

Minutes of the **Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council**
held on **Wednesday 29th January 2025** at 7.30 p.m. in Brightling Village Hall

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

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

Also Present: Sam Dugan, Parish Clerk

Meeting opened at 19:30

1. Public Forum

None

2. Apologies for Absence

None

3. Disclosures of Interest

Cllrs Oxenford, Petty, and Garbutt declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 9.1.4 (planning application for Brightling Village Hall) and item 7.3 (budget implications for Brightling Village Hall) due to their involvement in the Brightling Village Hall Committee. While they participated in discussions on these matters, they did not take part in the votes on these items.

4. Additional Agenda Items

4.1. Councillor Vacancy

The Council noted that a vacancy has arisen following Cllr Coleman's resignation. A Notice of Vacancy will be published following the meeting. The Clerk advised that if more than 10 electors request an election within the statutory period, an election will be held; otherwise, BPC will proceed with co-opting a new councillor.

4.2. RALC Representation

Cllr Coleman previously served as the RALC representative, and the position is now vacant. Cllr Croft put herself forward for the role, and Cllr Petty offered to provide support as needed.

5. Adoption of Minutes

Councillors received and **RESOLVED** to adopt the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 13th November 2024, and the amended 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)

Cllr Kirby-Green provided an update on devolution and the potential move to Unitary Authorities. ESCC has already completed preparatory work and has applied to be on the accelerated pathway, aiming for implementation by May 2028. A decision on acceptance into the programme is expected on 3.2.25. If accepted, ESCC has requested that May 2025 elections be postponed.

Cllr Kirby-Green noted that if the transition proceeds, Town and Parish Councils may need to take on an increased role, though this is yet to be determined. She recommended that Brightling Parish Council consider developing a Neighbourhood Plan. Cllr Barnes added that smaller parishes may wish to collaborate on such plans.

Regarding planning, Cllr Kirby-Green explained that the interim head of planning at RDC is concerned about meeting housing targets. In response to a query from Cllr Oxenford about the efficacy of Neighbourhood Plans in protecting the AONB, Cllr Barnes noted that central government's presumption in favour of development may override local decisions.

6.2. Cllr. John Barnes (RDC)

Cllr Barnes reported that RDC's new housing strategy will be presented to Cabinet Monday 3.2.25 before proceeding to public consultation. He considers the strategy reasonable but noted that achieving housing targets will require additional central government funding.

RDC expects to achieve £1.8m in savings, but reserves have fallen to £4.2m, and the budget remains unbalanced. The council plans to borrow £660K to address the shortfall.

Cllr Barnes is advocating for devolution of non-statutory services to Town and Parish Councils; however, he does not anticipate this having a major impact on Brightling due to its small size and limited assets.

7. Finance and Governance – RFO Update

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

7.1.1. **RESOLVED** to adopt the bank reconciliations to 31/12/24.

7.1.2. **RESOLVED** to adopt the schedule of receipts and payments for the months of November and December 2024.

7.1.3. **RESOLVED** to adopt the bank statements for November and December 2024.
Resolved.

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 December 2024.

7.3. Budget for Financial Year 2025/26

Councillors received and **RESOLVED** to adopt the draft budget for the 2025/26 financial year.

Discussions took place regarding the inclusion of funding for Brightling Village Hall as a regular expenditure, recognising its importance as a community asset that should be supported.

Cllr Wedmore proposed adopting the version with an 8% precept increase, which includes funding for the Village Hall as an expenditure item. Cllrs Blench and Croft supported the proposal, and the resolution was carried.

Councillors also discussed the need to balance the budget while considering the impact of the precept increase. The Clerk was asked to seek clarification from RDC on how the tax base is calculated year on year.

7.4. Councillors **RESOLVED** the precept amount to be requested for 2025/26 at £9137.

7.5. Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the payment of, verify and sign the following invoices:

7.5.1. Brightling Village Hall – INV 346: £925 (RETROSPECTIVE)

7.5.2. Jon Avery – Churchyard Maintenance – INV 783: £372 (RETROSPECTIVE)

7.6. RFO Correspondence.

7.6.1. The Clerk detailed that Year End audit arrangements are being scheduled.

7.6.2. The Clerk provided a quote for finger post repair at Twelve Oaks - £1688.60+VAT.

8. Emergency Plan

8.1. Councillors received and **RESOLVED** to adopt the updated Emergency Plan.

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

9.1. Planning

Following discussions and examination of the merits of each application by Councillors, the following comments will be submitted by the Clerk:

9.1.1. RR/2024/1788/P 1 Grants Cottages, Cackle Street, Brightling TN32 5HZ.

Brightling Parish Council supports the revised proposal, noting that it addresses previous objections concerning the unauthorised conservatory. However, we request the following conditions: No external lighting, in line with BPC's Environmental Policy on Dark Skies. Complete removal of the existing unauthorised extension as part of the project. Use of the exact materials and suppliers specified in the application to ensure consistency with the proposal.

9.1.2. RR/2024/1929/P Perch Hill Farm, Willingford Lane, Brightling TN32 5HP.

Brightling Parish Council has no objections to the application, subject to the following conditions: Use of the restored building should be limited solely to the owners and not for any commercial purpose or habitable accommodation. No external lighting, in accordance with BPC's Environmental Policy on Dark Skies.

9.1.3. RR/2024/2199/P Doves Barn, Brightling Road, Oxleys Green, Brightling TN32 5HD. Brightling Parish Council has no objection to this planning application.

9.1.4. RR/2024/2209/P Brightling Village Hall, The Street, Brightling TN32 5HH.

Brightling Parish Council (BPC) supports the proposed improvements to Brightling Village Hall, recognising the hall's value as a key community asset. Ensuring its long-term sustainability is of great importance, and BPC welcomes measures that contribute to its viability.

9.1.5. RR/2024/1886/P Green Oak Farm, Brightling Road, Brightling TN32 5HB.

Brightling Parish Council supports this application, but requests that the following conditions are included in any permission granted: 1. No, or limited, external lighting in order to support the 'Dark Skies' policy. 2. Planning permission should not be granted until satisfactory details of heating and energy use have been supplied, to conform with Rother's current policy SRM1: Towards a Low Carbon Future.

9.2. Enforcements

The Clerk informed Councillors that there are not currently any updates on the following Enforcement matters:

- 9.2.1. **ENF/216/24/BRI** Coldharbour Farm Battle Road Brightling TN21 9LQ. *Tree felling near development site (RR/2024/1619/P).*
- 9.2.2. **ENF/73/23/SAL** Land/Field next to Wyland Wood/Silver Birches (Column Wood), Willards Hill, Robertsbridge TN32 5ET.
- 9.2.3. **ENF/240/24/SAL** Peans Wood Brightling Road Salehurst/Robertsbridge TN32 5EL

9.3. Complaint to RDC

- 9.3.1. The Clerk provided Councillors with a breakdown of the response received from RDC to BPC's Stage 1 Complaint. Councillors **RESOLVED** that no further action be taken.

9.4. Site Visits Policy

- 9.4.1. Councillors received and **RESOLVED** to adopt the revised Site Visits Policy.

9.5. Planning reform working paper (Ministry of H, C & LG)

- 9.5.1. The Clerk provided Councillors with a briefing. After discussions, Councillors **RESOLVED** that no further action be taken.

10. English Devolution White Paper

- 10.1. Councillors received a briefing from the Clerk, in addition to the comments minuted above from Cllr Kirby-Green and Cllr Barnes. Cllr Barnes detailed that NALC is lobbying hard due to the lack of mention of parish councils, and suggested petitioning the chair of NALC to lobby for parish councils to be a statutory consultee. Councillors **RESOLVED** for the Clerk to complete this action. **Action - CLERK.**

11. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

- 11.1. Phone Box – Following Cllr Coleman's resignation, the Clerk has commenced obtaining additional quotes for the repairs. Councillors asked the Clerk to also approach Jamie French. Cllr Oxenford may have spare glass to replace the damaged piece. **Action – CLERK.**
- 11.2. Cllr Croft provided an update on the 'Adopt a Fingerpost' initiative. Cllr Croft has liaised with Jane Beard and provided copy for the Messenger. Cllr Kirby-Green offered to talk to Liz Humphries at ESH about whether a license is required to relocate the finger post in the Twelve Oaks triangle, and enquire whether there are services there. The Clerk provided detail of a quote to repair the Twelve Oaks finger post. Cllr Blench requested if an additional quote could be obtained, and agreed to share potential details of another tradesperson with the Clerk. **Action – Cllr Blench, Cllr Kirby-Green.**

12. Drones

12.1. Cllr Garbutt provided information regarding regulations of drones. Cllr Petty expressed that little can be done to enforce. The Clerk confirmed that he had contacted the PCC to discuss at a future meeting and requested that courtesy notices are shared with those booking weddings. Cllr Oxenford expressed that she would like the church to communicate to wedding photographers about the need to respect the privacy of residents.

13. Deer Management

13.1. Cllr Petty shared communication with deer manager regarding culling works in Darwell Wood. Deer management takes place weekly from November to March and sporadically in summer, focusing on reducing the female Fallow deer population. A WhatsApp group coordinates landscape cull days in winter. Operations follow strict safety protocols, with experienced Wildlife Rangers ensuring best practices. Public notification is not required, and signage is limited. Deer remains decompose naturally, while carcasses are processed for commercial sale. Darwell Wood is leased by Forestry England, with restricted public access. Further details are available on the Forestry England website. Councillors expressed surprise about how little signposting is required, leading to a discussion about whether signage should be more prominent. Councillors noted agreement of the need to cull to manage the deer population, and **RESOLVED** that no further action is required at this time.

14. Clerk Correspondence

- 14.1.** A FOI Request was received regarding BPC's financial contribution to the Judicial Review for planning application RR/2022/840/P. As the information was already published in the schedule of receipts and payments for September and October 2024, no further action was required.
- 14.2.** The Clerk received confirmation from both East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service and South East Water that protocols are in place to ensure water availability in the event of a water outage.
- 14.3.** The Clerk confirmed that guest speakers for the Annual Assembly have been confirmed.

15. Community and Business Development

15.1. Reports on the following areas by councillors:

- 15.1.1.** Broadband (AW) – Broadband all but complete bar the final few houses. Cllr Wedmore requested the Clerk arrange an additional meeting in June for Digital Voice and wider resilience. **Action – CLERK.**
- 15.1.2.** Crime, anti-social behaviour, police relationships (CC). Cllr Croft detailed further quadbike issues; although a van license was logged, it did not tally to a registration. Cllr Blench noted that a quadbike was stolen from Newhouse Farm recently.
- 15.1.3.** Defibrillators (CC) – no updates.
- 15.1.4.** Environment Policy & Bio-Diversity (KB and AW). Cllr Blench circulated a report. Councillors **RESOLVED** for Cllr Blench to register BPC's interest as part of the Weald to Waves Nature Recovery Corridor.

- 15.1.5.** Footpaths and Bridleways. (KB) – Cllr Blench shared a draft response to ESCC Footpaths consultation. During discussions, Cllr Petty suggested improvements to dog friendly styles - most are good, but not all. Councillors provided Cllr Blench with input to hone the responses to the consultation. Cllrs Kirby-Green and Barnes highlighted for the minimal size of the team, the footpaths team are likely the best team of officers in ESCC. Cllr Wedmore echoed this sentiment.
- 15.1.6.** Highways, Hedges & Potholes (JP). The Clerk circulated minutes from the recent SLR and will publish the minutes on the village website. Cllr Kirby-Green to follow up with Mark Stapley (drainage) on 17.2.25. Fly tipping by Darwell Car Park has been reported by Cllr Petty.
- 15.1.7.** Messenger magazine (JO) – no updates.
- 15.1.8.** Phone Box (JC) – see above.
- 15.1.9.** Trees - Tree warden (PG) – no updates.
- 15.1.10.** Utilities (CC) – no updates.
- 15.1.11.** Refuse Collection (CC) – Bins along Cackle Street are not being collected due to the road closure for drainage works. Cllr Kirby-Green to follow up and report back to Cllr Petty and the Clerk.
- 15.1.12.** Village Hall (JO). Cllr Garbutt shared a report.
- 15.1.13.** Website (AW) – Cllr Blench now has access to post on the village website.
- 15.1.14.** Welcome Packs (KB) – no updates.

16. Parish Councillors' Forum

Annual litter pick date to be finalised. **Action - Cllr Oxenford.**

17. Items for Noting or Including on the Future Agenda

Annual Assembly – discussion around food and drink. **Action – Cllr Petty (food), Clerk (drink).**

18. Remaining Planned Meetings

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

Meeting Closed 9:45pm