



The Queen's Hall  
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Cuckfield  
West Sussex  
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## Annual Parish Meeting held at the Queen's Hall, High Street, Cuckfield

### Notes of the Meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2022

- Present:** Mr Andy Burton (Chairman), Mr Paul Ceccherini, Mr John Dickie, Mr Steve Oversby-Powell, Mr Adrian Podmore, Mr Martin Sheldon, Mr Andrew Symonds and Mrs Jill White  
**and members of the public**
- In attendance:** Sam Heynes (Clerk) and Kate Ely (Assistant Clerk)
- Guest Speaker:** Mims Davies, MP

#### 1) Presentation by the Chairman of Cuckfield Parish Council

Cllr Andy Burton opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. The meeting included many local organisations for the first time in the format of a roadshow, with Made in the Shade performing for the crowd.

Cllr Burton went on to explain how the Council had performed against the business plan over the past 2 years since the last Parish Meeting. The Angela Fox Nature Garden had been developing well and food hampers had been donated to families in need during 2021. More events had been held including Silver Sunday, Skate Jams, and the Escape Treasure Hunt. The Platinum Jubilee Street Party was in full planning mode for later in the year.

Recent focus had turned to the proposed development at CuckStye; a recent public meeting had had an excellent turnout and opposition to the proposal was strong. A powerful video of drone footage had been put together to demonstrate the extent of the countryside that would be destroyed should the development proceed.

Mims Davies MP was welcomed to the meeting and would also be present at the next public meeting in opposition of Cuckstye on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2022, to be held in the Queen's Hall.

#### 2) Presentation by Mims Davies MP

Mims congratulated the Parish Council on the excellent format of the meeting and observed how passionate and welcoming residents of Cuckfield were.

Visited Cuckfield High Street to see how businesses have fared during COVID.

Cuckstye had been a bolt from the blue for most, and believed it was the right thing to halt the plan pending government revisiting the housing requirements for the South East. The iconic views must be saved and Mims would work with residents on this. Mims further observed that she believed MSDC had been doing what was required of them.

Mims had written to the planning minister to lay out local concerns and objections to this development.

The updated housing survey highlighted new housing numbers were significantly lower than previous estimates, due in part to the new environment bill which had not been considered in the housing projections. MSDC had been working to old legislation.

The Northern Arc had commenced and would provide many new homes for the area, and the new residents of this area needed to be integrated into the community.

Other challenges included the water table in the area as borne out by the drought and water shortages experienced in recent years. Significant constraints in Mid Sussex need to be considered before planning additional housing. The reality is this was an area under stress and would not cope without improvements being made prior to housing being built.

The proposed site will cause untold damage should it go ahead, it was necessary to find a long-term way to grow the community whilst keeping what is special about our it.

### **3) Questions and Answers**

A member of the public spoke to say it was nice to hear someone looking at the big picture and went on to recognise the biodiversity mentioned in the Northern Arc and Cuckstye, asking how this would be managed to show it had been achieved? Trees had been removed on Isaacs Lane, Mims advised some trees had been kept and would be used to support wildlife habitats to encourage insects and animals back.

Mims shared she had visited Wakefield to see a green development of chalet style houses which had future proofed design, with cupboards which could be covered to stair lifts. All kitchen appliances were built with changeable heights so they could be raised and lowered as per future needs. Based on this Mims had asked Homes England to be ambitious with who they worked with to incorporate things like this in the Northern Arc development.

The next question raised how the Country Park proposed on ancient woodlands as part of Cuckstye was an absurd notion, how can Planning departments be empowered to reject such claims to ensure developers do not include proposals like this to make their development sites financially viable when otherwise they would not be? Good planning means understanding what was already in place and maximising that. There were deep frustrations as regeneration was desperately needed in our communities eg Burgess Hill so why are open fields so attractive?

Mims response was that the simple answer was because it was easier. Hopefully the new planning bill would focus on brownfield sites as there had been a total lack of ambition around brownfield and regeneration of areas. More ambition and regeneration at the heart of the housing bill was essential to encourage footfall in our towns and villages.

Another member of public stated that councils needed to work out their criteria and constraints and manage the process with new developments, rather than having private developers coming up with ideas and then retrofitting those. Are you happy with the process that's been adopted?

Mims replied that a transparent process which the community could be involved with would be preferred; many MPs had been parish or district councillors so they understood the issues. Government was brilliant at meddling with things that were going well but less good with things going wrong. A more engaged way to bring communities into the process was required. Top-down processes from the government did not work, it would be better to work from the bottom up.

A further member of public asked how had we got into this position? MSDC were horrified about the number of houses allocated to the area due to the unmet need in Crawley and

Brighton. Now Michael Gove had different ideas to his predecessor, were the 1,600 proposed houses still part of government thinking?

Mims replied there was a duty to cooperate with Horsham, Crawley, Brighton regarding their unmet housing need. MSDC trying were trying to do the right thing by reducing unplanned development occurring randomly, by allocating specific sites.

Were these other areas trying to meet their own needs? Mims believed the new legislation would reflect this, as previous legislation had created a difficult political situation for many MPs to support. Social housing requirements also needed consideration. The Planning Bill was next due in parliament on 10<sup>th</sup> May; previously failures to get the bill through had left some areas vulnerable.

Homes England had completed a traffic study for the Northern Arc proposals, which had indicated the proposed 3,500 houses would see a reducing in traffic coming through Ansty over 10 years. This created a lack of trust when statements like this were made, as a consultant would give you the answers you want to hear, meaning people lose faith in the process. What would bring comfort is a truly independent analysis, as traffic gridlock would follow in this area with these houses, never mind the proposed additional 1,600 houses for Cuckstye.

Mims acknowledged that people were starting to disbelieve traffic modellers paid by developers. A truth was that whilst we were living and working differently, there were ways of relieving traffic; the reality though was that the school and nursery runs all take place at the same time of day.

A member of public raised concerns that the letterbox at the top of the village had been out of action for 18 months due to the developer converting the flats, can this be investigated? Mims would raise this with her casework team to follow up.

Who was living in these new houses, and who were we building the houses for? People who live and work locally? The demographic change has been substantial over the past couple of years with hybrid working, changes in care needs, schools, families, work, and Gatwick being a large employer. More and more people are moving to Cuckfield from London and areas with large budgets.

It was necessary to find a way to provide linked housing to sustain families and communities. 70-80% jobs in West Sussex were local. Making sure people could live and work in local jobs was essential.

#### **4) Closing Comments**

Cllr Burton thanked Mims Davies MP for answering all the questions posed, predominantly regarding planning issues which showed the strength of feeling within the community. Planning issues would not be going away over the next 10 years or so. Cuckfield was a victim of its own success. Our job was to protect the southern boundary as our predecessors did hundreds of years ago when the railways threatened the village.

Thanks to everyone for attending, we hoped to see you all on 10<sup>th</sup> June.

The meeting closed at 8.50pm

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_