

**Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Brightling Parish Council held on
Wednesday 8th May 2024 at 7.00 p.m. at Brightling Village Hall**

Parish Councillors Present: Cllrs C. Croft, K. Blench, J. Coleman, P. Garbutt, J. Oxenford (from 19:15), J. Petty and A. Wedmore.

District/County Councillors Present: Cllr E. Kirby-Green (ESCC)

Also Present: Sam Dugan, Parish Clerk.

1. Election of Chairman

Cllr Coleman stepped down as Chairman. The Council acknowledged its thanks for Cllr Coleman's time and efforts. Cllr Petty was proposed by Cllr Wedmore and seconded by Cllr Croft. There being no other nominations, Cllr Petty was elected Chairman.

2. Election of Vice Chairman

Cllr Croft was proposed by Cllr Wedmore and seconded by Cllr Garbutt. There being no other nominations, Cllr Croft was elected Vice Chairman.

3. Acceptance of Office

Cllrs Petty and Croft signed their respective Acceptances of Office.

4. Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from Cllr Barnes (RDC).

5. Disclosures of Interest

None declared.

6. Additional Agenda Items

None received.

7. Adoption of Minutes

Councillors **RESOLVED** to adopt the previously circulated minutes of the ordinary meeting held on Wednesday 13th March 2024 as true and correct records and authorised the Chairman to sign them.

8. Asset Register, Risk Assessment, Complaints Procedure, and Scheme of Delegation

Having previously circulated the documents, the Clerk advised that the updated Asset Register valued assets at £4139. The Clerk advised that there were no changes to the Scheme of Delegation last reviewed in May 2023 or the Complaints Procedure last adopted in May 2020. Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the Asset Register of Council Property, Risk Assessment, Complaints Policy, and the Scheme of Delegation.

9. Standing Orders and Financial Regulations

The Clerk confirmed that there had been no further changes to the most recent Standing Orders and Financial Regulations that had been adopted in May 2020. Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

10. External Bodies and Lead Responsibilities

10.1. Councillors **RESOLVED** that Cllr Coleman would continue to be BPC's representative at RALC.

10.2. Councillors **RESOLVED** to continue their lead responsibilities without change (Item 24 below).

11. Future Meeting Dates

Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the dates of future meetings as:

2024: 10th July, 11th September, 13th November

2025: 8th January, 12th March, 14th May (AGM).

12. Annual Assembly 2025

Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the date of the Annual Assembly in 2025 as Wednesday 9th April 2025

13. Reports from District and County Councillors

13.1. Cllr Kirby Green (EKG) raised the importance of the RDC Draft Local Plan and current public consultation. EKG was positive about the current version and, whilst not perfect, feels that it is an improvement on the previous plan. EKG suggested that the Draft Local Plan does not appear to resolve Cllr Wedmore's previously minuted concern around 'equestrianisation', so careful review and consideration is required.

13.2. EKG reported that the Stakeholder Liaison Officer at Balfour Beatty, Liz Humphreys, is leaving her current role. It is not yet clear if she is leaving the company or changing departments; regardless, there is concern that this resets progress with highways and drainage. EKG has had communication with Ruby Brittle (ESCC) and insisted a decent handover required to mitigate. Separately, EKG reported that issues with potholes in the area continue but there are some good works taking place e.g. Burwash to Etchingam. Drainage is a key issue, but weather has been unhelpful and creating a backlog.

14. Public Forum

No members of the public present.

15. RFO Report and Governance

15.1. Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)

- 15.1.1. Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the Internal Auditor's Report for 2023-24.
- 15.1.2. Having reviewed the internal systems of control, and read aloud the Annual Governance Statement, Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the Section 1 Annual Governance Statement.
- 15.1.3. Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the Section 2 Accounting Statement and witnessed the signing thereof by the RFO and the Chairman.
- 15.1.4. As gross income and expenditure for 2023-24 was below £25,000, Councillors **RESOLVED** that the parish council continues to meet the criteria to submit a Certificate of Exemption to the external auditor, and witnessed the signing thereof by the RFO and the Chairman.
- 15.1.5. Councillors **RESOLVED** to confirm the dates of the Notice of Electors' Rights as commencing Monday 3rd June 2024 and ending Friday 12th July 2024.

15.2. RFO Report

- 15.2.1. Having previously been circulated to Councillors by the RFO, Councillors **RESOLVED** to accept the schedule of receipts and payments for April 2024.
- 15.2.2. Having previously been circulated to Councillors by the RFO, along with bank statements, Cllr Wedmore confirmed that the bank reconciliation to year end 31st March 2024 was accurate.
- 15.2.3. Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the following payments:
 - 15.2.3.1. RDC 2023 Elections (INV 86565900) - £139.97 (paid retrospectively)
 - 15.2.3.2. Geosphere .gov email hosting (INV 21UG006-0009) - £184.80 (paid retrospectively)
 - 15.2.3.3. Clerk's Expenses: Parish Assembly Drinks – (ALDI RECEIPT) £40.14 (paid retrospectively)
 - 15.2.3.4. Clerk's Expenses: Millbrook Design and Print (INV 16376) - £96.00 (paid retrospectively)
 - 15.2.3.5. Clerk's Expenses: GoDaddy website hosting (RECEIPT 3060926016) - £48.20
 - 15.2.3.6. Zurich Insurance (INV 532816434) - £236.99
 - 15.2.3.7. Mulberry & Co. Internal Audit (Inv. 0045) - £270.78
 - 15.2.3.8. ESALC Subscription 2024'25 (INV 1733) - £104.65
- 15.2.4. The RFO had previously circulated the end of year statement of income and expenditure against the forecast and the statement of reserves. There were no questions, and Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the statement.

15.2.5. Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the the salary of the clerk at £378.90 per month (£12.63/hr) and the addition of the home office allowance at £6/wk. Salary equates to £4546.80/year, as agreed in the budget plans for 2024/'25 (note that budget includes increase to £13.63/hr if LGA pay award agreed). Councillors **RESOLVED** that this will continue to be paid on the 25th of each month by BACS as a regular payment.

15.2.6. Cllr Petty proposed to award the Clerk a £250 bonus. This was seconded by Cllr Oxenford and **RESOLVED** unanimously.

16. Highways update

16.1. Cllr Petty had circulated a report prior to the meeting. Cllr Petty updated Councillors on the difficulties getting engagement from stewards at SLR meetings, meaning little progress had been made at the last two meetings. Cllr Petty and the Clerk explained their insistence of better engagement at the forthcoming SLR meeting 31.5.24. Cllr Coleman confirmed that she had raised the issue of steward nonattendance of stewards at the recent RALC meeting. Cllr Coleman explained that at this meeting, James Kelly (Balfour Beatty) confirmed that stewards should attend, and would be ensuring this takes place. Cllr Kirby-Green confirmed that stewards had attended a recent SLR for Burwash.

16.2. Cllr Kirby-Green and Cllr Petty have had constructive conversations with Mat Jarman (Balfour Beatty) about ongoing issues affecting the parish. Cllr Kirby-Green requested attendance at the next meeting 31/5/24.

16.3. The Clerk raised that a key issue arising from SLR meetings is that stewards give non-specific information, such as 'works actioned' or 'scheduled for works', without details, meaning accountability is limited. Cllr Kirby-Green recommended chasing directly with Mat Jarman.

Action: Clerk to raise issues at SLR 31/5/24.

16.4. The Clerk had previously circulated a response from Ruby Brittle (ESCC) to a letter outlining BPC's concerns regarding highways. Cllr Petty described issues with the response, notably issues with accountability, auditing, checking quality of work. Cllr Petty provided feedback from MP Huw Merriman's meeting, detailing that she raised issues around repair priority and questioned why some patches are being done when far worse condition roads are not being completed. Cllr Kirby-Green explained that the Balfour Beatty operates different budget sources - repairs and scheduled maintenance. Cllr Kirby-Green offered to seek clarification about less priority works being complete before the urgently needed repairs to Rectory Hill. Councillors **RESOLVED** to delegate to Cllr Petty to draft a response to Ruby Brittle.

17. Annual Assembly 2024

Councillors noted that the food provided by Cllr Coleman and Bev Quinn was fantastic and gave their thanks. Councillors agreed that the presentation from South East Water was valuable and well received, noting high levels of public attendance. Cllr Blench noted her appreciation for the follow up information from South East Water after the meeting. Cllr Blench suggested that the 2025 Assembly has a focus on Dark Skies.

18. Planning Matters

18.1. *All decision notices and enforcement updates had previously been circulated to Councillors for information.*

18.1.1. RR/2024/416/P - Coldharbour Farm Estate, Battle Road, Brightling.

Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve comments submitted by the Clerk via delegated authority 9/4/2024:

Brightling Parish Council supported the original RR/2018/480/P application on the basis that rural employment must co-exist with protection of the AONB, whilst noting the need for enforcement of strict controls on noise levels and hours of operation to mitigate any nuisance being caused to nearby residents. The revised plans submitted under RR/2024/416/P are not supported by Brightling Parish Council on the basis that:

-Change of materials from larch cladding to steel Trimapanel is not considered a visually 'close match', as suggested by the applicant's planning consultant. The change of the materials from wood to metal significantly alters the entire aesthetic and ethos of the development from one that looks attractive and is sympathetic to the natural environment, to the erection of two large grey metal sheds not suited to the rural surroundings. Note the brochure for Trimapanel (https://planweb01.rother.gov.uk/OcellaWeb/viewDocument?file=dv_pl_files%5CRR_2024_416_P%5CTrimapanel+Brochure.pdf&module=pl) has no images of rurally located buildings, instead large monolithic modern industrial units and car sales courts.

-The change of materials means that the comments under 4.1 ('thoughtfully designed buildings, - providing substantial visual enhancement to the wider countryside') and 4.2 ('traditional material pallet complimentary to the rural location') of the original heritage statement for RR/2018/480/P are no longer applicable.

-The documentation in RR/2018/480/P stated that careful consideration of external materials would ensure the replacement buildings would be an 'enhancement to their rural setting'. This can no longer be said to apply.

-The increase of metal in the structure and risks reducing the sound absorption qualities of the building, which is important given the close proximity of residential properties.

-The addition of 96 roof lights and a roof lantern is contrary to Brightling Parish Council's Dark Skies Policy and commitment to seeking Dark Skies Accreditation with neighbouring parishes. The introduction of roof lights and lanterns to an original plan that contained none cannot be considered a 'minor amendment', as suggested by the applicant's planning consultant; it is a major design alteration that risks causing significant light pollution to the area.

-Although a subtle change, the removal of the hipped roof element to the large buildings reduces the quality of the design and makes it less in keeping with HWAONB design vernacular.

-Whilst the design in the original application was considered sensitive to the nearby Grade 2 listed properties, the new design materials are not and the addition of 96 roof lights risks causing unacceptable light pollution for the neighbouring properties (and the wider area).

18.1.1.1 Councillors held discussions about apparent issues with the RDC planning processes, specifically the lack of 'on demand' alerting and the limited timing in the case of amended plans submitted for RR/2024/416/P. The Clerk outlined the timescales under which BPC had been aware of updated and explained that small parish councils may be unfairly disadvantaged by the absence of an efficient alerting system. Cllr Kirby-Green stated that all parish councils can be negatively impacted as larger parishes are likely to have a greater number of planning applications at any given time. Cllr Kirby-Green clarified that Cllr Barnes had been in contact with the Planning Officer responsible throughout, so her expectation would have been that, at the least, Cllr Barnes should have been made aware of the amended

plans. Cllr Wedmore noted that a better process would be for an automatic extension to be applied to a decision date in the event of amended plans being submitted. Cllr Kirby-Green agreed to raise the issue further.

18.1.1.2 Cllr Coleman shared that she had raised with RALC about councillors being able to attend sites to aid their decision making prior to submitting comments on planning permission, but there was not a clear answer. The Clerk noted that he had previously requested information from planning officer in the case of RR/2024/416/P, but no response. Cllr Petty requested that the Clerk revisit again to inform future applications. Cllr Kirby Green noted that other parishes have had informal arrangements with applicants.

Action: Clerk to seek further clarification on site visits.

18.1.2. RR/2024/280/P and RR/2024/281/L - Hollingrove Farm, Hollingrove Lane, Brightling.

Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve comments submitted by the Clerk via delegated authority 9/4/2024: *Brightling Parish Council does not object to the proposed inclusion of a small dormer window but has concerns that the additional apex window is incongruous with the existing fenestration, therefore objects to its inclusion in the design. Brightling Parish Council is committed to preserving the quality of dark skies in the area, and encourages Rother to give due consideration to this if minded to granting permission.*

18.1.3. RR/2023/2077/P – Lake Cottage, Manor Farm, Brightling Road, Brightling. Councillors noted that permission had been granted with conditions.

19. Phone Box

19.1. Cllr Colman provided councillors with an update about works to refurbish the phone box. Cllr Coleman confirmed that BT would disconnect the electricity supply free of charge. Councillors had a robust discussion around the best value for money for the refurbishment, with Cllr Petty and Cllr Wedmore requesting that the quote be revisited to see if materials could be sourced for a better price. Councillors also noted that supporting the local economy was important. Councillors **RESOLVED** to use Community Budget reserves, once a final quote was secured, and to defer the addition of a solar light until a later date. Councillors **RESOLVED** that the use of the refurbished phone box will include housing local walks information and maps for visitors.

Action: Cllr Coleman to circulate final quote for approval.

19.2. Councillors discussed the logistics of completing the refurbishment work, and the need for the phone box to be stored in a secure location. Cllr Oxenford offered temporary storage of the phone box in her garden whilst works are completed.

20. Coronation Living Heritage Fund Grant

After a discussion of the merits and challenges to planting and maintaining fruit and nut trees, Councillors **RESOLVED** to delegate to the Clerk to apply for the grant, with view to identifying appropriate locations for planting should the grant be successful.

Action: Clerk to pursue application for the grant.

21. RALC

Cllr Coleman shared a report prior to the meeting and provided Councillors with additional updates, specifically regarding Action in Rural Sussex. Cllr Coleman provided feedback on the use of rural exception sites and requested that the Clerk invite Action Rural Sussex to present at a future meeting. Councillors requested that the Clerk recirculate information about affordable housing previously shared.

22. Feedback from MP Huw Merryman's Parish Conference

Cllr Petty provided Councillors with an update on the meeting, noting that it was worthwhile for discussions on housing, roads and wilding/verge maintenance, and recommended future attendance.

23. Correspondence

The Clerk provided an update on communication with Darvell Community regarding the recent wood extraction on Brick Lane, following a complaint from a resident that the logging transport had caused damage to the verges and road. The Clerk confirmed that he had had an initial response from Darvell, stating that it was necessary for works to take place via Brick Lane due to the parcel of woodland being extracted, that the works had been required by the government, and that damage to the verges was likely a result of agricultural activity and van drivers, not the log transporters. The Clerk has requested a site meeting with the woodland owner, so that he can provide Councillors with as much detail regarding the works as possible, and is awaiting a response. Councillors had an extended and robust discussion about the logging, in particular the volume of wood extracted, and species of tree planted to regenerate the woodland. Cllr Wedmore highlighted that the works would have been completed under a license. Cllr Kirby-Green recommended that the Clerk make contact with the Westfield Clerk for support in approaching the Forestry Commission. Cllr Coleman noted that whilst not required, it would be considerate for Darvell Community to notify residents of forthcoming works.

Action: Clerk to contact Westfield Clerk and seek further contact with the woodland owner.

24. Community and Business Development

24.1. Reports on the following areas by councillors:

- 24.1.1. Broadband (AW)- report circulated.
- 24.1.2. Crime, anti-social behaviour, police relationships (CC) – no updates.
- 24.1.3. Defibrillators (CC) – no updates.
- 24.1.4. Environment Policy & Bio-Diversity (KB and AW) – report circulated. Councillors requested that the Clerk arrange a site visit to Brightling Mine.
- 24.1.5. Footpaths and Bridleways. (KB) – report circulated.
- 24.1.6. Highways, Hedges & Potholes (JP) - report circulated.
- 24.1.7. Messenger magazine (JO) – discussion about success of recent changes as well as challenges around having a wider group of editors.

The Clerk had previously shared a request by the Editor for future contributions.

- 24.1.8.** Phone Box (JC) – see Item 19.
- 24.1.9.** Trees - Tree warden (PG) – Cllr Garbutt is due to meet with Doug Edworthy to touch base and seek feedback.
- 24.1.10.** Utilities (CC) – no updates.
- 24.1.11.** Refuse Collection (CC) – no updates. The Clerk was requested by Cllr Coleman to progress with dog bin.
- 24.1.12.** Village Hall (JO/PG) – Cllr Garbutt provided an update on the decarbonisation project. There is a potential further round of fund allocation; it may be possible that funding could be secured to replace VH lighting.
- 24.1.13.** Website (AW) – report circulated. Councillors requested that the Clerk obscure councillor signatures on register of interest forms on the village website.
- 24.1.14.** Welcome Packs (KB) – no updates.

25. Parish Councillors' Forum

- 25.1.** Cllr Croft raised that the road triangle at 12 Oaks on Cackle Street is being eroded. The Clerk will ensure that this is raised at the next SLR meeting.
- 25.2.** After discussion, Cllr Coleman agreed to liaise with the Flower Show to discuss arrangements for the litter picking award.

26. Items for Noting or Including on the Future Agenda

- 26.1.** Affordable housing
- 26.2.** Emergency plan review
- 26.3.** Adopt a signpost – maintaining the village's signposts

Meeting Closed 21:12

..... Signed (Chairman)

Date