

Minutes of the **Annual Meeting of Brightling Parish Council**  
held on **Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2026** at **7.30p.m.** in Brightling Village Hall

**Parish Councillors Present:** Judy Petty, Andrew Wedmore, Caroline Croft, Isabel Lloyd, Jane Oxenford, Philip Garbutt and Katrina Blench.

**District and County Councillors:** John Barnes, RDC

**Also present:** Lauren Dobson (Clerk) and one member of the public.

*The meeting opened at 19:42*

**1. Election of a Chairperson for 26/27 Council year**

Cllr Blench proposed Cllr Petty for the role of Chair for the ensuing 12months. This was seconded by Cllr Oxenford and unanimously agreed. Cllr Petty accepted and signed the declaration of acceptance of office.

**2. Election of Vice – Chairperson for 26/27 Council Year**

Cllr Petty proposed Cllr Croft for the role of vice chair for the ensuing 12months. This was seconded by Cllr Blench and unanimously agreed. Cllr Croft accepted and signed a declaration of acceptance of office.

**3. Summons to attend meetings** – Councillors completed and signed a consent form agreeing to receive meeting summons by email.

**4. Public Forum** – a member of the public commented that the village had been very lucky to get the white lines on Willingford lane and asked whether the council had met with the current ESCC highways officer. JP reported that ESCC Highway's description of procedure often bears no relation to what happens in reality. The member of the public also commented that he had hoped to see new ESCC councillor, Mr Mark Ashdown, at the meeting. Finally, he expressed huge thanks to all those involved with the messenger magazine, which he considered an excellent quality publication.

**5. Apologies for Absence** – Apologies had been received from Councillor Kirby Green (RDC) who was unable to attend due to a broken ankle.

**6. Disclosures of Interest**

None were declared.

**7. Additional Agenda Items**

See item 23.

## **8. Adoption of Minutes**

Subject to an amendment to item 10.4 following a request for accuracy from a resident, Councillors resolved to adopt the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2026 as a true and accurate record.

## **9. Reports from District and County Councillors**

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

- a. Following the ESCC elections no single party has a majority but it is expected Reform, as the largest party, will be asked to form the administration. BPC expressed sincere thanks to outgoing ESCC Cllr Eleanor Kirby-Green, particularly for her efforts on behalf of Brightling with regards highways matters.
- b. The regulation 19 consultation on the local plan will go out no later than September.
- c. RDC has now disposed of all public WCs.
- d. The war is causing concern with regards prices, RDC audit committee is watching this key risk carefully.
- e. Central government is consulting residents of Peacehaven and westwards regarding the planned Local Government Reorganisation and introduction of a single unitary. These areas are likely to be incorporated into Brighton and Hove, leaving half a million residents in the East Sussex unitary. Unitary elections are expected next year alongside mayoral elections.

## **10. Allocation of responsibilities for the year ahead** – Councillors reviewed current arrangements and resolved to keep appointments to external bodies and lead responsibilities unchanged for the 26/27 year:

**Rother Association of Local Councils (RALC):** Cllr Croft

**Defibrillators, Utilities and Crime Liaison:** Cllr Croft

**Deer Management:** Cllr Lloyd

**Environment and biodiversity:** Cllrs Blench, Lloyd and Wedmore

**Footpaths and Rights of Way:** Cllr Blench and Cllr Oxenford

**Messenger Magazine:** Cllr Wedmore

**Highways:** Cllr Petty

**Phone box:** Cllr Petty

**Planning:** all councillors

**Refuse collections:** Cllr Croft

**Village Hall:** Cllr Oxenford

**Trees:** Cllr Garbutt

**Website Oversight and broadband:** Cllr Wedmore

**Welcome Pack Coordination:** Cllr Blench

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

**11.1.** Councillors received and **resolved** to adopt the following documents:

**11.1.1.** bank reconciliations to 30/04/2026

**11.1.2.** schedule of receipts and payments for the months of March and April 2026.

**11.1.3.** Unity Trust bank statements for March and April 2026.

**11.2.** Councillors **resolved** to approve payment of the following invoices

- 11.2.1.** **2026-04-15** -- (RETROSPECTIVE) Brightling Village Hall March PC meeting **£18.75**
- 11.2.2.** **2026-04-15** -- (RETROSPECTIVE) RDC 26/27 dog bin emptying **£197.60**
- 11.2.3.** **2026-04-15** -- (RETROSPECTIVE) Parish Online .gov.uk email package 26/27 **£214.80**
- 11.2.4.** **Clerk reimbursement** - labels for Annual assembly signs **£12.00**
- 11.2.5.** **Clerk reimbursement** – drinks for Annual assembly **£104.69**
- 11.2.6.** **ESALC Ltd** – NALC and ESALC subscriptions 26/27 **£126.53**
- 11.2.7.** **Mulberry local authority services Ltd** – Provision of internal audit for 25/26 **£436.50**
- 11.2.8.** **Brightling Village Hall** – Annual Assembly meeting hall and projector hire **£45.00**

**11.3.** Review of Council policies and procedures:

**11.3.1.** Councillors reviewed and resolved to re-adopt the Code of Conduct without amendment.

**11.3.2.** The Clerk explained that the Council's insurance policy is due for renewal at the end of May. The current insurer (Zurich) has quoted £264 for the same level of cover (an increase of 11% on last year). Two other companies were approached, one didn't respond and the other stated the Zurich quote was very competitive and they would be unable to match. Councillors resolved to accept the Zurich quote and renew the policy for another year. **Action:** Clerk to arrange.

**11.3.3.** Asset register and website accessibility – update. The clerk reported that the internal auditor recommended she approach the Council's website provider and ask them to confirm the accessibility requirements of assertion 10 are being met.

**Action:** Clerk.

Following the March meeting the Clerk confirmed inclusion of fingerposts on an asset register is standard practice. For the 25/26 year the new post at Twelve Oaks has been added and all other village fingerposts will be included in the asset register for the coming financial year. It was suggested that residents living near a post be asked to 'caretake' their local sign, perhaps keeping it clean and periodically checking if it needs any maintenance. Cllr Petty to approach residents to caretake the following fingerposts:

- a. Oxley's Green
- b. Twelve Oaks
- c. Triangle at stable gates / Rectory Hill
- d. Hollingrove
- e. Long Reach
- f. Darwell
- g. Satcey's Corner
- h. Triangle at the Mount.

All posts are currently considered to be in good order.

**Action:** Clerk and Cllr Petty.

**11.4.** Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) 2025/26

- 11.4.1.** Councillors reviewed the Internal Auditor's report and recommendations and resolved to approve the internal audit report and confirm the effectiveness of internal control measures. **Action:** Clerk to take forward recommendations.
- 11.4.2.** Councillors reviewed and agreed each of the assertions in The Annual Governance Statement (Section 1). The statement was signed by the Chairman and Clerk.
- 11.4.3.** Councillors reviewed and approved The Accounting Statement (Section 2) as presented by the RFO. The statement was signed by the Chairman.
- 11.4.4.** Councillors resolved that the parish council continues to meet the criteria to submit a Certificate of Exemption to the external auditor and approved the signing of Form 2 by the Chairman and RFO.
- 11.4.5.** The Clerk suggested dates for the inspection period and publication of the Unaudited Annual Governance and Accountability return and Notice of Public Electors' Rights. Councillors resolved to agree the inspection period dates as suggested. The notice and AGAR will be published 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2026 with the inspection period running from Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June to Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> July 2026. **Action:** Clerk
- 11.4.6.** Having reviewed the end of year balance sheet and accounting statement against budget Councillors resolved to accept the 2025/26 year end statement and noted any significant variances.
- 11.5** Internal audit arrangements 2026/27
- 11.5.1.** Councillors considered a fixed price quote received from existing internal auditor Mulberry Local authority services Ltd for the 26/27 financial year and resolved to obtain comparable prices before accepting. **Action:** Clerk

## 12. Local Government Reorganisation

- 12.1.** Update on Asset Transfer – land at Park View. The land transfer is still expected to go ahead but the initial timeframe discussed with Rother DC looks less likely. Cllr Barnes agreed to chase timescale. **Action:** Cllr Barnes

## 13. War Memorial

- 13.1.** Councillors considered a recent approach from the War Memorials Trust that stated the inscriptions on the memorial may be difficult to read and some repointing may be needed. All agreed the memorial should look respected and cared for and one side is quite damaged. Names should be visible and the PC should take responsibility if there isn't another custodian. JP understands the RDC conservation officer may confirm custodianship. It was resolved the next steps would be to approach the PCC, get a specification for what needs doing and obtain some quotes. **Action:** Clerk to take forward.

## 14. Drain cover at Long Reach, Brightling

- 14.1.** Councillors considered ESCC suggestion of bollards in response to the PC's request for a sign or marker on the drain cover at Long Reach. The cover has been damaged again recently

but ESCC confirms a sign isn't permissible. The highways team suggested a heightened kerb might be an option but the traffic safety team considered this could be a trip hazard. The PC could put bollards in place, but Councillors considered this would also cause safety issues. AW suggested the drain cover might be the wrong weight for local vehicles such as tractors and may need to be more robust. **Action:** JP to look at size / number / weight limit and request replacement cover if found to be low.

## 15. RDC bin

**15.1.** Since the bin was removed from the church steps there has been no litter left so all agreed not having a bin was the best option. **Action:** Clerk to contact Andrew Mead at Rother DC to see if replacement bin can be placed at Darwell wood car park instead in lieu of the Darwell carpark dog waste bin the emptying of which is currently paid for by BPC.

## 16. British Gypsum Mountfield site

**16.1.** Cllr Blench had circulated a draft letter for Council consideration. The letter seeks a meeting with British Gypsum regarding light pollution and the dark skies initiative and is drafted jointly from Brightling PC, Mountfield PC and Salehurst and Robertsbridge PC. Councillors resolved the letter should be sent as drafted. **Action:** Cllr Blench

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

**17.1 Planning** – the following applications / updated had been received since the March meeting. RR/2026/0336/LBC Long Reach Farm, The Street, Brightling, Robertsbridge, East Sussex, TN32 5HJ Development application: Internal alterations and addition of single window on first floor of North elevation.

Received 7/4/26 Clerk submitted the following response under delegated authority “*Brightling Parish Council has no objection with this application*”.

**17.2**RR/2025/2014/HOU 2, PARK VIEW Rectory Hill, Brightling, Robertsbridge, East Sussex, TN32 5HE Proposed single storey rear extension including internal alterations. **Approved with conditions.**

**17.3 Enforcements**– CASE: ENF/5/23/BRI Address: 1 Grants Cottages. The conservatory has now been removed and will be replaced with an extension as per the planning permission subsequently granted.

**17.4 Appeal decision** - APP/U1430/C/24/3343279 & APP/U1430/C/24/3343276 - Land to the west of Wyland wood, TN32 5ET. Appeal A and B – the appeal is dismissed and the **enforcement notice upheld**. Appeal C and D – it is directed that the enforcement notice is varied by extending the period from four to nine months. Subject to this variation the appeals are dismissed and the **enforcement notice is upheld**.

Councillors discussed the appeal decision and whether camping as part of organised events is permissible under the existing permitted development or if further enforcement should be sought. Cllr Barnes confirmed Cllr Kirby Green is having a meeting with planning officers in June so should get an update for the next meeting.

## 18. Parish Assembly 2026 Review and agree a date for 2027

**18.1.** JP expressed thanks to Cllr Lloyd and Soil Craft for their presentations. All agreed number of attendees was a little disappointing. KB suggested reps from each organisation come and speak at the meeting to bring more people in. AW suggested Cllrs try and attend other village assemblies to see how others approach it. **Action:** Clerk to circulate any local assembly dates remaining this year. Councillors resolved the date for the next village assembly will be 14<sup>th</sup> April 2027.

## 19. RALC Feedback

**19.1.** Cllr Croft provided feedback from the recent RALC meeting. Use of AI, including the environmental implications, is being discussed at RALC and NALC – RDC to deliver a presentation which will be helpful. RALC is considering how it can work towards faster communications, making it easier to gather views and raise a collective response. Google forms and an updated website are in the pipeline so issues arising between working party meetings can be communicated. These will be in place before the unitary comes in. RALC wants to push back on the proposed £27m allocated for highways as this isn't considered enough. RALC is also trying to improve scrutiny and get ESALC and unitary members together to get views.

## 20. Annual litter pick

**20.1.** Cllr Oxenford reported that enough people came to the litter pick to cover all village areas. It was noted the road between the swan and Darwell hole is very dangerous in fog. Everyone who took part reported much less litter than normal but it is still starting to come back. JP thanked Cllr Oxenford for organising and all the volunteers for giving their time.

## 21. Community and Business Development

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

**21.1.1.** Broadband and Website / Environment (AW) – AW reminded the council that the website is currently hosted free by RDC and it will be important to keep this in mind as the new unitary evolves. **Action:** Cllr Barnes to consider best time to raise with RDC.

A round reservoir circular path could be established if it can be proved it is already being used as a footpath. A resident has started gathering information but it will be a big task. Brightling Environmental Group (BEG) will discuss at its next meeting. An ongoing legal dispute in the area has been cited by Southern water when it has previously been approached on the subject. JB suggested BEG check the statutory duties of a water company in terms of physical activity provision.

**21.1.2.** RALC (CC) – see item 19.

**21.1.3.** Crime, anti-social behaviour, police relationships (CC) – Cllr Croft reported there is currently lots of crime on farms, ISUZU trucks and similar are very stealable. Quad bikes have also been reported stolen and a dog was stolen in Goudhurst. No new date for the re-arranged horse road safety meeting yet.

**21.1.4.** Defibrillators, Refuse Collection and Utilities (CC) – Cllr Croft recently checked and everything was in order, the online circuit account has been updated.

- 21.1.5.** Environment Policy & Bio-Diversity (KB and AW) – Himalayn balsam will be mentioned in the Messenger next month.
- 21.1.6.** Deer Management (IL) – nothing to report
- 21.1.7.** Dark skies (KB and IL) – the preapplication to the International Dark Skies Association (IDSA) has been approved. Unfortunately, an application can't be made by a group of parish councils each has to apply separately. The cost will be £250 to join and £150 every two years. BEG hopes to fundraise towards the payments but would also like the PC to consider funding. **Action** – request for funding to be added to the next agenda.
- 21.1.8.** Footpaths and Bridleways. (KB and JO) – more footpath issues have been logged recently than usual, not sure who is raising but thank you. Coral root has been spotted locally recently. There will be an evening walk on 8<sup>th</sup> July.
- 21.1.9.** Highways, Hedges & Potholes (JP) – nothing to add to report. White lines at Darwell haven't been done but some have been added at Long Reach - there appears to be a slightly confused approach to highways at the moment.
- 21.1.10.** Messenger magazine (AW) – nothing to add to report
- 21.1.11.** Phone Box (JP) – AW will look at electricity supply. Jane Beard is putting information boards up. KB will speak to Jane to offer help.
- 21.1.12.** Trees - Tree warden (PG) – nothing to report.
- 21.1.13.** Village Hall (JO) – PG reported two successful large grant applications (to the national lottery community fund for £20k plus a £9k grant) plus an anonymous donation for £1014, crowd funder of £930 plus gift aid of £230 means the village hall can now get quotations for the solar panels and new roof. The VH committee is hoping work will begin late summer. The PC offered congratulations to all involved.
- 21.1.14.** Welcome Packs (KB) - nothing to report
- 22. Clerk Correspondence** – contact from a resident requesting correction to the March minutes for item 17.3.
- 23. Parish Councillors Forum – Cllr Lloyd has noticed** strong smells of chlorine in the water at the moment. It has also mentioned on the Burwash facebook page and Burwash Weald is also having issues. The potent smell suggests something may have gone wrong. CC also reported it. PG also reported a notice to the hall about flushing of pipes. **Action:** Clerk to find a contact south east water.

**24. Items for Noting or Including on a future Agenda** – funding request for dark skies registration.

## **25. Remaining Planned Meetings**

15<sup>th</sup> July, 9<sup>th</sup> September, 11<sup>th</sup> November, 13<sup>th</sup> January 2027, 10<sup>th</sup> March, 12<sup>th</sup> May (AGM)

*Meeting closed 21.26*