



## Minutes of the Highclere Parish Council Meeting

Westridge Studio

Tuesday 14 January at 7.30pm

**Members Present:** Cllr York (chair), Cllr Bartholomew, Cllr MacIver, Cllr Easton, Cllr Taylor

**In attendance:** Cllr Izett, 2 parishioners

**Clerk:** Amy White

**1. 90/24 Apologies for Absence**

No apologies received.

**2. 91/24 Declarations of Interest**

None.

**3. 92/24 To agree Minutes of Meeting held on 03 December 2024**

The Minutes of 03 December 2024 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman, Cllr York.

**4. 93/24 Matters arising from Meeting held on 03 December 2024**

Number	Action	Person
84/24	Cllr Bartholomew to call Savills and/or Diocese of Winchester to confirm HPC's interest in the rental of The Glebe. <b>In action:</b> Savills are now working on the request, which has been approved in principle by the Diocese.	<b>Cllr Bartholomew</b>
	Cllr York asked councillors to rank the current ideas in preparation for the January meeting. <b>Actioned</b>	<b>All Cllrs</b>
	Clerk to add payment of £2765 to Westridge to list of payments for approval. <b>Actioned</b>	<b>Clerk</b>

**5. 94/24 Public participation**

None.

**6. 95/24 Reports from County and Borough Councillors**

Cllr Izett commented on the latest update regarding the Hampshire County Council's decision to apply to become a Unitary Authority.

Cllr Thacker's report on the decision is included at the end of the Minutes.

**7. 96/24 Financial Matters**

**a. Budget third draft**

*Attached at the end of the Minutes.*

The Clerk presented the third draft of the budget and continued to recommend a precept increase of 3%.

HPC is still underspent at the end of Q3; it is hoped that the project ideas in agenda item 8 will help to reduce the reserves.

Council considered and agreed the 3<sup>rd</sup> draft budget. This will be finalised in March.

**b. Accounts for payment**

The Clerk presented accounts for payment (see end of Minutes).

**8. 97/24 HPC projects for further consideration**

The Clerk and Cllr York presented the draft HPC action plan which includes project ideas and an overarching HPC direction for the next three years. Councillors supported the plan in its draft form and were encouraged to think whether they can take responsibility for any of the project ideas. Cllr York will lead the agenda next month to firm up projects and roles.

**9. 98/24 Planning**

*For full responses, please visit the Basingstoke and Deane planning page.*

- 24/02914/HSE Walnut Mount Tubbs Lane- No objection
- 24/02635/HSE White Oak House Highclere Park- No objection
- 24/03004/HSE Tewdric House Westridge (Deadline 29/1/25)- No objection
- 24/02904/RET Highgates Seven Stones Lane Highclere (Deadline extension to 15/1/25)- Objection
- 25/00016/HSE Quarter Acre Andover Road (Deadline 29/1/25)- Objection

**10. 99/24 Neighbourhood Plan**

Colin Wall provided an update, attached at the end of the Minutes.

**11. 100/24 Footpaths**

The footpath by the Natural Garden is not an official path, no action to be taken.

**Action:** FP7 signpost is broken at the A343 entrance- Clerk to report.

**12. 101/24 Items to take forward to subsequent meeting**

(Lengthsman task list incl. Church Lane flooding, A343 milestones cleaning).

HPC Action plan, Co-option (TBC).

**Date of next Meeting Tuesday 11 February 2024, Westridge Studio 7:30pm**

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Actions from 14 January 2025 Meeting

Number	Action	Person
100/24	FP7 signpost is broken at the A343 entrance- Clerk to report.	Clerk

### County Councillor Update - January 2025

The following is taken from a statement published by Hampshire County Council:

At the meeting of the Full County Council on Thursday 9 January, followed by the Authority's Cabinet on Friday 10 January, approval was given to request that the County Council be included in Government fast-track plans to bring devolution to the area...

As part of devolution proposals, a Mayor would be elected in the spring of 2026 to head up a new Combined Authority across the wider region incorporating Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council, in line with the Authorities' expression of interest submitted to the Deputy Prime Minister last summer...

Alongside devolution, the County Council has committed to progress with developing proposals for local government reorganisation in the area. It would completely change the landscape of Hampshire's local councils by replacing the current two-tier council system, which is in place across most of the region, with a number of new unitary (all-purpose) councils...

If Government agrees for Hampshire to be added to the fast-track devolution programme it would then allow the County Council elections, due this May, to be postponed for 12 months. This postponement would be essential to enable local areas to focus on laying the groundwork for devolution and reorganisation and allow for a Mayor to be elected in 2026 so the benefits to local communities can be delivered as swiftly as possible. Reorganisation would then be expected to be in place by either April 2027 or April 2028.

Leader of Hampshire County Council, Councillor Nick Adams-King said:

"The proposal of devolution for the Hampshire and Solent area is truly exciting and the benefits it could bring to local residents and businesses are transformational. At the same time as enabling us to take control of our future, devolution would attract millions of pounds into our region to help shape key policies and initiatives to enhance people's quality of life and the growth opportunities of businesses. At the same time, we are being asked to bring forward proposals for local government reorganisation. It is vital that we take control of that process to ensure the outcome best suits the residents and businesses we serve.

"With final endorsement received today from the County Council's Cabinet, we can now progress our work with Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council, Southampton City Council and our 11 district council partners in Hampshire to draw up plans for a single Combined Authority for the collective area of our four upper tier authorities, in line with our joint Expression of Interest submitted to Government last summer. We will also engage with key stakeholders such as businesses, the further and higher education sectors, National Parks, police, fire service, health and parish and town councils. If the County Council is accepted onto the Devolution Priority Programme Government will then lead a consultation with residents on the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority.

"I recognise and share the concern of many, however the pressing deadline to submit our devolution plans to Government means it makes absolute sense to seek permission for our

upcoming elections to be postponed. It will give us the space and capacity to complete this important work with crystal clear attention to the crucial job at hand, while working collaboratively across political parties and engaging with local communities to secure the best possible deal for our residents.”

The full statement is published here:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/News/20250110DevolutionPriorityProgramme>

For context, at the Hampshire County Council meeting on 9 January, the Liberal Democrat group put forward an amendment to request the Secretary of State to delay the 2025 County elections for a short period, as yet undefined. The unamended motion was passed, requesting instead a delay of the 2025 the elections for one year, which is the only option available to the Secretary of State.

We hope to hear from the Secretary of State on these matters, including the request to postpone elections, by the end of January.

Tom Thacker

## Highclere Parish Neighbourhood Plan – End-of-year status 2024

2024 has been a year of debate and wait for the Neighbourhood Plan (NP). In 2023 much progress had been made, but we were soon met with unwelcome road-blocks dramatically slowing our progress. Once we cleared the roadblocks, consultation and funding delays were encountered and our current progress is shown below in tables and text.

### From inception to end-2023

Nov 2018	Designation of Parish granted
Mar-Aug 2019	Building the Steering Group (SG)
	Scoping the project
	Appointing consultants
	Identifying probable key issues
	Planning initial stages of Community engagement
Feb 2020	Neighbourhood Plan community launch event
--- Covid pandemic ---	
2020/2021	Drafting Vision and Objectives
Sep 2021	Vision & Objectives survey – parish mail drop
Feb 2022	Call for sites
Mar 2022	Drafting the plan begins
Apr 2022	Site selection process begins
May 2023	Site Preference survey – parish mail drop
Sep 2023	Allocation of Foxs Lane site announced
Oct 2023	Screening draft development begins

We have had four instances of community consultation, despite the intervention of Covid during and after which community engagement has been challenging :

- the original Open Day in Feb 2020. This was publicised by leaflet (Penwood), Parish magazine, Nextdoor and Highclere Society newsletter. Around 100 people attended.

- the Parish-wide mail-drop of the Plan Objectives Survey in Sept 2021. The 200+ responses were overwhelmingly positive.
- the Parish-wide mail-drop of the Site Preference Survey in May 2023. The 200+ responses formed a key input to the eventual choice.
- the series of three explanatory drop-in meetings run in parallel with the survey. Over 100 people attended.

In 2021 the five-year review of the Borough's Local Plan became due and both the Parish Council (PC) and the NPSG were consulted in its early stages of development. This revealed that the Borough planned for Highclere to have a Housing Requirement (HR) of 10 dwellings to be delivered over the Plan period to 2035. This has recently been confirmed in the latest release.

This raised two problems for the NP. The objectives so strongly supported in the September 2021 survey included support for smaller and affordable dwellings and constraining development to small sites. However, under the Borough's planning rules, only sites of 10 dwellings or more could :

- Qualify to be counted towards the HR, and
- Require the developer to provide a proportion of affordable homes.

Therefore, rather than have the Borough define where developers could build or give up the emphasis on affordable homes it was decided with the strong encouragement of our consultants, PlanET and Associates, to allocate a single site for 10+ dwellings.

While there is no formal process defined for site selection, examination of other NPs and advice from PlanET made it clear that combining a professional, independent view with community preferences and performance against the agreed Plan objectives would be a robust process.

The eleven sites proposed to us in the Call for Sites were therefore submitted to Navigus Planning, a reputed planning consultancy, for an independent assessment against planning and sustainability criteria; this step is advised in the NP process. The addition of the need to support 10+ dwellings eliminated five sites which could not support that scale of development reducing the eleven to six. Of those six the least favoured in the independent assessment was removed and five were taken forward. The Steering Group assessed the five against how well they supported the NP objectives and then used the Preference Survey last May to garner the Parish's views. The three results were used together to decide which site to allocate in the NP; the Foxs Lane site was chosen. The results of each assessment and the overall selection data are available on the Parish website.

#### **Jan 2024 to date**

The publication of the Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council (BDBC) Local Plan Update (LPU) in January 2024 left it unclear whether the chosen site was, in fact, acceptable within BDBC's Spatial Strategy. Despite the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) guidance that a Local Planning Authorities (LPA) should assign an actual or indicative Housing Requirement to a Neighbourhood Area (NA), BDBC decided to base their Spatial Strategy in the latest LPU on individual "settlements" alone and in the LPU assigned an HR of ten dwellings to the settlement of Highclere Village. Subsequent communications made it clear that our proposed site allocation in Foxs Lane would not count for our HR and that this judgment also applies to the Oakley Farm site. Despite raising the NPPF issue and pointing out a number of fundamental flaws in the Spatial Strategy's sustainability assessment, no acknowledgment or allowance was forthcoming. To compound our difficulties none of the five sites proposed to us in our Call for Sites exercise, but **not** presented in the Preference

Survey, satisfied the latest LPU criteria either. They could therefore not be re-entered into the debate.

Fortunately, the data from the Preference Survey did give us the justification to allocate “the best of the rest” and we judged that re-running the Preference Survey would not be useful or expedient. The replacement site for allocation in the NP was therefore determined to be Cleremeadows, which satisfies the latest LPU criteria.

Substantive discussions were held with the likely developer and agreement reached over viable layouts which would also satisfy the criteria to be embodied in the relevant NP policy.

The Screening Draft NP was then pursued and in June was sent to Basingstoke for screening. When the consultees from the three external bodies (Natural England, Historic England and Environment Agency) failed to meet the six-week target Basingstoke were helpful in chasing them although this still resulted in significant delay. The resulting report determined that a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) would be required but a Habitat Regulations Assessment would not.

Inasmuch as this was exactly the result we had predicted it was gratifying to have the dice fall our way for once. An SEA is normally done by an external consultancy selected by Locality – the NP quango - and paid directly by them. Our attempts to get Locality to “pre-clear” the funding, based on Basingstoke’s draft opinion, met with a wall of protocol but once we had the final report we applied and the funding came through reasonably quickly and Aecom were nominated.

After at least one personnel change, Aecom started the process with an Inception meeting on December 13<sup>th</sup> over MS Teams where the process was explained and plans were drawn. The SEA has to go to the same three consultees as the Screening Draft NP to be completed in February and we would hope to move forward quickly towards Reg 14 consultation.

Jan 2024	BDBC Local Plan Update released
Winter	Site Allocation debate
Spring	Screening Draft completed
Jun 2024	Draft Plan goes to Basingstoke & Deane for preliminary screening
October 2024	Screening Report published
November 2024	SEA funding approved
December 2024	Aecom initiate SEA process
Feb 2025	SEA reports
Spring 2025	Reg 14 draftcomplete
Spring 2025	<b>Parish consults on the pre-submission draft (Regulation 14)</b>
Spring 2025	Updating draft plan based on consultation responses
Summer 2025	Submission of plan to BDBC
Summer 2025	<b>BDBC consults on proposed plan (Regulation 16)</b>
Autumn 2025	<b>Independent examination of draft plan</b>
Winter 2025/6	<b>Referendum</b>
early 2026	Plan ‘Made’ by BDBC and becomes part of the Local Plan

During the later stages there are four opportunities for Parishioners (and other stakeholders) to have their say on the contents of the Plan. These are shown in **bold** above.

### Caveats

The caveats below could have unknown impacts at any stage so we plough on regardless.

### B&D Resources

There is no doubt that, as long as MCHLG persist in the view that B&D's Spatial Strategy needs reworking to accommodate the newly-demanded housing numbers, then B&D's Policy Planning Group's resources will be stretched and may well impact our progress down the line.

### Consultee delays

The three consultees have once already proved less than reliable regarding prompt turnaround and now they have the SEA. Delays are totally unpredictable.

### Government Policy

Overarching all this are two Government policies :

- Its insistence on the 1.5 million houses in 5 years and the concomitant fallout in Local Plan housing numbers, all of which are dependent on developers who have recently heavily cut back on their applications to avoid lower prices and profit, builders who already don't have the resources (skills *and* materials), and mortgage rates which will inevitably rise due to likely Trump policies which are already causing increased costs of government and thence bank borrowing
- Its encouragement of the merging of local authorities into Unitary Bodies (UBs). Hampshire are it seems keen on this and would absorb B&D and others. The subsequent merge and re-organisation would divert planning policy resources to work on new UB protocols and divert that resource from exactly the functions the government needs working hard today.