



Aldwick Parish Council

Annual Parish Assembly – Tuesday 19th May 2026

Chair's Report – Cllr Guy R Purser

Welcome

It is both a pleasure and a delight to welcome you to this Annual Electors Meeting for the Parish of Aldwick. My name is Guy Purser, and I am Chair of Aldwick Parish Council.

This meeting is not a regular meeting of the Aldwick Parish Council, but one which is facilitated by the Council for and on behalf of the residents of Aldwick and members of the public. As such, the meeting is open for anyone to attend, but only those who are residents of Aldwick and registered on the Electoral Roll as such may vote upon any resolutions before them.

It is therefore your opportunity to ask questions, to make suggestions regarding future business, and perhaps to tell us about organisations you may be aware of that benefit the Parish. It is also an important opportunity for the Council to provide residents with a brief resumé of its activities over the last year.

Your Council

To properly represent in excess of 10,000 residents of Aldwick, your Parish Council is permitted to have up to 14 Councillors. We currently have ten Councillors in post with vacancies for a further four.

Of the ten Councillors currently in post, two are currently County and District Councillors (Cllrs Trevor Bence and Ash Patel) two more are also District Councillors (Cllrs Guy Purser and Giuliano Pinnelli), all of whom bring local knowledge and wider experience for the benefit of the Parish and its residents. At the time of writing, County Council Elections have yet to take place, so the County Councillors on Aldwick Parish Council could change.

Your Parish Councillors are apolitical and represent the four Wards within the Parish – Aldwick East, Aldwick West, Barrack Lane and St Richards, and each Member has a seat at full Council meetings. Six Councillors also serve on the Planning Committee, currently chaired by Cllr Jan Rufey which meets monthly. Four Members also serve on the Staffing Committee which meets as and when required. Over the last year we have also set up a working group, chaired by Cllr Richard Gotheridge, to consider the annual budget.

Council Management

The work of the Council is managed by our Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer Heather Knight, who joined us in August 2023. In November 2024, Council appointed a welcome addition to the team in Ms Alison Colban as Assistant Clerk. Alison is responsible for the administration and clerking of the Planning Committee and of the Parish's allotments.

Both are very busy part-time roles, and I take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to them both for their continued hard work, and to commend them on your behalf for the diligence and the expertise they apply to their respective roles.

Work of the Council

Over the last year, Council has undertaken a very great deal of work for residents. Whilst there isn't the space to list all that has been achieved, I highlight a number of them here:

- Appointed and pay for our new contractor to develop and maintain the beautiful floral planters at Rose Green as well as three roundabouts and the Millenium Gardens outside the Council offices.

- Managed the administration of our allotments at The Nurseries, including letting plots to residents on our waiting list. Work this year has included a tidying up of overgrowth, recycling provision and the treatment of sheds.
- A fully funded Playscheme at Avisford Park and West Park last year, providing free outdoor activities during the school summer holidays for local children. Last year, summer skateboarding sessions were also provided and proved so popular that additional sessions were laid on over the Easter school holidays. Work is currently under way to lay on further schemes in 2026.
- Repaired or replaced several broken benches.
- Identified further locations and paid for the planting of ten trees to add to the thirty or so trees we have already planted over the last three years. Our thanks to Cllr Richard Gotheridge for driving this forward for another year.
- Provided a very well-attended Remembrance Day Service for our residents at the Millennium Gardens in November 2025 and returned to the popular practice of providing tea and cakes afterwards. Residents have said how much they enjoy this most welcome form of community engagement.
- Maintained regular communication and updates to our residents through the monthly newsletter printed within Sussex Views and on the Council's website (www.aldwickparishcouncil.gov.uk) and boards.
- Engaged with County and District Councillors, Southern Water and the Environment Agency on behalf of residents regarding the flooding within the Parish over the winter months.
- Represented our residents on the Bognor Regis and Aldwick Bathing Water Partnership Group to advocate for and drive forward the monitoring, testing and improvement of our beaches and bathing water quality.
- Worked with County and District Councils and Councillors to help further deter traveller incursions on West Park, Avisford Park, Queens Field and Aldwick Green.
- Awarded discretionary grants totalling £8,000 to support local charitable organisations and youth activities.
- This year, we have re-introduced monthly Drop-In Sessions where residents are able to attend the Council Officers on the last Friday morning of each month to seek help, advice and guidance on matters of concern to them.

Planning

The Planning Committee currently meets monthly to review and comment on planning applications. Whilst we are not the Planning Authority and the decision as to whether permission is granted or rejected is not ours, the Planning Committee carefully looks at applications and tries to provide local context to Arun District Council. Members of the committee have access to referred applications, very carefully examine all the documents and, where possible and appropriate, conduct site visits in their own time. Committee members listen to and check for residents' observations and comments presented at our committee meetings. The committee's decisions are always based on the individual application before them without speculation or bias.

After a careful and thorough examination and discussion of each application, the committee decides whether to 'object' or record a 'no objection' response. To retain 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, and 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 protected by the Tree Preservation Orders which cover much of Aldwick, as well as the number and maturity of the trees that provide significant character and visual amenity to the Parish. Applications may sometimes propose the complete removal of trees. These will almost always be referred to the Arboriculturist and an 'objection' recorded unless there is clear evidence that a specialist has demonstrated that the tree is diseased, dying, dead or is clearly causing damage to property or infrastructure. In these cases, the committee will normally register a "no objection" with a recommended condition to replace the loss of the tree.

Local Government Reform

Residents will be aware that the Government has stated its intention to devolve the County and District Council tiers of local authorities into Unitary Mayoral Authorities. Following a very great deal of hard work from all District and County Councils in our area, a decision was expected in March 2026. Sadly, the Government was unable to reach a decision for East and West Sussex, and at the time of writing we have been informed that a decision will be made by no later than June 2026. Whilst County and District Councils will be subsumed into a new Unitary Mayoral Authority, Parish Councils such as our own will continue. The role that our Parish Council will play going forward remains to be seen, but our own view is that the potential loss of at least two layers of local Councillor representation will make the role of the Parish and its Councillors for the provision of services and as advocates for local residents even more important. We will endeavour to keep residents informed as and when more information becomes available.

Finance

Managing the finances of the Council is rarely straightforward, and Council is acutely aware that in the currently difficult financial times in which we live there is both a clear duty and need to apply a precept which enables Council to provide residents with the pleasant, attractive and safe place to live whilst at the same time delivering good value for money.

The new precept from 1st April 2026 is £135,349, which equates to a Band D (the average used) council tax charge per year of £25.07. This is an increase on last year of £2.66 annually or 5p per week (for Band D). We try very hard indeed to keep costs down in the current financial climate whilst providing the best value we can for our residents.

To ensure good and transparent governance, finance and payment checks are carried out and documented at each Council meeting. This ensures that Members are fully involved with the Council's financial transactions and acts as a positive check to ensure that Financial Regulations are complied with.

All Members of the Parish Council receive records in a rolling format, which are included within the Council's minutes and published online for public view. Annual accounts are independently audited.

We hope that residents feel that Council delivers good value for money, and we appreciate your understanding as we work together to make our community a happy and pleasant place in which to live.

Once again, I thank my fellow Councillors and our hard working and dedicated Clerks for all that they do, and for their magnificent support to me as Chair over the last year.