

FIRLE PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF FIRLE PARISH COUNCIL: Tuesday 11th November 2025, 7pm, Firle Village Hall. **Members in Attendance:** Cllr Hill (Chair), Cllr Barr (Vice Chair) arrived 19.06, Cllr Bolger, Cllr Symes.

Members not in Attendance: Cllr Lance. **Others Present:** Lorna Thwaites, Clerk and RFO, Mr B Essink, ACS Ltd.

Members of the Public in Attendance: None. **Questions Received from the Public:** None.

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** RECEIVED and ACCEPTED from Cllr Lance.
2. **NO DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS RECEIVED AND NO REQUESTS FOR A DISPENSATION WITH RESPECT TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA,** as required by the Members Code of Conduct.
3. **TO HEAR FROM SOUTHERN WATER AND ACS Ltd ON THE APPLICATION OF BIOSOLIDS TO FARMLAND:** Mr B Essink, Head of Operations, ACS Ltd attended the meeting at the request of Firle Parish Council to discuss the spreading of biosolids (sewage cake) in mid-August 2025; the cake was applied to a field close to the village, and had an overpowering stench; the farmer had notified Firle Estate but no notice had been given to local residents or community groups; the cake had a very powerful and offensive smell which lasted 2 days and prevented people from opening their windows during a heatwave; this was the first time the Council were aware of sewage cake being spread and impacting the village; the Parish Council wrote to the farmer and a detailed response was received; Mr Essink advised that legally a farmer doesn't have to notify residents but the smell arising from the spreading of cake could impact outdoor events; a notification to residents, community groups and the parish council may have helped; the council asked about the closeness of the application to the village, the choice of location and why the use of sewage cake has been introduced; Mr Essink advised the field has had a registration of a stockpile of sewage cake previously although the council didn't think it hadn't been spread on this particular field before; the hot weather at the time had a negative impact on the smell; sewage cake is typically spread in July, Aug, Sept and can be spread 50m from houses; sewage cake has been spread on many of the farms in and around Firle; it can be applied to fields every other year and before spreading can proceed, samples of phosphate levels are taken; farmers decide when to spread the cake and will contact the contractor to arrange; the farmer pays the contractor that spreads the cake but it is cheaper and considered superior to fertiliser; approx. 180k tonnes of sewage cake from Southern Water are spread around the whole South East area during the summer months; the cake comes from treatment works at Peacehaven, Hastings and Goddards Green; the sewage cake produced by Southern Water is stored in a silo where no air can penetrate and this increases the smell; the Council raised concerns about forever chemicals and micro plastics which might be in the sewage cake and can build up in the soil over time - the soil is sampled for metals every 10 years; the Council discussed a recent feature by the BBC on forever chemicals in sewage cake - this referred to Maine, USA where a factory produces fire retardants (which has forever chemicals in the material); water companies do test for forever chemicals and DEFRA are currently writing a report on a forever chemicals which will be produced by 2027; the Environment Agency has been testing for micro plastics and forever chemicals in the soil since 2024; the Parish Council discussed asking Firle Estate to let them know if spreading is happening again - it was felt that good communication across the village would help; the field close to the village of Firle where sewage cake was recently spread was discussed and the fact that its yields had reduced over last 5 years; the council felt that overall the hot weather caused the extreme smell noticed this year; the only alternatives for disposing of the biosolids produced is landfill or incineration; the Council discussed how such a disruptive situation in Firle can be avoided in the future and made the following AGREEMENTS: Request Firle Estate to notify the Parish Council, local residents and community groups of any future sludge spreading in the vicinity of the village; to write letters to all farmers asking them to notify the Parish Council of any sewage cake spreading on fields south and west of the village; Cllr Barr will distribute the letters once approved; to write to Dan Munro, Southern Water to request more information about forever chemicals and micro plastics and the levels that can build up in the soil; to write to James McCleary MP to request updates on the work of DEFRA and his concerns with microplastics and forever chemical contamination in soils.
4. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING:** The minutes of the ordinary meeting of Firle Parish Council held on 7th October 2025 were RESOLVED to be a correct record and were SIGNED by the Chair; Cllr Hill advised that she tried to get a natural wreath but was unsuccessful and thus the usual plastic wreaths were bought.
5. **FINANCE/ADMIN:**
 - 5.1 Payments to be made in November were AUTHORISED and the bank reconciliation RECEIVED and SIGNED; the payment of £140 for the temporary repairs to the memorial wall was AUTHORISED.
6. **BUDGET 2026-27:**

6.1 The first draft of the budget and precept 2026-2027 was DISCUSSED and a similar precept increase to last year was considered.

7. THE LEGAL AGREEMENT WITH FIRLE VILLAGE HALL AND PLAYING FIELDS.

7.1 The Council RECEIVED feedback from FVHPFC and AGREED to insert 'does not include tennis courts – the parish council is not liable for any accidents or damage or maintenance of the tennis courts'; the next meeting of FVHPFC is Tuesday 18th November when the agreement can be signed.

8. THE WHOLE ESTATE PLAN – FIRLE ESTATE was RECEIVED: The plan is now accessible on the SDNPA website; the Council AGREED that they would meet to discuss the plan before the next meeting and would agree comments at the next parish council meeting.

9. REPORT(S):

9.1 Reports from Local and District Councillors and the MP for Lewes: None received.

10. MATTERS ARISING:

10.1 The works to temporarily repair the wall in front of the memorial are complete.

10.2 The Council AGREED to reduce the height of the hedge behind the war memorial by approx. 2ft.

10.3 The Council RESOLVED to buy dog fouling warning signs to use in parts of the village: 5 x signs for the play area and 5 x general signs; to be purchased with a mount.

10.4 Cllr Hill attended the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) webinar: Throughout Sussex there will be a nature recovery plan headed up by biodiversity officers from local councils; the aim is to help nature and the strategy will play a role in the planning process; areas in East and West Sussex that can be made more biodiverse are to be mapped; a consultation where locations can be proposed is underway; Firle Parish Council agreed that Cllr Hill would add the following sites to the consultation - the churchyard and spinney, the community orchard and Millennium Wood.

10.5 The Council RESOLVED to report the broken 'The Street' sign on the ESH portal.

10.6 The Council AGREED to write to Firle Bonfire Society to thank them for organising 3 maroons and to request an invoice; the Council were notified that plastic had been left on The Street from firework bangers and AGREED to ask the bonfire society to include the clear up of debris on the pavement in the future.

11. CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED:

11.1 Training – Parish Councils and Village Halls: NOTED.

11.2 Road Safety Posters ordered for Firle: RECEIVED; Cllr Barr and Symes will put the signs up in the following locations – 'Safety around Children' signs to be placed near the school; one by the crossing near the allotments; after the bungalows but before the junction; one on Bostal Road; the 'Pass Wide and Slow for Horses' signs to be placed on the Coach Road aiming down Chalky Road; on The Street towards to the school; one near Gibraltar Farm; and one by Beanstalk.

11.3 Sussex Resilience Toolkit – LDC: NOTED and AGREED to send to the parish magazine.

11.4 Stroke Awareness Workshop, Funding Information and Nature Recovery Consultation Details: NOTED.

11.5 SDNPA Active Travel Network Plan and Vision Map – Rights of Way, SDNPA: The Council AGREED that Firle campsite and the proposed A26 to Newhaven cycle path should be included and Cllr Hill will email to confirm.

11.6 LNRS website: Covered under item 10.4.

11.7 Village car park – Firle Estate: NOTED.

11.8 Lewes District Emergency Food Winter Fundraiser – Sussex Community Development Association: NOTED.

11.9 Thank you and follow up – ESH: NOTED.

12. HIGHWAYS:

12.1 The foliage by village sign at the entrance to the village at Crossways will be cut by Firle Estate.

12.2 Cllr Barr has reported the blocked drains by Redwood Cottage in Wick Street and has been given the reference DJD006852.

13. PLANNING: No applications received.

14. PROJECTS:

14.1 Assets of Community Value

14.1.1 The nomination of the Millennium Woods and the Allotments as an ACV has been drafted; Cllr Hill will add local usage and source a map before sending.

15. ITEMS AGREED FOR THE PARISH MAGAZINE: Small grant awards; summary of sewage cake/biosolids; the recent maroon provision; temporary traffic warning signs the temporary repairs to memorial wall by Paul Hollingdale.

16. THE TIME AND DATE OF THE NEXT ORDINARY MEETING OF FIRLE PARISH COUNCIL: 9th December, 7pm.

17. THE MEETING CLOSED at 21.06.