

Rochester with Byrness Parish Council

Minutes for the Meeting of Rochester with Byrness Parish Council held on
Tuesday 26 May, 2026 *At Byrness Village Hall*

1 Attendance: Cllr S Chapman (Chair), Cllr P. Softley & Cllr N. Hall.

M. Chilvers (Clerk). Nine residents and Kelly Hollings (Kielder Wildcat – until 8.03)

2 Apologies: There were apologies from Cllrs Hague & Kelly. **3 Declaration of Interest:** Cllr Softley (9l – Byrness VH)

4 Minutes of previous Ordinary Parish Council meeting on 31 March, 2026 – The minutes were agreed by all and signed as a true record.

5 Guest speaker – The Chair welcomed Kelly Hollings. Kelly provided a background to the project to introduce wildcats to Kielder. She explained the features as to why the Kielder location was considered a good area. Kelly reported on the results of a feasibility study that was generally supportive of the initiative. A habitat suitability study has been undertaken using Europe where wildcats exist and this has established three sites within Kielder that are considered excellent for Wildcats. Kelly provided details of the next steps that included surveying with volunteers as well as introduction of camera traps during 2026.

6 Opportunity for members of the public to raise matters – Mr Knight suggested that amended documents such as the proposed combined Standing Orders and Financial Regulations be shared publicly before a meeting. Mrs Oliver asked a question about a property in Byrness that she had been advised might be sold as a multiple-occupancy.

7 Matters arising

a) Woodland Management plan (WPM) in Byrness – It was acknowledged that there had been little progress of this matter recently but it was hoped progress would be made during the summer.

b) Byrness substation progress update – The Clerk provided details of the progress update he had received from Andrew Webster (Northern Powergrid). A part was on order that when received and fitted should lead to the substation becoming fully operational. Unfortunately Mr Webster was unable to confirm any timescale for this work.

c) 100 years of Kielder celebration at Byrness: There was discussion of possible events that could be held in Byrness. It was highlighted that there was no budget available from Forestry England. If an event was chosen that required budget the Chair advised details should be shared with the Parish Council to consider the proposal.

d) Boundary of Byrness car park: The Clerk provided an update he had received from Cllr Hague. Paul Scott confirmed he was happy to assist Cllr Hague and suggested contact was made with NPg for 'donation' of one of their old poles to use for the vertical posts for the boundary.

e) Fallen debris in Spithope burn: It was confirmed that the debris had been removed by Northumbria Water (NWL). The Clerk advised that contact details had now been established so that if a similar problem occurred NWL would recognise it as a priority job to clear.

f) Removal of abandoned car in South Greens: Thanks were expressed to NCC for the removal of the car that has created a further, much needed, parking place for residents.

g) Speeding traffic through Rochester – The Clerk provided the latest data from the two SIDs in Rochester. The North SID was recording an 85%ile in April of 35.3mph and over 50 months was averaging 36.5mph. The South located SID recorded 85%ile in April as 35.1mph and over 55 months average 85%ile of 36.9mph.

h) Rochester bus stop: The Clerk provided an update that he had received from Richard McKenzie (NCC) that the topic for both Rochester and Otterburn was on the LTP for 2026 and further details, including timescales should follow soon.

i) Possible litter/dog poo bin on Bremenium Way: The Clerk reported that his contact for this work at NCC had been on sick-leave but had recently returned and hoped to provide an update soon.

j) Warning signs of goats on A68: It was noted that NCC had confirmed there would installation warning signs however the Clerk advised he had not as yet received timescales for the work.

k) Location of the July Parish Council meeting: It was noted that Rochester Village Hall had a booking on the July meeting date so there was agreement to hold that meeting in Byrness.

8 Planning a) There were no applications to consider this meeting.

9 Finance/accounts for payment

- a) Parish finance update: The Clerk provided a budget update advising the balance as at 19 May was £40,648. This included a balance for the restricted reserves of Byrness garages £14,906.45, Byrness allotments, £229.57, Rochester Roundhouse, £2,878.00 and defibrillators, £570.03 plus £5,000 for the Bremenium Dig. The reserved budget presently had the balances of – Community benefit - £1,314.03, Parish Council Land Management - £945.00 and Rochester grass cutting - £304.00.
The Clerk provided details of the budget activity during 2025-26. The opening balance had been £28,736.15 and closing on 31 March, 2026 at £30,900.94. Details of the restricted budget were provided as at 31 March, 2026 – Byrness garages £14,646.45, Byrness allotments, £193.57, Rochester Roundhouse, £2,878.00 and defibrillators, £570.03. This provided a 'working balance' of £12,612.89. The Clerk reported that the precept had been maintained at £7,500.
- b) Confirm and approve the Certification of Exemption for 2025-26: This was approved by all.
- c) Approve the Annual Governance Statement 2025-26: This was approved by all.
- d) Approve the Accounting Statement & Explanation of Variances 2025-26: This was approved by all.
- e) Approve the draft Annual Accounts for 2025-26: This was approved by all.
- f) Funding update for Byrness play area equipment and seating:- The Clerk provided an update on funds received for the purchase & installation of the play area equipment as well as a replacement for Isaac's seat. There was still approximately £1,000 shortfall however the Clerk confirmed he was still investigating various sources for possible grant funding. The Councillors agreed to proceed with the play area equipment so that it may be potentially completed before the end of the summer.
- g) Quotes for removal of grass cuttings on Parish Council land, Byrness:- It was highlighted that there had been no progress on this matter. It was agreed to seek ideas for a possible community compost bin.
- h) Donation request from PCC for graveyard maintenance: There was agreement to make a donation of £500.00. It was questioned whether it was possible to increase the amount of the donation but it was highlighted that the current rules did not permit.
- i) Donation process for Bremenium Archaeological Excavations: The Clerk reported that the dig committee had confirmed that £5,000.00 had been received to the Parish Council bank account. The Clerk advised that he had received details suggesting the dig would happen late summer when the funds would be required by the committee.
- j) Bank charges for April & May, 2026: The Clerk confirmed that there had been a £4.67 and £4.25 charges respectively.
- k) The following payment(s) were approved between meetings:-
- Payment to Spanglefish for annual subscription £90.00 + VAT.
 - Payment to C. Mowatt for grass cutting £180.00 + VAT.
- l) The following payment(s) are presented for approval:-
- M. Chilvers (April & May, 2026) salary and expenses. The payment of £443.70 was agreed.
 - Payment to NALC (annual subscription) for £95.20 – was agreed.
 - Payment of room hire at Byrness Village Hall on 26 May for £18.00 was agreed and Clerk advised Cllr Kelly had agreed for the payment of the invoice.

10 Any Other Business:

- a) Cllr Softley provided an update on the latest development of Byrness Village Hall. This included the installation of solar panels and batteries. The Chair thanked him for his for all his work.
- b) The Chair reported that the bench at High Rochester had been repaired and whilst not sure who had undertaken this work, thanks were expressed to whoever it was.

Date of Next Meeting. Tuesday 28 July, 2026, at Byrness Village Hall, starting 7:00pm.

Meeting closed 9.10pm