Horsham Blueprint Business Neighbourhood Forum *Draft No.2 – 16/02/2025*

Notes of Steering Group Meeting held on Monday 27th January 2025.

Held at the Millennium Hall, Roffey, Horsham.

The meeting started at 7.00 pm

1.00 - Welcome

1.01 - John Steele opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and introduced Trevor Leggo of West Sussex Association of Local Councils, and Graham Watkins of Horsham Association of Local Councils. John Steele introduced everyone at the meeting. John Steele said the meeting will follow the previously issued agenda

2.00 - Attendees and Apologies

2.01 - Attendees : John Steele, Trudie Mitchell, Diane Sumpter, Morag Warrack, Ruth Fletcher, Francis Vernon, Malcolm Gilbert, John White, & Ron Bates.

2.02 - Apologies were received from - Andrew Cooke.

2.03 - Visitors : Trevor Leggo of West Sussex Association of Local Councils, Graham Watkins of Horsham Association of Local Councils, Martin Boffey - Leader of Horsham District Council, Nigel Friswell of Forest NC, Charles Puckle of Forest NC. Ian Botting of Denne NC, and Belinda Walters - Councillor of HDC.

3.0 - Notes of the last meeting

3.01 - John Steele asked if there are comments on the notes of the meeting on 24th September 2024.

3.02 - There were no comments and the notes of the meeting held on the 24th September 2024 (Draft No.3) were approved by all present at the meeting with no amendments.

4.0 - Introduction to the Governance Review

4.1 - John Steele set out that Blueprint in December 2024 requested HDC undertake a governance review of the unparished area of Horsham. HDC has agreed and has one year to carry out the governance review. Therefore a decision has to be made by 3rd December 2025.

5.0 - Creation of a Parish / Town Council

5.1 - Trevor Leggo started by saying that recently there have been big Government devolution plans proposed for East and West Sussex. Trevor identified a recent document prepared by Adur & Worthing Councils that sets out very well the Government devolution plans and Sussex proposals, including the proposed timeline.

5.2 - Trevor gave the example of the recently formed town council of Bexhill in May 2021. Previously Bexhill had been represented by only District Councillors. Bexhill being a town council it will collect council tax which it will spend it in its own area.

5.3 - Trevor set out that Haywards Heath has about 22.480 electors which is similar to the unparished area of Horsham with 22,456 electors. Haywards Heath has a budget of about £768.000 which could be similar to that of the new Horsham town council.

5.4 - Trevor gave the example of Hailsham town council with about 17,000 electors which is a town just north of Eastbourne, Hailsham took over the management of the local post office when it was about to close, because the electorate and town councillors deemed it necessary to maintain the heart of Hailsham town.

5.5 - The Government is proposing the creation of large unitary authorities, merging county and district councils, with higher level strategic authorities with an elected mayor. Parish and town councils would continue to provide specific locally agreed services in their area.

5.6 - Sussex is totally parished except for Crawley and Worthing and the centre of Horsham.

5.7 - A town council has powers independent of a unitary authority and it is likely that Eastbourne and Hastings will be town councils.

5.8 - Much has yet to be decided with regards to unitary authorities or a strategic authority for Sussex but will likely be East Sussex and West Sussex and Brighton / Worthing coastal strip, with Crawley being included in either East or West Sussex. Sussex is regarded as a rural area.

5.9 - It is expected that in the first quarter of 2025 the government will consult with East Sussex and West Sussex and for them to submit their plans of how they wish to proceed. There must be no areas outside the proposed unitary authority.

5.10 - Trevor set out that a town council needs a qualified Clerk and that this position for Horsham town council would be a sought after position. The cost of a Clerk would likely be in the region of £75,00 per annum, plus pension cost of say 21%; with employees contributing 7% into their pension. The rate per hour for a Clerk is about £30 per hour.

5.11 - Trevor indicated that at the beginning of a town council there will be few staff needed but as more work is taken on then more staff will be needed.

5.12 - Town Councils need to be informed of planning applications in their area, they also have a duty to co-operate with other authorities. A town mayor will have the authority to call in planning applications. The planning application reviews are helped by the existence of the neighbourhood plan.

5.13 - Trevor put forward that with the government changes proposed for local government it would be unwise to stay as an unparished area as the world will pass you by. Trevor put forward that most likely the way forward for a new town / parish council would be to have elections to elect new councillors where anyone who lives in the area can stand for election.

5.14 - A new town council could have assets transferred for it to manage by agreement such as playgrounds and with this comes the responsibility for maintenance.

5.15 - Trevor set out that Bognor has 17 councillors, Burgess Hill has 18 councillors so comparing these similar areas, it could be considered that a new Horsham town council would have a similar number of say 18 councillors. Graham said that with the number of Southwater councillors each represents about 200 people.

5.16 - Trevor indicated that there are no rules to cover party politics with regards to elected councillors. There could even be an association of ratepayers or some other group.

6.0 - Next Steps

6.01 - John Steele asked with this information received does anyone still have doubts about the need for a town council for the unparished area of Horsham.

6.2 - Nigel Friswell expressed his grave concerns about the democratic process that will be lost provided by the neighbourhood councils.

6.3 - John Steele said that as Blueprint is a Business Neighbourhood Forum for the unparished area of Horsham it should set up some public meetings to explain to residents of the unparished area the process of the governance review and the reasons why the creation of a town council would be beneficial. The question is how to go about arranging these meetings and attract residents to attend.

6.4 - Ian Botting asked why North Horsham Parish was not included in this town council process. The reason for this is that North Horsham is already a parish and Blueprint has called for the governance review as it only represents the unparished area of Horsham.

6.5 - Graham Watkins suggested that it may be worthwhile to take some legal advice on explaining this change to residents as if nothing changes then there will be no local body to represent the residents.

6.6 - Trevor said he had not seen the constitution for the unparished area of Horsham. It was agreed to forward this constitution to Trevor Leggo.

6.7 - Ruth Fletcher put forward the view that a town council will protect assets in Horsham.

6.8 - Trudie Mitchell said that the Government seems to have no thought for the unparished area neighbourhood councils.

6.9 - Trevor confirmed that he would be happy to attend any public meetings concerning the proposal for a new town council for the unparished area of Horsham. Trevor set out the process that a parish council would first be set up and then if so desired by the elected councillors can vote to be a town council.

6.10 - Ruth Fletcher put forward the view that an alternative would be to have three separate parish councils.

6.11 - Trevor put forward that the powers of a town / parish council are many but there are three duties - 1 - It must elect a chair annually - 2 - Set a budget even if it is Nil - 3 - provide allotments if requested to do so.

6.12 - Trevor put forward that assets that generate income need to be managed. An example of a building that generates income may have costs over time that will exceed the income.

6.13 - John Steele asked for proposals for public meetings. Trevor asked to avoid Wednesdays and Fridays so that he can attend.

6.14 - Discussion took place and it was agreed to investigate the availability of The Baptist Church Hall as the venue for the public meeting. The three dates suggested were Saturday 22nd February 2025 from 10.00am to 12.00 noon; and Thursday 27th February 2025 from 7.00pm to 9.00pm; and Saturday 1st March 2025 from 10.00am to 12.00 noon.

6.15 - Belinda Walters, the Chair of the Governance Committee at HDC confirmed that staff are preparing for what needs to happen. It is the first time that she and HDC are looking at a governance review to promote a council for the unparished area of Horsham so it is all new to them.

7.0 - Any Other Business

7.1 - It was agreed that all communications with the Neighbourhood Councils should be directed to each Clerk for them to distribute.

7.2 - Diane Sumpter confirmed that application has been to HDC for financial support for Blueprint and this has been approved with the money expected within the next few months.

7.3 - John Steele said that Blueprint's registration as a Neighbourhood Forum needed to be renewed before July and that he had started the process with HDC.

7.4 - John Steele confirmed that discussions continue with HDC about CIL. The documentation to be sent to interested local groups is complete awaiting approval from HDC; groups such as Friends of Horsham Park and Green Gym and many more. The next meeting with HDC about CIL is set for the 11th February 2025.

7.5 - John Steele brought up the question raised by Andrew Cooke who has asked for Blueprints support in progressing initiatives of the Community Land Trust in Horsham and also work with the North Horsham Community Land Trust initiative. It was discussed and agreed that Blueprint will support the endeavours of Community Land Trust in Horsham.

7.6 - John Steele put forward that if the local elections are cancelled this may free up some council staff which may speed up the work necessary on the governance review for the unparished area of Horsham. It is hoped a decision on the local elections will be known by the end of January 2025.

7.7 - Malcolm Gilbert raised the question about the public meeting; was it to be about the governance review for a parish council for the unparished area of Horsham not including North Horsham Parish. This was agreed and it is about a parish / town council for the unparished area of Horsham as a means to protect the assets of the town.

7.8 - Charles Puckle raised concern about publicising the public meeting that many residents may not know that they live in the unparished area of Horsham.

7.9 - The HDC governance review consultation with the unparished area residents will unlikely take place until May 2025. The method of this consultation is yet to be decided by HDC but may be a questionnaire.

7.9 - Nigel Friswell said that the residents need to be given sufficient time for the consultation and the lobbying of their councillors so that the democratic process is seen to be done. The unparished

area councillors will contact HDC on this matter.

7.10 - It was mentioned that when a parish council is formed it generally starts as a shadow parish / town council along side the unparished area councillors for some months.

8.0 Date of Next Meeting

8.1 - The next Blueprint Steering Group meeting will take place on Tuesday 18th February 2025 starting at 7.30pm.

8.2 - Diane Sumpter agreed to book the room in the Blackbridge Community Centre if available, if not then book the Amberley Room at the Millennium Hall, Roffey.

The meeting finished at 8.50pm