

# Aldwick Parish Council

## Minutes of the Annual Parish Electors' Meeting held on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024, at 6.30pm, at Aldwick Parish Council Offices

**Present, Parish:** Cllrs: R Gotheridge (Chairman), T Bence, M Buckley, F Huntley, A Patel, G Purser, K Shepherd and D Thas.

**District:** Cllrs Bence, Patel and Purser are also District Councillors for Aldwick East (Cllrs Bence and Patel) and Aldwick West (Cllr Purser)

**County:** Cllr Patel is also a County Councillor (Bognor Regis West & Aldwick )  
Cllr Bence is also a County Councillor (Fontwell).

**In Attendance:** Heather Knight (Clerk & RFO to the Council)  
4 members of the public (3 being residents of the parish)

The meeting opened at 6.33pm.

1. **Welcome by the Chairman and introduction of the Parish Councillors Present.**  
Cllrs. Rufey and Basford had sent their apologies. The Chairman of the Council, Cllr Gotheridge, welcomed everyone and thanked those attending. The Councillors present introduced themselves and briefly described their role or experience as a member of the Council and elsewhere.
2. **To receive and approve the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Thursday 21st April 2022.**  
It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes were a correct record of the meeting and that the Chairman sign them. It was noted that no Electors Meetings were held in 2023.
3. **To receive the Annual Report of the Parish Council from the Chairman.**  
The Report of the Council was read by the Chairman, Cllr Gotheridge, and is appended to these Minutes as Appendix 1. The Chairman added that after a much reduced membership at the start of the year, the Parish Council was now back up to 10 members out of the 14 seats.
4. **To receive the approved budget for 2024/2025.**  
Received and noted, no questions were raised. The Report of the Council under item 3 had detailed the financial planning, new precept and Band D increase.
5. **To receive the observations of County Councillors and District Councillors for the Division in which the Parish is situated.**  
There were no reports made or questions asked of the District and County Councillors present.
6. **To receive the reports of Parish Council representatives appointed by the Council to local organisations.**  
The Chairman had attended some of the Chairman's Forum meetings arranged locally.  
No other reports were made.
7. **To receive, discuss and vote upon business raised by the Electors of Aldwick.**
  - i. A resident referred to the No Cold Calling signs/stickers on lamp posts, installed 5 years ago, noting that a lot of these had faded: Were there any plans to replace them? The Chairman responded that it was likely these were arranged by the Neighbourhood Watch scheme. The resident agreed, adding that this was just before Covid lockdown but that the Parish Council were also involved. In conclusion, it was not known whether the NHW scheme was still in existence to champion the project, and perhaps the replacement stickers might be something for future Council consideration.

homes in Chalcraft Lane (Bersted), several hundred in Summer Lane (Pagham), and building on a flood plain was unbelievable. Where was all the increased traffic going to go? What influence does the Parish Council have to try to stop this? Was the Council doing all it could, does it have any say whatsoever? The Chairman explained that whilst the Parish Council doesn't have a say in the final decision on planning matters, it is consulted and has raised objections where appropriate: Most of the schemes the resident referred to had already been granted planning permission or outline permission and all of which the Council had objected to where feasible, on the basis of infrastructure and transport issues within planning law. Most of these were not in the parish of Aldwick. The Parish Council also asks the ward District and County members to feed back its concerns wherever possible.

Cllr Bence commented in his position as a District and County Councillor. As a resident he shared the concerns but explained that the District Council, as the planning authority had little manoeuvrability in approving planning permission of such developments as it had to meet Government targets, or risk being found 'in presumption' (to the favour of development) if developers referred it to the Planning Inspector for decision. On a positive note, he reported that he had recently succeeded in having the local flood plain recategorized to include commercial only, which would restrict some elements of development.

Cllr Shepherd commented as the Chairman of the Planning Committee that he was surprised at the lack of public attending the Parish Council's Planning Committee meetings to give their views. The Committee members are all passionate about doing the best they can to protect the area and support residents' views where these are known, and he encouraged public to attend meetings.

- iii. Public comments were made about concerns over sewerage in the sea, and consideration of withholding payment of their water bills.
- iv. A resident asked about the grass cutting scheme, having seen something in the Council's newsletter – Were residents to cut verges themselves? The Chairman explained that this is a West Sussex County Council scheme: They had changed the regime recently and would be collecting cuttings to use for biofuels. The Parish Council would be monitoring the project to try to check there is no adverse effect on the area.
- v. A member of the public (non-resident) commented that they were concerned about the democratic process and asked how many of the councillors were elected or co-opted. It was confirmed that 3 councillors were elected following the 2023 elections, the remainder being co-opted. The Clerk explained the legal and democratic process of appointments to the Council to fill vacancies, whereby if not enough people stand for election, the Council may co-opt to ensure a quorum exists.

There being no further questions or matters raised by public present, the Chairman thanked residents for coming and closed the meeting at 7.26pm.

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Chairman

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Dated

### **Annual Council Report 2024 by Chairman, Cllr Richard Gotheridge**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2024 Aldwick Parish Electors Meeting. My name is Richard Gotheridge and I am currently the Chair of the Parish Council, a position which I've been proud to hold during a challenging and busy period for the council, but which I shall be relinquishing to another councillor at our annual council meeting, later in May.

This meeting is dedicated to and focussed on the residents of Aldwick and is your opportunity to question us, or make suggestions regarding future business and perhaps tell us about organisations you may be aware of, or which benefit the parish.

It may be useful to provide some background as to how the Council has been working over the last year.

It would be fair to say; the council has had a very challenging year.

Over the course of 2023 we were impacted by the resignation or retirement of the previous chairman, the clerk and the deputy clerk. To represent the more than 10,000 residents of Aldwick, we are allowed to have up to 14 councillors. However, at the elections in May 2023, we only had four councillors stand for election, of which three remain on the council today, including myself.

In spite of this, we've been able to get the council back on its feet very quickly, initially by using a Locum Clerk for a short period and then in August hiring one excellent new clerk, Heather Knight. This has meant we've had two handover periods in 2023, transferring information on the council's operations not once but twice in short succession. A real challenge for Heather who has had to hit the ground running.

Prior to 2023, the council ran under a committee structure, where separate committees of councillors undertook work on amenities, finance or planning matters. During 2023, with so few councillors initially and to make the workload manageable, we took the decision to fold down the council's committees and address all work and decisions in more frequent, and longer, full council meetings on a monthly basis.

I'm pleased to say that using a co-option method we are now back up to 10 councillors and feeling a lot more robust and healthy as a council of representatives. Aldwick is divided into 4 wards – Aldwick East, Aldwick West, Barrack Lane and St Richards – not the same borders as the District or County wards. Each councillor here, represents one of these parish wards and does so from a purely non-political standpoint so that Aldwick and not a political party, is put at the heart of any decisions we may make.

Since the beginning of 2024 we have reintroduced a separate planning committee, due to the number of applications to review and the need to meet Arun District's response timescales. Thank you to Cllr Sheppard for picking up the chairmanship of the committee. I'm hoping in time, and with the right level of resource, we may be able to revert back to a wider committee structure. However, Heather only works part time, so we're not yet back up to where we need to be with personnel to support the council in everything we'd like to be undertaking. This is something I hope the council will address very shortly.

Whilst this may have been a challenging year, we've still managed to achieve an awful lot in 2023, and 2024 to date. This is a real testament to the work of the clerk and the locum clerk before her. For example;

- We continued to pay for and monitor the upkeep of the floral planters at Rose Green and West Meads precincts.

- We managed the administration of our allotments at The Nurseries, including letting plots to residents on our waiting list
- We managed to put on a, slightly-amended, version of the summer Play Rangers playscheme at Avisford Park and West Park, providing free outdoor activities during the school summer holidays for local children and their parents
- We paid for and arranged repairs to broken benches and a bus shelter across the parish
- We paid for and had thirteen new street trees planted, to add to the twenty-plus trees we've planted over the last two years, helping to keep Aldwick green and leafy.
- We put on a very well-attended Remembrance Day Service at the Millennium Gardens on November 11<sup>th</sup>.
- We've tried to maintain communication and provide updates to residents through a monthly newsletter printed within Sussex Views
- And my most pleasing success, we reintroduced the Rose Green Christmas tree, after we did not manage to install one in 2022.

It is worth saying that we have very few powers as a council (apart from a small number relating to allotments) but we are consultees on some things including planning and we have some influence, which we've tried to use to positive effect. To give just three examples, we've tried to engage with West Sussex Highways on the problems with the roads surrounding Aldwick, such as the B2166 Lower Bognor Road and Pagham Roads, both of which flooded for long periods again during the winter. Through Arun District we've tried to reduce the causes of runoff affecting the bathing water quality at Aldwick's beaches. We've reported and monitored issues associated with anti-social behaviour and vandalism, such as at the beach-huts earlier this year or the travellers illegally occupying Avisford Park during 2023. None of which are in our gift to resolve, but which we have endeavoured to obtain or advocate for positive outcomes for our residents.

I'd like to say a little about the role and work of the planning committee. The planning committee meets every two weeks to review and comment on planning applications. We are not the planning authority and ours is not the decision of whether permission is granted or rejected. The committee carefully looks at applications and tries to provide local context to be fed through to Arun District, which is where the applications are ultimately decided. Members of the committee have access to referred applications, and carefully examine all the documents, and where possible and appropriate, conduct site visits in their own time. Committee members listen and check for residents' observations and comments presented at our fortnightly meetings. The committee's decisions are always based on the individual application as it is submitted, without speculation. After careful and thorough examination and discussion of each application, the committee decides whether to 'object' or record a 'no objection' response. To retain our credibility, and comply with Planning Regulations, our objections must be based on material planning grounds, within the guidelines provided by the National Planning Policy Framework, the Arun Local Plan, and our own Parish Design Statement. The local Ward Member will also be informed of any objection recorded at the meeting. At all times as a committee, we acknowledge our responsibility for protecting the character, and promoting the special qualities of the parish of Aldwick. Many of the applications we review relate to trees due to the tree preservation orders which cover much of Aldwick and the number and maturity of the trees, which provide a significant character

to our area. Applications sometimes propose complete removal of trees. These will almost always be referred to the Arboriculturist and an 'objection' recorded, unless it can be seen that a specialist has demonstrated that the tree is dead, diseased or dying, or clearly causing damage to property or infrastructure. In these cases the committee will normally request a condition to replace the loss of the tree.

Finally I'd like to provide an update on the finances of the council. Managing the finances this year has not been straightforward. As discussed, we've had to unpick and transfer a lot of knowledge on each of our accounts, transferring each a number of times to ensure correct and legal signatories are in place. This has been necessary just to ensure ongoing payments to suppliers and received receipts of payments, such as the allotments. We've also had to update our systems significantly. This includes moving away from paying by cheques and using local branch banking, to online banking and new accounting software. This has been a tough challenge to administer and is not fully resolved yet.

In spite of these challenges, we've remained on budget for 2023/24, with over £52,000 in the councils' bank accounts. Plus the first precept instalment of £57,000 just received. Each year the council awards discretionary grants to worthwhile causes, this year we distributed nearly £7,500 through our community grant scheme to 11 local voluntary or charitable organisations that support Aldwick residents. If you would like to see the list please see us after the meeting.

Looking ahead for 2024/25, the council decided, in accordance with national guidance for public bodies, to set a balanced budget. This meant catching up for a number of years where we have been living off our reserves. Everyone will be aware of the inflationary pressures recently, which has impacted all of our spend categories. Our budget working group considered our position carefully and made a recommendation, accepted by council, to set our parish precept for 2024/25 at £114,424 an increase of 7p per week for a Band D property. This remains one of the lowest precepts in the Arun District.

To ensure good and transparent governance, finance and payment checks are carried out and documented at each council meeting. This ensures that members get involved with payments and with checking that Financial Regulations have been adhered to.

All members of the Parish Council receive the rolling format money records, these are also included within minutes published online for members of the Public to view. The Expenditure and Income Balances are checked every council meeting. Each Year the Finances are Audited by an independent audit Company. We thank the clerk for their diligent administration in ensuring that these are passed by the Auditors.

You are welcome to attend the meetings of the council and the planning committee. The dates and agendas are published on the website and in the parish notice boards and there is a slot for questions from members of the public.

I would like to thank again my fellow councillors and our hard working and dedicated clerk. Thank you all for your work, your kindness to me and your support. Aldwick is lucky to have you.