

# ALFRISTON PARISH COUNCIL

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**CLERK TO THE COUNCIL**

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Alfriston War Memorial Hall  
Old School House  
The Tye, Alfriston  
East Sussex, BN26 5TL

Monday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2024

## **Draft Minutes of The Annual Parish Assembly held in Alfriston War Memorial Hall on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024 at 7.15pm.**

**Present:** Cllr Monteath-Wilson, Cllr Harris, Cllr Daw, Cllr Spring and Cllr Parkinson

**Apologies:** Cllr Watkins, Cllr Rabagliati

**In Attendance:**

Mrs Suzanna Dry – Clerk & RFO

Approximately 15 members of the public in attendance.

### **1. Welcome by the Chair, Cllr Diana Monteath-Wilson**

Cllr Monteath-Wilson welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending the Annual Parish Assembly.

### **2. Report from Maria Caulfield MP**

Maria Caulfield was unable to attend the meeting and sent her apologies. The Clerk read out a summary of Maria Caulfield's report, which is attached as [Appendix A](#).

### **3. Report from Cllr Stephen Shing – East Sussex County Council**

Cllr Shing read his report to the meeting, which is attached as [Appendix B](#).

### **4. Report from Cllr David Greaves - Wealden District Council**

Cllr Greaves read his report to the meeting, which is attached as [Appendix C](#).

## 5. Presentation from Cllr Richard Brown, Cuckmere Valley Parish Council on Flooding issue with Cuckmere River.

Key points of Cuckmere River Update provided by Richard Brown, who is also the farmer representative member of the WLMB for the lower Cuckmere, and who farms the valley to the south of Litlington.

### Very wet winter:

- 1282ml rain recorded in 2023, 65% higher than 20 year average of 784ml.
- The last 9 months (July 2023-March 2024 inc) especially wet @ 1232m: 90% higher than 20 year average of 653ml

### Tough for everybody and everything:

- Farms: crops, livestock, staff
- Cuckmere Valley grassland
- Infrastructure: roads, footpaths, telecoms ... even water supply
- Community

If weather such as this is the future, then we have to **be prepared**:

- Intelligent maintenance of the river, roads etc ... so that we do not suffer prolonged and repeated flooding
- Changed behaviour

### What has happened to the Cuckmere?

- Cuckmere Haven: the all-important exit of the river to the sea has been OK.
- Overtopped at Alfriston 15-20x since October causing extensive and prolonged flooding to the valley and the roads
  - o Major inconvenience to everyone and loss of business
  - o Further damage to the riverbanks, roads, footpaths etc
  - o Damage to the SSSI in the valley
  - o ... but at least the floods did drain away each time because at low tide the sluice gates could open
- High springs: oozing water and causing some further property flooding (Westdean)

### Postponement to WLMB repair programme at Alfriston due to flooding

- £100k spent .... and 2 years of time, has been spent by WLMB on getting permissions to do riverworks at Alfriston (which the EA will not do, even though it is their responsibility)
- Emergency phase 1 repairs in early Oct were initially effective for ~1 week of the wet weather, but were then overtopped, repeatedly
- The scheduled phase 2 de-silt of ½ of the river channel between the white bridge and Deans Place has been postponed. It was licenced for Feb- 1<sup>st</sup> ½ March .... When the valley was flooded.
  - o Permission is now be requested to do this in Sept 2024
- Phase 3 rebuilding of the riverbank which was scheduled for Aug/Sept is also impacted, as the silt will not be available. Instead this is being requested to be brought forward to July, but using 1200 cubic meters of clay and topsoil which will need to be trucked-in.

The community needs to **support WLMB** as the key organisation to getting sensible maintenance work done at the right time of year. Preference is for the EA to de-main the river and pass responsibility to WLMB. The Community and WDC will need to support WLMB with some more funding to get maintenance work done: but to spend this money frugally and intelligently under local direction and with local support.

Cllr Brown offered to have his cattle graze between the Clergy House and Deans Place for 1 or 2 nights, in order to remove the reeds that impede the flow of water and help the water to go down river. Deans Place

Hotel, the National Trust and St Andrew's Church are the landowners. Cllr Monteath Wilson thanked Cllr Brown for his offer and APC will liaise with the landowners.

Cllr Brown then took questions from the floor.

## 6. Public Questions

Question from Mr Reynolds. Mr Reynolds thanked Cllr Brown for his talk and asked if the proposed repairs to the riverbank are up to the job? Cllr Brown replied he is not a civil engineer, but can say it would have been better to have the work much earlier in the year. All that has been done so far is repair the current bank. Phase 2 is to raise the banks which will make a big difference.

Question from Judy Burn – Who took the £100,000 that has been spent so far? Cllr Brown confirmed this money had been spent on licence fees from various organisations, consultancy work and employed staff time management.

Question from John Hurwood – Where does the funding come from for WLMB (Water Level Management Board)? Cllr Brown replied 50% is from a levy on farmers, 35% from Wealden District Council and 15% from other sources. Two executives from the WLMB who are very competent and very proactive are Richard Dan who is the Sluice Gate Keeper for WLMB and Revai Kinsella a civil engineer and the Area Manager, both are very helpful and effective.

Question the floor - The flooding is only going to get worse, is there a scenario for 10 years? Cllr Brown replied the E.A. (Environment Agency) will be doing scenarios. They have got other priorities and limited resources and will therefore not help us. Until there is a compelling alternative, we must keep our current structures as they are. If sea levels go up, we can build up our riverbanks.

Question from Keith Blackburn - Through his involvement with Seaford sea defences Keith Blackburn has found the E.A. want to help but simply don't have the money. Long term strategy has been used to get funding in the past, does Cuckmere have a long term strategy? Cllr Brown replied the E.A. cannot justify spending their money on the Cuckmere. The answer is to have local control both Cuckmere Valley Parish Council and Wealden District Council have been pushing for this. Wealden District Council wrote to the Lead Member for Transport & Environment at ESCC in November 2023 asking for pressure to be put on the EA to either upgrade the Cuckmere themselves or relinquish responsibility to a local body. Copy of ESCC letter attached [Appendix D](#).

Cllr Shing confirmed that the E.A. have no funding from the Government. Cllr Shing agreed getting control locally will help. E.A. do not want to maintain riverbeds or river mouth due to no funding.

Question from Cllr Parkinson - Who is empowered to make the E.A. handover responsibility locally? Cllr Brown thought it would involve legislation to do this. It would be a start if senior people in the E.A. confirm this would be a good idea.

Question from Cllr Spring - are there any examples anywhere of the E.A. relinquishing responsibility? Cllr Brown said there were some examples of this. Cllr Spring said it would be good to see how this had been achieved.

Cllr Monteath Wilson confirmed that APC are very keen to support Cllr Brown and Cuckmere Valley P.C. in their work and thanked Cllr Brown for such an informative talk and his obvious extensive knowledge on the subject.

The meeting closed at 8.20pm

## [Appendix A](#)

Maria Caulfield MP's Update for Alfriston Parish Council - April 2024

Please accept my apologies that I am unable to join you at your upcoming meeting. I do however have the following updates for the parish.

### [Chancellor's Spring Budget Update](#)

I am delighted to commend the Chancellor's spring budget, which brings about significant tax cuts benefiting working families across our constituency. With the main rate of employee National Insurance Contributions (NICs) reduced from ten percent to eight percent, over 27 million working individuals will experience a boost in their pay packets, amounting to an average tax cut exceeding £900 for those earning £35,400 annually. This reduction marks the lowest effective personal tax rate since 1975, underscoring the government's commitment to supporting hardworking people.

Additionally, changes to the high-income Child Benefit Charge, including raising the threshold and halving the rate of Child Benefit withdrawal, will provide significant relief for families, with some parents set to benefit by an average of £1,260. These measures, coupled with the extension of fuel and alcohol duty freezes, demonstrate the government's dedication to easing financial burdens on families and fostering economic growth.

### [£6.9m for SEND Funding in East Sussex](#)

I am pleased to announce that East Sussex County Council will benefit from a substantial funding injection of £6,696,429 aimed at supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) as well as those in alternative provision (AP). This funding, part of the Government's broader commitment to invest a record annual sum of £850 million in councils, underscores the Government's dedication to providing high-quality education tailored to the needs of every child. With the aim of creating new places for young people with SEND and AP in mainstream and special schools, this initiative seeks to offer specialised support for children facing various challenges such as autism, learning difficulties, and mobility issues.

### [Supporting the Ban on the Import of Hunting Trophies](#)

I have stood in support of a crucial bill in Parliament aimed at banning the import of hunting trophies from approximately 6,000 species, including majestic creatures like lions, elephants, rhinos, and polar bears. This legislative effort builds upon the groundbreaking Ivory Act, which has been in effect since 2022, significantly limiting the trade and import of elephant ivory in the UK. The devastating impact of trophy hunting on endangered species, as highlighted by research from Oxford University, underscores the urgency of this measure, particularly evidenced by the alarming decline in African lion populations. I am proud to have contributed to this effort.

### [Halting HMRC Plans to Close the Phone Lines over Summer](#)

I would like to express my appreciation for Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's decision to intervene and suspend HMRC's plans to close their phone lines over the summer. HMRC's initial proposal to suspend phone services for six months, from April to September, raised concerns among taxpayers who rely on telephone assistance for their tax-related queries. I have been contacted by many concerned residents about issues they are having getting through to HMRC on the phone. We must see an improvement in the service so that residents can quickly and easily resolve any issues.

## Expansion of the Boiler Upgrade Scheme

I would like to take the opportunity to praise the government's decision to modify the Boiler Upgrade Scheme, facilitating support for properties off the gas grid. The scheme now offers grants of up to £7,500 for households seeking to transition to air source or ground source heat pumps. Notably, the government has eased the requirement for properties to have no outstanding Energy Performance Certificate recommendations for loft and cavity wall insulation, potentially saving households £2,500 in costs. Recognising the suitability of ground source heat pumps for rural properties, the government plans to increase the capacity limit for shared ground loops from 45kW to 300kW, aiming to distribute the infrastructure costs more evenly. Moreover, the government will introduce flexibility into regulations to potentially adjust grant levels for off-grid properties in the future, while maintaining simplicity.

## Funding Boost for Schools across the Constituency

I welcome the announcement of a £2.2 million increase in funding for schools within the Lewes Constituency for the 2024-25 academic year compared to the previous year. This increase is part of the total school revenue funding in England, which amounts to £59.6 billion for the same period, resulting in the highest ever real-terms per pupil funding. The boost translates to approximately £35,000 extra for a typical primary school with 200 pupils and around £200,000 additional funding for a typical secondary school with 900 pupils. Notably, schools have the autonomy to allocate the additional funding as they see fit, whether on staffing, classroom materials, or other operational expenses.

ENDS

## Appendix B

Cllr Shing's report to follow.

## Appendix C

### Cllr David Greaves, WDC

#### Report – Alfriston PC - Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024

##### **1) Cliff Collapses**

The Council have issued warnings about the dangers of people going close to cliff edges along the South coast. Local Councils have teamed up with HM Coastguard and landowners to launch a campaign reminding people of the risk posed by unstable chalk cliffs. The risk is not just with the cliff edges but also at the base of the cliffs.

The joint campaign to raise awareness of cliff dangers is being promoted by HM Coastguard, The National Trust, South Downs National Park Authority, Sussex Wildlife Trust, East Sussex County Council, Seaford Town Council, Wealden District Council, Eastbourne Borough Council and Lewes District Council.

#### **For further information contact:**

Stacey Robins  
Head of Planning & Environmental Services

Wealden District Council  
Email: [Stacey.robins@wealden.gov.uk](mailto:Stacey.robins@wealden.gov.uk)

## **2) Climate Change**

Wealden District Council have released surveys to find out residents' opinions on climate change. This is with a view to creating a new climate change strategy and action plan based on those opinions.

To complete the surveys, visit [Climate Change | Let's Talk Wealden](#). The survey will be open for eight weeks and closes at 12 p.m. on Friday 10 May 2024. For more information residents can contact the Climate Change team at [sustainability@wealden.gov.uk](mailto:sustainability@wealden.gov.uk)

For further information contact:

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## **3) Food Waste Collection grant**

Wealden District Council have received a grant of £1,637,844 to support Food Waste collection (capital) costs from 2023-24.

## **4) Postal Votes**

Changes take effect from 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024:

- Ban on political campaigners handling postal votes (there are certain exclusions but also strict controls)
- Limits on the number of postal votes that can be handed in at a polling station (limit to be 5 plus their own)
- Completion of postal vote documents form (incomplete forms = postal vote rejection and the voters will receive a letter following the election telling them why).
- Handing in postal votes to the Returning officer - same restrictions as above. Any such votes must be handed in personally at the Elections Office (in Hailsham).
- Secrecy requirements apply as per requirements at Polling Stations

Anyone dealing with Postal Votes needs to check out the new requirements to ensure compliance with the Elections Act 2022.

Just to give you an idea of the scale of this - for the Police and Crime Commissioner election at the beginning of May 25,000 postal votes have been sent out.

## **5) A22 overnight roadworks**

There will be road works overnight on the A22 Hailsham bypass between Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> April and Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> May. There will be road closures and significant diversions – check it out on the ESCC website if necessary.

## **6) Net Zero workshops**

Wealden District Council have partnered with Brighton University to deliver one-day courses to help businesses across the District to cut their carbon footprint and save money on energy and waste bills.

The session is to be held on 20<sup>th</sup> June at the Horsted Place Hotel near Uckfield and are open to micro, small and medium sized businesses including not for profit businesses and charities.

## **7) New funding available to help community spaces and facilities**

The Wealden Community Infrastructure and Spaces Funding Programme to help partners improve local rural green spaces and community infrastructure within the district is being launched by Wealden District Council.

The council is inviting organisations such as Not for Profit organisations and town and parish councils to apply for grants between £1,000 and £20,000 for projects that will help Wealden residents improve and

enhance green spaces and community assets, and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups. A total funding pot of £120K is available.

This will be a rolling programme and applications will be processed on a first come first served basis. The fund closes in autumn 2024, or sooner if all funds are allocated.

The funding programme has been made available through the government's Rural England Prosperity Fund. The England-wide initiative is a new £110million, two-year capital fund from the Department for Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs, complementary to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund - run by the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities. It will enable the council to support projects in rural areas of the district.

Further details about the grant scheme and information on how to access the application can be found at <https://www.wealden.gov.uk/information-for-businesses/economic-development-and-growth/rural-england-prosperity-fund/wealden-community-infrastructure-and-spaces-fund/>

For organisations wishing to register their interest, please contact the council via email on [communitygrants@wealden.gov.uk](mailto:communitygrants@wealden.gov.uk).

**For further information please contact:**

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