

Minutes of the **Ordinary Meeting of Brightling Parish Council**  
held on **Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2025** at 7.00 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), Doug Edworthy (Tree Warden).

---

**Meeting opened at 19:00**

**1. Guest Speakers**

**1.1.** Jonathan Webb (Woodland Officer, Forestry Commission) provided an overview of its structure and responsibilities:

- The Forestry Commission was established in 1919 to address the need for replanting timber following World War I.
- Forestry England (FE) manages 250,000 hectares of England's forests and is the largest land manager in England.
- Forest Services (FS) regulates private forestry and provides grants and incentives to landowners.
- Forest Research supports the sector by providing scientific evidence and expertise.

**Local Management and Planning**

- A significant area of Brightling Parish falls within the Weald Forest District and is covered by a Forest Design Plan managed from Bedgebury.

**National Woodland Strategy**

- The UK has one of the lowest woodland covers in Europe, currently 12.5% (previously 9%), second only to Malta.
- The government has set a target of increasing this to 16.5% under the 2023 Environmental Improvement Plan.
- This target will be achieved through land acquisitions by Forestry England and grants administered by FS to private landowners, benchmarked against the UK Forestry Standard.

**Tree Health and Biosecurity**

- Ash Dieback and the 8-Toothed European Spruce Beetle were identified as major threats.
- FS is encouraging the removal of spruce in the South East to safeguard national timber stock.
- FC monitors the impact of climate change on tree species and has ceased recommending some vulnerable species (e.g. ash, spruce).
- Local concerns have been raised about sweet chestnut suffering from fungal root rot.
- Due to the limitations of native species, more "naturalised" species are being modelled for future planting.

**Carbon and Public Health**

- Tree planting remains the most cost-effective way to sequester carbon.
- Woodlands are estimated to save the NHS £2.1 billion annually through associated health benefits.

**Woodland Management and Licensing**

- Coppicing plays a vital role in biodiversity and sustainable woodland management.
- Felling licenses are required under the Forestry Act 1967, subject to certain exemptions.
- FC is responsible for investigating and prosecuting illegal felling.
- Reports can be made to: [adminhub.buckshornoak@forestrycommission.gov.uk](mailto:adminhub.buckshornoak@forestrycommission.gov.uk)

**Questions and Responses**

- **Felling License Register** – It remains publicly accessible, but only covers felling and coppicing (not thinning). A request was made for the Clerk to be sent the relevant link.
- **Climate Change and Tree Species** – FC is monitoring climate trends and adapting recommended planting lists accordingly. However, predicting long-term outcomes is challenging.
- **Raising Concerns** – Past challenges regarding eucalyptus felling and replanting were noted. Future issues should be reported to Jonathan Webb or the admin email above.
- **Ancient Woodland Classification** – Defined as land continuously wooded since the 1600s. A national database is maintained.
- **New Woodland Classification** – Requires a minimum width of 20 meters and must meet area criteria. Parish councils are reminded that felling licenses are required for trees in hedgerows unless exempt.
- **Transparency of Felling Conditions** – The public register indicates whether conditions are attached to licenses but does not specify them. Due to privacy concerns and limited resources, detailed conditions are not published, although spot checks are conducted by Forestry England.
- **Freedom of Information** – There is no formal protocol for raising concerns; however, PCs and individuals may submit FOI requests where appropriate.
- **Deer Management** – Grants and support are available from FC. Deer are identified as a significant threat to biodiversity, and active management is encouraged.

**Action: Clerk to follow up for access to the public felling license register link.**

**1.2** Alison Otway (South East Deer Management) provided a presentation on local deer management strategies:

- Deer management is recognised as a sensitive and often emotive topic, but growing deer populations are having a measurable impact on biodiversity and woodland regeneration.
- Emphasis was placed on adopting more *localised and collaborative* approaches, engaging with landowners to promote *sympathetic* management strategies.

**Key Issues and Proposals**

- A key challenge is the presence of unmanaged buffer zones around estates; these create a vacuum that undermines effective deer control within estate land.

- There is a need to open dialogue with local landowners to understand perspectives on deer – whether they are seen as a pest, a valued species in excessive numbers, or somewhere in between.
- A suggestion was made for Brightling Parish to explore facilitating discussions among landowners with a view to forming a Deer Management Group. This group would:
  - Include both stalkers and landowners.
  - Map local deer movements and anticipate displacement caused by culling activity.
  - Coordinate efforts to increase effectiveness and reduce localised overpopulation.

**Proposed Actions**

- One key strategy is to coordinate stalkers to conduct culling on a single morning per month, which encourages deer to move and mimics the ecological role of apex predators.
- Investment in shared infrastructure such as hub chillers is being explored to help support independent stalkers and enable effective, hygienic processing of carcasses.
- The results of coordinated efforts have been observed to reduce visible ground impact and encourage deer to disperse temporarily before returning in smaller, more manageable numbers.

**Community Engagement**

- The first step proposed is to gauge local feeling through a community information campaign, with a view to fostering understanding and support.
- Collaboration and landscape-level coordination were highlighted as essential to success.
- Cllr Lloyd stressed the importance of working at scale to protect biodiversity and reiterated the value of deer management in the absence of natural apex predators.

**Questions and Responses**

- Question: Would multiple shots not cause deer to scatter and make culling ineffective?  
Response: This depends on the skill and professionalism of the stalker. Experienced professionals are capable of carrying out multiple successful culls within one session, even under those conditions.

**2. Public Forum**

None.

**3. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies received in advance from Cllr Kirby-Green.

**4. Disclosures of Interest**

None.

**5. Additional Agenda Items**

None.

## 6. Adoption of Minutes

Councillors received and **RESOLVED** to adopt the minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> May 2025 as a true and correct record.

## 7. Reports from District and County Councillors

Cllr. John Barnes (RDC) updated the Council on items of change or importance:

- RDC focus remains on local government reorganisation and devolution planning.
- The HELAA process has reopened to seek further development sites.
- Financial performance: 83% of the savings programme achieved; reserve usage (£188k) was significantly lower than forecast, with £5m remaining.

## 8. Finance and Governance – RFO Update

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

8.1.1. **RESOLVED** to adopt the bank reconciliations to 30/06/2025

8.1.2. **RESOLVED** to adopt the schedule of receipts and payments for the months of May and June 2025.

8.1.3. **RESOLVED** to adopt the bank statements for May and June 2025.

8.2. The Clerk had provided an update on income and expenditure against budget 2025/26. Councillors received and **RESOLVED** to adopt the I&E document as of 30/06/2025

8.3. **RESOLVED** to approve the following payments:

8.3.1. **2025-05-23** – Zurich Insurance (RETROSPECTIVE)

8.3.2. **2025-06-24** – Brightling Village Hall (Digital Voice Hire) (RETROSPECTIVE)

8.3.3. **2025-06-24** – ESALC (Annual Subscription) (RETROSPECTIVE)

8.3.4. **2025-07-10** – Jon Avery (Churchyard Grass Cutting)

### 8.4. Section 137 Community Grants

The Clerk had prepared a briefing note outlining the current limits of the Community Grant Scheme, details of previous beneficiaries, and a draft revised policy and updated application form for consideration.

Cllr Oxenford proposed that the Brightling Environmental Group be included as a recognised beneficiary under the scheme. Cllr Blench advised that support should be linked to specific projects rather than a general inclusion. Cllr Lloyd noted that targeted, community-focused projects by such groups could be beneficial in future applications.

In reviewing the draft policy and application form, Cllr Wedmore proposed removing the requirement for applicants to submit a receipt upon receiving a donation, in order to reduce the administrative burden on small charities. This proposal was supported by Cllr Blench. Whilst Cllr Oxenford felt that the requirement of a letter of thanks was not overbearing, ultimately Councillors **RESOLVED** to adopt the Community Grants policy inclusive of Cllr Wedmore's amendment.

**Action – Clerk**

**8.5. Clerk Office Expenditure**

- 8.5.1. Councillors RESOLVED** that the annual cost of PDF Extra (currently £41.28) should be paid from the existing £312 office allowance budget.
- 8.5.2. Councillors RESOLVED** that future similar purchases may be made by the Clerk under the office allowance without separate resolution, provided they are within budget and appropriately recorded.

**9. Phone Box Update**

The restored box was delivered during the meeting and praised by councillors. Thanks were formally recorded to Jamie French and Jamie Smith for their generosity, time and effort.

**10. Planning and Enforcement Matters** – *All decision notices and enforcement updates had previously been circulated to Councillors for information***10.1. Planning****10.1.1. RR/2023/1335/O** - 4 Longhouses, Hollingrove Lane, Brightling TN32 5HT –

Councillors noted an update that Listed Building Consent is required for the proposed replacement windows, and not just a Certificate of Lawfulness due to the impact on the terrace more broadly.

**10.1.2. RR/2025/1015/P** – Land at Fir Tree Cottage, Netherfield Hill, Battle TN33 9P

**Councillors RESOLVED:** *Brightling Parish Council supports Battle Town Council and local residents in objecting to this application for the following reasons:*

- *Since new structures have been brought onto the site, this application should be for retrospective permission, not variation of condition*
- *The new structures are in breach of condition relating to dimensions and site layout*
- *There is no accompanying Planning Statement and therefore no indication of change in circumstance or requirements that justify new or additional structures.*

**10.1.3. RR/2025/676/P** - Pays Cottage, The Furnace, Ashburnham TN33 9PG

Councillors **RESOLVED:** *Brightling Parish Council objects to this proposal. The size, layout, flat roof, extent of glazing and proposed inappropriate modern materials will be to the detriment of the architectural and historical character of the building, and to the integrity of its siting as a designated heritage asset. The plans are contrary to Section 66 of the Planning (listed buildings and conservation areas) Act 1990; Policies EN2, EN3 of Rother's current Core Strategy; Policies DHG9, DHG10, DEN1 and DEN2 of the current DaSA: LAN1, LAN3 and HER1 of the proposed Local Plan and the High Weald Management Plan and Design Guide. If officers are minded to grant approval, conditions are requested to limit the impact of lighting and preserve the integrity of dark skies in the locality.*

**Action – Clerk**

**10.1.4. RR/2025/951/O** - Coldharbour Farm House, Battle Road, Brightling, TN21 9LQ

Councillors noted that there was no evidence to counter the application.

**10.1.5. RR/2025/1042/P - Lake Cottage, Manor Farm, Brightling Road, Brightling**

Councillors discussed their concerns and **RESOLVED** that the Clerk summarise them and submit comments using delegated authority:

*Brightling Parish Council objects to this application on the following grounds:*

**1. Cumulative Impact and Over-Development in an AONB:**

*The proposed garage reintroduces built form that was specifically removed during the planning process for the replacement dwelling (RR/2023/2077/P) due to concerns about scale, landscape impact, and over-development within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The reintroduction of this structure undermines the negotiated balance that led to the earlier approval. The visual prominence and cumulative massing of the dwelling and garage together would constitute over-development, conflicting with the aims of AONB protection and the High Weald Management Plan. It is also noted that two large Scots Pine trees are located within the curtilage of the property; these would likely be impacted by the additional development and do not appear to be properly accounted for on the site plan.*

**2. Contrary to Local Character and Vernacular:**

*Although the materials proposed for the garage are consistent with those approved for the main dwelling, the addition of further built form risks altering the open and traditional rural character of the site. The combined effect of the house and garage would erode the setting's contribution to local character and views, contrary to policies that seek to preserve and enhance the distinctive landscape and vernacular of the High Weald.*

**3. Precedent and Planning Integrity:**

*The original application included a garage, which was removed during the determination process. Rother District Council's case officer report explicitly noted that "the previously proposed garage [was] removed" as part of the mitigation of harm to the AONB. To now reintroduce this element via a separate application raises concerns about the integrity of the original approval and may be perceived as an attempt to circumvent prior planning controls.*

**10.2. National Scheme of Delegation**

Cllr Barnes advised that the Government is consulting on a proposed national scheme of delegation which would allow large developments to bypass both local authority planning committees and parish councils. He highlighted the particular risks this poses to areas such as the High Weald AONB and the erosion of democratic accountability. Councillors were encouraged to consider submitting comments before the consultation deadline on 23rd July. Councillors **RESOLVED** that the Clerk would provide a briefing note and that comments could be submitted by the Clerk via delegated authority.

**Action – Clerk**

**10.3. Enforcements**

Councillors noted that no updates have been received.

## 11. Local Government Consultation

**11.1.** Councillors **RESOLVED** to minute the comments submitted by the Clerk via delegated authority as proposed by Cllr Petty and unanimously agreed by Councillors:

Brightling Parish Council recognises that the proposal to form a single East Sussex unitary authority is likely to proceed. We welcome the potential for streamlined services, efficiencies, and a stronger collective voice for the county.

However, as a small rural parish, BPC wishes to register the following significant concerns regarding the risks and challenges this reorganisation may pose to rural communities:

### 1. Democratic representation

There is a clear risk that reduced councillor numbers will result in larger, more urban-focused electoral areas. Rural concerns and priorities could be diluted or overlooked.

### 2. Local decision-making and accountability

A larger, more centralised authority may weaken opportunities for local input and reduce the visibility and accountability of decision-makers to small communities.

### 3. Allocation of resources

There is a risk that funding and services will be disproportionately directed toward higher population centres, leaving rural areas with reduced provision.

### 4. Environmental stewardship

Rural parishes play a key role in safeguarding landscape, biodiversity, and heritage assets. We are concerned that centralised planning control and enforcement may erode this local stewardship and reduce the influence of bodies such as the High Weald Unit.

### 5. Parish capacity and liabilities

While we welcome the principle of devolving some community assets and responsibilities to local level, many small parishes lack the governance capacity, officer support, or insurance cover to take on significant new obligations. This could result in unmanaged risk or service gaps.

### 6. Digital exclusion and transport

Rural residents are more vulnerable to digital exclusion and more reliant on fragile transport links. The new authority must ensure that digital-first service models and transport policies do not further disadvantage these communities.

## Suggested Safeguard: Rural Parishes Forum

In light of these concerns, Brightling Parish Council proposes that a formal Rural Parishes Forum should be embedded in the governance structure of the new unitary authority, with the following features:

- Parishes grouped into representative clusters based on geographic and community links (e.g. Brightling, Dallington, Ashburnham/Penhurst, Mountfield, Etchingham, Burwash, Stonegate).
- Each cluster to elect representatives to the Forum.
- The Forum to be a statutory consultee on matters affecting rural areas, with the ability to feed directly into both the new unitary authority and the future Sussex Strategic Authority structures.

Such a mechanism would help to ensure that the rural voice remains strong, visible, and respected within the future governance landscape.

Brightling Parish Council is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation and would welcome ongoing engagement as the reorganisation proposals develop.

**11.2.** Councillors **RESOLVED** that the Clerk to petition RALC for advocating a Rural Forum as part of the new devolution settlement, as noted in item 11.1.

**Action - Clerk**

## **12. Land at Park View**

**12.1.** Following discussions, Councillors **RESOLVED** to submit an expression of interest to Rother District Council regarding the potential devolution of the land at Park View, noting that no further action (e.g. legal or environmental assessment) will be taken until further information is received from RDC. Cllr Barnes recommended emphasising that the asset's best value be articulated through its social value, not necessarily commercial.

**Action - Clerk**

## **13. Community and Business Development**

**13.1.** Reports on the following areas by councillors:

- 13.1.1. Broadband and Website (AW)** – See attached report.
- 13.1.2. RALC (CC)** – nothing to report. Cllr Croft cannot attend next meeting; Cllr Petty will attempt if possible.
- 13.1.3. Crime, anti-social behaviour, police relationships (CC)** - Tent reported by Cllr Petty in Darwell Wood, along with evidence of fire, has now been removed.
- 13.1.4. Defibrillators, Refuse Collection and Utilities (CC)** – no updates.
- 13.1.5. Environment Policy & Bio-Diversity (KB)** – See attached report. Councillors had an additional discussion regarding Himalayan Balsam, with Cllr Lloyd noting that it does have bio-diversity value and due to its growth cycle, does not impact on native primroses. Cllr Wedmore noted that the location is not particularly concerning as it is not near a water source. Cllr Oxenford expressed that BPC continue to monitor – **RESOLVED** by Councillors.
- 13.1.6. Deer Management (IL)** – following contribution by guest speakers, Cllr Lloyd will draft a proposal for BPC to consider at a future meeting.
- 13.1.7. Footpaths and Bridleways (KB and JO)** – See attached report. Cllr Petty reported a new footbridge has been installed in Mansbrook Wood. Cllr Oxenford raised that a footpath between Hollingrove and Tower Field is overgrown; Cllr Blench offered to raise with the Footpath Team.
- 13.1.8. Highways, Hedges & Potholes (JP)** – See attached report.
- 13.1.9. Messenger magazine (AW)** – Praise from Councillors was expressed for a great edition.
- 13.1.10. Phone Box (JP)** – See Item 9.
- 13.1.11. Trees - Tree warden (DE)** – Guided walk through Dallington Forest on 19/7/25. Woodland in Dallington has been felled of Western Hemlock and left to naturally regenerate two years ago. This has been a big success as birds, including nightjars, have returned.
- 13.1.12. Village Hall (PG)** - Crowd funding page established to raise additional funds for the solar panels/roof replacement. An implication of including solar is that works that were hoped to be completed this year will now be pushed into 2026.
- 13.1.13. Welcome Packs (KB)** – No updates.

**14. Parish Councillors' Forum**

None.

**15. Items for Noting or Including on the Future Agenda**

Deer management proposal from Cllr Lloyd.

**16. Remaining Planned Meetings**

2025: 10th September, 12th November

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

***Meeting Closed 21.07***

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_