

Bolney Parish Council Chair's Report for 2025

I would like to share what the Parish Council has achieved since the Chair Report last May.

The Parish Council

The Parish Council has met on the third Tuesday of each month throughout the year and all meetings have been open to the public. The Parish Council has a full compliment of 9 councillors and it remains a politically independent council.

To keep up to date with issues that may impact on Bolney, members of the Parish Council regularly attended briefings held by Sussex Police concerning Road Safety, meetings on the proposed expansion of Gatwick Airport, planning hearings for the expansion of the Rampion offshore wind farm, meetings of the Mid Sussex and the West Sussex Associations of Local Councils and meetings concerning the District Plan Review, of which more below.

The Parish Council website contains information about the Parish Council, a calendar of events, agendas and minutes for the Parish Council meetings, and details of who to contact to report issues such as pot holes or fly-tipping, for example. Residents can also subscribe to receive news, updates, meeting agendas and minutes by email.

District Plan Review

The Mid Sussex District Council District Plan Review process began in January 2022 and has continued to occupy much of the Parish Council's time over the last year.

The draft District Plan was submitted by Mid Sussex District Council to the Planning Inspectorate in July 2024 following the conclusion of the second public consultation held in early 2024. 340 objections were made by members of the public and the Parish Council in the consultation against the proposals to allocate land at Foxhole Farm in the village for 200 houses, and these objections were submitted to the Planning Inspector appointed to conduct the Examination of the draft Plan.

The initial Stage 1 hearings conducted by the appointed Planning Inspector took place last October and the dates for the Stage 2 hearings are expected imminently. Members of the Parish Council will be attending these hearings in person to represent the views of the Parish on the proposals for Foxhole Farm.

Over last Christmas, Wates, the promoter of the Foxhole Farm site, ran a public consultation on its plans for the site, and as part of this consultation process, requested a meeting with the Parish Council. The Parish Council took the opportunity of the meeting to express its concerns over the ability of the existing village infrastructure to support another 200 houses, and the impact these new houses might have on an already overstretched drinking water supply, sewerage system and electricity supply. The Parish Council also expressed its

concerns about the lack of any new infrastructure now proposed by Wates in its revised proposals, and questioned how a building for a charity will make the village more sustainable for current and future residents.

Other planning matters

The Parish Council Planning Committee comprises six councillors and has met every month to consider all planning applications in the Parish. This year the committee has considered 19 applications and submitted comments on each of these applications to Mid Sussex District Council.

Working with representatives of other local Parish Councils, the Parish Council objected to plans for a number of large scale Lithium battery storage facilities in the vicinity of the Bolney Substation. Members of the Parish Council attended several Mid Sussex District Planning Committee meetings and spoke against these planning applications. We were successful in ensuring that adequate water supplies for fire fighting and suitable access for fire appliances were included in the final plans and that for the health and safety of local residents, Risk Management and Emergency Response Plans must be produced and agreed with West Sussex Fire & Rescue before construction commences.

The Parish Council involved the Enforcement Department at Mid Sussex District Council in several planning breaches at sites across the Parish, including at the former Marylands site and at Nailards Wood, and will continue to press for action to remedy these planning breaches.

The Parish Council has been a registered Interested Party in the Rampion 2 planning application to expand the wind farm off the coast of Sussex. The Parish Council has submitted written responses at each stage of the examination of the proposals by the Planning Inspectorate's Examining Authority and a member of the Parish Council has appeared at several hearings before the Examining Authority. As a result, one of the grounds cited in the Examining Authority's recommendation to the Secretary of State to select a site in Cowfold for the new Rampion 2 substation as opposed to the alternative site identified in the Parish of Bolney, was that it shared Bolney Parish Council's concerns about the potential negative cumulative environmental impact on the area of a fourth large infrastructure facility. The Parish Council also successfully argued that the Parish's small rural back roads be prohibited from use by all construction traffic connected with the project, and that the proposed core construction hours be reduced for the benefit of local residents.

On 4th April 2025, the Secretary of State for Energy Security & Net Zero granted permission for the expansion of the wind farm and construction is expected to start in 2027.

Parish assets and maintenance

The Parish Council has been responsible for the cost of the electricity and maintenance of 15 street lights in the village area, 3 of the dog waste bins and ensuring that the 13 salt bins across the Parish were full at the start of the winter season. We were responsible for the maintenance and repair of the Parish notice boards; village bus shelters; War Memorial; 12

finger posts across the Parish; Speed Indicator Device (SiD); picnic tables and benches on Batchelors Field, and of the Bolney village gates and signs.

The Parish Council receives its income through collection of a precept from parishioners. The precept is set after a budget is prepared each year to cover the costs of the running and maintenance of these assets, insurance, forward planning, and other expenditure for the following financial year. Once finalised and agreed by the Parish Council, it is submitted for payment by Mid Sussex District Council and then collected by them through monthly Council Tax payments.

Grants

The Parish Council supported local groups and village societies through grants.

We supported the maintenance of the churchyard through an annual grant to the Parish Church and another to the Rawson Hall for the cleaning of the outside public toilets. At the end of the financial year we also made grants to charitable organisations which have supported residents in Bolney such as 4Sight Vision and the St Peter and St James and St Catherine's Hospices.

Volunteers

The Parish Council has continued to coordinate the volunteer group's activities. The group has cleared footpaths in the village and cleared and tidied the War Memorial. Over the summer months the volunteers ensured that the verges around the village were kept tidy and have organised litter picks.

Roads and footpaths

Last year the Parish Council successfully applied for a Traffic Regulation Order to reduce the speed limit in the village centre to 20mph and has continued to work with West Sussex County Council and the Police to try to ensure that the new speed limit is adhered to for the safety of pedestrians and other road users in the village.

Councillors regularly walked the Public Rights of Way across the Parish and reported any issues to West Sussex County Council. West Sussex County Council has advised that the damaged footbridge on PRow 23Bo from Bolney Chapel Road to the Bolney Mill ponds is now scheduled to be replaced in the 2025/2026 financial year.

Devolution

You may have read in the local and national press about the Government's plans for devolution and local government reorganisation.

Devolution is the transfer of powers and funding from national to local government, and the creation of a new strategic authority that will be led by a mayor. The local government

reorganisation is the process of restructuring local authorities from a two-tier to a one-tier council or unitary authority.

In Sussex, devolution will create a Mayoral County Combined Authority in place of the current West and East Sussex County and Brighton City councils, which will take responsibility for big, strategic issues such as highways, transport, economic growth, health and public safety. The newly created single council, or unitary authority, formed by the reorganisation of the current two-tier council system, will operate most of the day-to-day services currently delivered by the county and district councils, and the county and district councils will be disbanded.

As a consequence of these plans, the County Council elections that were to have taken place in May this year have been cancelled. Instead, elections will take place in May 2026 to elect a Mayor for the new combined authority. The reorganisation of the councils will be completed by 1st April 2028.

A lot of the detail on how these plans will affect Sussex, and where Parish and Town Councils will sit in these devolution and reorganisation plans is not clear at present. A further White Paper is due from the Government later this year which is expected to set out the future role of Town and Parish Councils and whether this reorganisation of local government will result in added responsibilities and/or opportunities being handed to Town and Parish Councils.

The Parish Council has been invited to join an inter-parish group with several Parish Councils from the central Sussex area to understand more about the impact these changes might have on Parishes and to learn from Parish Councils located in other parts of the country which are already in unitary authorities.

We will keep the Parish informed as more details become available.

And finally

Thank you to my fellow Parish Councillors who volunteer their time for the benefit of our community.

And a special thank you to Debbie Thomas, the Parish Clerk. Debbie is the first point of contact with the community, the County and the District Councils. She prepares the monthly agendas and minutes, the monthly and annual financial reports and ensures we comply with our regulatory obligations. The Parish Council is extremely grateful for everything that Debbie does and the Parish is very fortunate to have such an experienced and proactive Clerk.

**Cllr Nicky Hanley
Chair Bolney Parish Council
April 2025**