



DRAFT Minutes of the Annual Parish Council Meeting and Annual Parish Meeting held at 7pm on Monday 19th May 2025

<p>Present: Cllr Deborah Harwood - Chairman (DH); Cllr Tony Marshall (TM); Cllr Jeremy Rigby (JR); Cllr Mark Rawlings-Smith; Cllr Jasmine Hathaway, Cllr Jeremy Hunt (JH WSCC); Cllr Henry Potter (HP CDC) 60 members of the public also attended.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 1 – Apologies for Absence/Resignations – GZ, KN, PG Peter Gattrell has resigned and DH thanked him for his contribution to the parish council.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 2 – Election of Chairman – It was proposed that Deborah Harwood be elected as Chairman, this was seconded by JR and all councillors agreed.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 3 – Declaration of Interests/ Dispensation Requests - There were no declarations of interest or dispensation requests.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 4 - Minutes of the last Parish Council Meeting – to approve as a correct record the Minutes of the Annual Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 17th March 2025. It was Resolved that that the minutes were correct, all councillors agreed, DH signed the minutes.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 5 – Public Open Forum Louise Barnetson from Western Sussex River Trust introduced herself and her role. She acknowledged that Singleton and Charlton Parish are very engaged with Kate Whitton in improving the health of the River Lavant. She is keen to give a presentation to any community groups. An MOP enquired about the cutting of hedges in the parish, it was explained that Goodwood had intended to coppice the hedge between Charlton and Singleton, however, it was not achieved during the cutting season, they hope to re-visit this project in the autumn. It is unknown whether they will cut along Knights Hill, which could be done before the autumn if there is a safety issue.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 6 – Finance Report Balance at year end 31/03/25 - £6,470.89 of which £1,533.57 held in the reserves. Reserves – Playground Maintenance – £392.68, School Parking Project - £84.86, General Maintenance £1,056.03, Balance in Current Account (14/05/25) - £20,344.46 Balance in Savings Account (14/05/25) - £7,203.70 2025/26 Reserves to date: Playground Maintenance – £2,392.68, School Parking Project - £84.86, General Maintenance £1,517.71, Events £800.00 (£500 2024/25 & £300 2025/26. Funds Received since 14/05/25 – Precept £15,299.50. VAT Reclaim £2,272.16. CDC Grant for VE80 £247.50, this has been used to purchase the Rusty Soldier.</p> <p>Annual Audit (a) the Annual Governance Statement (Section 1) was approved by all councillors. (b) the Annual Accounting Statement (Section 2) was approved by all councillors.</p>	
<p>ANNUAL PARISH MEETING</p>	

<p>Agenda Item 1 - Chairman's Annual Report</p> <p>Firstly, a huge thank you to you all for attending. I am sorry to start the meeting with sad news, and that is that Steve Corbett the Chairman of West Dean Parish Council and a huge part in the Weald and Downland Museum has sadly died. I would like to take this opportunity of sending our condolences to his wife and family. We have had a busy year with the CHS project finally coming to fruition. I would like to thank Councillors old and new and parishioners who have worked so hard to deliver this project for the parish. Also, the incredible work by councillors getting Southern Water to finally sort the pipework through the valley. It has been an enormous project and they have now finished all the work in Charlton, through the meadow and are now in Singleton. Southern Water have worked tirelessly to do the work and as far as I am aware they have been courteous and have always dealt with any parishioners concerns promptly. I would also like to thank our MP Andrew Griffith for supporting the parish council throughout this project.</p> <p>There have been no great planning issues except for the oil field and this is on-going. As of today, I can report that they have put in an amended planning application and we have agreed to go back with our original response as none of our points have as yet been answered. We will continue to work hard on this and hope that the South Downs National Park will be able to support us.</p> <p>After a great year we need to celebrate and the Village BBQ will be on Saturday June 28th at the village hall and the leys. It is free to all parishioners and we look forward to welcoming everyone for a great party.</p> <p>I would finally like to just say a huge thank you to all the councillors for their incredible hard work. As volunteers they give up their time to support and improve our community. I would also like to thank Jeremy Hunt and Henry Potter for all their support. Major and I mean major thanks goes to Viv Nuttall our clerk who without I would not be able to do my job. She keeps us all in order and is hugely efficient and a joy to work with.</p> <p>I believe we are in robust form as a council and look forward to the coming year. Please remember that if there is anything that you are concerned about or would like improved in the parish then please do contact us.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 2 – Mr Jeremy Hunt, Chichester North Division - WSCC</p> <p>So much has happened over the last year it would take a lengthy report to cover everything. My bi-monthly reports over the year cover many key County Council activities, so I won't report them all here. I hope that you are able to access my reports through the PC website. You might be interested to know that the County Council has a gross spend on £2.2bn and provides over 300 services, such as social care, libraries, West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, highways, libraries, registration services, disposing of your waste, public health and education and schools, to name but a few key services. Please find below an update on three key areas.</p> <p>Obviously the key political change in the last year was the election of a new Labour government last July. As far as the County Council is concerned this has brought about some challenges, not least is the increase in NI - and the lowering of the threshold where NI payment begins. This, together with the above inflation increase in the minimum wage, will push up the already challenging costs of social care - in both adults and Childrens services - as many of our providers struggle with these unexpected increases. Our social care budget is by far our largest spend and accounts for nearly 70% of our spend on services. The huge pressures on the social care budget is not just a WS issue, but is a national one, and unless government acts soon, many councils - even well run ones - could well be in trouble.</p>	

Unfortunately, although the government talks a lot about promoting growth, they seem to put in place policies that stifle growth. Also, very relevant to WS, are the new taxes they have introduced on farmers and small businesses. Both these industries are vitally important to the economy of WS, providing employment which is so vital for our residents, the sustainability of our communities and the sustainability of our countryside. In fact at recent County Council Meetings a number of motions have been put forward by the Conservative Group, including one supporting our farmers and calling on the government to look again at their new tax policies on farmers and SMB's, and another one calling on government to introduce an exemption from national insurance employer contribution increases for all care providers, charities and hospices. These motions coincided with similar calls from numerous organisations and other bodies, but unfortunately the government have so far failed to respond.

Then of course we have the **Government's Devolution Proposals**. They published the white paper on devolution in December, with an implementation period which is extremely challenging. I am sure many of you already understand these proposals, but I think it is worth repeating them here again. Basically, the proposal is that areas will become Mayoral Strategic Authorities (with a minimum population of c.1.5 million). Those wishing to be on the priority programme were asked to register their expressions of interest to be a Priority Scheme Mayoral area by Friday 10th January. Following approval at their respective cabinet meetings, West Sussex, together with East Sussex and Brighton and Hove, subsequently submitted a combined expression of interest. I know that some people wonder why we did this in such haste. However, it was made very clear in the white paper that if authorities did not choose to do this, then the government would enact legislation to force them to go down the devolution route by May 2028. In other words, you would then be at the back of the queue when it came to influencing how your strategic area would be governed. The government also made it clear that those on the priority programme would receive devolved powers, such as economic development and regeneration, environment and climate change, health, wellbeing and public service reform, strategic planning (roads and infrastructure), transport & Local Infrastructure, economic development, skills & Employment Support and Fire and Rescue and the Police, ahead of those not on the programme. Following extensive discussions between the three authorities, it was felt that in the best interests of supporting our residents, we should apply to be on the priority programme. Subsequently, we were notified that we had been accepted.

Running parallel with - but separate from - devolution there will be Local Government Reform (LGR). The proposal is that current two tier areas (CC plus D's & B's) of E & W Sussex will become individual Unitary authorities with one tier of government. So in March the West Sussex Councils - that's the CC plus the seven District and Borough councils - submitted their [draft interim plan for Local Government Reorganisation \(LGR\)](#), outlining their progress and seeking guidance on several critical issues to ensure a successful final submission in September 2025. These plans included a number of possible unitary options.

The interim plan, submitted by West Sussex Leaders and Chief Executives, emphasises the councils' commitment to devolution and a route map for creating unitary authorities that will deliver the best outcomes for citizens. The interim plan outlines potential options for new council structures. It also highlights the opportunity for public service reform and improved outcomes, particularly in areas such as homelessness prevention and social care. The councils have also proposed how to address democratic representation, governance arrangements, and how new structures will support devolution ambitions. While acknowledging limited local engagement due to the tight timeline, all councils have committed to extensive consultation with local residents, businesses and wider stakeholders as proposals develop.

The plan is that there will be Mayoral elections in May 2026. We then understand that the current proposal is that in May 2027 there will be elections for the shadow Unitary Authority - or Authorities - which will run in tandem with the CC and the D's and B's until May 2028. At that point, the CC and the D's and B's will cease to exist and the shadow unitary - or unitaries - will take over full control. In the Devolution White Paper it is made very clear that localism is very much to the fore of these plans and engagement with parish and town councils is planned to increase, devolving more powers to local areas.

The Devolution White Paper can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper>

Finally, probably the most discussed service provided by the CC is **Highways**. We have put an additional £50m into our highways over the last two years and despite what is often said, they are improving. Yes, there is a long way to go, but we do receive many reports from residents saying that that they feel we are generally improving the state of the roads. Our figures for the 2024-2025 financial year have highlighted the significant progress made by its highways team in improving the condition of the county's 2,500 miles of road. Between April 2024 and March 2025, the council's highways team delivered a wide programme of essential reactive maintenance and proactive improvements including:

- 44,767 potholes repaired, using durable methods such as 'sawn and sealed' patching and 'spray injection patching'
- A decrease in the average time between receiving a report and repairing a pothole to just 14 days
- 134.5 miles of surfacing works, including surface dressing, micro-asphalt and major carriageway patching
- 36,031 sqm of small and medium scale patching

Over the winter months, the highways team have also been working hard to keep drainage systems clear and ensure water can run off the roads as effectively as possible, cleansing 123,000 drainage gullies and completing 63 small scale drainage schemes. These works help to protect road surfaces from water damage and reduce the risk of flooding in the event of heavy rainfall.

As part of our efforts to improve winter resilience on the road network, extra resources were provided to clear more gullies, ditches and areas where leaves build up. Extra CCTV resource was also brought in to monitor and identify issues, and an additional jetting unit was provided to clear flooded areas and get them moving as soon as possible.

The team's hard work has been reflected in the number of reports of defects, such as potholes or blocked drains being submitted by the public. In recent years, there has been an upward trend in the number of defects being reported, however, in a clear sign of the improvement in the condition of the county's road network, there has been a drop in reports from 69,669 last year to 53,574.

At the start of this financial year, the council implemented a new highways contract with VolkerHighways Limited, for the delivery of core carriageway maintenance across the county. VolkerHighways' remit covers everything from rapid-response pothole and jet patching repairs to our winter maintenance programme and vegetation management. A key focus of the contract will be the cutting of average repair times by up to 25% while still ensuring that high quality services are consistently delivered. At the same time, FM Conway took on the contract for cyclical and small-scale drainage works. Their responsibilities include routine gully cleansing and the installation of new pipes and chambers, applying root-cause solutions to reduce repeat defects and extend the lifespan of drainage assets. As part of this new partnership, we have also increased the frequency of our gully cleansing programme. This means that all 140,000 gullies will now be emptied every 2 years instead of every 4 years.

<p>Residents are encouraged to continue reporting any issues using the council's online reporting tool, helping the Highways Team respond quickly and effectively. More information about ongoing improvements to the road network can be found on the council's Better Roads campaign page.</p> <p>Local Issues:</p> <p>Charlton 20MPH Scheme - This scheme has now been fully approved, so it is now out with our contractors for installation. We have recently appointed new contractors, so I am waiting to get an update on when this work will be scheduled.</p> <p>Halnaker Windmill - slightly out of your area, but I thought you might appreciate an update. In simple terms, and following a frustrating time addressing the bat issue, a design now seems to have been agreed with all parties, including ecologists and conservationists, with a proposal that, with a fair wind, we could complete next summer.</p> <p>Finally, please don't forget to keep an eye on our website, especially our news and campaigns page where you can keep up to date with all our latest news. https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/news-and-campaigns/</p> <p>Also, a reminder that all our public meetings are webcast live and are also archived, so you can always view them later. https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/how-the-council-works/watch-county-council-and-committee-meetings-online/</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 3 – Mr Henry Potter, Goodwood Ward</p> <p>The main focus this past month has been modifying the Local Plan to accommodate the comments and advice of the Planning Inspector after his initial study of the submitted Plan and having taken into account the representations made to the two hearing sessions held in the latter part of last year. These Main Modifications have been produced in a new document, the Chichester Local Plan 2021-2039, the Modification Consultation Version. I have a paper copy of this document if anyone wishes to read it, it is also available by visiting the CDC website. It is equally as comprehensive as the original submitted document with much redaction and substitution and there are some poignant changes. The Council has also published an Annual Progress report on its Climate Emergency Plan. This Plan has a target of a reduction of 10% of greenhouse gases year on year. Between 01/10/2023 and 30/09/2024 emissions of 2,903 tonnes of carbon dioxide were recorded, only a 5% reduction on the previous year. The current action plan has resulted in 75 actions having been implemented, solar panelling installed on several public conveniences and Leisure Centres. Under the Warmer Homes Scheme 68 homes have had 131 measures completed, 3 more electricity vehicles have been added to the CCS fleet in addition to the 2 electric refuse collection vehicles. Much lighting in all CDC buildings has been replaced with LED units, and the list goes on. Costs?? The modifications to Westgate Leisure Centre alone cost £1.3 million!! Funded mainly by Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and £210.000 from the Councils Reserves. Incidentally, the Councils application for funding from the National Lottery "Climate Action Fund - Our Shared Future" was rejected. This would have helped support a network of climate action groups in the District. Work on this will continue but at a much reduced pace.</p> <p>Finally, at the full Council Meeting, held on the 8th April, it was announced that the Chief Executive, Diane Shepherd, will be reducing her work with the Council to concentrate on the extensive programme towards the Devolution process. This is transpiring to be a very complex process requiring many meetings between the Executives of the Authorities involved, CDC and the other District or Borough Councils, East and West Sussex CC's and Brighton and Hove Council. To compensate for Diane's absence, John Ward has assumed a new role of Chief Operating Officer to oversee the day to day affairs of the Council. Eventually when the Unitary Authority reaches the</p>	

<p>'Shadow' stage with an elected Mayor, Diane hopes to take full retirement after 40 years working at CDC during which time she rose to become the CEO for the past 13 years. This will possibly be in 2027. An extensive Public Bulletin has been issued by her Office. At another meeting, the Joint Employee Consultation Panel, last Thursday 08/05, it was announced that our Senior Enforcement Officer, Shona Archer is to retire in a couple of weeks after 20 years in the department. I have contacted Shona on numerous occasions during this time and considering the constraints and seemingly ridiculous regulations Enforcement work under, it is not an easy occupation. Far from it! I have forwarded the latest update on the Local Govt. Reorganisation for information and it is becoming apparent that the timetable will be slipping. so many important questions with no answers as yet.</p> <p>And finally, after an examination by the Planning Advisory Services into the CDC Planning process, various changes were recommended most of which, the Planning Committee at the most recent meeting 07/05, agreed were unnecessary. Reducing the number of Members to 10, from 13, reducing the time allowed for each speaker to 2 minutes, from 3 and scrutinising PC objections which usually bring an application before a committee for decision making. This would allow more decisions to be made under delegation by Planning Officers, a less Democratic way of doing things.</p> <p>The principle behind these recommendations was to "speed up" the Planning process but Members generally felt these proposals wouldn't make an appreciable difference. The final decision will be from the Cabinet Meeting on the 13th and referred to the next Council Meeting.</p> <p>It is always a pleasure to attend your Parish Council meetings and I shall continue to do so for the final two years as your elected Councillor. Thank you.</p> <p>HP reported that two training sessions for parish councils, to advise on submitting comments on a planning application. DH could not understand the necessity for this training, given that the parish council comments seem to carry no weight when a planning decision is taken. HP suggested that point of the training would cover how parish councils could have more influence on decisions.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 4 – Update on Projects for 2024/25</p> <p>Southern Water – DH covered this subject as KN is unwell, however her report has been circulated. DH commented on how successful the work that SW has carried has been, however due to low rainfall there has not been so much pressure on the sewage network this year. Work is now progressing in Singleton. SW have said that they will not leave the valley until all work is completed and tested. JH complimented SW doing what they said they would do at the last annual parish meeting, unlike previous years.</p> <p>CHS & Charlton Gates/20mph – TM reported that the Community Highways Scheme is completed and reiterated the thanks expressed by DH. The Charlton 20 mph scheme has been agreed, we are awaiting confirmation of commencement of work. There will be no roundels on the road, there will be speed signs on roads within the village. There will be a short section of road as you leave Singleton before reaching the Charlton sign that will remain 30 mph. The village gates will be positioned at the East Dean end of the village there will be gate by Charlton Mill Way, so there won't be a visibility issue when leaving Charlton Mill Way. A MOP commented that there are 11 changes in speed limit from Singleton to Chichester. DH pointed out that the parish council has no influence over speed limits outside of our parish.</p> <p>Centurion Way – JH has submitted a full report that has been circulated. The key points are that SDNP are due to complete the final work from West Dean to Cucumber Farm in June with the intention of opening that section in the summer. The route from Cucumber Farm to Cocking has not been agreed yet. Cyclists will not be able to leave this stretch of the Centurion Way so will need to go back to West Dean, unless they push their bikes down the footpath at Hat Hill. There are no plans to widen the footpath to make it cycle friendly, however, discussions are taking place to find an alternative route from the Singleton railway bridge to the A286. This is not part of the SDNP plans, however, they will assist the parish council with finding funding sources. Nothing will be in place for at least 2-3 years.</p>	

Agenda Item 5 – Speaker – Tim Burr – Deputy Chairman of the South Downs National Park

Tim Burr introduced himself and outlined how he became involved with the National Park. One of the first projects he was involved with was The Secrets of the High Woods. Using lidar it was possible to scan the micro topography of the ground and produce a beautiful picture of the world before the trees. Through this project he became a member of the SDNP.

What is the National Park? Some people think they are a planning authority, they are involved in planning, however the statutory purposes of the park are to conserve and enhance the beauty of the SDNP and promote enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the National Park. There are 27 members of the SDNP Management Committee and the area of the park is 625 square metres. It is the third largest and the newest. They produce a Local Plan and the new version is currently being worked on and is due to be completed next year. The other side of the business is nature recovery, climate action and to increase access to the countryside for everyone. They are currently working on the Partnership Management Plan. The goals are to increase the proportion of the land managed for nature and to not only reduce emissions but increase resilience to climate change. They are looking at access for all, how to make the National Park appeal widely to people of different backgrounds and those who are at different stages of life, from the young to the older population. This will be addressed in the new plan. The challenges of the National Park are, given that they don't own most of the park, is to work with the farmers of which 70% of the park is farmed and the large estates within the park. The challenge can be the conflict between enjoyment and enhancement. Another challenge is finance, the government has frozen budgets over the last five years and this year it has been cut by 9%, however our national park is in a good place, due to restructuring, reducing some of the spending commitments including spending on staff. The Future up to 2060 - The SDNP will be a vibrant place with nature everywhere for everyone, where wildlife flourishes, clean water flows and the dark night skies are filled with stars. The landscape is adapted to climate change and sits in the heart of thriving communities and a green vibrant economy, shaped by stories old and new, this place inspires everyone to connect, enjoy, care and love. DH thanked Tim for his presentations, this was followed by questions. There was a discussion about planning, where on occasions questions are asked to CDC they then defer to the SDNP who divert back to CD who say they are following the rules made by the SDNP, there appears to be too much lack of ownership and indecision. It feels like SDNP are wanting to make money out of the householders by requesting what appears to be an unreasonable number of different reports for a simple planning request e.g. location plan, conservation impact statement, bat surveys and the unnecessary use of an architect for a simple planning request, this situation needs to be addressed. JH is concerned that the SDNP are not now putting a number on housing development within the park, which means that there could be a situation where the quota of new houses demanded by the government is crammed into a small area which is outside the National Park. We need more affordable houses and the SDNP should recognise this and respond accordingly. TB confirmed that there will be housing developments to include affordable housing, however, the difficulty with affordable housing is not at the planning permission stage but actually getting it built and managed. It would be preferable that the affordable houses are scattered around and not built in blocks of this type of housing but housing associations that administer this type of housing don't want this. We have just finished the consultation on the Local Plan and are working through the feedback and will take into account comments on affordable housing. DH reported that housing associations are selling off affordable homes because they need £100,000 spent on them, however, she pointed out that you can't build a new house for this amount and also that in a village like Singleton, there is no land to build new affordable houses. We have now lost four family homes which directly affects our community. We are in the SDNP but CDC have allowed this to happen. TB said That is why we are consulting on our Local Plan. The direction of travel is to be professional, research

the needs thoroughly and respond to those needs, it is a very challenging area of policy. The question was asked whether the SDNP have a policy on Airbnb and second homes, this will also be covered in the new local plan. HP reported that planning regulations have changed and CDC have rewritten the policy on enforcement. We can't have an energy policy and stop people conserving energy by putting in double glazed windows. TB will report back to the chairman as she is very keen on this problem of contradictory regulations.	
Meeting Closed – 20.30	
Confirmed that these minutes are a true and accurate record of the meeting. Signed: DEBORAH HARWOOD Name & Position: CHAIRMAN Date:	