

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2025

It has been pretty much 'business as usual' on Brightling Parish Council over the last year. Having said that, the business of running the parish council generates a lot more work behind the scenes than most people realise. We have been extremely fortunate in having Sam as Parish Clerk. Sam is not only highly competent but is very hard-working and an enormously helpful member of the Parish Council team.

So what business have we been conducting? We have been:

- Liaising with the rural crime team and spreading news of criminal activity
- Looking after the village assets - the defibrillators, the recently acquired dog poo bin, and very recently, thanks to some very generous community involvement, restoring the phone box (there will be more news on that in the next edition of The Messenger)
- Making sure the utilities are functioning and bins get emptied
- Ensuring the fire hydrants are up to standard
- Looking after footpaths
- Ensuring we have an up-to-date Emergency and Resilience Plan
- Liaising with the Forestry Commission
- Promoting wildlife verges, dark skies and protecting our environment courtesy of our enthusiastic and very active Brightling Environment Group
- Welcoming newcomers and supplying them with Welcome Packs
- Supporting village initiatives and celebrations
- Protecting trees
- Supporting the Village Hall
- Clearing litter and reporting fly-tipping
- Responding to government consultations and plans that will affect our parish
- Responding to planning applications:

PLANNING

The PC does not have a planning sub-committee but all councillors discuss each planning application together and decide either to:

- make no comment at all
- suggest conditions
- object

The PC considered twelve notices in the last year. Nine applications were approved by Rother. One was found not to require planning permission, one awaits a decision and one was a case of prior approval having been denied, a notice that a full planning application is necessary. Of the nine approved, the Parish Council objected to two. One on the grounds of likely harm to dark skies and because the proposal, we thought, was not in keeping with the local vernacular, and one, at the Coldharbour Farm development, because Rother allowed considerable changes to the original plans under a clause that permits minor amendments without public consultation, whereas the Parish Council saw the changes as a substantial departure from the original plans, with potential harm to the AONB.

We often suggest conditions be applied to permissions. Sometimes to ensure that extensions, for instance, cannot be sold off as separate properties, but more frequently, on environmental grounds, for example, we might suggest no external lighting be allowed in order to protect dark skies.

We occasionally report matters to the Enforcement Team at Rother where building has taken place without due permission or materials used in the actual build differ from those stated in the application.

Sometimes we comment on applications in neighbouring parishes. At the moment we are supporting Mountfield Parish Council and local Mountfield residents in an attempt to mitigate the visible effects on the landscape of Southern Water's planned solar farm on Mountfield Lane. This is another example of plans having been approved by Rother without public consultation by the issuing of a Certificate of Lawful Use on the grounds that the land in question is 'Operational'.

Back to the list of what we have been doing...

- Highways matters are a considerable part of Parish Council activities. The state of our roads, as we all know, are in a very poor condition. I have written a separate report on Highways which is available to all.
- Last but certainly not least on the list, is Broadband. Cllr Andrew Wedmore has worked tirelessly for more years than he probably cares to remember, to bring super-fast fibre to Brightling and the surrounding locality. This has required dogged persistence in the face of intransigent organisations. We owe him great thanks. Not only that, but he has organised a Digital Voice Event for 11 June to make sure everyone has the opportunity to understand the ramifications of changes to the telephone system.

Finally, changes are on the way as a result of the Government's Devolution plans. The changes are two-fold:

East Sussex is to be merged with West Sussex and Brighton & Hove as a single Strategic Authority under an elected mayor, and our district and borough and county councils are to be abolished and replaced by one single unitary authority. Cllr Eleanor Kirby-Green has written in greater detail on this, copies are available. What this will mean for Brightling Parish Council and our locality is yet to unravel. But the Parish Council has recently completed two consultations: one on Devolution and one on the latest Housing Development Strategy. In both, our aim was to ensure that the rural voice was represented. If anyone would like to read our responses, we would be happy to share them.

Cllr Judy Petty
April 2025