

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Parish Council held at Ewhurst & Staplecross
Village Hall, Staplecross on Wednesday 19 February 2025**

PRESENT Councillors Jacqui Hyett, Larry Hyett, John Lederer, Gareth Matthews, Robin Matthews, Barbara Mould (**Vice-Chair**), David Young (**Chairman**)

IN ATTENDANCE Richard Farhall - Parish Clerk; Jessica Neame – Deputy Parish Clerk & RFO; Rother District Councillor Tony Ganly; East Sussex County Councillor Paul Redstone; 9 other members of the public

The meeting commenced at 7.01pm.

1 APOLOGIES

There was none.

It was noted that Cllr Biggs was unable to be present.

2 CODE OF CONDUCT

There were no disclosure or interest, nor requests for dispensation.

*The Chairman adjourned the meeting for the Reports of the County and District Councillors – and any contributions/questions from members of the public.
(See **APPENDICES A-C.**)*

The meeting reconvened.

3 COUNCIL MINUTES

RESOLVED To adopt the draft Minutes of the Council meeting held on 15 January 2025 (C25-01) as an accurate record.

4 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

RESOLVED To note the responses following, submitted under the Clerk's delegated authority.

[RR/2024/2024/P](#) Quarry Farm, Bodiam Road, Ewhurst
Temporary change of use of former agricultural yard to fibre installation compound.
NO OBJECTION

[RR/2025/1/P](#) The Oast House, Gate House Farm, Northiam Road, Staplecross
Proposed rebuilding of an existing fire-damaged and subsequently demolished barn – with additional extension.
SUPPORT APPROVAL

[RR/2024/2270/P](#) Madamses Farm, Bodiam Rd, Staplecross
[RR/2024/2271/L](#) Demolition of existing open log store. Construction of new utility room.

SUPPORT APPROVAL

3 RIGHTS OF WAY

- a) *Parish Rights of Way Officer* Members were asked to consider appointing Tracey Neill (TN) to the (voluntary) position of Ewhurst Parish Rights of Way Officer – and to consider the role content.

The Chairman advised that Tracey frequently walk the Parish footpaths. She is familiar with the issues – a stile collapsed whilst she was using it.

Cllr Redstone advised that stiles are the responsibility of the landowner. If a problem is reported, ROW will, initially, contact the landowner.

The Chairman suggested that, if neither the landowner nor ROW repaired a broken stile, EPC could step in.

The Clerk suggested that the role could usefully include reporting issues/faults to ROW.

RESOLVED To accept TN's kind offer to act as the Parish Rights of Way Officer. Clerk

Cllr Lederer was asked to provide details of a closed path – that presents an access issue – to the Clerk (to pass to TN). **Cllr Lederer**

- b) *ESCC ROW Access Plan survey* Members were invited to consider whether EPC should respond (deadline: 14.3.25).

RESOLVED To ask the Clerk to draft a response in liaison with TN. Clerk

6 STAPLECROSS: ADDITIONAL DOG WASTE BIN

The Clerk advised that a bin had been delivered and would be installed (adjacent to the K6 kiosk) on 21 February.

7 VERGE PARKING PROVISION (HERDMAN AND ALLOTMENTS)

The meeting noted that ESCC has commenced the feasibility appraisals – and that this process could take up to four months.

8 EWHURST GREEN BUS SHELTER

The Clerk advised that he had commissioned – and received – a drawing of the shelter; had obtained two groundworks quotes (with a third awaited) – and he was waiting for shelter assembly and installation quotes from two oak frame buildings makers.

9 VILLAGE HALL: LAND FRONTING (PLANTING)

The Clerk advised that he was struggling to obtain a second quote. It was now too late to source plants – the scheme would need to wait until the autumn.

It was agreed generally to proceed with the proposed reduction of the cherry.

10 STAPLECROSS PLAYING FIELD: ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT/FACILITIES

The Deputy Clerk had met with Cllr Mould and Gareth Matthews at the Field on 17.3.25.

The options being considered by the Outdoor Play Equipment WG are:

- a) An all-weather 1.2m wide track around the perimeter. Estimated cost: £37k-£43k.
- b) Swings for older young people.
- c) An outdoor table tennis table

b) and c) are being explored further.

Although it would be cheaper not to hard-surface a perimeter track, Cllr Larry Hyett reminded Members that one of the reasons for exploring the option was to provide somewhere that could be used by those with mobility difficulties.

11 END OF WWII: 80TH ANNIVERSARY (8 May 2025)

Cllr Lederer reported that the basic format is now in place. The school and Bonfire Society will be involved in some of the events – and the Club will mark the Anniversary in some way.

There will be a film, exhibit and activities for younger children at the Village Hall – as well as a band on the Saturday.

After this meeting he, the Chairman, Clerk and Deputy Clerk will be discussing funding and insurance. It may be that it will not be possible to have burning torches.

Responding to a question posed by Cllr Jacqui Hyett, Cllr Ganly advised that Cllr Biggs is still waiting to hear if RDC's Community Grant funding might be available.

The Deputy Clerk suggested waiting until the end of March to determine if RDC is intending to allocate a proportion of the Community Grant funding, before submitting a 'standard' application.

12 FINANCE

a) Reports

RESOLVED To receive and note/approve the Payment Schedule for January 2025 (*over page*).

Ewhurst Parish Council Payment Schedule January 2025

Payee	Item	Invoice/Ref	Net Cost	VAT	Total
Salaries	January salaries		£1,559.26		£1,559.26
Richard Farhall	Adobe acrobat subscription	Expenses	£10.95	£2.19	£13.14
HMRC	PAYE & NI	January	£443.34		£443.34
East Sussex Pension Fund	Pension contributions	January	£480.34		£480.34
Brian Scowen	Handyman works	20.12.24- 13.01.25 + backpay	£268.65		£268.65
Pet Waste Solutions	December dog waste collections	38622	£54.00	£10.80	£64.80
Ewhurst and Staplecross Village Hall	Council meeting 15.01.25	ESVH970	£27.00		£27.00
GMP Accountants	Payroll fees	59470	£120.00	£24.00	£144.00
Cloud Next Ltd	Hosting fee - ewhurstparishcouncil.gov.uk	235806	£99.99	£19.99	£119.98
Action in Rural Sussex	Village Hall Advisory Service	4637	£60.00	£12.00	£72.00
John Lederer	Reimbursement for replacement Christmas tree lights	Expenses	£62.87	£12.57	£75.44
Orchard Landscapes	Parish grass cutting 2024	1726	£4,326.00	£865.20	£5,191.20
Forest Tree Surgeons	Annual tree inspection	18.01.25	£750.00		£750.00
Ewhurst and Staplecross Village Hall	Grant - Community Open Spaces	Minute ref: C25-01/9	£1,500.00		£1,500.00
Ewhurst Parochial Church Council	Grant	Minute ref: C25-01/6b	£1,350.00		£1,350.00
Direct Debits					
Tamar Telephone	Line rental	4114049	£5.78	£1.16	£6.94
Unity Trust Bank	Bank charges		£7.80		£7.80
EDF	Electricity	KI-C7A006E1-0012	£18.81	£0.94	£19.75
Total Payments			£11,144.79	£948.85	£12,093.64

b) Budget Monitor

RESOLVED To receive and note/approve the budget update as at 31.1.25.

c) Earmarked Reserves

RESOLVED To receive a statement as at 31.1.25.

d) Bank Reconciliation

The Deputy Clerk advised that these are checked every 2 months and that they are up-to-date as at 31.12.24.

e) Hinckley & Rugby

The Council was invited to consider opening a 90-day notice deposit account with Hinckley and Rugby, initially depositing £50,000.

The Deputy Clerk advised that the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) covers deposits of up to £85,000 per institution. Therefore, it is prudent to spread EPC's cash holdings in order to minimise the risk in the event of institutions failing.

Hinckley & Rugby is a long-established building society, which understands the needs of local councils – and offers a favourable interest rate.

It was noted that the Society requires one signatory to be the Proper Officer (or RFO) and permits a maximum of 4 signatories in total. Only one signatory is required to authorise withdrawals – however, these withdrawals can be made to the EPC's nominated current account only.

RESOLVED To open an account with the Hinckley & Rugby Building Society – with an initial deposit of £50,000 - and that the authorised signatories be:

Richard Farhall (Clerk)

Cllr David Young (Chair)

Cllr Barbara Mould (Vice Chair)

Deputy Clerk & RFO

13 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED In accordance with the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 (1)(2), to exclude the public and press from item 14 on the grounds that it includes consideration of terms of employment.

14 STAFFING ARRANGEMENTS

Members were invited to consider proposed amended staffing arrangements from 1.3.25 and 1.7.25.

It was noted that, arising from changes in personal circumstances and to their employments with Rye Town Council, it was necessary to ask Members to approve an alternative staffing structure – as follows:

From 1 March 2025

Deputy Clerk to reduce her hours from 10 a week to 5 – with her last day of employment being 30.3.25.

Clerk to increase his hours from 10 a week to 15.

From 1 July 2025

Clerk to work 20 hours a week

RESOLVED To approve the arrangements proposed.

Clerk, Deputy Clerk & RFO

The Deputy Clerk added that, if necessary, she would be happy to be invited to provide locum services after 30 June.

The meeting ended at 7.44pm.

Date Chairman

Report of the District Councillors

(Ward Report for January 2025 attached – see APPENDIX B)

Cllr Ganly had nothing to add the District Councillors' report.

Report of the County Councillor

(Ward Report for January 2025 attached – see APPENDIX C)

Cllr Redstone added/highlighted:

ESCC's 2025-26 budget was confirmed last week – there is not much leeway.

County is still consulting on the closure of some non-statutory provisions. Quite a few petitions have been received. There will be a Cabinet decision next week.

Devolution/Re-organisation is moving swiftly. The Government is running a consultation on the Mayoral element of the proposed Sussex Strategic Authority.

It is looking as though there will be a 'localism' White Paper later in the year that will give parish and town councils more powers. Provisionally, elections for the Sussex Mayor will take place in May 2026 – with unitary council elections being held in May 2027. The period of office for current Brighton & Hove Councillors may be extended by a year.

Public questions/contributions

There was none.

NORTHERN ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT January 2025

We attended a RALC meeting in January. Balfour Beatty attended and gave a briefing on their work on highways etc. We asked questions regarding their work, pointed out some of their shortcomings and they took this on board. The CEO of Rother was there along with some of her colleagues. The topic of car parks came up and she mentioned the response from the people of Northern Rother.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those residents who took the time to take part in the survey. There were over 800 !!!!! people who gave their views regarding the Doctors surgery car park and hopefully it has made RDC to think twice about charging for parking. The final decision will be made at full council at the end of the month.

PCSO'S Reports.

Northiam

9th – Report of the Scout Hut being broken into. Appears nothing stolen, but writing on the walls, furniture moved, and people had been smoking inside.

16th – A business in Coplands Lane had a container broken into and some electrical items were stolen. A padlock on a nearby field had been cut and it is believed this is how the suspects entered.

23rd – Quad bike stolen from a property in Beckley Road.

Staplecross.

23rd Outbuildings and a garage have been broken into; tools and equipment have been stolen.

Members' Allowances 2025-26 - The Independent Remuneration Panel's Review

The IRP met in November 2024 and their report recommended that the Council increases its Basic Allowance (BA) by 3%, the same level of award made to staff in September 2024. All Special Allowances (for the Leaders of political parties, chairmen of committees etc.) are paid as ratios of the BA so any increase to the BA will automatically be applied to the SRAs and Co-Optees' allowances.

The recommendations of the IRP will be considered by the full Council at its meeting in February and a decision made.

Enforcement of Environmental Offences

The Council's current three-year concessionary agreement with National Enforcement Solutions Ltd (NES) is due to expire in July 2025 and authority is sought to procure and enter into a new 5-year concessionary agreement for the period 2025-30.

NES Officers patrolled the district and issued fixed penalty notices (FPNs) in respect of environmental offences, most commonly that of littering of cigarette butts. Under the present agreement, 30% of FPN income is received by the Council which is used to pay for the removal of graffiti and waste. If the Council did not employ an enforcement company, then very limited enforcement would take place, and the condition of the streets was likely to deteriorate. The Council would be unable to provide this service in-house without significant financial investment in employment and IT, which was not a viable option at the current time.

Members had noted a marked improvement in the cleanliness of streets, particularly in Bexhill, due to the existing contract and thanked the officers and current contractors. It was noted that the number of FPNs issued for fly-tipping, which was mostly at recycling centres, had reduced as behavioural change had been brought about by the issuing of FPNs.

Cabinet agreed that the protection of the district's environment was enhanced by carrying out effective enforcement against all forms of pollution and agreed that a new concessionary agreement be sought. It was noted that the East Sussex Procurement Hub would advise on an appropriate termination clause (currently three months) because of any potential local government reorganisation.

RESOLVED: That the Deputy Chief Executive be authorised to procure, and enter into, a concessionary agreement, as a closed quote with selected providers, or using a framework agreement, for the enforcement of environmental offences from 2025 to 2030.

Barnhorn Green NHS Development

Rother District Council (RDC) had originally acquired the land at Brooklands Road, Bexhill, in 2019 with the intention of undertaking a commercial revenue-generating development (light industrial and medical centre) and a budget of £10m (borrowing) was approved to obtain planning consents and construction. Both elements of the project (light industrial and medical centre) provided important facilities to the local area which accorded with the original outline consent for major development at the Barnhorn Green site.

Since the grant of Planning Permission, £5m of Levelling Up Partnership (LUP) Grant had also been secured towards delivery of the project, although the light industrial units had been assessed as not commercially viable at the current time.

The proposed arrangement was that the GP Partners of Old Town and Little Common Surgeries would relocate their Little Common Surgery operations to the new Barnhorn Green Medical Centre, once constructed, whilst retaining a GP Service at the Old Town Surgery. The GP Partners would continue to operate a twin-centre GP service from those two buildings; in time, the Little Common Surgery building would become redundant and be an asset of the Council.

The proposed arrangements for the overall final scheme, which was now agreed in principle between all parties, was for RDC to enter into the following Agreements, simultaneously with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and GP Partners:

- § Freehold purchase of Old Town Surgery from the GP Partners.
- § Lease of Old Town Surgery to the GP Partners for 25 years.
- § Freehold purchase of Little Common Surgery from the GP Partners.
- § Lease of Little Common Surgery to the GP Partners for a short period – until the New Medical Centre was completed.
- § Agreement for Lease with/by the ICB committing (a) RDC to delivery of a new Medical Centre, and (b) ICB to enter a Lease for 25 years on pre-agreed terms, and (c) the ability for ICB to sub-let the building to GP Partners as they saw fit.

Once the Agreements were in place, RDC would arrange construction of the new Medical Centre, procured as a JCT Design and Build Construction Contract where a single contractor was responsible for the design and construction, which streamlined the process for time and cost efficiency whilst simplifying project management. It was noted that the NHS partners

had good experience with Design and Build Construction Contracts and had written a performance specification for the construction.

Overall, the proposed arrangements would:

- ? Allow the project to proceed.
- ? Make use of £5m LUP within an acceptable timescale.

Cllr. Tony Ganly & Cllr. Tony Biggs.

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Report to Parish Councils – February 2025

This report is written is for Parish Councils meeting in February. It is slightly delayed as I wanted to report on the government decision on Devolution, but this is now delayed. Some of the items here are from information circulated by ESCC but which may not have been drawn to the attention of parish councillors and others.

ESCC Budgets

Headline details of the government settlement are now known. Cabinet approved a budget in late January, and this is expected to be approved at Full Council on 11th February. This was conditional on the final government settlement which was announced on 3rd February. This is still being analysed but it seems to have no surprises so the budget will probably be unchanged.

The key headline points from the budget are:

- ESCC Council tax to be raised by 2.99% plus 2% extra on Adult Social Care, so 4.99% in all
- Net revenue budget (excluding schools) is shown as £579.6M
- The government has allocated some funds to areas with 'deprivation'. East Sussex was not included in this despite having significant deprivation in some parts of Hastings, Bexhill and Lewes.
- Allocations for road maintenance funding: ESCC was allocated new funding of £5.6M bringing total; funding to £21.0M which is £1.9M higher than previous planning assumption but assumes government approval for the £1.9M based on 'performance'. Sadly, nothing like what we need.
- Budget is balanced but only by using £11.4M of reserves which is clearly not sustainable on an ongoing basis.
- The government settlement is only for one year with a funding review due later this year. The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) shows additional financial pressures from 26/26 which are not sustainable.
- Our spending is dominated by adult social care and children's services directed at some of the neediest in the county. We have a higher proportion of over 85s who require more care than other age groups, but this is not recognised in government funding.

Fire and Rescue Service

I am a member of the Fire Authority which has a meeting on 5th February to approve budgets and precept. As with the County Council funding is very tight indeed and can only be balanced by using some reserves.

The increase in precept for ESFRS will either be 2.99% or a flat £5 for Band D properties. In the latter case the £5 is reduced proportionately for lower bands and increased for higher bands – it is not a flat £5 for everyone. It seems likely that £5 will be approved.

Unitary Authority and Mayors

The decision on this was due to be announced by the end of January but has now been delayed – we think to 5th February at the earliest. I have separately sent a briefing paper to set out the background and key stages in this essentially government-imposed process.

One additional point: at the moment council tax is made up of:

- A. Parish/town precepts
- B. District or borough precepts
- C. County council precepts
- D. Police precept
- E. Fire and Rescue precept

If we go unitary B and C would effectively merge into a unitary authority precept. There might be an extra precept for the mayoral authority, though hopefully given central government funding and some movements in responsibilities, no overall increase.

However different districts and boroughs do levy different levels of council tax across the county, so this process does imply some equalisation. The implications of this have not been set out by the government.

Grants for Parishes

This section will occur each month and is a list of possible sources of funding for parish level projects

- Dungeness Power Stations. I sit on the Site Stakeholder Group which liaises between the massive project to decommission these and the local community. They often provide grants for local activities including some in East Sussex even though the power stations are in Kent. For example, this Christmas Rye food bank is their designated charity.
- Veolia Green and Food Waste Composting Facility. As a member of Place Scrutiny I recently visited this site near Lewes. Their 'output' is compost and they deliver 'one tonne bags' at no cost to local community gardens and similar. I put Peasmarsh parish council in contact with them and they have already received two bags for the community gardens.
- Southeast Water do make grants to local communities, for example to support playgrounds

- Gatwick Airport are keen on funding local projects, at least partly driven by their desire to open a second runway which would have some impact on East Sussex, though less in the Eastern part

If you have a project which might benefit, please let me know and I will put you in contact and try to help get it approved.

Please let me know if you come across any new sources of funding and I will add them to the list.