

Update and News

April 2026

Local Planning News

Once again local planning decisions have been overridden by the Planning Inspectors. Despite Wealden's Planning Committee rejecting an application to build 65 houses on land north of Budletts Lane (shown on the map).

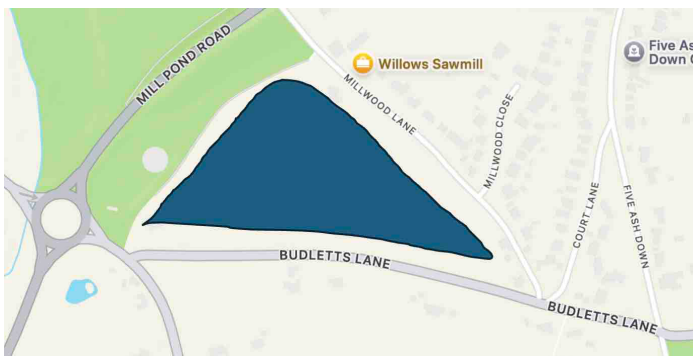
East Sussex Highways indicated that:

A number of issues have been overcome however safe pedestrian access for this major development is not achievable. The current proposals fall short of required safety standards and cannot deliver a safe option for active travel choice for non-motorised users, thereby exacerbating reliance on the private car and compromising safety for users of the local highway network.

And the Wealden Officer report concluded:

The unacceptable highways safety issues have undergone detailed and extensive discussion in an effort to resolve the ESCC Highways Authorities concerns, but despite the negotiations the issues would appear incapable of resolution; safe pedestrian access for this major development is not achievable.

Nevertheless, Planning Inspectors have overturned our decision and granted permission for the building of 50 houses on a site that is so clearly unsustainable.



National Planning News

The overriding of local planning decisions is also now being further embedded in the operation of the national planning system – taking even more power away from elected councillors.

As of last month any development over 150 houses is to be referred to the Secretary of State if a local planning committee is minded to refuse the planning application. That local decision could then be overturned by the SoS.

And in October a further regulation comes into being which will further reduce the scope for local democratic decision making. It will be based on a presumption that virtually every decision on a planning application, whether an approval or a refusal, should be taken by a planning officer, not by the elected members of our 2 planning committees. The committees will still be able to take decisions on larger applications (for housing, more than 9 homes or a site larger than half a hectare), *but only if*:

- a) The application raises at least one significant social, environmental, economic and/or planning issue, *and*
- b) A nominated planning officer and a nominated councillor agree with each other that the application does raise such an issue *and* should be referred to one of the committees. In other words, the existence of the issue will not be enough by itself to remove the decision from the officers.

This means that the work of both planning committees will be significantly reduced. It could mean that they cease to function altogether, because the new rules give each of the nominated individuals a veto over what will go to the committees and their decisions will be very hard to challenge. I'm sure these decisions will be made in good faith while Wealden continues to exist, but what may happen once the unitary authority takes over, or elsewhere, is anyone's guess.

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

Councillor Ward Budget Scheme

On a more positive note, the 2026/27 Councillor Ward Budget schemed opened in last month. I have already allocated a total of £8.1K to High Hurstwood School and Buxted Allotment Association. If you would like to discuss accessing the remaining resources please contact me.



High Hurstwood School has received £5K towards a week of summer extra-curricular activities. These will include: learning circus skills, skateboarding, bounce fitness, golf, badminton, wrestling, Drumba and Zorbing – all designed specifically for the children. For the first time ever the whole school (101 children) will also visit a local outdoor activity centre. The events are designed to promote fitness, teamwork and wellbeing so that every child can join in and learn new skills.



Wealden Council have joined with the Ashdown Forest Foundation and the Arts Council to fund The Big One Hundred - a major festival celebrating the 100th anniversary of *Winnie-the-Pooh*. The arts organisation Trigger will be organising events Taking place in Ashdown Forest (the real-life Hundred Acre Wood) and across the Wealden district (including Uckfield, Sheffield Park and the Forest Centre), during the summer. Events will feature interactive puppet performances, nature-based activities. Further information is at thebigonehundred.co.uk

Buxted Allotment Association have received £3.1K to improve their parking area and better access to their site. At present, plot holders are required to park on surrounding roads or informal verges, which are frequently unsafe and inaccessible, particularly in poor weather. This disproportionately impacts older residents, people with disabilities, and those with limited mobility, creating inequality of access and preventing full participation. The scheme will include environmentally sustainable measures.

Finally, after the prolonged wet weather we have had over the winter, work has started on the extension to the playground and construction of new play equipment at Buxted School. £5K from my 2025/26 ward budget went to supporting this initiative, alongside Sports Premium funding already raised by the school.



As part of our commitment to improving health and wellbeing Wealden has been investing in a host of initiatives and activities.

Some of the highlights include securing grants from a range of bodies and use of CIL funds to deliver leisure centre improvements, deliver a new Sports Hub, support several grassroots sports organisations, provide support to 23 local organisations providing targeted health and wellbeing interventions, supported the work of the Wealden Dementia Alliance, and supported the delivery of three new GP surgeries in Mayfield, Polegate and Hailsham. Wealden works closely with the NHS and Public Health on these initiatives.

For more information see healthywealden.co.uk/