

Rochester with Byrness Parish Council

Minutes for the Meeting of Rochester with Byrness Parish Council held on
Tuesday 13 May, 2025 *At Rochester Village Hall*

1 Attendance: Cllr S Chapman (Chair), Cllr N. Hall, Cllr Kelly, Cllr P. Softley. Mr D. Pentney. M. Chilvers (Clerk)

2 Apologies: Cllr Scott was absent. **3 Declaration of Interest:** Cllr Hall (9c – Rochester VH) & Cllr Softley (play area items reimbursement)

4 Minutes of previous Parish Council meeting on 25 March, 2025 – Were agreed and signed as a true record.

5 Guest speaker –

6 Opportunity for members of the public to raise matters – Mr Pentney asked about the possibility of Rochester getting average speed cameras to help combat the speeding of many vehicles through the village. The Chair provided an update on the request made to NCC for these and willingness to share with Otterburn where this type of camera is due to be installed this summer. Unfortunately there has not been a positive response so far with NCC advising those to be installed in Otterburn are for a trial period and if successful then there will be a discussion about roll-out elsewhere. Mr Pentney also asked who is responsible for filling the potholes near the village hall. The Chair advised these were on Lord Redesdale's land and she offered to get in touch with his office to ask about them being filled.

7 Matters arising

a) Woodland Management plan in Byrness – The Chair reported that a further meeting with James Lee (Forestry Commission) had been arranged for June when the next stages of the woodland plan would be discussed. Mr Lee had also offered to provide guidance on the most appropriate trees for the area of Otterburn Green that was often wet. The Chair also raised a request from resident Craig MacNeil who provided forest training events located in Byrness. He had asked whether his training could include the wooded area between the play area and the goal posts. On the assumption that all appropriate certificates and insurance were in place there was agreement from all Councillors for Mr Macneil's proposal although no proposal was as yet recieved.

b) Byrness flooding incidents – The Chair reported that following meetings with appropriate authorities all possibilities for the reasons of the ongoing flooding around Otterburn Green had been investigated and nothing more could be done according to Northumbria Water Ltd (NWL) and NCC. The planting of trees in the area had been suggested (see item 7a). There was agreement that NWL had made a good job of repairing the potholes on the track to the Byrness sewage treatment works.

c) Byrness garages (rental update & repairs) and parking of vehicles on Parish Council land – The Clerk advised Chris Mowatt would be looking to make the agreed repairs within the next couple of weeks but would confirm a date soon. It was noted that garage 5 had still not been emptied despite previous promises from Mr Dominic McGlen. The Clerk advised he had not had replies to any communication sent since March. There was discussion about the best way to proceed following the receipt of the quote for legal work. It was agreed to try one more time to get commitment from Mr McGlen to empty the garage and remove his late father's vehicle from the Parish Council land outside what had been his property.

d) Byrness substation progress update – The Clerk provided details of the planned event an external company were arranging on behalf of Northern Powergrid to talk with residents about the expectations and ongoing problems that were delaying the operational start of the substation. It was agreed that given the good attendance at the August event, a weekday evening was perhaps likely to be the most popular.

e) Play area maintenance – Cllr Softley provided a report on progress and Cllr Hall agreed to assist him with the work. This included adding new T-pieces to the netting and removal of algae from some of the equipment. There was a discussion about making improvements to the Play area sign and the Chair agreed to get a quote for the suggested work.

f) Covenants in Byrness – It was agreed to not proceed with this work at the moment.

g) Isaac's seat – The Clerk provided details of a quote for replacement bench where 'Isaac's' seat had been located. There was discussion on the priority of the work considering the possible need to

erect a fence around the play area to define an area where dogs should not be. It was agreed to not go ahead with the replacement bench at this time but obtain quotes for fencing around the play area and decide how best to fund that work before making a commitment.

h) Maintenance jobs around Byrness: There was agreement that Josh Howden and his team had undertaken great work around Byrness including removing the overhanging branches and self-sown trees behind the garages as well as repair path near the footbridge. They were also in the process of removing the remaining debris from the demolished gritter garage. Josh advised that Forestry England were considering installation of replacing the village-end barrier of the ride with gabions.

i) Catcleugh lay-by, Bremenium Way drainage & Rochester road flooding – Cllr Softley reported that whilst the Catcleugh lay-by was constantly having rubbish left there, this was being removed quickly by NCC. There is some evidence that the flooding on Bremenium Way may be fixed shortly. Following Cllr Riddle's attendance at the last Parish Council meeting the Chair provided him with photos highlighting the problems. The damage to the stone wall had been repaired and piping laid in a section of the ditch that had been backfilled. However it was noted that there was still considerable work to be undertaken before the project was completed.

j) Speeding traffic through Rochester – The Clerk reported that the average 85%ile for the south camera was 37.2mph and 49.1% of all vehicles passing were exceeding the 30mph speed limit. For the north camera the 85%ile was averaging 36.7mph and 42.4% of vehicles were exceeding the speed limit. There seemed to be marginal evidence to suggest the 'pop-up Bob' was having a positive impact but there was agreement that generally the vast majority of traffic was exceeding the speed limit. It was reported the a Police camera had been in Rochester recently and caught four drivers speeding, one of which was doing 46mph.

k) Roundhouse fort information board – The Chair reported that there was no update to provide this month.

l) Rochester bus stop: The Clerk reported that he had spoken to Neil Easton (NCC) again who had advised that whilst budget had been agreed for various projects he was unsure which were included. Mr Easton advised he would provide an update when he heard more but believed the post with bus timetable should be within budget to install.

m) Possible EV charging point in Rochester and Byrness – The Clerk advised that he had not received an update on this matter.

n) Grass cutting – There was agreement to ask Mr Mowatt to cut the agreed areas of grass in Rochester the next time he was due to cut Byrness. It was noted that there had been two cuts in Byrness so far in 2025.

o) Smart meters in Redesdale: The Chair advised that progress had been made on this topic and the local residents who had highlighted the problem had had the matter resolved.

p) Community transport in Redesdale (volunteer drivers): The Clerk reported that he had been advised that there had been two possible drivers contact Church & Community Partnership (CCP) following the distribution of the flyer about the service. It was agreed that a further push on the scheme was required in an effort to increase the number of drivers.

q) Bus service to Morpeth: The Chair provided a report on the service following passengers being advised it would no longer be going to and from Rochester or Byrness. The Chair met with Sarah Crone and Jo Willis from Ray Windfunds who fund the service. It was highlighted that whilst it was appreciated these two communities were outside the catchment area of Ray Wind there was no other possible funder of a service that was vital to many local residents who would have no other way to visit Morpeth. There was agreement that the service would call at Rochester and Byrness on a fortnightly basis. Ray Windfunds would also investigate whether there were any other companies that could provide the service with a larger bus to accommodate the high number of passengers using the weekly service.

r) Local traders / information pack: The Clerk reported that he had been approached by a local resident asking whether there was a 'directory' of local traders. Following discussion it was agreed to contact Charlotte Lloyd in Bellingham who it was believed had developed a pack covering this type of information.

- s) Complaint received from a Byrness resident: The Chair read out the email that had been received and provided an update on the action she and the Clerk had taken, advising the matter was ongoing.
- t) Parish Council vacancies: The Clerk highlighted that there were presently three vacancies. There was discussion how to attract parishioners to apply to become a Councillor and consideration was given to providing a flyer through doors in the Parish.

8 Planning

- a) 25NP0033: Listed Building Consent: Upgrade of eight damaged sash windows to the North and West elevations: Netherhouses, Rochester, NE191RX: Following discussion there was agreement to support the application.

9 Finance/accounts for payment

- a) Parish finance update – The Clerk provided a budget update advising the balance was presently £32,902.83 This included a balance for the restricted areas of Byrness garages £13,609, Byrness allotments, £442, Rochester Roundhouse, £2,878 and defibrillators, £570, leaving a current working balance of £15,403.
- b) Transfer of the Parish Council bankers – The Clerk provided a report on the poor service including inaccurate information had had receive from NatWest business regarding the proposed transfer of the Parish Council banking arrangements. Given the new information and what charges the account would likely attract there was agreement to maintain the banking with Lloyds Bank for the time being.
- c) Donation request from PCC for churchyard maintenance – There was discussion regarding the request from the PCC. Cllr Hall questioned why the invoices in the accounts seemed to be below £500 from the previous year when a donation was made. He also asked whether part of the donation was being made retrospectively as some maintenance had already been undertaken in 2025. It was highlighted that the requested was for the year from May, 2025. There was agreement from all to make a donation of £500.00
- d) Payments – The following payments presented were all agreed.
- M. Chilvers salary for April & May, 2025 of £429.69 was agreed plus expenses of £9.90 which is a third of the travel cost for submitting the election nomination papers.
 - Payment of room hire at Rochester Village Hall on 13 May for £18.00 was agreed.
 - Payment of NALC annual subscription – payment of £95.16 was agreed.
 - Payment of Spanglefish annual subscription for website – payment of £33.30 + VAT was agreed.
 - Reimbursement of cost of materials for play area to Cllr Softley – Payment of £15.02 + VAT was agreed.
- e) Approve the Annual Governance Statement 2024-25 – Agreed by all.
- f) Approve the draft Annual Accounts for 2024-25 – Agreed by all.
- g) Approve the Accounting Statement & Explanation of variances for 2024-25 – Agreed by all.
- h) Confirm and approve the Certification of Exemption for 2024-25 – Agreed by all.

10 Any Other Business:

- a) The Chair highlighted the Kielder Design Challenge at Falstone on 9 June and Kielder on 11 June. For those interested details can be found of the Kielder website.

Date of Next Meeting. Tuesday 29 July, 2025, at Byrness Village Hall, starting 7:00pm.

Meeting closed 9.30pm