

Rochester with Byrness Parish Council

Minutes for the Meeting of Rochester with Byrness Parish Council held on
Tuesday 30 September, 2025 *At Rochester Village Hall*

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

2 Apologies: None. **3 Declaration of Interest:** Cllr Hall (9 – Rochester VH)

4 Minutes of previous Ordinary Parish Council meeting on 29 July, 2025 – 7h Cllr Hall advised he believed the decision at the meeting had been to get quotes and not to make a decision to proceed. On a vote 3-1 in favour the minutes were agreed and signed as a true record.

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 (WMP) in Byrness – The Chair provided a summary of the progress since the meeting with James Lee (Forestry Commission). A summary of the work to date and possible activities had been agreed by the Cllrs and shared with residents. The Chair proposed that when funding began to be received as the WMP progressed an unrestricted reserve was created for the funds. This was agreed by a vote of 4–0 in favour.

The Clerk reported that Paul Scott had been in contact about the condition of a number of trees near the car park in Byrness. The Clerk had been in touch with James Lee who advised it may be as a result of drought and/or aphid. Whilst the trees appeared to still be sturdy potential funds for felling could be raised through the WMP.

The Clerk reported that the application for the 220 trees to be planted on the wet area between Otterburn Green and A68 had been successful. Forestry England will be planting the trees in December. The Clerk confirmed a Teams meeting had been arranged for 28 October on the topic. Cllr Hall asked whether the new trees would require cutting around and if so, how much extra cost would this be. The Clerk advised that the project manager confirmed it would not be necessary to cut around the trees and that potentially mulch mats maybe provided to assist with growth. It was noted that when the planting of the trees was being undertaken a sufficient gap should be left for a pathway through to both the A68 and the car park and this area would require cutting 2 or 3 times a year.

The Clerk reported that he had received an email from Tyne Rivers Trust (TRT) who hoped to be undertaking the next stage of willow coppicing later in October.

b) Byrness substation progress update – The Clerk reported that he had been chasing Northern Powergrid for an update on progress of the substation including when it would be operational as well as when the report from the drop-in event in August would be shared, but had not received a response.

c) Isaac's seat replacement options – The Clerk reported that he had noticed that the NCC Community Chest fund had just opened for grant applications. Following discussion, it was agreed by a vote 4–0 in favour to proceed with an application for a recycled plastic seat. It was agreed to also include a new seat to replace the rotten seat which had been removed from the play area in the application. It was noted that whilst Forestry England had proposed to install a seat on the 'ride' this was on hold whilst there was uncertainty regarding the route of the sewage pipe from the Old Filling station development.

d) Byrness telephone box – It was noted that the battle to retain the public telephone which had included Joe Morris MP had been lost. BT Openreach had removed the telephone and box. Disappointment was expressed given the poor mobile signal in the area and the often busy route for cyclists and walkers, including those undertaking the Pennine Way.

e) Debris on the Parish Council land, Byrness: The rubbish and trailer that had been left near 1 Otterburn Green had been removed. The Clerk confirmed that a letter had been sent to the residents of 2 South Greens regarding the property boundary.

f) Byrness allotments: The Chair reported that a wooden 8 x10 shed on one of the allotment plots was in a poor condition and that a request had been made to replace it with a metal shed and if required could be painted to ensure it blended with the area. There was agreement from all.

The Chair agreed to check whether 8 x 10 sheds were allowed on all plots regardless of size. There had also been a request for the new hedge to be cut. The Clerk would look to get quotes for cutting and/or hedge laying.

There was discussion regarding the plot of the tenants who had recently moved away from the village. It transpired livestock was being kept that it was believed would disappear at Christmas. Whilst there were residents on the waiting list it was agreed to allow the tenant to remain until the 31 December, 2025 at which time the allotment must be vacated so a new tenant could take over the plot.

g) Grass cutting in Byrness and Rochester 2026-2028: The Clerk highlighted the need to agree the areas, as well as the frequency, in Rochester and Byrness that would require grass cutting from 2026. It was agreed to consider the requirements and amend the current maps as appropriate before discussing the matter at the November meeting. The Clerk would then seek tenders for grass cutting for the three years to 2028.

It was noted that Byrness required a further grass cut within the next couple of weeks and it was agreed Rochester should be cut at the same time. Cllr Hall highlighted that due to the lack of grass cutting in Rochester he believed the area looked terrible.

h) Speeding traffic through Rochester & possible Community Speed Watch – The Clerk shared the latest data taken from the two speed indicator devices (SID). The north camera over the 43 months of data collected had an average 85%ile of 36.6mph and 42.1% of vehicles passing were exceeding the 30mph limit. The south camera recorded an average 85%ile over the 47 months of 37.1mph and 48.4% of passing vehicles were exceeding the limit. The Clerk confirmed the data had been shared with the appropriate authorities however he had as yet received no response.

i) Rochester bus stop: The Clerk provided an update following receipt of an email from Neil Easton (NCC) and the further delay of the bus stop sign being installed. It was highlighted that a local resident in Rochester had potentially offered to donate a piece of land where a new bus shelter could be installed. It was noted that there were a lot of aspects that would need to be agreed with NCC before any possibility of this proposal proceeding.

j) Community Transport in Redesdale (volunteer drivers): The Clerk reported that he had been advised that there were now six drivers on the scheme. Whilst more drivers would be welcomed the Church Community Partnership (CCP) has advised it now has sufficient capacity to help local residents with journeys for health appointments as well as to attend community events etc.

k) Local Transport Programme plan 2026/27 – 2028/29: Following discussion there was agreement to request average speed cameras in Rochester. It was also agreed to request resurfacing of the roads within Byrness that it was suggested were in a bad condition.

l) Giant tree circle – The Chair reported that she had attempted to contact Lord Redesdale to seek agreement that a tree could be planted on his land as part of this initiative but as yet had not received a response.

m) Community Governance Review: The Councillors completed the questionnaire provided by NCC for this pre-consultation survey. There was agreement that a request should be made for the parish to be formally recognised as 'Rochester and Byrness Parish Council'.

n) Polling district & polling place review 2025: Following discussion it was agreed that the polling stations in both wards were fit for purpose.

o) Parish Council vacancies: It was acknowledged that there had been no change in the position.

p) 2026-2030 NCC Corporate Plan meeting: It was confirmed that the Chair and Cllr Softley would be attending the meeting.

8 Planning

a) 25/01109/FUL: Siting of container coffee stop including formation of hardstanding: Land East & East of Carter Bar lay-by, Jedburgh: This application was received between meetings and was outside the parish boundary. Whilst the Parish Council did provide comment to the original application it had been agreed there had been no reason to comment to the latest application.

9 Finance/accounts for payment

a) Parish finance update: The Clerk provided a budget update advising the balance was presently £33,654.35 following receipt of the second tranche of the precept of £3,500 on 9

September. This included a balance for the restricted reserves of Byrness garages £14,078, Byrness allotments, £442, Rochester Roundhouse, £2,878 and defibrillators, £570, leaving a current working balance of £15,684. The Chair highlighted that the latest version of the Financial Regulations was now available from NALC and would be presented to the Cllrs for discussion and proposed adoption at the next meeting.

- b) Proposal to use way-leave income, currently in the general balance, for community benefits:
The Chair provided details of the way-leave income to the Parish Council and based on the current projected balance as at 31 March, 2026 suggested a balance of £1,125.00 which equates to the five years of substation annual way-leave plus £498.28 for Poles total £1,623.28 be moved to an unrestricted reserve for community benefit. It was agreed 4–0 vote.
- c) Proposed creation of an unrestricted reserve for Parish Council land management: The Chair provided details of the proposal for 'in-hand' budget from previous years unused budgeted grass cutting which equated to £1,200 for Byrness and £304 for Rochester. It was proposed the £1,200 Byrness budget, currently in the general balance, be moved to an unrestricted reserve for Parish Council land management this would also include the land at the Roundhouse when a budget had been agreed. The £304 Rochester budget, currently in the general balance, be moved to an unrestricted reserve for Rochester grass cutting. It was agreed 4–0 vote.
- d) Review of Clerk's salary following NALCs recommendations: There was agreement to adopt NALC recommendation to increase the Clerk's hourly salary to £13.90 and backdate to 1 April, 2025.
- e) Bank charges for august and September, 2025: The Clerk confirmed that there had been a £4.25 charge in July and £4.75 in August
- f) The following payment(s) were approved between meetings:-
 - Payment to Chris Mowatt for grass cutting. The invoices for £356.00 + £71.20 VAT for two cuts in Byrness and £386.00 + £77.20 VAT for one cut in Byrness, cutting either side of the route to the footbridge in Byrness and one cut in Rochester were all approved.
The Chair requested that it was minuted that the two verbal quotes of £50/£60 received from Chris Mowatt for the two areas in Byrness and shared at the July meeting had been confirmed in writing by the Clerk to the Councillors and Mr Mowatt.
- g) The following payment(s) are presented for approval:-
 - M. Chilvers (August & September, 2025) salary, backdated salary and expenses. The payments of £443.70 (salary) and £27.46 (backdated salary increase) were agreed.
 - Reimbursement to Clerk for purchase of Remembrance wreath. The Payment of £14.16 + £2.83 VAT was agreed.
 - Payment of room hire at Rochester Village Hall on 30 September. The Clerk advised he had not as yet received the invoice but there was agreement for this to be paid assuming it was the usual cost of £18.00.
 - Remuneration for costs associated with Byrness grass cutting at playing field. The Chair advised that the two residents had declined the offer of reimbursement of costs.

10 Any Other Business:

- a) The Chair reported that she had attended a webinar titled "Beyond the precept" and would provide a summary of the event at the next meeting.
- b) Cllr Softley reported that he had read that there was a recommendation that Parish Councils consider moving to a 'gov.uk' domain and create specific email addresses for all Councillors. It was agreed the Clerk would investigate what would be involved to undertake the move from existing structure and update at the next meeting.

Date of Next Meeting. Tuesday 25 November, 2025, at Byrness Village Hall, starting 7:00pm.
Meeting closed 9.10pm