

WESTHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held at 7.00pm on Monday,
17 February 2025 at The Amenity Hall, Stone Cross School,
Adur Drive, Stone Cross, BN24 5EF

Present: Cllr D Axell, Cllr P Baldwin, Cllr L Comfort, Cllr F Durling, Cllr M Fairweather*, Cllr K Farley, Cllr M Hallett, Cllr C Hanson, Cllr P Quanstrom, Cllr D Upton*

(* denotes WDC Councillor)

Also at the meeting:

S. Sanders (Clerk)

203. Apologies

Cllr R Mayfield, Cllr A Taylor

204. Declarations of Interest

None

205. Questions from members of the public

None

206. Draft Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on Monday 20 January 2025 to be agreed and confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair of the Meeting

The Minutes had previously been circulated to Councillors.

The Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on Monday 20 January 2025 were agreed and signed as a correct record by the Chair of the Council

Proposed and Seconded

Unanimous decision

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 20 January 2025 be agreed and signed by the Chair of the Meeting

207. To receive reports from East Sussex County Councillors and Wealden District Councillors

(i) Cllr Fairweather – Wealden District Council

In January, the White Paper had only just been published (just a few days before Xmas) and the implications hadn't fully emerged.

In January, East Sussex CC met to decide how to respond to the Govt's very tight deadlines. ESCC voted to apply for the Govt's Priority (fast-track) Programme in conjunction with West Sussex and Brighton to be under a "Mayor of Sussex." (The Priority Programme carries a subsidy towards the re-organisation costs, that otherwise would not be available.) The Govt. has already breached its own "deadline" (31st Jan) for saying whether the application is accepted and whether the County elections will go ahead in May. The Local Govt. Assn. is exerting pressure for clarity on this elections point (and quickly). The Govt. has now announced that Sussex's CC elections will be postponed

The Districts were kept in the dark and not consulted, perhaps unsurprisingly, only the "first tier" authorities (e.g. County Councils) were. The re-organisation would see Districts eventually disappear but legacy Districts might endure for a year or two beyond their 2027 term to wind things up in an orderly manner.

Parishes are predicted to need to take on more powers locally, but there are also prophecies that small parishes might need to merge to be able to manage these powers. All these proposals are due to go out to public consultation sometime in Feb – Apr. What will be consulted on is totally unclear. (There are suggestions the Brighton will swallow up Shoreham and Worthing. Surrey are bidding to take over Crawley and Gatwick. At least the East Sussex proposals are fairly clear-cut.)

This process is also dubbed “devolution” by the Govt., but there are precious few details about this, beyond that the Mayor would have power to ram through Planning Applications. (Although there are mutterings that there may be new powers around transport.)

A central Govt. “consultation” has opened today, for 6 weeks, on “devolution” on which you may very well have opinions:

The Local Plan -Apparently, all the consultation comments have now been collated but Cllrs. have yet to see, or hear, any feedback. There is a deadline (in early March) to report progress to Govt. and this will include informing the Wealden public. The instructions from Govt. are to keep preparing the plan (the work will be needed regardless.)

(ii) Cllr C Primett – Wealden District Council

Cllr Primett informed Councillors about the Boundary Commission reorganisation in Wealden. This had been paused and not cancelled. The Constitution Review was continuing and a draft document of the Review would be out in late February.

208. Financial Items recommended for approval

(i) Reconciliation Reports and payment lists for January 2025 for approval and resolution

The reconciliation reports and payment list were agreed by Council and signed by the Chair of the Council.

That the Payment List of £22,790.50 for January 2025 is approved

Proposed and seconded

Majority agreement – 1 abstention

Resolved: That the reconciliation reports and payment list for January 2025 are agreed and signed by the Chair of the Council

(ii) Bank Statements January 2025 to be approved

The bank statements were approved by Council and signed by the Chair of the Council

Proposed and seconded

Majority agreement – 1 abstention

Resolved: That the bank statements for January 2025 are agreed and signed by the Chair of the Council

(iii) Councillor to independently check bank reconciliations

At least [once in each quarter], and at each financial year end, a member other than the Chair {or a cheque signatory} shall be appointed to verify bank reconciliations (for all accounts) produced by the RFO. The member shall sign and date the reconciliations and the original bank statements (or similar document) as evidence of this. This activity, including any exceptions, shall be reported to and noted by the council.

Proposed and seconded

Majority agreement – 1 abstention

Resolved: That the checked reconciliation reports were signed by an independent Councillor

(iv) The Reserve Account to be moved to a new provider

It was agreed that this item should be moved to the March Full Council agenda

(v) The Internal Auditors Interim Report – January 2025

The report had previously been circulated to Councillors. The Clerk explained the report and the various comments. The Internal Auditor made two comments which had now been corrected.

Proposed and seconded

Majority agreement – 1 abstention

Resolved: That the Internal Auditors Report be accepted by Council

209. Anti-Social Behaviour in Westham and Stone Cross- an update on crime figures in the Parish for Councillors

At the last meeting, the Clerk said that crime figures have shown an increase in the past year of certain types of crime in the Westham and Stone Cross Parish area. The figures in certain months may be skewed by one incident but overall the increase was worrying. Clarity in the numbers was needed.

Councillor's discussed whether it would be a good idea to contact various organisations in the area to have a campaign to make residents aware of reporting crime to the police.

The PCSO for the area would be invited to a future meeting of the Council.

A Councillor remarked that it would be a helpful to the Council if a meeting with the new Police Inspector for the area could be arranged.

At this meeting, the crime figures for December were discussed. There was a slight drop in numbers but the figures were much higher than Councillors expected. A reply about the figures had been sought from the Police asking them to explain how the figures were collated and what could be done to reduce crime in the area.

A reply to these question was received from the PCSO for the area. They explained how the figures were collected and how the figures were not always reflective of the true numbers/locations of crimes which are then followed up depending on triage.

The crime figures for January 2025 should be available for the next Full Council meeting.

210. Road Safety on Adur Drive

Following on from the previous meeting when concerns were raised the background to this item was explained by a Councillor.

Previously Stone Cross School had employed a lollipop person twice daily to escort children across the road. Unfortunately, the current lollipop person had left and recruitment of a new person was found to be difficult at this time.

An officer from the East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Road Safety Traffic Team had met with the headteacher of the school at 'dropping off' time in the morning. They found that the school had all safety measures in place including a 20 mile an hour zone, road humps and flashing lights at the approach to the school.

Councillors pointed out that morning 'dropping off' time was phased and not as busy as the 'pick up' time in the afternoon.

Councillors were told that there is an ESCC scheme that will make contributions to safety schemes such as a zebra crossing. The school is waiting for a response from the ESCC team.

A police officer was present outside the school at pick up time earlier this month. They reminded people not to park on double yellow lines or on the pavement which was very helpful. This is a much welcome occasion that happens rarely.

211. Clerks Monthly update for Councillors

(i) Solar Lighting on the Parish Council car park

The contractors had inspected the site for risk assessment which they duly submitted to the Council.

Before the work can commence SGN have to be notified of the work that is to be carried out next to a high pressure gas main. A meeting has now been arranged for 5 March to meet with the SGN engineer for the area. Hopefully work can then start once the precise placement of the solar lights are agreeable to everyone.

(ii) Cherwell Close Play Area – removal of equipment

A further discussion took place about re-siting the equipment or disposing of it totally.

Some of the equipment is still in fairly good condition and could be re-sited at the pylon field off Hamble Road which has spare capacity for equipment.

The cost of removing and re-siting the equipment would be expensive but cheaper than having to buy new equipment.

New estimates for re-siting and removal of the equipment would be sought for the March Full Council Meeting.

Further discussions about what happens to the vacant play area off Cherwell Close once the equipment is removed.

(iii) Adur Park – replacement of outdoor adult gym equipment this year

The outdoor adult gym equipment in Adur Park is very well used and is now showing signs of wear and tear after being in place for the last few years. A Councillor informed the Council that it would be good if this year there could be a complete refit of the equipment.

The Clerk replied that she would find out details about companies who specialise in outdoor adult gym equipment and meet with them and a Councillor on site. All details will be brought to Full Council for their consideration.

(iv) Wells Estate Allotment site and car park

The Clerk informed Councillors that estimates for the trenching of the pipework /troughs to connect to the mains water were difficult to source. Two contractors had been contacted but they both wanted detailed plans and measurements of the allotment site and plots. Also the type of troughs required to be fitted on the site needed to be decided before an estimate could be made.

It was decided that the Clerk should contact a local contractor who might be able to draw up plans for the site and advise on the best type of water trough to be fitted.

Further discussions with Councillors about the total cost to make the allotment site useable will be required in future meetings.

211. To resolve to exclude Members of the Press and Public (Public Bodies [Admission to Meetings] Act 1960

There were no matters to be discussed

The Meeting closed at 20.40pm