

## Brightling Flower Show Annual Report April 2023

The 2022 Flower show was a lovely sunny day with a record number through the gates of 422 adults. For the first time in a long time, the flower Show made a profit of £800. The addition on stalls, kids races and the fact it was a glorious sunny day could have all been contributing factors of making a profit. Most of the takings were from the gate and the bar. £844 was taken on the gate and the bar made £1800 (cost £900). The Children's games also made a considerable amount of £520.

The Dog Show was a real success as always, however we did not charge to enter so exact numbers are unknown.

The Barn Dance made £1370, with nearly everyone pre-booking their tickets, which was a huge help to those taking money on the door.

With the money raised from the Flower Show and Barn Dance, The Flower Show donated £1000 each to the Air Ambulance, RLNR and MND. Next year it was discussed to look at more local charities, providing we have a surplus of funds! One suggestion on Crisis at Christmas.





# Brightling Village Trust

What have we done in the last year?

The Trust exists to support charitable purposes in Brightling and can also make grants to help individuals and relieve hardship. This gives the Trustees discretion to support a wide range of activities which will benefit people in Brightling and which are not otherwise supported.

In last year's report, I mentioned proposals relating to four other small Brightling charities. These are the Mary Herbert Educational Foundation (set up in 1728 to support girls' education), the Catherine Stone Bequest (to support the welfare of Sunday School children), the Jesse Gregson Charity (to provide bread to needy Brightling parishioners) and the FH Scott Charity (to support the poor of the parish including through the provision of coal). Meeting the Charity Commission requirements for these very small trusts has proved hugely burdensome, and their precise objectives are now out of date.

In September 2021 we agreed in principal that the four charities should be merged with the Village Trust. The intention is that the Village Trust will then be able to use what funds there are to benefit modern Brightling.

As I reported last year, making the change has turned out to be a lot more complicated than any of us had expected. None of us who are trustees of the Village Trust or of the other charities are experts in charities law or the hoops that we are having to jump through to get Charities Commission approval. That is one of the reasons why the problem has hung around for several years. We therefore appointed an expert in charity law to help us through this. We have had a very generous donation which will cover a significant part of the cost of this advice.

With much work, and especially from Nicola Magill, we are almost there. We are still waiting for a final decision from the Charity Commission on the Catherine Stone Bequest, but the merger of the others has now been approved subject to one or two formalities. I will put a report in the Messenger when the mergers have been completed.

On other matters, as in previous years, the Trust provided mulled wine and mince pies after the Village Carol Service.

We would welcome suggestions generally and for grants that the Trust should consider making, as well as donations and proposals for raising funds.

The Trustees are Mark Bridge (Treasurer), Charles Everett (Chair), Louise Dando, David Gasson, Brian Holliday, Bob Howell and Nicola Magill (Trust Secretary).

Charles Everett

Chair, Brightling Village Trust  
April 2023



## 2023 Tree Warden Report to Brightling Annual Parish Assembly

The Walnut tree planted on the Observatory Triangle as part of the late Queen's Green Canopy initiative was attacked by thieves in May last year who stole the ornamental tree guard that had been generously donated by our PC Chair, Joanna Coleman, and her husband.

After tending to the tree, which had escaped serious damage, a new guard was generously donated to the parish by a local resident who also watered the young tree throughout the dry summer. Cllr Wedmore and I installed the new guard in such a way that it is now extremely difficult to steal.

In July the tree was showing signs of mildew which had been brought on, so a knowledgeable arborist told me, by the wet spring followed by a dry summer. I'll be keeping an eye on it this year.

Towards the end of 2022 I undertook training with the Woodland Trust to become an Ancient Tree Verifier. A doubly appropriate title considering my age! The Ancient Tree Inventory (<https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>) maps the oldest and most important trees in the UK.

If you are aware of old or notable trees in the parish then please let me know about them.

Our parish needs more Tree Wardens and I'm looking for more people with an interest in trees to help me. You don't need to be a tree expert, I'm not, just enthusiastic. And you don't have to be a designated 'Tree Warden'. Please contact me if you can help.

If you'd like to come on a walk or be involved in helping to organize the walks, please contact me at the tree warden email address – [treewarden@dallington.org.uk](mailto:treewarden@dallington.org.uk)

Doug Edworthy

Tree Warden, Brightling and Dallington Parishes



## **Rother District Council Report to Brightling Parish Assembly April 2023**

For the fifth year in a row the Council has achieved a balanced budget only by drawing in reserves built up before 2019/20. The intention when the policy was launched was to make up the shortfall between our net spend and income raised by increasing our income from property bought in the course of an energetically pursued programme of regeneration. Although hampered by the onset of the pandemic, that programme has made a worthwhile contribution to income, and some projects e.g. Barnhorn Road Surgery have yet to come into play. The £8+ million investments made in property funds more than four years ago have fluctuated in value but continue to generate worthwhile sums and inflation, while a major headache, has led to an increase in interest rates, meaning that the substantial sums that pass through the Council's hands can be put to beneficial use.

There were two other elements to the Council's Financial Stability Programme, the transfer of services to Parish and Town Councils, and a search for efficiency savings. Many of the services that were proposed to go to Bexhill Town Council were in large part financed by the Special Expenses tax charged to the residents of Bexhill, Battle and Rye, although there was an element of subsidy from the generality of Rother council tax payers. However, Bexhill Special Expenses has had to be reinstated this year as no transfer of services has as yet taken place to the Town Council. Burwash Parish Council, however, have taken over the Burwash car park. Every year so far the Financial Stability Programme has missed its target; while savings have been found, the level of savings has always fallen short of the target.

In the meantime net expenditure has continued to rise and the reserves to fall. In 2022/23 Council has a net spend of £16 + million and useable reserves have fallen by over £3 million. The 'balanced' budget agreed for 2023/24 relies on £1 million largely unidentified savings (if and when Bexhill's public conveniences are transferred to the Town Council that will save £160 thousand) and £2 million drawn from reserves. That will bring the useable reserves to £5.3 million and the Chief Finance Office, backed by the Audit Committee, has made it clear that the minimum useable reserve kept intact should be £5 million. The newly elected Council will therefore face some difficult decisions.

Council tax has been set at the maximum permissible rate (any more would require the consent of the electorate by referendum) which in our case (because of the special expenses) is just 2.7%. The Council's capital programme has slipped badly in recent years, in part because of Covid, and given the recent rise in interest rates, is under review to ensure that it is still viable.

The Government has entered into a Levelling Up partnership with the Council, the first fruits of which are a grant of over £19 million, the bulk of which will regenerate the de la Warr pavilion, with a relatively small contribution going to the new community hub at Sidley Recreation ground – Sidley is amongst the ten per cent most deprived communities in England.

The backlog in dealing with planning applications is well on the way to being eliminated, largely thanks to new procedures inaugurated by the interim development planning manager, and the new local plan should be out for consultation in the near future. At the moment Rother still suffers from an imposed target for annual housebuilding that has no regard at all for the fact that ninety per cent of our district is designated AONB or otherwise protected as RAMSAR sites or SSSIs. Thanks to a quite arbitrary process which pays no attention at all to the steadily widening gap between house built and permissions given, Rother is deemed to have less than 3 years land supply. In general the Planning Committee does not allow itself to be swayed by this where the AONB is concerned, but



not all Appeal Inspectors are prepared to recognise the problem. Nevertheless Rother is winning the majority of appeals and the Government seems to be moving in the right direction with its proposed reforms to the planning system.

The steps Rother has taken to address the housing problem have had mixed fortunes. Not a single house has yet been started on the Blackfriars site and the spine road (a Council project) essential to site development is running months late with a cost that has doubled. Optivo (now Southern Housing Association) has been encouraged to purchase sites and develop them with 100 per cent affordable housing, but only that at Banky Field at Ticehurst has yet come to fruition. Roughly 100 affordable homes will have been completed in 2023/24, slightly fewer than the 112 in 2022/23, but that figure should improve; and the completion of the first Community Land Trust housing at Icklesham is very welcome. Overall house building has picked up post pandemic, 238 new homes being added in 2021/22, a number that is almost certain to have been exceeded in 2022/23. But the demands on our housing services continue to swell, with something like 20 households a month swelling a housing list that in December stood at 2095 households. At that moment Rother had no fewer than 133 households living in temporary accommodation. The decision to devote £8 million to the purchase of properties to accommodate at least some of those requiring temporary accommodation is therefore not only necessary but actually saves the Council money.

About 30 projects have been completed as part of our environment strategy and £500,000 of CIL money has been awarded through the Climate Emergency Bonus Fund (sic) to the Village Halls Energy Project. Brightling is one of the halls being investigated. Progress is also being made with installing vehicle charging points in Council car parks, and a grant is being sought from the Energy Saving Trust. However, it looks as though only the urban areas will benefit. The possibility of using vegetable oil rather than diesel in our waste collection fleet at a cost of £250,000 a year is under consideration, but will have to be agreed by all three authorities involved. Regrettably the Waste recycling facilities at Burwash have had to be closed as the waste had to be treated as contaminated.

Community Grants continue with the new Lottery launched a year ago making a small but useful contribution towards what remains a largely tax funded programme. Burwash Playing Field Association is amongst the latest beneficiaries.



## REPORT FOR BRIGHTLING ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2023

### HIGHWAYS

It has been another challenging year for Brightling's roads. Heavy rain, ice and snow have caused further highway deterioration and left the Parish Council battling - along with with similarly afflicted local parishes - for the scarce maintenance resources of East Sussex County Council Highways Department.

#### DRAINS

Regularly-cleared drains would siphon off the standing flood water that allows potholes to form and would divert the running water that erodes the carriageway edges. Believe it or not, East Sussex Highway's general policy is to clear drains only once every three years. Brightling should, therefore, consider itself fortunate that some of our drains are on a two year clearing cycle and some on a one year cycle. However, as is all too evident, this regime is not kept to. As a result, the Parish Council is in frequent contact with the Highways Department to report blocked drains. Back in December a site meeting was held with County Councillor Eleanor Kirby-Green and the Head of Drainage from East Sussex Highways and focused on problems at Oxley's Green and the stretch from the Robertsbridge Road junction down past Twelve Oaks to Darwell Hole. Despite Cllr Kirby-Green's best efforts, and despite further problem reporting, we have not seen any progress and the drains remain blocked.

#### POTHoles

The general state of the roads and the number of potholes is worse than ever. The Highways Department specifies certain criteria a pothole must meet before it reaches their intervention level. The Parish Council continues to report potholes around the village to the local Highways Steward who then assesses whether they should be repaired (indicated by white spray paint). The steward's response is usually quite quick. More often than not though, the resulting repair is seen as 'safety measure' funded out of the Highways Department's 'reactive maintenance' revenue. The problem is, that when larger and more permanent repairs are called for, they come out of capital expenditure budget and are carried out according to priority. We all know the result: more and more unsatisfactory repairs that don't last - and not enough proper, permanent repairs.



## **MEETINGS WITH EAST SUSSEX HIGHWAYS**

Meetings are held twice a year between Parish Councillors and representatives from East Sussex Highways. The latest was held in March with the following agenda:

- Drainage problems at Oxley's Green
- Blocked drains from Robertsbridge Road junction via Twelve Oaks to Darwell Hole
- Blocked drains opposite the Village Hall
- Flooded road/blocked drain by New House Farm on the Brightling -Robertsbridge Road
- Flooded road/blocked drain opposite Bannisters
- Blocked drain Penhurst Lane
- Overhanging branches on the B2096 at Darwell junction
- Suspected water leak on Rectory Hill
- Eroded carriageway edge opposite Mount Farm, Perrymans Lane

## **NEW MAINTENANCE CONTRACTOR**

Having come to the end of its fixed maintenance contract with Costain, East Sussex County Council has recently negotiated a new maintenance with Balfour Beatty who take over next month. We have high hopes of improvement!

## **WE CAN ALL HELP!**

The more complaints and problem reports the Highways Department receives, the more likely those problems are to get fixed. It is easy to report a problem on line:

1. Go to [eastsussexhighways.com](http://eastsussexhighways.com)
2. Click on the tab 'Report a Problem'
3. Click on the subject tab - e.g 'Drains'
4. Using two fingers, navigate the map and indicate the location
5. Fill in the form, uploading photos if you have been able to take them safely. You will then receive an emailed acknowledgement and, within a couple of weeks, notification of outcome.



## Reports for Brightling Annual Parish meeting 12<sup>th</sup> April 2023

This report covers 5 topics:

- Messenger magazine
- Welcome packs
- Environment Strategy
- Web site
- Broadband

### Messenger magazine

I took over as chair in September 2022 and Gilly Lowe has taken on the Treasurer role.

The magazine is run by a committee which currently consists of the following:

David Gynge (Distribution)  
Patricia Jones  
Gilly Lowe (Treasurer)  
Peter Miles  
Pauline Ridley  
Bill Vorley  
Andrew Wedmore (Chair)  
Mel Willis Fleming (Secretary and Editor)

We would love to get more people involved in the running of the magazine. In particular we would like to find someone to get involved in the monthly editing of the magazine and take some of the strain off Mel Willis Fleming, who has edited the magazine every single month for over 4 years. Do please get in touch, without commitment, if you think that this is something that might interest you.

The magazine depends on its small army of unpaid volunteer deliverers. I would particularly like to thank all our deliverers, including those who have recently stepped back after many years and those who have stepped forward to take over and ensure the continuing delivery of the magazine.

The AGM of the magazine will be in November. We normally structure this as a bit of a social occasion, in the Village Hall, so do look out for it and come along.

### Welcome packs

The parish council aims to personally deliver a welcome pack to all newcomers to the village. The welcome pack has recently been overhauled, and the latest version can be viewed at <https://brightling.community/welcome-to-brightling/>

If you haven't had a welcome pack and would like one, you can download it by following the above link, or request a printed copy.

### Environment strategy

Brightling Environment Group had its first two meetings on 11 February and 11 March. We are pursuing various ideas including becoming part of a Nature Recovery Network, liaison with Rother District Council, and finding out what other village environment groups are doing.

### Web site

The village website is at <https://brightling.community/>

The site continues to be hosted by Rother District Council.



The main contributors are me, the Parish Clerk, Jane Beard, and Chris Wing.

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 planned timescale was broadly 6 months planning, 6 months physical delivery, giving a delivery deadline of July 2023.

Last week, Openreach blandly informed me that the delivery date had been put back to 31 December 2023. No apology or explanation for the delay was offered.

This is obviously very unsatisfactory. I am vigorously pursuing Openreach to find out what has gone wrong, and what they are doing to recover the slippage and prevent any further slippage - and I will escalate if I don't get a satisfactory reply. Realistically, though, we have little control over Openreach (a private sector company) and I would be surprised if the project is in fact delivered before the end of 2023.

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



## **ESCC annual report for Brighton Parish Assembly 2023**

This summary sets out some of the key achievements of East Sussex County Council over the last year under the four strategic priorities of the Council:

### **Driving sustainable economic growth**

Following a competitive tender process, ESCC awarded a new contract for highways and infrastructure services to Balfour Beatty Living Places Ltd. The contract valued at £297m for an initial seven years from May 1<sup>st</sup> 2023, has an option to extend to a maximum of 14 years. During the procurement process bidders were asked to demonstrate how they would support the Council's goals to reduce its carbon footprint, ensure high quality work, provide value for money and improve social wellbeing.

Over 752 road improvement schemes, utilising the one-off additional investment agreed by ESCC Cabinet in November 2021, were completed by the end of 2022 at 398 sites with a further 100 sites expected to be completed by the end of 2022/23. This includes patching schemes, new signs and new road markings. In addition, during the first three-quarters of the year we completed 140 road maintenance projects to maintain and improve the county's roads and repaired over 17,000 potholes in the roads and pavements. There was a significant increase in reported potholes following the wettest November on record and one of the coldest starts to December. By the end of January 2023, we had more than doubled the number of pothole repair gangs from 10 to 23 and extended working hours.

In September 2022, over £41m of funding to improve bus services across the county was confirmed by Government. ESCC's Bus Service Improvement Plan was approved which has enabled the Council to reduce fares and will support bus priority and bus stop improvements, investments in infrastructure and the provision of more bus services.

Following extensive consultation, Transport for the South East, the region's sub-national transport body which is chaired by ESCC, approved their Strategic Investment Plan which is the blueprint for future investment in strategic transport infrastructure for the next thirty years.

Over the summer, over 600 people looking to get into the world of work attended Apprenticeship Roadshows in Hastings and Eastbourne, with more than 60 training providers and employers from a range of industries on hand to give advice and information. The Apprenticeship Roadshows are part of the £600,000 Transform programme, supported by the European Social Fund, and including match funding of £300,000 from the Council's Apprenticeship Levy which helps small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) access apprenticeship advice and funding. More than 3,600 students from across East Sussex gained an insight into the world of work through the Council's work experience scheme with pupils aged 14-18 from 32 schools being offered placements during the last academic year with over 1,400 businesses. More than 20 businesses have also signed up to the Open Doors scheme which gives young people real-life experience of the workplace and runs from November to June 2023 this year. Recruitment of Industry Champions has also continued, with 190 champions supporting schools and colleges in place by the end of 2022.



## **Keeping vulnerable people safe**

The Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme provided for more than 1,800 young people during the Easter holidays, including 300 young people with additional needs. May half-term activities focused on supporting young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and those with low attendance: 1,440 young people were involved through more than 4,500 sessions. Provision was also extended over the summer holidays with over 80 providers across 144 sites, offering activities and nutritious food to children who receive free school meals.

A new Connected Families Service was launched in 2022 for families with children aged 11-17 who are on the edge of care. The service aims to enable children to live safely at home, or where care is necessary, to maintain relationships and work to support children to return home when appropriate. Connected Coaches provide proactive, tailored support for families at their point of need.

Trading Standards were involved in over 425 interventions over the first three-quarters of 2022/23 to protect vulnerable people, including installing CCTV and call blockers to try to prevent people from falling victim to telephone scams. Trading Standards have also obtained Proceeds of Crime Act confiscation orders against convicted individuals this year totalling nearly £100,000. The team also took part in Scams Awareness Fortnight, including speaking to people at local libraries to raise awareness of the types of scams which target vulnerable people.

As at mid-January 2023 1,170 guests were in East Sussex under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, with more than 400 school places allocated to Ukrainian children. ESCC is working with Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations to provide support to Ukrainian families.

## **Helping people help themselves**

A new East Sussex SEND strategy for 2022-25 was launched in November 2022 after a 10-month consultation period. The strategy outlines a partnership approach to service provision and commissioning by putting children, young people and their families at the centre of decision making. A new specialist facility for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder opened at All Saints Primary School in Bexhill during 2022, alongside a new free special school in Eastbourne; Summerdown School – which will educate up to 84 learners with a diagnosis of autism, between the ages of 5 and 16.

Reablement services are provided to help people to regain mobility and daily living skills, especially after a hospital stay. Between April and September 2022 90.7% of older people discharged from hospital to reablement or rehabilitation services were at home 91 days after discharge.

Work continued on the further integration of health and social care. The Integrated Care Board (NHS Sussex) was formally established on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022 and is responsible for agreeing strategic priorities and resources for all NHS organisations in Sussex. The joint statutory committee between local government and the NHS, the Sussex Health and Care Assembly approved the Sussex Integrated Care Strategy with work underway to develop a joint Forward Plan which will support delivery of shared priorities. During the last part of 2022, schemes to support people who were medically fit to leave hospital into appropriate onward care settings were mobilised to help alleviate pressures on the NHS. ESCC teams



also worked with urgent community response healthcare services to support people and their carers to remain in their own homes.

Thirteen road safety schemes were completed during the first three-quarters of 2022/23 to improve road safety infrastructure. Nearly 3,000 people have also benefited from 'Bikeability' courses.

A new initiative to tackle fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency in privately rented households within areas of Hastings was launched in August 2022. ESCC was one of 13 local authorities to secure funding from the Government's Partnerships for People and Place programme. The funding will help the Council, local partners, and central government colleagues to develop new solutions which aim to reduce fuel poverty and increase the take up of energy efficiency improvements, boosting residents' health and providing environmental benefits.

### **Making best use of resources in the short and long term**

The Council's budget and Council Plan for 2023/24 was approved at the meeting of Full Council on the 7<sup>th</sup> February 2023. Councillors approved a £501m net budget for 2023/24 for the day-to-day provision of services. Spending in 2023/24 also includes part of our £725m 10-year capital programme, which includes investment in roads and highways structures, in reducing the Council's carbon emissions and in school places.

Following the declaration of a climate emergency in 2019 the Council developed a corporate climate emergency plan for 2020-22, which set out the baseline carbon emissions and the actions to be delivered. In January 2023, Cabinet approved an updated corporate Climate Emergency Plan covering 2023-25. The plan sets out a number of actions to reduce our carbon emissions including in property services, travel, street lighting and procurement. The outturn for quarter 2 of 2022/23 showed a 29% reduction in carbon emissions, from the baseline year 2019/20.

The Council spent £295m with 908 local suppliers over 2022, equating to 67% of total spend. In addition, during the first three-quarters of the year, 10 contracts were awarded which were in-scope of the Social Value Measurement Charter. These contracts had a total value of just over £340m with almost £198m of social value commitments secured, including apprenticeships, employability support and support for the VCSE. This equates to an outturn of 58% of applicable procurement spend, against a target of 10%.

The East Sussex Pension Fund was named Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) Fund of the Year (assets over £2.5 billion) at the 2021 Local Authority Pension Fund (LAPF) Investments Awards (announced in March 2022). The award recognises the Fund's excellence in implementing best practice, leadership across pension fund operations, investment performance, governance and administration. In addition, the Fund was highly commended in the Best Climate Change Strategy category.