

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2026

It has been another busy year for Brightling Parish Council. We have had the good fortune to be joined by Lauren as Clerk. Lauren has had a busy start and is managing the council's affairs with great competence.

Parish council admin has become increasingly complex over recent years: we now have to comply with policies governing risk assessment, data protection, document retention, freedom of information, website accessibility - to name just a few. And then there are also financial rules and regulations. So, it is important we have a competent clerk to keep on top of matters and Lauren is doing just that.

Add to that, the importance of keeping abreast of local and national proposals that might affect us all. In the last year we have had:

- Proposed Local Government Changes:

This will bring the whole of Sussex under one Strategic Mayoral Authority from May 2028. The changes will also abolish the current two-tier county and district layers of government and replace them with one single Unitary Authority for East Sussex. A final decision on the geographical footprint of the new East Sussex Authority is due after the local Government elections at the end of May. Whether there will be any effect on the rôles of town and parish councils is as yet unclear. Current thinking is that Neighbourhood Area Committees will be established. These will act as a liaison between town and parish councils, community stakeholders and the new Unitary Authority.

- Rother's Draft Local Plan and Housing Strategy:

This sets out how Rother district could develop and change up until 2042. It includes plans for industrial sites, houses and infrastructure. Despite the proposed changes in local government mentioned, the Rother District Council is still committed to finalising the plan before transition.

Under the current proposed plan, Brightling has not been allocated any housing requirement, and there is only one site for small industrial development at Coldharbour Farm on the B2096.

- Government's proposed National Scheme of Delegation:

This will potentially limit the scrutiny of local planning authorities and deny the potential for town and parish councils to object.

So, there has been quite a lot going on behind the scenes. Parish councils are invited to respond to consultation documents relating to such proposals. Brightling usually does.

The Parish Council has also been overseeing more routine business:

- Liaising with the rural crime team to spread news of criminal activity and arranging public meetings with the community speedwatch officer.
- Looking after the village assets - the de-fibrillators, the dog poo bin, and, thanks to some very generous community involvement by Jamie Smith, Jamie French and Jane Beard, the newly restored phone box.
- Making sure the utilities are functioning and bins get emptied.
- Ensuring the fire hydrants are up to standard.
- Looking after footpaths, bridleways and arranging village walks.
- Ensuring we have an up-to-date Emergency and Resilience Plan.
- Liaising with the Forestry Commission and producing information about deer management.
- Promoting wildlife verges, dark skies and protecting our environment courtesy of our enthusiastic and active Brightling Environmental 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 planning applications (a list of the year's planning applications and enforcement orders is available to view)
- Reporting potholes, blocked drains, worn road markings (a Highways Report is available separately)
- Ensuring good broadband service is available and keeping locals updated on developments on, for instance, digital phone switchover

Finally, an update relating to the land adjacent to Park View. Residents will remember that last summer, the Parish Council announced that as part of the Local Government Reorganisation, Rother District Council were carrying out a

programme of Asset Devolution. As part of this, we were invited to submit an Expression of Interest in acquiring the plot of land adjacent to Park View. We duly carried out a village-wide survey to judge interest. The result was overwhelmingly in favour of attempting to acquire the plot in order to protect it from unwanted development and preserve it for community benefit. The Parish Council is expecting to hear imminently whether we have been successful, and will make an announcement in due course.