

**Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Brightling Parish Council held on
Wednesday 9th November 2022 at 7.00 p.m. at Brightling Village Hall**

Parish Councillors present: Cllrs Caroline Croft, Daniel Lambert-Gorwyn, Judy Petty and Andrew Wedmore and Jane Oxenford

Parish Councillors absent: Cllr Dianne Mower

County/District Councillor present: Cllr John Barnes, RDC and Cllr Eleanor Kirby-Green, ESCC

In attendance: Gilly Lowe, Clerk to the Council and 10 members of the public

1. Apologies for absence
Received from Cllr Mower and Doug Edworthy, Tree Warden.
2. Disclosures of interest
None were declared.
3. Additional agenda items
One additional planning application (RR/2022/2615/P) had been added from the most recent planning list. There were no further agenda items that had not already been included on the agenda.
4. Adoption of Minutes
The Chairman was authorised to sign the minutes of the Ordinary Council Meeting of the Parish Council held on Friday 23rd September as a true and correct record.
5. Open Forum
 - 5.1 Richard Meakin from Jack Fuller's said he is still experiencing flooding at home. He has had to clear his own drains every night and had water in the house again after the heavy rain. JP said that a drain survey has been requested. She has seen several residents clearing their own drains. Balfour Beatty will be the new contractors instead of Costain but apparently there are only 3 drain-clearing lorries for the whole of East Sussex. Cllr Barnes said that the contractors could remain as the sub-contractor under a new contractor, but in fairness they have had an awful lot of flooding to deal with. JP will mention it to the county councillor to follow up.

Rowena Suthers wanted to question the change of British Gypsum's operating hours. In 2008 she recalled a conversation that the belt would not run after 6pm. In January 2021 it started to operate from 6.30pm until 11.30pm. There had been an amendment to the original planning act, and the belt can apparently now operate from 6am on Monday to Saturday 3pm. She is very concerned about the

night-time peace and quiet and has suffered 2 years of misery. She questioned the validity of the document.

Virginia Letchworth added that residents had been given no warning that they were going to begin operating for these additional hours. AW pointed out that there had been an article in The Messenger in May 2018 after several parish councillors had visited British Gypsum and discussed at length who had detailed their planned increased operations.

A resident who has lived at The Cottage confirmed that she could hear the conveyor rumbling for the first time in 14 years this summer, but only when outside in her garden. It is a constant noise.

Antonio Micelli, Mine Manager at British Gypsum (BG) then introduced himself. He began his role 4 years ago, and in the first 2.5 years, the mine only ran in normal working hours. The plant has increased production so there is a duty to increase the running of the mine. The permit clearly states the amended operating hours which no one seemed to be aware of. However, Rother DC has served a noise abatement order and BG are working hard to adhere to this. They are replacing rollers on a 500m stretch which should reduce the operating noise.

He then introduced members of the Engineering Team who provided further details: new composite bearings are being fitted, initially to a 500m stretch around Ms Suthers' property. Further soundproofing measures are being investigated, and the work should result in a 10-decibel reduction. The plan is to make ongoing investment to replace rollers as they fail with the new composite bearings - an investment of £250k.

Finally, they confirmed that once works are complete, they will conduct a noise survey and Rother will also carry out an independent survey to ascertain the effectiveness of the works in reducing noise levels.

Rowena Suthers said she was interested to know more about the planning amendment and that she did appreciate the efforts made so far. BG confirmed that they want to work with their neighbours and ultimately, the more smoothly the conveyor runs, the better for everyone. They are very confident in the new rollers and reiterated that it is a continual process of improvement.

Cllr Coleman summarised: there are two avenues to pursue - following up on existing works, and she invited BG to share the results of their survey and attend a meeting in the new year to provide an update. They confirmed that they would be very happy to do so. Secondly, to investigate the planning notice and amendment that was issued to increase operating hours and verify its validity. Cllr Barnes said that whilst noise levels connected to mineral extraction are a county matter, there have been several statutes since 1990 which may be more relevant regarding wildlife etc.

AW added that planning permissions issued by county council exist forever and would specify a noise level, but this is only one condition. All regulations must be adhered to, and environmental noise conditions may have changed over the years. The fact that Rother are investigating is a stronger argument, but until the abatement work is complete, everyone must wait & see.

The Chairman thanked everyone for coming, and most members of the public then left the meeting.

- 5.2 Cllr Kirby-Green provided an update from county which included the topics of increased payments for Ukrainian host families, the bus improvement plan which should in the future be akin to an 'on demand bus service' for rural areas and the change of contractor to Balfour Beatty for all Highways matters. (Her report is attached as an appendix).

Cllr Barnes reported that despite not getting the outcome they'd hoped for The Oast, Brickyard Lane at the planning committee meeting, the conditions on the permission granted are more enforceable. JP thanked Cllrs Kirby-Green and Barnes for their representations at the meeting.

Further matters raised included the rejection of planning for the Town Hall project based on design. Although being re-presented in December, costs have increased to £25m and with no guarantee of the office rental income, it is fast becoming an unrealistic project. £660,000 has been spent to date.

There is a public consultation on Health & Wellbeing to include leisure services. Ultimately having closed pools locally, Rother intend to be a sign poster for services rather than a deliverer.

The financial situation has marginally improved due in part to higher interest rates and one or two projects producing more ongoing income. However, the drawing down on reserves at £3m per year is unsustainable, and the CFO is carrying out an affordability check on all capital projects. Finally due to the lack of energy efficiency in the Town Hall, they have applied for a government grant for improvements.

6. Gypsum mines update - see previous item 5.1.

7. Finance and Governance

7.1 RFO Report

7.1.1 The bank reconciliation to 31st October 2022 had been previously circulated and Cllr Wedmore confirmed that having checked online, the balances were correct as stated.

7.1.2 The schedule of receipts & payments for September & October 2022 had also been previously circulated and was approved by members.

7.1.3 The Clerk presented a draft budget applying a 2% increase to the precept. With no unexpected expenditure, there would be a small deficit for the financial year, but the reserves are healthy. Members agreed with the projections, and the clerk will finalise the budget for the January meeting, and the precept request deadline of the end of January 2023.

7.1.4 The following S137 grant payments were approved:

7.1.4.1 St Michael's Hospice - £60

7.1.4.2 Rother CAB - £60

7.1.4.3 Rother Rural Trust - £60

7.1.4.4 Sussex Air Ambulance - £60

7.1.4.5 Victim Support - £60

7.1.4.6 RNLI - £60

7.1.4.7 Battle Foodbank - £60

8. Highways

Cllr Petty provided an update on all Highways matters. She began by raising the issue of drains and the lack of regular clearance. She asked EKG if pressure can be put on the new contractors to increase the

frequency, and despite the usual argument that drains cannot cope with unprecedented levels of rainfall, when they are so compacted that even a prod with a stick doesn't clear them, they cannot serve their purpose. The programme of clearing once every 2 years had to be improved upon. EKG was very surprised to learn that it was only every 2 years, but AW had checked online, and according to the website 'roadside gullies were cleaned at least once every 3 years'. The clerk had received an email from the customer services manager stating that drain clearing routes were scheduled on a 6-month rolling programme, so there was conflicting information. Many residents regularly had to clear drains in their own area which indicated a lack of clearance by contactors.

JP also asked if the detail of the new contract could be changed so that cleared spoil is not deposited to one side where it promptly gets washed back in. She had also been told that workers are paid piece work and therefore rushed to do as many drains as possible and sometimes missed some out entirely. They often work from an iPad and in areas where there is no signal, they don't know where the drains are located.

Regarding flooding, AW had been told by Rother that residents could no longer be provided with sandbags and EKG said she will investigate.

There had been a recent site visit with Ian Johnson, the Road Safety Manager for Highways about the poor surface on Rectory Hill. The Steward has said repeatedly that it doesn't meet repair criteria, but common sense was required. The Clerk had received confirmation from Traffic that after studying crash data, there was no further action planned, and JP asked if EKG could apply some pressure.

The fading white lines at 4 junctions had been reported and were due to be re-painted with 28 days. The lack of Give Way signs at the Willingford Lane junction was also mentioned following a nasty accident. Finally, the overhanging branches on the B2096 are still causing visibility issues. Again, the steward has inspected and says that they're fine, but CC said that in high vehicles they cause a real issue. EKG suggested the PC write to landowner but tracing the owner of the woodland has proved difficult in the past.

9. Annual Parish Conference

JP had attended this event on 19th October. There had been a lot of discussion about Rother's Local Plan - they will be consulting on it early in 2023 and are still evidence gathering, but the mantra is 'Green to the Core'. It will include the response to climate change, plans for sustainable development, looking at living well locally and environmental standards of new builds. The challenges of supporting rural businesses had also come up.

More specific to Brightling was the village hall energy project. There is £500m available from the CIL fund to make village halls more energy efficient. 40 have signed up expressing interest in the scheme, including Brightling, and they will be surveyed between now and March '23. Decisions will then be made depending on their current state and footprint etc. Brightling has also registered as an emergency/rest centre which should help its claim. The roof is coming to the end of its natural life, and the committee is considering solar panels or something more environmentally friendly but will have to wait for the results of the survey and hope to be recipients of a grant.

10. Matters arising from the previous meeting:

10.1 Welcome pack

The clerk read out Cllr Mower's comments on the newly revised welcome pack that had been circulated by AW. Members felt overall that it was a vast improvement and merely required a couple of corrections - local lunches are bi-monthly not every month and Keep Fit no longer happens. AW said he is appealing for photographs to use and will then finalise the details. JC thanked him for his hard work and JO offered to proofread & check telephone numbers etc. in the final edition.

10.2 Councillor Email addresses - the clerk had no further information to date.

11. Community and Business Development

11.1 Broadband

Cllr Wedmore had previously circulated a report (attached as an appendix). EKG congratulated AW on his efforts and JC thanked him too.

11.2 Crime, anti-social behaviour & police relationships

Cllr Croft stated that the October report had mentioned a lot of catalytic converter theft, a vehicle had number plates stolen overnight and there had been motor bikes in the woods again recently. AW mentioned the newly appointed PCSO who had called in to the most recent Brightling Café.

11.3 Defibrillators - nothing to report.

11.4 Environment Policy & Biodiversity

AW reported that he was hoping to form a group and had been in touch with other local parish council environmental groups. He hoped to have more to report in the future. He would also like to find out more about 'Warmer Crowhurst' and will share any relevant information.

The grass cutting options were discussed. JO wanted to remove a couple of areas from the urban cuts as they don't cause visibility issues and could be left as wildflower verges. Other members agreed, and she will liaise with the clerk to submit the relevant information to Highways before the deadline of 16th December.

11.5 Footpaths & Bridleways

Nothing to report.

11.6 Highways, hedges & potholes

Cllr Petty nothing further to add (see item 8).

11.7 Messenger Magazine

JO again encouraged the submission of any articles for the Brightling pages. A resident said that the new improvements are excellent reflecting the personality of the parish and bringing it to life.

11.8 Phone Box

JC has chased Chris & Jamie French who have promised to right the phone box. JC also intends to put a 'Work In Progress' poster in it so that people know it hasn't been forgotten.

11.9 Trees

Nothing to report.

11.10 Utilities

DLG said that there had still been a few blips, but no major outages. AW suggested adding his report on energy banks to the emergency plan. The clerk will follow up on this with Cllrs Croft & Petty.

11.11 Refuse Collection – nothing to report.

11.12 Village Hall

JO reported that the first 'Warm Wednesday' had taken place. It is currently an experiment where the hall will be open between 9am & 4pm with tea, coffee and biscuits available. She will update further in the new year.

11.13 Website

Cllr Wedmore had previously circulated a report (attached as an appendix).

11.14 Welcome Packs

See item 10.1.

12. Planning Matters

12.1 As the subject concerned is confidential, this item was moved to the end of the meeting.

12.2 New Planning Applications

12.2.1 RR/2022/2615/P - Turners Retreat, Battle Road, Dallington

Proposal: *Variation of conditions 2 and 3 imposed on RR/2020/1407/P to amend internal layouts, external materials, add fenestration and increase the size of the patio area.*

The clerk read out Cllr Mower's comments. There was discussion about the revised plans not respecting the local style nor using local materials. AW proposed objecting to the new plans and the clerk was asked to submit the following comments online:

Brightling Parish Council objects to this application on the basis that the general appearance is damaging to the AONB and out of keeping with surrounding properties. Furthermore, the design and proposed materials do not adhere to the High Weald Design Guide and local materials should be used. If Rother are minded to grant permission, then we request that a condition of no external lighting be included to support the dark skies policy.

JC seconded his proposal and all members agreed.

12.3 Enforcement - For information only

12.3.1 ENF/297/22/BRI - Manor Farm, Brightling Road, Brightling

Use of land for aircraft hangar - helicopter in frequent use

12.4 Decision Notices – **For Information Only**

12.4.1 RR/2021/1982/P - The Oast, Brickyard Lane, Brightling

Permission refused for creation of field track and widened field access opening (Retrospective)

12.4.2 RR/2022/1350/P - The Oast, Brickyard Lane, Brightling

Permission granted with conditions for retention of outbuilding (retrospective) and re-instatement of grassland

13. Correspondence

13.1 High Weald AONB survey on the management plan. The clerk offered to collate comments to submit on behalf of the parish council, or members can respond as individuals.

13.2 Jane Beard's request for any takers of sweet chestnut seedlings - this has also been included in The Messenger magazine's next issue.

13.3 Rother's Well-being Consultation - again the clerk offered to collate comments. AW said that often as a small parish council, there simply aren't the resources to respond to lengthy consultations.

14. Parish Councillors' Forum

JP asked if anything could be arranged to gain a better insight on planning comments to make them more effective, particularly in relation to building materials. AW said that in the past, they have sat with the planning department to go through comments and improve on the process. He stressed that it was not to complain or go over past applications. JP said that despite conditions associated with planning permissions, there didn't seem to be checks made or follow up visits to ensure that the right materials were used. EKG said that Rother are awaiting a new head of planning and offered to mention this specific point.

JC said that she was regularly getting letters returned with "Not known at this address" and asked if anyone else had experienced the same. No one present had.

CC said that she had noticed a lot of water still coming across Penhurst Lane, near the junction with the B2096. JP said that she had reported it.

15. Information for Councillors / Future Agenda Items

Planning Training - 16th November

ESALC Conference - 30th November

16. Future Meetings

The next meeting of the parish council will be in Brightling Village Hall at 7.00pm.

16.1 The following are the remaining dates for council meetings in the current council year:

2023: 11th January, 8th March, (12th April Annual Assembly), 10th May (AGM)

At this point, members of the public were asked to leave the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 3(d) to discuss a confidential matter.

Meeting closed at 9.44pm

..... Signed (Chairman)

Date