

CHALVINGTON WITH RIPE PARISH

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 9TH MAY 2022

Agenda Item 4 Reports from Councillors

Planning report

It has been a busy year on the planning front.

35 planning applications were received in the 12 months between April 2021 and March 2022, an increase on last year. Of these, 20 were approved, 3 refused, 5 withdrawn and the remainder are yet to be determined. Where decisions have been made, Wealden's planning department and our own comments largely agree but there has been one case where local views are at odds with Wealden's decision – Lovers Farmhouse in Chalvington.

Last year I reported on the Deanland Wood Park application for 105 new dwellings that had been refused (in line with our comments). The case, however, went to appeal and was upheld. There are lessons that can be learned from this for the future. If there is any development on greenfield/pasture land then it is very difficult to stop further development on immediately adjacent land, so 26 units on a greenfield site close to existing dwellings at Deanland Wood Park were approved in 2018 and although the Parish and District Councils received assurance that no further development would take place the fact that one development had occurred gave almost carte blanche permission for further adjacent development.

There have been 2 applications for solar farms in our parish, a small scale one in Poundfield Road that was supported by us and has now been approved, and a massive one at Pollards Wood (50MW) which we have robustly objected to; it is yet to be determined and is likely to go to Planning Committee. There has been a large increase in applications for solar farms in Wealden recently with developers wanting to take advantage of government policy on reducing reliance on fossil fuels. Our position has been that we support solar farms but we need to restrict the number and scale in this SW part of Wealden as we are in danger here of reaching saturation. We requested a strategic plan limiting the number in any one area and a clear idea of how we protect the Low Weald landscape; we are unlikely to get this until the draft Wealden Local Plan is produced.

Wealden has published its sites for possible future development (SHELAA sites); these are sites submitted by landowners. Each site needs to be assessed against strict criteria and Wealden is in the process of doing this. It will not however publish the agreed sites until it has heard from the Government regarding a requested reduction in housing targets. We have submitted a response to the proposed sites in our parish, and this can be found on our website under 'Planning'. Briefly, we are opposed to any development on greenfield/pasture land.

<https://www.chalvingtonwithripeparishcouncil.co.uk>

The parish council is also represented at some strategic district wide planning meetings – the Parish Planning Panel (issues that affect parishes in particular) and the South West Cluster Group which feeds directly into the new Wealden Local Plan. Notes from these meetings are made available on our website.

39 Parish and Town councils across Wealden have formed an action and campaigning group called 'Wealden against Overdevelopment'. We have joined them. Parish and town councils are under tremendous pressure to do something urgently to address overdevelopment of Wealden and adjacent districts, but feel that, while they have the power to express opinions, they are powerless to act to halt it. There is general consternation in many towns and villages that the quality of life and the environment have deteriorated, are deteriorating and will continue to deteriorate under the onslaught of overdevelopment (eg huge increase in traffic through small villages). There is a broad consensus that the key driver of overdevelopment and its consequences is the existing unsustainable and unfair targets for housebuilding set for the South East as a region, and Wealden and adjacent districts specifically. It is these housing targets that the Group is challenging. There have been meetings between Wealden Council leaders and Michael Gove and the housing minister; they say they are listening to us and we await the outcome. We are pleased to be part of this campaigning group; we are stronger together than fighting it separately.

I'd like to thank my fellow councillors and our clerk for their valuable input on planning. I'd also like to thank parishioners who have taken the trouble to make their views known on individual planning applications.

Alison Dunbar-Dempsey

May 2022