

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Brightling Parish Council held on Wednesday 11th March 2026 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: E. Kirby-Green (ESCC).

Also Present: Lauren Dobson (Parish Clerk).

Meeting opened at 19:31.

1. Public Forum – there were no members of the public present and no questions or comments had been received.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received and accepted from Cllr Barnes (RDC).

3. Disclosures of Interest – none

4. Additional Agenda Items

One additional item of correspondence was discussed as item 15.2

5. Adoption of Minutes

Councillors **RESOLVED** to adopt the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 12th January 2026 as a true and correct record. The minutes were duly signed by the Chairman.

6. Reports from District and County Councillors

6.1. Rother District Council (Cllr Barnes)

In his absence Cllr Barnes had provided the following written update:

6.1.1 Rother has adopted a balanced budget this year, set the council tax rate at a 2.99% increase, and achieved about nine tenths of the savings programme it set out to deliver in the current year. The Government as part of its three-year settlement got rid of most specific grants, including that for rural delivery, and chose to redistribute in favour of areas with high deprivation. In effect that meant high urban deprivation and so much of what Rother gained was offset by rural deprivation slipping under the radar. This coming year the Council's net gain roughly keeps pace with inflation, but in the next two years the additional gain is minimal and clearly inflation will add to costs. Hence at the moment, RDC anticipates further drawdowns on useable reserves in 2027/8 and 2028/9, leaving the general reserve at about £1.5 m. where the aim normally would be to keep it at about £5m.

6.1.2 The regulation 18 consultation on the Rother Local Plan finishes on 23 March and parishes surrounding Brightling are facing not only increased housing targets, but increased densities. Even so Rother will be short of its required target of 911 houses a year by more than 300 houses a year and is

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looking to make a case for an even lower figure. But it needs to have shown that it has made a serious effort to reach the target. The final plan to go before the Inspector will undergo regulation 19 Consultation in the summer.

6.1.3 The new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on which consultation ends on 11 March has been divided into two codes, one of which appears to retain all the protections for historic landscapes and other protected land, while the other undermines those protections. This has been pointed out in responses, not least from the South Downs National Park, but whether the Government will listen to those responses is far from clear. Some nine tenths of the land surface of Rother is protected.

6.1.4 Rother anticipates a decision on the creation of unitary authorities by the end of the third week in March. In terms of devolution of Assets, Rother's Audit Committee emphasised the need to take social value fully into account in evaluating Best Value.

6.2 ESCC (Cllr Kirby-Green)

Cllr Kirby-Green confirmed the ESCC election will take place on 7th May 2026 (purdah will begin 30th March) and updated the Council on the ESCC budget, attendance at a recent dark skies meeting and work on highways. After much correspondence, the drainage investigations for the upperpart of Cackle Street are due to take place between Monday 30th March and Thursday April 2nd. **See annex for Cllr Kirby-Green's full report.**

7. Finance and Governance – RFO Update

7.1. Councillors received and **RESOLVED** to adopt the following:

7.1.1. Bank reconciliations to 28/02/2026. Cllr Petty noted the balance on the current account (£395.38) was below the sum needed to meet known expenditure to year end (£658).
Action: Clerk to transfer £335 from deposit to current account.

7.1.2. Schedule of receipts and payments for the months of January and February 2026.

7.1.3. Bank statements for January and February 2026.

7.2. Income & Expenditure document as of 28/02/2026.

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

7.3.1. 2025-01-23 – Brightling Village Hall – (RETROSPECTIVE) s.137 grant **£490.00**

7.3.2. 2025-01-26 – Brightling Village Hall – (RETROSPECTIVE) s.137 grant **£10.00**

7.3.3. 2025-02-23 – Brightling Village Hall – (RETROSPECTIVE) Clerk handover **£28.00**

7.4. Annual review of Council policies and procedures:

7.4.1. Subject to a small update at 7.1 (change “a number of” to “three”) Councillors **resolved** to adopt the reviewed Financial Regulations.

7.4.2. Councillors **resolved** to adopt the reviewed Standing Orders.

7.4.3. Asset Register and Risk Assessment 25/26.

Councillors **resolved** to adopt the updated risk assessment but questioned whether finger posts should be included on the asset register as the Council does not own them, only a share of the

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maintenance costs. **Action:** Clerk to confirm position and whether inclusion on the asset register is standard practice.

7.5. Year end audit and requirements of new assertion 10

The Clerk confirmed that the end of year internal audit for 2025/26 will take place on 22/04/2026. The Clerk then outlined the requirements for the Council to be compliant with Assertion 10 of the 25/26 Accountability and Governance Annual return (AGAR) which specifically covers data and digital compliance.

Having reviewed ahead of the meeting Councillors **RESOLVED** to re-adopt the following documents:

7.5.1. Data Protection Policy

7.5.2. Freedom of Information Policy and Document Retention Scheme

7.5.4. Privacy Policy for Parish Website

and **resolved** to adopt an overarching

7.5.5. IT Policy

7.5.3. Accessibility Statement for Parish Website – Councillors discussed and resolved further work is required to confirm website complies with current web content guidelines (2.2AA). Accessibility statement will need further review / amendment to check it adequately reflects current content and the latest standards including when and how the council tests that content is accessible

Action: Clerk and Cllr Wedmore.

8. Local Government Reorganisation

8.1. Update on Asset Transfer – land at Park View.

Cllr Petty summarised the current position as outlined in the briefing note provided to Councillors ahead of the meeting.

Cllr Lloyd raised concern that the maintenance costs of the land could be substantially more than anticipated however all agreed that acquiring the land is a unique opportunity for the village to own an area of community land and prevent potentially unwanted development in the future.

Having discussed the cost implications including potential sources of additional funding Cllr Petty proposed the Council continue with the acquisition and budget for the associated costs. Cllr Lloyd seconded the motion and it was unanimously carried.

Action: Clerk to update 26/27 budget to include legal costs of transfer and agreed cost savings (cease churchyard maintenance and reduce finger post reserve).

9. Churchyard Maintenance

Cllrs **resolved** to pause funding churchyard maintenance for at least three years to help the council meet the costs of the Park View land acquisition.

Action: Clerk to write to PCC and Jon Avery with decision.

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

10.1. RR/2025/2187/LD – Lawful Development Certificate Existing, Telegraph Point, Coldharbour Farm, Battle Road, TN21 9LQ. Certificate of lawfulness for the existing use of static home (fixed to ground) as a dwelling house. The Council submitted the following objection to the proposal under delegated authority 6/2/2026.

Brightling Parish Council objects to this application. As cited in response to previous applications, this unit, together with the area of patio and decking, are incongruous in terms of size, design, materials and position within the AONB. Furthermore, the pattern of change of application between residential and business use indicates a deliberate attempt to circumvent the planning rules. Earlier enforcement orders should be upheld.

Cllr Kirby-Green agreed to follow up.

10.2. RR/2025/1172/P – Browns Oak Cottage, Brickyard Lane, Oxleys Green, Brightling TN19 7DL. Proposed riding arena for private use only with access track to the paddocks plus associated new and improved entrance to Browns Oak Cottage and biodiversity enhancements. **Application withdrawn 23/02/2026.**

10.3. Enforcements – CASE: ENF/240/23/BRI Address: Browns Oak Farm cottage. Complaint: Erection of conservatory without planning permission. **Action: NFA No Further Action**

10.4. CASE: ENF/5/23/BRI Address: 1 Grants Cottages. Complaint: Erection of stable without planning permission. **Action: Compliance visit following appeal decision, site to be monitored.** Should be conservatory not stable.

10.5. Rother District Council draft Local Plan

10.5.1 After discussion Councillors resolved to submit two comments in response to the consultation document.

The first a response to Q8 in support of the broader development strategy but recording concern for the potential detrimental impact on the High Weald National Landscape as follows:

Whilst generally supporting the Overall Development Strategy, concern remains for adequate protection of the High Weald National Landscape. The NPPF confirms that major development in National Landscapes should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. This draft states 'the need for housing, including affordable housing in sustainable locations, within the district could potentially be an exceptional circumstance that could allow for a major development within the HWNL.'. This opens the door for inappropriate large-scale building in rural areas. Development in and around villages should be limited to small clusters of sensitively-designed, social and affordable housing for young families, together with small units for the elderly. The aim should be the viability of multi-generational village communities.

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The second comment an objection to Q64 the proposal to use the land adjacent to Fir Tree cottage, Netherfield Hill as a permanent gypsy, traveller and travelling people site. Comment agreed as follows:

GYP4: Retrospective, temporary permission was granted for this site solely on the basis that the short-term needs of the residents should be met. The site is not in a sustainable location and contravenes numerous policies relating to development within the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL). Rother District Council commented in relation to the RR/2025/1015/P application "The residential use of this site is not considered suitable on a permanent basis in this location due to harm it causes to the landscape and the scenic beauty of the HWNL.

Action: Clerk to submit comments ahead of deadline.

11. Parish Assembly 2026 – 8th April

Cllrs discussed and resolved the following:

- 11.1. Cllr Lloyd will partner with local group 'Soil Craft' to speak on the subject of food composting.
- 11.2. Updated signs to go up a week in advance. **Action:** Clerk and Cllr Petty
- 11.3. The same village organisations as last year to be asked to provide reports, Church warden to be invited to speak. **Action:** Clerk
- 11.4. All **Councillors** to provide a plate of refreshments, **Clerk** to organise drinks and displays.

12. Dark Skies

- 12.1. Ahead of the meeting, Councillor Blench had circulated a draft dark skies and light management policy. Councillor Lloyd had also shared a draft pre-application to the International Dark Skies Association (IDSA). Following a brief discussion Cllr Blench proposed the Council adopt the dark skies policy, Cllr Lloyd seconded and the motion was carried (7:0 in support). Councillors also resolved to submit the pre-application to the IDSA before the end of March. **Action:** Cllr Lloyd
Cllr Garbutt reported increased lighting at Sugar Loaf yard recently. It was agreed to monitor.

13. Annual litter pick

- 13.1. Cllr Oxenford outlined arrangements for litter pick to be held 21st March 2026. Councillors agreed enough equipment was available but volunteers should be encouraged to bring their own gloves.

14. Community and Business Development

- 14.1. Reports on the following areas by councillors:
 - 14.1.3. **Broadband and Website (AW)** – report shared. Nothing to add.
 - 14.1.4. **RALC (CC)** – Cllr Croft no meeting since last BPC meeting – **Action:** Clerk to find out next meeting.
 - 14.1.5. **Crime, anti-social behaviour, police relationships (CC)** – Cllr Croft summarised the information in her report. Anyone with an interest is invited to a meeting with the British Horse

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Society and Police on 16th May. Reminder to all to keep sheds locked and report anything suspicious or criminal activity.

- 14.1.6. Defibrillators, Refuse Collection and Utilities (CC)** - Cllr Croft reported some properties have not yet received new food waste collecting bins.
- 14.1.7. Environment Policy & Bio-Diversity (KB)** – report shared. Cllr Blench reported that the British Gypsum mine has commissioned a dark skies survey which is positive. However, the Brightling Environmental Group has struggled to move forward on issues relating to the factory site at Mountfield. **Action:** Clerk to add British Gypsum Mountfield site to agenda for next meeting.
- 14.1.8. Deer Management (IL)** – report shared. Nothing to add.
- 14.1.9. Footpaths and Bridleways. (KB and JO)** – report shared. Two walks planned 26th April 2pm wildflower identification. 6th July 6pm flower and insect count.
- 14.1.10. Highways, Hedges & Potholes (JP)** – report shared. Cllr Petty reported ESCC has a new highways steward. Drain investigation at Cackle Street will take place 30th March to 2nd April. More fly tipping of tyres in Kent Lane – logged by a resident. AW has also reported and got case closed duplicate. Cllr Petty had reported fly-tipping behind the hedge at the lay-by between Darwell car park and Darwell crossroads. Clarification is being sought as to whether the land is privately owned. RDC has agreed to remove the rubbish on this occasion.
- 14.1.11. Messenger magazine (AW)** – Clerk will be added to the list for a postal copy.
- 14.1.12. Phone Box (JP)** – Cllr Petty expressed thanks to Jane Beard for her hard work on the boards. Dark skies information and some history of the street will be displayed. Cllrs discussed concern regarding live electricity connection and resolved to get the connection safely capped. **Action:** Cllr Wedmore to investigate electricity connection.
- 14.1.13. Trees - Tree warden (PG)** – see latest report from Doug Edworthy in the messenger.
- 14.1.14. Village Hall (JO)** – Cllr Oxenford reported the recent quiz was a huge success and raised £905.
- 14.1.15. Welcome Packs (KB)** – Cllrs discussed size of type print. **Action:** Cllr Blench to try and increase.
- 14.1.16. Clerk correspondence** – Email received from a Ukrainian national seeking help finding a sponsor in the Brightling area. **Action:** Cllr Lloyd to liaise with a contact who has helped place people previously.

15. Parish Councillors' Forum

Cllr Oxenford reported the bin at the bottom of the church steps has been removed. The PC noticeboard needs some maintenance over the summer. **Action:** Cllr Petty.

New farm shop has opened and has a lot to offer – the Council wishes them well.

16. Items for Noting or Including on the Future Agenda

Factory site at Mountfield (see 14.1.7)

17. Remaining Planned Meetings

The next meeting will be on 13th May 2026 and will be the AGM. Further meetings are scheduled for
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15 July 9 September 11 November
2027 13 January 10 March 12 May

Meeting closed at 21.05

Signed: _____ (Chairman)

Date:

DRAFT

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Annex - ESCC report to Brightling Parish Council on 11th March 2026

Budget

Full Council agreed the budget on 10th February. We have requested approval from Government to borrow £70 million to allow us to balance the budget. If we had to balance with council tax alone we would have to increase by 19% this year. Despite having made savings of £156 million since 2010 and potentially agreeing a further £3.5million of savings this year the costs of local government have rocketed. Adult Social Care has increased by 40% since 22/23 and Children's Services by 54%. Increases to employment costs as well as inflation have put further pressure on the budget. In addition, the Fair Funding Review has resulted in a decrease of £12.6 million funding received from central government. This loss of funding is driven by several key factors in the new funding methodology: the impact of council tax equalisation; the absence of a metric that reflects the significant proportion of residents aged over 85; the limitations of using median wages as a proxy for the labour costs borne by the Council; and the Government's decision, announced with the Policy Statement, that rurality was to be removed as a factor from all but the ASC needs formulae. This is compounded by the continuation of the Recovery Grant (which has been top-sliced from the overall quantum to be paid to qualifying authorities). These changes fail to capture the true cost pressures in delivering statutory services in a county with high social care demand and a dispersed population, with limited opportunities to raise income locally.

As a result the ESCC council tax increase for the forthcoming year will be 2.99% plus the adult social care precept of 2%.

Governance

The authority's external auditor (Grant Thornton) has provided an assessment of the authority's arrangements for Financial Sustainability, Governance and Improving Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness in the use of its resources. It is pleasing to be able to report that, given the financial challenges, GT have not identified any significant weaknesses in the Council's response to these challenges, with a green rating in terms of Governance arrangements and for Improving Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness.

The full report can be found [here](#)

Sussex Councils continue to create new Combined County Authority to unlock investment

East Sussex County Council, Brighton & Hove City Council and West Sussex County Council are reaffirming their commitment to devolution for Sussex.

The Cabinet meetings taking place at each local authority over the next few weeks follow confirmation from Government that the Sussex & Brighton Combined County Authority will be created as planned this May and releases £1.14 billion of additional investment into Sussex over the coming years.

This has followed confirmation from Government that while mayoral elections may have been delayed, devolution proceeds apace and Ministers remain committed to

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delivering significant powers and funding for the region.

Work to establish the new authority is already underway and partners across Sussex have been involved in discussions that will help shape the opportunities that devolution will bring to the region and the priorities for a new Sussex & Brighton Combined County Authority.

The three councils will continue to work closely to finalise arrangements and prepare for the expected launch of the Sussex & Brighton Combined County Authorities in the spring of 2026.

More information can be found [here](#)

Elections

County Council elections will be going ahead! The Government has u-turned on its previous decision to delay for a further year because of LGR. Therefore there will be elections to the existing County Council on 7th May. Unless the Government decides to delay LGR there will be elections to the new Unitary Authority in May 2027.

Highways

The roads are in a dreadful state as a result of the recent wet weather. Repairs are just not holding up and I am in constant dialogue with the Highways team around our worst areas.

After much correspondence on the matter the drainage investigations for the upper part of Cackle Street are due to take place between Monday 30th March and Thursday April 2nd.

Dark Skies

I attended the recent meeting which the local Dark Skies groups held with our MP Kieran Mullan where I explained that ESCC will be reviewing their lighting policy in the Spring and will be engaging with all the local groups in the High Weald.

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