

March 2026 Parish Council Report

Fire Damaged Buildings – Update 10th March 2026

Three Years On.....

Everyone is mindful that we are coming up to the 3rd anniversary of the fire, which in the early hours of 16th March 2023, devastated lives, and businesses in Midhurst. We all remember the difficult times we experienced after the fire, when the road closed, splitting our community in half. So many issues have arisen in the last few years, with businesses struggling, and some closing, due to reductions in footfall to the town. People living in close proximity to the buildings have reported problems selling their properties, and residents have reported difficulties accessing homes behind the fire damaged buildings. Everyone, myself included, is understandably angry and frustrated at the length of time it has taken to restore our beautiful town to some semblance of normality.

However work continues behind the scenes. The situation is both complex and sensitive, but good progress is being made.

- With two out of three large insurance claims still outstanding, progress has been incredibly difficult and protracted. Despite this, it has not prevented owners from working together and moving forward, for example, in commissioning the surveys at their own cost.
- A specialist heritage planning and architectural practice is assisting, advising, and guiding all parties through the complexities of this site.
- They are in regular discussions with SDNPA and Historic England.
- The surveys, now completed, have provided options. All of these options are being considered but due to the complexities of this constrained site in the centre of town, the best option for Midhurst at this time appears to be to seek Listed Building Consent to dismantle the Angel wall, rebuilding it sympathetically to retain the historical townscape, whilst aiming to keep the remainder of the adjacent frontage (including the old Olive and Vine).
- The priority for the owners is to get to a point, as soon as it is possible, where the scaffolding can be taken down and a pedestrian walkway reinstated. This is so important for the businesses on North Street, which have been particularly affected.
- Everyone involved is now hopeful that further progress on the preferred option will be made within a matter of weeks, once the Authorities have met to discuss the complexities.

I will be meeting with SDNPA and other parties next week to discuss the option and I will continue to provide updates as often as possible.

Improvements to Fire Service Equipment in West Sussex

West Sussex County Council has committed to invest £4.8m in West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service to purchase a further 12 new fire engines as it nears the end of its current Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

The new fire engines feature improved vehicle and fire-fighting technology including a clean-cab concept to reduce firefighters' exposure to contaminants. Each vehicle also delivers lower emissions which supports the council's goal to be net carbon neutral by 2030.

In addition to the new fire engines, West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service has also invested in Platinum House – a state-of-the-art training centre and fire station in Horsham – along with other projects totalling £19.3m over the course of the current CRMP.

Signpost residents to free stop smoking services

I welcome your support in signposting residents who may be thinking about quitting smoking to the Council's free stop smoking services. With the right support, people are three times more likely to stop smoking for good:

- Quit 4 Wellbeing – a specialist, countywide, stop smoking service offering face-to-face and telephone support
- Smokefree app – a fully digital stop smoking service, for West Sussex residents
- Wellbeing teams, delivered by district and borough councils, offering stop-smoking support as well as a range of other advice, including how to maintain a healthy weight, how to be physically active, and support with reducing alcohol intake
- Support from participating GP surgeries and community pharmacies

Further information is available

at www.westsussexwellbeing.org.uk/smokefree or the Smokefree West Sussex phoneline: **0330 222 7980** for further information

West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service welcomes eight new on-call firefighters



Eight new on-call firefighters have joined West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service after successfully completing their initial two-week training course.

On-call firefighters often have full-time employment elsewhere but respond to emergency calls within their local area.

The new recruits live or work nearby to one of the service's fire stations and will respond to emergencies either from their place of work or from home.

West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service's Area Manager for Service Delivery, Ady Carter, presented the recruits with their certificates at Platinum House in Horsham on Friday (6 March) in front of their proud families.

Speaking after the event, he said: "It was a pleasure to attend the pass out parade and welcome our new on-call firefighters into the service"

I am delighted that two of the new recruits are based in Midhurst.

County Council Elections

I am sure everyone is aware that elections will proceed on 7th May and I will be standing again for Midhurst and surrounding villages. The pre-election period commences on the 30th March and finishes on 7th May, with results being announced on 8th May. A timetable for the lead up to the election is attached as appendix 1.

West Sussex County Council Budget 2026/7

The budget is balanced.

There are however many pressures on the budgets. Future years will be harder to balance. E.g. 2027/8 £18.1m deficit/budget gap up to £72.5m for 2030/31.

Additional £2.4m for 2026/7 will be received from the Local Government Finance Settlement.

Dedicated School Grants – central government will meet 90% of the cumulative High Needs deficit recorded by local authorities up to the end of 2025/6. This would reduce local liability to £19.3m. Future arrangements for management of deficits is not yet confirmed.

The CC was pushed in a proposed amendment for an additional £2m on highways maintenance, local resurfacing and flood prevention in consultation with local members. Money was also found for AI tech, bus services, SEND travel, LNRS delivery, and support for school on SEND processes. It was however voted down.

Devolution

Government has laid the Statutory Instrument in Parliament that will formally establish the Sussex & Brighton Combined County Authority. This is the final legislative step and will enable the new Mayoral Combined Authority to be created this spring.

Government has also confirmed that, although mayoral elections have been delayed until 2028, devolution continues at pace, led by the constituent councils.

New Crisis and Resilience Fund

This new fund which becomes available from 01 April replaces the Household Support Fund. It is aimed at supporting families to gain greater financial resilience and to cope with financial shocks. More information, is available here [Crisis and Resilience : Arun & Chichester Citizens Advice](#) and residents will also be able to get information from Community Hubs.

Yvonne Gravely

11 March 2026