**Wealden District Association of Local Councils**

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Minutes of a Meeting of the Wealden District Association of Local Councils held via Zoom on Wednesday 13th October 2021 at 7.00 pm

1. Present: Councillors Keith Stevens (Chairman, Wartling), Robert Nathan (Hartfield), Deveda Redman (Mayfield and Five Ashes), Kay Moss (Crowborough), Martyn Garrett (Crowborough), Andy Watkins (Willingdon and Jevington), Nikos Mikelis (Chiddingly), Peter Lowton (Pevensey), Penny Strudwick (Hellingly), Peter Weston (Hadlow Down), Jenny Alder (Herstmonceux) and Lolita Reeves (Maresfield)

Also in attendance; Chris Bending (Head of Policy and Economic Development at Wealden District Council), James Adler (Chief Executive of The Conservators of Ashdown Forest) and Alison Stevens (Honorary Secretary).

2. Apologies for Absence: Apologies for absence were received from: Beryl Smith (Berwick), Sally Carnie (Berwick), Kaye Crittell (Ninfield), Mike Garner (Arlington), Graham Knight (Horam), Martin Cooper (Willingdon and Jevington), Shirley McKinnon (Pevensey), Susan Cole (East Hoathly with Halland), Laughton Parish Council, Averil Price (Wealden) and Bob Standley (Wealden).

3. Draft Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on the 14th July 2021 – The minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on the 14th July 2021 were read, approved by all and signed by the Chairman.

4. Draft Minutes of the Management Meeting held on the 8th September 2021 – The minutes of the Management Meeting held on the 8th September 2021 were adopted and the recommendations made were accepted by the Association.

Councillor Watkins asked if Councillor Standley said ‘Wealden District Council sees no necessity to provide facilities for Willingdon and Jevington as these were available in Eastbourne’. Mr Bending pointed out this was only in relation to sports facilities.

5. Speaker – James Adler, Chief Executive of The Conservators of Ashdown Forest – Mr Adler introduced himself and said;

* The Ashdown Forest is a lovely place which is full of wildlife, famous for Winnie the Pooh and can help in the fight against climate change.
* There has been a massive increase in visitor numbers over the last eighteen months due to the pandemic.
* ESCC has reduced its funding, which leaves a significant shortfall of £100,000, so the Forest is now looking at options to fill that gap. Charging for car parking is being considered by the Conservators as an option.
* A series of meetings is being held about the Forest, details of which will be sent to each Parish Council by the Honorary Secretary.
* Natasha Kaplinsky will be presenting an evening of an author and poet reading from their books about the forest at the Ashdown Park Hotel on the 17th November to help raise funds. Details are on the Ashdown Forest website.
* The Forest is going to have to make some pretty challenging funding decisions and would like to ask Parish and Town Councils to put the word out that the forest is struggling and needs help.

In answer to councillor’s questions Mr Adler also said;

* He will google the Winnie the Pooh shop in Niagara and see if something similar can be set up here. Disney owns the rights and will need to give permission.
* Crowborough Town Council is going to see if it can help. Hartfield is also on board.
* Wealden is already contributing £10000 towards the forest and when the Service Level Agreement ends the conservators will be invited to rebid. The District Council is expecting to be oversubscribed so parishes are being asked help by lobbying their District Councillor. Wealden also invests a lot of time and money monitoring the forest.
* Vehicles and planes have a significant effect on the forest and he encouraged parishes to lobby their County Councillors for change.

The Chairman thanked Mr Adler for attending and Mr Adler then left the meeting.

6. Reports from Outside Meetings

Councillor Stevens attended the latest Joint Action Group Meeting and said;

* the Fire Brigade has 10000 Fire Alarms to give away and will visit any home to fit them. He asked councillors to put the word out.
* Speedwatch Groups are getting more abuse. Trial tests are being carried out in which volunteers will be fitted with cameras to see if that helps reduce the number of cases.
* Inspector Kendall sent his apologies for not be able to attend this WDALC meeting. He said he is midway through the latest round of CSAG Meetings but plans to attend the Association meeting in January and update members then.

Councillor Alder said she attended a traffic meeting hosted by Huw Merriman, MP. She feels;

* it was a bit of a free for all and it would have been better if it had been for councillors only.
* there is a need for councillors to promote themselves so residents know they represent them.
* residents often report issues to the wrong councils so it would be good to stop that happening too.

Councillor Moss said Crowborough Town Councillors hold regular surgeries on Saturday mornings near a local supermarket which seems to help.

Councillor Stevens said that when the next meeting is being arranged with Huw Merriman MP he will ask for it to be for councillors only.

7. Updates from Wealden District Council

Mr Bending introduced himself and said;

* The main focus at Wealden is currently the Local Plan. Five rounds of Cluster Meetings have been held so far, a sixth is planned before Christmas with two more after.
* The next Local Plan consultation is due to take place in the spring.
* The Prime Minister recently announced there will be no building on green spaces in the South of England. Mr Bending urged caution and said we need to wait for the official planning policy.
* The next Parish Conference will be held in the spring to coincide with the Local Plan Consultation. It will also mean windows can be open.
* There were 500 responses to the Sports Park Consultation, most of which were positive.
* Other projects currently being worked on include Mayfield Doctors’ Surgery, Hailsham Aspires and Knights Farm West Business Park.
* Waste Management reported 35 to 40 missed bins per 100000 collections. The charging for removing garden waste is proving to be successful. It has resulted in an additional revenue of £2m which is being used to help subsidise the bin collections.

In answer to councillors’ questions, Mr Bending said;

* The White Paper which came out last year said very little about Neighbourhood Plans.
* There could be changes to the Environmental Bill. It is possible new standards might be imposed which could affect the collection of food and garden waste.
* CIL is only paid out to the parishes and towns where the development takes place and not to neighbouring parishes even if they are affected. There is some good news in that £4m has been committed to a package of roadworks which should help them indirectly and it is also possible to get funding from ESCC. Parish and Town Councils may need to match fund though. The contact at ESCC is Jon Wheeler. Councillors have found that traffic surveys can be useful as evidence.
* Wealden is listening to parishes like Hellingly which are now becoming gridlocked. It is talking to developers to try and resolve the issue but there is only so much they can do. Specific routes for construction traffic are agreed but difficult to enforce.
* Wealden has just received a response to its letter to Central Government about the housing numbers. The contents of the letter are not yet known.
* Developers are responsible for the yellow development signs at the side of roads. The signs are there to direct construction traffic but are supposed to be removed when the development is finished. Any that remain can be reported to Mr Bending.
* Any errors in the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) also need to be reported to Mr Bending.
* There is a shortage of Enforcement Officers in the District. More cases have been reported over lockdown and there were even more staffing pressures. Attempts to employ more Enforcement Officers were not successful.

Cases reported to Enforcement are prioritised thus;

1. Safety - Is there any imminent danger?
2. Timing - Is there consent by virtue of time?
3. Seriousness - How serious is the issue?

Councillor Mikelis said his council feels that what is happening with the housing numbers is indefensible. His council appreciates the numbers come from Whitehall, not Wealden, but the figures are unsustainable. He asked how other parishes feel and if there is anything they can do collectively. Councillor Alder suggested involving CPRE. Mr Bending recommended parishes lobby their MP. This will be on the agenda for the next Association Meeting.

8. Next Association Meeting: Councillors agreed to invite a representative from ESCC Highways to the next Association Meeting to answer questions parishes have on Highways.

The next Association Meeting will be held on the on 12th January 2022 via Zoom.