

WDC Report – Long Man PC - Monday 8th January 2024

1) Changes for Postal and Proxy Voters

A result of the Elections Act 2022 new regulations require electors wishing to vote by post to have to reapply every 3 years.

If a voter holds a postal vote before 31st October 2023 that facility will expire on 31st January 2026.

Proxy voting has also changed with the maximum number of people for whom one can act as proxy will be 2.

2) Wealden Parking Charges

WDC is 'looking' at its policy regarding parking enforcement.

WDC is one of the few authorities in the country not to have a Civil Parking Enforcement scheme. At present parking enforcement is the responsibility of Sussex Police but they do not view this as a policing priority. In other areas of East Sussex ESCC deal with on-street parking enforcement – and have 'pay and display' systems in place.

3) WDC has obtained £28k funding for work to support the purchase of trees and protection measures. Any Parish Council will be able to apply for funding for fruit tree to create a community orchard

4) Wealden councillors have passed a motion to investigate river damage in Wealden's rivers and waterways. The concern is with river damage and preservation and for silt run-off in developments close to rivers – and to work with the EA to reduce silt run-off into rivers. The council want to demand more of the EA in order to protect waterways. Apparently 30% of the rivers and water bodies in WDC area are in poor or bad condition. Only Arlington Reservoir is rated 'good' by the EA.

5) The Daily Mail exposed a situation (discovered by the Taxpayers' Alliance) regarding WDC paying staff members' domestic energy bills for staff who are working from home. The figure obtained through a FOI request is £245,644 since 2019 (over £126,000 in the past year).

6) There are apparently fewer empty homes (i.e. empty for more than 6 months) within WDC despite the total rising in England (572 in October down from 641 the year before).

7) At the recent Full Council meeting on 22nd November WDC agreed to allocate an additional £5.2m (up from £8m) to a Sports Hub complex near Horsebridge. There are lots of questions about the likely total costs for the project (which are unknown).

8) Apparently Wealden is the 2nd least violent area in England and Wales, according to a new study of crime data ! (156.4 violent crimes per 10,000 residents)

9) Electric car charging points are being installed in various WDC car parks

10) An Annual Budget Consultation is underway and residents and businesses are being urged to have their say. The consultation closes on 12th January and the results will be reviewed before the council sets its budget in February.

The consultation is for the 2024/25 budget and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the next five years, the council's General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budgets.

The council is also consulting on the increase of its share of Council Tax by 2.99%, which equates to £6.23 for a band D property for the year 2024/25, to agree General Fund Revenue 2024/25 budget proposals, estimates for 2025-2029 and the General Fund Capital Programme.

The Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires the council to estimate General Fund Revenue expenditure and income for the forthcoming year from all sources, together with contributions from reserves, to determine a net budget requirement to be met by government grant, Business Rates and Council Tax.

Residents in Wealden can access the consultation by visiting the Let's Talk Wealden engagement

hub. <https://letstalk.wealden.gov.uk/wealden-district-council-budget-2024-25-and-mtfs-2024-29-consultation>

David Greaves
8th Jan 2024