

Wealden District Councillor, Graham Shaw

Update and News

April 2026

Local Government Reorganisation

You may remember from previous updates that the government wishes to move to a single tier of local government (unitary authorities). Different plans were submitted – one proposing a large council on the footprint of the current East Sussex county council – another proposing smaller council's.

Government has rejected both, but are proposing that several wards from the Lewes District (currently in East Sussex) move into an expanded Brighton and Hove authority; whilst the remaining area becomes a reduced East Sussex authority. Government wishes to consult on this proposal in June.

Whatever the outcome there will be elections for the new unitary council in May 2027, which will act as a “shadow” authority preparing to take over on 1st April 2028.

Meanwhile the county councillors elected next month will serve until 31st March 2028 and we expect Wealden district councillors (myself included) will serve an extra 10/11 months to 31st March 2028 – beyond their expected term.

This all seems to be a recipe for confusion at least in the short term and doesn't address the basic problem of historic underfunding of local government. Whatever the final structure the new councils will start their lives in a financially precarious state as the rising demands from social care remain.

A new Sussex mayor will also be elected in 2028, with, as yet undefined powers.

Planning News

You also may remember the campaign in 2022/23 against the expansion of **Ashdown Business Park**. I can now report that the planning application submitted just before Xmas 2022 has finally been refused.

It sets out a number of reasons for the refusal - one of the most important being the failure to investigate the extent to which the site is contaminated by harmful chemicals known as PFAS, some of which have been used at the Fire Brigade's training centre for over 60 years. We now know more about the dangers of these chemicals than when the application was made. It's therefore essential to find out the extent of contamination before anything else happens. That is why the site is not an approved site in the latest draft Local Plan (contrary to what you might have read or heard elsewhere). It is mentioned in the draft, but only in the context of explaining why it isn't being approved.

And at last Wednesday Wealden's Planning Committee refused the application for **land north of Buxted Road at Coopers Green**. Councillors believed that the development would harm the setting of several Grade 1 and 2 dwellings. The site hadn't been identified in the draft local plan and Inspectors had rejected an adjacent application because of its impact on the same heritage assets. However, there is likely to be an appeal against this decision. The same meeting unanimously approved (with the support of the Parish Council and myself) a 30 home development on the site of the care home at **Saxon Court, Pound Green** – effectively a “brown field” site.

Councillor Ward Budget Scheme

During the last financial year, I made three grants totalling £10K to Buxted groups. A new round of the scheme will open on 1st May. If you would like to discuss a potential project, please contact me.

Please don't hesitate to **contact me** to discuss these or any other issues important to you.

Contact me on cllr.graham.shaw@wealden.gov.uk Tel. 07770 571828

Wealden's website is www.wealden.gov.uk

Council Tax

You will no doubt have received council your council tax statements for this year and will see that the Council approved a decision not to increase Wealden's proportion of council tax for this year. However, the proportion of your bill that goes to Wealden is only about 8% and the others for whom we collect council tax (County Council, the Police, Fire and Rescue, town and parish councils) all increased their charges.

In related news Wealden has joined with many other local authorities to include in our council tax reduction scheme those who are terminally ill. In response to a campaign by the Marie Curie charity, Wealden Council has decided to extend the Scheme by removing all liability from people already receiving a reduction who become terminally ill. To have your liability cancelled you will need to obtain an S RI form from your GP or hospital doctor. The form certifies that you have an illness or condition from which you are likely to die in the next 12 months. Once you have the form, you (or someone on your behalf should contact our Finance department. Further details can be found at www.wealden.gov.uk/benefits/who-can-get-council-tax-reduction/

Health Checks

The Council has arranged for another series of health checks, for residents aged 40-74 who haven't had a check in the last 5 years, who aren't taking medication for high blood pressure or cholesterol issues, aren't diabetic and don't suffer from heart, kidney or circulatory problems.

There will be sessions on 12th May at Croft Road car park in Crowborough and on 13th May at the Luxford Car Park in Uckfield. You can book by phone (01323 404600) or online (hello@oneyoueastsussex.org.uk).

Heating Oil Fund

In response to the oil crisis the government announced a new Heating Oil Fund to support those on low incomes who rely on oil. We have now been notified that the fund is going to be administered by the county council. If you think you may be eligible please go to:

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/community/cost-of-living-support/your-home/help-for-households-using-oil-heating>

County Council Elections – 7th MAY

Many of you will be aware that elections for the two remaining years of the County Council will take place on Thursday 7th May. If you are not registered to vote (or if you have a "child" recently turned 18 who may wish to vote) please note that the deadline to register to vote is midnight on Monday 20 April. Voters can apply at <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote> It takes just five minutes. Once registered, voters have a range of options to vote – in person, by post or by appointing someone they trust to vote on their behalf, known as a proxy vote. The deadline to apply for a proxy vote is 5pm on 28 April.

Voters going to vote at a polling station will need to show, so it is important that residents check what ID is accepted before going to vote. See <https://www.gov.uk/how-to-vote/photo-id-youll-need> If Wealden residents do not have one of the accepted types of ID, they can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate at <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate> or complete a paper form and submit it to Wealden District Council. The deadline to apply to use the Voter Authority Certificate is 5pm on 28 April. Voters wanting a postal vote will need to apply by 5pm on 21 April – it is important to note that a person with a postal vote will not be able to vote at a polling station, even if they do not use their postal vote

And for the future - if you have teenage children don't forget that the Representation of the People Bill currently going through Parliament will extend the voting age to 16 and 17 year olds. They will have the same rights, once registered, as any other voter.

The registration age will be extended to 14, helping to ensure young people can be fully registered and have the opportunity, to vote even if an election falls on or shortly after their 16th birthday.