

# Community News

Newsletter of the Wealden Residents' Action Group

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*Selby Meadow Community Garden, Uckfield*

**Issue 18 Spring 2015**

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## A Question of Trust.

Many of you will have read and heard the exchanges between WRAG, SHRG and WDC over the latest rent increases being implemented by the council, imposing a rent increase amounting to 168% of the government's recommended amount. As this is an average it is envisaged that some tenants could face an increase of 253% of the government's recommendation.



It has for our part highlighted some serious issues in the way we are dealt with as a supposed partner with WDC.

In their briefing documents, sent to both tenants and councillors, WDC stated "...we no longer get any funding from Government, so everything we do is paid for from your rent..." WRAG feels this is very misleading because, in the past, WDC didn't receive any funding from the government. In fact, before self-financing, WDC had to pay some of the rental income TO the government!

Examples like this lead the reader to incorrect conclusions, and make it very difficult for WRAG to take statements made by WDC at face value.

WRAG also feels that it is at a disadvantage when dealing with housing finance matters because no officer support is available. In previous years, the Tenant Involvement Team was able to provide information. This year, that support has been withdrawn without consultation or explanation. During rent discussions this year, the Portfolio Holder admitted that he did not understand why Tenant Involvement are no longer able to assist with Housing Finance matters. It feels that WDC only want Tenant Involvement when WDC will benefit.

The arbitrary removal of this source of help and information further highlights the underlying issues with the relationship between WRAG and WDC. WRAG is made up of volunteers, and does not have the resources or expert advice that is available to WDC. In matters as detailed and complicated as Housing Finance we have little experience; it feels as though we are being manipulated to agree to options we think are unfair.

We now know that WDC do not have to abide by government guidelines. Although they have often used this to justify past decisions, they have now shown us quite blatantly that this is not

the case and we should never again accept this as a justification for their actions or decisions.

So, how do we move forward with this situation now that the element of trust has gone from the relationship with WDC?

We need to start by asking ourselves some very serious questions about our role as tenant representatives and what sort of future relationship we will accept with WDC.

We need to insist that a proper and robust consultation agreement is agreed and adhered to.

We are actively seeking to employ the services of an independent housing finance consultant to make up for the services taken away from us by the Housing Officers in relation to the Tenant Involvement Team.

**There will be some very frank discussions on these issues at the next WRAG meeting on:**

**Wednesday, 13th May, at 7pm, in the Uckfield Civic Centre.**

Stephen Hadfield of Booker & Best will be in attendance to get feedback on the Repairs service.

In the meantime, you can contact me by email if you wish to express your views on these issues.

**George Hedges – Wealden Resident Action Group – [hedges.george@gmail.com](mailto:hedges.george@gmail.com)**



## Update from the Sheltered Housing Residents Group (SHRG)



This is the last message from Malcolm and Derek as joint chairs of SHRG. We are retiring from SHRG due to ill health and frustration at the "misleading information" ( see WRAG introduction) issued by various WDC officers thereby damaging our trust in WDC.

WE WOULD LIKE TO POINT OUT TO ALL READERS THAT FOREGOING IS NOT THE ORIGINAL SCRIPT BUT PRESSURE WAS PUT ON BY WDC TO ALTER IT.

**Derek Lee and Malcolm Palfrey**

# The Future for Local Bus Services

Integrated local transport systems are vital for creating sustainable growth and prosperity in our towns villages and rural areas; Good public transport links will attract investment, employment and tourism both today and in the future.

During the last few years however, the lack of competition and the failure of deregulation since the 1986 privatisation of rural bus services has led to bus usage declining by 32% in rural areas, while it has risen by an amazing 99% in the still regulated London area. The future is looking bleak!! Some rural communities are becoming isolated by having no regular transport links.

More people travel to work by bus than all other forms of public transport combined.

There are 2.5 million bus commuters. This is around 12% of the working population.

Approximately 20% of full time employed and 30% of part time employed people are frequent bus users. One fifth of the working age population in rural areas outside of London use buses at least once a week

So what can we do about it?

A start has been made by Wealden District Council providing a grant to create the Wealden Bus Alliance, formed as a Community Interest Company whose aims are to promote the greater use of public transport and encourage new routes and services throughout the Wealden area.

Like so many aspects of life, the solution is within our own hands! More innovative projects to encourage local transport are needed, such as the 'Forest Explorer' bus/rail integrated scheme, 'Access to Healthcare' patient transport in Uckfield, the Shopping service run by Wealdlink, supported by 5 Parish Councils and the Hailsham local bus services operated by Cuckmere Buses

We must not allow rural communities to become isolated. Buses provide convenient low-cost environmentally friendly transport for young and old alike.

Cllr. Barry Marlow.

# Driving for a Community Transport Service

There are many community groups and charities that offer volunteering opportunities. One of the most rewarding must be helping with a Community Transport provider, such as Wealdlink.



Wealdlink provides a shopping service. Passengers from rural areas, small towns and villages in the North Wealden area, are taken to Crowborough, Tunbridge Wells, and occasionally Eastbourne. Wealdlink is a friendly, door-to-door service; passengers are collected from home, taken to the shopping centre, and their bags are carried by the driver or driver assistant. For many passengers, the service is one of the few opportunities they have to leave the house and meet other people. For them, it's not just about shopping, it's also a chance to socialise.

It takes about an hour to collect all the passengers and deliver them to the shops. Since the passengers use the service regularly, they know each other well, and the atmosphere on the bus is invariably friendly.

Passengers have two hours to shop and to have a cake-and-coffee break, before the bus returns to collect them.

Shopping bags are loaded by the driver or driver assistant while the passengers get settled into their seats.

With shopping bags to unload, and conversations to finish before getting off, the return journey takes a little longer. At each passenger's home, bags are taken to the front door, or carried inside if necessary. There's never any doubt that the customers appreciate the independence that the shopping service gives them

After the last shopper has been safely taken home, the bus is returned to base and checked again, to make sure it's ready for the next day's trip.

If you think the shopping service would be useful to you, or you'd like to volunteer as a shopping service driver, more details can be found on the Wealdlink website, at <http://www.4weald.co.uk/>, or you can phone the office on **01892 771332**.

# Community Gardens

Several community groups have transformed often neglected communal areas of land. The most prolific group is the Newtown Action Group that has taken over 3 areas all together. Sometimes groups plant spring flowers, sometimes they have formally community gardens or both!! This feature gives a flavour some of the different approaches to communal areas around Wealden.

## **The Ridge Community Association, Groombridge.**

When the Ridge Community Association formed one of the main concerns was the communal greens and the lack of screening of the houses from the main road. So the association got funding to plant a hedge between the houses and the road and got a lawn mower to cut the grass themselves to a higher standard. The lawns make a pleasant backdrop for the groups annual dog show "Scruffs" and community parties.

## **Newtown Action Group, (NAG) Uckfield.**

NAG currently manages three communal garden spaces in their area, the award winning Selby Meadows, a large rustic green space which won the WRAG Garden Competition last year, as well as a small part of Vernon Close, which was transformed from an overgrown patch of weeds into a pleasant area with seating and planting. Work is well underway on a Community Garden for Keld Close, with clearance work done, and a planning application submitted it is hoped that phase two will begin in April.



### **School Lane Community Association, Hadlow Down**

The Community Association have transformed a disused piece of land into a vibrant kitchen garden with raised beds, green houses and sheds, as well as an area for socialising and enjoying the fruits of their labour.



### **Town Farm Residents Association, Hailsham**

The Residents Association on Wealden's largest estate have planted thousands of bulbs and trees in the past, but now are exploring possible uses (such as a community garden or garden plots) for a neglected and forgotten corner of the estate.



### **Southfields Community Association, Polegate**

Southfield community association dipped their toes in the water by planting flowers on communal verges last year. The same has been done again this year and the group have also got funding to create a community garden space in a

disused garden plot. It is envisaged that the garden will have beds and a meeting space and will take shape over the summer

### **Unity Community Association**

The Unity Community Garden was developed on a piece of waste ground and over the years and with a lot of hard work has transformed into a wonderful garden area with raised beds, fruit trees a green house and terraces.



# Adam Field – Alderbrook

In late 2009 work started on Adam Field to provide a much needed play area for children of all ages. When the Community Association was formed in 2008 it was obvious that a decent play area was needed to occupy children from the area. Adam Field at that time had two tatty goal posts on a downhill stretch, a small basket ball shooting area and a seating area on grass which in the wet was not suitable for use.



Meeting with local children shaped what they needed and after some begging and form filling by the Alderbrook Community Association funding was secured from Crowborough Town Council and Play England and in conjunction with Wealden District Council and Orbit Housing Association.

Work started to turn a sloping field into something more suited to the needs of the area. Unfortunately it was an extremely wet winter so work was delayed but by May 2010 both the older children's area and the toddler play area were ready to use.

Now, 5 years on some residents probably wouldn't even know the work that went into getting this excellent facility and it is a pleasure to see how well used the equipment is - particularly the MUGA (Multi Use Games Area) - it was well worth holding out for a larger MUGA even though it was more expensive - it gets so much use throughout the year even when the ground is too wet to walk on kids can use it and burn some energy off!



To see more pictures as the field took shape please go to [www.alderbrookonline.co.uk](http://www.alderbrookonline.co.uk) and go to page 12 on the Photos page – there are lots to see!