FLETCHING PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Gabriella Paterson-Griggs
Tel: 07534 959772
E-mail: clerk@fletching-pc.org
Website www.fletching-pc.org

5th June 2024

FLETCHING PARISH COUNCIL MEETING - Monday 10th June 2024

To Members of the Fletching Parish Council: You are summoned to attend a meeting of Fletching Parish Council on Monday 10th June 2024, 6.30pm at the West End, Fletching Church.
Signed: *Gabriella Paterson-Griggs,* Clerk and RFO

Public Questions

The first ten minutes, before the start of the meeting, are available for public participation. Members of the public may ask questions or make representations, in respect of the business on the agenda. They may only speak at other points during the meeting, at the Chairman's discretion, if they have knowledge or information that will aid the discussion.

This meeting may be audio recorded for the purpose of minute taking

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES
Apologies for absence as reported at the meeting. - Cllr Greenish

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
To receive Declarations of Interest in respect of items on the agenda, as required by the Members' Code of Conduct.

3. MINUTES
To resolve that the minutes of the meetings held on 13th May 2024 as circulated on the agenda are confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. attached

4. MATTERS ARISING
Update on any matters arising from the last meeting not covered elsewhere on the agenda. To note any action taken or agree further action to be taken. Action list attached

5. REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR
To receive a report from the County Councillor Roy Galley. Verbal update

6. REPORT FROM DISTRICT COUNCILLOR
To receive a report from District Councillor Christina Coleman. Verbal update

7. WORKING GROUPS / EXTERNAL GROUPS
To receive reports/updates from the Working Groups and External Bodies:

i. Neighbourhood Plan Working Group – Councillor Hannay. Verbal update
ii. Fletching Recreation Ground Committee – Clerk. Verbal update

8. CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED
To note any correspondence received since the last meeting and agreed any actions arising.

9. FINANCE AND ASSETS

i. To approve the invoices and payments for June 2024 and note the Council's current financial position and bank reconciliation. attached
ii. CIL Funds – replacement litter bins – update. Verbal update

10. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR)

i. To receive the report from the internal auditor, Mulberry Local Authority Services attached
ii. To approve and sign the AGAR Section 1 Annual Governance Statement attached
iii. To approve and sign the AGAR Section 2 Accounting Statements attached

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11. POLICIES

To review and approve the following policies: attached – no amendments proposed

i. Data Retention Policy
ii. Freedom of Information Policy and Scheme
iii. Pay Policy
iv. Planning Protocol

12. BURIAL GROUND

To approve any requests or permits for the Burial Ground.

i. To consider parishioner/non-parishioner status of prospective burial plot purchase
ii. Application for purchase of burial plot and interment. attached

PLANNING AND LICENSING

13. ENFORCEMENT – PLANNING AND DRAINAGE

To discuss any issues/updates raised related to suspected breaches of planning or other regulations.

i. **Flitteridge Farm, Daleham Lane** – update verbal update
ii. **Lay-by opposite Piltdown Service Station** – update verbal update

14. PLANNING APPLICATIONS – RECEIVED proposed comments to follow

To agree comments to be submitted to Wealden District Council for the following applications:

i. **WD/2023/2741/F The Old Archery, North Hall Lane, Piltdown TN22 3SA**
Proposed extension works to the existing dwelling house including remodelling of front elevation with small corner extension, attached garage and works to first floor accommodation including new roof structure. Amended Plans and Description (Comments to be submitted by 12 June 2024)

ii. **WD/2023/2989/F Piltdown Poultry, Fairhazel, Piltdown TN22 3YE**
Conversion of existing barn into a single dwelling. (Comments to be submitted by 11 June 2024)

iii. **WD/2024/1041/LB The Griffin, High Street, Fletching TN22 3SS**
Internal refurbishment works to listed building and curtilage listed buildings. (Comments to be submitted by 11 June 2024)

iv. **WD/2024/1232/F Vaughans, North Hall Lane, Fletching TN22 3TJ**
Demolition of single storey sunroom and erection of a two storey extension to south eastern elevation. (Comments to be submitted by 24 June 2024)

To note the comments submitted to Wealden District Council, as agreed by the Planning Working Group, since the last meeting:

v. **WD/2024/0929/FA North Hall Shooting Club, North Hall Lane, Fletching TN22 3SA**
Variation of condition 2 of WD/2005/2619/FR to enable clubhouse to also be used for Northall CPC meetings, training courses, first aid training and occasionally for local community and charity events. (Comments submitted on 29 May 2024)

15. PLANNING APPLICATION – APPEAL

To consider whether any representation be made to the Planning Inspectorate in respect of the refusal of the following application:

i. **WD/2023/3137/PIP Little Barkham Farm, Goldbridge Road, Piltdown TN22 3XL**
Erection of detached three-bedroom single storey dwelling with car port and associated works. (Planning Inspectorate Ref: APP/C1435/W/24/3340301) (Representations to be made by 14 June 2024).

The Parish Council previously objected to the application. Proposed representation attached

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16. PLANNING APPLICATIONS - DECISIONS

To note the planning application decisions from Wealden District Council received since the last meeting(s):

Applications Approved

ii. **WD/2023/2653/F Fletching Garage, Bell Lane, Splaynes Green, Fletching TN22 3TN**

A partial demolition of the existing garage building and converting it to a 4 bedroom house and erection of 2 x 4 bedroomed houses with associated car parking, amenity space and landscaping. (APPROVED, subject to a legal agreement, at Planning Committee North on 23 May 2024)

<u>*Response to Parish Council*</u>

The Council's Conservation Officer supports the principle of the development and acknowledges that the proposal provides an opportunity to enhance the former forge building and general character of the Conservation Area. Amended plans have been submitted to address the concerns raised by the Conservation Officer.

The sustainability of the site / area was assessed during the approved housing application on the adjoining site. There have been no significant changes in the Council's five year housing land supply position and no material changes in planning policy since this decision was made. The adjoining site was considered to be sustainable and acceptable for housing development, on balance, which is a material planning considered when determining the current application.

The design and scale are considered to be acceptable and the pot pattern and garden sizes are consistent with the adjoining site. In addition, the gardens meet and exceed minimum standards.

Drainage can be controlled by condition. The application site is located in flood zone 1 and is therefore not susceptible to flooding. It is understood that some of the surface water flooding issues relate to the construction works on the adjoining site and highways ditch running along the western boundary of the site.

Specific drainage details could be secured by conditions to prevent surface water runoff onto the public highway.

iii. **WD/2023/3115/F Wilmshurst, Bell Lane, Fletching TN22 3YB**

Part single, part two-storey front extension, new canopy to proposed new entrance, material face-lift to existing office with terrace above. A glazed link addition linking the main dwelling to existing barn and a single side extension to barn with material alterations with change of use of barn to form part dwelling. An outdoor swimming pool addition with associated hard landscaping and external works. (APPROVED 10 May 2024)

iv. **WD/2024/0075/F Barkham Farm, Goldbridge Road, Piltdown TN22 3XL**

Proposed vehicular access and driveway to serve dwelling and adjoining agricultural land with existing access remodelled to provide access for pedestrian/cyclists only. (APPROVED 31 May 2024)

Applications Refused

i. **WD/2023/2627/MAJ Wilderlands Farm, Bell Lane, Fletching TN22 3YB**

Proposed change of use of land for mixed agricultural/educational purposes with temporary rural workers' dwelling, agricultural building and ancillary development, and part retrospective application for wildlife pond. (REFUSED 28 May 2024)

Applications Withdrawn – none since the last meeting

17. FLETCHING BONFIRE SOCIETY SUMMER FETE

To consider whether the Parish Council should have a stall at the Summer Fete on 20 July 2024.

18. ITEMS FOR THE PARISH MAGAZINE

To agree any items to be included in future editions of the Parish Magazine

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19. AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS
To discuss and note any future agenda items

20. TIME AND DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING
To agree the time and dates of the next meetings of the Parish Council

FLETCHING PARISH COUNCIL

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MINUTES of the Meeting of **FLETCHING PARISH COUNCIL** held on Monday 13th May 2024 in the West End, Fletching Parish Church, Church Street, Fletching (7.30 – 8.48pm).

PRESENT: Councillors R Hannay (Chair), D Greenish (Vice-Chair), R Borton, N Collum, K Minch and S De St Croix.

Also in attendance: Gabriella Paterson-Griggs (Clerk and RFO).

Members of the Public in Attendance: 12

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence were received from Councillors W Constantinou and L Snelgrove. Apologies were also received from Councillors C Coleman (WDC) and R Galley (ESCC)

24/81. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Greenish proposed and Councillor Minch seconded that Councillor Hannay be elected as Chairman of the Parish Council for the forthcoming year.

It was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Richard Hannay be elected Chairman of the Parish Council for the forthcoming year.

Councillor Richard Hannay signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office which was witnessed by the Clerk as the Proper Officer.

24/82. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Councillor Hannay proposed and Councillor De St Croix seconded that Councillor Greenish be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council for the forthcoming year.

It was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Damian Greenish be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council for the forthcoming year.

Councillor Damian Greenish signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office which was witnessed by the Clerk as the Proper Officer.

24/83. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of Interest RECEIVED in respect of items on the agenda, as required by the Members' Code of Conduct:

Minute 24/85(iv) Councillor De St Croix as the neighbour for application WD/2024/0726/F.

In accordance with the FPC Code of Conduct, the councillor left the meeting during the discussion and agreement of comments on this application.

24/84. CODE OF CONDUCT 2024

Councillor Hannay proposed and Councillor De St Croix seconded an additional obligation to the Code of Conduct for 2024 under Member Obligations that reminded Members that they should adhere to the Nolan Principles of Public Life with details of each of the principles. Members were unanimously in favour of this addition.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Code of Conduct 2024 be **APPROVED** with an additional Member Obligation added setting out the Nolan Principles as set out above.

All Councillors present at the meeting signed the Code of Conduct 2024 as amended.

24/85. PLANNING APPLICATIONS - RECEIVED

It was **RESOLVED** to make the comments as set out after each application in respect of the following:

i. **WD/2024/0348/F Moons Farm, Sharpsbridge Lane, Piltdown TN22 3XG**

Construction of 20m x 40m equestrian arena, stable block comprising 5 no. stables and hardstanding.

Approved at a meeting of the Parish Council held on 10 June 2024
Signed: Councillor Hannay, Chairman

The applicant has sought pre-application advice from WDC and that advice has been disclosed. That advice set out the criteria to be met under the applicable Saved Policies DC12, DC13 and EN8 of the Local Plan to permit equestrian development within the countryside; also the requirements of Ch 16 of the NPPF to assess the impact (if any) on nearby listed buildings. The applicant has followed the advice and, subject to the applicant dealing with any outstanding matters under the Statements, Reports etc. so obtained, the Parish Council SUPPORTS the application, provided that any consent given contains conditions that (i) restrict the use to non-residential use only (ii) use of the arena and stable block should be limited to the private use by the owners for the time being of Moons Farm only and (iii) in the event that use of the arena and stable is no longer required by the owners for the time being of Moons Farm, the stable block and the equestrian arena should be removed and the site reinstated to the satisfaction of the District Planning Authority.

ii. **WD/2024/0917/F + 0918/LB Moons Farm, Sharpsbridge Lane, Piltdown TN22 3XG**

Conversion of parts of outbuildings to ancillary living accommodation, installation of solar panels, replacement of oil tank and associated work.

Although the outbuilding itself is not listed, it lies within the curtilage of two Grade II Listed Buildings and as such this proposal is also subject to a listed building application. The Parish Council agrees that the alterations and internal works will have minimal impact on the curtilage listed building and in consequence SUPPORTS the application.

iii. **WD/2024/0629/F Little Wild, Sharpsbridge Lane, Piltdown TN22 3XG**

Conversion of former pool house to dwellinghouse with associated extension and biodiversity enhancement.

The building (formerly known as Little Sharpes) received in 2020 a planning consent to convert a former pool house in the style of a French barn to form a new one-bedroom residential dwelling with associated extension and alterations. A new application is now made for a larger scheme to provide a three-bedroom house. The applicant has sought pre-application advice from WDC and that advice has been broadly supportive of the scheme. The Parish Council SUPPORTS this application on the basis that there are conditions imposed as regards (i) professional approval of foul and surface water drainage system for the property as it is an area that regularly floods (ii) approval of external materials (iii) approval of landscaping (iv) the protection of trees and hedgerows and (v) the protection of bats and birds in accordance with the recommendations of the submitted Ecological Appraisal and Bat Roost Report.

iv. **WD/2024/0726/F Woolpack Farm Barn, Bell Lane, Fletching TN22 3YB**

Single storey extension to link existing dwelling with existing barns to increasable habitable accommodation of main dwelling together with fenestration alterations and addition of 4 x rooflights.

This site lies outside any development boundary but within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Having considered NPPF paras 180 to 183, High Weald AONB Management Plan (2024-2029) and applicable Saved Policies DC19 and EN 27, the Parish Council SUPPORTS the application.

<u>Note:</u> Councillor De St Croix left the meeting during the discussion of this application (See Minute 24/83 above)

v. **WD/2024/0929/FA North Hall Shooting Club, North Hall Lane, Fletching TN22 3SA**

Variation of condition 2 of WD/2005/2619/FR to enable the clubhouse to also be used for Northall CPC meetings, training courses accredited by the CPSA and BASC, first aid training and occasionally for local community and charity events.

Councillors discussed the proposed comments from the Planning Working Group and took into consideration the concerns of the local residents and the views of the applicant. It was **AGREED** that a request be made to the planning officer for an extension of time for comments; and the Planning Working Group be delegated with reviewing its comments taking into account the concerns expressed at the meeting to see whether it would be possible for those to be addressed by planning conditions, prior to submission to the planning authority.

24/86. GRANT APPLICATION

The Grant application from the Fletching Bonfire Society for £500 for the purchase of fire extinguishers, fire blankets and first aid kits for all the public events, was considered and it was **RESOLVED** that the grant be awarded in full.

24/87. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the last meeting held on 8th April 2024 were a correct record and were duly signed by the Chairman.

24/88. MATTERS ARISING

The Actions List as prepared and circulated by the Clerk was noted.

24/89. COUNCILLOR RESPONSIBILITIES AND APPOINTMENTS TO WORKING GROUPS AND EXTERNAL BODIES

The proposed appointments of members to individual areas of responsibility, working groups and representatives on external bodies were **APPROVED** as set out below:

Area of Responsibility	Areas Covered	Councillor/Appointee
Assets	• All assets owned by the Parish Council eg. Pump House, Splaynes Green Phone Box, Benches, War Memorial	Cllr Damian Greenish Cllr De St Croix
Burial Ground and Green Spaces	• Burial Ground / Commons • Grass Cutting • Street Cleaning	Cllr Richard Hannay Cllr Kate Minch Cllr Noel Collum
Community Safety	• CSAG/Police Focus Group • Road Safety/Speed Watch • Emergency Services • FPC Emergency Plan	Cllr Kate Minch Cllr Amanda Abraham
Finance	• Budget / Precept / Grants • Grants / Insurance	Cllr Richard Hannay Cllr De St Croix
Health and Community Services	• NHS / Adult Social Care / Activities for the elderly • Transport	Cllr Kate Minch
Highways	• Roads / Potholes / Verges / Pavements / Flooding / Drainage / Signs / Footpaths / Fingerposts	Cllr Leighton Snelgrove Cllr Amanda Abrahams
Planning Group	• Planning applications received from Wealden District Council for comment	Cllr Noel Collum Cllr Damian Greenish Cllr Leighton Snelgrove Cllr Ross Borton
Staffing	• Pay / Performance Review • Recruitment	Cllr Richard Hannay Cllr Damian Greenish

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Area of Responsibility	Areas Covered	Councillor/Appointee
Fletching School Liaison	• Liaison with the school	Cllr Richard Hannay
Neighbourhood Plan Working Group	• Setting up the Neighbourhood Plan process for the parish	Cllr Richard Hannay Cllr Damian Greenish Cllr Leighton Snelgrove Cllr Sally De St Croix 3 parishioners
Fletching Historical Group	• Partnership between the Church, Parish Council and School	Cllr Richard Hannay Gabriella Paterson-Griggs
Parking Working Group	• Improvement to parking issues in the village of Fletching	Cllr Ross Borton Cllr Amanda Abraham
Ashdown Forest Conservators Parish Liaison Group	• Partnership meeting between Conservators and parish councils	Cllr Kate Minch Cllr Leighton Snelgrove
Community Safety Action Group (Uckfield Cluster)	• Partnership meeting between Police and Parish/Town Councils	Cllr Kate Minch
East Sussex Association of Local Councils (ESALC)	• Association of Town and Parish Councils in East Sussex	Cllr Richard Hannay Gabriella Paterson-Griggs
Fletching Recreation Ground Committee (FPC is Sole Trustee of the FRC Charity)	• The running of the Fletching recreation ground and children's play area	Cllr Richard Hannay Cllr Sally De St Croix Chris Rothery
Fletching Village Hall Committee	• The running of the Village Hall through the Fletching Village Hall Charity	Cllr Kate Minch (one representative only)
Leches and Smith Charity	• Charity for the benefit of those in need in Fletching and Danehill	Andrew Shaw (one representative only)
North Wealden Police Focus Group	• Focus Group held by the PCC's office for Parish and Town Councils	Cllr Kate Minch (One representative only) Gabriella Paterson-Griggs
Parish in Bloom	• Annual competition run by South-East in Bloom	Cllr Kate Minch Gabriella Paterson-Griggs
Wealden District Association of Local Councils (WDALC)	• Partnership meeting between District / County and Parish Councils	Cllr Richard Hannay (one representative only)
Wealden Parish Cluster Group (Central West)	• Information sharing meeting between Wealden District Council Planning and parish councils	Cllr Richard Hannay (one representative only)

24/90. STANDING ORDERS and REGULATIONS

It was **RESOLVED** to **ADOPT** the following:

i. Standing Orders 2024

Clerk: Gabriella Paterson-Griggs
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ii. Financial Regulations 2024 – it was noted that these were based on the new regulations proposed by the National Association of Local Councils.

24/91. REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR GALLEY

The written report received from Councillor Galley, circulated with the agenda, was noted.

24/92. REPORT FROM DISTRICT COUNCILLOR CHRISTINA COLEMAN

Councillor Coleman had given her apologies for the meeting but had given an update at the Annual Parish Meeting the previous week.

24/93. WORKING GROUPS / EXTERNAL GROUPS

i. *Neighbourhood Plan:* Councillor Hannay reported that a meeting was being planned with the consultant who would visit the parish and talk to the Steering Group and provide recommendations. A decision would then be made as to the next steps. It was confirmed that funding would be available from Locality and that an application would be made as soon as the site was open to applications.

ii. *Fletching Recreation Ground Committee (FRGC):* The Clerk reported that the pavilion refurbishment was ongoing and was due to be completed just after the start of the cricket season. In response to a query regarding an area for tree planting on the recreation ground it was suggested that the Bonfire Society has a discussion with the cricket club in the first instance.

24/94. CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

i. *Fletching Cricket Club – additional grass cutting request:* a request had been made to the Chairman that additional grass cuts be undertaken to the grass verge that ran down the outside of the recreation ground during the cricket season. It was noted that a quote had been obtained from the Parish Council's existing grounds maintenance contractor which was £55 + VAT per cut. Councillors discussed the request and agreed that the grass along that verge also caused visibility issues for drivers approaching Fletching village along Ruston Bridge Road as well as difficulties for parents walking their children along the verge to the school.

It was **RESOLVED** that the grounds maintenance contractor be requested to cut the verge at the next available opportunity and then four-weekly until the end of August/beginning of September (to tie in with the other cuts being carried out in the parish during that timeframe). The cost to be met by the Parish Council.

24/95. FINANCE AND ASSETS

i. The Asset Register for Fletching Parish Council was **AGREED**. The Clerk agreed to investigate whether the beacon should be added to the list.

ii. The Risk Assessment and Management Document for Fletching Parish Council was **AGREED**.

iii. The direct debits made to other bodies were **AGREED**.

iv. The banking arrangements were confirmed for the forthcoming year. It was **AGREED** that Councillors Hannay and Collum would continue as authorised signatories.

v. The budget outturn for 2023/24 and precept for 2024/25 were noted.

vi. The arrangements for insurance cover and the payment of the premium were

vii. The invoices and payments for May 2024 were **AUTHORISED** and the Council's current financial position and bank reconciliation were noted.

24/96. BURIAL GROUND

There were no requests or permits for the Burial Ground.

24/97. ENFORCEMENT – PLANNING

i. *Flitteridge Farm:* There was no update at this time.

ii. *Lay-by Opposite Piltdown Service Station:* concern had been raised by a resident that the lay-by opposite the service station was being used by the used car sales company to park cars in which was blocking access to the post box as well as making it very difficult for the bus to pull into the bus stop. The matter had been raised with both East Sussex Highways and Wealden Planning Enforcement but the responses had not been encouraging. It was noted that both Councillors Coleman and Galley had taken up the case and would be seeking a resolution from the appropriate authority.

24/98. PLANNING APPLICATIONS - DECISIONS

Planning decisions **RECEIVED** from Wealden District Council since the last meeting:

Applications Approved

i. **WD/2024/0218/F North Hall Shooting Club, North Hall Lane, Fletching TN22 3SA**

Metal storage building. (APPROVED 9 April 2024)

ii. **WD/2024/0393/F Roselands, Goldbridge Road, Piltdown TN22 3XL**

Make temporary access used during construction of the new dwelling permanent and associated works. (APPROVED 7 May 2024)

iii. **WD/2024/0504/PO Moons Farm, Sharpsbridge Lane, Piltdown TN22 3XG**

Discharge of s106 Agreement attached to planning permission WD/1995/0915/F (conversion of redundant granary to provide ancillary accommodation). (S106 Agreement REVOCATED 30 April 2024)

Applications Refused – none since the last meeting

Applications Withdrawn

i. **WD/2023/3456/LB Trading Boundaries, Sheffield Green, Sheffield Park TN22 3RB**

Minor alterations to the first floor involving removal of two non-load bearing partition walls which form a corridor and separate the current staff kitchen and office. (WITHDRAWN 16 April 2024)

ii. **WD/2024/0230/F The Flying Engine, Mill Lane, Fletching TN22 3PY**

Mounting of 3KW solar array to south facing slope of existing double garage. (WITHDRAWN 9 April 2024)

24/99. ITEMS FOR THE PARISH MAGAZINE

It was agreed that the following items be included for the next edition of the Parish Magazine:

- CIL – request for ideas for Piltdown area
- Grant awarded to the bonfire society

24/100. AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

- Replacement litter bins and other CIL items

It was requested that Councillors contact the Clerk with any other items they wish to be considered at the next meeting.

24/101. TIME AND DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Parish Council is due to be held on Monday 10th June at 7.30pm in the Pavilion on the Recreation Ground.

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FPC Meetings Actions List 2024

Date	Action	Who By	Notes
08/01/24	Invite PCSO Leon Greck to future FPC meeting	Clerk	Ongoing: email invite sent. Clerk investigating whether PCSO Greck still covers Fletching as he was linked to Wadhurst in social media post from Sussex Police.
05/02/24	CIL Funds: obtain quotes for path in burial ground; replacement public litter bins; new handrail beside village hall	RH & Clerk	Public litter bins: information received from WDC. Decision made as to type of bin. Now awaiting WDC for installation costs.
04/03/24	Resilience Plan: Identify team members from each area of the Parish and add in any additional resources to Appendix D	KM & Clerk	Ongoing. KM waiting for response from prospective team members. Due to go to July FPC
13/05/24	Apply for grant funding from Locality for the Neighbourhood Plan	RH/Clerk	Completed. Application submitted 28 May 2024
13/05/24	Request Countrymans to make additional cuts of verge alongside recreation ground once a month during the summer.	Clerk	Completed.

Fletching Parish Council Finances 31 May 2024

Payments made by Direct Debit/Debit Card/BACS in May 2024

Payee	For	Amount	Method
HSBC	Bank Charge	£ 5.00	DD
EE Ltd	Mobile Phone bill	£ 17.76	DD
Hugofox Ltd	FPC Website	£ 11.99	DD
Tesco	Refreshments for Annual Meeting	£ 30.75	DC
D G Multibao Ltd	USBC connector cable for projector	£ 6.98	DC
Amazon	Stationery	£ 8.75	DC
Fletching Bonfire Society	Grant (approved by FPC 13/5/24)	£ 500.00	DC
	TOTAL	**£ 581.23**	

Payments Received in May 2024

From	For	Amount
Wealden District Council	Refund	£ 30.00
	Total	**£ 30.00**

Payments for Approval – June 2024

Payee	For	Amount	Method
Knill James	Payroll Provider	£ 42.12	BACS
Mulberry LAS	Audit Fees	£ 253.50	BACS
Troy Hayes Planning Ltd	Neighbourhood Plan support	£ 150.00	BACS
Countrymans Contractors Ltd	Grass Cutting	£1,011.44	BACS
G Paterson-Griggs	Clerk Expenses	£ 22.50	BACS
ESCC Pension Fund	Clerk Pension	£ 301.19	BACS
G Paterson-Griggs	Clerk Salary	£1,026.11	BACS

Fletching Parish Council Bank Reconciliation	**31-May-24**			
Balance per bank statements as at	**31-May-24**		**Cashbook**	
FPC Current Account	£ 56,644.08		Opening balance	£56,377.57
FPC Savings Account	£ 32,402.69		Add receipts in year	£40,947.57
FPC War Memorial Account	£ 432.64		Less payments in year	-£ 7,334.18
FPC Maryon-Wilson Account	£ 511.55			
Net Balance	**£ 89,990.96**		**Balance**	**£89,990.96**

APPROVED at a Parish Council Meeting on 10 June 2024:

Signed: Chair of Fletching Parish Council

Date: 10 June 2024

MULBERRY
LOCAL AUTHORITY SERVICES LTD

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Gabriella Paterson-Griggs
Fletching Parish Council
Fletching
Uckfield
East Sussex
TN22 3SS

16 May 2024

Dear Gabriella

Re: Fletching Parish Council
Internal Audit Year Ended 31 March 2024 – Year-End Audit report

Executive summary
Following completion of our year-end internal audit on 16 May 2024 we enclose our report for your kind attention and presentation to the council. The audit was conducted in accordance with current practices and guidelines and testing was risk based. Whilst we have not tested all transactions, our samples have where appropriate covered the entire year to date.

Our report is presented in the same order as the assertions on the internal auditor report within the published AGAR. The start of each section details the nature of the assertion to be verified. Testing requirements follow those detailed in the audit plan previously sent to the council, a copy of this is available on request. The report concludes with an opinion as to whether each assertion has been met or not. Where appropriate **recommendations for action are shown in bold text and are summarised in the table at the end of the report.**

Our sample testing did not uncover any errors or misstatements that require reporting to the external auditor at this time, nor did we identify any significant weaknesses in the internal controls such that public money would be put at risk.

It is clear the council takes governance, policies and procedures seriously and I am pleased to report that overall, the systems and procedures you have in place are fit for purpose and whilst my report may contain recommendations to change these are not indicative of any significant failings, but rather are pointers to improving upon an already well-ordered system.

It is therefore our opinion that the systems and internal procedures at Fletching Parish Council are well established and followed.

Regulation
The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require smaller authorities, each financial year, to conduct a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control and prepare an annual governance statement in accordance with proper practices in relation to accounts. In addition to this, a smaller authority is required by Regulation 5(1) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 to “undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance.”

Internal auditing is an independent, objective assurance activity designed to improve an organisation’s operations. It helps an organisation accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes. The purpose of internal audit is to review and report to the authority on whether its systems of financial and other internal controls over its activities and operating procedures are effective.

Internal audit's function is to test and report to the authority on whether its specific system of internal control is adequate and working satisfactorily. The internal audit reports should therefore be made available to all Members to support and inform them when they considering the authority's approval of the annual governance statement.

Independence and competence

Your audit was conducted by Michelle Webber on behalf of Mulberry & Co. We confirm we are independent from the management of the financial controls and procedures of the council and neither the internal auditor or the firm have any conflicts of interest with the audit client, nor do they provide any management or financial assistance to the client.

Your auditor has over 27 years' experience in the financial sector with the last 12 years specialising in local government.

Your auditor is independent from the management of the financial controls and procedures of the council and has no conflicts of interest with the audit client, nor do they provide any management or financial assistance to the client.

Engagement Letter

An engagement letter was previously issued to the council covering the 2023/24 internal audit assignment. Copies of this document are available on request.

Planning and inherent risk assessment

The scope and plan of works including fee structure was issued to the council under separate cover. Copies of this document are available on request. In summary, our work will address each of the internal control objectives as stated on the Annual Internal Audit Report of the AGAR.

It is our opinion that the inherent risk of error or misstatement is low, and the controls of the council can be relied upon and as such substantive testing of individual transactions is not required. Testing to be carried out will be "walk through testing" on sample data to encompass the period of the council year under review.

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A. BOOKS OF ACCOUNT

Internal audit requirement

Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the financial year.

Audit findings

The audit was conducted remotely with the Clerk, who also acts as the council's Responsible Financial Officer (RFO). The Clerk had prepared the information advised in advance of the visit, and overall, I have the impression that accounting records are neatly maintained and easily accessible. Other information was reviewed through discussion with the Clerk and a review of the council website www.fletching-pc.otg.uk

The council uses the Scribe accounting package for recording the council's finances. This is an industry specific accounting package. The accounting package is updated regularly and used to produce management information reports for review at council meetings.

The system requires the population of key data fields to enable the user to record a transaction. This is a clear and easy to follow system and a review of the cashbook shows that all data fields are being entered, the reports are easy to read and logically filed.

I reviewed the nominal ledger entries for the period 1 April to 31 March to ensure items were posted to the correct heading and that there were no instances of netting off and the expenditure was correctly posted to the headings to which the line item related. This has confirmed that the accounting package is being properly used.

B. FINANCE REGULATIONS, GOVERNANCE AND PAYMENTS

Internal audit requirement

This authority complied with its Finance Regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved, and VAT was appropriately accounted for.

Audit findings

Check the publication and minuting of the prior year audited AGAR and notice of conclusion of audit

The External Auditor's Report was not qualified and has been published on the council website along with the Notice of Conclusion of Audit and was reported to the council meeting held on 4 September 2023 (minute ref 23/151 (iii).

I note the council received and considered the internal auditor's report at the council meeting held on 5 June 2023 (minute ref 23/112).

Confirm by sample testing that councillors sign statutory office forms

I confirmed by sample testing that councillors sign "Acceptance of Office" forms together with a formal acceptance to receive information by electronic means in the form "As per Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972, I consent to the receipt of all council meeting papers by electronic methods. I understand I may withdraw this consent at any time"

The council website provides the councillor's Register of Members' Interests forms.

Confirm that the council is compliant with the relevant transparency code

As the council's income and expenditure exceeds £25,000, it is not a statutory requirement to follow the requirements of the Local Government Transparency Code, although it is recommended best practice to do so. A review of the council website shows that some of the information is published, but if the council wishes to comply fully with the code, I recommend viewing the way West Chiltington Parish Council publishes the information, which can be viewed via this link www.wcpc.org.uk/transparency

Confirm that the council is compliant with GDPR

The council is fully aware of GDPR and has undergone training. It was noted the council has established common email addresses for all councillors. This is recommended because it gives a natural segregation between work and personal lives, making it clear beyond doubt in what capacity a councillor is acting. In addition to this it gives control to the council, adds a degree of professionalism and in the event of a FOI request limits access to personal computers.

The Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) Practitioner's Guide (March 2023) contains updated guidance on the matter as below:

The importance of secure email systems and GOV.UK

5.205. All authorities except parish meetings must now have an official website. To comply with GDPR, councils should provide official email accounts for their councillors as well as for their clerk and other officers.

5.206. When choosing a domain name for the council's website and emails, many local council websites are appropriately making use of the official GOV.UK domain (for example, ourparishcouncil.gov.uk), with email addresses being linked to that domain.

5.207. Using a GOV.UK domain for your council website and email accounts demonstrates the council's official local government status. Members of the public are increasingly cyber security awareness, so a GOV.UK domain can also help to build trust, and credibility and visibly demonstrates authenticity. Many people will now reasonably expect a local council to have a GOV.UK domain name.

5.208. For the purposes of user management, councils should ensure that the proper officer can add and remove member and staff email accounts. Commercial 'dashboard' email and web systems offer centralised searching of all data contained within the system for effective compliance with GDPR Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information Requests.

The council has a Privacy Notice and Accessibility Statement on the home page of its website, and it is clear the council has made every effort to comply with the website requirements.

Confirm that the council meets regularly throughout the year
All the business of the council is conducted through Full Council meetings.

A diary of future meeting dates is also published on the council website, along with historic agendas and minutes for council and committee meetings.

Check that agendas for meetings are published giving 3 clear days' notice
I was able to confirm that at least 3 clear days' notice is given on agendas. Whilst we have not tested every council meeting there was no evidence of non-compliance in giving three clear days' notice of the meeting.

I remind council it is required to also post any supporting documentation with the agendas as outlined by the Information Commissioner's Office (page 3 of this link) ico.org.uk/minutesandagendas.pdf

Check the draft minutes of the last meeting(s) are on the council's website
Draft minutes are uploaded to the council website.

Confirm that the Parish Council's Standing Orders have been reviewed within the last 12 months
The Standing Orders are based on the current NALC model and were most recently reviewed and adopted by council on 17 May 2023 (minute ref 23/85).

Confirm that the Parish Council has adopted and recently reviewed Financial Regulations
Financial Regulations are based on the current NALC model and were last reviewed and adopted by council on 17 May 2023 (minute ref 23/85). The regulations contain provisions for the approval of spending, setting of budgets, reconciliation of the bank and reporting to council. I note the council also has an adopted Scheme of Delegation to support the Financial Regulations.

Check that the council's Financial Regulations are being routinely followed
The council has thresholds in place at which authorisations to spend must be obtained as below:

FR 4.1. Expenditure on revenue items may be authorised up to the amounts included for that class of expenditure in the approved budget. This authority is to be determined by:

- *the Council for all items over £5,000*
- *a duly delegated committee of the Council for items up to £500; or*
- *the Clerk, in conjunction with Chair of Council or Chair of the appropriate committee, for any items below £500.*

Such authority is to be evidenced by a Minute or by an authorisation slip duly signed by the Clerk, and where necessary also by the appropriate Chairman.

Contracts may not be disaggregated to avoid controls imposed by these regulations.

FR 4.2. No expenditure may be authorised that will exceed the amount provided in the revenue budget for that class of expenditure other than by resolution of Full Council, or duly delegated committee. During the budget year and with the approval of Council having considered fully the implications for public services, unspent and available amounts may be moved to other budget headings or to an earmarked reserve as appropriate ('virement').

FR 4.5. In cases of extreme risk to the delivery of council services, the Clerk may authorise revenue expenditure on behalf of the council which in the Clerk's judgement it is necessary to carry out. Such expenditure includes repair, replacement or other work, whether or not there is any budgetary provision for the expenditure, subject to a limit of £500. The Clerk shall report such action to the Chairman as soon as possible and to the council as soon as practicable thereafter.

Based on the level of financial activity of the council, and through discussion with the Clerk, these authorisation thresholds appear appropriate although the council may wish to consider increasing the Clerk's authorisation limit within FR 4.1 to a higher figure based on her experience level.

A review of council minutes shows that council authorises payments in accordance with the adopted Financial Regulations, and the council has in place a system to segregate duties in terms of the setting up and subsequent release of payments made via online banking.

Confirm all section 137 expenditure meets the guidelines and does not exceed the annual per elector limit of £9.93 per elector
The council has expenditure of section 137 these are within the threshold.

Check receipt of VAT refund matches last submitted VAT return
The council submits its VAT return on a bi-monthly basis. I reviewed the submission for the period ending 31 December 2023 which showed a refund amount due of £5,490.52 and was fully supported by the required details. I was able to confirm receipt of this amount to the council's bank account on 12 February 2024. The council is up to date with its VAT submissions.

Confirm that checks of the accounts are made by a councillor
The system noted above details internal review takes place and I am under no doubt that council properly approves expenditure.

C. RISK MANAGEMENT AND INSURANCE

Internal audit requirement

This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these.

Audit findings

The council has a risk assessment process in place, which was last reviewed and approved by council on 17 May 2023 (minute ref 23/92). I reviewed the risk assessment record, which includes a risk matrix to assess the overall risk based on likelihood and consequences of an event occurring, and then assesses the risks within each sector of the council's business operations.

This is a comprehensive approach and includes analysis of all risks typically associated with a council of this size with its range of services and facilities.

I confirmed that the council has a valid insurance policy in place with Zurich Municipal Insurance which covers the year under review. The policy includes Public Liability cover of £12 million and Employers Liability cover of £10 million and a Fidelity Guarantee level of £250,000 which is sufficient for a council of this size, although the council is advised to keep this figure under review to ensure it covers the maximum balance held.

We discussed assertion 8 on the Annual Governance Statement and whether this had any impact on the council.

"We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and, where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements."

The Clerk confirmed that they were not aware of any event having a financial impact that was not included in the accounting statements.

D. BUDGET, PRECEPT AND RESERVES

Internal audit requirement

The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.

Audit findings

The council set a precept of £33,900 for 2023/24. With a tax base of 572, this equates to a band D equivalent of £59.27 (compared to the average in England of £79.35).

The Clerk confirmed that the 2024/25 budget setting process is complete it was agreed at Council meeting 8 January 2024.

There is evidence within the minutes of Council meetings that reviews of financial performance take place during the year, including receiving income and expenditure reports, and bank reconciliations. Council minutes include a list of payments, and these are appended to the minutes of the relevant meeting.

At the end of the financial year, the income and expenditure report showed income at 175% of budget and expenditure at 128% of budget, suggesting that the budget has been accurately set and carefully monitored throughout the year. The higher income due to community infrastructure levy (CIL) higher then expected and higher than budget expenditure due to Elections costs, and fingerpost replacements.

The council holds circa £2,214 in earmarked reserve spread across a range of clearly identifiable projects. I checked the purpose of these projects with the Clerk and am satisfied that they are all legitimate future planned projects for the council. The General reserve balance is £54,164.

The Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) Practitioner's guide states *'the generally accepted recommendation with regard to the appropriate minimum level of a smaller authority's general reserve is that this should be maintained at between three and twelve months of net revenue expenditure'* (para 5.33).

The general reserve balance is higher the recommended range. On discussion with the clerk, there is a major project for the Neighbourhood Plan for 2024-25 which funds will be allocated.

E. INCOME

Internal audit requirement

Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT was appropriately accounted for.

Audit findings

Apart from the precept, the council receives income from a range of sources including burial, bank interest, community infrastructure levy, and donations. From a review of the accounting records, income appears to be recorded with sufficient narrative detail to identify the source and allocated to the most appropriate nominal code.

Fees are reviewed at Full council in February 2023, I reminded the clerk these need to be reviewed annually even if there is no change.

F. PETTY CASH

Internal audit requirement

Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved, and VAT appropriately accounted for.

Audit findings

The council has no petty cash float.

G. PAYROLL

Internal audit requirement

Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with this authority's approvals, and PAYE and NI requirements were properly applied.

Audit findings

The has one employee, they have a signed contract of employment, based on the NALC template, and the council is a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

Payroll is processed by a third party. I reviewed the payroll summary presented for the internal audit and the payroll deductions appear correct. I was able to confirm HMRC and pensions payments are up to date and that the council is correctly not claiming the employment allowance for national insurance contributions.

There are no councillor allowances.

I reviewed the total figure being included within box 4 (staff costs) on the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and was able to confirm from the accounting software that this includes only salary payments, HMRC payments and pension contributions.

H. ASSETS AND INVESTMENTS

Internal audit requirement

Asset and investments registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained.

Audit findings

The council has a fixed asset register in place, maintained in an Excel format, which includes details of asset location, date of acquisition, original purchase price, replacement value and insurance value. Assets are correctly listed at cost/proxy cost, or where gifted/donated, given a nominal £1 value for the purpose of the asset register.

I confirmed the asset register total matches that included in box 9 (total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets) on the AGAR and was able to trace the changes to the previous year's total against the asset register. I confirmed by sample testing of the invoices that items added during the year has been accurately recorded as the original net purchase price.

The council has no Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) loan or long-term investments.

I. BANK AND CASH

Internal audit requirement

Periodic and year-end bank account reconciliations were properly carried out.

Audit findings

Financial Regulation 2.2 states *'On a regular basis at least once in each quarter, and at each financial year end, a member other than the Chairman or a cheque signatory shall be appointed to verify bank reconciliations (for all accounts) produced by the RFO.*

The member shall sign and date the reconciliations and the original bank statements (or similar document) as evidence of this. This activity, including any exceptions, shall be reported to and noted by the council.'

Bank reconciliations are completed monthly and presented to the Council for review. I reviewed the March 2024 bank reconciliation for all accounts and was able to confirm the balances to the bank statements and found no errors, and that the total balances match the figure included in box 8 of the AGAR.

I was also provided with signed copied of bank reconciliations and bank statements confirming the council is following the requirements of FR 2.2.

The council holds four accounts, the balances held with do not exceed the £85,000 protection limit offered by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS).

J. YEAR END ACCOUNTS

Internal audit requirement

Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (receipts and payments or income and expenditure), agreed to the cash book, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and where appropriate debtors and creditors were properly recorded.

Audit findings

The council, at its meeting to sign off the year-end accounts, must discuss Section 1 of the AGAR (Annual Governance Statement) and record this activity in the minutes of the meeting. **COUNCIL IS REMINDED THAT THIS MUST BE A SEPARATE AGENDA ITEM PRIOR TO THE SIGNING OF SECTION 2 OF THE AGAR (ANNUAL ACCOUNTS).**

Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement

Based on the internal audit finding I recommend using the table below as the basis for that discussion.

	Annual Governance Statement	*'Yes', means that this authority*	Suggested response based on evidence
1	We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.	*prepared its accounting statements in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.*	**YES** – accounts follow latest Accounts and Audit Regulations and practitioners guide recommendations.
2	We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.	*made proper arrangements and accepted responsibility for safeguarding the public money and resources in its charge.*	**YES** – there is regular reporting of financial transactions and accounting summaries, offering the opportunity for scrutiny.
3	We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and Proper Practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances.	*has only done what it has the legal power to do and has complied with Proper Practices in doing so.*	**YES** – the Clerk advises the council in respect of its legal powers.
4	We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.	*during the year gave all persons interested the opportunity to inspect and ask questions about this authority's accounts.*	**YES** – the requirements and timescales for 2022/23 year-end were followed.
5	We carried out an assessment of the risks facing this authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the	*considered and documented the financial and other risks it faces and dealt with them properly.*	**YES** – the council has a risk management scheme and

	introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required.		appropriate external insurance.
6	We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.	*arranged for a competent person, independent of the financial controls and procedures, to give an objective view on whether internal controls meet the needs of this smaller authority.*	**YES** – the council has appointed an independent and competent internal auditor.
7	We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.	*responded to matters brought to its attention by internal and external audit.*	**YES** – matters raised in internal and external audit reports have been addressed.
8	We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and. Where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements.	*disclosed everything it should have about its business activity during the year including events taking place after the year end if relevant.*	**YES** – no matters were raised during the internal audit visits.
9	Trust funds including charitable – In our capacity as the sole managing trustee we discharged our accountability responsibilities for the fund(s)/asset(s), including financial reporting and, if required, independent examination or audit.	*has met all its responsibilities where, as a body corporate, it is a sole managing trustee of a local trust or trusts.*	**YES** – the council has met its requirements as sole trustee

Section 2 – Accounting Statements

AGAR box number		2022/23	2023/24	Internal Auditor notes
1	Balances brought forward	41,556	37,765	Agrees to 2022/23 carry forward (box 7)
2	Precept or rates and levies	32,000	33,900	Figure confirmed to central precept record
3	Total other receipts	11,771	39,400	Agrees to underlying accounting records
4	Staff costs	12,866	16,664	Agrees to underlying accounting records. Includes only expenditure allowed as staff costs (see section G)
5	Loan interest/capital repayments	0	0	Confirmed to PWLB documents
6	All other payments	34,696	38,023	Agrees to underlying accounting records
7	Balances carried forward	37,765	56,378	Casts correctly and agrees to balance sheet
8	Total value of cash and short-term investments	37,765	56,378	Agrees to bank reconciliation for all accounts
9	Total fixed assets plus long-term investments and assets	18,984	18,984	Matches asset register total and changes from previous year have been traced
10	Total borrowings	0	0	Confirmed to PWLB documents
11a	Disclosure note re Trust Funds (including charitable)	YES	YES	No – the council is a sole trustee
11b	Disclosure note re Trust Funds (including charitable)	YES	YES	N/A – the council is a sole trustee

Audit findings

The year-end accounts have been correctly prepared on a receipts and payments basis with the box 7 and 8 reconciliation not required. Amounts for each of these are similar to those for the previous year and appropriate for a council of this size and financial activity level.

The AGAR correctly casts and cross casts and last year's comparatives match the figures submitted for 2022/23 and published on the council website.

The variance analysis has been completed to explain the variances exceeding 15% where required, and in my opinion, contains sufficient narrative and quantitative information for the External Auditor.

K. LIMITED ASSURANCE REVIEW

Internal audit requirement

IF the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in 2022/23, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2022/23 AGAR tick "not covered")

Audit findings

The council did not certify itself exempt in 2022/23 due to exceeding the income and expenditure limits and this test does not apply.

L: PUBLICATION OF INFORMATION

Internal audit requirement

The authority published the required information on a website/webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation

Audit findings

For councils with a turnover over £25,000, it is recommended best practice to follow the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, but not a statutory requirement and therefore not subject to verification during the internal audit.

<u>All councils</u> are required to follow The Accounts and Audit Regulations which include the following requirements:

13(1) An authority must publish (which must include publication on that authority's website)

- (a) the Statement of Accounts together with any certificate or opinion entered by the local auditor in accordance with section 20(2) of the Act; and
- (b) the Annual Governance Statement approved in accordance with regulation 6(3)

13(2) Where documents are published under paragraph (1), the authority must

- (a) keep copies of those documents for purchase by any person on payment of a reasonable sum; and
- (b) ensure that those documents remain available for public access for a period of not less than five years beginning with the date on which those documents were first published in accordance with that paragraph.

I was able to confirm that pages 4 (Annual Governance Statement), 5 (Accounting Statements) and 6 (External Auditor's Report and Certificate) of the AGAR are available for review on the council website for financial years 2018/19 to 2022/23 inclusive.

M: EXERCISE OF PUBLIC RIGHTS - INSPECTION OF ACCOUNTS

Internal audit requirement

The authority has demonstrated that during summer 2023 it correctly provided for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

Audit findings

Inspection – key dates	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Proposed
Date AGAR signed by council	5 June 2023	10 June 2024
Date inspection notice issued	12 June 2023	12 June 2024
Inspection period begins	13 June 2023	13 June 2024
Inspection period ends	24 July 2023	24 July 2024
Correct length (30 working days)	Yes	Yes
Common period included (first 10 working days of July)	Yes	Yes

I am satisfied the requirements of this control objective were met for 2022/23, and assertion 4 on the Annual Governance Statement can therefore be signed off by the council.

I was able to confirm that the proposed dates for 2023/24 meet the statutory requirements.

N: PUBLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Internal audit requirement

The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2022/23. Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, authorities must publish the following information on the authority website / webpage.

Before 1 July 2023 authorities must publish:
- *Notice of the period for the exercise of public rights and a declaration that the accounting statements are as yet unaudited*
- *Section 1 - Annual Governance Statement 2022/23, approved and signed, page 4*
- *Section 2 - Accounting Statements 2022/23, approved and signed, page 5*

Not later than 30 September 2023 authorities must publish:
- *Notice of conclusion of audit*
- *Section 3 - External Auditor Report and Certificate*
- *Sections 1 and 2 of AGAR including any amendments as a result of the limited assurance review.*

It is recommended as best practice, to avoid any potential confusion by local electors and interested parties, that you also publish the Annual Internal Audit Report, page 3.

Audit findings

I was able to confirm that the Notice of Public Rights is published on the council website along with the Notice of Conclusion of audit and External Auditor Report and I was able to confirm that the publication requirements for 2022/23 have been met.

O. TRUSTEESHIP

Internal audit requirement

Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.

Audit findings

The council is the trustee of Fletching Recreation Ground (charity number 305221). I reviewed the information available on the Charity Commission website and was able to confirm that all reporting is up to date and that the council is correctly listed as the sole trustee. The charity accounts show an independent examination of the charity accounts has taken place, and the council has therefore met its responsibilities as a trustee.

Achievement of control assertions at year-end audit date

Based on the tests conducted during the year-end audit, our conclusions on the achievement of the internal control objectives are summarised in the table below and are reflected in the completion of the Annual Internal Audit Report within the AGAR.

	INTERNAL CONTROL OBJECTIVE	YES	NO	NOT COVERED
A	Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the financial year	√		
B	This authority complied with its Finance Regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved, and VAT was appropriately accounted for	√		
C	This authority assesses the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these	√		
D	The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.	√		
E	Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT was appropriately accounted for	√		
F	Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved, and VAT appropriately accounted for			√
G	Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with this authority's approvals, and PAYE and NI requirements were properly applied.	√		
H	Asset and investments registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained.	√		
I	Periodic bank account reconciliations were properly carried out during the year.	√		
J	Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (receipts and payments or income and expenditure), agreed to the cash book, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and where appropriate debtors and creditors were properly recorded.	√		
K	If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in 2022/23, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. *(If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2022/23 AGAR tick "not covered")*			√
L	The authority published the required information on a website/webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation	√		
M	The authority, during the previous year (2022/23) correctly provided for the period for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations *(evidenced by the notice published on the website and/or authority approved minutes confirming the dates set).*	√		
N	The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2022/23 AGAR.	√		
O	Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.	√		

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

M. Webber

Michelle Webber
For Mulberry Local Authority Services Ltd

Year-End Audit - Points Carried Forward

Audit Point	Audit Findings	Council comments

Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

We acknowledge as the members of:

Fletching Parish Council

ENTER NAME OF AUTHORITY

our responsibility for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control, including arrangements for the preparation of the Accounting Statements. We confirm, to the best of our knowledge and belief, with respect to the Accounting Statements for the year ended 31 March 2024, that:

	Agreed Yes	Agreed No*	'Yes' means that this authority:
1. We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.	✔		*prepared its accounting statements in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.*
2. We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.	✔		*made proper arrangements and accepted responsibility for safeguarding the public money and resources in its charge.*
3. We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and Proper Practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances.	✔		*has only done what it has the legal power to do and has complied with Proper Practices in doing so.*
4. We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.	✔		*during the year gave all persons interested the opportunity to inspect and ask questions about this authority's accounts.*
5. We carried out an assessment of the risks facing this authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required.	✔		*considered and documented the financial and other risks it faces and dealt with them properly.*
6. We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.	✔		*arranged for a competent person, independent of the financial controls and procedures, to give an objective view on whether internal controls meet the needs of this smaller authority.*
7. We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.	✔		*responded to matters brought to its attention by internal and external audit.*
8. We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and, where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements.	✔		*disclosed everything it should have about its business activity during the year including events taking place after the year end if relevant.*

	Yes	No	N/A	
9. (For local councils only) Trust funds including charitable. In our capacity as the sole managing trustee we discharged our accountability responsibilities for the fund(s)/assets, including financial reporting and, if required, independent examination or audit.	✔			*has met all of its responsibilities where, as a body corporate, it is a sole managing trustee of a local trust or trusts.*

***Please provide explanations to the external auditor on a separate sheet for each 'No' response and describe how the authority will address the weaknesses identified. These sheets must be published with the Annual Governance Statement.**

This Annual Governance Statement was approved at a meeting of the authority on:

10/06/2024

and recorded as minute reference:

24/

Signed by the Chair and Clerk of the meeting where approval was given:

Chair SIGNATURE REQUIRED

Clerk SIGNATURE REQUIRED

www.fletching-pc.org

Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2023/24 for

Fletching Parish Council

ENTER NAME OF AUTHORITY

	Year ending		Notes and guidance
	31 March 2023 £	31 March 2024 £	*Please round all figures to nearest £1. Do not leave any boxes blank and report £0 or Nil balances. All figures must agree to underlying financial records.*
1. Balances brought forward	41,556	37,765	*Total balances and reserves at the beginning of the year as recorded in the financial records. Value must agree to Box 7 of previous year.*
2. (+) Precept or Rates and Levies	32,000	33,900	*Total amount of precept (or for IDBs rates and levies) received or receivable in the year. Exclude any grants received.*
3. (+) Total other receipts	11,771	39,400	*Total income or receipts as recorded in the cashbook less the precept or rates/levies received (line 2). Include any grants received.*
4. (-) Staff costs	12,866	16,664	*Total expenditure or payments made to and on behalf of all employees. Include gross salaries and wages, employers NI contributions, employers pension contributions, gratuities and severance payments.*
5. (-) Loan interest/capital repayments	0	0	*Total expenditure or payments of capital and interest made during the year on the authority's borrowings (if any).*
6. (-) All other payments	34,696	38,023	*Total expenditure or payments as recorded in the cash-book less staff costs (line 4) and loan interest/capital repayments (line 5).*
7. (=) Balances carried forward	37,765	56,378	*Total balances and reserves at the end of the year. Must equal (1+2+3) - (4+5+6).*
8. Total value of cash and short term investments	37,765	56,378	*The sum of all current and deposit bank accounts, cash holdings and short term investments held as at 31 March – **To agree with bank reconciliation.***
9. Total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets	18,984	18,984	*The value of all the property the authority owns – it is made up of all its fixed assets and long term investments as at 31 March.*
10. Total borrowings	0	0	*The outstanding capital balance as at 31 March of all loans from third parties (including PWLB).*

For Local Councils Only	Yes	No	N/A	
11a. Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)	✔			*The Council, as a body corporate, acts as sole trustee and is responsible for managing Trust funds or assets.*
11b. Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)	✔			*The figures in the accounting statements above exclude any Trust transactions.*

I certify that for the year ended 31 March 2024 the Accounting Statements in this Annual Governance and Accountability Return have been prepared on either a receipts and payments or income and expenditure basis following the guidance in Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities – a Practitioners' Guide to Proper Practices and present fairly the financial position of this authority.

Signed by Responsible Financial Officer before being presented to the authority for approval

SIGNATURE REQUIRED

Date 10/06/2024

I confirm that these Accounting Statements were approved by this authority on this date:

10/06/2024

as recorded in minute reference:

24/ MINUTE REFERENCE

Signed by Chair of the meeting where the Accounting Statements were approved

SIGNATURE REQUIRED

FLETCHING PARISH COUNCIL

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FPC Document Retention and Disposal Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 The Council accumulates a vast amount of information and data during the course of its everyday activities. This includes data generated internally in addition to information obtained from individuals and external organisations. This information is recorded in various different types of document.

1.2 Records created and maintained by the Council are an important asset and as such measures need to be undertaken to safeguard this information. Properly managed records provide authentic and reliable evidence of the Council's transactions and are necessary to ensure it can demonstrate accountability.

1.3 Documents may be retained in either 'hard' paper form or in electronic forms. For the purpose of this policy, 'document' and 'record' refers to both hard copy and electronic records.

1.4 It is imperative that documents are retained for an adequate period of time. If documents are destroyed prematurely the Council and individual officers concerned could face prosecution for not complying with legislation and it could cause operational difficulties, reputational damage and difficulty in defending any claim brought against the Council.

1.5 In contrast to the above the Council should not retain documents longer than is necessary. Timely disposal should be undertaken to ensure compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations so that personal information is not retained longer than necessary. This will also ensure the most efficient use of limited storage space.

2. Scope and Objectives of the Policy

2.1 The aim of this document is to provide a working framework to determine which documents are:

- Retained – and for how long; or
- Disposed of – and if so by what method.

2.2 There are some records that do not need to be kept at all or that are routinely destroyed in the course of business. This usually applies to information that is duplicated, unimportant or only of a short-term value. Unimportant records of information include:

- 'With compliments' slips.
- Catalogues and trade journals.
- Non-acceptance of invitations.
- Trivial electronic mail messages that are not related to Council business.
- Requests for information such as maps, plans or advertising material.
- Out of date distribution lists.

2.3 Duplicated and superseded material such as stationery, manuals, drafts, forms, address books and reference copies of annual reports may be destroyed.

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2.4 Records should not be destroyed if the information can be used as evidence to prove that something has happened. If destroyed the disposal needs to be disposed of under the General Data Protection Regulations

3. Roles and Responsibilities for Document Retention and Disposal

3.1 Councils are responsible for determining whether to retain or dispose of documents and should undertake a review of documentation at least on an annual basis to ensure that any unnecessary documentation being held is disposed of under the General Data Protection Regulations.

3.2 Councils should ensure that all employees are aware of the retention/disposal schedule.

4. Document Retention Protocol

4.1 Councils should have in place an adequate system for documenting the activities of their service. This system should take into account the legislative and regulatory environments to which they work.

4.2 Records of each activity should be complete and accurate enough to allow employees and their successors to undertake appropriate actions in the context of their responsibilities to:

- Facilitate an audit or examination of the business by anyone so authorised.
- Protect the legal and other rights of the Council, its clients and any other persons affected by its actions.
- Verify individual consent to record, manage and record disposal of their personal data.
- Provide authenticity of the records so that the evidence derived from them is shown to be credible and authoritative.

4.3 To facilitate this the following principles should be adopted:

- Records created and maintained should be arranged in a record-keeping system that will enable quick and easy retrieval of information under the General Data Protection Regulations
- Documents that are no longer required for operational purposes but need retaining should be placed at the records office.

4.4 The retention schedules in Appendix A: List of Documents for Retention or Disposal provide guidance on the recommended minimum retention periods for specific classes of documents and records. These schedules have been compiled from recommended best practice from the Public Records Office, the Records Management Society of Great Britain and in accordance with relevant legislation.

4.5 Whenever there is a possibility of litigation, the records and information that are likely to be affected should not be amended or disposed of until the threat of litigation has been removed.

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Document Disposal Protocol

4.6 Documents should only be disposed of if reviewed in accordance with the following:

- Is retention required to fulfil statutory or other regulatory requirements?
- Is retention required to meet the operational needs of the service?
- Is retention required to evidence events in the case of dispute?
- Is retention required because the document or record is of historic interest or intrinsic value?

4.7 When documents are scheduled for disposal the method of disposal should be appropriate to the nature and sensitivity of the documents concerned. A record of the disposal will be kept to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations.

4.8 Documents can be disposed of by any of the following methods:

- Non-confidential records: place in waste paper bin for disposal.
- Confidential records or records giving personal information: shred documents.
- Deletion of computer records.
- Transmission of records to an external body such as the County Records Office.

4.9 The following principles should be followed when disposing of records:

- All records containing personal or confidential information should be destroyed at the end of the retention period. Failure to do so could lead to the Council being prosecuted under the General Data Protection Regulations.
- the Freedom of Information Act or cause reputational damage.
- Where computer records are deleted steps should be taken to ensure that data is
  'virtually impossible to retrieve' as advised by the Information Commissioner.
- Where documents are of historical interest it may be appropriate that they are transmitted to the County Records office.
- Back-up copies of documents should also be destroyed (including electronic or photographed documents unless specific provisions exist for their disposal).

4.10 Records should be maintained of appropriate disposals. These records should contain the following information:

- The name of the document destroyed.
- The date the document was destroyed.
- The method of disposal.

5. Data Protection Act 2018 – Obligation to Dispose of Certain Data

5.1 The Data Protection Act 2018 ('Fifth Principle') requires that personal information must not be retained longer than is necessary for the purpose for which it was

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originally obtained. Section 1 of the Data Protection Act defines personal information as:

> Data that relates to a living individual who can be identified:
> a) from the data, or
> b) from those data and other information which is in the possession of, or is likely to come into the possession of the data controller.
> It includes any expression of opinion about the individual and any indication of the intentions of the Council or other person in respect of the individual.

5.2 The Data Protection Act provides an exemption for information about identifiable living individuals that is held for research, statistical or historical purposes to be held indefinitely provided that the specific requirements are met.

5.3 Councils are responsible for ensuring that they comply with the principles of the under the General Data Protection Regulations namely:

- Personal data is processed fairly and lawfully and, in particular, shall not be processed unless specific conditions are met.
- Personal data shall only be obtained for specific purposes and processed in a compatible manner.
- Personal data shall be adequate, relevant, but not excessive.
- Personal data shall be accurate and up to date.
- Personal data shall not be kept for longer than is necessary.
- Personal data shall be processed in accordance with the rights of the data subject.
- Personal data shall be kept secure.

5.4 External storage providers or archivists that are holding Council documents must also comply with the above principles of the General Data Protection Regulations.

6. Scanning of Documents

6.1 In general once a document has been scanned on to a document image system the original becomes redundant. There is no specific legislation covering the format for which local government records are retained following electronic storage, except for those prescribed by HM Revenue and Customs.

6.2 As a general rule hard copies of scanned documents should be retained for three months after scanning.

6.3 Original documents required for VAT and tax purposes should be retained for six years unless a shorter period has been agreed with HM Revenue and Customs.

7. Review of Document Retention

7.1 It is planned to review, update and where appropriate amend this document on a regular basis (at least every three years in accordance with the *Code of Practice on the Management of Records* issued by the Lord Chancellor).

7.2 This document has been compiled from various sources of recommended best practice and with reference to the following documents and publications:

- *Local Council Administration*, Charles Arnold-Baker, 12th edition,

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Chapter 11

- NALC LTN 40 – *Local Councils' Documents and Records*, January 2013
- NALC LTN 37 – *Freedom of Information*, August 2022
- *Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Management of Records* issued under Section 46 of the *Freedom of Information Act 2000*

8. List of Documents

8.1 The full list of the Council's documents and the procedures for retention or disposal can be found in Appendix A: List of Documents for Retention and Disposal. This is updated regularly in accordance with any changes to legal requirements.

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Appendix A: List of Documents for Retention or Disposal

Document	Minimum Retention Period	Reason	Disposal
Minutes	Indefinite	Archive	Original signed paper copies of Council minutes of meetings must be kept indefinitely in safe storage. At regular intervals of not more than 5 years they must be archived and deposited with the County Archive.
Agendas	5 years	Management	Bin (shred confidential waste)
Accident/incident reports	20 years	Potential claims	Confidential waste A list will be kept of those documents disposed of to meet the requirements of the GDPR regulations.
Scales of fees and charges	6 years	Management	Bin
Receipt and payment accounts	Indefinite	Archive	N/A
Receipt books of all kinds	6 years	VAT	Bin
Bank statements including deposit/savings accounts	Last completed audit year	Audit	Confidential waste
Bank paying-in books	Last completed audit year	Audit	Confidential waste
Cheque book stubs	Last completed audit year	Audit	Confidential waste
Quotations and tenders	6 years	Limitation Act 1980 (as amended)	Confidential waste A list will be kept of those documents disposed of to meet the requirements of the GDPR regulations.
Paid invoices	6 years	VAT	Confidential waste
Paid cheques	6 years	Limitation Act 1980 (as amended)	Confidential waste
VAT records	6 years generally but 20 years for VAT on rents	VAT	Confidential waste

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Document	Minimum Retention Period	Reason	Disposal
Petty cash, postage and telephone books	6 years	Tax, VAT, Limitation Act 1980 (as amended)	Confidential waste
Timesheets	Last completed audit year 3 years	Audit (requirement) Personal injury (best practice)	Bin
Wages books/payroll	12 years	Superannuation	Confidential waste
Insurance policies	While valid (but see next two items below)	Management	Bin
Insurance company names and policy numbers	Indefinite	Management	N/A
Certificates for insurance against liability for employees	40 years from date on which insurance commenced or was renewed	The Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Regulations 1998 (SI 2753) Management	Bin
Playground equipment inspection reports	21 years		
Investments	Indefinite	Audit, Management	N/A
Title deeds, leases, agreements, contracts	Indefinite	Audit, Management	N/A
Members' allowances register	6 years	Tax, Limitation Act 1980 (as amended)	Confidential waste. A list will be kept of those documents disposed of to meet the requirements of the GDPR regulations.
Information from other bodies e.g. circulars from county associations, NALC, principal authorities	Retained for as long as it is useful and relevant		

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Document	Minimum Retention Period	Reason	Disposal
Local/historical information	Indefinite – to be securely kept for benefit of the Parish	Councils may acquire records of local interest and accept gifts or records of general and local interest in order to promote the use for such records (defined as materials in written or other form setting out facts or events or otherwise recording information).	N/A
Magazines and journals	Council may wish to keep its own publications For others retain for as long as they are useful and relevant.	The Legal Deposit Libraries Act 2003 (the 2003 Act) relates to Councils' own publications.	Bin if applicable
To ensure records are easily accessible it is necessary to comply with the following: • A list of files stored in cabinets will be kept • Electronic files will be saved using relevant file names	The electronic files will be backed up periodically on a portable hard drive and also in the cloud-based programme supplied by the Council's IT company.	Management	Documentation no longer required will be disposed of, ensuring any confidential documents are destroyed as confidential waste. A list will be kept of those documents disposed of to meet the requirements of the GDPR regulations.
General correspondence	Unless it relates to specific categories outlined in the policy, correspondence, both paper and	Management	Bin (shred confidential waste) A list will be kept of those documents disposed of to meet the requirements of the

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Document	Minimum Retention Period	Reason	Disposal
	electronic, should be kept. Records should be kept for as long as they are needed for reference or accountability purposes, to comply with regulatory requirements or to protect legal and other rights and interests.		GDPR regulations.
Correspondence relating to staff	If related to Audit, see relevant sections above. Should be kept securely and personal data in relation to staff should not be kept for longer than is necessary for the purpose it was held. Likely time limits for tribunal claims between 3–6 months Recommend this period be for 3 years	After an employment relationship has ended, a council may need to retain and access staff records for former staff for the purpose of giving references, payment of tax, national insurance contributions and pensions, and in respect of any related legal claims made against the council.	Confidential waste A list will be kept of those documents disposed of to meet the requirements of the GDPR regulations.
Documents from legal matters, negligence and other torts Most legal proceedings are governed by the Limitation Act 1980 (as amended). The 1980 Act provides that legal claims may not be commenced after a specified period. Where the limitation periods are longer than other periods specified the documentation should be kept for the longer period specified. Some types of legal proceedings may fall within two or more categories. If in doubt, keep for the longest of the three limitation periods.			
Negligence	6 years		Confidential waste. A list will be kept of those documents disposed of to meet the requirements of the GDPR regulations.

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Document	Minimum Retention Period	Reason	Disposal
Defamation	1 year		Confidential waste. A list will be kept of those documents disposed of to meet the requirements of the GDPR regulations.
Contract	6 years		Confidential waste. A list will be kept of those documents disposed of to meet the requirements of the GDPR regulations.
Leases	12 years		Confidential waste.
Sums recoverable by statute	6 years		Confidential waste.
Personal injury	3 years		Confidential waste.
To recover land	12 years		Confidential waste.
Rent	6 years		Confidential waste.
Breach of trust	None		Confidential waste.
Trust deeds	Indefinite		N/A
For Halls and Recreation Grounds			
• Application to hire • Invoices • Record of tickets issued	6 years	VAT	Confidential waste A list will be kept of those documents disposed of to meet the requirements of the GDPR regulations.
Lettings diaries	Electronic files linked to accounts	VAT	N/A
Terms and Conditions	6 years	Management	Bin
Event Monitoring Forms	6 years unless required for claims, insurance or legal purposes	Management	Bin. A list will be kept of those documents disposed of to meet the requirements of the GDPR regulations.
For Burial Grounds			

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Document	Minimum Retention Period	Reason	Disposal
• Register of fees collected • Register of burials • Register of purchased graves • Register/plan of grave spaces • Register of memorials • Applications for interment • Applications for right to erect memorials • Disposal certificates • Copy certificates of grant of exclusive right of burial	Indefinite	Archives, Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 (SI 204)	N/A
Planning Papers			
Applications and Appeals and Trees	Papers not held as Wealden District Council uses online Planning system		
Local Development Plans	Retained as long as in force	Reference	Bin
Local Plans	Retained as long as in force	Reference	Bin
Town/Neighbourhood Plans	Indefinite – final adopted plans	Historical purposes	N/A

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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION POLICY

The Freedom of Information Act (2000) came into force in January 2005. The Act applies to all public authorities, including parish councils.

Under the Act any individual is able to make a request for information, except in certain specific cases where the 'exceptions' to the duty to disclose prevail.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Fletching Parish Council complies fully with its legal duties and adheres to its aspiration to be an open and transparent organisation.

The Council will ensure that it complies with the Act by:

- Making as much information available as possible through the 'model publication scheme' that accompanies this policy and sets out:
    - The classes of information published, or intended to be published
    - The manner in which publication is, or is intended, to be made
    - Whether the information is available free of charge or if payment is required (the parish council reserves the right to waive the charges if deemed appropriate)
- Aiming to comply with the 20 working day deadline for responding to a request
- Using the 'exemptions' to the Act – the reasons not to give information out – as a last resort and implementing the public interest test to decide whether information subject to an 'exception' can be released in response to an individual's request.

The Council is not obliged to respond to vexatious or repeated requests for information.

Individual enquiries related to the Act can be made to the Information Commissioner. The Commissioner's website also provides helpful guidance and information for the public:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Information line: 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545745
Fax: 01625 524510
Email: casework@ico.org.uk / **Website:** http://www.ico.org.uk/

Reviewed at a meeting of Fletching Parish Council on 10 June 2024

FLETCHING PARISH COUNCIL

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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION PUBLICATION SCHEME
Information available from Fletching Parish Council under the model publication scheme

Class 1 - Who we are and what we do (Organisational information, structures, locations and contacts) This will be current information only	**How the information can be obtained**	**Cost**
Who's who on the Council and its Committees	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page
Contact details for Parish Clerk and Council members (N.B. Council members can also be contacted via the Parish Clerk)	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page
Location of main Council office and accessibility details	No offices / no information	
Staffing structure	None / no information	
Class 2 – What we spend and how we spend it (Financial information relating to projected and actual income and expenditure, procurement, financial audit) Current financial year as a minimum	**How the information can be obtained**	**Cost**
Annual return form and report by auditor	Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	10p/page
Finalised budget	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page
Precept	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page
Financial Regulations	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page
Grants given and received	Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	10p/page
List of current contracts awarded and value of contract	Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	10p/page
Members' allowances and expenses	Electronic – Contact Clerk Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page

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Class 3 – What our priorities are and how we are doing (Strategies and plans, performance indicators, audits, inspections and reviews)	**How the information can be obtained**	**Cost**
Annual Report to Parish or Community Meeting (current and previous year as a minimum)	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page
Local charters drawn up in accordance with Government guidelines	None	
Class 4 – How we make decisions (Decision making processes and records of decisions) Current and previous council year as a minimum	**How the information can be obtained**	**Cost**
Timetable of meetings (Council, any committee/sub-committee meetings and parish meetings)	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page
Agendas of meetings (as above)	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Noticeboard Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free Free 10p/page
Minutes of meetings (as above) – NB this will exclude information that is properly regarded as confidential.	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Noticeboard Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free Free 10p/page
Reports presented to council meetings – NB this will exclude information that is properly regarded as confidential.	Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	10p/page
Responses to consultation papers	Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	10p/page
Responses to planning applications – recorded in minutes	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page
Bye-laws	None / No information	

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Class 5 – Our policies and procedures (Current written protocols, policies and procedures for delivering our services and responsibilities) Current information only	**How the information can be obtained**	**Cost**
Policies and procedures for the conduct of council business (if applicable): Standing orders Committee and sub-committee terms of reference Delegated authority in respect of officers Policy Statements Code of Conduct	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page
Policies and procedures for the provision of services: Grant awarding policy Freedom of Information Policy Complaints Policy and Procedure	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page
Policies and procedures for the employment of staff: For recruitment and employment policies please contact the Clerk	Electronic – Contact Clerk Hard Copy - Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page
Records management policies (records retention, destruction and archive)	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page
Data Protection - Registered with Information Commissioners Office	Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	10p/page
Schedule of charges for the publication of information – see cost column	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page

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Class 6 – Lists and Registers Currently maintained lists and registers only – some information may only be available by inspection	**How the information can be obtained**	**Cost**
Any publicly available register or list (if any are held this should be publicised; in most circumstances existing access provisions will suffice)	Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	10p/page
Asset and Document Register	Electronic – Contact Clerk Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page
Register of members' interests	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page
Register of gifts and hospitality	Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	10p/page
Class 7 – The services we offer (Information about the services the Parish Council offers, if applicable) Current information only – some information may only be available by inspection	**How the information can be obtained**	**Cost**
Allotments	Not applicable	
Burial grounds and closed churchyards	Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	10p/page
Community centres and village halls	Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	10p/page
Parks, playing fields and recreational facilities	Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	10p/page
Seating, litter bins, clocks, memorials and lighting	Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	10p/page
Bus shelters	Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	10p/page
Markets	Not applicable	
Public conveniences	Not applicable	
Agency agreements	Not applicable	
A summary of services for which the council is entitled to recover a fee, together with those fees (e.g. burial fees)	Website – www.fletching-pc.org Hard Copy – Contact Clerk	Free 10p/page

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PAY POLICY

1. Introduction

1.1 Fletching Parish Council actively promotes equal opportunities in employment and welcomes diversity within its workforce. The Council is committed to ensuring a clear and fair pay policy for its staff members. This policy supports those principals in explaining how pay is calculated, reviewed and paid to staff.

2. Legislation

2.1 The relevant legislation concerning equal pay is found within the Equal Pay Act 1970, the Equal Pay (Amendment) Regulations 1983 and the Pensions Act 2011.

2.2 It is included in other United Kingdom legislation, European Community Law, the EU Directive on Fixed Term Work and resultant UK regulations. The legislation applies to all workers or employees regardless of full or part-time status, casual or temporary contract or length of service or any other consideration.

3. Pay Scales

3.1 To comply with the legislation, the council will operate a transparent pay system, based on objective criteria and publish pay details of staff in line with the requirements of the Local Government Transparency Code 2015.

3.2 All staff members pay scales will be determined by their grading, which will align to the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) published pay scales.

3.3 Staff members will be appointed to either a defined salary scale point, or within a defined salary scale published for their role.

3.4 The starting salary on appointment will normally be at the lower end of the salary scale, subject to negotiation based on the appointee’s level of relevant knowledge and experience.

3.5 One salary point will be added to a staff members salary, up to a maximum of four points, for success in obtaining or already holding any of the following relevant qualifications:

- The Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA)
- The Certificate of Higher Education in Community Engagement and Governance – Level 1 or equivalent qualification previously awarded by the University of Gloucestershire
- The Diploma in Higher Education in Community Engagement and Governance or equivalent qualification previously awarded by the University of Gloucestershire
- BA (Hons) degree in Community Engagement and Governance or equivalent qualification previously awarded by the University of Gloucestershire

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4. Pay Reviews

4.1 Each staff member will receive an annual appraisal, which will include a review of their salary.

4.2 Subject to satisfactory performance, staff members appointed within a scale will progress automatically through the salary scale by annual increments until they reach the maximum salary in the range.

4.3 Increments will be payable on the 1st April. The council may withhold an increment if it is considered that performance fell below the expected level following an annual appraisal, or award additional increments for exemplary performance.

4.4 Progression for staff members appointed on a single point salary will depend on their performance and will be subject to agreement by Fletching Parish Council. Increments for staff members on a single point salary will be payable on a date to be agreed by Fletching Parish Council.

5. Salary payments

5.1 Staff members are paid in arrears and receive payment by bank transfer on the 27th of each month, or if the 27th is a weekend or bank holiday, the previous working day.

5.2 In December, pay day will be moved forwards to the 21st of the month, or if the 21st is a weekend or bank holiday, the previous working day. In this instance, overtime claims up to and including the 14th of December will be paid.

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PLANNING PROTOCOL

This protocol should be used in conjunction with the current Code of Conduct and the Standing Orders of Fletching Parish Council.

The role of Parish Councils as a Statutory Consultee for Planning Applications

Fletching Parish Council is a statutory consultee of Wealden District Council and as such is asked to comment on planning applications during the consultation period. Fletching Parish Council cannot determine applications, but any views expressed by the Parish Council will be taken into account by the Planning Authority (Wealden District Council), before a decision is made, providing the points are relevant to the determination of the planning application.

The final decision is made by the Planning Authority and **NOT** the Parish Council.

Fletching Parish Council will only comment on what are known as 'material planning considerations'

Fletching Parish Council will provide comments on all applications it is consulted on (including those submitted by current parish councillors) which are relevant and appropriate with a clear recommendation whether it supports, objects or remains neutral.

Fletching Parish Council Planning Working Group

A Planning Working Group has been established for the review of planning applications and for agreeing comments on behalf of the Council when a deadline for comments falls outside of the date for the ordinary meeting of the Parish Council and when an extension of time cannot be agreed with Wealden District Council.

Members of the planning working group are listed on the Fletching Parish Council website and membership is reviewed yearly at the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council.

Receipt of a Planning Application

Planning application notices are received electronically from Wealden District Council by the Clerk and contain hyperlinks to full documentation held on the District Authority website.

The Clerk is responsible for requesting extensions to deadlines where appropriate.

Notices are emailed to all Fletching Parish Council Members as soon as possible after receipt.

Extra-ordinary meetings of the Parish Council will be scheduled, as and when required, to discuss applications where deadlines for comments fall outside of ordinary Parish Council meetings timetable and comments cannot be delegated to Councillors on the Planning Working Group.

Site Visits

If Members of Fletching Parish Council wish to make a site visit, they can do so, but only using public vantage points (land with public access, public highways, or rights of way).

Members of the Parish Council have no special rights of entry to private land without the owner's consent.

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If members of the Fletching Parish Council Planning Working Group agree that access to the site is beneficial to the consideration of the application, this must be done with the owner's consent and the Clerk informed.

Such arranged site visits should be for the sole purpose of understanding the application proposals and their relationship to the wider environment.

Site visits should only be arranged when the Planning Working Group considers it appropriate or necessary for the understanding of the application proposals.

All Councillors must keep an open mind when considering applications.

Those making a site visit should endeavour to limit its duration to no more than 20 minutes.

Communication with the Applicant

Site visits will be co-ordinated by one councillor from the Planning Working Group.

Applicants must be advised that site visits are optional for the Parish Councillors.

Applicants must be advised that Members attending a site visit are not able to make any decisions and that Fletching Parish Council is only a consultee in the planning process.

Applicants must be advised of the date and time of the Parish Council meeting at which their planning application will be discussed. Applicants and agents are welcome to attend meetings.

If an applicant refuses to allow a site visit, Members may view the site from the public highway or other public land but must not trespass on private land. The application will still be discussed and voted upon at a Parish Council meeting.

Attending a Site Visit

A minimum of 2 Members must attend a site meeting

Up to a maximum of 4 Members may attend a site visit, although more Members may attend if a major application.

Members must ensure they are familiar with the relevant planning application before attending a site visit.

All Members should attend a site visit at the same time except in exceptional circumstances and not cause the applicant inconvenience.

Members deemed to have a personal or pecuniary interest in the application should not attend a site visit. Other Members of the Parish Council can be appointed to attend a site visit in their place, if appropriate.

Members should not attend a site visit with a pre-determined view of the application.

Members are permitted to ask questions about the planning application in question but cannot discuss any other matters or ask to view any other part of the property which is not in the application site.

Members should make no comments to indicate support or otherwise for the application.

Commenting on Applications

The Planning Working Group will prepare its recommended comments in advance of the Parish Council meeting. These will be sent to the Clerk in writing in advance of the meeting for circulation to the full council.

The comments and decision of the full council will be agreed at ordinary meetings of Fletching Parish Council by vote.

If the deadline for comments prevents comments from being agreed at an ordinary meeting, an extra-ordinary meeting may be called, or comments can be delegated to councillors who are members of the Planning Working Group.

Where comments and decisions are delegated, they should be agreed by a majority of the members of the Planning Working Group and sent to the Clerk in writing in advance of the Parish Council meeting and the due date for submission to Wealden.

In the event that the Planning Working Group is not able to agree comments and a decision, the Clerk will be so advised. The Planning Working Group with either call an extra-ordinary meeting to agree comments or a neutral response will be submitted to Wealden DC.

Comments should be recorded and submitted using one of the following formats:

- No objection or support or no comments (neutral)
- Support with reasons set out as clearly as possible (positive)
- Object with reasons set out as clearly as possible (negative)

The Parish Council is under obligation to give reasons for its decisions.

Declarations of Interest

A Register of Interests is held by Wealden District Council, where disclosable pecuniary interests are recorded, following election or appointment.

Where a planning matter occurs, which is related to previously registered, or other personal, prejudicial or disclosable pecuniary interest, it should be declared by the councillor at the meeting where it is being discussed.

Following such declaration, the councillor should play no part in the discussion, debate or vote unless it is not considered to be prejudicial by the councillor and full council. The councillor may leave the meeting whilst the matter is being discussed or if the code of conduct permits, remain in the room.

If the interest is minor or has only a tenuous link to the matter under discussion, the councillor should raise the matter with the Clerk and seek guidance on whether it is sufficient to be declared and affect participation.

Planning Enforcement

Parish Councils do not have any formal statutory role in planning enforcement.

However, members of Fletching Parish Council can report information if they feel there has been development without the necessary permissions.

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If a councillor feels there is a matter to be reported to Wealden District Council Planning Enforcement, this should be brought to the attention of the full council at an ordinary meeting.

In the event that the full council decides that the matter should be referred to Wealden DC then reasonable measures will be taken to notify the land-owner that the matter has been so referred.

If the matter is considered urgent, it should be reported to the Clerk with a request to call for an extra-ordinary meeting made in accordance with the Fletching Parish Council Standing Orders.

Councillors should not enter a site under investigation nor confront persons alleged to be in breach of planning control, or their contractors.

Request for comments or a site visit prior to an application being submitted to Wealden District Council

Councillors will not visit a site or make any comments about a proposed application site until a formal application has been received by the Planning Authority and the Parish Council has been consulted officially.

Applicants are advised to contact Wealden District Council, as the Planning Authority, for pre-application advice if they want information before submitting an application.

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Fletching Burial Ground - Applications Received

The following applications have been received:

Grant of Burial Rights

Applicant	Burial Plot / Cremated Remains Plot	Plot No	Parishioner / Non- Parishioner
Andrew Johnson	Burial	957	Parishioner

Notice of Interment

Deceased	Plot No	Date	Burial / Cremated Remains	Parishioner / Non-Parishioner
Rosemary Johnson	957	25/06/24	Burial	Parishioner

Consent to erect a monument (proposed design attached)

Applicant	Plot No	Name of person interred in plot	First inscription / 2nd inscription	Parishioner / Non-Parishioner

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Proposed FPC Representations to Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Ref: APP/C1435/W/24/3340301

Former Equestrian Manège (Former Sand School) At Little Barkham Farm, Goldbridge Road, Piltdown, TN22 3XL

- The appeal is made under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
- The appeal is made by Mr Stuart & Mrs Philomena Albone against the decision of Wealden District Council.
- The application Ref WD/2023/3137/PIP, dated 19 December 2023, was refused by notice dated 12 February 2024.
- The development proposed is erection of detached three-bedroom single-storey dwelling with car port and associated works.

Preliminary Matters

1. This appeal concerns the fourth recent proposal for residential development to the rear of Little Barkham Farmhouse. Conversion of a stable building into a dwelling was permitted by permission reference WD/2019/1088/F.
2. A proposal for residential development on the Lower Field and a further one on the Upper Field were both dismissed on appeal on 23 August 2023[1].
3. The Parish Council notes that the original sand school was formed out of an existing paddock and was subject to a personal planning permission for private use (WD/1999/0689/F) and thus the intention was that the sand school revert to the paddock on sale of the property. Thus it does not, and cannot, form curtilage of any permanent structure. So it follows that the land does not constitute PDL in accordance with the NPPF definition. Furthermore, as the original planning permission was personal, the former sand school should be considered to be expected to revert to its previous paddock use.
4. There is a shed standing adjoining the proposed car port. As far as the Parish Council is aware, this shed does not have the benefit of planning permission. A recent shed has also been erected on the west side of the Upper Field which also does not have planning permission.
5. An engineering operation of creating spoil heaps to the southeast of the appeal site has been undertaken and there does not appear to have been any planning permission granted for these works.

Main Issues

6. The main issue in relation to this appeal is whether the site is a suitable location for a residential development having regard to local and national policy.

[1] APP/C1435/W/22/3297916, APP/C1435/W/22/3297438 – attached as Appendix A

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7. In addition, the other main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area including on the setting of Little Barkham Farmhouse, a Grade II listed building.

Suitability of Location

8. The appellant's case is that the short-term lack of a 5 year housing supply "trumps" the assessment of long-term sustainability of spatial planning and justifies abandoning the long established spatial hierarchy of development patterns across the district. The appellant's approach is fundamentally misconceived for the following reasons:-
9. The Council's hierarchy is defined precisely because it is a more sustainable approach for the distribution of development than an ad hoc distribution.
10. The critical reduction of carbon depends, in part, upon maintaining an overarching strategy of careful long-term distribution of housing to reinforce long-term ways of sustainable living.
11. If this were not true, then any housing would be justified anywhere subject to assessment of short term planning effects.
12. The availability of a few facilities in the hamlet and a bus route on a major road do not amount to the infrastructure necessary for an enlarged sustainable settlement.
13. Piltdown is clearly not a sustainable location for developing a long-term enlarged settlement – if it were, then this potential would already have been reflected in the established hierarchy.
14. The Council's strategy for housing growth is set out under Saved Policies GD2 and DC17 of the Wealden Local Plan 1998 (WLP). These guide new housing development to locations within the defined settlements and apply a policy of restraint outside development boundaries unless the proposal conforms with other policies in the Plan. The appeal site is located adjoining the hamlet of Piltdown outside any defined development boundary. It would therefore conflict with these strategic spatial planning policies.
15. The Core Strategy Local Plan sets out a structure of strategic spatial planning policies designed to secure sustainable development.
16. Policy WCS4 of the Core Strategy Local Plan 2013 (CSLP), which post-dates the WLP, identifies Strategic Development Areas. In this regard, the scheme's location would be at odds with the spatial strategy of the development plan taken as a whole.
17. Policy WCS6 of the CSLP relates to the Rural Areas Strategy for four categories of rural settlements. The scattered hamlet of Piltdown is not one of the settlement types (Service Centres, Local Service Centres and Neighbourhood Centres) referred to in the policy. No housing is allocated at Piltdown. This policy is directly relevant to the application scheme. Piltdown lacks the adequate facilities to be found within the designated settlements. For example, Tesco in Uckfield is 5.4 miles away. Sainsbury in Haywards Heath is 9.3 miles away. Access is primarily by private car mode. The proposed development makes provision for private cars and carport garaging, recognising that the primary mode of transport will be by private cars. East Sussex County Council as Highway Authority has previously reported

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that the location is not particularly well connected to public transport. There is no train station within an acceptable walking distance[2].

18. The District Council concluded in respect of the Lower Field application that "Para. 79 of the NPPF states that to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Policy SPO7 of the CSLP seeks to reduce the need for travel by car and make it easier to make trips on foot, by bike or by public transport. It is recognised that there are some food shops, a public house and garage on or close to the A272 through Piltdown. There is a bus service providing links to Haywards Heath and Uckfield. However, the application site would be detached from these shops and other facilities with a lengthy uphill walk to the A272. It is considered that the route along this access and then the A272 would be unlikely to appeal after dark or during inclement weather. The nearest primary school, is beyond walking distance, as are medical services in neighbouring settlements. Therefore, although there are some facilities and services within the locality the site is quite detached from the majority of shops and other facilities and incoming residents of the proposed dwellings would need to travel further afield to access most employment, leisure and secondary education opportunities. The nearest large settlement of Uckfield is approximately 3miles distant and Haywards Heath and Crowborough approximately 9 miles. It is considered that future occupants would be reliant on the private car to access most day-to-day goods and services, which is one of the least sustainable modes of transport."

19. The hamlet of Piltdown cannot be regarded, having regard to up to date national and local policies, as a sustainable location for development as a matter of principle. Thus, the proposal would conflict with these policies.

20. The Inspector considering the recent appeal in respect of the Upper Field concluded[3] unequivocally that the Piltdown as a location and Little Barkham Farm in particular do not represent a suitable location for residential development, stating *"I therefore conclude that Upper Field is not a suitable location for new housing. It would be contrary to the Council's spatial strategy and policies for the same reasons that apply to Lower Field."*

21. There has been no material change of spatial facts since that decision was made a few months ago. Insofar as emerging policy is concerned, consultation on the Regulation 18 Wealden Draft Local Plan has recently closed.

22. Some draft policies have been the subject of objection and some have not. Thus those that have not, are of some limited weight.

23. Draft Policy SS1[4] has limited weight and provides that development shall be permitted within identified settlement boundaries. In the remainder of the District, the land is treated as countryside and shall be protected. Piltdown is outside any such development boundary and thus is in protected countryside. Indeed the hamlet is so small that it is not identified at all in the draft Settlement Hierarchy[5].

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[2] ESCC letter of representation dated 14th September 2021

[3] DL paragraphs 5 to 12

[4] Draft Wealden Local Plan https://consult.wealden.gov.uk/kpse/event/2726CE98-03BA-4520-8558-361BAA45F784/section/5934701

[5] DWLP Table 3

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24. Draft Policy SS1 demonstrates the principles of settlement boundaries are being carried forward into the emerging Wealden Draft Local Plan.
25. The appellant has argued that the sand school constitutes previously developed land (PDL). The Parish Council considers (and the District Council agrees) that this is an incorrect analysis and application of the definition in the NPPF (Annex 2). The NPPF definition states that the PDL must contain a permanent structure (which the application site does not as stated in paragraph 9.5 of the Design and Planning Statement) or be in the curtilage of a permanent structure (which the application site is not).
26. Even if the application site were to be considered to be PDL, that consideration would not outweigh the overall conclusion as to the unsuitability of the location for residential development.
27. Thus the proposal would also be in conflict with Saved Policies EN8 and EN27 of the Local Plan and Policies SPO1 and SPO13 of the Core Strategy and Draft Policy SS1 of the Wealden Draft Local Plan.
28. As is stated in Reason 1 of the letter of refusal, the appeal site occupies an unsustainable rural location outside a development boundary where new housing is resisted and where there is very limited access to local and day-to-day services other than by private car. The provision of one dwelling would not significantly or demonstrably outweigh this harm. The site does not therefore constitute a sustainable location for housing contrary to Policies GD2, EN1 and DC17 of Wealden Local Plan 1998; policies SPO7, SPO14 and WCS6 of Wealden Core Strategy 2013; and paragraphs 83, 108, 114 and 116 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Character and Appearance

29. The Framework promotes well designed places[6].
30. The semi-rural character of the hamlet of Piltdown is characterised by narrow bands of ribbon development, generally of a single residential plot depth and width along Goldbridge Road and the other small roads and lanes nearby, which in turn are surrounded by fields. The appeal site comprises part of one open field, lying beyond the band of existing and well established roadside development.
31. Due to its agricultural character and location beyond the edge of the narrow band of development lining Goldbridge Road, the site of the proposed housing lies within the distinctive rural hinterland around the hamlet.
32. The proposed dwelling would be outside the existing figure ground and historic pattern of development of Piltdown fronting Goldbridge Road.
33. The appeal site is a back land site well beyond the characteristic building line of the hamlet defined by dwellings on the road frontage with fields and open land to the rear. The proposal would fail to protect, maintain, enhance and/or reinforce the key characteristics and qualities of landscape character and landscape components of this part of the rural hamlet of Piltdown. It would harm the well-established settlement pattern, settlement character, its setting and identity. In consequence, it conflicts with Draft Policy NE6.

[6] NPPF Section 12

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34. Whilst, historically, there has been minor single plot depth infill on the road frontage and some conversions of existing buildings, this proposed development is materially different and can be demonstrably distinguished from the other permissions granted on the current facts and on the basis of the application of current policy, practice and in the light of the up-to-date planning appeal decisions.
35. The proposal would not accord with the Framework[7], as the proposed development would not function well nor add to the overall quality of the area, nor would it be visually attractive as a result of poor layout and lack of integration with existing form and pattern of historic development. Accordingly, it would be significantly and demonstrably harmful to local character and history and to the surrounding built environment and landscape setting.
36. Paragraph 174 of the Framework sets out that Planning policies and decisions should contribute to, and enhance, the natural and local environment by: recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland. Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty.
37. The development, as proposed, would be neither sensitive to, nor appropriate for, this semi-rural location in the countryside and would cause significant and demonstrable harm.
38. The proposal would conflict with Policy EN8 of the WLP which relates to development within the Low Weald in that it would fail to conserve the low rolling agricultural character of this part of the landscape and the local setting of the hamlet.
39. In considering the appeal in respect of the Upper Field of which the subject appeal site in spatial terms forms a part, the Inspector concluded that that proposal would harm the character of this semi-rural area[8]. The subject appeal proposal would similarly consolidate and intensify the looser and more dispersed pattern of built development in the locality[9]. The proposal would similarly introduce hardstanding, boundary treatments, parking spaces and domestic paraphernalia and a car port. Any sense of the site being countryside would be displaced.
40. Thus, the appeal proposal would harm the character and appearance of this semi-rural area. It would conflict with Saved Policies EN27 of the Local Plan and Policy SPO13 of the Core Strategy.
41. As stated in Reason 2 of the letter of refusal, the proposed development and related residential use would have a harmful urbanising impact on the rural location contrary to policies EN1 and EN27 of Wealden Local Plan 1998; SPO1, SPO13 and WCS14 of Wealden Core Strategy 2013; and paragraphs 131, 135 and 182 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

[7] NPPF para 130
[8] Dl paras 18 to 24
[9] DL para 18

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Listed Buildings

42. Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the decision maker, in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest.

43. Little Barkham Farmhouse, listed Grade II, is situated adjoining the application site to the north. The existing field system, from which the former sand school has been fenced, forms an integral part of the setting of the listed building and thus is material in defining the designated heritage asset's architectural and historic interest and its significance.

44. Consequently, the significance of the designated heritage asset would be adversely affected by the proposed development. No clear nor convincing justification for this harm has been made.

45. The Inspector also drew attention of the sensitivity of this location as an important element of the rural hinterland of the Grade II listed farmstead, noting the historic relationship between the house and the agricultural activities of the surrounding open fields[10] of which the sand school is clearly a part. It is no more than a small area of the Upper Field on which sand has been spread and a simple field fence erected around it.

46. The Inspector noted the cluster of buildings and the gaps between them. Upper Field and thus the sand school is the only remaining connection between the farmhouse and the surrounding rural landscape[11].

47. Thus the Inspector concluded that the insertion of development where there was no previous evidence of agricultural buildings would harm the setting of the listed buildings[12], albeit that the harm would be less then substantial. In the subject appeal, the public benefit of one bungalow does not outweigh that same nature of harm.

Other Considerations

48. It appears that the Council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. The Council states that it has 3.83 years supply.

49. The housing shortfall is significant. As such, the weight to be given to the conflict with the relevant housing supply policies of the WLP and CSLP is significantly reduced due to this shortfall. Given that the Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land, in accordance with paragraph 11 of the Framework, relevant policies for the supply of housing, as opposed to spatial hierarchy of settlements and location, should not be considered up to date. This matter is considered further in the Planning Balance.

50. The previous appeals decision letter notes that the housing supply stood at 3.66 years and thus paragraph 11 d) of the NPPF is engaged. Now the supply figure stands at 3.83, an improvement. Nonetheless the Inspector concluded that there is nothing in the Framework to indicate that the definition of settlement boundaries is no longer a suitable policy to direct

[10] DL para 21
[11] DL para 21
[12] DL para 22

development towards the most appropriate locations having regard to the objectives of the development plan. The proposal is not close to any development defined by a settlement boundary. There are no policies in the development plan that offer support for this appeal proposal either[13]. Thus the subject proposal would also conflict with the development plan as a whole.

Planning Balance

51. The Council cannot demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites. Consequently, paragraph 11 d) of the Framework is engaged.

52. Whilst the specific housing supply polices of the WLP cannot be regarded as up to date, the application site is not located within any designated settlement relevant to the adopted spatial planning policies for the District and, having regard also to the Framework, therefore does not constitute a sustainable location as a matter of principle.

53. The proposal would result in harm to the character, and well-established pattern of historic ribbon development of Piltdown. The proposal would result in poor layout and a lack of integration with the existing form and pattern of development. The proposal would not constitute a suitable location for the proposed development.

54. The proposal would fail to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and to conserve and enhance landscape and scenic beauty.

55. Notwithstanding the considerable shortfall in housing land supply, the weight to be given to the conflict with the Framework's principles of sustainable development, and the development plan, is substantial and the cumulative harm, which the proposed development would cause, is significant and demonstrable.

56. Set against this harm, the social and economic benefits are of minor significance and of limited weight.

57. Overall, the proposed development would result in substantial harm which would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the minor benefits of the proposal when considered against the up-to-date part of the development plan, other than housing supply, and the Framework taken as a whole. It would also be in conflict with clear direction of emerging Wealden Local Plan policy.

58. Consequently, the proposal would not represent sustainable development as defined in the Framework and material considerations indicate that planning permission for the proposed development should be refused.

59. It has been established that future occupants would be heavily reliant on the private car. The subject appeal proposal would make an even lower contribution to the vitality of the rural community than the minimal contribution found in respect of the Upper Field proposal.[14]

60. The proposal would not meet the statutory duty in respect of the listed building. The subject appeal proposal would harm the setting of the Little Barkham Farmhouse which is a matter of considerable weight and importance and counts against the scheme. The siting, design

[13] DL para 27
[14] DL para 31

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and layout would also harmfully consolidate and intensify built development in this semi-rural area. This would result in permanent harm to the local environment, conflicting with the Framework's objectives of promoting good design and ensuring that development respects its context[15].

61. Collectively these adverse impacts of the subject proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the Framework. Consequently, the presumption of sustainable development does not apply.

Conclusion

62. The proposal is contrary to the development plan and emerging development plan policy. There are no other considerations, including the Framework, which outweigh this finding.

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[15] cf DL para 32