

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on
Monday 16th February 2026 at 7.05pm in the Village Hall

Parish Councillors present: Cllrs Geoff Thomas (GT), Sonia Plato (SP), Sue Laimbeer (SL) and John Goddard (JG).

County/district councillors present: Cllr Kathryn Field, ESCC and Cllr Nicola McLaren, RDC.

In attendance: Maureen Collins, Parish Clerk & RFO and four members of the public

1. Public Questions

There were no questions from members of the public.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were accepted from Cllr Lynda Roller

3. Declaration of Interests

Received from:

Cllr Thomas – Village Hall Committee

Cllr Roller – Member of the Crowhurst Environment Group

Cllr Laimbeer - Annual Fayre Committee, Strolling Group, Drama Group & Crowhurst Environment Group

4. Adoption of Minutes

The Chairman was authorised to sign the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the parish council held on 19th January 2026 as a true and correct record.

5. Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting

Vacancies – continue to be advertised on our website, in the notice board and periodically in the Crowhurst News.

6. Representations from District & County Councillors

Report from District Councillor McLaren

Rother District Council has launched the Draft Local Plan consultation (Regulation 18). This is an important stage in planning for future housing, development, climate action, heritage, and economic growth across the district. Residents can view the consultation and submit comments at: <https://www.rother.gov.uk/draftlocalplan2026>. The consultation runs from 26 January to 23 March 2026. Hard copies of the Plan are available at Bexhill Town Hall and local libraries for anyone without internet access. Public exhibitions will take place across the district; the Battle exhibition is confirmed for 10 March, 3–7pm. Cllr McLaren is happy to meet with residents at the exhibition to answer any questions or to hear their views.

A briefing had been made to Rother District Councillors regarding proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework, with a national consultation open until 10 February 2026. Key themes include a stronger focus on affordable housing, changes to how local policies interact with national ones,

and ongoing uncertainty about how Green Belt requirements will affect protected landscapes such as the High Weald AONB.

Rother District Council is proposing a core budget of around £50m, a £191m capital programme, and a council tax rise of 2.99% (equivalent to £6.30 per year for a Band D property).

The 2026/27 budget is balanced without using reserves. For 2025/26, up to £2.5m may still need to be drawn from reserves.

Report from County Councillor Kathryn Field

East Sussex County Council has reported that it is unable to set a balanced budget for the coming year without a council tax rise of around 19%. The authority is facing a funding shortfall of approximately £54 million. The Government has agreed to provide a £70 million loan to support the council's finances; however, this will need to be repaid with interest in future years. The situation has arisen after several years of sustained underfunding, which has placed increasing pressure on the council's ability to deliver statutory services.

Rother District Council had agreed to consult on a proposed road safety policy aimed at ensuring new developments are designed so that vehicle speeds are naturally limited to 20mph. The intention behind the proposal is to prioritise pedestrian safety and support wider community wellbeing. The consultation follows a notice of motion submitted by Cllr Kathryn Field. If the policy is ultimately approved, RDC officers will work with developers and local community groups to support effective implementation.

7. Town and Country Planning

1) To consider the following planning application and provide comments to Rother District Council:

RR/2026/0065/HOU CROWHURST

Fairbourne, Forewood Lane, Crowhurst, TN33 9AG

Proposal: Proposed garage conversion with front extension to habitable accommodation and new pitch roof over to cover the conversion and extension, together with alterations to include white render over existing brickwork and to replace weatherboard.

Comments by 17th February 2026.

Cllr Sue Laimbeer visited Fairbourne and reported that she could see no problem with the proposals. After a brief discussion, councillors agreed to support the application, and the clerk was requested to submit the following comments before the deadline - If Rother District Council is minded to approve the application, they ask that the Crowhurst Neighbourhood Plan should be referenced - namely that there is no or limited external lighting (downlighters only) to protect dark skies as detailed in policy CE32 (v), and that any new hard standing is made of a porous material to limit run-off (see policy CE5) and that the building style should adhere to our Design Guide.

8. Financial Matters

8.1 The financial report to 31st January 2026 had been circulated and was approved by members.

8.2 The payments report for February 2026 was considered and approved.

8.3 The bank reconciliation to 31st January 2026 had been circulated. It was approved by members and signed by the Chair (GT).

8.4 Retrospective approval was given to pay Dale Saunders £151.20 for repairing further water leaks in the Pavilion which took place on 23rd January 2026.

8.5 Councillors noted the increase in price of the new barrier gate and approved the payment of £498,55 to Crestala.

8.6 The clerk did not have time to make the VAT refund request and will report on this next month.

At this point in the meeting, the Chair reordered the agenda and took Items 13 and 18 before Item 9 to enable public participation. The Council heard representations from members of the public who left the meeting at this point, and the Council returned to the published agenda order.

13. International Dark Skies Community Certification

Councillors agreed unanimously to proceed with the pre-application stage for International Dark Skies certification. This decision was taken in light of anticipated changes to the application process from April 2026. The Crowhurst Environment Group (CEG), working alongside neighbouring parishes, will begin preparing the required documentation with the aim of submitting it by the end of March 2026. CEG will draft the paper template ahead of the formal online submission, which will be subject to Parish Council approval. Two members of the CEG were present at the meeting and responded to questions from Councillors.

18. Condition of the Trees surrounding the Crowhurst Youth Club building

The Council considered a letter received from the Youth Club regarding the condition of trees surrounding the Youth Club building. The Youth Club had asked:

- Whether the Parish Council would accept responsibility for any risks posed by trees located on parish-owned land; and
- Whether the Council holds appropriate liability insurance in the event of damage or injury.

The Clerk confirmed that the Parish Council does accept responsibility for trees on its land. Any insurance claims arising would, however, be subject to approval by the Council's insurers. The Clerk further confirmed that the Council holds £12 million public liability insurance.

The Youth Club also queried whether the Parish Council would continue with annual tree inspections. The Clerk reported that, having reviewed the records, there was no evidence that formal annual inspections had previously taken place. One tree inspection was identified in 2019, costing £275, followed by tree works totalling £2,527.

The Clerk had contacted the Council's insurers, Zurich, who confirmed that the Council's insurance cover is not dependent on annual tree inspections. Zurich advised that the Council should continue to carry out risk assessments as appropriate throughout the year. It was noted that the Youth Club's own insurance policy does require an annual tree inspection.

Members discussed the concerns raised, including the age and size of the trees surrounding the Youth Club building. It was agreed that the Parish Council would obtain two quotes from qualified arborists to carry out a tree inspection of the recreation ground.

9. Recreation Ground

- 9.1 Councillors received an update on the monthly playground and defibrillator inspection. It was noted that the rota for this month's inspection could not immediately be recalled; however, Nicola Stell's completed inspection report was available. Nicola reported that the area inside the playground gate has become muddy and suggested adding planings or sand to improve the surface. The Council is still awaiting confirmation of whether paediatric defibrillator pads are required in the phone box in addition to the existing adult pads. Nicola had also noted that the hedge around the MUGA was overgrown and that a tree branch needed trimming back. Cllr Goddard kindly agreed to attend to this.
- 9.2 Councillors discussed the further actions required following the recent water leaks in the Pavilion. It was noted that the water supply remains turned off due to the cold snap forecast over the weekend. Cllr Thomas requested an update on the pipework survey carried out by Dale Saunders. The Clerk advised that Darren from Dale Saunders had recommended undertaking the survey in the Spring. Cllr Goddard advised that the ongoing damp issues in the Pavilion could be improved with increased ventilation and possibly the use of a dehumidifier.
- 9.3 The next Recreation Users meeting will take place on Thursday 12th March at 7.30pm in the Village Hall. The Clerk reported a positive response to the invitations sent out. The agenda will follow the same format as last year.
- 9.4 The Clerk reported that a letter had been received from the Croquet Club expressing concern about the rise in their fees for the 2026/27 season. The Club noted that passing this increase on to members could have an adverse impact on membership levels. Councillors wished to record that they value the Croquet Club as an important and active member of the Recreation Users

Group and appreciate the Club's contribution to village life. The Clerk will write to the Club explaining that similar increases have been applied across all user groups due to rising costs associated with grounds maintenance and repairs at the Pavilion and recreation ground.

10. Asset of Community Value

The clerk was pleased to confirm that Crowhurst Parish Council's nomination to add The Plough Inn to Rother District Council's Register of Assets of Community Value has been approved as the property meets the criteria set out in Section 88 of the Localism Act. The property will remain on the Register for five years.

11. Annual Parish Assembly

Arrangements have begun for the Annual Parish Assembly, which will take place on Monday, 27th April at 7.30pm. Elize Manning, Climate Project Officer at Rother District Council, has been invited to speak about Rother's Nature Recovery and Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and related projects, including how these fit within the wider context of Crowhurst. There will be an opportunity for attendees to ask questions. The Clerk will invite local groups to attend to provide reports and information on their recent activities. The 2025 Community Award will also be presented at the meeting. The clerk confirmed that details of the event will be published in the March edition of the Crowhurst News and boards advertising the event will be placed around the village.

12. Community Award 2025

The clerk has received several nominations for the Community Award 2025. The deadline for nominations is March 13th, 2026, and all nominations for the award will be discussed at next month's meeting.

13. International Dark Skies Community Certification

Please see above.

14. SLR Meeting

The next SLR meeting will be held in Crowhurst on Tuesday, 5th May 2026 at 11:00am. Venue to be confirmed.

15. Pavilion Refurbishment Project

Members considered the motion "To discuss the potential engagement of a suitably qualified contractor to complete a full structural survey of the Pavilion and to review progress made to date."

Following discussion, Councillors unanimously agreed to engage a contractor to undertake a full structural survey of the Pavilion, including an assessment of its suitability for extension as proposed in the plans prepared by Tillmann Lenz. Given the anticipated cost of £1,000–£2,000, the Clerk was instructed to obtain three quotations. The clerk had sought confirmation from Harris Reed, CIL Monitoring Officer, and was pleased to confirm that our CIL reserves can be used for this purpose.

16. Crowhurst Community Solar Farm

Members discussed the outcomes of the recent meetings of the Crowhurst Community Solar Farm Group. Cllr Plato reported that an initial meeting had taken place at Mantel Farm a few weeks ago, followed by a further meeting at which a steering group was established. Once the lease for the Community Solar Farm has been confirmed, the first priority will be the planting of hedging on the site.

It was noted that Energise Sussex Coast will take the lead role in progressing the project together with the Warmer Crowhurst Group. While there remains a significant amount of work to undertake, the initiative is moving forward positively. Members agreed that effective community consultation will be essential to the project's success.

17. Sunday Social

Cllr Roller had provided an update on the success of this year's Sunday Social programme, which has now concluded. These gatherings are now firmly established as a valued and regular community event. The Chair, Cllr Thomas, thanked Cllr Roller and all those who helped at the sessions. He also asked the clerk to write a letter of thanks to all those who gave talks and presentations.

18. Condition of the trees surrounding the Crowhurst Youth Club building

Please see above.

19. Network Rail tree works on Station Road

Members considered a request from Network Rail seeking the Parish Council's assistance with a temporary closure of Station Road to enable essential works on trees affected by ash dieback. The Chair, Cllr Thomas, noted the importance of ensuring that all relevant utilities and stakeholders were engaged at an early stage to minimise disruption and ensure coordinated planning. It was agreed that the Clerk would arrange an initial meeting with Network Rail to discuss the proposed works in more detail

20. COUNCILLOR UPDATES ON EXTERNAL BODIES (IF ANY)

Resolve:

To note the updates and agree any associated actions.

Cllr Plato reported that one or two apple trees in the Community Orchard have been vandalised and may require replacement. Additional ties and stays will also be needed to support the young trees. Members noted with thanks that Ian Donovan has kindly pruned all of the orchard trees. It was agreed that the Clerk would write to Mr Donovan to express the Council's appreciation for his work.

21. Clerk's report/Information for Councillors

1. Hedge Cutting on the Crowhurst Road – This has now been done, and thanks were sent to Sam Crowhurst, our Stakeholder Liaison Officer, for their input. Cllr Goddard reported that the hedges were kindly cut by the Wests, who, on becoming aware of the issue, stepped in to carry out the work even though it was not their responsibility. The Clerk will write to Steve and Bob West to pass on the Parish Council's appreciation for their help.

2. Replacement Paediatric Defib Pads – No response has been received from the second request for assistance made to The Circuit. The request on Clerk's forum was inconclusive. The existing paediatric pads are now out of date. The cost for replacement is £132 +VAT. New adult pads are required in April.

3. Assertion 10 – The clerk met with Cllr Thomas, and Cllr Plato to discuss the actions the Parish Council should take to comply with the new Assertion 10 regulations. They agreed that moving forward all councillors will be requested to attend training so that they fully understand the expectations around digital, data and information governance. A discussion will be had regarding the purchase of a device for each councillor to be used solely for council business, and importantly from March 1st, all emails and information to councillors will be sent to gov.uk email addresses only.

It was agreed that the ICO Freedom of Information Model Publication Scheme should be reviewed with a view to adoption at the March meeting of the Parish Council. The clerk will prepare the information for consideration by councillors.

4. Rother draft Local Plan consultation and Exhibition. An article regarding the draft Local Plan consultation went out via village email and the Crowhurst News. A poster is in the Notice Board. A further email was sent out with information about the exhibition, and a reminder will be sent out at the beginning of March. Cllr McLaren has offered to meet any resident at the exhibition to answer any questions and to hear opinions. An article will be submitted by the clerk to The Crowhurst News to publicise the event. The Crowhurst Neighbourhood Plan Group are compiling a response to the draft Local Plan.

5. Information has been received regarding The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025: also known as Martyn’s Law. This will require certain public premises and events to be prepared and ready to keep the public safe in a terrorist attack. WE are not within the scope of the Act.

22. Any Other Business

There was no other business to discuss.

23. Date of next meeting:

The next meeting of the Parish Council will take place on **Monday,16th March 2026** at 7.05pm in the Village Hall.

The meeting closed at 8.35pm

Signed Dated