

Rochester with Byrness Parish Council

Minutes for the Meeting of Rochester with Byrness Parish Council held on
Tuesday 31 March, 2026 *At Byrness Village Hall*

1 Attendance: Cllr S Chapman (Chair), Cllr P. Softley, Cllr Kelly, Cllr N. Hall & Cllr O. Hague.
M. Chilvers (Clerk). B. Sunley

2 Apologies: There were none. **3 Declaration of Interest:** Cllr Softley (9 – Byrness VH)

4 Minutes of previous Ordinary Parish Council meeting on 27 January, 2026 – The minutes were agreed by all and signed as a true record.

5 Guest speaker – N/A

6 Opportunity for members of the public to raise matters – Barb Sunley reported that the local Red Squirrel group was up and running and had receiving training. Additionally she reported that a 'Byrness Volunteer Group' had been set up and would be looking to assist with local events and community jobs. It was suggested that they may perhaps be able to help with the organisation of a local BBQ as part of the Kielder 100 years celebrations.

7 Matters arising

a) Woodland Management plan (WMP) in Byrness – The Clerk advised that unfortunately there had been no progress on this project since the last meeting. There was discussion on the initial stages of the work that it was hoped would be undertaken in the near future.

b) Byrness substation progress update – The Clerk shared the latest details received from Andrew Webster (Northern Powergrid). Councillors reported frustration from residents with the ongoing problems. Comments were made about a planned power-cut by NPg for commission testing which only a few residents had received notice about. However, the power-cut did not happen and notice of the cancellation was only received three days after the event.

c) Debris on the Parish Council land, Byrness: It was noted that the logs on the Parish Council land had almost all been removed and that the debris outside 1 Otterburn Green had been removed. It was also reported that a further skip had been left at the property but on private land.

d) Byrness allotments and garages: The Clerk provided details of the recent changes to some of the allotment plot and garage tenants. There was discussion regarding possible action to be taken regarding garage 5 that was still to be vacated by the son of the tenant who had passed away.

e) Alternative use of the concrete litter bin in Byrness: There was agreement by all that the bin was looking so much better following its transformation. Thanks were expressed to Ken and Sandra Falcus for their work.

f) 100 years of Kielder celebrations at Byrness: As reported earlier in the meeting consideration would be given whether the Byrness Volunteer Group may organise an event such as a BBQ. It was questioned whether funding would be available and it was agreed to consider this matter should it be necessary.

g) Boundary of Byrness car park – The Chair reported she had spoken to the local resident who had provided the wood to replace the old boundary panels. He had advised that they had been cut to the correct size and just needed fixing into place. Cllr Hague offered to manage the work.

h) Fallen debris in Spithope burn: Following recent storms it had been reported that there was tree debris in the burn. The Clerk reported he had been in contact with Tyne Rivers Trust and Northumbria Water to have the debris removed and the area made safe.

i) Speeding traffic through Rochester: The Clerk provided details of the latest data taken from the two speed indicator devices in Rochester. The Chair reported that she had learnt at the recent conference she had attended that there were plans for average speed cameras to be installed sometime from 2026 – 28 as part of the local transport programme.

j) Rochester bus stop: The Clerk reported that he had received an email from Richard McKenzie (NCC) advising that as there was no budget remaining in the 2025-26 financial year the work would be scheduled for sometime from April 2026. The Chair advised that NCC were still investigating whether a previously used bus shelter was available to provide to replace the old shelter. However, the Chair advised there would be further complications even if a shelter was provided including

legal costs with the landowner and cost for the necessary footings where it would potentially be located.

k) Possible litter bin on Bremenium Way: Following a request via Cllr Kelly the Clerk reported that he had been in contact with Jenny Dodd (NCC) to determine whether a litter bin could be installed on Bremenium Way, beyond the majority of the properties, and if it would be serviced by NCC. It was hoped it could be installed on the roadside on the grass verge. The Clerk was waiting for a response and a quote for the work should it be possible to proceed.

l) Town & Parish Council conference: The Chair provided a summary of the conference she attended earlier in the month. The conference was opened by Cllr Glen Sanderson who stated that the 2026-27 budget had been agreed by all Council members. The Chair provided details of the areas the conference covered including 'Healthy Communities', 'Governance Review' and 'Planning changes'.

m) Org.uk domain, upgrade of website platform & amendment of Parish Council title: The Clerk provided an update on the progress. The new website platform was now up and running although required further work. The new email address was clerk@rochesterandbyrness-pc.org.uk and whilst there were a few problems accessing it the Clerk advised he hoped he would be able to transfer business to the new address shortly. It was noted that NCC already recorded the Parish Council title as Rochester and Byrness and as such there was agreement to proceed with this title.

n) Northern Powergrid store of poles on Parish Council land, Byrness: It was noted the poles were still in place and that it appeared the work was ongoing.

o) Consultation of NCC libraries – The Clerk highlighted that the consultation on the Northumberland library network was open until 13 April.

p) Community Governance Review consultation – The Clerk highlighted that the questionnaire was available for all residents to complete before the deadline of 30 April.

q) Beyond the Precept Funding solutions for Smaller Parish Councils Webinar – The Chair provided a summary of the webinar recently attended. The purpose of the webinar was “to protect residents from unnecessary precept increases” and the Chair reported on the learnings taken from the event.

r) IT Policy – The Clerk provided details of the policy that is part of the Assertion 10. There was agreement by all to adopt the policy.

s) Warning signs of goats on A68 – Cllr Kelly had raised the concern over the danger of goats on the A68 and suggested there should be warning signs at key locations to warn drivers of the dangers.

t) Sycamore Gap tree saplings – The Chair provided details of the invite from Northumberland National Park to receive a sapling. She advised that there is agreement with Forestry England for the sapling to be planted at the Three Kings walk. A provisional date of 3 May has been set for the planting which will be part of Kielder 100 years.

u) Resilience plans – The Clerk provided details of the plan to hold a meeting for local communities to develop resilience plans that includes working together following an emergency incident.

v) Location of the May Annual Parish Council meeting – It was agreed to hold the 2026 Annual Parish meeting at Byrness and alternate between the villages each year. It was noted that there will be an Annual Parish and Annual General meeting prior to the Ordinary meeting on 26 May.

8 Planning a) 26NP0034: Variation of condition no. 2 (approved plans & documents) of planning permission 23NP0084 – Demolition of existing Garden Room & construction of replacement Garden Room with porch: Ramshope Lodge, Catcleugh, NE191Z – Following discussion there was agreement to support the proposal.

9 Finance/accounts for payment

- a) Parish finance update: The Clerk provided a budget update advising the balance as at 29 March was £31,616.06. This included a balance for the restricted reserves of Byrness garages £14,616.45, Byrness allotments, £187.57, Rochester Roundhouse, £2,878.00 and defibrillators, £570.03. The reserved budget presently had the balances of – Community benefit - £1814.03, Parish Council Land Management - £1,200.00 and Rochester grass cutting - £304.00.

The Clerk provided details and explanation of the Accounting and Audit process.

- b) Section 106 funding request for Play Area equipment in Byrness: The Clerk confirmed that the application had been successful and that the £2,937.65 had been agreed towards a new piece of play area equipment in Byrness.
- c) Community Foundation grant for Play Area seating / equipment in Byrness: The Clerk confirmed that the Bellingham fund had been oversubscribed however the Committee had agreed to provide £500.00 from the application of £1,826. It was agreed this sum would be put towards the purchase of the play area equipment. Together with the Section 106 funding the amount required was approximately £1,000 short. There was no current funding for the replacement of the play area and Isaac's seats confirmed. Various other possible sources of funding were discussed and it was agreed to investigate further.
- d) Quotes for removal of grass cuttings on Parish Council land, Byrness: The Clerk reported he had not been successful in obtaining a second quote as yet. The Chair advised she had also asked someone for a quote but that also as yet had not been forthcoming. It was noted that it would be beneficial for improving parking availability if the debris was to be removed however over time there had become an expectation from some residents that debris could be placed at this location and if the area were to be cleared it may be difficult to prevent debris from still being dumped there. This was compounded as there was an expectation that residents cutting the area in front of their properties but no facilities were provided by County Council for removal of the debris. It was agreed to give the matter further consideration.
- e) Quote for weed killing tarmac area between garages and the start of the 'Ride' in Byrness: The Clerk advised that he had received a quote of £50.00 plus VAT from Chris Mowatt and this was agreed by all. It would be funded from the garage reserve fund. It was noted that the first cut of the Byrness grass would need to be made as soon as possible from week commencing 13 April. It was also requested that when Mr Mowatt weed killed at Rochester he contacted the Chair beforehand so necessary preparations could be made.
- f) RTC Sports Centre donation request:- The email received from the RTC Chair, Cheryl Wilson, had been shared and was discussed. There was agreement that the RTC was a vital local facility and all agreed to make a £500.00 donation. It was also agreed that the funds would come from the Community Benefit reserve fund.
- g) Donation process for Bremenium Archaeological Excavations:- The Chair reported that she had been contacted by Richard Carlton regarding a donation the Bremenium dig had been offered however they did not have an account that could accept it. It was noted that the Parish Council could accept the donation and keep the funds until the dig required the funds to cover costs. All were in agreement to the proposal. It was agreed by all that the Chair and Clerk would administer the restricted reserve balance when received.
- h) Bank charges for February & March, 2026: The Clerk confirmed that there had been a £4.25 and £4.67 charges respectively.
- i) The following payment(s) are presented for approval:-
- Payment to A. Scott for hedge cutting at Byrness allotment £200.00 was agreed. It was noted that this payment would be funded by the reserve funds for the allotments.
 - Payment to A. Scott for pest control in Byrness £255.00 was agreed and would be funded from the PC Land Management reserved budget.
- j) The following payment(s) are presented for approval:-
- M. Chilvers (February & March, 2026) salary and expenses. The payment of £443.70 (salary) was agreed.
 - Payment of £18.00 for room hire at Byrness Village Hall on 31 March. was agreed.

10 Any Other Business:

- a) Cllr Softley highlighted that despite the Parish Council precept remaining at the same figure as 2025 the increase documented on the Council Tax information recently received was 4%. It was noted that this potentially could be for a number of reasons such as fewer residents paying Council Tax or at least the full amount compared to the previous year.

b) The Chair reported that the Byrness volunteers had been in contact with Forestry England regarding the possibility of having some seating installed. Forestry England had provided a picnic table near the church and there is a possibility further seats will be provided along the walk in the village. The Chair highlighted the need for the Parish Council to consider the possibility of replacing Isaac's seat although it was appreciated a grant application had been made.

c) Cllr Hall enquired whether any seating can be installed at High Rochester as he had been advised by two residents anything can be put there as long as there is no digging. The Chair advised that an official confirmation is required and that it is likely that a consultation with land owners would be required before any action could be considered.

Date of Next Meeting. Tuesday 27 May, 2026, at Byrness Village Hall, starting 7:00pm. This will begin with the Annual Parish and Annual General Meetings. Meeting closed 9.25pm