Reports for Brightling Parish Council meeting
6 July 2022

Environment strategy

I reported on the Environment strategy in my March report, and said that I planned to do a full review every 6 months. That would be in September.

A number of people have approached me in support of the idea of putting in an electric vehicle charging point at the Village Hall. There are government funds available to local authorities to help support this, but I understand that ESCC has not yet taken advantage of these. The latest statement that I can find on the ESCC web site says "We are currently developing a strategic approach". This is unchanged from 10 months ago, with no indication of when the strategic approach will be revealed.

This can be compared to Kent County Council's position, who announced in October 2021

> "We're leading a project with 7 other Kent local authorities to place more charging points around Kent. Nearly 200 car parks have been put forward as potential locations with over 600 chargers being installed. We've already started and will continue instillations until 2024.
>
> "We are also working with parish councils, town councils, village halls and community hubs to install chargers in smaller communities around Kent."

Web site

The site continues to be hosted by Rother District Council.

The number of news articles published in recent months are

April	10
May	10
June	11

The page with all the barrel organ tunes has been loaded, and also the first of a planned series of articles about the barrel organ.

https://brightling.community/barrel-organ-recordings/

https://brightling.community/barrel-organ-1/

Conveyor belt

Rowena Suthers (Brightling Cottage, Hollingrove Hill) reported on 15 June:

> *After three months of carrying out various noise surveys (both internal and external) Rother DC came to the conclusion that British Gypsum were causing a statutory noise nuisance and they have served them with a noise abatement order. The relationship between myself and BG is good, and they are taking steps to alleviate the problem. Rother DC has given them 12 months to sort the noise issues out and BG are looking into providing quieter rollers, isolators (apparently a lot of the noise is vibration coming from the conveyor belt supports) and finally sound proofing for a short area backing onto our lane. I am hoping that this will all take place and understand that they have to take these steps in order to conform with the terms of the abatement order.*
>
> *In the meantime, I think they must be running it with lighter loads as it has been quieter lately. They seem to have stopped running it until 11.00pm and have agreed with Rother DC to try to reduce their operating hours to 8.00pm whilst this is being sorted out.*

Broadband

Progress towards the original target of £937,513 stalled at 64%, after about 10 weeks, and it was apparent that there was no chance of reaching 100%.

As mentioned in my previous report, I requested a "re-modelling" from Openreach to deal with the very large number of errors that they had included in the original target. This re-modelling was requested on 6 May and was expected to take about 2 weeks. In fact I received the first revised quote on 22 June, and a further revised quote on 30 June. The first revised quote was about £320,000 but this one went too far in the other direction and left out a number of properties which should have been included. The second revised quote (which is now targeted correctly as far as I can see) was for £430,000.

The pledges received amount to around £419,000. This is a combination of DCMS vouchers and ESCC top-ups.

The quote of 30 June was what is called a "community-led" scheme. On the face of it, the offer letter requires a contract to be signed by a single legal entity (for example Brightling Parish Council) to take responsibility of for any shortfall in the costs (for example if someone does not take up a faster service, then their DCMS voucher would be withdrawn and the contracting legal entity would be responsible for the cost). Obviously, as I have repeatedly said to Openreach, Brightling Parish Council is not in a position to take on a liability which could (in theory at least) amount to several hundred thousand pounds.

The Openreach project manager told me that she expected that Openreach management would waive the requirement to sign with a single legal entity, thus enabling the project to go ahead. Confirmation of this was expected during week ending 1st July. However, as at 6th July, it has not been received. The delay is said to be due to Openreach being very busy.

As an alternative to their "community-led" scheme, Openreach offer a "demand-led" scheme. In this variant, there is no requirement to contract with a single legal entity, but the costs are increased by 30% to compensate Openreach for the risk of some people dropping out. Our original offer (the one with all the mistakes) was for a demand-led scheme and this led to further difficulties because the Openreach project manager informed me that the ESCC top-ups could not be used with the demand-led scheme, which would have left us well short of the target. Our county councillor (Eleanor Kirby-Green), Cllr. Rupert Simmons and Katy Thomas (the ESCC project manager) then got involved, and the name of Huw Merriman MP was also invoked. Openreach then appeared to back down, although this has now become irrelevant as we can't afford the 30% mark-up in any case.

A further complication is that if we do not get the project off the ground by 15th July, then it will go on hold for at least 6 months. This is because there is to be another round of local authority broadband procurement, starting on that day. The local authority procurement process cannot be expected to fire at a moving target (ie before they can decide what is included in the procurement round, they need to have a clear, fixed, picture of what else is and isn't in the process of being built, hence the need to freeze projects such as ours if they haven't got a definite commitment to happen).

All in all, I would give the project about a 30% chance of happening. Of course, it is quite possible that the forthcoming local authority procurement round will include parts of Brightling, so people will get it that way in any case. But I think it is unlikely that this would include the so-called hardest to reach, and also ESCC are still fixated on the outdated "superfast" target of 24Mbps, so properties that have already got an FTTC service (eg the centre of Brightling), will probably not be included. The project that I have been trying to get off the ground, on the other hand, would bring FTTP broadband to all.

Domain name

As previously reported, I intend to use the Nominet's Domain Dispute Resolution service to try and regain ownership of the domain name brightling.org.uk for the parish council. However, I have not made any progress with this yet.

Andrew Wedmore