

Minutes of the **Annual Meeting of Brightling Parish Council**  
held on **Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> May 2025** at 7.30 p.m. in Brightling Village Hall

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

**District and County Councillors:** Cllr J. Barnes (RDC)

**Also Present:** Sam Dugan, Parish Clerk.

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**Meeting opened at 19:30**

**1. Election of Chair**

Cllr Blench proposed Cllr Petty for the role of Chair for the 2025/26 municipal year. This was seconded by Cllr Oxenford and unanimously agreed.

**RESOLVED:** That Cllr Petty be elected Chair of the Council for the 2025/26 municipal year.

**2. Election of Vice-Chair**

Cllr Blench proposed Cllr Croft for the role of Vice-Chair for the 2025/26 municipal year. This was seconded by Cllr Petty and unanimously agreed.

**RESOLVED:** That Cllr Croft be elected Vice-Chair of the Council for the 2025/26 municipal year.

**3. Declarations of Acceptance of Office and Registers of Members' Interests**

The newly elected Chair and Vice-Chair each made a public declaration of acceptance of office. Due to a technical issue with the printer, the formal Declarations of Acceptance of Office were signed following the meeting in the presence of the Clerk, acting as Proper Officer, in accordance with section 83(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

No new or updated Register of Interests forms were required at this time.

**4. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies received from Cllr Kirby-Green.

**5. Disclosures of Interest**

None declared.

**6. Additional Agenda Items**

None.

**7. Adoption of Minutes**

Councillors received and **RESOLVED** to adopt the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025 as a true and correct record.

**8. Member Responsibilities**

Members reviewed appointments to external bodies and confirmed lead responsibilities for the coming year as follows:

- **Rother Association of Local Councils (RALC):** Cllr C. Croft
- **Defibrillators, Utilities, and Crime Liaison:** Cllr C. Croft
- **Footpaths and Rights of Way:** Cllrs K. Blench and J. Oxenford
- **Messenger Magazine:** Cllr A. Wedmore
- **Highways:** Cllr. J. Petty
- **Phone box:** Cllr. J. Petty
- **Village Hall:** Cllr J. Oxenford
- **Trees:** Cllr P. Garbutt
- **Website Oversight:** Cllr A. Wedmore
- **Welcome Pack Coordination:** Cllr K. Blench

Cllr Lloyd proposed the establishment of a lead responsibility for Deer Management, involving liaison with local stakeholders and responding to parish queries. Cllr Petty raised the importance of reflecting a range of views on this issue, and Cllr Oxenford supported the need for a neutral approach. Cllr Lloyd agreed and confirmed that any activity would form part of the broader planning and engagement process, including work with HWNL and local landowners.

Cllrs unanimously supported the proposal. Cllr Petty proposed that Cllr Lloyd invite a contact to speak on this issue at the next council meeting; this was agreed.

**RESOLVED:** To approve the appointment of councillors to external bodies and lead roles as listed above.

**RESOLVED:** That Cllr Lloyd be appointed to lead on Deer Management liaison, with a speaker to be invited to the next meeting.

**9. Councillors RESOLVED to adopt the follow dates for BPC meetings during 2025/26:**

2025: 9th July, 10th September, 12th November

2026: 14th January, 11th March, 13th May (AGM).

**10. Councillors RESOLVED the date of the Annual Assembly in 2026 as Wednesday 8th April 2026.****11. Reports from District and County Councillors**

Cllr Barnes (Rother District Council) provided an update. He reported that there was not a great deal to report at present, with several meetings having been cancelled. The council is seeking to make savings where possible.

Of concern, planning application numbers are down despite the RDC housing target having recently been increased. Although it is likely the target will be missed, efforts are being made to catch up on the existing backlog. Discussions continue regarding the creation of a new unitary authority; a counterproposal from the Labour group for a separate coastal authority was recently voted down.

Cllr Barnes also noted that the Enforcement Task Force has been re-established and that the new Head of Planning appears to place a greater emphasis on planning enforcement.

## **12. Finance and Governance – RFO Update**

### **12.1. Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)**

- 12.1.1.** Members reviewed the Internal Auditor's Report and the effectiveness of the Council's internal systems of control.

**RESOLVED:** To approve the Internal Auditor's Report and confirm the effectiveness of internal control measures.

- 12.1.2.** The Annual Governance Statement (Section 1 of the AGAR) was reviewed.

**RESOLVED:** To approve Section 1, the Annual Governance Statement, for 2024/25.

- 12.1.3.** The Accounting Statements (Section 2 of the AGAR) were reviewed.

**RESOLVED:** To approve Section 2, the Accounting Statement for 2024/25, and to witness the signing thereof by the Chair and RFO.

- 12.1.4.** Members reviewed the criteria for exemption from external audit and confirmed eligibility.

**RESOLVED:** To certify that the Parish Council meets the criteria to submit a Certificate of Exemption to the external auditor, and to witness the signing thereof.

- 12.1.5.** Members confirmed the dates for the publication of the Notice of Public Rights and Publication of Unaudited Annual Governance & Accountability Return.

The Clerk confirmed that the notice will be published on Friday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2025, with the inspection period running from Monday 3 June to Friday 12 July 2025.

- 12.1.6.** Members reviewed the end-of-year accounting statement against budget.

**RESOLVED:** To accept the 2024/25 year-end accounting statement and note key variances as reported by the RFO.

### **12.2. Confirmation of Annual Governance Reviews**

- 12.2.1.** Members noted that the following reviews and approvals took place at the meeting held on 12 March 2025 (Minute 8.3–8.11):

- i. Delegation arrangements to the Clerk
- ii. Standing Orders and Financial Regulations
- iii. Council policies and procedures, including the Code of Conduct, Risk Assessment, and Data Protection policies
- iv. Asset Register

- 12.2.2.** Members reviewed the Parish Council's insurance policy.

**RESOLVED:** That the Clerk be delegated authority to renew the Council's insurance policy in line with existing cover.

**12.2.3.** Members reviewed the updated the Code of Conduct.

**RESOLVED:** To approve the updated Code of Conduct without amendment.

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

**12.3.1. RESOLVED** to adopt the bank reconciliations to 30/04/2025

**12.3.2. RESOLVED** to adopt the schedule of receipts and payments for the months of March and April 2025.

**12.3.3. RESOLVED** to adopt the bank statements for March and April 2025.

**12.4.** Clerk provided an update on income and expenditure against budget 2025/26. Councillors **RESOLVED** to receive and adopt the I&E document as of 30/04/2025

**12.5.** Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the following payments (all retrospective):

**12.5.1. 2025-03-28** – Milbrook Design and Print – INV-17174

**12.5.2. 2025-04-02** – RDC – Dog Waste Bin Emptying – INV-86833548

**12.5.3. 2025-04-02** – X2 Connect – Phone box door frame and paint – INV-24778

**12.5.4. 2025-04-03** – Clerk Expenses – Litter picking equipment

**12.5.5. 2025-04-07** – Chair Expenses – Assembly food

**12.5.6. 2025-04-08** – Clerk Expenses – Assembly drinks

**12.5.7. 2025-04-15** – Mulberry Audit – INV-0959

**12.5.8. 2025-04-15** – Parish Online – INV-21UG006-0011

## **12.6. S137 Grant Allocations**

Members discussed potential recipients of S137 grant funding. It was agreed that councillors would review local organisations and bring forward suggestions for consideration at a future meeting. The Clerk will provide councillors with an up-to-date total of registered electors to inform the calculation of the total S137 spending limit.

**RESOLVED:** That councillors will review potential S137 grant recipients and the Clerk will circulate the number of electors to support this process.

## **13. Phone Box Update**

**13.1.** Cllr Petty provided an update on the refurbishment of the village phone box. The new door frame and paint have been received, and works are due to be completed shortly.

Cllr Oxenford proposed that a letter of thanks be sent to the anonymous donor who contributed to the refurbishment costs. This was agreed by all.

**RESOLVED:** That Cllr Petty will draft a thank you letter to the anonymous donor on behalf of the Council.

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

**14.1. Planning** – *Councillors noted that no new applications have been received.*

Cllr Petty raised a query regarding the lack of progress for a resident seeking replacement windows. Cllr Barnes confirmed that he had raised the matter with Rother District Council's Planning Department. The Clerk was asked to submit a follow-up request to Cllr Barnes, citing comparable approved applications at Hunters Farm and The Granary as relevant examples.

**RESOLVED:** That the Clerk follow up with Cllr Barnes regarding planning enforcement on the Freddie Pook property, referencing comparable permissions at Hunters Farm and The Granary.

#### **14.2. Enforcements** – *Councillors noted that no updates have been received.*

### **15. Annual Parish Assembly 2025 Review**

- 15.1.** Councillors reviewed the 2025 Annual Parish Assembly and noted that the event was well attended and positively received. The guest speaker was commended, and the provision of refreshments was appreciated. It was suggested by Cllr Lloyd that next year's publicity should more clearly advertise the availability of drinks and nibbles.

Councillors expressed their thanks to Cllr Petty for delivering a clear and informative summary of the Parish Council's activities during the session.

**RESOLVED:** That the Clerk will include an item on the November agenda to begin planning for the 2026 Annual Parish Assembly.

### **16. RALC Feedback**

- 16.1.** Cllr Croft provided feedback from the recent RALC meeting, which included a presentation from Lorna Ford, Chief Executive of Rother District Council, on proposals for local government devolution. Representatives from Bexhill were reportedly sceptical, and concerns were raised that the proposals appeared to be focused on larger councils, with limited relevance or benefit to smaller rural parishes. The date of the next RALC meeting was noted as 23 July 2025.

### **17. Annual Litter Pick**

- 17.1.** Cllr Oxenford reported on the recent Annual Litter Pick. It was noted that there appeared to be less litter than in previous years. There were sufficient volunteers on the day, and areas not covered during the main event were subsequently completed by residents, for which thanks were noted. Rubbish was also removed directly by residents, which was helpful. The timing of the litter pick was considered effective, taking place before the spring growth of the verges.

### **18. Clerk Correspondence**

None.

## 19. Community and Business Development

### 19.1. Councillor Updates

The following reports were received:

- 19.1.1. Broadband (Cllr Wedmore):** A report was shared. Preparations are underway for a Digital Voice presentation.

**RESOLVED:** That the Clerk will print flyers advertising the event for distribution at the next Village Café.

- 19.1.2. Crime, Anti-Social Behaviour, Police Relationships (Cllr Croft):** Reports of recent thefts were noted, including a pickup vehicle where the keys had been left inside. Police are planning to hold street surgeries, with dates to be confirmed. Residents were reminded to report illegal use of motorbikes in the woods to 101, particularly if number plates are visible.

- 19.1.3. Defibrillators (Cllr Croft):** The Clerk confirmed that all defibrillators have been checked and are in working order.

- 19.1.4. Environment Policy & Biodiversity (Cllrs Blench and Wedmore):** A report was shared. The recent Dark Skies walk was well attended. The upcoming garden event has been relocated to The Granary.

- 19.1.5. Footpaths and Bridleways (Cllr Blench):** Three community walks are planned. Cllr Petty raised concerns about some footpaths being rendered impassable by quadbike use. It was noted that these routes are also used by local shoots and forestry vehicles.

**RESOLVED:** To revisit this issue at the next meeting, when a speaker from the Forestry Commission will be present.

- 19.1.6. Highways, Hedges & Potholes (Cllr Petty):** A report was shared. Verge cutting was observed at Twelve Oaks Triangle, Rectory Hill, and the Church. The Clerk confirmed the Council's request to ESCC Highways for minimal cuts, likely meaning these were for visibility only.

**RESOLVED:** That the Clerk will check with ESCC Highways to confirm whether the contractor has recorded the cut locations.

- 19.1.7. Messenger Magazine (Cllr Wedmore):** Issues with distribution and cash collection were noted. Cllr Wedmore will raise these at the next Messenger Committee meeting.

- 19.1.8. Phone Box (Cllr Petty):** See minute 13 above.

**19.1.9. Trees – (Cllr Garbutt):** Nothing to report. Clerk requested to invited Doug Edworthy to the next meeting.

**19.1.10. Utilities (Cllr Croft):** Some brief power cuts have been reported.

**19.1.11. Refuse Collection (Cllr Croft):** Nothing to report.

**19.1.12. Village Hall (Cllr Oxenford):** A report was shared by Cllr Garbutt.

**19.1.13. Website (Cllr Wedmore):** A report was provided. The website experienced temporary downtime due to an issue transferring to a new domain name provider (now Geosphere instead of GoDaddy).

**19.1.14. Welcome Packs (Cllr Blench):** The welcome pack is now available in PDF format.

## **20. Parish Councillors' Forum**

**20.1.** Cllr Croft reported a good uptake on the “Adopt a Fingerpost” scheme, noting that all fingerposts have now been adopted and are in the process of being maintained.

**20.2.** Cllr Oxenford shared information received from Energise Sussex. Cllr Lloyd confirmed that the Brightling Environmental Group is already in contact with the organisation and agreed to follow up.

## **21. Items for Noting or Including on the Future Agenda:**

None.

## **22. Remaining Planned Meetings:**

2025: 9th July, 10th September, 12th November

2026: 14th January, 11th March, 13th May (AGM).

**Meeting Closed 20:50**