

# PARISH COUNCIL OF BENENDEN

## Minutes of the Ordinary Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024, 7pm, Memorial Hall

Present	Cllrs Beveridge, Cochrane, Driver, Grant, Hagan, Lewis, Presgrave and Thomas; Cllr Dawlings. One member of the public to address the Parish Council regarding the proposed solar array development at Netters Farm and Lower Ellenden Farm. Plus three members of public attending.	
Item		Action Responsibility
1. APOLOGIES	Apologies received from Cllrs Cruse, Holden and Neville and the Parish Clerk.	
2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS	Cllrs Grant and Lewis declared an interest, as Trustees of Benenden Village Trust, in Item 8 b iii and were excluded from the Parish Council vote.	
3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING	The minutes from the Parish Council Meeting held on 18 <sup>th</sup> November were unanimously approved as a correct record of the meeting.	
4. REPORTS BY COUNTY/ BOROUGH COUNCILLORS	<p>Cllr Dawlings reported :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full council meeting last week.</li> <li>• Spend money on car Park at RVP (freehold TWBC) repairs. 50% operational, floors are being propped up.</li> <li>• The waste collection contract will be renewed in 2027, and this is currently estimated to be an additional £4m.</li> <li>• Any mayoral combined authority would probably be Kent and Medway covering 1.9m people, which would not work at a local level. A unitary authority of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone is the preferred option, about 500,000 residents. Some functions such as Planning and Highways would still need to be dealt with at a regional level.</li> </ul> <p>Cllr Neville's report was received too late to be taken to the meeting, and was circulated with the minutes.</p>	
5. REPORTS BY CHAIR AND PARISH COUNCILLORS	A Parish Chairs meeting was held in December but Cllr Thomas was unable to attend.	
6. PLANNING	<p>a. <u>Planning Applications</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>24/02802/LBC</b> Gibbons School House, The Street. Reinstatement of collapsed ceiling to an existing store room to the rear of the house. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ SITE CONSTRAINTS: 15 in total including.</li> <li>○ LISTED BUILDINGS IN PROXIMITY: Subject property Grade II Listed. Many in proximity.</li> </ul> <b>The Parish Council unanimously agreed to support this application</b> subject to the works being satisfactory to the Conservation Officer.</li> <li>• <b>24/02803/LBC</b> Gibbons School House, The Street. Addition of 4 roof lights to the rear of the property. (Works already carried out). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ GENERAL COMMENTS: Regularisation of roof lights to rear of property. Date of installation circa 2013.</li> </ul> <b>The Parish Council unanimously agreed to support this application</b> subject to the works being satisfactory to the Conservation Officer.</li> <li>• <b>24/02868/FULL</b> Culpeppers, Coldharbour Road. Minor Material Amendment of Condition 2 of Planning Permission 23/01223/FULL - Alterations to; increase/changes to Building Design, Height &amp; Size; External Materials; Garage Design &amp; Size; Landscaping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Small increase in length of building and increase in height; slight change of orientation.</li> <li>○ Roof terrace above lower ground floor to rear of building (north elevation).</li> <li>○ Extent and layout of lower ground floor not shown but north elevation drawings show lower ground floor with large sliding glass doors/windows.</li> <li>○ Detached garage reorientated with doors facing the east elevation of house, 3 bay cart barn with roof space and roof lights, external staircase to roof space.</li> <li>○ Larch exterior cladding, brick, anthracite grey window frames, slate roof.</li> <li>○ Post and rail fencing, wildflower meadow planting.</li> </ul> <b>The Parish Council unanimously agreed to support this application.</b></li> </ul>	

Chairman..... Date.....

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*These minutes are not a verbatim record of the meeting, but a summary of discussion and decisions taken at the meeting.*

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>24/01767/FULL</b> Land At Netters Farm, Attwaters Lane, Hawkhurst. Development of solar array, battery storage and associated infrastructure (resubmission of 23/02067/FULL)</li> <li>• <b>24/01768/FULL</b> Land At Lower Ellenden Farm, Water Lane, Hawkhurst. Development of solar array, battery storage and associated infrastructure (resubmission of 23/02067/FULL)</li> </ul> <p>➤ The applicant addressed the meeting and advised : the laydown site will now be located at Water Lane/A229 junction; tractors and trailers will be used to transport the construction materials; reduction in traffic movements as a result of changed laydown site; 3-month build; maintenance once a month; no roadstone to be used, interlocking plastic squares laid onto the grass – 4 lorry loads to Netters, 4 to Ellenden; panels higher than usual to enable sheep grazing; poor grade agricultural land – no good for crops; farm could be carbon neutral in 4 to 5 years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Fundamentally no change from the previously withdrawn applications and the harm to the High Weald National Landscape remains the same.</li> <li>○ Use of a separate ‘laydown’ site at Water Lane/A229 junction on former landfill site for the construction project demonstrates that the Attwaters Lane site is an unsuitable location for a solar farm. Tractors and trailers to be used instead of HGVs to transport construction materials from laydown site and again demonstrates unsuitability of proposed site. Though it must be said that rural lanes were not designed for the large, heavy tractors and trailers used today.</li> <li>○ Attwaters Lane and Water Lane are Designated Significant Rural Lanes with historic value and contribute to nature conservation and to the distinctive character of the countryside.</li> <li>○ High Weald National Landscape Partnership recommends various practices and actions are pursued in the High Weald in relation to the climate crisis. This includes the development of renewable energy appropriate to the landscape: <i>Renewable energy systems in the High Weald can be best accommodated into this small-scale landscape through smaller scale and domestic projects, and small-scale shared community installations, for example prioritising solar panels on roofs of existing development, (particularly on the larger roofscapes of modern commercial and agricultural buildings, and avoiding external roofscapes of historic and listed buildings), in gardens and on brownfield land (depending on visibility in the landscape), rather than solar fields.</i></li> <li>○ Under Section 85 of the Countryside and Right of Way Act 2000, as amended by the Levelling-up and Regenerations Act in December 2023, strengthened the statutory ‘duty of regard’ for LPA decisions to ‘seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.’</li> <li>○ In determining this application, the LPA must seek positive outcomes for the holistic natural beauty of the HWNL and ensure its conservation and enhancement.</li> <li>○ The BNDP policies are to protect the landscape and environment of the parish.</li> <li>○ Whilst this application also falls within the adjoining parishes of Hawkhurst and Cranbrook &amp; Sissinghurst, the cross-parish scenario is irrelevant in the decision-making in regard to the holistic natural beauty of the HWNL.</li> <li>○ BPC’s objection to the previously withdrawn application 23/02067/FULL remains relevant and identifies the BNDP &amp; TWBC policies leading to the decision of the parish council.</li> <li>○ BPC contends that this proposal will alter and harm the appearance of the landscape, including its landform and geology, plantlife, wildlife, and landscape features of the HWNL, thereby producing a negative outcome to conservation and enhancement and urges the refusal of the application.</li> </ul> <p><b>The Parish Council unanimously agreed to object to this application.</b></p> <p><u>Other Planning Matters</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>23/03274/FULL</b> Benenden Hospital Development, Goddards Green Road. Submission of details in relation to conditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>24/02952/SUB</b> Condition 14 - Details of proposed roads, footways, verges, junctions, street lighting, retaining walls, service routes, surface water outfall, vehicle overhand margins, embankments, carriageway &amp; street furniture</li> <li>➤ Street lighting scheme - 31 no 1m high Bollard lighting finished in black. Miniature infrared photocell; 7 no Lighting columns and glass lantern. 5m high tubular galvanised steel.</li> <li>➤ 3.5 There is minimal artificial lighting in the parish. New developments must not introduce inappropriately bright lighting at night over pathways or other areas within the site. Artificial</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
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	<p>lighting at night creates light pollution and is detrimental to wildlife and to the rural nature of the parish. Sites on top of a ridge or very open sites would be particularly impactful and low lighting levels would be expected to be used. The parish has repeatedly stressed a wish to preserve Benenden's dark skies. (See Guidance Notes for the Reduction of Obtrusive Light, The Institution of Lighting Engineers 2005, and any subsequent revisions.)</p> <p>➤ 3.5.1 The Parish Council will work with the owners of existing exterior lighting schemes to modify these to enhance the quality of the dark sky of the parish.</p> <p><b>The Parish Council unanimously agreed to object to lighting columns</b> as contrary to BNPD policies, impact on the adjoining HWNL, impact because of location on a ridge.</p> <p>Other conditions to note with no comment :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 24/02951/SUB Condition 8 - Drainage details for the relocated carpark</li> <li>○ 24/02847/SUB Condition 13 - Drainage Details</li> <li>○ 24/02952/SUB Condition 14 - Details of proposed roads, footways, verges, junctions, street lighting, retaining walls, service routes, surface water outfall, vehicle overhand margins, embankments, carriageway &amp; street furniture [No mention of street furniture other than lighting found within the documents.]</li> <li>○ 24/02848/SUB Condition 24 - Landscape &amp; Ecological Management Plan</li> <li>○ 24/02971/SUB Condition 31 - Crime prevention through environmental design</li> <li>○ 24/02886/SUB Condition 32 - Phasing Plan Phase 1 part SEQ, Phase 2 AH SEQ and NEQ, Phase 3 remainder of NEQ plus dwellings rear of the AH at SEQ.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>23/02523/FULL Uphill, New Pond Road</b></li> <li>○ The Parish Council discussed the recently submitted "Exceptional Circumstances Statement – December 2024" by the applicant, and agreed to comment as follows : <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The proposal for no affordable housing being provided on site is unacceptable due to non-compliance with the made Benenden Neighbourhood Plan Site Specific Policy 2 (SSP2) 1): "Provide a residential development of 18-20 C3 dwellings, with 40% affordable housing in accordance with the TWBC policy and a mix of type and size integrated throughout the development to meet local identified needs (see Policy HS1)."</li> <li>2. The number of affordable units proposed in the application for this development is 9 no. units, presently proposed as one block of flats, all units in the block being affordable. In every enquiry made by the applicant to the Registered Providers, they state that the number of affordable units is 7 no. thus making the block of flats a mixed tenure of affordable housing and 2 no. privately owned. This has resulted in negative responses from all the providers, as they require freehold ownership of any affordable units offered. We require an explanation as to why the number of affordable units has been reduced from 9 no. to 7 no.</li> </ol> </li> </ul> <p>BPC also notes that the applicant made no request or offer to the Registered Providers in light of their negative responses, to facilitate a revised scheme that may better meet their requirements for affordable housing units in Benenden.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Notwithstanding the above, BPC also notes the recent comments from the HWNL Joint Advisory Committee in relation to the overall scheme character: <i>"The scheme overall lacks place-making coherence and a clear design rationale, composed as it is of two distinctive halves; a large 'country house' style apartment block to the front of the plot, along with a fairly generic suburban style housing estate, with no clear attempt to reconcile the two. As such, the scheme overall is confused and disjointed, with the large 'country house' sitting in a sea of housing development, and with neither half of the development contributing positively or appropriately to the setting of the other. This would be a concerning design approach even if the country house were already existing, however, since all built form is newly proposed this approach is wholly unjustified.</i></li> </ol> <p>Taking into account the above comments, BPC asks that there is consideration given to a revised scheme, with the amount and type of affordable housing better responding to local needs, in line with the Affordable Housing Officer's comments made back in December 2023. These comments have so far been ignored by the applicant, who have chosen to forge ahead with a scheme that includes affordable housing units in a style and tenure that is not acceptable to Registered Providers.</p>	
7. HIGHWAYS, FOOTPATHS & TRANSPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● As previously reported, Cllr Driver had reported the ditch issues on Woodcock Lane to KCC Highways and the matter is still under investigation.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Cllr Driver has reported the footpath gate at the bottom of Hilly Fields to KCC which is rotten and needs replacing. The bollards nearby have also fallen over, and Cllr Driver will report this.</li></ul>	PD																																																																																													
8. RESOURCING/ FINANCE	<p><u>a. Monthly Finance</u></p> <p>TRANSACTIONS FROM 1st November 2024</p> <table><tr><td>Brought Forward Current Account</td><td>12386.51</td></tr><tr><td>Brought Forward Savings Account</td><td>75551.41</td></tr><tr><td>Brought forward income</td><td>87937.92</td></tr></table> <table><tr><td>Payee</td><td>Reference</td><td>Amount</td></tr><tr><td>B&amp;IG WI</td><td>Copying</td><td>1.80</td></tr><tr><td>TOTAL</td><td></td><td>1.80</td></tr></table> <p>Expenditure</p> <table><tr><td>Supplier</td><td>Reference</td><td>Amount</td></tr><tr><td>DD Nest</td><td>Pension</td><td>169.10</td></tr><tr><td>FEE Unity Trust Bank</td><td>Monthly Charge</td><td>6.00</td></tr><tr><td>FEE Unity Trust Bank</td><td>Stop Cheque Fee</td><td>8.00</td></tr><tr><td>BACS Employee</td><td>Staffing Costs</td><td>1113.81</td></tr><tr><td>BACS o2</td><td>Telephone</td><td>31.80</td></tr><tr><td>BACS F&amp;C Cleaning</td><td>Public Toilet</td><td>1482.00</td></tr><tr><td>BACS Tompsett Landscaping</td><td>Grounds Maintenance</td><td>558.00</td></tr><tr><td>BACS Business Stream</td><td>Public Toilet</td><td>27.32</td></tr><tr><td>BACS Iden Green Pavilion</td><td>Meeting Hire</td><td>16.00</td></tr><tr><td>BACS A Thomas</td><td>Beacon Field Mowing</td><td>200.00</td></tr><tr><td>BACS RBL Appeal</td><td>Poppy Wreath</td><td>20.00</td></tr><tr><td>BACS A Durnnell</td><td>Mower/War Memorial</td><td>331.92</td></tr><tr><td>TOTAL</td><td></td><td>3963.95</td></tr></table> <p>Balance 83975.77</p> <p>Current account bank statement 103 30th November 2024 8424.36</p> <p>Savings account bank statement 007 30th November 2024 75551.41</p> <p>Reconciled 83975.77</p> <p>Approved December 2024 Payments</p> <table><tr><td>BACS G Hagan</td><td>Flags</td><td>288.59</td></tr><tr><td>DD Nest</td><td>Pension</td><td>128.77</td></tr><tr><td>FEE Unity Trust Bank</td><td>Monthly Charge</td><td>5.40</td></tr><tr><td>BACS Employee</td><td>Staffing Costs</td><td>1543.40</td></tr><tr><td>BACS o2</td><td>Telephone</td><td>31.80</td></tr><tr><td>BACS Amazon</td><td>Paper</td><td>5.25</td></tr><tr><td>BACS HMRC</td><td>Employer Contributions Q3</td><td>587.25</td></tr><tr><td>BACS Memorial Hall</td><td>Meeting Hire</td><td>27.00</td></tr><tr><td>BACS Castle Water</td><td>Public Toilets</td><td>110.55</td></tr><tr><td>BACS Benenden Community Shop</td><td>Volunteer Village Tidy</td><td>140.40</td></tr><tr><td>BACS Benenden Community Shop</td><td>Volunteers Wildflower Meadow</td><td>54.60</td></tr><tr><td>TOTAL</td><td></td><td>2923.01</td></tr></table> <p><u>b. Resourcing Committee Meeting 3<sup>rd</sup> December</u></p> <p>The draft minutes of the meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> December had been circulated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. BPC Financial Regulations – <b>the Parish Council unanimously agreed the Financial Regulations.</b></li><li>ii. BPC Standing Orders – <b>the Parish Council unanimously agreed the Standing Orders.</b></li><li>iii. Benenden Village Trust – <b>the Parish Council unanimously agreed a grant of £5,000 towards the Village Hall heating project; the Parish Council unanimously agreed to take on the grounds maintenance mowing and hedge-cutting contract for Benenden and Iden Green Recreation Grounds and Benenden Village Hall for a period of 5 years.</b></li><li>iv. 2025/26 Precept - <b>the Parish Council unanimously agreed the 2025/26 budget and a</b></li></ul>	Brought Forward Current Account	12386.51	Brought Forward Savings Account	75551.41	Brought forward income	87937.92	Payee	Reference	Amount	B&IG WI	Copying	1.80	TOTAL		1.80	Supplier	Reference	Amount	DD Nest	Pension	169.10	FEE Unity Trust Bank	Monthly Charge	6.00	FEE Unity Trust Bank	Stop Cheque Fee	8.00	BACS Employee	Staffing Costs	1113.81	BACS o2	Telephone	31.80	BACS F&C Cleaning	Public Toilet	1482.00	BACS Tompsett Landscaping	Grounds Maintenance	558.00	BACS Business Stream	Public Toilet	27.32	BACS Iden Green Pavilion	Meeting Hire	16.00	BACS A Thomas	Beacon Field Mowing	200.00	BACS RBL Appeal	Poppy Wreath	20.00	BACS A Durnnell	Mower/War Memorial	331.92	TOTAL		3963.95	BACS G Hagan	Flags	288.59	DD Nest	Pension	128.77	FEE Unity Trust Bank	Monthly Charge	5.40	BACS Employee	Staffing Costs	1543.40	BACS o2	Telephone	31.80	BACS Amazon	Paper	5.25	BACS HMRC	Employer Contributions Q3	587.25	BACS Memorial Hall	Meeting Hire	27.00	BACS Castle Water	Public Toilets	110.55	BACS Benenden Community Shop	Volunteer Village Tidy	140.40	BACS Benenden Community Shop	Volunteers Wildflower Meadow	54.60	TOTAL		2923.01	
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	<b>precept of £52,000.</b> The Band D equivalent of a precept of £52,000 represents an increase of 3.8 % from £51.95 to £53.90 per annum. An increase of £1.95 for the year.	
9. ENVIRONMENT & MAINTENANCE	<p><u>a. Beacon Field Wildflower Meadow</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cllr Driver has planted out some Cowslip and Ox-Eye Daisy seedlings and sown some Yellow Rattle and Foxglove seeds.</li> <li>• Cllr Driver has dug up a few Bristly Ox Tongue and suggests investing in a weed puller (£40) to tackle these, Docks and other weeds which were troublesome last year. The Parish Council agreed to this purchase.</li> <li>• The final draft of the lease agreement has been received. BPC to confirm it is in order and arrange for it to be signed.</li> </ul> <p><u>b. Village Asset/Maintenance Report</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The possible uses of telephone kiosks has been raised by parishioners. BPC owns the 3 kiosks in the parish (Benenden is an operational telephone and is Listed). It is preferred that the other two kiosks remain as they are as heritage assets.</li> <li>• Parishioners are encouraged to check grit boxes and to report to KCC Highways if filling is required <u>Report a problem on a road or pavement - Kent County Council</u> – winter maintenance – salt bin empty. To be included in next PC Magazine piece.</li> </ul> <p><u>c. Parish Wells</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The bollard licence application and payment has been cancelled. £8 fee was payable to cancel the cheque.</li> </ul> <p><u>d. Hedgerow Management Survey/Consultation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation by Rural Payments Agency (RPA) (part of DEFRA) on regulatory approach and use of civil sanctions for hedgerow management.</li> <li>• RPA is a government agency that pays farmers, traders and landowners, and manages schemes to support the rural economy.</li> <li>• The Management of Hedgerows (England) Regulations 2024 set out the rules for hedgerow management (applies to hedgerows growing in or adjacent to agricultural land) together with the approach to enforcement and the civil sanctions which may apply. The RPA has been appointed by SoS for DEFRA to act on his behalf as Regulator in respect of the Regulations. The proposals in the consultation will impact on all farmers and land managers in England who have hedgerows on their agricultural land. The regulations and their associated enforcement apply only to agricultural land. Hedgerow management beyond agricultural land would form a separate future consultation (but see Hedgerow Regs 1997).</li> <li>• The 2024 Hedgerow Regs apply to all agricultural land, whether claiming subsidies or not. Breaches can be reported to RPA.</li> <li>• Breaches can also be reported to the local authority.</li> <li>• It was agreed that no response from BPC is necessary.</li> <li>• It would be useful for councillors to be familiar with the Hedgerow Regulations so that action can be taken if a breach is in progress. Cllr Grant to write some notes.</li> </ul>	
10. VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS/ COMMUNITY	<p><u>a. Allotments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specification for parking area discussed, quotes sought and grant applications to be progressed.</li> <li>• May put woodchip down to make entrance less muddy this winter.</li> <li>• £2,270 in bank account; £400 of which is remaining grant, committed to water and fencing projects.</li> <li>• One structure application: Plot 6b, Fruit Cage and Shed, both supported by the Allotment Committee. <b>The Parish Council unanimously approved these structures.</b></li> </ul> <p><u>10.b KALC Community Award</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nominations for the KALC Community Award to be submitted by 7<sup>th</sup> February.</li> <li>• Parish Councillors to suggest suitable nominees.</li> </ul>	
11. CORRESPONDENCE/ PARISHIONER QUESTIONS	None.	

12. PARISH COUNCILLOR RESIGNATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cllr Presgrave has tendered her resignation with effect from 31<sup>st</sup> December. Councillors wished her well and thanked her for her contribution.</li> <li>• The Clerk will advise TWBC and request that the Parish Council is able to co-opt a new member. This process takes a couple of months to complete – notice has to be given of the resignation, notice that a co-option will take place and time for interested candidates to put themselves forward.</li> </ul>	
13. MEETING DATES 2025	Meeting dates 2025 : 20 <sup>th</sup> January, 17 <sup>th</sup> February, 17 <sup>th</sup> March, TUESDAY 22 <sup>ND</sup> APRIL (21 <sup>st</sup> being Easter Monday), 19 <sup>th</sup> May, 16 <sup>th</sup> June, 21 <sup>st</sup> July, 15 <sup>th</sup> September, 20 <sup>th</sup> October, 17 <sup>th</sup> November, 15 <sup>th</sup> December (moving the December meeting from second to third Monday in the month).	
DATE OF NEXT MEETING	Date of Next Meeting: Monday 20 <sup>th</sup> January 2025, Iden Green Pavilion, 7pm.	
	The meeting closed at 8.20pm.	