

Rochester with Byrness Parish Council

Minutes for the Meeting of Rochester with Byrness Parish Council held on
Tuesday 29 July, 2025 At *Byrness Village Hall*

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

2 Apologies: None. **3 Declaration of Interest:** Cllr Softley (9b – Byrness VH) & Cllrs Chapman & Kelly 8a

4 Minutes of previous Ordinary and Annual Parish Council meeting on 13 May, 2025 – Were agreed and signed as a true record following a small amendment to the Ordinary minutes proposed by Cllr Softley and agreed by all.

5 Guest speaker – N/A

6 Opportunity for members of the public to raise matters – None was raised.

7 Matters arising

a) Woodland Management plan in Byrness – The Chair provided a summary of a meeting with James Lee (Forestry Commission) attended together with Cllr Softley and the Clerk last month. Mr Lee had provided feedback to the initial draft of the Woodland Management Plan. Mr Lee had made contact with Great Northumberland Forest who confirmed that they would provide 200 trees to be planted in the wet area of land between Otterburn Green and the A68. The Clerk was asked to determine the size of the trees that will be planted and when the planting will take place. Following the meeting the Clerk had created an account with the Rural Payments Agency and created a BI reference. Mr Lee had provided guidance on the next steps to applying for grants towards the work that will be identified as the plan begins to be rolled out. It was agreed that there should be ongoing communications with residents of Byrness as the plan develops including maintenance on the shelter belt and the creation of trails with new fencing and gates all subject to successful funding grant applications.

b) Byrness garages (rental update & repairs) – The Clerk provided details of the tenancy of a garage that was changing this month. It was noted that Dominic McGlen had still not cleared and vacated garage 5 despite numerous requests from the Parish Council. The Clerk advised it was apparently due to the fact Mr McGlen had no transport to move the items. There was discussion as to what action to take in an attempt to resolve the matter and begin to rent out the garage to the next resident on the waiting list. There was also discussion regarding Mr McGlen's late father's car that was still parked on Parish Council land and as to when it would be removed. It was also reported that Mr McGlen's late father's property become neglected and required some attention as it was impacting on the look of the local area and neighbouring properties. It was agreed the Clerk would contact NNPA and NCC to seek guidance how to possibly proceed.

c) Byrness substation progress update – The Clerk reported that he was due to speak with Andrew Webster (NPg) the following day for an update on the progress towards full operations of the substation. Cllr Softley provided a summary of the recent drop-in event run by Northern Powergrid. It was reported that whilst Mr Webster may be able to obtain an EV charger at present the only type available is an out-of-date version and the Councillors agreed this potentially may present costly servicing and maintenance challenges so have decided not to accept this proposal.

d) Isaac's seat – The Clerk reported that at present NCC were not providing the Community Chest grant. He advised he was waiting a reply from CAN and Cllr Riddle for any suggestions of grants that could be applied for. It was agreed to continue to undertake research before any decision was made on the possible replacement of the seat.

e) Potential boundary around Byrness play area: There was discussion regarding whether a boundary around the play area was required following response from the company who undertakes the annual inspection. Different suggestions were provided on the size of the possible boundary and length that would be required. Cllr Softley advised he would provide a map of possible boundary options including gates.

f) Byrness telephone box: Emails from Joe Morris MP office were shared as he was communicating with BT Openreach seeking for the public telephone to remain in Byrness. Cllr Softley highlighted a further reason for the need of the telephone for emergency reasons, following recent heavy rainfall.

There had been a number of hikers whose phones had become so wet there were not operational and would be of no use in an emergency. The Clerk confirmed he had requested that if Joe Morris MP was unsuccessful then the Parish Councillors would wish for the telephone box to remain in place for community use.

g) Matters requiring attention in Byrness: A number of matters were discussed by the Councillors including 1) a pile of logs left on the Parish Council ground outside 1 Otterburn Green. It was agreed to write to the person who it is believed had left them there 2) trailer full of household rubbish in a parking space on Parish Council land near 1 Otterburn Green. It was agreed to speak with Archie from NCC for guidance and Cllr Hall suggested Paul Turnbull at NCC may be worth speaking to as well about the matter 3) residents parking on Parish Council land. A number of suggestions were proposed to help reduce the problem however it was noted all would require grant funding that may be difficult to obtain for such a project.

h) Grass cutting (access route to bridge through play field and area near 32 South Greens in Byrness): There was discussion regarding the two areas that required cutting to not only improve the look of the area but assist residents walking about Byrness. Cllr Hall questioned whether it was fair for additional funds to be spent on Byrness whilst Rochester only had three grass cuttings a year. The Chair highlighted that there is very little land in Rochester that is the responsibility of the Parish Council but a relatively low spend can be used towards keeping the verges neat. In Byrness there is extensive grass and woodland that does require the attention of the Parish Council. The estimated costs were shared and there was agreement to have the two areas cut by Chris Mowatt. The route to the footbridge should be 1 meter either side of the narrow track and there was agreement to initially plan to have it cut twice a year. There was also discussion regarding the boundary of 2 South Greens where the owner had removed the fence. It was agreed there needed to be communication between the Parish Council and the owner before the boundary was replaced to ensure it was in the correct position.

i) Speeding traffic through Rochester & possible Community Speed Watch – The Clerk reported that due to a fault on one of the speed cameras the latest data had not been successfully downloaded. Cllr Hall believed that the data should be downloaded OK next month. The Clerk reported the Elsdon Parish Council were making enquiries about the volunteer scheme Community Speed Watch. It appeared the Elsdon volunteers would not want to work in their village and asked should there be any volunteers in Rochester whether they could cover each others 'patches'. There was a cautious agreement although it was agreed volunteers would need to be recruited first.

j) Roundhouse fort information board – The Chair reported that there was no update to provide this month. She did report however that she had been approached by a group called Kids Kabin who were to use the Roundhouse to make furniture and provided details from an email she had received. Whilst there was a general agreement of the proposal it was agreed plans would need to be seen before consent was provided.

k) Rochester bus stop: The Clerk reported that despite attempting to contact Neil Easton (NCC) several occasions he had not received an update as to when the bus stop pole with timetable would be installed where the bus shelter had stood. The Chair reported that Mr Amos would offer a piece of land for a new bus shelter if funding was raised to provide one.

l) Possible EV charging point in Rochester and Byrness – This matter had been discussed in agenda item 7c.

m) Community transport in Redesdale (volunteer drivers): The Chair reported that there were now six volunteer drivers for the service run by Church & Community Partnership (CCP) but any more would be welcomed.

n) Wednesday bus to Morpeth: The Chair provided usage numbers of residents from Rochester and Byrness on the Adapt bus to Morpeth. It was noted that very few had been using the service in recent months and it was agreed to provide communication to the community about the service.

o) Kielder forest at 100 years: There was discussion on the potential events that could be held at Byrness. The Chair agreed to approach Alex MacLennan for possible dates of events currently booked so not to clash.

p) Parish Council vacancies: It was noted that there had been no interest as yet to fill the current three vacancies.

q) Joe Morris MP visiting Redesdale on 1 August: It was noted that Joe Morris MP was conducting drop-in sessions at Redesdale village halls as well as Rochester Relish Cafe 1 August.

8 Planning

a) 25NP0040: Variation of conditions 1 (plans) and 4 (air source heat pump) of planning permission 24NP0102 – Variation of condition 2 (plans) and 3 (materials) of planning permission 23NP0036 – Erection of 2 no. cottages for the purpose of permanent residence of holiday accommodation: Land north of Bremenium Way, Rochester, NE191RB: This application was received between meetings. The Chair and Cllr Kelly declared an interest and leaving only two Councillors so it had not been possible to provide a response to NNPA.

b) 25NP0038: Variation of condition no2 (approved plans), condition no7 (surface water drainage) and condition no8 (foul drainage) of planning application 23NP008 – replacements buildings, including new estate office: Cleughbrae Farm, Rochester: This application had been received between meetings and reviewed by all Councillors. There was agreement to support.

9 Finance/accounts for payment

a) Parish finance update – The Clerk provided a budget update advising the balance was presently £30,721 This included a balance for the restricted areas of Byrness garages £13,807, Byrness allotments, £442, Rochester Roundhouse, £2,878 and defibrillators, £570, leaving a current working balance of £13,024.

b) Payments – The following payments presented were all agreed.

- M. Chilvers salary for June & July, 2025 of £429.69 was agreed.
- Payment of room hire at Byrness Village Hall on 29 July for £18.00 was agreed.
- Payment of the two invoices from Chris Mowatt for grass cutting in Byrness and Rochester for £356.00 & £411.00 plus VAT were agreed.
- Payment of the invoice to A. Scott for £270.00 for pest control in Byrness was agreed.
- There was agreement to offer remuneration to the volunteers who had cut the lower field near the river in Byrness.

It was noted that a NALC communication had been received the previous day regarding Parish / Town Clerk salaries and a rise backdated to 1 April, 2026. It was agreed to review the matter at the September meeting.

Cllr Softley highlighted four poles belonging to Northern Powergrid (NPg) in Byrness that it was believed the Parish Council was not receiving way-leave payments for. It was understood that this may be because NPg believed the poles were on Forestry England land. It was agreed the Clerk would contact NPg.

10 Any Other Business:

a) The Chair highlighted that many of the local pedestrian pavements were full of weeds making the path much narrower. The Chair reported that she had reported the matter with photos on Fix My Street.

Date of Next Meeting. Tuesday 30 September, 2025, at Rochester Village Hall, starting 7:00pm.
Meeting closed 9.30pm