Berwick Annual Parish Meeting

Held on 21st May 2025 at 7pm at Berwick Village Hall

Present: Cllrs Winter (Chair), Burrough and Smith.

In attendance: County Councillor Nick Bennett, Paul Warren of Cuckmere Community Buses and Lynette Kemp -Parish Clerk. There were no members of public attending.

1. **Apologies for absence**
   Apologies were received from Parish Councillors Barham, Carnie and Mills, and District Councillor Alison Wilson.

2. **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 22nd May 2024**
   The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 22nd May 2024 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. **Welcome and Annual Report by the Chairman**
   The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave an overview of the past year – please see Appendix 1 for the full report.

4. **Presentation by Paul Warren of Cuckmere Community Buses**
   Mr Warren gave a history of CCB. The object of the charitable limited company which has been running for 49 years, is to supplement existing bus services and provide bus links for village residents in the Cuckmere Valley to nearby towns for shopping, appointments and social activities. The vision is to provide the service of choice in their area, with a mission to provide a safe, reliable and courteous local bus service serving those rural and urban communities in our part of East Sussex not served by commercial companies.
   CCB is run entirely by volunteers, with around 40 volunteer drivers and 10 additional volunteers who help to run the fleet of 16-seater Mercedes mini-buses. CCB has developed its own training and assessment scheme, at least equivalent to MIDAS standard, which has been accepted by East Sussex County Council and insurers. CCB operates over 20 weekly public timetabled services. In addition, CCB operates summer leisure services and special annual services for International Tennis in Eastbourne and the Charleston Festivals.
   Mr Warren also gave details of the review by the Department of Transport of the changing need for D1 licence requirements for minibuses, this is considered a positive move and may result in access to a broader driver pool as the D1 is only available if drivers passed their driving test before 1997.
   2024 showed an increase in the growth of passenger numbers to 87,915 which exceeded pre-pandemic numbers.

Two new buses were added to the fleet in 2024, bringing the number of buses in the fleet to eight.
Two stakeholder meetings are held each year which include representatives from Town and Parish Councils.
Further information regarding Cuckmere Community Buses including timetables can be found at https://cuckmerebuses.org.uk/

The Chairman thanked Mr Warren for his interesting and informative presentation.

5. **County Matters**
County Councillor Nick Bennett provided a written report, which is attached at Appendix 2, there were no questions for Cllr Bennett.

6. **District Matters**
District Councillor Alison Wilson provided a written report which is attached at Appendix 3.

7. **Reports from Clubs and Associations**
There were no reports.

8. **Open Forum – questions from the floor.**
There were no questions.

There was no further business and this meeting closed at 8.20pm

Signed……Chairman

Date……..

Chairman's Report 21st May 2025

Welcome to this Annual Parish Meeting

Traffic issues continue to be a concern for the Parish Council and residents. Speed surveys will be carried out in June, this time on two sites. With this evidence and the possibility of working more closely with neighbouring parishes it is hoped that some measures could be introduced which may help the increasing problem of speeding and goods vehicles in our village. We continue to report highways issues, some are more successful than others. The Parish Council was pleased to see the road markings at the bridge on Chilver Bridge Road have been repainted.

Work has been carried out on the Berwick Way, the verges and hedges have been cut after several missed years, we intend this maintenance work will now be carried out annually. The barrier at the southern end has been replaced. More recently a new bench has been installed, this has been well received by residents. Another similar bench will be installed midway along this popular route for cyclists and walkers.

A working group is being formed to install additional play equipment at the recreation ground, this will be in keeping with the existing equipment and the rural location. Young people in the Parish will be consulted and we look forward to hearing their views.

The Parish Council has a new more modern website and we hope residents will find this more user-friendly and assist in communication with residents.

Thanks to County Councillor Nick Bennett and District Councillor Alison Wilson for their regular attendance and the information they provide.

The Parish Council is keen to be kept updated on Devolution and Local Government re-organisation, and thanks again to Cllrs Bennett and Wilson for the information they have provided so far.

Thanks to fellow Councillors, Sally Carnie, Beryl Smith, Victoria Burrough, Tom Mills and Glenn Barham for their hard work this year.

Also thanks to Carole Vine for dealing with the recreation ground lettings so efficiently.

We still have a councillor vacancy and would welcome anyone interested to come forward for co-option. The Clerk will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Keith Winter

Chairman

Report to Parish Councils

April 2025

Cllr Nick Bennett

Dear Councillors,

At this time of year I prepare a summary of the Authority's work in time for your Council and public meetings. This year I report a summary of the devolution process that we are now committed to, and the annual summary which is provided by the Chief Executive's office. I hope you find both documents useful.

Devolution in Sussex - Update

In December, the government published a paper on Devolution. Unusually they did not choose to publish a consultative Green Paper but a White Paper which sets out what they plan to do. It was much more specific than expected and with a tight timetable.

The White Paper covers two separate but linked areas:

- Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) which means that two-tier areas such as East Sussex which currently have a County Council and separate District and Borough Councils, would reorganise to have a new single unitary authority, taking on the responsibilities of all councils
- The election of a Mayor for Sussex, taking a strategic role, covering three unitary authorities (East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton & Hove)

The timetable for these is as follows:

- Councils were invited to send expressions of interest for both LGR and the mayoral authority by 10th January. These were sent by the leaders of East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove
- On 5th February the Minister for Local Government and English Devolution notified the leaders of the councils that Sussex had been given the go ahead for the Devolution Priority Programme, one of only 6 areas.
- In response to this, on 21st March all councils in East Sussex submitted an interim plan to the government setting out developing proposals for LGR in East Sussex. Although there are some concerns, all recognised that it was the sensible way ahead, particularly given the government imperatives.
- The next stage in LGR is for a full proposal to be submitted to government by 26th September.

For the wider Sussex area, the government proposal is for a directly elected mayor with responsibilities for:

- Transport and local infrastructure
- Skills and employment support
- Housing and strategic planning
- Economic development and regeneration
- Environment and climate change
- Health, wellbeing and public service reform
- Public safety (including fire and rescue services and the police)

The Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) would include the mayor plus six 'cabinet' members (the term is not yet clear), made up of two councillors from each of the three unitary authorities, probably the leader and deputy leader from each council. Decisions would be subject to majority voting by the cabinet. The mayor would also appoint a deputy and perhaps other associate members.

The mayoral structure is regarded as 'light touch', unlike those in cities such as Manchester. Almost all services to residents would be provided by the unitary authorities.

The timetable for LGR and MSA are currently expected to be:

- Decision by government by January to April 2026
- Elections for Mayor in May 2026
- Elections for shadow East Sussex unitary councillors in May 2027
- Vesting (i.e. assuming power) of the new unitary council in May 2028

Prior to vesting, the county and services provided by it would continue to be run by the district/borough and county councils/ councillors.

In common with other local government reorganisations, the White Paper suggested that county councils might wish to delay elections and could ask government to do this, which is what happened. The rationale is:

- Given the timescales set out by the government, much of the work involved in consultation and writing proposals for devolution would be at the same time as the build up to, and follow on from, the May 25 elections. This could not be done during an election period.
- Local elections invariably lead to a turnover in council membership across all parties. This would give a new set of councillors who would need significant support by officials to bring up to speed, at a time when their workload would be dominated by the reorganisation and continuing to manage services.

- The resulting county councillors would only be in office for 2 years, could only pass one meaningful budget and could not make any fundamental changes to council policy.

There is a lot of work required over the next few years to make this happen, one of the reasons that the government only gave the go ahead to some areas. There are many issues to resolve including:

- The geography of each of the unitary councils. Government guidance is that a unitary council should have population of more than 500,000 which fits East Sussex with a population of about 560,000. However, Brighton has only 280,000 residents and West Sussex about 900,000. Some discussions on the geography and organisation are ongoing but are unlikely to affect East Sussex.
- At the moment district and borough councils can set different levels of council tax to support their operations. (The county component of council tax is the same everywhere). It is expected that in due course one level of council tax would be needed throughout East Sussex.

Any newly created unitary authority would replace ESCC and the five boroughs or districts of Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes, Rother and Wealden in 2028.

The six councils have agreed that any new structure for local government in East Sussex must:

- Improve outcomes for residents and communities
- Make best use of resources now and for the future
- Be member-led and developed in collaboration with a range of stakeholders, including public sector partners, business and the voluntary sector
- Support staff in all councils as they are crucial to delivery during transition and beyond
- Enhance local democracy, local identity, transparency, accessibility, local decision making and accountability
- Support and drive decision making and public service reform at both Sussex and local level
- Provide a stronger and unified voice to help attract investment and tackle priorities.

REPORT FROM WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL
MAY 2025

1. At the Full Council meeting on 14 May, WDC adopted a new constitution. Councils are obliged by law to have a constitution which is up to date. WDC's constitution had been updated and amended over the years, with the result that it had become very long and unwieldy, and also contradictory in places. The new constitution is clearer and more user-friendly, and it is hoped that residents will find it more straightforward to consult and to find the information that they require.

   Notable changes include adjustments to the way that planning committees are organised. WDC will no longer have a North and South planning committee, but will instead have a Majors and a Minors Committee. This reflects best practice, in that the Majors Committee will have councillors who have been trained to look at larger developments (10 or more residential units) and who have the expertise to consider strategic planning applications, such as those for solar farms or battery storage. The Minors Committee will deal with applications for less than 10 residential units and all other householder applications, including those involving heritage issues.

2. Ward budgets of £10,000 will be allocated to each councillor to fund projects and initiatives which directly benefit our wards. Councillor ward budgets have been successfully used by councils across the country to support grassroots projects that may otherwise lack financial backing because they do not fall within existing grants programmes. The scheme is expected to be up and running by July, so I should be grateful if Parish Councils and Parish Meetings could spread the word amongst their residents, and encourage community groups to contact me directly if they would like to apply for funding (cllr.alison.wilson@wealden.gov.uk).

3. Full Council also approved the creation of a new fund, the Community Led Infrastructure Fund (CLIF). This new capital fund will be backed by monies collected from developers through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and is intended to target small and medium scale projects based in communities across the district. WDC is currently delivering a range of grant funding programmes and is contacted regularly with funding enquiries which do not fit within the terms and conditions of specific government grant programmes which often have strict funding criteria. The CLIF will help to bridge this gap and to fund locally led projects which meet the needs of communities. Examples of such projects include adaptations to community buildings, energy efficient measures, access improvements to outdoor spaces and installing new facilities and equipment. The CLIF will have a fund of £2M, all areas of the district will be eligible to access the CLIF and the grants awarded will be between £5,000 and £200,000 (subject to a low match funding requirement of 20%). If Parish Councils and Parish Meetings are aware of community projects which might benefit from the CLIF, please do get in touch (email address as above). Once the CLIF scheme has been set up, applications for funding will be made directly to WDC.

Alison Wilson
21 May 2025