

Minutes of the **Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council**
held on **Wednesday 12th November** at **7.30p.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), Cllr. E. Kirby-Green (ESCC).

Also Present: Sam Dugan (Parish Clerk) and one member of the public.

Meeting opened at 19:30

1. Public Forum

A resident raised concerns about the spread of Himalayan Balsam, noting it is close to reaching Darwell Reservoir and the lakes at Socknersh Manor. The plant was first seen locally around ten years ago on Hollingrove Lane near British Gypsum land, with suspected spread via vehicle wheels. Areas near the storm drain by Doctors' Cottage were also highlighted as at particular risk.

Residents have been carrying out pulling, which is understood to be more effective than cutting, as the plant can re-seed within the same year if merely cut back.

Cllr Petty reported that East Sussex Highways will not take action, as their remit covers only Japanese Knotweed, Ragwort and Giant Hogweed. Cllr Lloyd noted that landowners may have a duty to prevent invasive species spreading to adjoining land. Cllr Kirby-Green agreed to follow this up.

Cllr Blench highlighted that the Sussex Nature Recovery Strategy identifies invasive non-native species as a priority. This will be discussed at the next Brightling Environment Group (BEG) meeting in December, with potential for a working party. Cllr Lloyd has also raised the issue with Wild About Burwash, though it is not currently one of their priority areas.

A resident suggested prioritising land adjoining highways to help limit spread, and identified several affected areas. Cllr Blench will take these to the BEG meeting. Cllr Wedmore recommended writing to relevant landowners with information regarding Schedule 9 responsibilities. This information will also be added to the Council website. Cllr Blench will lead on these actions.

Action – Cllrs Blench and Kirby-Green

2. Apologies for Absence

None.

3. Disclosures of Interest

Cllr Garbutt, Cllr Petty and Cllr Oxenford declared an interest in the Village Hall item as members of the Brightling Village Hall Committee. They contributed to the discussion but did not vote.

4. Additional Agenda Items

None.

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5. Adoption of Minutes

Councillors received and **RESOLVED** to adopt the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 10th September 2025, and the Extraordinary Meeting held Friday 24th October 2025, as true and correct records.

6. Reports from District and County Councillors

6.1. East Sussex County Council – Cllr Kirby-Green

Cllr Kirby-Green referred to the report circulated ahead of the meeting, noting that the financial outlook for ESCC remains extremely challenging. Significant pressures on the budget are being driven by increased costs in adult social care, children's services, employer National Insurance, and the rising living wage. ESCC has already made over £140m of savings since 2014, but further substantial cuts will now be required.

Home-to-school transport alone now costs around £28m per year. ESCC is in discussions with central government regarding Exceptional Financial Support, which may include permission to borrow to fund revenue costs or to raise council tax above the usual referendum threshold. Adult social care services were rated "Good" by the CQC.

Cllr Kirby-Green confirmed that a new Highways Steward has been appointed. She also updated the Council on ongoing Cackle Street drainage issues, which she has raised with Andrew Turner, stating that the current situation is unacceptable. A response is awaited.

6.2 Rother District Council – Cllr Barnes

Cllr Barnes reported that although RDC's financial position is more stable than that of ESCC, the district is still facing serious pressures, including a further reduction in government grant due to an unfavourable funding formula. RDC expects to lose around £7m of income, and restructuring is underway to achieve savings, including operating without a deputy. He warned that significant cuts were inevitable given the wider national context, with many local authorities in financial difficulty.

Cllr Barnes expressed concern that future council tax reform, such as changes to property banding, may disproportionately affect residents who are asset rich but income poor.

In response to a question from Cllr Petty, Cllr Barnes advised that progress on asset devolution is slow due to very limited staffing capacity, with priority given to parishes holding larger portfolios. He noted that planning applications remain extremely low, which is impacting housing targets. It was suggested that members check the Overview & Scrutiny agenda for details on the Local Plan and site visits.

Nationally, he reported that large-scale developments are frequently being overturned on appeal following government direction. RDC expects council tax to increase by at least the permitted 3%, and potentially more if central government grants approval for a higher rise.

7. Finance and Governance – RFO Update

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

7.1.1. **RESOLVED** to adopt the bank reconciliations to 31/10/2025

7.1.2. **RESOLVED** to adopt the schedule of receipts and payments for the months of September and October 2025.

7.1.3. **RESOLVED** to adopt the bank statements for September and October 2025.

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7.2. The Clerk provided an update on income and expenditure against budget 2025/26. Councillors **RESOLVED** to adopt the I&E document as of 31/10/2025.

7.3. Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the following payments:

7.3.1. **2025-10-22** – Gilly Lowe – (RETROSPECTIVE) MS365 Subscription **£84.99**

7.3.2. **2025-10-28** – Douglas Alexander – Long Reach Fingerpost **£261.60**

7.4. S137 Grant Application - Brightling Village Hall.

Councillors considered the request for an S137 grant from Brightling Village Hall. During discussion, Cllr Croft asked whether BPC pays for hire of the hall for Council meetings; the Clerk confirmed that the annual cost would be £168. Cllrs Garbutt, Oxenford and Petty noted that they had not been aware the funding request had been submitted.

Cllr Lloyd highlighted the community value of the Village Hall, including its role in community resilience and emergency planning through broadband provision. Cllr Wedmore commented that the request did not set out the Village Hall's income and expenditure in sufficient detail, and that the Council had no information regarding its other revenue streams.

The Clerk advised that, given the Council's own financial position (see Item 7.5), it would be prudent to request further information from the Village Hall Committee before making a decision, and to communicate clearly the pressures on BPC reserves.

RESOLVED: To defer the decision and request further financial information from Brightling Village Hall before reconsidering the grant application.

Action – Clerk

7.5. Draft 2026/7 Budget

Councillors considered the draft 2026/27 budget proposal, including the financial implications of appointing a new Clerk and the associated increase in salary costs. The Clerk outlined the projected precept requirement and the resulting impact on reserves.

Councillors discussed the potential need to pause all S137 grants for 2026/27 with the exception of the Brightling Village Hall application. A provisional figure of £400 for the Village Hall was discussed, subject to Item 7.4. The Clerk confirmed that some items had been duplicated in the current year (e.g. website costs) and extrapolated forward; these will be corrected in the revised draft.

Councillors noted that the percentage increase in the precept appeared high, but that in real terms the impact on a Band D property was relatively small. Cllr Petty observed that the proposed increase would bring Brightling in line with comparable parishes. Cllr Wedmore highlighted that historically the precept had fluctuated significantly before his chairship, and that predictable, steady increases were preferable.

In light of the financial challenges highlighted by East Sussex County Council and Rother District Council, councillors emphasised the importance of prudence. The draft budget was scrutinised line by line. The Clerk confirmed that a reimbursement of £844 from East Sussex Highways for the Twelve Oaks fingerpost repair would improve the reserves position. Cllr Kirby-Green confirmed that there was not cap on fingerpost match funding; the Clerk was requested to submit a claim for the Long Reach works (7.3.2).

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Councillors agreed to pause all S137 grants other than the Village Hall, and requested that the Clerk remodel the budget on the basis of a £400 allocation to Brightling Village Hall only. A revised draft will be presented at the January 2026 meeting for final resolution.

Action – Clerk

7.6. Clerk Recruitment

Cllr Petty and the Clerk provided an update on the recruitment process, confirming that applications had been received and candidates were being shortlisted.

Cllr Blench asked why a salary increase was necessary given that several candidates had applied. Cllr Petty referred to ESALC's recommendations and explained that Brightling's previous salary range had become non-competitive compared with neighbouring councils also recruiting. The Clerk added that, in light of Local Government Reorganisation, asset devolution and wider financial pressures, it was his view that BPC required an experienced Clerk/RFO to manage the increasing complexity of the role.

Cllr Oxenford commented that it would be preferable not to appoint than to recruit a candidate who was not suitable for the role.

The Recruitment Committee will arrange interviews and will keep the full Council updated. The aim is to complete the process by the end of November 2025.

Action – Recruitment Committee

7.7. Procedures and Scheme of Delegation

7.7.1. Councillors **RESOLVED** to adopt the reviewed Scheme of Delegation.

7.7.2. Councillors **RESOLVED** to adopt the reviewed Complaints Procedure.

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

8.1. Planning

8.1.1. **RR/2025/676/P** - Pays Cottage, The Furnace, Ashburnham – Councillors noted appeal received: APP/U1430/W/25/3372851. Following discussions, Councillors **RESOLVED** to delegate to the Clerk to submit objections to the Planning Inspectorate. **Action - Clerk**

8.1.2. **RR/2025/1172/P** - Browns Oak Cottage, Brickyard Lane, Oxleys Green, Brightling – Councillors noted that no decision has yet been made.

8.2. Enforcements

8.2.1. **APP/U1430/C/24/3338892** - 1 Grants Cottages, Battle Road, Brightling – Councillors noted the Planning Inspectorate outcome and that the conservatory will be removed and replaced with the approved design RR/2024/1788/P.

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9. Local Government Reorganisation

Cllr Petty had previously circulated notes for Councillors. Cllr Barnes reported that the RALC working group is considering the potential development of Neighbourhood Area Committees as part of future arrangements. Cllr Petty advised that she is unable to attend further meetings; Cllr Todd of Robertsbridge Parish Council may attend in her place. Cllr Barnes confirmed that all proposals remain uncertain pending a final decision from central government.

10. Himalayan Balsam

See Item 1.

11. Deer Management

Cllr Lloyd presented a proposal for BPC to adopt an information-based approach to deer management, which was unanimously supported. Cllr Oxenford requested minor clarifications to aid residents' understanding. Cllr Lloyd will revise the material for Cllr Blench to include in the Welcome Pack and requested access from Cllr Wedmore to upload the information to the village website. **RESOLVED:** To adopt the proposal as presented and to maintain a neutral council position given the diversity of public views on deer management.

Action – Cllrs Blench, Lloyd and Wedmore.

12. Community and Business Development

12.1. Reports on the following areas by councillors (see website minutes attachments):

- 12.1.1.** Broadband and Website (AW) – Cllr Wedmore had previously circulated a report to councillors.
- 12.1.2.** RALC (CC) – Cllr Petty detailed attendance at the recent RALC meeting. Keith Robertson was elected as Chair, which Cllr Petty noted as a positive appointment. The Chair of Brede Parish Council was elected as Vice Chair, and Cllr Todd has joined the Executive Committee.
- 12.1.3.** Crime, anti-social behaviour, police relationships (CC) - Cllr Croft detailed a recent increase in truck thefts and that rural crime typically increases in the lead-up to Christmas. The Local Policing Team will be holding a drop-in session at Brightling Village Hall on 12th December for residents to meet officers and raise concerns. Councillors also noted that future events are expected to rotate between neighbouring parishes.
- 12.1.4.** Defibrillators, Refuse Collection and Utilities (CC). All defibrillators were reported to be in good working order by Cllr Croft. Councillors noted a recent pattern of frequent short power cuts in the parish. The Clerk was requested to contact UK Power Networks to seek an update. **Action - Clerk**
- 12.1.5.** Environment Policy & Bio-Diversity (KB and AW). Cllr Blench had previously circulated a report to councillors. It was unanimously **RESOLVED** that the Council will work towards developing a parish lighting policy. **Action – Cllr Blench**
- 12.1.6.** Deer Management (IL) – see Item 11.
- 12.1.7.** Footpaths and Bridleways. (KB and JO). Detailed in Cllr Blench's report.
- 12.1.8.** Highways, Hedges & Potholes (JP) – Cllr Petty had previously circulated a report. Cllr Kirby-Green is following up on photos of sub-standard works shared by Cllr Petty.

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- 12.1.9.** Messenger magazine (AW) – Cllr Wedmore had previously circulated a report to councillors.
- 12.1.10.** Phone Box (JP) – Cllr Petty updated the Council that resident Jane Beard is making progress with the internal refurbishments.
- 12.1.11.** Trees - Tree warden (PG) – Cllr Garbutt had previously circulated a report to councillors.
- 12.1.12.** Village Hall (JO) – Discussed under Item 7.4.
- 12.1.13.** Welcome Packs (KB) – Councillors noted that there is a new resident in Holly Cottage. Cllr Blench to share welcome pack. **Action – Cllr Blench**

13. Parish Councillors' Forum

Cllr Lloyd reported that a property on Perryman's Lane was hosting bell tents for an extended period. Councillors noted that the property lies within Burwash Parish but agreed to remain vigilant and report any suspected non-permitted activity to RDC Enforcement.

14. Items for Noting or Including on the Future Agenda

- Invitation for speaker at the Parish Assembly
- Waste bin at the bottom of the church steps
- Ratification of the Lighting Policy
- Final 2026/7 Budget

15. Remaining Planned Meetings

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

Meeting closed at 21:20

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