

**Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting of Woodmancote Parish Council (WPC) held at The Pavilion, Blackstone Lane, Blackstone, Henfield BN5 9TA on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2026 at 7pm.**

**Present:** Cllr R. Noel (Chairman), Cllr D. Austin, Cllr M. Batchelor, Cllr K. Donald and Cllr W. Noel.

**Clerk:** Celia Price, FSLCC, FdA (Comm Gov)

**Also Present:** HDC Cllr M. Croker

The Chairman welcomed all those present and opened the meeting

**125. Apologies for Absence**

None.

**126. Declarations of Interest**

The Chairman reminded all present that declarations of interest stand.

The Chair and Cllr Wendy Noel declared an interest in item 133 (ii) DC25/2021 St George as neighbours.

**127. Public Adjournment**

None present.

**128. Minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2025**

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2025 as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

**129. Action Updates**

The Clerk advised that the Speedwatch coordinator at Sussex Police has been contacted but no update to report. In addition, the HDC enforcement team have been advised of the illegal signage on the A281 towards Horn Lane providing advertising and directions to a coffee retailer. Finally, members noted that the bank mandate amendments have been actioned and the new clerk now has access.

**130. Horsham District Councillor report**

Cllr Mike Croker reported on the following

**Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)**

The current position regarding Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The authority is currently awaiting a decision from the relevant Ministry on the number of unitary authorities to be established. This decision is anticipated possibly in March, although no firm date has been confirmed.

Once the Ministry decision is received, a Structural Changes Order will be required. This will then proceed through Parliament, a process which is expected to take approximately nine months. In the interim period, officers are seeking to pre-empt potential outcomes and are undertaking forward planning with relevant partner organisations and stakeholders where possible.

At present, there remains uncertainty regarding whether local elections will take place and, if so, when these may occur.

### **Financial Position and Budget Planning**

The budget for the 2026/27 financial year is currently being finalised. Significant capital expenditure is planned, with a target council tax increase of 2.94%.

The budget position for the next financial year is reported to be stable; however, net expenditure is forecast to increase from £16 million to £21 million. This increase is partly attributable to the introduction of food waste collection, which is estimated to add approximately £2 million to expenditure.

Reserve levels are falling, and as a result, the recommendation is to maximise capital receipts where possible. The capital programme is projected at £35 million over the next two years, which was described as a significant financial commitment.

### **Housing Strategy**

A new Housing Strategy has been developed and is currently awaiting formal approval.

### **Active Well-being Strategy and Leisure Provision**

The Active Well-being Strategy is under review, with the intention of broadening its appeal across a wider demographic. Consideration is being given to the future use of leisure centres, particularly in light of upcoming contract renewals.

The ageing population was highlighted as a growing concern, with projections indicating that by 2041 approximately 30% of the population will be aged over 65, compared to the current figure of 23%. This demographic change has implications for health and well-being provision.

A hub-and-spoke model is being explored, which would link leisure centres with other well-being and health service providers, with the aim of delivering more integrated and accessible services to residents.

Cllr Noel raised personal concerns regarding the level of projected expenditure. It was noted that planned spending is forecast to be £21.5 million in the next financial year, rising to approximately £30 million thereafter, despite reserve levels not being sufficient to comfortably support this scale of expenditure. Cllr Noel expressed concern about the sustainability of this position.

Reference was made to Woodmancote Parish Council's wish to seek funding from Horsham District Council (HDC), and the potential opportunity to secure financial support through a grant arrangement was highlighted.

Further concerns were expressed in relation to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), particularly regarding the uncertainty it creates for future governance, funding, and local representation. It was also noted that Horsham is expected to establish a new Parish Council as part of forthcoming governance changes, with implications for the wider local government structure.

### 131. Reports

Cllr Wendy Noel reported attendance at the playing fields committee meeting.

Cllr Roger advised he will be attending a meeting hosted in Henfield to review bus stops on Route 17

### 132. General Power of Competence

Members considered the criteria for eligibility to exercise the General Power of Competence in accordance with Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 and the Parish Councils (General Power of Competence) (Prescribed Conditions) Order 2012, namely that:

- The number of elected councillors exceeds two thirds of the total number of councillors; and
- The Clerk to the Council holds a qualification that meets the statutory requirements.

It was **RESOLVED** to adopt the General Power of Competence with immediate effect as the criteria has been met.

### 133. Planning

#### i) Appeal Decisions

The following appeal decisions made by HDC were noted

- **DC/25/1240 Annies Baskets, Henfield Road, Albourne – ALLOWED**  
Prior notification of change of use of an agricultural building to a private dwelling
- **DC/23/1494 Lavender Cottage, Blackstone Gate Farm – DISMISSED**  
Construction of 1 no. dwelling
- **DC/23/1594 The Old Dairy, Blackstone Gate Farm – ALLOWED**  
Development of dog grooming and reception building

#### ii) New Applications

The following new applications were reviewed and discussed.

- **DC/25/1968 Holders, Furners Lane, Henfield**  
Conversion and extension of existing stable building into a two-bedroom dwelling with use of existing hay barn as car port.

The following observations were noted based on local knowledge and the submitted plans:

- The location of the existing water pipe serving the site would be compromised.
- Concerns were raised regarding the proposed new access, which appears to cross land not within the applicant's ownership.
- Members noted potential ecological impacts, including the impact of external lighting.
- Local knowledge of Furners Lane as a single-lane road was highlighted, with concerns raised regarding access and traffic movements.
- Comments were noted in relation to the internal layout, including the proposed bathroom arrangements.

It was **RESOLVED** to submit a neutral response whilst drawing attention to the above observations

- **DC/25/2021 St George, Brighton Road, Woodmancote**

Erection of home office accommodation above detached triple garage with installation of 3no. dormers to the south elevation.

*Cllr Dixon took the Chair for this item.*

It was **RESOLVED** to submit a neutral response with a request that light pollution mitigation is considered

*Cllr Noel returned to the Chair.*

- **DC/25/2061 The Little Hundred, Brighton Road, Henfield**

Application to confirm use as a single dwelling house (Lawful development certificate – existing)

It was **RESOLVED** to submit a neutral response

- **DC/25/2162 Bankside, Bramlands Lane, Woodmancote**

Erection of single storey side extension

It was **RESOLVED** to support this application noting that it appears that the CiL details have not been fully completed in the application.

**134. Blackstone Playing Field Lease**

Cllr Roger Noel updated members advising that the Allen Trust met in December and whilst they are happy with the lease would like the lease with Sussex Cricket finalised before signing.

Sussex Cricket have indicated acceptance including liability for the maintenance of the play area and trees as well as the pavilion. The legal teams are currently reviewing a break clause.

**135. A281 Bike Rack**

The licence issued by WSCC for the installation of the bike rack at the bus stop on the A281 was reviewed.

It was **RESOLVED** to agree the licence and to delegate authority to the Clerk, in consultation with the Chair to facilitate the installation of the bike rack within a budget of £2500.

**136. Bus Route 17**

The next working group meeting is scheduled for 20<sup>th</sup> January 2026; the Chair will be in attendance communicating WPC requests.

Members reviewed the audit and agreed requests for additional shelters and poles/flags at several locations including outside 'Dragons', 'East House', 'Holmbush Farm' (south), 'Terry's Cross' and Blackstone Lane.

At the meeting, the Chair will establish the on-going maintenance costs.

**137. Payments Schedule**

It was **RESOLVED** to authorise the following payments totaling £2057.10

November and December clerk costs £1733.34

2 x invoices for Scribe (accounting software) totaling £48.00

Vision ICT (.gov.uk domain name to 2027) £78.00

WSALC Subscription £197.76

**138. Scribe (Accounting Software)**

The Clerk reported that the Scribe accounting package was now being used, and year to date accounts have been transferred onto the new system. A selection of reports were reviewed.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Clerk set up a direct debit for Scribe commencing 1<sup>st</sup> March for £24 per month

**139. Clerk's Salary**

The Clerk reported issues with the WSCC payroll service resulting in non-payment of salary.

It was **RESOLVED** to cancel the agreement with WSCC payroll services and investigate HMRC PAYE Tools - a free software solution provided by HMRC.

**140. Bank Reconciliations**

It was **RESOLVED** to note the bank reconciliations for November and December 2025.

**141. 2025-26 Budget Review**

The budget vs actual accounts were reviewed, noting no significant variances.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report.

It was also **RESOLVED** to delegate to the Clerk, in consultation with Members, the facilitation of the purchase and installation of a new noticeboard in Blackstone at a maximum cost of £2,700 and to proceed with the purchase and installation of a new SID on the B2116 to be within the previously agreed cost.

**142. 2026-27 Budget**

The proposed budget for 2026-27 was reviewed.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the proposed budget.

**143. 2026-27 Precept**

It was **RESOLVED** to submit the precept demand for 2026-27 to HDC for 17,573.00 (seventeen thousand, five hundred and seventy-three pounds only) a total increase of £500 from 2025-26 which equates to 2.93% or £1.81 per year (0.15p per month) on an average Band D property.

**144. Correspondence**

It was **RESOLVED** to note correspondence from Paul Marshall, Leader WSCC re: LGR.

**145. Confidential Session**

It was **RESOLVED** that under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the following items of business will remain confidential.

**146. Confidential Matters**

It was **RESOLVED** to agree the terms of the Clerk's contract.

It was **RESOLVED** to facilitate the back pay rise that was agreed by NALC for the outgoing clerk after she had left.

**147. Items for the next agenda and date of the next meeting.**

The date of the next meeting is **10<sup>th</sup> March 2026 @ 7:00pm**

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9:07pm.