

Minutes of the **Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council**
held on **Wednesday 13th November 2024** at 7.30 p.m. in Brightling Village Hall

Parish Councillors Present: K. Blench, C. Croft, P. Garbutt, J. Petty, and J. Oxenford

District and County Councillors: Cllr J. Barnes (RDC) and Cllr E. Kirby-Green (ESCC)

Also Present: Sam Dugan, Parish Clerk

Meeting opened at 19:31

1. Public Forum

None.

2. Apologies for Absence

Cllr Coleman – apologies were received ahead of the meeting and noted by the Chair.

3. Disclosures of Interest

3.1. Cllrs Blench and Garbutt declared a personal interest regarding Items 13.1.4, 13.2.1 and 13.3.1 citing a familial or friendship connection to the Items. Cllrs Blench and Garbutt participated fully in the subsequent discussion and resolutions, as the interests were deemed not prejudicial.

3.2. Cllrs Oxenford, Petty and Garbutt declared an interest regarding Item 7.7 resultant from their involvement with the Brightling Village Hall Committee. In accordance with powers under the Localism Act 2011, Councillors Wedmore, Croft and Blench resolved to grant Cllrs Oxenford, Petty and Garbutt a dispensation for the duration of the meeting, enabling them to participate in discussion on Item 7.7 but not vote.

4. Additional Agenda Items

None.

5. Adoption of Minutes

Councillors **RESOLVED** to adopt the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 11th September 2024 as true and correct records.

6. Reports from District and County Councillors

6.1. Cllr Eleanor Kirby-Green (ESCC) detailed the ESCC budget gap. A proposed money-saving scheme includes the introduction of a booking system for household waste facilities, aiming to reduce staffing costs. Most cost savings are being found through services affecting urban areas. While there has been an increase in adult social care funding, this has been offset by rises in Employers' National Insurance and the minimum wage. It was noted that NHS funding remains protected, but adult social care funding is not.

6.2. Cllr Barnes (RDC) detailed that RDC is anticipating the Government's forthcoming Devolution White Paper, with background work already underway. The Local Plan has been delayed, with an extension granted until the end of 2026, due to changes in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Cllr Barnes is leading the Housing Task Force. Concerns were raised regarding RDC planning officers taking a lenient approach to applications, with some feeling this does not uphold their responsibility to promote and support the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL). RDC is managing a £950k in-year overspend and is planning £1.25m in savings for the coming year.

7. Finance and Governance – RFO Update

7.1. Councillors **RESOLVED** to adopt the following documents:

7.1.1. **RESOLVED** to adopt the bank reconciliations to 31/10/24. Cllr Petty confirmed the accounts are reconciled.

7.1.2. **RESOLVED** to adopt the schedule of receipts and payments for the months of September and October 2024.

7.1.3. **RESOLVED** to adopt the bank statements for September and October 2024.

7.2. The Clerk provided an update on income and expenditure against budget 2024/25. Councillors **RESOLVED** to receive and adopt the I&E document as of 31st October 2024.

7.3. The Clerk updated Councillors that Unity Trust bank account charges are now paid monthly, rather than quarterly. The Clerk updated Councillors that the current interest rate was 2.60%.

7.4. The Clerk provided Councillors with an update on the recently published NALC guidance on the LGA pay award. Councillors **RESOLVED** to link the Clerk's salary increment to the new pay award and backdate Clerk's pay from April 2024.

7.5. The Clerk presented Councillors with a budget draft for financial year 2025/26. After discussions, Councillors **RESOLVED** for the Clerk to provide a revised budget based on 4% and 5% precept increases to aid deliberations. **Action - Clerk**

7.6. The Clerk updated Councillors on the implications of the planned increase to Employers' National Insurance and confirmed that BPC would be required to pay it on the Clerk's salary by year 3 of the budget forecast.

7.7. Funding Request from Brightling Village Hall (BVH)

Councillors discussed BVH's funding request. It was noted that BVH's accounts are in a good position, and would continue to be so following planned roof works. Cllrs Oxenford and Garbutt highlighted the need to maintain good reserves due to rising costs and explained that this year's profit was unexpected (linked to use as a polling station), following two years of losses. Councillors unanimously recognised the importance of supporting BVH as a community hub, particularly its broadband provision. After discussion, Cllr Wedmore proposed that BPC fund broadband costs and half the insurance for 2024/25, totalling £925. The proposal was **RESOLVED** with support from Cllrs Blench and Croft. **Action - Clerk**

7.8. Councillors **RESOLVED** to continue the annual £10 subscription to GACC.

7.9. Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the payment of the following invoices:

7.9.1. Satswana – DPO Services: Invoice M3154 (£180) - RETROSPECTIVE

7.9.2. Wel Medical – Defibrillator Battery: Invoice I281284 (£279.54)

7.9.3. Clerk Expenses – Dog bin labels: (£19.34)

7.9.4. GACC Subscription: (£10 Standing order) RETROSPECTIVE

7.9.5. Gillian Lowe – Clerk Microsoft 365 Annual Subscription: (£59.99) RETROSPECTIVE

7.9.6. Judicial Review Pledge: (£750) RETROSPECTIVE

7.10. The Clerk confirmed that no CIL money has been claimed for year 2023/24 and this information had been submitted to RDC.

7.11. Councillors considered the implications of Government consultation on proxy voting and remote attendance. Councillors **RESOLVED** to support the modernisation of local government processes and delegated completion of the consultation to the Clerk. **Action - Clerk**

7.12. Councillors considered the RFO's request to increase RFO delegated spend in BPC's Financial Regulations. Councillors unanimously **RESOLVED** to increase the amount from £250 to £500. **Action - Clerk**

7.13. The Clerk provided Councillors with feedback on actions from first half of the year. Councillors discussed BPC's priorities for remainder of financial year 2024/25, and after discussion, reached agreement that planning and advocating for the protection and enhancement of the HWNL were key. Cllr Wedmore noted the high number of public consultations and the limited resources of BPC. Cllr Wedmore proposed that the Clerk notify Councillors of consultations or activities/causes of potential interest to BPC, with the invitation for a Councillor to take a lead in proposing a draft response. If there is not sufficient interest from a Councillor to lead on an issue, then the Clerk can determine no further action required. Councillors unanimously **RESOLVED** to adopt this approach. Cllr Kirby-Green noted that larger rural parish councils often share many of the issues and perspectives of BPC, and that they are typically better resourced to contribute to a greater number of consultations and causes.

8. Draft NPPF Consultation

8.1. The Clerk confirmed submission of BPC's comments.

9. Emergency Plan

9.1. The Clerk provided an update on the review of the Emergency Plan, following action from Cllrs Petty and Croft to check details with those involved. Councillors **RESOLVED** to include details of the village hall broadband, and for the reviewed Emergency Plan to be adopted. **Action - Clerk**

10. Darwell Wood Dog Waste Bin

10.1. The Clerk confirmed stickers have been installed on the dog waste bin.

11. Southern Water Solar Array – Darwell Reservoir

11.1. Cllrs Wedmore and Petty provided updates from the Working Group. Cllr Wedmore summarised details in his report to the Council. Cllr Petty reported that the Working Group has raised concerns about the lack of response from South East Water to questions, particularly regarding mitigation measures.

12. Grass and verge cutting

- 12.1. Councillors **RESOLVED** to classify all verges within Brightling Parish as 'rural'. **Action – Clerk**

13. Planning and Enforcement Matters – All decision notices and enforcement updates had previously been circulated to Councillors for information

13.1. Planning

- 13.1.1. **RR/2024/1121/P** Bannisters, Deer Park Road, Brightling TN32 5HL – Councillors noted the application as *Approved Conditional*.
- 13.1.2. **RR/2024/1508/P** Swallowfield Farm, Brightling Road, Brightling TN32 5HB – Councillors noted the application as *Approved Conditional*, highlighting that BPC's request for private use only and limited external lighting conditions were included.
- 13.1.3. **RR/2024/1151/P** Scalands Farm, Brightling Road, Robertsbridge TN32 5EU – Councillors noted the application as *Approved Conditional*.
- 13.1.4. **RR/2024/1619/P** Coldharbour Farm, Battle Road, Brightling TN21 9LQ.
The Clerk provided Councillors with details of correspondence with Kemi Erifevieme at RDC regarding incremental deviation from the initial planning approval.

13.2. Enforcement

- 13.2.1. **ENF/216/24/BRI** Coldharbour Farm Battle Road Brightling TN21 9LQ. *Tree felling near development site (RR/2024/1619/P)*. Councillors noted the new enforcement case.
- 13.2.2. **ENF/73/23/SAL** Land/Field next to Wyland Wood/Silver Birches (Column Wood), Willards Hill, Robertsbridge TN32 5ET. The Clerk confirmed that case is awaiting an Appeal hearing date.

13.3. Complaint to RDC

- 13.3.1. After discussions, Councillors **RESOLVED** to submit a Stage 1 letter of complaint to RDC regarding the Mountfield solar array and Coldharbour Farm developments.

Action – Clerk

13.4. Site Visits Policy

- 13.4.1. Councillors discussed the draft Site Visits Policy, noting the need for greater clarity and substance in terms of safety and appropriately managing interactions with potentially fraught or heightened landowners during visits. Councillors **RESOLVED** for the Clerk to revise the policy for presentation at the next meeting. **Action – Clerk**

14. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

- 14.1. Councillors **RESOLVED** to direct the Clerk to seek alternative costings for the phone box works. **Action - Clerk**

- 14.2.** Cllr Croft provided an update on 'Adopt a Fingerpost' initiative. After discussions, it was **RESOLVED** that Cllr Croft would include details in the next issue of the messenger. **Action – Cllr Croft**

15. Annual Parish Conference

15.1. Cllr Petty provided feedback to Councillors: Lorna Foord reported on the Local Plan, highlighting focus on rural areas and submission progress. Finance overspends include homelessness and planning fees. Updates included devolution impacts, stricter planning rules, housing targets in AONB areas, and overworked enforcement officers. Retrospective permissions prioritised, with minor breaches often dismissed. RALC involvement in consultations and regulations on caravan parks noted.

16. RALC Survey

- 16.1.** Councillors **RESOLVED** for Cllr Coleman to draft a response to the RALC Survey for circulation, as BPC's RALC representative. **Action – Cllr Coleman**

17. Clerk Correspondence

- 17.1.** Road closures and refuse collection: The Clerk confirmed that temporary road closures do not typically result in rescheduled refuse collection. Residents are encouraged to report missed collections via the RDC website.
- 17.2.** British Gypsum (BG) – Resident's Feedback: Rowena Suthers contacted the Clerk to express her gratitude to Cllr Coleman and BPC is securing positive engagement with BG.
- 17.3.** Deer management – Resident's Request: A resident contacted the Clerk expressing concern about the proliferation of deer causing damage to woodland, requesting that BPC consider coordinating local landowners to run a managed cull. Councillors discussed the concern, noting that they had feedback from other residents to the contrary. Councillors also noted the challenge posed to BPC in coordinating, due to lack of resources. Cllr Wedmore suggested the resident write an article for the Messenger Magazine. Cllr Garbutt to liaise with Doug Edworthy and report back to Council. **Action – Cllr Garbutt**
- 17.4.** The Clerk noted the acceptance of Jonathan Webb from Forestry Services to present at the January meeting of BPC.
- 17.5.** Brickyard Lane Wildlife Verge – Resident's Request: Councillors **RESOLVED** for the Clerk to write a letter of support for an application to designate Brickyard Lane as a Wildlife Verge. **Action - Clerk**
- 17.6.** Fire Hydrants / South East Water (SEW): The Clerk detailed correspondence with SEW, noting that confirmation of the viability of fire hydrants during an episode of low/no water pressure remains unresolved. **Action - Clerk**

18. Community and Business Development

- 18.1.** Reports on the following areas by councillors:

- 18.1.1.** Broadband (AW)- provide a report. During the meeting, Cllr Wedmore raised concern about broadband resilience in instance of sustained power cuts. The Clerk was requested to explore with emergency planning and what the implication would be, including for Digital Voice switchover. Councillors requested a presentation from Digital Voice switchover. **Action - Clerk**

- 18.1.2.** Crime, anti-social behaviour, police relationships (CC). Lots of crime locally. Quadbikes, vans and tools are being stolen – 1 instance in Brightling.
- 18.1.3.** Defibrillators (CC). The Clerk confirmed that all batteries and pads have been replaced in the last 6 months. All status details have been updated on circuit website.
- 18.1.4.** Environment Policy & Bio-Diversity (KB and AW) Reports shared. The Clerk was requested to add to dark skies depository. **Action - Clerk**
- 18.1.5.** Footpaths and Bridleways. (KB) Report shared. Cllr Kirby-Green suggested Matthew Harper as a helpful contact at the Rights of Way team.
- 18.1.6.** Highways, Hedges & Potholes (JP) – Report shared.
- 18.1.7.** Messenger magazine (AW) – Recently held AGM. The Magazine is in a strong position. Cllr Wedmore expressed compliments to the Brightling editor.
- 18.1.8.** Phone Box (JC). See Item 14.1
- 18.1.9.** Trees - Tree warden (PG). No updates at this time.
- 18.1.10.** Utilities (CC) – No updates at this time.
- 18.1.11.** Refuse Collection (CC). See Item 17.1 The Clerk was requested to share this information via the village website. **Action - Clerk**
- 18.1.12.** Village Hall (JO). See Item 7.7
- 18.1.13.** Website (AW). Report shared.
- 18.1.14.** Welcome Packs (KB). Report shared.

19. Parish Councillors' Forum

- 19.1.** Cllr Croft raised that the signpost at Cock and Hen, Twelve Oaks, is at risk of damage due to grass triangle erosion. After discussions, the Clerk was requested to establish costings for repositioning the post. **Action – Clerk**
- 19.2.** Cllr Oxenford expressed concerns that drones are flying low in the village, often over private gardens. Cllr Garbutt explained that there are regulations that govern their use. Cllr Petty requested that Cllr Garbutt investigate the relevant regulations and report back to Council. The Clerk offered to explore the efficacy of byelaws. **Action – Cllr Garbutt, Clerk**
- 19.3.** Cllr Blench proposed that BPC consider arranging for a speaker to present on the theme of Dark Skies for the next Parish Annual Assembly. Councillors unanimously RESOLVED for the Clerk to make arrangements. **Action - Clerk**

20. Items for Noting or Including on the Future Agenda

None noted.

21. Remaining Planned Meetings

8/1/25, 12/3/25, 9/4/25 (Annual Assembly), 14/5/25 (Annual Meeting of BPC)

Meeting Closed at 21:47