

Wealden Cabinet News 13 July 2011

FOLLOWING CHANGES IN national policy, Cabinet has recommended that the Council should start building its own council houses again. Three schemes are planned making use of Council-owned sites at Rochester House, Crowborough; Evelyn Clark House, Forest Row and Towermill Place, Willingdon. They are council schemes which are redundant or in need of redevelopment. Wealden's New Build Housing Project will create 64 new council homes to be let at affordable rents. The £9 million cost of the three schemes will come from capital receipts from the Council's housing account, a Social Housing Grant from the Homes and Communities Agency and additional borrowing of £2.7m. A local lettings plan will be developed using affordable rents to support mixed and sustainable communities.

"We have over 2000 people on our housing register so we know there is a need," said Councillor Graham Wells, Cabinet member for Affordable Housing. "This is a golden opportunity to secure funding from the Homes and Communities Association to enable us to build new council houses." Towermill Place had earlier been designated for a mixture of affordable housing and a new health centre for Polegate and Willingdon but, after considerable efforts to develop a financially viable model, the scheme has been withdrawn as a new building of this size is unfortunately not affordable in the current economic climate. The practices and primary care trust are exploring alternative options within the available resources.

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THE COUNCIL'S NEW Affordable Warmth Strategy 2011-2016 is going out for consultation following Cabinet approval. It aims to build on the success of earlier work which saw nearly 42,000 energy efficiency measures undertaken in Wealden. Last year, the Council's Home Energy Efficiency Officer secured £34,000 of home energy work in the District and a further £22,000 has already taken place this year. The new strategy aims to:

- Establish a multi-agency Affordable Warmth Steering Group.
- Target energy efficiency advice to the most vulnerable, including those at risk of fuel poverty.
- Inform private landlords and tenants of the benefits of affordable warmth.
- Provide advice on energy from renewable resources.
- Promote understanding of energy efficiency in local schools.

"The cost of fuel, especially from carbon-based sources is going up and up," said Councillor Graham Wells. "The reality is that some people are finding it difficult to be able to heat their homes and afford to eat sufficiently to keep alive."

A reliance on oil-based heating in rural areas and a high proportion of houses with solid walls means that 10 per cent of Wealden households are classified as being in fuel poverty ie spend more than 10 per cent of their income on fuel.

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COUNCIL LEADER BOB Standley reported that the Transformation Programme continued to make good progress. It will reduce the cost of Wealden's services from £20.25m this year to under £17.4 million in two years' time. The exact detail of how certain changes in national policy such as the introduction of Universal Credit, localisation of business rates and the New Homes Bonus Grant will impact on the Council is still unclear.

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Margaret opens Margaret House



Former Wealden District Councillor Margaret Kirkpatrick officially opened the District's first Extra-care Home, Margaret House, in Uckfield last month. The £6.34 million housing scheme offers 39 one and two bedroom apartments to enable people with support needs to live independently in their own homes. A restaurant is open to residents, guests and members of the local community. A grant of just over £3 million was provided by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). It is owned and managed by Saxon Weald, and has been supported by Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council. Housing 21 provide the care.

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Community Toilet Scheme expands into Hailsham and Uckfield



The Wealden Community Toilet Scheme is now available in Uckfield and Hailsham, as well as Crowborough, Forest Row and Horam. Premises providing toilet facilities to the public during their opening hours in Uckfield are Limelight, Chilli Peppers Cafe Bistro, The Maiden's Head, and the Civic Centre. In Hailsham, premises include Waitrose supermarket, Callenders, and the Freedom Leisure Centre. Facilities for people with disabilities are available at The Maiden's Head, Uckfield Civic Centre, Waitrose supermarket and Freedom Leisure. Participating

premises receive payments from the Council for maintaining a free service to the public. Participating premises display the Wealden Community Toilet Scheme sign. Location information is provided through street and car parks signs, posters, leaflets, an 0845 6046718 information line and a location mapping service on the Wealden website.

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Consultation on proposals to merge East and West Sussex Fire & Rescue Services

A public consultation has been launched on the proposed merger of East and West Sussex Fire and Rescue Services. The proposed merger is considered the best option to protect community fire and rescue services from the expected impact of Government grant reduction over the next few years. Wealden District Council will be submitting a formal response before the consultation closes on 6 October 2011. Two public meetings are being planned locally: as detailed below:

- 12 September ESFRS Service Training Centre, Maresfield.
- 14 September East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service, Upperton oad, Eastbourne.

Further information including how to get involved are given on the East Sussex Fire and Rescue website: <http://www.esfrs.org/mergerConsultation/>

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Review of the Housing Allocations Policy



Wealden District Council is currently reviewing its Housing Allocations policy on how it lets affordable homes in the district, to ensure that it meets current guidance and best practice. The Community and Environmental Scrutiny Committee has set up a Members' Working Party to gather evidence and undertake the review of the Allocations Policy. It consists of Cllr David Larkin (chairman), Cllr Diane Phillips, Cllr Barry Marlowe, Cllr John Padfield and Cllr Peter Newnham. The working party is supported by officers from Housing, Planning and Legal. The working party is carrying out a short pre-consultation exercise ahead of the formal 12 week consultation period to follow in autumn. It would like to hear your views to feed into the first draft of the new policy, so please help us by completing a short online questionnaire, by going to: http://surveys.wealden.gov.uk/HousingPolicyConsultationQuestionnaire/allocations_policy_consultation.htm . Responses must be received by 12 August 2011.

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Disabled British Open Golf Championships at the East Sussex National, Uckfield.



For the second successive year, the East Sussex National Golf Resort & Spa is hosting the Disabled British Open Golf Championships. This international sporting event offers golfers with a wide range of disabilities the opportunity to compete against each other according to their golf handicaps, and will take place on 20 & 21 August. Volunteers are needed to help with the event, please visit the *Volunteer* section of the website - www.disabledbritishopen.org. Spectators are free to attend. The Disabled British Open is part of Accentuate, a transformational programme of 15 projects, inspired by the Paralympic Movement, which seeks to change perceptions and offer opportunities to showcase the talents of deaf and disabled people.

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