Horsham Blueprint Neighbourhood Forum Annual General Meeting 2025
Held on Thursday 11th December 2025 at Park Barn, North Street, Horsham.
Chaired by John Steele.

1. Welcome
John Steele introduced himself as Chair of Blueprint and thanked everyone for attending the 2025 Blueprint Annual General Meeting.
John Steele introduced Councillor Martin Boffey, Leader of Horsham District Council.

2. Talk by Councillor Martin Boffey.

2.1 - Martin Boffey opened by saying he is a long term friend of Blueprint with his involvement in local politics since 2018 and now as leader of Horsham District Council.

2.2 - Martin Boffey talked of his early involvement with Trafalgar and the other unparished areas of Denne and Forest; with involvement in the Year of Culture and neighbourhood wardens and the opening of the Bridge Community Centre. Martin Boffey raised the question where will the finances come from in the future for such services.

2.3 - Martin Boffey talked of the past chairs of Blueprint, Francis Haigh and Andrew Cooke and of the consultant Alison Eardley who converted the ideas from the public consultations into a document for both residents and businesses in the unparished areas. How the funding for this came direct from a government agency Locality, as HDC did not wish to provide funding. Martin Boffey said that the proposed new parish council covering the current unparished area of Horsham in future will receive money through the precept.

2.4 - Martin Boffey talked of neighbourhood plans in other parish council areas and that many of them thought a neighbourhood plan was to stop development whereas it was devised to shape development to what communities wanted that other policies and plans do not offer. Planning policies and plans were there for shaping the area.

2.5 - Martin Boffey talked of the Blueprint Neighbourhood Plan and that it does not say this is how we get a town council. The designation of the Neighbourhood Forum permits it to request Horsham District Council to have a town council for their area and the district authority has to agree, and through set procedures make a decision within 12 months. If the District Council had proposed a town council for the unparished area it may have been considered on a political basis.

2.6 - Martin Boffey talked of Blueprint's request being well before the government changes of devolution to a unitary authority and with this change, it would be likely that the change to a town council would have had to have been done in the unparished area of the town anyway. The consultation by Blueprint was ahead of the game.

2.7 - Martin Boffey talked of the many hours currently spent by HDC on the local government reorganisation and what this may look like in the future with East Sussex likely to be one area, while West Sussex currently has three options. HDC currently favour the proposal of Horsham, Crawley and Mid-Sussex as one area for which there is considered a strong economic benefit.

2.8 - Martin Boffey talked of the demand for services increasing and there will unlikely be any more government funding to come, therefore councils should be looking for 4% savings per year.

2.9 - Martin Boffey talked that in the Blueprint area of Horsham with the government re-organisation local decisions will be made by a larger authority. The current special charge is only £500k and is used for such expenditure as parks, wardens, Christmas lights and more.

2.10 - Martin Boffey talked that the new parish council will decide what it wants to do and how much money it needs to do it, such as subsidies for the Capitol Theatre and the Horsham Museum.

2.11 - Martin Boffey talked of the positive good news, in that the residents will have a chance as a community to decide what it wants to do as a community, which is a positive position to be in.

2.12 - Martin Boffey asked if there were any questions for him.

2.13 - Peter Beckley observed that in the government technical consultation and that the financial aspects were unclear, but the consultation it did give an opportunity to say what people felt, Martin Boffey answered that this is the government's consultation and all are encouraged to respond to the consultation, the government will likely use AI to analyse the comments received.

2.14 - John Steele asked if we all should do more to publicise this consultation for people to make comments. Martin Boffey agreed that everyone should be encouraged to make comments.

2.15 - The question was asked if the proposed Unitary elections will take place in May 2027. Martin Boffey said at this time he thought these elections would take place in May 2027. He explained that elections costs are very high, with HDC elections set to take place in May 2027 and that HDC will not ask for these elections to be deferred. Therefore it is thought likely that the government will push through with the unitary authority elections.

2.16 - Trudie Mitchell asked why the mayoral elections and the unitary authority elections will be taking place at different times. Martin Boffey put forward a view that a mayor should be the chair of an executive board and not a president. Martin Boffey said that he felt that the government view would be that they would like just to talk with mayors and not have to interact with larger groups of councillors and leaders. The mayoral elections have been deferred for 2 years to May 2028.

2.17 - Martin Boffey felt there may be some advantage to first setting up the unitary authority and sorting this out before the mayoral elections.

2.18 - Martin Boffey said that HDC gave a unanimous 'yes' vote to forming of the new parish council for the unparished area of Horsham and that a shadow group will be in place by the end of March 2026.

2.19 - Martin Boffey talked of the need for an interim clerk who will be appointed by HDC before the shadow authority meets on the 31st March 2026 when the new parish council comes into being on the 1st April 2026 and will be a legal entity but with no elected councillors until after elections.

2.20 - Martin Boffey said that on the 31st March 2026, Blueprint will lose its designation and the neighbourhood councils will be dissolved, even though the neighbourhood councils will continue

to comment on planning applications. Between the 31st March 2026 and the elections on the 7th May 2026 the Clerk will keep things going. After the elections on 7th May 2026 and within 14 days there needs to be a meeting on the way forward.

2.21 - Martin Boffey said that even with Blueprint losing its designation it could carry on,

2,22 - John Steele thanked Martin Boffey for his informative talk and invited him to stay for the remainder of the AGM, to which he accepted.

3. Approval of Minutes of AGM held on 5th December 2024.

Apologies were received from Morag Warrack, Andrew Cooke, Ian Botting, Graham Sitton.

The minutes of the last Blueprint AGM were proposed by Malcolm Gilbert and seconded by Nigel Friswell. There were no objections so the minutes were accepted as approved. There were no matters arising raised and actions taken forward are covered in the Chair's Report.

4. Chair's Report

4.1 - John Steele thanked everyone in the Steering Group for their continued involvement over the past twelve months and their future support during the first quarter of 2026.

4.2 - John Steele talked over the Chair's Report slide showing the main events in 2025..

4.3 - The HDC Governance Review and the public consultation concerning the forming of a parish council for the unparished area of Horsham and the public meeting chaired by Blueprint and held in the Baptist Church Hall on the 29th April 2025 which was well attended.

4.4 - The redesignation of Blueprint Neighbourhood Forum was approved by HDC.

4.5 - The Construction Infrastructure Levy panel for the unparished area of Horsham chaired by HDC including members from Denne, Trafalgar and Forest and the Blueprint Steering Group and has requested local community groups to come forward with projects. The applications will be amplified later in this meeting.

4.6 - The monitoring of non-policy objectives as identified in the Blueprint Plan are still an aspiration and it is hoped will be taken up by local community groups.

5. Accounts and Treasurer's Report

5.1 - Diane Sumpter, member of the Blueprint Steering Committee and Treasurer talked of the Report and Accounts which show a credit of funds donated by the three Neighbourhood Councils and Horsham District Council.
The Bank balance at 31st March 2025 was £1908.12.

5.2 - Diane Sumpter confirmed that Blueprint has taken out and paid for public liability insurance which is being asked for with hall hire and will likely be needed for future Blueprint activities.

5.3 - It is recognised that at the time Blueprint Neighbourhood Forum is wound-up when it loses its designation on the 31st March 2026 the unspent funds will need to be given back to those who gave it.

6. Election of Officers and Members of the Steering Committee

6.1 - Current members of the Steering Committee John Steele, Diane Sumpter, Trudie Mitchell, Ruth Fletcher, Morag Warrack, Colin Bush, Andrew Cooke, John White, Francis Vernon, Malcolm Gilbert and Ron Bates, have indicated their willingness to continue by completing the Steering Committee Nomination Form 2025/2026. Laura Thomas proposed that all the nominees be elected and Martin Boffey seconded the nominations.
All were elected to the Blueprint Steering Committee.

6.2 - There were no new officer nominations, the existing holders indicated their willingness to continue and there were no objections. These officers were re-elected.

Chair - John Steele
Treasurer - Diane Sumpter
Secretary - Ron Bates

7. Town Council and Future of Blueprint

7.1 - John Steele reiterated that HDC had recently approved that elections will take place in April 2026 for a parish council for the unparished area of Horsham town, that being Denne, Forest and Trafalgar Neighbourhoods.

7.2 - John Steele said that the new parish council area will be made up of nine wards with a total of eighteen councillors.

7.3 - John Steele said that a printed copy of the Blueprint Neighbourhood Plan will be given to each of the newly elected councillors for their future reference when making decisions in the name of the new parish council.

7.4 - John Steele said that the closing down of Blueprint Neighbourhood Forum on the 31st March 2026 will require an Extraordinary General Meeting so that all matters are concluded properly, there is quite a lot to be done by the Blueprint Steering Group early in 2026

7.5 - Martin Boffey said that when Blueprint comes to an end hopefully the new parish councillors will agree to take up the content of the neighbourhood plan. Other parish councils have set up working groups which include local people other than elected councillors to take up the proposals contained within their neighbourhood plan. This could be a possibility here.

7.6 - Nigel Friswell asked that the map of the unparished area shown at the AGM be attached to these minutes, and this was agreed.

8. Community Infrastructure Levy Grants

8.1 - John Steele stated that the first round of requesting applications for CIL funding for local

community projects in the unparished area was from the 24th February 2025 to the 30th April 2025. The second round of requesting applications for CIL funding is currently in progress being from 23rd October 2025 to the 16th January 2026.

8.2 - Ron Bates explained that from the first round there had been five expressions of interest - these were from the HTCP Riverside Walk; Springboard; 4theYouth; Holy Trinity Church and the Cycling Forum. Two of these submitted applications were successful in receiving funding, The HTCP Riverside Walk received funding and agreement to proceed; while 4theYouth received agreement to funding subject to providing some additional information.

8.3 - Ron Bates explained that from the second round there has already been one application from 2nd Horsham Scouts for some flexible paving to gain access along the side of their Scout hut. We hope for further applications from other local community groups by the due date. The applications received will be reviewed by the CIL panel during January 2026.

8.4 - Ron Bates talked about the Riverside Walk and showed pictures of the completed 60metres of raised boardwalks adjacent to Grebe Crescent where flooding regularly occurs. The installation was managed by HDC Parks and Countryside Team.

8.5 - John Steele explained that any money not spent would not go to the new parish council, therefore it would be better if it is spent on community projects.

9. Other Neighbourhood Plan Policies

9.1 - John Steele explained there are a number of non-policy actions within the Blueprint Neighbourhood Plan and it is hoped local community groups will take them up.

9.2 - John Steele explained that Blueprint is currently supporting a Denne Neighbourhood Council E-petition for paving across a grass verge in North Street opposite the traffic island adjacent to the underpass. Currently about 400 signatures have been obtained of the 500 signatures needed for WSCC to carry out a review to assess if they will carry out the work.

10. Questions

10.1 - There were none.

11. Close

11.1 - There being no other business John Steele thanked everyone for attending the Blueprint AGM and wished everyone a safe journey home.
The meeting closed at 8.55pm.

Attendees (17)
Trudie Mitchell, Peter Beckley, Christine Beckley, Ruth Fletcher, Tim Thomas, Ron Bates, John Steele, Francis Vernon, Malcolm Gilbert, Martin Boffey, Colin Bush, Diane Sumpter, Dan Garner, Sara Doy, Laura Thomas, Nigel Friswell, Belinda Walters.