

## Brightling Annual Assembly

### Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2024

**Venue:** Brightling Village Hall

**Start Time:** 19:30 | **Close:** 21:00

#### **Present:**

Approximately 30 members of the public

Brightling Parish Councillors: Coleman, Petty, Blench, Croft and Oxenford; Parish Clerk

Rother District Council: Cllr Barnes

James and Doug from South East Water (SEW)

#### **Apologies:**

- Cllr Garbutt
- Cllr Eleanor Kirby-Green (East Sussex County Council)

#### **1. Welcome and Parish Council Overview**

Cllr Coleman opened the meeting by welcoming attendees and providing an overview of Brightling Parish Council's activities over the past year. She introduced newly appointed councillors and the new Parish Clerk.

#### **Key points included:**

- The creation of a Welcome Pack to support new residents settling into the parish
- Maintenance work such as grass cutting and hedge trimming to preserve the locality's character
- Support for resident complaints, including ongoing concerns about operations at British Gypsum – BPC successfully secured noise monitoring and improvements to site housekeeping
- Refurbishment of the village phone box, with a quote being sought for a new concrete plinth prior to redecoration
- Planning matters – with a growing link between local planning applications and the Dark Skies initiative
- Progress on broadband connectivity, with only two properties remaining to be connected after twelve years of advocacy
- Continued upkeep of the parish's defibrillators
- Ongoing contributions to RALC (Rother Association of Local Councils), ESALC (East Sussex Association of Local Councils), and NALC (National Association of Local Councils)
- Updates on highways and drainage, with thanks given to Cllr Petty for her sustained efforts in this area

Cllr Coleman expressed thanks to all councillors for their continued work and support throughout the year.

#### **2. Village Reports**

Reports from village organisations were made available for attendees to view.

#### **3. Presentation from South East Water (SEW)**

Representatives James and Doug from SEW provided a presentation covering the following areas:

**a. Background and Future Planning**

- A brief history of SEW, current challenges, and future improvements
- Planned use of water tankers and the installation of air valves on hills around Brightling to prevent air locks
- New pumps are scheduled for the Crowhurst Bridge pumping station, though these are subject to long lead times
- Cross-connections between network zones are being developed to improve supply resilience
- SEW's new Alternative Water Manager is tasked with community engagement, with priorities being addressed in sequence
- From April 2025, tanker fleet to increase from 3 to 12 tankers
- Expansion of bottled water supplies during outages
- Residents were encouraged to register with the Priority Services Register to ensure support for vulnerable individuals

**b. Questions and Answers***Water Quality*

- Discolouration remains an issue, particularly in Burwash and Punnetts Town – acknowledged as the worst-affected areas in the company's region
- Mains have been relined and new treatments introduced, but network upgrades are still needed to improve water flow and clarity

*Communication*

- A request was made for SEW to return in 12 months to provide an update on the promised improvements – Doug confirmed they would
- Strong feedback was given around communication during outages, with residents requesting accurate and realistic updates (even if pessimistic), to aid household planning
- A suggestion was made for SEW to communicate directly with the Parish Council, who could then relay accurate information via the parish website
- Difficulty locating the "AquaAlter" service on SEW's website was raised – it was suggested that a flyer explaining key resources could be included with water bills
- Residents were encouraged to create a My Account on the SEW website to improve direct contact from SEW

*Financial Stability and Infrastructure*

- SEW confirmed they are in a stable financial position, comparable to other companies in the industry
- Questions were raised about the impact of new housing on water supply – SEW cited a long-term plan focused on reducing leakage, increasing supply resilience, and promoting behaviour change around water use
- Plans are in place for a new reservoir in Kent, expansion of Arlington reservoir, and improvements at Bewl Water
- SEW acknowledged that regulatory pressures from the Environment Agency limit the amount of water that can be extracted

*Water Quality Targets*

- The Secretary of State has directed SEW to improve water quality in Burwash and Brightling by April 2025
- Day-to-day water quality is deemed acceptable, with issues arising primarily when mains are disrupted
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*Future Sustainability*

- Attendees raised the lack of emphasis on water recycling in new housing developments
- SEW acknowledged the importance of greywater use and water efficiency, noting that current policy and regulation do not enforce such measures on developers

**4. Meeting Close**

Cllr Coleman thanked all speakers and attendees for their time and engagement. The meeting closed at 21:00.