



HENFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

**Meeting of Henfield Parish Council
held on Tuesday 11th March 2025 at 7.00pm in The Henfield Hall.**

Present: Cllr E Goodyear (Chairman), J Jones, G Perry, M Morgan, R Kendall, S Leader, A Willard, R Shaw, C Simmonds, J Potts, D Grossmith, D Jemmett, A May and F Ayres.

In attendance: Mrs R Grantham (Operations Manager), Jane Eaton – Chief Executive of Horsham District Council (HDC), Martin Boffey – Leader of HDC and 11 members of the public.

MINUTES

1. **DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

None.

2. **APOLOGIES**

Cllr Andrews and Cllr Payne - West Sussex County Council (WSCC).

3. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 4th FEBRUARY 2025**

Approved. Signed and dated by the Chairman.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

None.

5. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman welcomed the visitors from HDC and explained that they were in attendance to present on Devolution.

The Chairman adjourned the meeting.

OPEN FORUM

The members of the public were in attendance for the presentation on Devolution. They represented members from West Grinstead, Cowfold, Shermanbury and Woodmancote Parish Councils.

The Chairman reconvened the meeting.

6. **DEVOLUTION PRESENTATION BY JANE EATON AND MARTIN BOFFEY FROM HORSHAM DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Mr Boffey explained the background and history to Devolution in the UK. Expressions of interest were invited from government last summer and the Sussex region has been accepted on to the priority programme. The new strategic authority will be responsible for transport and infrastructure, skills and employment, housing, economic development, environment and climate change, health and wellbeing and public safety as well as encompassing policing, fire services and the integrated health board. A panel will be formed with two voting seats each for East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove with the addition of a Mayor, making seven in total. Mayoral elections will take place in May 2026. There will also be a local government reorganisation at the same time for the twenty one areas that currently have a three tier system (with District and Borough Councils). It is expected that each unitary authority will have a population of around 500,000. East Sussex has around 550,000, West Sussex 890,000 and Brighton and Hove has 300,000 so there may need to be some reorganisation of boundaries. Crawley Borough are considering combining with Surrey, there will be further clarity on this by May. Initial proposals are to be submitted by HDC by the 21st March with final proposals by 26th September. The HDC consultation will likely be in July and August. Mr Boffey advised that Parish Councils should begin to consider which services, assets and facilities they may want to take on from HDC given that there is a possibility that non statutory functions such as parks, leisure, culture and wellbeing services may be targeted for cost savings under the new unitary authority. There was

also the suggestion that Parish Councils might want to consider merging or combining with others, this might be particularly helpful when trying to deliver services such as car parks. Nothing will be forced on Parish Councils. HDC is keen to advise and encourage to help Parish Councils fulfill their aspirations. HDC is also conducting a Community Governance Review for the whole district, this will include consideration on parish boundaries and the number of Councillors required for each area.

CEO Jane Eaton took over to answer questions. Henfield Parish Council had submitted a number of questions to HDC in advance, as follows with the answer given below:

1. How are you (and local government generally) going to protect the skills and knowledge of the current HDC staff especially the planning team within HDC?
All staff will be TUPE'd over to the new unitary authority but it is expected that up to 25% will leave HDC prior. There are likely to be job losses following the restructure. HDC have increased their training budget and are encouraging staff to upskill to put them in the best position possible.
2. With the fast-track move to Unitary authorities and a Combined Mayoral authority, will HDC be able to continue on the route for the delivery of the Local Plan as laid out in the Local Development Scheme 2025?
HDC plan to keep moving forward with the Local Plan.
3. When/if land and other assets are transferred to HPC from HDC, how will HPC be expected to pay for maintenance of these? Will HDC transfer funds to cover, or at least contribute to, such costs?
HDC hopes that there will be a net nil cost and gave the example of a Parish Council generating income by running flat car parks in order to cover the cost of maintaining the Commons.
4. Will HDC transfer ALL its current functions (as opposed to land and other assets) to the new West Sussex Unitary Authority, or may some potentially be transferred to Parish Councils?
All current functions will be transferred to the new authority, but there are alternative options as well as Parish Councils choosing to take them on, for example wellbeing services could transfer to a community group.
5. Is the Government likely to require, or offer the chance of, merging of certain Parish Councils based on the number residents in each area? For example, might those PCs with a population below a certain level have to amalgamate with another/others nearby as a way of improving efficiency which seems to be one of the key aims of the whole devolution process?
This was covered previously, it will be Parish Councils' choice on how to structure following the Community Governance review.
6. If Parish Councils take on activities/ functions from District/ Borough Councils, presumably the costs of these may need to be met from an increase in their precepts? If that is the case, is it likely that capping of precepts will be introduced?
This is currently unclear, but possible if Parish Councils become very large.

Further questions included the following;

If land is transferred to a Parish Council, will they have ultimate authority to act as they see fit?
Yes, unless HDC place a covenant in circumstances such as if land could be used for housing development.

Did WSCC consult with HDC prior to submitting the expression of interest?
No, most Counties spoke with Districts but WSCC did not in this case.

With regards to merging Parish Councils, is it possible to decide at a later stage, e.g. in 2029?
This would be possible as the Community Governance Review process will remain in place every 10-15 years, but will not be carried out by HDC as it will no longer exist.

Further comments from Councillors included that there may be a need to take on more office staff and find larger premises, that members allowances may need to increase in order to attract Councillors and reflect the potential increase in work load and there may need to also be transfer of IT systems and data from HDC to allow Parish Council to run certain services such as car parks.

The Chairman added that she and the Clerk have read the consultation document and will respond. There will be an inter parish group meeting on the 8th April and the Finance Committee will be discussing setting up a Devolution working group at their meeting next Wednesday.

7. **WEST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT**

A written report was submitted from Cllr Payne prior to the meeting, summarised as follows.

Parents and carers were informed on 3rd March of the secondary school their child was allocated. There were 283 children in total who were not allocated one of their top three choices. WSCC's thought-full service is celebrating its 5th anniversary. The service provides mental and emotional wellbeing support in schools. It started with 8 staff and 29 schools and now supports 149 schools and is hoping to reach 100% coverage by 28/29.

8. **HORSHAM DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT**

Cllr Perry reported that the Scout Community Building project has received a grant for hedge laying and that HDC have moved offices to Alberry House. She had a visit to a local recycling centre where the importance of not placing batteries or vapes in general waste was emphasised due to the dangers to staff of fire and explosion. She also reported on the Paws on the Doors scheme for recognising dog friendly places and that there should shortly be more disabled parking bays in the Coopers Way car park.

Cllr Potts reported that the next round of LEAP small business grants is available from 2nd April. He also reported that government are now limiting the powers of local Councillors in the planning system, they will only be involved in larger or more controversial applications. It was felt this is disappointing. It is thought that Parish Councils will remain as statutory consultees. There has been a recent increase in planning applications in part due to the lack of a Local Plan and the shortfall in five year land supply. With regards to the Local Plan, HDC has responded to the inspector concerns but there has still not been any reply. There has recently been a large litter clearance from the Wheatsheaf road. Cllr Potts added that it is important that this continues and it is unrealistic to expect any deterrent.

9. **MOTION: TO APPROVE AMENDMENTS IN SECTION SIX OF THE PRINCIPLES FOR VERGE MANAGEMENT DOCUMENT**

A proposal for hedge planting on the Wantley verge was circulated prior to the meeting. The Chairman explained that the Finance Committee (FRC) had discussed this paper and recommended approval with five in favour and two against. The Chairman asked for views from those not on FRC. Cllr Simmonds stated he has spoken with several residents who would rather retain an open aspect to the northern entrance to the village. Cllr Kendall agreed and added that the views of wider residents are considered, not just Wantley residents. Cllr Ayres agreed and asked who would maintain the verges, which will be the Works Officers. Cllr Morgan said that he feels that in addition to the objections already stated, that he feels there is unlikely to be any positive benefits to reducing road noise or increasing safety for pets or people as stated in the report. He feels that 107 feet is too long and up to 10 feet is too high. He also added that as there could be a change to road layout when the next phase of the Parsonage Farm development takes place then no works should take place prior to this. Cllr Shaw agreed and stated that the northern entrance to the village is the most unattractive of all three and the area should be considered as a whole. Cllr Perry stated that the Council had committed to prioritising nature and that having this area as a Community Road Verge would be mean that it is the Council's decision on how it is managed and the verge could be changed or adapted in future. She added that it could be viewed as an asset and that the funding is already in place. **The Motion was proposed by the Chairman and seconded by Councillor Jones and the vote was seven in favour and seven against, therefore the Chairman had the casting vote. The Chairman voted in favour of the amendments therefore the Motion was carried.** The Chairman added that the opposing views would be taken into consideration when planning the work.

10. **HENFIELD ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – REVIEW & ACTION POINTS**

It was generally agreed that the evening was a success. Positive comments have been received by the office from Councillors and residents. It was agreed that the refreshments were worth offering as lots of people stayed behind after the formal meeting to look at displays and chat with Councillors. It was suggested that Councillors could sit to the side or in the front row rather than lined up behind the Chairman, and that planning could begin sooner. It was useful to have representatives from Sussex Police in attendance as many of the issues raised such as parking on zig zags required their input.

11. **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

(A) Finance, Risk & Change Governance

Cllr Jones reported that the cemetery lights are now working and thanked Cllr Grossmith for his help. The Council has also purchased an electric van for the works team.

(a) Summary of £26,433.54 Expenditure from 1st February to 28th February 2025.
Noted by Council.

(b) Select Expenditure as the Monthly Random Audit Check – February.
Cllr Grossmith selected litter wardens.

(B) Plans Advisory

Cllr Shaw reported that the Committee have noticed an increase in appeals and that the application for 29 homes at Backsettown would be heard by HDC Committee on the 18th March. A letter has been received from Wates requesting a meeting to discuss the application for south of New Hall Lane in Small Dole. Dates are being discussed; it will be a public meeting.

(a) Local Plan Update.
This was covered under item 8.

(C) Recreation & Open Spaces

Cllr Perry reported that the Committee has agreed to research costs for the cricket club car park. She added she was pleased to see the Padel courts open and hoped to increase the crocus ribbon planting.

(D) Village Amenities

Cllr Morgan reported that the committee are meeting tomorrow.

(a) Mock Bridge Flooding Signage.
Input is awaited from WSCC.

(E) Children & Young People

Cllr Leader reported that design options have been received for the skate park improvements and that planning permission can now be sought. Cllr Andrews has offered to oversee this project.

(F) Museum

Cllr Potts reported that the Museum continues with its programme of temporary exhibits, the heritage project and digitisation. There will shortly be a mentor visit from Chichester Museum which it is hoped will assist with the accreditation renewal.

(G) Joint Commons

Cllr Perry reported that, further to comments made at the Annual Parish Meeting, there may have been one Oak tree removed on the Common which would have either been accidental or necessary in order to remove another potentially dangerous or diseased tree. Removal of the holly was part of the approved management plan. The wood resulting from the work will be sold in order to lower the cost of the tree work. HDC also confirmed that no poisons are used on the Tanyard and that HDC has agreed that the conservation volunteers can use the Tanyard Barn for storage. She also reported on the benefits of biodiversity net gain offsetting which could be used to generate income for 30 years from areas of land such as Parsonage Wood, the Community Orchard and Commons, should their ownership be passed to the Parish Council.

12. **REPORTS FROM MEMBERS REPRESENTING COUNCIL ON OUTSIDE BODIES**

Cllr Grossmith reported that a low native hedge will be planted around the new Padel courts and that funding is in place to move the doors in the leisure centre to better accommodate the Community Fridge and clothes rail as well as improve safeguarding by allowing access to the café without entering the soft play area. He has also assisted the Scout Community Centre project by advising on the rainwater recovery system.

Cllr Leader reported on a successful coffee on the kerb event which is hoped will continue each second Saturday of the month and expand to other locations in the village.

13 **PCSO & POLICE ACTIVITIES**

There are no concerns to report. The month of action in Henfield was considered a success, there was an increase in foot patrols, officers attended the market and a general increase in police presence was noticed and appreciated.

14. **ANY OTHER URGENT MATTERS TO BE RAISED BY COUNCILLORS**

Cllr Simmonds raised that there was some concern from the BP Guild about the potential numbers that are likely to attend the VE Day celebration event planned. They asked whether it might be more appropriate to just run a bar and not offer food, as the Beacon lighting is not until 9.30pm and is mid week. This will be discussed at the Village Amenities meeting tomorrow.

15. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday 1st April 2025.

Meeting Closed at 9pm.