Wealden District Councillor, Graham Shaw

Update and News

November 2026

The Local Plan and Owlsbury

The final consultation on the Local Plan closed on 2nd November. The current timetable requires any necessary changes to the draft to be made in the next month, then for the Cabinet to decide if it wants to ask the whole Council to approve the draft and send it off to the Planning Inspectorate and lastly – if the Cabinet does want that – for the Council to vote on it. If the Council approves the draft, the Planning Inspectorate will arrange for a public hearing in Wealden (probably at East Sussex National) sometime next year. Currently the Cabinet (and Council, if required) are due to make their decisions on 17th December.

Until a couple of weeks ago, our government-imposed deadline for submitting the draft Plan was 31st December. Out of the blue, we've been given another 3 months, i.e. to 31st March 2027. We don't want to delay, because if the Plan is to go ahead, the sooner we send it in the sooner we should have the public hearing. However, East Sussex Highways department raised major objections to the Owlsbury development a few weeks ago (available on the Council's website). If the developer can't deal with those objections satisfactorily, the Plan may need revision, with the extra time coming in very handy.

Crowborough Camp

The Government have used an Urgent Crown Development application to continue using the Camp to 2030 could go ahead – IE it does not go through the local planning application process.

The Council's role is therefore limited to commenting on the application, which we will be doing once the Minister asks for comments, and passing on any comments we receive from the public. If you want to comment, please email planning@wealden.gov.uk and put 'Crowborough Camp Urgent Crown Development application' in the subject line of your email.

The recent undercover ITV documentary "Inside the Asylum Camp", showed the staff from the Home Office contractor, Clearsprings, regularly cutting corners on welfare checks and the wrongful accommodation of torture victims. Residents were also subject to long periods in isolation without access to sufficient water. Wealden has written to the Home Affairs Committee, urging it to hold both the company and the HO to account for these inhumane conditions; that the facility is being properly managed and appropriate safeguards are in place; and that the HO is exercising effective oversight.

Wealden recognised as very good landlord

Unusually for these days Wealden owns about 3300 homes for rent. The Regulator of Social Housing spent about 5 months this year investigating every aspect of our performance as a landlord, and we were awarded the highest grade available. We're the only council in Sussex (including Brighton & Hove) to have achieved this, and it puts us among the top 20% of council landlords in England. While the Alliance has supported the expansion of social housing in the face of considerable financial and government policy obstacles, it's the officers in the housing department whose dedication has played far and away the largest part in obtaining this distinction. Unfortunately, investment in building social housing remains pitifully low despite the housing crisis being faced, particularly by young people and families.

Wealden steps in to help schoolchildren and families

Many of us will know that families can face significant costs for school uniform, footwear, stationery, essential travel and hygiene items before the new academic year. Proposed cuts to Back to School Hardship Payments (not by Wealden) prompted a rapid response from Wealden to provide additional support to families facing hardship associated with children returning to school after the summer holidays. £100,000 from our cost-of-living reserve was allocated leading to hundreds of families accessing a £50 grant per eligible child in a two-week period last August. Wealden staff worked quickly to respond to the situation and the needs of each family.

The Asylum Grant and investing in Crowborough

Despite our opposition to the Crowborough Camp, government expects Wealden to manage additional funding to support the voluntary bodies providing support to asylum seekers within the Camp and is making “per head” funds available for that purpose (with very tight criterion for its use). From our existing resources we also propose to create a Crowborough Community Investment Fund to invest an additional £170K in the Crowborough Town Council, the Cadets, for town centre improvements and local groups/projects. East Sussex County Council have indicated they will undertake their duties to the Camp using their existing resources. The NHS and Police receive separate funding for costs they may incur.

Zanes Law

The appalling lack of information about contaminated land and its impact on public health in the UK is no better illustrated than in the case of 7-year-old Zane Gbangbola and his father. In 2014 their house, along with others, was flooded. Something some Wealden residents know too well. But in this case the flood water passed through a historic landfill site creating toxic levels of hydrogen cyanide. Zane died and his father was left paralysed. Following a campaign and recognition from the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee that the problem of illegal waste dumping was out of control, legal experts and parliamentarians are working on a bill (Zanes Law) to strengthen control of such environmental and public health disasters,

The full council voted to support this initiative to ensure a proper national register of contaminated land is kept, updated and open to the public; and that local authorities are given funds to ensure sites are regularly inspected and remediated when possible.

Whilst the proposer of the motion had hoped that all councillors would support this important initiative, sadly, Conservative, Reform and Independent councillors either voted against or abstained, in the vote to support the campaign.

My ward budget

My ward budget still has a few hundred pounds should there be any local group wishing to have some financial support. This year, I am proud to have been able to support High Hurstwood School, Buxted Allotment Association, Buxted Horticultural Society, Buxted Art Group, Buxted Together and Crowborough Choral Society. Provision has been made in next year’s council budget to continue the scheme.

And finally, local government reorganisation and elections

The Government has finally confirmed that its reorganisation of local government will take place along the lines I mentioned in previous updates. Wealden District Council will disappear in April 2029, being subsumed (with other district and borough councils) into a new East Sussex Unitary Authority. This will take on all the current responsibilities of the county council, the districts and the boroughs.

However, there will be elections for Wealden councillors in May next year. These councillors will sit for two years at which point the unitary authority will take over. Elections of “shadow councillors” for the unitary will take place in 2028, ready for taking full responsibility in 2029.

On a personal note, I will not be seeking re-election as the councillor for Buxted in 2027, nor in any future elections. After the district council elections in May, I will retire from being a councillor.

Please don‘t hesitate to **contact me** to discuss these or any other issues important to you.

Contact me on **cllr.graham.shaw@wealden.gov.uk** Tel. 07770 571828

Wealden’s website is **www.wealden.gov.uk**