

Benenden Parish Council Ward Member Report

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December 2025

Full Council – Wednesday 10 December 2025

With a vote of 27 For, 4 Against, and 4 Abstentions, the Local Plan is now part of the borough's Development Plan.

The new Local Plan is adopted – having gone through multiple consultations, independent examination, and (recently) a public consultation on 'Main Modifications'.

Adoption will provide the borough with a current, robust planning framework to manage development pressures, ensuring that future housing, infrastructure, and community proposals are evaluated against clear, up-to-date policies. Without it, decisions might be more uncertain or reactive. Approving the plan now signals that the council is committing to long-term strategic planning, which can give developers, residents, and local organisations confidence about future growth and investment.

There was some pushback from some ward members, and some of that was motivated by party politics over the betterment of the borough. The Plan is nearly 9 years in the making - long overdue and halts the borough's housing targets at 678 per annum. Without the plan, yearly targets would be over 1,000.

Water outage

24,000 households have been affected by the water outage from the Pembury plant. There is a lot of misinformation about, and the saga has only just come to an end. Many of our Councillors have been on the ground, distributing water and ensuring that local businesses were supported throughout the crisis. However, it's disappointing to note that less than a week before the incident, representatives from South East Water attended an Overview and Scrutiny meeting at the Council to answer questions on crisis management, and yet the committee's concerns about poor engagement and communication with residents appear to have gone unheeded.

The council is now in the process of sending SE Water the bills for the resources TWBC used during the crisis, and they will be called in again to the Overview and Scrutiny committee to answer further questions.

Council Tax base

The 2026/27 Council tax base has been approved:

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL TAX BASE 2026/27

	Band A Disabled	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H	TOTAL 2026/27	TOTAL 2025/26
Dwellings	0.00	3,498.00	5,450.00	14,264.00	11,142.00	7,216.00	5,269.00	5,658.00	622.00	53,119.00	52,690.00
Voids	0.00	0.00	0.00	(1.00)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	(1.00)	(2.00)
Exemptions	0.00	(251.00)	(247.00)	(384.00)	(257.00)	(172.00)	(91.00)	(81.00)	(9.00)	(1,492.00)	(1,374.00)
Additions	0.00	46.00	72.00	135.00	171.00	166.00	71.00	55.00	3.00	719.00	725.00
Disabled Relief	2.00	1.00	29.00	(5.00)	(3.00)	4.00	(9.00)	(17.00)	(2.00)	0.00	0.00
Chargeable Dwellings	2.00	3,294.00	5,304.00	14,009.00	11,053.00	7,214.00	5,240.00	5,615.00	614.00	52,345.00	52,039.00
Discounts											
-----25%	0.00	2,248.76	2,954.02	5,335.75	3,385.45	1,763.15	1,103.20	815.58	39.59	17,645.48	17,430.72
-----50%	0.00	56.00	27.00	31.00	19.00	7.00	12.00	23.00	4.00	179.00	218.00
-----63%	0.00	7.00	2.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	10.00	9.00
-----10%	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	340.00
Discount Deduction	0.00	594.60	753.26	1,349.44	856.49	444.29	281.80	215.40	11.90	4,507.18	4,506.35
"National" Net Dwellings	2.00	2,699.40	4,550.74	12,659.56	10,196.51	6,769.71	4,958.20	5,399.60	602.10	47,837.82	47,532.65
Long Term Empty Class C Premium Over 1 years	0.00	26.00	59.00	62.00	48.00	28.00	20.00	14.00	3.00	260.00	298.00
Long Term Empty Over 5 years Premium	0.00	2.00	8.00	7.00	3.00	2.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	24.00	18.00
Long Term Empty Over 10 years Premium	0.00	4.00	2.00	6.00	8.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	22.00	28.00
Empty Exempt Class C	0.00	71.00	90.00	179.00	95.00	62.00	29.00	29.00	5.00	560.00	508.00
Repairs Class A	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	3.00	0.00
Second Home Class B	0.00	7.00	33.00	45.00	41.00	27.00	15.00	22.00	11.00	201.00	68.00
TWBC Net Dwellings	2.00	2,809.40	4,742.74	12,959.56	10,391.51	6,890.71	5,022.20	5,467.60	622.10	48,907.82	48,452.65
CT Reduction Scheme	(0.80)	(604.14)	(762.62)	(1,305.93)	(494.87)	(100.32)	(36.28)	(6.63)	0.00	(3,311.59)	(3,265.12)
Total Net Dwellings	1.20	2,205.26	3,980.12	11,653.63	9,896.64	6,790.39	4,985.92	5,460.97	622.10	45,596.23	45,187.53
Band D Equivalents	0.67	1,470.17	3,095.65	10,358.78	9,896.64	8,299.37	7,201.88	9,101.62	1,244.20	50,668.98	50,137.46

TAX BASE CALCULATION	2026/27
Total Band D	50,668.98
Collection Rate	98.00%
Tax Base	49,655.60

2025/26
50,137.46
98.00%
49,134.60

Variance
521.00

Planning Policy Working Group (PPWG) 2nd December

Planning & Infrastructure Bill

The Bill is positioned as part of a “pro-growth, pro-infrastructure” agenda aimed at accelerating housing, energy, transport, and other major developments. Its streamlining of planning and environmental rules, however, has drawn criticism from environmental groups, planners, and conservationists.

Key concerns:

- Reduced avenues for legal challenge could weaken scrutiny of major projects.
- The proposed Nature Restoration Fund, allowing developers to pay into an off-site mitigation fund, is seen by critics as a “pay-to-build” mechanism that may dilute environmental protections.
- Greater use of delegated decisions (planning officers rather than councillors) raises fears about diminished local democratic oversight and reduced sensitivity to local issues.

- Accelerated development may come at the expense of sustainability, green spaces, water resources, and heritage protections.

Supporters' view:

The Bill is considered essential to ease longstanding blockages in housing delivery, infrastructure building, and clean-energy rollout.

The Bill has passed the House of Lords and is expected to receive Royal Assent by year-end.

S106 Training for the Planning Committee

We had a shortbite briefing on the Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS). This is an annual report that local authorities must publish on their websites and report to the government to summarise how developer contributions are used for infrastructure projects. This began in 2019.

The goal of the IFS is to increase transparency for the public and developers about how these funds are collected and utilized.

Key total figures from developer contributions 2023/24: Held / Agreed / Received / Spent

<p>Held</p> <p>The total amount of funding held at the start of the reported year £10,062,139.26</p>
<p>Agreed</p> <p>The total amount of funding secured under planning obligations which were entered into during the reported year £672,421.75</p>
<p>Received</p> <p>The total amount of funding received from planning obligation during the reported year was £3,186,521.50</p>
<p>Spent</p> <p>The total amount of funding spent / transferred during the reported year £1,857,632.19</p>

TWBC IFS reports in the links below:

2019/20:

https://tunbridgewells.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/381999/Infrastructure-Funding-Statement-2019_20-accessible.pdf

2020/21: https://tunbridgewells.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/406926/TWBCInfrastructure-Funding-Statement-2020_21.pdf

2021/22:

https://tunbridgewells.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/436688/TWBCInfrastructure-Funding-Statement-2021_22.pdf

2022/23:

https://tunbridgewells.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/458320/TWBCInfrastructure-Funding-Statement-2022_23.pdf

2023/24: https://tunbridgewells.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/487636/Infrastructure-Funding-Statement-2023-2024-v3.pdf

TWBC – S106 Planning Obligations – [Good Practice Guide](#)

KCC – [Developer Contributions Guide](#)

Heartenoak junction

Finally!! 6 years of badgering KCC to complete these S106 works. My experiences of the junction so far are entirely positive. I hope you are experiencing the same.

Leisure Centres

The recommissioning of management services for the Tunbridge Wells Sports Centre, Putlands Sports, and Weald Sports Centre became urgent and was brought to Cabinet on 4 December 2025.

The current contract with Fusion, extended in July 2021, runs until March 2027. It includes provisions for an annual management fee (MF) paid by Fusion to the Council, totaling approximately £3.5m to date, with an additional £422k due before the contract ends. The agreement outlines Fusion's responsibilities for service delivery, building compliance, and maintenance, while the Council retains landlord duties.

The Cabinet considered two options:

- Option 1: Direct award of a management contract for the three centres.
- Option 2: Enter into a property lease with a leisure operator.

Certain details were exempt from public disclosure, so full information is not available. Due to the rushed timeline, Cabinet Advisory Boards couldn't contribute to the discussion. This missed opportunity could have been used to suggest modernising services, integrating amenities such as pharmacies, meeting spaces, cafés, and drop-off/collection points. All that free parking!!

Taxis

As part of the ongoing VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) campaign to enhance the safety of women and girls, a new working group has been established within the Licensing Committee. I have promptly reminded them of the proposal to place a sticker in the rear seats of all taxis, providing contact information for reporting concerns about the driver or any other safety issues a passenger may encounter. The Chair of the group has confirmed that this will be added to their next agenda for discussion.

Public Realm 1 and 2, Tunbridge Wells

We have just received notification that KCC will be starting to enforce PR1 and 2 themselves from Wednesday, 17th December. Warning Notices will, once again, be issued on the first offence for 6 months, as KCC has changed the basis of the Traffic Regulation Order.

As already advised by me, TWBC's agreement to enforce ended on 30th September, and there has been no enforcement in the intervening period. The TWBC Parking Team no longer has any responsibility for either the restriction or the enforcement of it.

If you or your residents have any queries, KCC has asked that they be directed to use the following email address: MTETeam@kent.gov.uk

Food Waste Collection Expansion

The council has expanded food waste collection service to additional communal properties in the following areas: Ashurst, **Benenden**, Bidborough, Brenchley, Cranbrook, Goudhurst, Groombridge, Filmwell, **Hawkhurst**, Horsmonden, Lamberhurst, Langton Green, Matfield, **Sandhurst**, Sissinghurst, and Speldhurst.

Residents in these areas can begin using their new food waste caddies and bins immediately. The service will start the week of 1 December, with food waste being collected on the same day as refuse and recycling.

For questions or further information, please reach out to foodwaste@tunbridgewells.gov.uk.