

**Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Brightling Parish Council held on
Wednesday 12th July 2023 at 7.00 p.m. at Brightling Village Hall**

Parish Councillors present: Cllrs Judy Petty, Dianne Mower, Jane Oxenford, Andrew Wedmore and Joanna Coleman (Chair)

District Councillor present: Cllr John Barnes, RDC

In attendance: Gilly Lowe, Clerk to the Council & 2 members of the public

1. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Cllr Kirby-Green, ESCC and Cllr Caroline Croft.

2. Disclosures of interest
None.

3. Additional agenda items
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 Annual Meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 10th May 2023 as a true and correct record.

5. Open Forum

5.1 Cllr Barnes reported that the full council meeting was postponed until 31st July; less had been spent from reserves than anticipated; the costs of the capital programme had risen to such an extent that a lot has been put on hold including the Town Hall project. He confirmed that Rother is still considering buying flats above shops and other empty properties for use as temporary accommodation.

5.2 Members of the public were present to raise the issue of the enforcement action on the land between Wyland Wood & Silver Birches. Firstly, there was the mix up in assigning it to the parish of Salehurst even though it is in Brightling which has caused confusion, but apparently cannot be amended. The land which is agricultural land with ancient woodland (6 acres), has a variety of buildings present, some hardstanding, a new access and pavilion etc. which after investigation, the case officer asked that they remove by 30th June, and make a retrospective planning application for the new access. However, additional items have arrived since 30th June, not been removed. The district & county councillors have been very supportive, and they wanted to make the parish council fully aware too and ask for support. They further stated that Enforcement are not providing satisfactory updates, nor verifying facts. DM suggested looking at Google Earth images for before & after evidence and AW further added that you can use the time programme to see how it looked before. AW also echoed DM's comments about enforcement action being a long

process. JB said that he has spoken to the Chief Executive and suggested Rother use solicitors to support the Enforcement dept. which is what happens at Wealden. AW proposed writing a formal letter to Enforcement asking them to keep the parish council informed, and expressing concern about damage to AONB and requesting more decisive action following the 30th June deadline. All members agreed and the clerk was asked to write to the Enforcement Team.

6. Finance and Governance

6.1 RFO report

- 6.1.1 The bank reconciliation to 30th June 2023 had been previously circulated together with a copy of the bank statement showing that the balances were correct as stated.
- 6.1.2 The schedule of receipts & payments for May & June 2023 had been previously circulated and was approved by members.
- 6.1.3 The first quarter's income & expenditure report had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The RFO reported that no reserves have been used to date, and all other expenditure was as forecast.
- 6.1.4 The clerk confirmed the publication of the AGAR documents and confirmation of the submission of the Certificate of Exemption to the external auditor.
- 6.1.5 The clerk confirmed the VAT refund of £193.21 for 2022/'23 has been claimed.

7. Councillor Vacancy

A panel of 3 councillors had informally interviewed an applicant for co-option prior to the meeting. They recommended to the other members that he be co-opted and there was unanimous agreement. The clerk will organise the necessary paperwork to co-opt Philip Garbutt as the new parish councillor.

8. Highways

- 8.1 Drains - Balfour Beatty are now the new contractors and there appears to be some better repair work being carried out on the roads. There is a faster response time to potholes etc. and more stewards to inspect repairs. £15.7m has been earmarked for road improvement projects county-wide, but the jetting on Penhurst Lane has yet to be carried out.
 - 8.1.1 Oxley's Green - still waiting to hear from Mark Stapley directly. The clerk has chased. Also still awaiting a site visit for the leak on Rectory Hill. Responses from customer service is still slow despite the change of contractor.
 - 8.1.2 Drain clearing - JP said that this was meant to have taken place in December, then February, then May, and it still hasn't happened. Very overdue, and the clerk will chase Mark Stapley.
- 8.2 Verge cutting - the safety cut is scheduled for the end of July, but there seems to have been a 1m wide strip cut in various places and at junctions. The clerk will ascertain whether this was carried out by East Sussex or residents. JO reported that there is a 20 yd stretch of Himalayan Balsam under the conveyor belt along Hollingrove Lane. The clerk will report it to Highways.

9. RALC meeting

Cllr Coleman had attended the quarterly meeting earlier in the day and provided a brief summary: on planning, there is a presumption of granting permission unless it's in the AONB; potholes, roads only have to be safe and RALC has requested sight of the contract with Balfour Beatty; Bexhill are concerned about the number of sinkholes appearing; the Quiet Lanes initiative has still not been adopted by County; Rother Together can do a survey of any residential property re solar panels; there has been a change of areas covered by PCSO's, but they will still cover each other's areas - all issues must be reported for information gathering; the new Flexibus scheme is being used by quite a few, with positive feedback. The next RALC meeting is on 11th October.

10. Matters Arising from the previous meeting:

10.1 Councillor email addresses

Almost all councillors have now successfully set up their new email addresses. Initial teething problems have been resolved. The clerk will update and inform all publications etc.

10.2 SE Water - The clerk had spoken to another resident who had suffered from discoloured water on Netherfield Hill. SE Water have fitted a filter and this has improved their water quality. The clerk to follow up with other affected residents.

11. Community and Business Development

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

11.2 Crime, anti-social behaviour & police relationships - Cllrs Croft & Coleman together with the clerk had met with the PCSO following a change in reporting procedure and areas of coverage. Brightling are keeping their PCSO, and all officers will cover each other's areas when they aren't on duty. The monthly report will continue to be sent with incidents in the local area.

11.3 Defibrillators - the Clerk suggested a regular monthly check of the 2 de-fibs in the village and will ensure that they are registered on The Circuit, the national register of de-fibs. Cllr Croft had previously agreed to check the de-fib at Darwell Hole.

11.4 Environment Policy & Biodiversity - See AW's report attached. Caroline Hodge attending the meeting had further information about the Dark Skies festival in 2024. At this stage, groups can express an interest in taking part and then provide of summary of planned activities by the end of September. AW proposed Brightling express an interest and discuss the matter further at the next meeting.

Also see his comments about the decarbonisation survey carried out as part of the VH Energy Project.

11.5 Footpaths & Bridleways - no current issues.

11.6 Highways, hedges & potholes - see item 8.

11.7 Messenger Magazine - The clerk will submit a meeting report for the August issue.

11.8 Phone Box - JC asked for approval to obtain a quote for a new concrete base to stabilise the phone box. Members agreed.

11.9 Trees – nothing to report.

11.10 Utilities – nothing to report.

11.11 Refuse Collection – nothing to report.

11.12 Village Hall - JO reported that a new treasurer had been appointed and there were some other new committee members and help with the cleaning rota.

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

11.14 Welcome Packs - JO requested an updated copy to print out.

12. Planning Matters

12.1 New Planning Applications

12.1.1 RR/2023/792/P - Park Pale Meadow, Mountfield Lane, Mountfield TN32 5LD

Using delegated authority, the clerk submitted the following comments online:

Brightling Parish Council objects to this application on the grounds that:

(1) It will cause further damage to the High Weald AONB, above and beyond the damage already caused by the existing buildings, hard standing and general "domestication"; (2) The new proposed buildings are considerably larger than the existing ones approved as part of the 2019 application. No justification has been given as to why a much larger building is required. It seems likely that more horses will be stabled here than at present; (3) The landowner / applicant / horse-owner does not live on site and therefore additional vehicle journeys will be generated (down very narrow, currently quiet, country lanes); (4) In the past it has been argued that there is no impact on the appearance of the High Weald AONB when buildings are screened by a hedge. This tends to be not the case in practice: the buildings will be visible in longer views, and hedges are by no means impervious to see through, particularly in winter.

However, if Rother District Council are minded to approve this application, then we would like the following conditions imposed:

(a) only for private equestrian purposes and not for any commercial riding, livery use, breeding, training, sub-letting or other business use, or for other forms of recreation; (b) no external lighting of any kind to protect 'dark skies'; (c) that all the existing buildings are removed within a short time of the new building starting to be used, in part or whole.

The decision notice has since been issued and planning permission has been refused.

All decision notices and enforcement updates have previously been circulated to councillors for information. The following specific cases were discussed:

12.2 Enforcement / Appeals

12.2.1 RR/2023/2791/P - Land at Fir Tree Hill, Netherfield

This had been discussed at a recent planning committee meeting. The same site had been subject to enforcement, but a revised application went before the planning committee on 22nd June and was granted permission. JP had watched proceedings online and felt that a number of questions went unanswered. There is a strong group of residents on Netherfield Hill who are concerned.

JB commented that it has been approved with conditions that it is for a 3 year term and for the current residents only. The enforcement ruling suggested that the site be re-located away from the woodland edge, and smaller mobile homes used to make it less visible. However, it raises questions about Enforcement's rulings. JB stated that Rother is vulnerable to these sorts of decisions as it doesn't have enough pitches, but allocated pitches as per the Local Plan e.g at Watermill Lane where outline planning permission for 5 pitches was granted some years ago. Why hasn't Rother taken action to bring this site forward, especially as we are told a compulsory purchase order has been agreed?

JP proposed writing to the Chief Executive raising this point and members unanimously agreed.

12.2.2 ENF/5/23/BRI - 1, Grant's Cottage, Brightling

There has been a long delay in dealing with this enforcement and the case officer is still waiting to hear what the resident intends to do. Members asked if Enforcement should surely be giving instruction not waiting to hear.

12.2.3 ENF/44/20/BRI - The Oast, Brightling Place

Enforcement had decided that with vegetation, the access track has naturalised and can remain despite refusing permission for the shed that it led to - members asked why the track remain in place?

JP proposed writing to Enforcement on the various unsatisfactory outcomes. Members agreed that there were sufficient grounds to request further action and/or information. JB suggested writing to the Development Officer as well as the Enforcement Department. The clerk will follow up.

12.2.4 ENF/73/23/SAL - Land between Silver Birches and Wyland Wood, Ludpit Lane

See item 5.2

12.3 RR/2022/840/P - Beech Hill Farm, Sedlescombe - an update

Members decided not to discuss this matter and it was deferred to a later meeting.

13. Correspondence

13.1 Victim Support letter requesting a donation. Members decided that this will be considered later in the year with other grant applications.

13.2 Dog Control consultation. Members felt that this wasn't applicable to Brightling as the parish council is not responsible for any public recreational areas.

13.3 D-Day 80th celebrations - 6th June 2024. Planning around this event is already being advertised in The Messenger.

13.4 Gypsum mine update - Rowena Suthers had provided an update - Rother were in the process of carrying out noise testing. The results should be available for the next meeting.

14. Parish Councillors' Forum

Cllr Mower said that she was planning to resign. The clerk and other members tried to persuade her otherwise. She will confer with the clerk.

JP raised the matter of emergency services response times following the length of time it took the fire brigade to arrive at a fire in the parish recently. The clerk will make enquiries to see if a representative can attend a future meeting.

15. Information for Councillors / Future Agenda Item

15.1 Advanced Planning Training - 18th July

No councillors wanted to attend this training.

15.2 Rother Energy Champion Training - 27th July

AW gave a summary of the training being offered but no councillors can attend. The clerk will advertise it on the website and send the information to Caroline Hodge.

16. Future Meetings

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

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

2023: 20th September, 8th November.

2024: 10th January, 13th March, (10th April Annual Assembly), 8th May (AGM)

Meeting closed at 9.40pm

..... Signed (Chairman)

Date