

NOTES FROM FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

29th November 2021

I represented Warbleton Parish Council at two Focus Group meetings on 19th November 2021.

1. Meeting with Wealden Planning Staff

The first was the 3 monthly routine meeting for the Group to question Wealden on any uncertainties or concerns and for Wealden to inform the Group on the state of progress in any area.

Group Questions

As I reported last time, our main questions, submitted in advance, covered:

- Lack of communication from Wealden. Group members complained that they had no early oversight of Wealden's discussions with developers which put them on the back foot. Wealden have agreed to re-start Protocol Meetings to cover this but urged Group members to contact them with individual concerns.
- Enforcement. There were complaints that, once discovered, breaches were taking a long time to come to a conclusion. Wealden explained that this was a resource issue and, again asked for individual concerns to be notified to them.
- Letter To Secretary of State Michael Gove. Wealden said how appreciative and supportive they were of the Group's initiative to send a forceful letter to Michael Gove. Wealden would, however, continue to work on the current requirements for 1,200 new houses a year but were aware that there might be potential changes. If the figure does come down it will give Wealden more choice of development areas. Wealden would continue to lobby for change to the algorithm.
- Climate Change Policy. Wealden confirmed that their Climate Change policy continued to be as laid out in the draft Wealden Plan.

SHELAA (Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment) MAP

You will recall that we were warned that Wealden wanted our views on the suitability of identified areas in the parish and I sent you the map for comment.

Wealden stressed that they were not looking for confirmation of sites for the Wealden Plan at this stage but just looking for broad acceptability. The choice of sites will be made later taking into account all criteria – e.g flooding, contamination etc.

The map, which shows sites in several colours depending on when sites were identified will then be reissued, hopefully in the New Year, with sites in just two colours – suitable and unsuitable.

We were asked to check our sites and inform Wealden about their suitability. I asked if sustainability of local amenities (The Settlement Sustainability Study) would be a consideration but apparently not as, for example, increased development might result in increased amenities.

However, Wealden, informally said that sites in Rushlake Green and Bodle Street Green were unlikely to be taken. Obviously it is possible that more land might be identified by 2023 when the Wealden Plan is published.

In order to allow Wealden to publish the next iteration of the map, they asked for comments on our sites by the end of next week, (Friday 10th December).

The sites in the parish (taken from the map and with descriptions also taken from the map) seem to be:

- Bodle Street Green
 - Old Homestead land – 0.24 ha. Added in 2019
- Rushlake Green
 - Chapple Cottage Farm, Middle lane – 3.4 ha. Added in 2019
- Turners Green
 - Land at the Old Brickfield – 1.44ha. Added in 2019

- 3 Cups Corner
 - Land at Spring Hill – 0.5ha. Added in 2019
 - Land at 3 Cups pub – 0.7ha. Added in 2019
- Punnetts Town
 - Scots Paddock Forest Lane - .85ha. Added 2019
 - Little Pig Farm – 2.4ha. Added 2020/2021

Someone will need to be nominated to check these sites and confirm that the owners wish them to be included as possible development sites.

Focus Group Meeting to discuss the Letter to Michael Gove.

The Group then met to discuss the final format, presentation and dispatch of the letter to Michael Gove agreed at the last full Council meeting.

6 of the 7 parishes in the Group had sanctioned the letter with Horam to meet tonight to discuss it.

On the assumption that Horam also sanctioned it, it was agreed that:

- The letter would be signed by all Council Chairs, indicating which parish they represented. This is in hand for Warbleton.
- It will, hopefully, be dispatched by the end of this week.
- Copies will be sent to:
 - Group MPs
 - Wealden Councillors
 - Wealden Planners
- There will also be a Press release.

Councillor Michael Smythe OBE

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