

# Update and News

We are now mid-way through our term of office and have undertaken a review of our progress in delivering our council strategy. Some highlights include:

## On Climate change and our environment:

- Reached a 20% reduction in the council's carbon emissions improving the energy efficiency of council owned properties, investing in renewable energy sources, promoting the use of electric vehicles and improving waste management practices.
- Funded 12 community orchards, having secured £128,000 from the Coronation Heritage Living Fund.
- Secured £1million of Warm Homes Social Housing Fund to improve the energy efficiency of 233 council owned homes.
- Invested in EV charging infrastructure for the district providing for nine live phase 1 locations. The roll-out of phase 2 sites will follow shortly, as the necessary technology is nearly ready.
- Collaborated with the Sussex Wildlife Trust on the Wilder Ouse project, which aims to restore natural processes and create a Nature Recovery Network within the Ouse River catchment. So far, over 4,512 trees and 700 metres of hedging have been planted.

## On Community resilience and wellbeing:

- Invested £16m in the new Wealden Community Sports Hub, in partnership with the Football Foundation, bringing state of the art sports facilities to the area and helping tens of thousands of residents to stay active and healthy.
- Delivered 777 new affordable homes - more new affordable housing than the rest of East Sussex combined.

- Refurbished the Uckfield and Hailsham leisure centre pools to improve the facilities.
- Adopted a revised council tax reduction scheme from April 2024, helping nearly 4,000 working-age residents in Wealden.
- Obtained planning permission for a new medical and community centre in Mayfield and bought land as the first stage in building a brand new £12m medical centre in Polegate.

## On the local economy:

- Successfully attracted new businesses to the district, resulting in a 15% increase in local employment, through business support services, development of modern employment units, and investing in infrastructure improvements.
- Secured £ 19M of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to support improved public transportation links and health and wellbeing projects.
- Focussed on supporting local businesses through our procurement activity with 40% of our spend, or almost £39 million, being with local businesses over the past two years.
- Launched the Wealden Innovation Hub, supporting over 50 start-ups and small businesses with a focus on sustainability and clean growth.
- Upgraded over 1000 homes in our existing housing stock with improved energy efficiency through insulation, modern heating systems and other essential improvements.

## Mid-term review

### ***Uckfield High Street***

Regular users of the High Street will have come across the scaffolding and traffic control on a building just north of Church Street. Large cracks appeared in the front of the building and attempts to contact the owners proved unsuccessful. We had to use our emergency powers so, along with the County Council, we took action to shore-up the building. The owners have now been found. Hopefully they will now make arrangements for the long-term repair of the building. We will also seek to recover the council's costs in due course.

### ***Southern Water and housing development***

In 2022 Wealden started to impose a planning condition forbidding occupation of new housing until Southern Water has done all necessary upgrade works. Southern Water's long-term neglect of its basic responsibilities has required this condition to be imposed numerous times. I'm pleased to report that the first appeal by a developer - Chailey Homes Ltd - against the condition was rejected by a Planning Inspector last month. The Inspector decided that we have the legal power to impose the condition and that it was justified on the facts. Other developers have told our planning officers that they were awaiting the outcome of this appeal because they thought we'd lose. The time period for Chailey Homes Ltd to ask the High Court to review the decision is short and as of today we haven't been notified of an application to that court.

### ***Ward budgets for councillors***

Numerous councils around the country, of different political persuasions, provide each councillor with a fund to spend on the needs of their community. Wealden has finally caught up with this idea and for 25/26 each councillor will have £10,000 to support their community. The aim of the scheme is to support community groups with grants of between £250 and £5000. There will be a simple application form which will come to me, and I will decide how to distribute the money, after discussion and consultation. Even though we are waiting for the final guidelines you might like to start thinking about whether a group, in which you are involved, might benefit from a small grant. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you do!

### ***Local government reorganisation***

I outlined in previous updates the proposal to create a new unitary council for East Sussex. Wealden and the other district and borough councils in East Sussex submitted a joint response to the government's proposal. We have expressed reservations about the lack of detail to date and about the government's plans. We feel that larger authorities with a more urban bias are less likely to be sensitive to the complexities of service delivery in rural areas than existing authorities and that smaller unitary areas will be closer to their populations and therefore more democratic. Furthermore, we have stressed that we cannot afford to meet the costs of the reorganisation so the government will have to do that.

Further information and a consultation can be found at <https://www.eastsussexcouncils.org>

### ***Buxted Cricket Club wins WDC grant***

The first successful applications to receive funding to enhance outdoor playing pitches and sports facilities in Wealden has been awarded to Heathfield Park Cricket Club and Buxted Park Cricket Club. The funding comes from the Sports Infrastructure Fund, launched by Wealden District Council. The programme will invest up to £600,000 over the next three years to improve outdoor sports pitches and facilities. Buxted Park Cricket Club has received £12,000 to install hybrid cricket wickets at Buxted Park and Maresfield Recreation Ground.

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