

**Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Brightling Parish Council held on
Wednesday 10th January at 7.00 p.m. at Brightling Village Hall**

Parish Councillors present: Cllrs. Joanna Coleman (Chairman), Judy Petty (Vice-Chair), Jane Oxenford, Andrew Wedmore, Philip Garbutt & Caroline Croft

District/County Councillors: Cllr. John Barnes, Rother District Council (RDC), and Cllr. Eleanor Kirby-Green, East Sussex County Council (ESCC)

In attendance: Sam Dugan, Clerk to the Council, & 7 members of the public

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies received and accepted from Cllr. Katrina Blench who circulated reports to Cllrs prior to the meeting.

2. Disclosures of interest

None.

3. Additional agenda items

A resident's request to discuss future D-Day Celebrations was received prior to the meeting. The Chairman agreed the item to be included after existing agenda items, but there was not time during this meeting. Accordingly, the item will be included in the March meeting agenda.

4. Adoption of minutes

The Council **RESOLVED** to authorise the Chairman to sign the minutes of the ordinary meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 8th November 2023 and the additional planning meeting held on Wednesday 4th October 2023 as true and correct records.

5. Open Forum

5.1 County Councillor Update

Cllr. Kirby-Green (EKG) provided an update on highways, as it remains a big issue. All potholes meeting current intervention levels are being filled temporarily to clear them down, ahead of being completed permanently. The Chairman asked why potholes are not being repaired properly once. EKG explained that it was about reducing ESCC liability by reducing risk. There is increased workforce, but poor weather hampering progress.

ESCC budget is facing challenges due to high expenditure in children services and adult social care, which ESCC is legally obliged to support. Central government not providing sufficient funding, with the result that Council Tax is likely to increase at forthcoming budget. EKG expressed view that ESCC is efficient and well run, but challenges remain that are outside of ESCC control.

EKG updated Cllrs that she had held discussions around planning and enforcement with RDC, which indicated an appropriate number of enforcement officers, but the need for changes in working practices between the planning and enforcement teams. There is a new development plan in the future; EKG has been given assurances that this will improve the amount of enforcement action being taken.

5.2 District Councillor update

Cllr. Barnes explained how RDC cabinet has been cancelled, resulting in a long list of decisions to be made between now and May. Rural Services Bulletin identifies that rural funding is much poorer than urban areas. RDC budget is running at costs which are not being met by revenue over the last four years. Cannot be covered by reserves alone, so cuts are also required. There have been some achievements through devolution, e.g. transferring public toilets to Bexhill Town Council, but this is not providing huge savings. RDC are considering further devolution of parks and recreation grounds. Where possible, digitalisation will be sought to make savings, but services (possibly leisure and recreation) are likely to suffer. RDC is likely to get through without a S144 notice with careful management, but hard decisions ahead. RDC homelessness strategy under review.

5.3 Members of the public

Rowena Suthers gave detail of her research into noise levels involving the British Gypsum conveyor belt at Brightling Mine. She found evidence in minutes at The Keep of complaints of noise in 1991, and welcomed further information.

6. British Gypsum (BG)

Eoin Wallace, recently appointed Mine Manager at Brightling Mine, Joseph Flack, Head of Mining for BG, and Neil Hutton, BG Health and Safety Officer, accepted invitation to attend the meeting. Apologies were given from EW about breakdown in communication over recent months due to long term sickness and staffing changes. JF explained that production at the mine changes over time due to gypsum supply/demand. Currently, the mine is in a growth period. JF said this was good for the local economy, and good environmentally (less than 2kg of CO2 per tonne vs 40kg imported). For a long time, production was stable at 70,000 tonnes, but now at 200,000 tonnes so additional second work shift is required to meet demand. Confirmation that the shift patterns now finish at 10pm. JF explained that St Gobain (BG parent company) does things 'by the book', so keen to understand issues and seek resolutions. JF detailed that 'night-time working' is defined as starting at 11pm. There are no systematic plans to work beyond then, but BG's planning permission would permit this.

JF explained to Cllrs that there is interest from high up in the company to understand the issues around soundproofing and establish a solution. BG have trialled different rollers alongside soundproofing, achieving reductions 11db below the set limit. Rowena Suthers said that the noise is still unacceptable, and that a precedent of 15 years having a 6pm cut off matters, impacting house value and quality of life. JF explained that the shift pattern has changed and there is an entitlement for BG to operate this way. The Chairman focussed the conversation into two issues, sound proofing and operating hours, reminding the meeting that RDC had completed noise monitoring that had returned acceptable levels. JF repeated insistence that BG wants to resolve the issue. JF has instructed the mine to install continuous sound monitoring with the hope of generating ongoing data. The new rollers have improved acoustics; NS confirmed that rollers are on a maintenance regime. Paul Farrant raised that although new rollers have been installed, he is concerned that the benefit is offset by increased use. JF clarified that he (and

BG) wants to act based on data, hence installation of continuous sound monitoring. The Chairman confirmed with JF that sound proofing will not be installed until data suggests need.

Cllr. Wedmore raised that when maintenance is completed, debris should be removed, as there is evidence of poor cleanup along the conveyor. OW confirmed this would happen. The Chairman acknowledged that BG needed time to act, and requested both attendance at the March meeting and keeping the Clerk updated throughout. NS repeated that BG wants to, and does, work within the law, and encouraged open and continuous dialogue between the Mine and the Parish Council.

7. South East Water (SEW)

The Clerk had previously circulated a response from SEW to Cllrs regarding the December 2023 water outage. SEW advised of future plans to establish a Stakeholder Liaison relationship with the Parish Council. Cllr. Petty confirmed that the village hall should be registered as an emergency centre. Cllr. Coleman shared that she had received £150 compensation following the outage and encouraged others to check. Cllr. Petty said that SEW response that all information about the outage was shared is not accurate; the Council expressed disappointment with the communication received from SEW. Cllr. Coleman agreed to provide an update to Jane Beard for the Messenger Magazine – including how to register for alerts and the vulnerable list, and how to access key information from the SEW website as it can be hard to navigate. Cllrs confirmed that there is some bottled water remaining at the Village Hall. The Council **RESOLVED** to instruct the Clerk to invite SEW to attend a future meeting of the Parish Council.

8. Finance and Governance

- 8.1 The Council **RESOLVED** to adopt bank reconciliation and bank statements to 31st December 2023. Cllr. Croft confirmed that the balance was correct.
- 8.2 The Council **RESOLVED** to adopt the schedule of receipts & payments for November and December 2023. The Clerk highlighted that the \$137 grant to Rother Citizens Advice Bureau had been rejected and therefore shows as a receipt item. Cllr. Wedmore requested that the Clerk confirm payment details for returned payment and reattempt to process the grant.
- 8.3 The Council **RESOLVED** to adopt the 2024/'25 budget with a 7.2% precept increase.
- 8.4 The Clerk updated Cllrs on new RDC online system for precept submission. The Council **RESOLVED** to authorise the Clerk to submit the precept request of £8460.
- 8.5 The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the following payments:
 - 8.5.1 Jon Avery - £720 (retrospective)
 - 8.5.2 Rock salt purchase – Cllrs. **RESOLVED** to delegate to the Clerk to identify and purchase.
- 8.6 The Clerk detailed his eligibility for income tax and NI and that the total of the Clerk's salary would be itemised as two payments through PAYE (one to the Clerk, one to HMRC) on future schedule of receipts & payments.

9. Planning Matters

9.1 New Planning Applications

- 9.1.1 RR/2023/2423/P - Bannisters, Deer Park Road, Brightling, TN32 5HL

Cllrs had **RESOLVED** to authorise the Clerk to submit a response via delegated authority due to pre-meeting deadline: Brightling Parish Council supports this application, provided that the following conditions are included: 1) No external means of illumination of the extension shall be provided, installed, or operated at the site without a further planning permission, to safeguard the special character and dark skies of the rural area within the High Weald AONB in accordance with Policies OSS4 (iii) and EN1 of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy and DEN2 and DEN7 of the Development and Site Allocations Local Plan. 2) That timber windows, rather than aluminium, are installed to be in keeping with the local vernacular architecture. 3) That permission be subject to a Section 106 Planning Agreement to prevent the converted accommodation being sold off separately. 4) Planning permission should not be granted until satisfactory details of heating and energy use have been supplied, to conform with Rother's policy SRM1: Towards a Low Carbon Future.

9.1.2 RR/2023/2077/P – Lake Cottage, Manor Farm, Brightling Road, TN32 5HB

Planning decision date delayed until 2.2.24. Update from Jo Oliver, planning officer at RDC: A new decision date has been agreed as it was not possible to determine the application before the previous deadline.

9.2 Open Enforcement Cases & Appeals

9.2.1 ENF/73/23/SAL - Wyland Wood/Silver Birches, Willards Hill, Robertsbridge, TN32 5ET

Correspondence from RDC Cllr. Prochak to resident David Todd was circulated to the Council by the Clerk prior to meeting. The enforcement action is now sitting with the legal team. Cllr. Kirby-Green has asked the enforcement officer if it had been issued last week, but no update received. DT raised that his response from Cllr. Prochak stated that action to legal was taken in November '23, so should have been actioned by now. Cllr. Kirby-Green asked the Clerk to contact Oliver Hurst to follow up, and apologised to DT that action had not yet been resolved.

9.2.2 ENF/5/23/BRI – 1 Grants Cottage, Battle Road, Brightling, TN32 5HZ

Investigations undertaken; now awaiting preparation of Enforcement Notice.

9.2.3 ENF/307/23/SAL - 3 Scalands Farm Cottages, Brightling Road, Robertsbridge, TN32 5EU

Siting Of Large Mobile Home/ Cabin Home Awaiting further information.

9.2.4 ENF/213/23/BUR - Perrymans Barn Kings Hill, Burwash, TN19 7DW

The Clerk provided an update that the site has been visited and a further inspection date will be arranged with the landowners. Further updates will be provided once the building(s) have been accessed and a decision made on how to proceed.

10. Dog Waste Bin at Darwell Woods

The Council **RESOLVED** to instruct the Clerk to confirm with the Forest Commission whether they would provide permission for the installation of a dog waste bin. The Clerk shared costings for bin emptying

and indicated capital expenditure costs. The Council **RESOLVED** that these costings are to be met within the 2024/25 budget.

11. Highways and drainage

Cllr. Petty gave an update of recent meetings and explained that the relationship with new Stakeholder Liaison Officer (SLO), Liz Humphreys, appears to be strong and productive. Cllrs. Petty and Kirby-Green met with Mark Stapley from Balfour Beatty (BB) and covered all outstanding issues:

- Drainage survey to be completed between Rectory Hill and Oxley's Green to investigate suspected collapsed drain.
- Some drains not identified on BB map.
- Cackle Street drains to be jetted ahead of repairs to damaged drains being completed.
- Increased frequency of drain clearance at Darwell Hole.
- Penhurst Lane ditch has been cleared, but will require more frequent management.
- Carriageway on B2096 deteriorating with a recent accident caused by aquaplaning. Repairs scheduled in next 8 weeks.
- Drain clearances to be scheduled December to March in future to deal with leaf fall, and possibility of a rural road sweeper run being reinstated (not confirmed).
- Request for drains to be worked on in day light and for rationalisation of schedules so that all drain on a given stretch are cleared at the same time.

Confirmation of new 6-weekly meetings between SLO, Cllr. Petty and the Clerk. The Council thanked Cllr. Petty for her persistence.

Cllrs. discussed ongoing challenges with BB reporting website (also raised in recent SLO meeting).

Member of the public, David Todd, raised delays with the planned Ludpit Lane works. Survey and jetting could not take place due to poor weather. Cllr. Kirby-Green agreed to chase Mark Stapley. Member of the public, Jeremy Richardson, verbalised that previous works information stored with last highways contractor is lost. The previous contracted company, Costain, did not provide a full data transfer; liability lies with Costain but little incentive for them to complete. Cllr. Petty has received a copy of the BB contract and will circulate to Cllrs. for review. Cllr. Barnes said it is an issue across many local parishes and explained that drainage issues cause road surface issues. Cllr. Kirby-Green has recently attended a pothole review board – there is now acceptance that drainage is the primary issue.

The Council **RESOLVED** to instruct the Clerk to formally write to ESCC Cllr. Claire Dowling to express the Council's continuing frustrations with drainage and highways, and to request attendance at a future meeting.

12. Electric Vehicle Charging Point at Village Hall

The Council discussed the merits and/or need for EV charging. The Clerk was asked to circulate details of Rother Rural Grants for further consideration.

13. Update from the RALC Meeting (11th October)

Cllr. Coleman circulated details of the meeting to Cllrs. prior to the meeting. Cllr. Coleman has been coopted into the RALC executive. The Clerk was asked to check subscriptions paid via RALC are in order.

14. Correspondence

Letters of thanks were received from Victim Support and St Michael's Hospice for S173 grant donations.

15. Matters arising from previous meeting:

The Clerk is to confirm details of both defibrillators to update The Circuit Website.

16. Community and Business Development

- i. **Broadband (AW)** – Cllr. Wedmore shared report (attached as an appendix). Telephone meeting with project manager at open reach due 11.1.24. Cllr. Wedmore detailed frustrations with poor customer service when there is an outage.
- ii. **Crime, anti-social behaviour, police relationships (CC)** – Cllr. Croft attended at Teams meeting with Mervin Dadd from the Office of the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner and James Baker from Sussex Safer Roads. Noisy motorbikes – not a lot that be done, but if caught with exhaust baffles installed, the vehicle can be compounded. Confirmation that only the presence of a high number of fatalities will lead to changes in road speeds.
- iii. **Defibrillators (CC)** – see 15.1
- iv. **Environment Policy & Bio-Diversity (KB and AW)** – Energise Sussex Coast meeting 29.2.24 covering retrofit architecture and warmer homes at Brightling Village Hall. Cllr. Coleman offered for Local Lunches to contribute money to provide drinks for the evening. Cllr. Blench shared a report (attached as an appendix).
- v. **Footpaths and Bridleways (KB)** Cllr. Blench provided a report (attached as an appendix). The Council **RESOLVED** to support Cllr. Blench's suggestion for monthly local walks, under the name 'Walk Brightling's Byways'.
- vi. **Highways, Hedges & Potholes (JP)** - see 11.
- vii. **Messenger Magazine (JO)** – Jane Beard has requested updates of village life in Brightling.
- viii. **Phone Box (JC)** – update to be provided by next meeting.
- ix. **Trees - Tree warden (PG)**- Little to report and thankfully minimal damage in recent storms. PG to investigate how to report damaged trees.
- x. **Utilities (CC)** - Powercut following the storm, but not major outage. South East Water covered above (7). The Council **RESOLVED** to instruct the Clerk to invite UKPN to the Annual Meeting.
- xi. **Refuse Collection (CC)** – no updates.
- xii. **Village Hall (JO)** – ex Cllr. Dianne Mower is working hard to promote advertising of bookings to aid further attendance and bookings. 130 bookings for the year confirmed to date. 24.2.24 is quiz night with teams of 8. Cllr. Garbutt provided update on the Village Hall energy project – confirmed material of roof, costings received for replacing. The committee turned down decarbonisation project offer from Elise Manning at RDC due to auxiliary costings. There is budget for replacement LED lighting; awaiting installation.
- xiii. **Website (AW)** - Village Hall Committee now has access to update the website, including calendar of bookings (can be public or private). The Clerk is to work on accessibility statements.
- xiv. **Welcome Packs (KB)** – Are in the process of being updated. Cllr. Oxenford to proofread when completed.

17. Parish Councillors' Forum

- 17.1** The Council **RESOLVED** to delegate authority to the Clerk to exercise discretion over information displayed on Parish Notice Board.
- 17.2** The Council was unanimous in their expressions of thanks and gratitude to Gilly Lowe for her time served as Clerk. The new Clerk also wishes to register deep thanks for Gilly's patient and detailed handover.
- 17.3** Annual village litter collection is scheduled for 6th April. 10am start, meeting at the Village Hall. Cllr. Oxenford is to advertise in the Messenger Magazine.
- 17.4** Cllr. Coleman gave updates on forthcoming Local Lunches meets, including 3 evening dates – all to be detailed in Messenger. The Council thanked Cllr. Coleman for organising.
- 17.5** The Council **RESOLVED** to not have a caterer for the AGM. Instead, Cllr. Coleman is to take the lead in organising. The Clerk was requested to supply wine as previous year. Cllrs discussed need for a focus and **RESOLVED** to instruct the Clerk to invite UKPN as guest speaker. To be discussed at next meeting.

18. Information for Councillors / Future Agenda Item

- a. New to Clerk training via ESALC 12.2.24
- b. Cllrs Blench and Garbutt to attend ESALC new councillors training 16th January and 8th February 2024
- c. Cllr. Blench to attend Climate Literacy Training via Community Energy South 25.1.24
- d. ESALC Chairmans' Forum 15.1.24
- e. The following are the remaining dates for council meetings in the current council year:
2024: 13th March, (10th April Annual Assembly), 8th May (AGM)

Meeting closed at 21:19

..... Signed (Chairman)

Date