

# Reports for Brightling Parish Council meeting 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025

This report covers 3 topics:

- Web site
- Broadband
- Environment – jointly with Katrina

Katrina is reporting on the Environment Strategy generally.

This report covers the period since my previous report dated 8<sup>th</sup> January.

## Web site

The village website is at <https://brightling.community/>

The main contributors continue to be me, the Parish Clerk, the Village Hall representative, Jane Beard, and Parish Councillor Katrina Blench. Nicola Magill and Parish Council chair Judy Petty also have logons.

If other contributors want to come forward I would be very happy to get them a logon and give any necessary training.

The site continues to be hosted by Rother District Council, free of charge (what will happen when RDC ceases to exist?)

There have been no episodes of downtime since my last report.

## Broadband

The last loose end of the project was that some of the properties in the Mountfield Park Farm area had been told that they could not get full-fibre, as a result of one of the newly-installed telegraph poles being too short! This has now been resolved and the grateful residents are very pleased with the result. According to Openreach, all 4 properties in this area now have access to full fibre broadband. Evidence on the ground suggests that there might still be problems reaching Mountfield Park Farm itself but since they have not actually tried to place an order, the point is moot.

This completes the “contract” with Openreach and means that all but one of the houses in the parish of Brightling now have full fibre broadband available (the sole exception is a house in Fontridge Lane which is connected to the Burwash exchange).

A talk on “Digital voice” has been arranged for Wednesday 11 June 2024. Chris Hockley, “Digital Voice Engagement Manager” for BT/EE/Plusnet will be giving it. The Village Hall has been booked. I’m planning to say a few words myself to put this in the context of resilience planning particularly with regard to power cuts.

On the 15th Feb 2025, the Brightling Exchange joined the “Openreach Fibre Priority Programme”. This means that any order processed by Openreach (Change ISP, Change Speed, Change Owner, ...) will result in the premises being upgraded to a full-fibre connection, if the service is available and they aren’t already on it. Since Openreach is the only wholesale provider of terrestrial fibre broadband in the area, this effectively applies to all properties in Brightling parish.

## Environment – Park Pale solar project

This refers to the proposal by Southern Water to install a 1.2 MWp solar farm between the Darwell reservoir dam and the road (Mountfield Lane).

There are 3 separate strands to this issue:

- **Complaint to RDC re lack of communication / consultation.** It has been decided not to take this any further
- **Reducing the impact on residents.** From a meeting of the working group on 2 February 2025:
  - “Reposition two rows of solar panels. SWWP request two rows of solar panels from the upper end of the development be moved to the lower, south-eastern end. Southern Water say moving only one row is possible. Action James Fraser - SW to be asked again for two rows to be moved
  - Planting. Southern Water have not responded to questions about hedge height, fencing panels, and tree planting. As of the end of 2024 none of the tree planting proposed by Southern Water has been done. New trees will need up to two years care/replacement and as planting has not yet started it should be possible to alter the plan. Action JF to email Southern Water to press for planting now (late Winter/Spring 2025) rather than in 12 months time”
- **Wider community benefits: establishing a circular off-road path round the reservoir.** The solar panel team are adamant that this is outside their scope, and have referred us to a different team, namely the Commercial Property department. Cllr. Petty received an email from them on 15<sup>th</sup> January suggesting that they had no resources to even look at the proposal, and concluded: “we can only suggest we may be able to re-consider looking again at your proposal perhaps during the summer of this year.” Cllr. Petty subsequently wrote to the CEO but got a similar reply, with some rather vague reasons. Our feeling is to simply wait for a few months and try again – this is obviously going to be a “long game”.

## Environment – solar panels on the Village Hall roof

The planning application for roof replacement, which includes 12 solar panels, was approved by RDC on 26 February.

On 3 February I emailed Philip Garbutt, in his role as chair of the VH committee, a spreadsheet showing how Discounted Cash Flow analysis could be used to predict the financial return from installing solar panels. Because the occupancy of the village hall (mostly in the evenings) does not match solar power generation (mostly between 10:00 am and 2:00 pm) – and also because electricity consumption is quite small - nearly all the financial benefit would come in the form of export payments (rather than reduction in metered consumption). Therefore the actual financial return will depend on crucially on the assumptions about rates of export payment.

My offer of attending a meeting of the VH committee to answer any queries that people may have has not yet been taken up.

Andrew Wedmore