

ARUNDEL, WALBERTON & BARNHAM LABOUR PARTY

Chair Michael Ward
Sec. Will Ashton
Treasurer, Deborah See

February 2025

www.southdownslabour.org.uk

**The next branch meeting is Tuesday 11th February 7.39pm
The Victoria Institute, 10 Tarrant St, Arundel BN18 9DG**

Gaza and Palestine:

Report and discussion on the latest developments.

Non members and supporters are welcome to this meeting.

From the Palestine Solidarity Campaign

Regretfully have no one available for that date to give a talk. I need to say that I was also concerned that the meeting would have been open to the public. This is such a sensitive topic that being open to the public does pose a risk of disruption. However, I wasn't sure what you were actually expecting as news on Gaza and the West Bank is readily available, The Guardian regularly updates, the BBC has a bias but one can glean from it the situation, and of course plenty of news on social media.

I have sent you some links that you may wish to send to your members to bring them up to date.

The Palestinian Solidarity Campaign, of which I am chair of our local branch, Worthing and Adur, is currently engaged in a campaign to ask the Local Government Pension Scheme Fund to disinvest from Israeli firms that are complicit in human rights violations and atrocity crimes conducted by the IDF in Gaza and the West Bank. I have sent you a link for this and perhaps your members may wish to participate in this action.

Since this recent ceasefire, violence, killings and abductions have increased in the West Bank, Trump has lifted sanctions on the settlers and so horrific crimes are carried out against Palestinian families with impunity.

The ceasefire in Gaza is not necessarily a sustainable one, and there is no guarantee that Netanyahu will not resume fighting after 6 weeks. He is still bombing Lebanon and has today bombed Al-Farra Refugee camp south east of Jenin.

The suffering in Gaza is unprecedented, for example there are now the most paediatric amputees in living history. Many of these children are in fact orphans, having had to undergo this surgery without anaesthetic, because the IDF under Netanyahu and his far right government made sure that medical supplies could not be delivered, hence amputations were necessary to prevent sepsis and deadly infections.

There are no functioning hospitals left. Medical staff have been murdered, and tortured to death. Gaza has been compared to Nagasaki.

In all the State of Israel, sanctioned by the USA and UK have committed not just a genocide but an ecocide.

Israel has dropped more than 70,000 tons of explosives on the Gaza strip in addition to its bulldozing operations, far surpassing the bombing of Dresden, Hamburg and London combined during WW2.

The ground is littered with unexploded mines, air and water is polluted. Water is very hard to come by. Aid is coming in dribs and drabs, there is famine and polio is now prevalent, the first time in 25 years.

The best thing people can do is to put pressure on our government by writing to our MPs for an arms embargo to Israel and to also engage in the disinvestment campaign which can be actioned by an e-petition of which I have sent the link below.

If you still wish for someone to speak on the topic of Gaza, it may be possible for someone to come on a different date.

The Unitary Authority Proposal: What It Means for Our Community

The significant change which is being proposed will reshape the way our local government operates: the establishment of a unitary authority. What does this proposal entail, why it is being considered, and how it might impact our community?

A unitary authority is a single-tier local government structure that replaces the existing two-tier system which includes both county and district councils. In a unitary model, one council is responsible for all local government functions, from education and housing to waste management and planning.

A Strategic Authority will be the West and East Sussex authorities grouped together with Brighton or any other such grouping which may be created.

Why is this Being Proposed?

Proponents of the unitary authority model argue that it offers:

- **Cost Savings:** Streamlining local government can reduce duplication, potentially saving taxpayers money.
- **Simplified Services:** A single authority could make it easier for residents to navigate services and resolve issues.
- **Stronger Strategic Planning:** A unified council together with a Strategic Authority could coordinate efforts more effectively across the area, addressing challenges such as housing and economic development.
- The government says that it will devolve responsibilities and funding to the more powerful bodies.

However, critics have raised concerns about potential drawbacks, including:

- **Loss of Local Representation:** A larger unitary authority may dilute the voice of smaller communities.
- **Centralisation of Power:** Decision-making could become less responsive to local needs.
- **Implementation Costs:** The transition from a two-tier to a single-tier system could incur significant upfront costs and might prove damaging to the conditions and morale of employees.

How Will This Affect Us?

The proposal's impact on us will depend on the specific details, such as:

- The boundaries of the unitary authority.
- The process by which it will be elected.
- How local representation will be maintained.
- The distribution of services and resources.
- The integration of staff into the new authority.
- Fundraising powers.

What Happens Next?

A Local Government Commission has recommended that a new unitary council be established on the south coast comprising Brighton and Hove, Worthing and Adur from West Sussex. The Commission report recommends that the rest of the county of West Sussex should retain its current two tier structure. However the County Councils are looking to create unitary authorities across both counties. The government requires that the new unitary authorities consist of a population not less than 500,000.

The Commission's alternative option was for the creation of three new unitary authorities comprising Arun and Chichester; Crawley, Horsham and Mid-Sussex; and Worthing, Adur and Hove. Consultations are expected to take place to gather input from residents, businesses and stakeholders. It is vital that we, as Labour Party members, engage in this process to ensure that the voices of our community are heard and that any changes prioritise social justice, equity, and public accountability.

Many party members see the benefits of a West Sussex Coastal Authority which will reverse the decline that our our seaside towns have experienced in recent decades. It could encompass a development corporation with powers to drive improvements in the region. On this basis the authority would encompass Arun district and the coastal wards of Chichester. It is a concern that consideration might be given to dividing Arun to increase the population of an authority based on Chichester. Party members in Crawley see advantages in pursuing city status for the town with a unitary authority encompassing the Horsham area and Gatwick.

The Tories appear to favour West Sussex Authority based on the existing county. For the run down and neglected areas of the county this would not be good news.

Staff reorganisation and the inevitable redundancies must be viewed with caution and help from our trades unions. The whole package raises concerns that a smaller number of local authorities and a powerful mayor would centralise power and make it easier for the party to control candidate selection and reduce still further internal party democracy.

A decision on whether to cancel the election is expected. Any proposed unitary authorities are expected to operate by May 2028.

The Sussex Mayor is a proposal which the government will announce shortly with administrative powers over West and East Sussex together with Brighton. It is intended that Mayoral elections should be conducted in May 2026. Without doubt the Labour mayors of London and Greater Manchester have had considerable success. Elsewhere elected mayors have had a lesser impact.

A Sussex mayor would take over the role of the police and crime commissioner together with some of the powers of the leaders of the Sussex county councils and Brighton. Unless we can motivate our Labour electorate this could be a move in a challenging direction.

What would a strategic combined authority for Sussex look like?

The Strategic Authority will be the unitaries grouped together, with (or without) a Mayor. If agreed by the government, it would cover West Sussex, East Sussex and Brighton & Hove, with a population of 1.7 million, aligning with the Sussex Police and Integrated Care System (ICS) areas.

The Government White Paper says the Strategic Authority would be responsible for:

1. Transport and local infrastructure
2. Skills and employment support
3. Housing and strategic planning
4. Economic development and regeneration
5. Environment and climate change
6. Health, wellbeing and public service reform
7. Public safety

With regard to planning we should seek a return to wider regional planning. The Strategic Authority will do the (sub) regional plan

The risk in this change is a further transfer of power to Whitehall. We need to ensure that any new authority is more transparent and accessible to the public than the current system, otherwise the simplification of council structures will not benefit the people we are told it's aimed at. Number of councillors and the size of their electorate will be important. In addition, parish councils must be considered. They do important work, especially in rural areas and this change may make parish and town councillors the first point of contact creating a much heavier casework load.

Democracy is critical. How will elections be run. Might it be 'first past the post', something like 'single transferable vote' or a more representative proportional representation system?

Funding. We need any efficiency benefits to be retained locally. We also need the restoration of the Revenue Support Grant in some form, with good protection and guarantees.

How Can You Get Involved?

- Attend local meetings and forums to learn more about the proposal.
- Share your views during the consultation process.
- Discuss the potential implications with friends, family, and neighbours to raise awareness.
- Canvass continuously in areas where we can identify Labour supporters.

As a branch, we will be monitoring developments closely and will keep you informed about opportunities to contribute to the debate. Together, we can ensure that any changes serve the best interests of our community.

If you have questions or would like to share your thoughts, please don't hesitate to contact us or attend the next branch meeting.

ARUNDEL, WALBERTON and BARNHAM TRANSPORT CAMPAIGN

Why isn't it free?

In West Sussex young people can use the 16 to 20 Bus Saver discount providing reduced fares through participating bus operators. While this scheme is a step forward it still requires young people to pay for public transport leaving travel costs as a barrier for many. Proof of age is needed to access the discount which can add unnecessary hurdles for some. The discount scheme is unattractive to many young people because the fare reduction is small, it isn't well advertised and doesn't solve the problem with the efficacy and frequency of the routes available. Unable to pay, youngsters are left to walk and cycle. Whilst this is good healthy exercise it can be hazardous on dark winter evenings on our country lanes. As soon as they learn to drive, youngsters take their parents' cars where they can, adding to our traffic problems.

Contrast this with Scotland where all young people and children aged 5-21 have been able to travel for free since January 2022 thanks to the Young Persons 'Free Bus Travel Scheme. This initiative removes financial barriers to public transport opening up opportunities for education, work and leisure while promoting safe and sustainable travel choices. Similarly in London young people under 16 travel free although teenagers need an Oyster Card.

If free bus travel can be achieved in Scotland and London why not here in West Sussex or indeed across the whole of England and Wales? The Labour Party believes in making public transport accessible and affordable for all, starting with our young people. Free bus travel isn't just a social justice issue, it's an investment in our future empowering the next generation and helping to tackle climate change.

We must ask: why isn't youth bus travel free? And what can we do to make it happen?

ARUNDEL, WALBERTON and BARNHAM PLANNING CAMPAIGN

Have your say on the South Downs Local Plan Review

The eight-week consultation has begun as the National Park invites us to have our say on how and where development takes place.

The South Downs Local Plan is being reviewed to ensure it's up-to-date and addresses important issues such as nature recovery, climate change, affordable housing and helping local communities thrive. The plan will also continue to prioritise the provision of clean air, water, and food, and a medium level of growth spread across the towns and villages of the national park, said a park authority spokesperson. However, it includes changes to strengthen green infrastructure policies and to give greater protection to water resources. The plan also includes 48 new proposed site allocations across East and West Sussex and Hampshire. These include fields near Amberley, Easebourne, Cocking, Midhurst, Chichester, Petworth and Washington.

The public consultation of the Local Plan Review started on 20 January and will run until 17 March. **This is the main opportunity for us to help shape the final Plan.**

LETTERS To the Branch

As you are aware thousands of women born in the 1950s have been unfairly impacted by changes to the State Pension Age. These changes which were implemented without adequate notice have left many women facing financial hardship during what should have been their retirement years.

The WASPI campaign does not oppose the equalisation of the State Pension Age, but it strongly contests the way these changes were communicated and implemented. Many affected women were given little or no notice of these changes leaving them unable to make informed decisions about their financial futures.

This injustice has caused widespread distress and failure to provide compensation and government recognition of the harm caused is deeply concerning. We believe the Labour Party has a proud history of standing up for fairness and social justice and this is an opportunity for us to reaffirm those principles.

The branch is requested to express publicly support for the WASPI campaign, to commit to raising of this issue within the party and in the wider community. In this way you will assist towards a fair resolution to this injustice and gain appropriate compensation for the affected women.

(Name & address supplied and withheld by Secretary)

Letters reflect the opinion of the writer only and are not necessarily the views of the branch.

VOLUNTARY HELP NEEDED

Arun planning applications

We have a small group monitoring local planning applications. Any medium or large proposals need to be scrutinised to ensure they comply with local Labour policy. Improvements will be suggested or objections made where appropriate. Our Labour councillors on the planning committee will be consulted. Help wanted in the Aldingbourne, and Lyminster areas.

Advice and assistance

There is a suggestion that we should run limited advice sessions in Arundel and our local villages. We shall ask a Labour councillor to help and we need members who are interested in assisting, advising and steering people seeking help in the direction of suitable professional advice.

ARUNDEL AND COURTWICK CAMPAIGNING

Sanctuary in Chichester – Volunteers Needed

Sanctuary in Chichester is growing to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in Chichester and the surrounding area. More volunteers are needed who have regular time to commit and – depending on their role – who have their own transport.

Here are some of the specific volunteer roles Sanctuary is trying to fill:

Supporting refugee pupils in local school: If you are, or have been, a teacher and happen to have some spare time, Sanctuary in Chichester would really appreciate you joining their team of volunteer teachers offering support to refugee children attending local schools in Bognor and Chichester. This involves working with, ideally, the same pupils each week and supporting them with their educational gaps and whatever else their teachers may specify. The focus could be on a particular subject of your expertise, or support with reading or general homework.

Befriending: befrienders are needed to support individual families in Bognor, Tangmere, Bracklesham and Chichester. This involves helping refugee families settle into UK life, supporting them to gradually gain confidence and building their new lives until they don't need Sanctuary's support anymore. You will be part of small team working together to support each family with their various needs by being a solid, friendly presence in their lives as well as giving day-to-day practical help, which and may involve for example taking them to drop-in sessions, showing them where local food banks are, helping with arranging GP or hospital appointments, accompanying them to appointments, helping fill in NHS forms and liaising with schools.

Teaching English to adults: teachers with an ESOL or TEFL qualification are needed to teach English to people of various ages and first languages, particularly for one-to-one sessions. Sanctuary currently has a waiting list of people who would like one-to-one English learning support.

Drop-in support: Sanctuary in Chichester runs a well-attended drop-in session for refugee families and individuals on Monday evenings in Chichester. These lively sessions provide opportunities for socialising and conversation and include children's craft sessions and outdoor activities.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer and want to know more, please email contact@sanctuaryinchichester.org

The link to the volunteer application forms is [VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FORM](#)

The form should be sent to the email address above.

Saturday mornings from March Meet: 30 Maltravers Street, Arundel BN18 9BU 11am

Or Meet: Green Lane Close, Arundel BN18 9HG 11am.

There will be future arrangements for evening canvassing in Walberton and Barnham etc on sunlit days after the clocks go forward.

NEW DATES

TOWN AND PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS

Aldingbourne Parish Council

Next meeting: Tuesday 4th March at 7.00pm Aldingbourne Community Centre, Olivers Meadow, Westergate PO20 3YA

Arundel Town Council

Next meeting: Thursday 13th March 2025 7pm
The Town Hall, Maltravers Street, Arundel, BN18 9AP

Barnham and Eastergate Parish Council

Next meeting: Tuesday 11th March 2025 7.30pm
Barnham Community Hall, Murrell's Field, Yapton Road, Barnham, PO22 0AY

Lyminster and Crossbush Parish Council

Next meeting: Thursday 27th February Slindon parish council meeting at 7.30pm
The Beefeater, Crossbush Lane, Arundel, GB BN18 9PQ

Slindon Parish Council

Next meeting: Monday 10th March 2025
Coronation Hall, Reynolds Lane, BN18 0QT, 6.30 p.m.

Walberton Parish Council

Next meeting: Tuesday 4th March 7:15pm
The Pavilion, The Street, Walberton BN18 0P

Arun District Council

Next full council meeting: Wednesday 26th February 6pm
Arun Civic Centre, Maltravers Road, Littlehampton, BN1