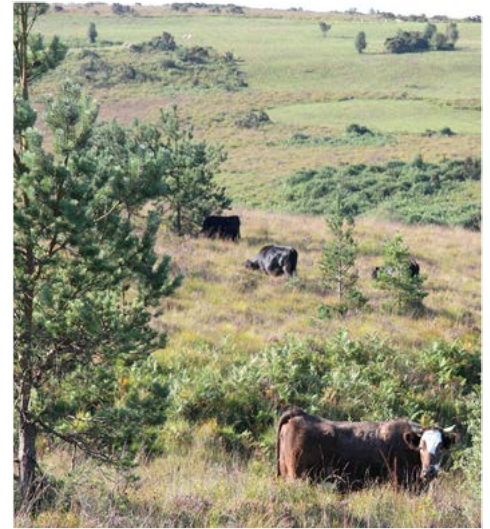
School funding

This has been a hot issue of late. There is the question of whether the cake is big enough (although central government has put in an extra £1.3bn) and how the cake is sliced. East Sussex historically gets a smaller amount per pupil than most other areas, and considerably less than London Schools. A school in Hackney would receive 37% more per pupil funding from central government than a school in East Sussex, which is difficult to justify.

Whilst all East Sussex schools had increases in funding for 2018/19 they have also had increased costs in salaries, pension payments and apprenticeship levy. As local authority schools have a centralised salary system they have to pay the levy, whilst academies in the main do not as their payroll is less than £3m.

In my role as Lead Member for Education at County I am working with our schools to get the best deal possible whilst mindful of the need of the Treasury to balance the nation's books.

A Changing Forest



As he steps down from almost two decades of service, retired local horse vet and active wildlife conservationist Philip Glyn reflects on his time on the Board of Conservators of Ashdown Forest

SOME years after my election as a Commoner Conservator, one of my fellow longstanding Conservators was asked at the commoners' meeting why he had been there so long; he retorted: "Because you will keep electing me!"

Having served for 19 years, I have seen many changes, not just in the landscape but in the speed and volume of traffic, numbers of visitors and their dogs and changes of emphasis in the struggle to conserve precious heathland and its astonishing wildlife.

In the 1950s, I saw active commoners putting stock out on to the unfenced forest - at a time when cars were scarce. Then, many farms with commoner's rights had two farmyard stacks, one hay and the other 'litter': bracken, heather and gorse cut from the heath to use as animal bedding. There were almost no trees; they were cut for fuel or grazed off while seedlings. The strong decline in this subsistence farming by commoners has resulted in invasion by birch and oak. This, surprisingly to some, is a headache for the Conservators who have a statutory duty to conserve heathland.

Can we graze it today?

Reintroducing grazing for conservation rather than livelihood has been checked by dog attacks, limitations on fencing and safety concerns. Much of my time as a Conservator has been spent in the rôle of 'non-exec', listening to solutions from the professional staff.

Progress has been slow. The future lies in a combination of management tools to emulate hundreds of years of the commoners' use: mechanical cutting, controlled burning and judicious use of livestock grazing. Changes to the management structure, as Richard Stogdon so rightly flags, are also part of that future. But volunteers are, and always will be, pivotal; many of us devote time, effort and expertise out of love for the Forest. How ironic it is that echoing what commoners once did to survive is now the only way the Forest will survive to retain its singular landscape, highly prized by wildlife, visitors and residents alike.

Wealden's planning re-vamp explained

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) - The Government have recently published a revised draft National Planning Policy Framework. The consultation period ends on 10 May and the final document will not likely come into effect until late summer/early autumn 2018.

Some key changes/ headlines include: references include the concept of permission in principle (similar to the current outline consents), the requirement for Local Planning Authorities to ensure/endeavour that at least 20% of their housing supply sites are on small sites to support small to medium size builders, potential easing of planning controls to support extensions upwards (eg roof extensions), more efficient use of land 'higher densities' in town and city centres, greater weight is being suggested for Neighbourhood Plans, standard methodology for assessing OAHN (objectively assessed housing need) and five-year land supply, level entry exception sites for first time buyers, reviewing CIL and Section 106 charging regime, and the streamlining of plan-making regime.

Drive to digital

As part of the Council's Drive to Digital initiative the Planning Department has taken a significant step forward by directing the majority of its general planning queries through to the Council's website. This has involved discontinuing the planning duty phone service and providing easier more streamlined access to advice and guidance through the web site. This move aligns itself with the Council's goals of increasing customer self-service and access to vital information more easily. Officers are soon to be trained so that they can amend the pages for their respective areas, so that updates and improvements can be made to pages as timely as possible.

Planning surgeries will still be provided with no change to the current system. Any queries regarding building regulations can still be accessed via the website and by telephone on 01892 602005. There will be of course certain residents and visitors that do not have access to the internet and procedures have been put in place so that they will still be able to receive information and support with their planning queries.

**Cllr Ann Newton -
Cabinet member for Planning and Development
at Wealden District Council**