

WEALDEN PLANNING/ FOCUS GROUP NOTES

Since the last Council Meeting:

- I submitted the Council's comments on Wealden's "Direction of Travel" document on 15th January and received confirmation of its receipt on 19th January.
- I attended a Focus Group meeting on 25th January. The major points were:
 - Apparently the other Focus Groups are not meeting – therefore not fulfilling their role of coordinating parish responses.
 - All parishes confirmed that they had individually submitted points on the Direction of Travel document in addition to the Focus Group's consolidated response.
 - There are concerns with apparent conflicting Wealden decisions – East Hoathly development (205 houses) agreed because there is a (small) village shop but Halland (40+ houses) refused because of the requirement to travel to amenities.
 - Some other PC's trialling Planning Meetings every 3 weeks.
 - Concern that Horam is becoming a magnet for developments (51 and 69 houses in planning)
 - Applications for solar farms increasing.
 - Concerns about developing "rat runs" in rural areas from new developments.
 - The list of questions for meeting with Chris Bending (below) were discussed
 - Next meeting 22nd February 2021
- I attended a further Focus Group meeting with Chris Bending (Head of Policy and Planning at Wealden on 26th February, During the meeting, Bending answered questions from the submitted list (attached):
 - The final plan will include a "Mission Statement" formulated with the outcome of Focus Group discussions.
 - After all public responses (1,500) and the Group discussions with Bending have been consolidated, there will be an interim report in "weeks" for us to comment on. The Focus Group will meet again with Bending after the interim report is published.
 - The rural nature of Wealden was confirmed as a priority for the plan.
 - Bending agreed that there were contradictions in the plan at this stage which would be ironed out as it progressed. All problems can't be solved and some will not be content with the outcome.
 - 12,225 new houses required in the plan. Lack of brownfield sites in Wealden will mean that some greenfield sites will be required and we must be prepared to see some growth.
 - Attention to climate change matters will be addressed in new developments.
 - Wealden will be asked to take growth from neighbouring authorities (already happening from Eastbourne and Tunbridge Wells) but will not necessarily agree.
 - They believe that their Planning Department is sufficiently well resourced to deliver the plan.
 - They claim to be on top of enforcement (!).
 - The SHELAA map will be updated every 2 months so that we can monitor where available land is.

Councillor Michael Smythe

27th January 2021