

# **PLANNING FOCUS GROUP MEETING WITH WEALDEN**

## **16<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2021**

### **Introduction**

I represented the Council on a Focus Group meeting with the Chris Bending and his Planning staff at Wealden on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

The main aim of the meeting was, we thought, to discuss the outcome of the responses to Wealden's "Direction of Travel" consultation document, to which the Parish contributed, and to ask further questions.

However, unbeknownst to us, Wealden had posted the outcome document on their website on 11<sup>th</sup> March without informing us, and, as it consists of some 300 pages of comments from over 1,700 individuals and organisations, I am unable to report on it here.

### **Progress on the new Plan**

Chris Bending assured us that work on the Wealden Plan was progressing well and was on track for completion in 2023. A great deal of modelling is taking place and, after the comments (above) have been digested, visions, objectives and strategies will be adjusted to construct a draft Plan by early 2022. Further consultation will take place in late 2022/early 2023 with the Plan submitted to the Inspectorate in 2023. He stressed that local decisions should not be made on any draft plans.

### **Target New Build Numbers**

The Government target for new builds in Wealden is 1220/year – a significant rise on previous years and generally believed to be unsustainable over the period of the plan. Bending pointed out that 1034 units had been built in 2019 but the number would be less in 2020 due to Covid. Wealden had already given approval for 7,500 new builds, theoretically sufficient for c5 years, but not all these would be completed. Therefore Wealden would continue to try to hit the annual 1220 target.

### **Enforcement**

I questioned the efficacy of the Enforcement staff at Wealden as little checking was being done and the offer of retrospective application was allowing laxity. It was generally accepted that this was the case due to Covid restrictions but that a new post of "Monitoring Officer" was just about to be filled which would improve the situation.

### **Other Matters**

- Improvements to A22. There is a £32m bid in for improvements to the A22 between Hailsham and Polegate.
- Improvements to A27. There is a £.5bn proposal for improvements to the A27.
- Healthcare. There are plans for a new medical centre in Hailsham and improvements to the surgery in Mayfield but it is difficult working with the NHS as their structures change.
- Water/Sewage. Talks in progress with Southern and South East Water to ensure supply/capacity.
- Infrastructure. Future development sites will be chosen with the ease of provision of infrastructure in mind rather than the other way round.

### **Future Work**

In relation to the Wealden Plan, Bending has asked us for clear statements:

- What 2-3 points or key issues do we consider to be the most important to us for inclusion in the Plan?
- What has Wealden missed out?

I would be grateful for your views which I have to submit to the Focus Group by the end of the month.

Councillor Michael Smythe OBE

16<sup>th</sup> March 2021.