

**Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of Brightling Parish Council held on
5th June 2024 at 7.00 p.m. at Brightling Village Hall**

Parish Councillors Present: P. Garbutt, J. Petty and A. Wedmore.

Also Present: Sam Dugan, Parish Clerk, and 2 members of the public.

1. Presentation from Rother District Council on the Draft Local Plan Consultation

Craig Steenhoff (CS) from Rother District Council (RDC) provided a presentation on the draft Local Plan (DLP) Consultation. CS explained how 90% of land within Rother District is under environmental restrictions (High Weald National Landscape HWNL and other protected areas) with the majority of population located in Bexhill, Battle and Rye. Plan attempts to balance this, along with recognizing significant areas of deprivation (wards in Bexhill and Rye). Over 70 individual policies are feeding into the document.

Green to the Core strand emphasises the need to consider the impact of planning decisions on the climate emergency, biodiversity crisis and the High Weald National Landscape.

Live Well Locally strand recognises that in all planning decisions, the goal is to create healthy, sustainable and inclusive communities. The DLP doesn't contain specific site allocations; RDC are currently consulting separately on sites with no definitive answers yet.

CS explained that there are new chapters new in the DLP, including for the first time a section specifically on Health and Wellbeing.

The housing chapter includes a commitment to areas of 100% affordable housing where appropriate. This is because it is often more economical for developers to provide fully affordable housing builds, rather than mixed developments.

CS explained that Dark Skies is now specifically included in Landscape Character chapter.

RDC has produced a Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA), which is available to view as part of the supporting evidence accompanying the DLP.

CS explained that central government has set RDC a local housing need (LHN) of approximately 700 dwellings per year for the next 20 years – totaling 14000.

The RDC HELAA indicates that there will more likely be between 5000 and 7000 dwellings available in Rother due to protected landscape and other environmental impacts (i.e. roughly half the LHN number).

CS confirmed that there is not much development potential within Brightling.

Brightling is considered part of the Battle sub-area, rather than Northern, due to assumed infrastructure links/facilities/leisure. CS asked the Parish to consider whether this is agreed, and to feedback via the consultation.

Bexhill: some fringe/brownfield areas for development. RDC is keen to avoid spill into Combe Valley Countryside Park to maintain distinction from Hastings.

Hastings fringe: looking at sensitive development that doesn't impact on HWNL.

Battle: RDC keen to retain historical character of Battle and locality. Some development opportunities in Battle along North Trade Road and to the west of Hastings Road (small developments), which could support habitat creation as well as improving diversity enhancements and opening access. In the villages surrounding Battle, very small scale development is proposed. No new housing development numbers proposed for Brightling. Some employment growth potential for Brightling – planning permission already granted (Coldharbour Farm). RDC is seeking views of the parish - is no development appropriate? CS explained it was important to recognise that no growth can also have an impact over time.

Rye – RDC proposing sensitive development due to HWNL, Dungeness Complex and tourist economy.

Northern – CS explained there is not as strong a connection with a key town/village. Etchingham and Robertsbridge have stations but limited other services and facilities. Due to limited services and facilities, limited development is proposed. The A21 corridor has a long term Transport for South East Plan 30 year plan, which may provide some development opportunities, but these may not be realized within the timescale of the Local Plan so not included.

CS encouraged residents to contribute via the online consultation.

RDC is attempting to meet a deadline of Summer 2025 for submission to Secretary of State because this means the plan has to be considered against the current NPPF regardless of any changes that may arise due to changes of central government.

The adoption of the Local Plan would support Rother in maintaining robust planning decisions (300-350 new developments per year, rather than 700 nationally for comparable districts).

2. Public Forum

Public question – what plan is currently in place? CS explained that once submitted in 2025, the new local plan can have weight in planning decisions earlier than the adoption date. This is because the evidence base is up to date and therefore relevant. Until adoption, planning officers have to make decisions on balance. Concern from member of the public that housing development is not viable, especially due to service infrastructure, drains, etc.

CS explained that Rother has done as much local evidence gathering as possible.

CS clarified that Rother is not promoting sites in Brightling. This is not to say that no development can take place, just that it will be exceptional.

CS explained how the local plan is reviewed every 5 years and builds on the reality of progress against the previous plan.

Cllr Wedmore expressed that he supports the 0 housing allocation, and believes the majority of residents support the 0 allocation, because this doesn't preclude very small scale appropriate developments supported by BPC and residents. This would be considered a windfall for Rother.

Cllr Wedmore explained that Brightling does not have a neighborhood plan, because of the 0 allocation, and explained that the DLP confirms that a neighborhood plan is not an appropriate priority for Brightling Parish Council (BPC) in the future.

Cllr Petty asked whether a change of government could change the plan. CS reiterated that the 2025 submission is key to limiting any changes.

Cllr Wedmore raised a question about extensions and alterations, saying that if all the small houses convert to bigger houses and there is no new development, the community becomes less mixed over time.

Cllr Wedmore outlined that there are two frequent considerations made by BPC on planning applications (dark skies and RDC policy SRN1 energy efficiency). BPC is pleased that dark skies is mentioned in the DLP, but feels it should go further. SRN1 is routinely ignored in planning decisions. Cllr Wedmore asked CS to confirm whether Rother will go against governmental guidance to not exceed building regulations for energy efficiency. CS said that building regulations have been a limiting factor and not kept up with intentions of local policies, but the new Rother policy has greater ambitions under the Green to the Core strand of the DLP.

Cllr Petty raised that materials used for development including extensions can be inappropriate and enforcement is generally poor. Cllr Wedmore agreed, emphasizing that conditions should both be more enforced/having specific materials identified in the condition of planning. CS said that he couldn't provide specific comment but could feedback to the planning department. CS said that the new policy should strengthen planning conditions further.

Cllr Wedmore asked about rural exception sites, expressing concern that requirement for parish council engagement has been replaced by a much weaker emphasis on 'community engagement' and this creates opportunity for developers to sidestep local democratic institutions such as parish councils. CS said that he believed this was intended to support growth of community land trusts, not to sidestep parish councils.

Cllr Petty asked about gypsy and traveller sites and asked how the figure of 26 new sites was developed. CS signposted to document GTAA in the evidence base online. Cllr Petty raised concern that 26 new sites seems high for Rother; CS explained that it was a national challenge to provide sufficient sites and 26 is not a high number compared to the national picture.

Cllr Wedmore asked whether or not feedback is given on comments submitted. CS explained that all comments online are public and planning officers then organize these into themes and provide a statement of responses.

CS emphasized the importance of public exhibitions, with the nearest being held at Robertsbridge Village Hall on 12/7/24 3-7pm.

BPC gave thanks to CS for his time and engagement.

3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllrs Blench, Coleman, Croft and Oxenford.

4. Disclosures of Interest

None.

5. Additional Agenda Items

None.

6. Draft Local Plan Consultation

Councillors discussed their current views regarding the consultation. The Clerk was requested to request seek further comments from Councillors via email by end of 17/6/24. Councillors **RESOLVED** to delegate to the clerk responsibility for submitting comments by 1st July.

7. RFO update

7.1. Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the following payments:

- 7.1.1. Dog waste bin - £320.26 (Glasdon UK)
- 7.1.2. Defibrillator pads - £143.88 (Welmedical)

8. Planning

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

8.1.1. RR/2024/555/P BRIGHTLING Green Oak Farm, Brightling Road, Brightling, TN32 5HB.

After discussions, Councillors **RESOLVED** to support the application and delegate to the Clerk to submit comments.

8.1.2. RR/2022/2791/P NETHERFIELD Fir Tree Cottage, Land Adjacent to, Netherfield Road, Netherfield Hill, Battle TN33 9PP

Cllr Petty provided Councillors with an update on the above application.

8.1.3. RR/2023/2467/O MOUNTFIELD Park Pale House - Land South of, Mountfield Lane, Mountfield TN32 5LD – *Due to the nature of the business being disclosed, Councillors **RESOLVED** to exclude members of the public and press for this item under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.*

8.2. Following discussions, Councillors requested that the Clerk write a letter of complaint to RDC about planning processes - in particular, not being informed of material changes, Lawful Development Certificates, amendments etc in good time.

9. Remaining Planned Meetings

10/7/24, 11/9/24, 13/11/24, 8/1/25, 12/3/25, 14/5/25

Meeting Closed 20:45

..... Signed (Chairman)

Date