

Minutes of the meeting of **Brightling Parish Council**
held on **Wednesday 15th July 2026** at **7.30p.m.** in Brightling Village Hall

In attendance: Councillors Judy Petty (Chairman), Andrew Wedmore, Caroline Croft, Katrina Blench, Jane Oxenford, Philip Garbutt and Isabel Lloyd.

District and County Councillors: John Barnes (RDC), Mark Ashdown (ESCC)

Also present: Lauren Dobson (Clerk) and one member of the public joined at 8.23pm.

1. Public Forum – an opportunity for members of the public to comment or ask questions to the Council on item on *this* agenda. There were no questions.

2. Apologies for Absence – Apologies had been received from RDC Cllr Kirby-Green.

3. Disclosures of Interest

*To receive any disclosure by Members of personal and disclosable pecuniary interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the Member regards the personal interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct. **None.***

4. Additional Agenda Items

No additional agenda items had been received.

5. Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the correction of two typos under item 11.3.3 Councillors resolved to adopt the minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 13th May 2026 and the Chairman duly signed as an accurate record.

6. Reports from District and County Councillors

East Sussex County Cllr Mark Ashdown thanked the PC for the invite. He reported the recent Full Council meeting of ESCC covered a range of topics including Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), tips and free bus passes for veterans. Cllr Ashdown explained as a Member of the scrutiny committee he will initially focus on highways – in particular ESCC's contract with Balfour Beatty. He has spent time with several highways stewards and become frustrated that there appear to be insufficient funds to do the work required. Currently waiting for further disclosure from the contractor on the current contract. To alleviate pressure on the service, Cllr Ashdown is considering setting up a small volunteer organisation for small street work jobs, subject to appropriate insurance and licencing and will establish interest from PCs in the coming weeks.

Cllr Lloyd asked what further information was awaited on the Balfour Beatty contract. Cllr Ashdown explained there are 7 volumes at least of the contract, but elected Members are yet to see any financial information to understand who is working on what and how much is being paid, the non-disclosure to elected Members is causing much frustration.

Cllr Petty suggested the operation of a voluntary 'small job' task force would be unlikely to work well in small parishes like Brightling.

RDC Cllr Barnes commented that he was on a previous scrutiny committee that argued to bring the highways contract back in house, considering it a fundamental error putting stewards in the employ of an external company and not the council. Cllr Barnes then gave his own report. The main focus at RDC is waiting for central Government's announcement on the future shape of the unitary authority

which is expected this week. RDC's outturn and audit are going well, a crucial figure to note is that reserves are down to below a million which puts the council on a red risk alert and makes devolvment of any services all the more important.

Two big business pieces currently under discussion at RDC:

- i. the change in constitution to reflect HMG decision to remove elected Members from the planning process for anything except applications with more than 9 houses. One suggestion is applications referred to committee be decided by an officer and a Member, perhaps a local ward member working with an officer. If BPC agrees this is a sensible suggestion, then JB suggested the Council might consider writing to democratic services.
- ii. Local planning enforcement policy is currently under review by scrutiny committee with the decision deferred to allow an informal consultation with town and parish councils (see item 12.4). A task and finish group has been reconstituted to meet late in August to consider any PC representations.

7. Finance and Governance

7.1. Councillors resolved to approve the following documents:

- 7.1.1. bank reconciliations to 30/06/2026
- 7.1.2. schedule of receipts and payments for the months of May and June 2026 and Q1 review of actual spend against budget.
- 7.1.3. Unity Trust bank statements for May and June 2026.

7.2. Councillors resolved to approve payment of the following invoices which were then checked and signed by two signatories (JP and CC).

- 7.2.1. **2026-05-27 – (RETROSPECTIVE) Zurich Insurance premium for 26/27 £264.00**
- 7.2.2. **2026-06-12 – (RETROSPECTIVE) BVH Inv.26033 May PC meeting £20.80**

7.3. Internal audit arrangements 2026/27

- 7.3.1. Councillors considered two comparable internal auditor quotes for 26/27 and resolved to instruct Mulberry & Co for another year then review.

7.4. To consider making a contribution to the cost of Brightling Environmental Group's application to the International Dark Skies Association (IDSA). Item deferred to September meeting when further information will be available.

7.5. Clerk's Contract

- 7.5.1. Councillors resolved to move the Clerk to a permanent contract following successful completion of initial probation period. **Action:** JP to confirm in writing.
- 7.5.2. Councillors resolved to pay a voluntary employer's contribution of 3% of salary (currently £17.82 per month) into a NEST employee pension scheme for the Clerk (Clerk to pay 5% contribution, inclusive of 1% tax relief). **Action:** LD / JP to arrange.

8. **RALC meeting 8th July** – feedback on the meeting from Cllr Croft who attended via Zoom. ESALC have a new director, Martin Griffiths. The RDC local plan will remain until the new unitary is in place. Response from the local plan consultation is expected beginning of October and the revised plan will be in place from next spring until further revised by the new unitary which could take some years. Cllr Barnes expects RDC will argue with inspectors for far less houses than the 900+ currently drafted.

8.1. Update on LGR and NAC – see item 9.1.**9. Local Government Reorganisation**

9.1. Cllrs considered the RALC LGR working group's proposal to lobby for a combined NAC (Neighbourhood Area Committee) and District Association structure for local engagement under the new unitary authority. All agreed it will be important that PCs are still represented. Cllr Petty considered the RALC proposal a good starting point and proposed the PC write to support. There was some concern raised about area committees and how the suggested structure would fit into the scrutiny process / influence up stream policy within the new unitary authority. Council resolved to support the proposal in principle but suggest further consideration is needed as to how the suggested structure might fit into the unitary scrutiny process. **Action:** Clerk to feedback to RALC.

9.2. Land at Park View – Cllr Wedmore reported hearing a rumour that devolution was not going to happen. **Action:** Clerk to chase RDC again in terms of timing and grants.

10. War Memorial – as the memorial is on church land it has been agreed the responsibility lies with the PCC but the PC will support where it can. Etchingham PCC has shared its recent experience of similar works and what needs to be in place regarding faculties etc. At the Brightling flower and dog show on 18th July Annette Lloyd Thomas has generously donated a number of her books about Jack Fuller with any proceeds raised to be shared between the war memorial fund and village hall. There will also be a showing of Jane Beard's film and a talk by Alan Petty as a fundraiser in November. **Action:** Clerk to share initial quotes with PCC.

11. RDC bin – the Clerk updated the Council on recent discussions with the Forestry Commission. Permission for the bin will be required from both the Forestry Commission and British Gypsum who own some of the car park. Cllrs discussed whether the new bin will be emptied by RDC without charge **Action:** Clerk to confirm with RDC any costs associated with the new bin and chase forestry commission.

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

12.1 Planning Applications:

- i. RR/2026/2187/LDE-DN: Application for a certificate of lawfulness for the existing use of static home (fixed to the ground) as a dwelling house (**REFUSED**).
Location: Telegraph Point, Coldharbour Farm Battle Road, Dallington, Heathfield, East Sussex, TN21 9LQ. There has been nothing further reported on the ongoing enforcement. **Action:** LD to write to Head of Planning and ask for a progress report.
- ii. RR/2026/0336/LBC: Application for Listed Building Consent: internal alterations and addition of single window on first floor of North elevation (**GRANTED**).
Location: Long Reach Farmhouse, The Street, Brightling, East Sussex, TN32 5HJ
- iii. RR/2026/0684/HOU: Application for construction of a garden hobby room.
Location: Woodmans, Perryman's Lane, Brightling, TN19 7DN. *For information only as actually comes under Burwash PC.*

12.2 Enforcements – none

12.3 Council considered its response to the neighbour and local authority consultation email received from Landpod.co.uk for a proposed Certificated Site at Column Wood, Ludpit Lane, Willards Hill, TN32 5ET (maximum 5 Landpod units). Councillors discussed and resolved (6:1) to oppose the certification with Cllr Croft supporting the proposal and its benefits to the landowner. **Action:** Clerk to submit the following comment:

“Brightling PC opposes certification of this site. It is currently subject to an enforcement order, upheld at appeal, against the change of use from agriculture to leisure and recreation. It is also an area of ancient woodland which should be protected.”

Additional item added 13/07/2026

12.4 Ahead of the meeting, Councillors had considered Rother District Council’s **draft local enforcement plan**. Following a brief discussion it was agreed to submit comments for submission to RALC, coordinating responses on behalf of all town and parish councils. **Action:** Clerk to submit the following comments:

“Brightling Parish Council (BPC) considers Rother District Council’s local enforcement plan should place greater emphasis on deterrence and penalty.

- *Unauthorised developments should be acted on immediately rather than by inviting retrospective applications. This would avoid offenders ‘playing’ the system and bypass time-consuming and expensive process.*
- *Offences involving listed buildings, TPOs and environmentally sensitive areas should be subject to immediate cease and desist notices.*
- *Parish and Town Clerks should be given a coordinating role between the local council and designated enforcement officer, thus reducing the bureaucratic burden on the Department.*
- *BPC has considered the points raised by RDC Cllr John Barnes with the Head of Planning and is in general agreement.”*

13. Community and Business Development

13.1. Reports on the following areas by councillors:

- 13.1.1. Broadband and Website (AW)** – further to his written report Cllr Wedmore reported there are 25 households in Brightling that don’t have full fibre broadband. Some may be telephone only customers who will lose connection at the end of the year. The PC website is currently hosted free of charge by RDC. Previous contact for liaison has moved roles and AW keen to discuss ahead of LGR. **Action:** Cllr Wedmore to send details to Cllr Barnes for new contact.
- 13.1.2. RALC (CC)** – covered under item 8.
- 13.1.3. Crime, anti-social behaviour, police relationships (CC)** – Cllr Croft reported there have been a number of metal and cable thefts in the area recently. Residents are asked to report suspicious activities remain vigilant. General discussion about a camper van in a state of disrepair parked on a local verge. As it is off the road no further action to be taken.
- 13.1.4. Defibrillators, Refuse Collection and Utilities (CC)** – all ok however there have been lots of water outages and the power keeps flicking on and off. **Action:** Clerk to write to SE water for explanation on recent outages and to keep chasing for an area specific answer on the Chlorine, including requesting a spot check for Cllr Lloyds area.

- 13.1.5. Environment Policy & Bio-Diversity** (KB and AW) – see report. IL, KB and AW to consider what could be done through the Brightling Environmental Group towards the recently launched local nature recovery strategy. Volunteer working group taken some action against himalayan balsam but need to approach British Gypsum to trim again underneath the conveyor belt **Action:** Clerk to contact BG (check Sam's previous mails). Landowners also to be contacted to see if they will take on managing HB on their land. **Action:** Cllr Blench
- 13.1.6. Deer Management** (IL) – see report
- 13.1.7. Dark skies** (KB and IL) – see report
- 13.1.8. Footpaths and Bridleways.** (KB and JO) – nothing to add to report
- 13.1.9. Highways, Hedges & Potholes** (JP) – Cllr Petty reported that ESCC's decision to remove the fingerpost match funding scheme was discussed at the recent RALC chairs forum. Some confusion over the difference between owned and adopted fingerposts. **Action:** Clerk to check with Zurich to see if Brightling posts are / can be insured for accidental damage. It was suggested the Council write to ESCC stating that BPC will take full responsibility for the maintenance of all fingerposts in the village (rather than have them replaced with metal signs). **Action:** Cllr Ashdown agreed to speak to the officer at ESCC.
- 13.1.10. Messenger magazine** (AW) – nothing to add.
- 13.1.11. Phone Box** (JP) – nothing to report
- 13.1.12. Trees** - Tree warden (PG) – nothing to report
- 13.1.13. Village Hall** (JO / PG) – Cllr Garbutt reported delays in the arrival of some materials needed to start the roof but the scaffolding will go up 6th August and work due to start 7th August. The work is scheduled to take 7-10 days then the solar installers will finish the job before the end of August. Roofers are a local company based in Etchingham.
- 13.1.14. Welcome Packs** (KB) – no update

- 14. Clerk Correspondence** – LD reported a recent email from a resident asking the Council to look at speed reduction in the village following the loss of her cat. Unfortunately, the issue has been looked at previously and would be very difficult to achieve. **Action:** Clerk to write to the resident expressing the Council's sympathy and explaining the situation with regards speed.

The Council had also received an invite to the Rother Annual Parish Conference on 21st October 2026. **Action:** Clerk to circulate details.

- 15. Parish Councillors Forum** – General discussion about how to improve attendance at the annual village assembly. Cllr Wedmore recently attended Staplecross village assembly to compare. It was very well attended with the formal part of the meeting lasting about 20mins before a very relaxed general gathering. All the village organisation reports were put into one document, edited and delivered to every house in the parish with an invitation before the event. There was a speaker from victim support. Cllr Lloyd went to Burwash's assembly. The turnout was about double that of Brightling with MP Kieran Mullen and ESCC Mark Ashdown both speaking. It was reported that generally turnout is best when there is a contentious issue such as planning on the agenda. Cllr Blench reported on Speldhurst assembly. The official part was very brief then all the different groups had a table / stall, with groups like brownies doing a demo to increase attendance. General

consensus that delivering the reports to households ahead of the meeting was a positive step and worth trying. **Action:** Clerk to put on agenda for January.

Cllr Petty announced RDC Chairman Councillor Legg would be coming to the flower show in an official capacity on Saturday. Previous Clerk Gilly Lowe will also be visiting soon.

16. Items for Noting or Including on a future Agenda – none recorded.

17. Remaining Planned Meetings

9th September, 11th November, 13th January 2027, 10th March, 12th May (AGM)

Meeting closed 20.43pm

DRAFT