

## **NEWS FROM YOUR WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCILLOR**

I thought I would give a synopsis of activities at Wealden District Council over the last year.

- **Budget** – The Council Tax increase for 2018/19 was 2.7%, in line with inflation. The Government grant, through the Revenue Support Grant has been reduced each of the past few years and has now gone altogether. The Council has done well, given these reductions in grant, to keep Council Tax as low as possible and for 5 of the last 7 has had zero increase Council Tax.
- **Crematorium** – This is on budget and on time for completion at the end of this calendar year - being built in Horam. The facility is expected to contribute over £900k to revenue by 2022/23. This will help to keep Council Tax increases as low as possible.
- **Investment in Hailsham High Street** – WDC acquired a site in Hailsham (Including Waitrose) with the aim of increasing revenue (£600k per annum) and also to regenerate the town centre. It is likely that the Local Plan will have significant housing numbers in the Hailsham area.
- **Wealden Local Plan** – The latest iteration is to be published at the end June and will go to Full Council in July. It will then go to the Planning inspectorate for Examination in Public (EIP). The timing of EIP is up to the Planning Inspectorate but we have asked Government to expedite an early date so that the Plan can move forward for approval by Secretary of State as quickly as possible. 65% of Wealden is protected space (58% Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty [AONB]). Protected space includes the Ashdown Forest/AONB and Pevensey Levels. We continue to meet regularly with the County Council regarding the delivery of relevant infrastructure.
- **Ashdown Forest** – This continues to be a constraint on housing development. Developments close to the Forest have to make a contribution to SANGS (Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces). These are designed to attract recreational use and therefore reduce the use of the Forest. The first has been open in Crowborough and well received. A second is in progress for Uckfield.
- **Police** – WDC liaises with Police and has lobbied hard on the lack of police “on the ground” in many parts of the District and our concern regarding the rising crime rate particularly acquisitive crime. WDC has a representative on the Police and Crime Panel.
- **On- Street Parking** – This is a Sussex Police responsibility but they have stated it is a low priority. WDC could decriminalise (CPE [Civil Parking Enforcement]) and take responsibility but would need to fund the enforcement. The County Council proposal was to install Pay and Display meters but WDC felt that presented a risk to viability of our High Streets. The Leader of Council recently met with the Police Commissioner to discuss the subject (and also crime rate) and put suggestions to the PCC which could progress the parking issue.

- **Waste Collection** – residents in Wealden have achieved the highest recycling rate in East Sussex with 51.9% recycled and the Council is now 65<sup>th</sup> out of 350 councils in England and Wales. Of the remaining waste less than 1% goes into landfill with the rest going to the incinerator in Newhaven which uses the waste as fuel to generate electricity – enough to power 20 thousand homes. A new waste contract is being negotiated and will commence in June 2019. As always with missed bin collections - don't forget to always contact Wealden District Council if your bin is missed and if you have any concerns please let me know particularly with ongoing problems.
- **Litter** – The amount of litter on the roadside is still a concern and we continue to put pressure on the current waste contractor (Kier) to improve performance. There has been improvement in recent weeks. It would of course also be beneficial if motorists did not throw litter from their vehicles – a campaign to highlight this will be launched in the next few weeks.
- **Wealden Careers Fair** – WDC organise this fair which attracts firms from across the County and gives pupils at our schools the opportunity to discuss future career choices with employers and colleges.
- **Big Switch** – WDC continues to assist residents in getting the best deal for their power through joining together to get better rates. In 2017 953 households who switched in the Council's Big Wealden Switch 2017 campaign with iChooser enjoyed an average saving of £228 a year on their domestic energy bills. Collectively residents saved £217,549.
- **2017 Resident Satisfaction Survey** - 90% of respondents, not surprisingly like living, in Wealden and 75% believe Wealden DC is doing a good job. Given the normal critical view of Local Government this is a pleasing result.

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