

Reports for Brightling Parish Council meeting 9 November 2022

This report covers 4 topics:

- Welcome packs
- Environment Strategy
- Web site
- Broadband

Welcome packs

I volunteered to try and produce a more streamlined and up-to-date version of the welcome pack.

I have now roughed out a 6-page document, which I will circulate separately. With the addition of a few well-chosen photos, this will become an 8-page document, which can be printed as a folded brochure on two sheets of A4 paper. I intend to appeal for suitable photos in the December edition of the Messenger magazine.

Environment strategy

1. Environment Group for Brightling? I intend to put the following announcement in the December edition of the Messenger magazine, and on the village website. Please let me have any comments. If there is sufficient interest, I would look to hold an inaugural meeting in January.

What can we do, locally, about the two "planetary emergencies": the climate crisis, and the decline in bio-diversity? You can worry about it, or you can tell yourself that it's not really a problem, or that someone else will solve it somehow - or you can take action.

For those who would like to take action, I propose coming together to form a "Brightling Environment Group" (provisional name). Please email me at andrew@wedmore.com if you are interested.

I have had a little look around (on the Internet, naturally) to see what other villages and towns are doing. There are a number of local environment groups around: Wild about Burwash, for example. A Google search reveals a large number of "Wild about [insert town/village name]" organizations around the country. Mostly they seem to be focused on nature and conservation. Then there are BEG (Bexhill Environment Group) and REG (Rother Environment Group). These seem to focus on practical activities such as beach-cleaning and tree-planting, and occasional talks. And of course we have DACS (Darwell Area Conservation Society) also focused on nature conservation, education, and in particular the protection of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty from inappropriate development.

Other groups have the specific aim of reducing or eliminating the local carbon footprint. In October 2021, Crowhurst launched the "Warmer Crowhurst" project, with a £40,000 grant to "investigate how Crowhurst residents can be provided with affordable, reliable, clean heat to help reduce carbon emissions in line with the parish's net zero by 2030 ambitions." And within the last month, Ouse Valley Climate Action has won a £2m National Lottery Grant aiming to make the region a national pioneer in tackling the climate change emergency. Included in this is the village of Barcombe (near Lewes), which says it is aiming to be the UK's first net-zero village.

Poking around in this side of things, I find a quite bewildering array of advice, grants, support and projects that we might wish to study and perhaps copy. For example, here is Community Energy South: "Community energy works by connecting people from all walks of life to deliver community-owned green energy, reduce energy use and help make it affordable for all. We are empowering people to set up community solar and heat projects, car sharing and EV charging schemes, as well as supporting energy efficiency initiatives and delivering trusted local energy awareness services for communities and vulnerable neighbours. By working with local authorities, we are providing the expertise on the ground to allow community groups to not only help tackle soaring energy costs, tackle the climate emergency and support the drive towards Net Zero. We are excited to be offering

Community Energy Pathways to all local authorities in England as the next step in accelerating the growth of the community energy sector.”

There are plenty of possibilities. Do contact me at andrew@wedmore.com for a no-obligation chat if you are remotely interested in any of this.

2 Energy efficiency improvements at the Village Hall. I understand that the Village Hall committee is currently looking into all this, but I don't have any details beyond what I reported in September.

3 Electric vehicle charging points. In September 2021 I was told by our MP that central government had allocated money to allow local councils to install (and support the installation of) EV charging points. However, ESCC had not at the time taken advantage of this money. Instead the ESCC website said:

“We are currently developing a strategic approach”. [September 2021]

Fourteen months later, the ESCC website says

“We are currently developing a strategic approach”. [November 2022]

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/roads-transport/transport-planning/public-electric-vehicle-charging-points-east-sussex>

This can be compared to Kent County Council's position, who announced over a year ago:

“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 installations 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 main contributors are me, Jane Beard, and the Parish Clerk. If other contributors want to come forward I would be very happy to get them a logon and give any necessary training.

Broadband

The broadband project for Netherfield Village / Brightling / Woods Corner project got the go-ahead from BT Openreach on 8th July 2022. The timescale is broadly 6 months planning, 6 months physical delivery, which would give a delivery deadline of July 2023. However delays are entirely possible and we won't be able to do much about them if they do occur.

On 17th October 2022, I received an email from the BT/Openreach project manager to say that the project was on track for delivery in July 2023. Approximately 114 properties in Netherfield, within the area of the project, in fact received full fibre broadband services a few weeks ago. This was a spin-off from the primary school getting full-fibre.

Unlike many broadband projects, there is no legal contract with BT Openreach and no cash deposit has been required. In particular there is no commitment from the Parish Council. The only commitment is from individuals who have pledged that when the new service becomes available, they will sign up to take the new service for a minimum of 12 months.

Andrew Wedmore