

**PARISH COUNCIL OF BENENDEN**  
**Minutes of the Ordinary Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2025, 7pm,**  
**Iden Green Pavilion**

Present	Cllrs Beveridge, Cruse, Driver, Hagan, Lewis and Thomas; C Levett, Clerk	
<b>Item</b>		<b>Action Responsibility</b>
1. APOLOGIES	Apologies received from Cllrs Cochrane, Grant, Dawlings and Neville.	
2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS	No declarations of interest.	
3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING	The minutes from the Parish Council Meeting held on 18th November were unanimously approved as a correct record of the meeting.	
4. REPORTS BY COUNTY/ BOROUGH COUNCILLORS	<p>Report received From Cllr Dawlings :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion at TWBC dominated by Devolution by Government to Mayoral Authorities and consequent Local Government reorganisation.</li> <li>○ Following the Government's White Paper, Kent and Medway have applied to be in the priority group to be considered for a mayoral authority. The population of Kent and Medway is 1.9 million which fits with the target stated. If accepted into the priority group, there would be an election for a mayor in May 2026 and KCC elections in May 2025 would be postponed.</li> <li>○ Upper (KCC) and Lower (TWBC) authorities will then be required to form Unitary Authorities in areas with populations of around 500,000. The intention is that these boundaries should be existing boroughs and bring together Health and Police areas.</li> <li>○ Seemingly a West Kent Unitary comprising Maidstone, Sevenoaks, TMBC and TWBC (with a population of 560,000) may be a good fit but whether Kent should be divided into 3 or 4 unitaries is being debated.</li> <li>○ There is also debate on whether the town of Tunbridge Wells which is presently unparished and administered by TWBC should have a Town Council.</li> <li>○ To be considered is whether there are matters which are presently the responsibility of KCC or TWBC which should be undertaken by Parish Councils.</li> <li>• TWBC has agreed to the call-in request on the solar farm in the event that TWBC is minded to recommend approval. The Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy which may be helpful in opposing the solar panels.</li> </ul> <p>Report received from Cllr Neville :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lorry Watch : To date no enquiries have come forward following Cllr Cruse's piece on the lorry issue in the village magazine.</li> <li>• Buses : Petition for the Etchingham to Tenterden bus service closed with 317 signatures.</li> <li>• Brook House, Cranbrook Rd, Hawkhurst : Developers have offered £120,000 S106. 6 social homes that were to be delivered on the site attracted no registered providers.</li> <li>• Civility in public life : Strengthening the standards and conduct framework consultation The Government published their Devolution White Paper on Monday 16 December.</li> <li>• Full Council : Extraordinary Full Council meeting called on 4th February regarding the impending devolution. Next Full Council 26th February which is expected to approve the Strategic Plan prior to budget setting for the next year.</li> <li>• Housing targets : If Borough councils are to be dissolved, developers may be reluctant to come forward for a period of time because there will be no formal authority to deal with applications and the new housing targets look even more unlikely to be met.</li> <li>• Devolution : Concerns that upcoming KCC elections may be postponed until 2026, 2027 or 2028. However, within the priority programme, the regional Mayor's elections will be held in 2026. The next round of BC elections are due to be held in 2026. Given that TWBC will be dissolved into the new authority within three years, it would seem logical to cancel TWBC elections; all councillors achieved a fresh mandate in 2024. KCC however, had their mandate from 2021-2025. Postponing or cancelling their elections will result in the current county councillors making decisions on all of our behalf without the democratic mandate. Concerns that proposed large unitary councils may alienate rural communities, reduce access to services, and hinder local democracy.</li> </ul>	
5. REPORTS BY CHAIR AND PARISH COUNCILLORS	<p>Cllr Thomas reported that Ben Chapelard and William Benson gave a useful report to the Parish Chairs meeting regarding devolution. In addition to Cllr Dawlings' and Cllr Neville's reports, Cllr Thomas advised :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed timetable for the formation of new unitary authorities in Kent is likely to be: 2026 -</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.*

	<p>Mayoral elections; 2027 – Councillor elections; 2028 unitary authorities fully operational.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each unitary authority would be in charge of highways.</li> <li>• Current number of borough and county councillors would likely reduce from 130 to about 80 – one per 5,000 residents. This would result in one councillor for Benenden and say, Sandhurst.</li> <li>• It is proposed that further powers will be devolved to Parish Councils, but no details of what these are at present.</li> <li>• Further discussions need to take place regarding finances, KCC and Medway both have large debt whereas Tunbridge Wells Borough Council do not, and the distribution of assets will need to be decided.</li> <li>• Currently newly formed Unitary mayoral authorities do seem to operate more effectively and efficiently.</li> </ul>	
6. PLANNING +	<p><u>a. Applications</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>24/03106/FULL</b> Marble Meadow, Cranbrook Road. Retrospective - construction of shed for forestry purposes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Permission was granted by Prior Approval under reference 22/03318/AGRIC for a small metal shed for forestry purposes</li> <li>○ Current application seeks to address breaches to that permission, namely the altered position of the shed, installation of a window and 4 no. solar panels, plus security camera on a metal pole.</li> <li>○ This site is within an area under constraints of an Article 4 Directive as well as in the High Weald National Landscape.</li> <li>○ The original location was more acceptable as being on the very edge of the site so lessening the impact on the landscape.</li> <li>○ Camera installed after a crime occurred in May 2023. The meadow is now substantially fenced and has a locked gate.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>The Planning Group was unable to agree on a recommendation for this application and <b>the Parish Council by majority agreed to object to this application.</b> Cllr Thomas to draft comments for submission to TWBC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>24/03209/NMAMD</b> Beacon Fold, Rolvenden Road. Non-Material Amendment in relation to 24/00548/FULL Installation of 43No. PV Panels. Removal of 1no. window on south elevation &amp; installation of 1no. window on east elevation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Amendment seeks approval to install renewable technology on roofscape of building and change position of a window from south to east. Complies with BNDP Policy BD8 b). Single storey building. PV panels to be encouraged on roofs of existing/replacement or new buildings.</li> <li>○ Provision of hedgehog nesting boxes, tree bird box and 2 bat boxes together with planting scheme of flowering lawn, native hedge and native plant border. Complies with BNDP Policy LE8 Features to Encourage Wildlife.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>The Parish Council unanimously agreed to support this application.</b></p> <p><u>b. 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 Conditions Details to note : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>24/03124/SUB</b> Condition 25 - Details of hard and soft landscaping including street furniture and planting</li> <li>○ <b>24/03157/NMAMD</b> Non-Material Amendment - Minor elevational changes and additions to some plots, parking adjustments to Garland Wing, adjustments to local wildlife site boundary</li> <li>○ <b>24/03166/SUB</b> Condition 30 - Details of External Lighting. <b>The Parish Council unanimously agreed to object to the 5m high lighting columns and requests these are replaced with bollards.</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>19/00822/HYBRID</b> Land adjacent Rothermere Close, Walkhurst Road <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Submission of Conditions Details to note :</li> <li>❖ <b>24/03192/SUB</b> Condition 34 Details of sustainable surface water drainage scheme.</li> <li>❖ <b>24/03191/SUB</b> Condition 15 Details of EV charging points; Condition 17 Details of renewable energy technologies/energy conservation measures; Condition 22 Details of existing and proposed levels; Condition 23 - Method statement detailing hard surfaces within root protection areas of trees.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	NT

	Cllr Hagan raised concerns about light pollution from properties. Cllr Cruse to write an article for the village magazine highlighting that the Benenden is a dark skies area and the adverse effects on wildlife etc from light pollution and ask residents to be considerate and close curtains/blinds at night and to reduce outdoor lighting.	RC
7. HIGHWAYS, FOOTPATHS & TRANSPORT	<p><u>a. Highways Report</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drains Maintenance</li> <li>❖ A parishioner has raised concerns about the lack of drains maintenance, a major factor in the cause of potholes and erosion of lane edges. Many are completely covered with debris. The parishioner raised this with KHS but was very disappointed with the response from KCC Highways Drainage Team and its assessment that the location does not meet the intervention criteria for additional reactive works and will continue to be maintained through the cyclical cleansing programme.</li> <li>❖ The Clerk has raised this with KHS Drainage Team and asked when this might happen, but has not yet received a response.</li> <li>❖ KCC website shows that there are many blocked gulley reports</li> <li>• Potholes</li> <li>❖ A parishioner raised concerns about potholes and some particularly deep potholes in Hinksden Road which were reported. These were filled with a couple of shovels of tarmac for what was assumed to be a temporary repair. However the status has been updated to “Works Complete”. The parishioner is concerned that there is no quality control on the work and the continued poor repairs are also a major factor for the continued issues.</li> <li>❖ The Clerk to contact the parishioner for the exact location of this pothole and will report again.</li> <li>• Footpaths</li> <li>❖ A parishioner raised concerns about walking from Iden Green to Benenden with young children and a pram as the verges are very overgrown.</li> <li>❖ Cllr Driver confirmed that the grass verge has gradually been encroaching onto the footpath making the footpath narrow for long stretches and has reported to KHS.</li> <li>❖ The parishioner will also contact KHS with photos and request that the verges are cut back and the footpath restored to its intended width.</li> <li>• Speeding traffic</li> <li>❖ A parishioner raised concerns about speeding traffic through Iden Green and is keen to address this to improve both safety and the experience for all those walking.</li> <li>❖ Cllr Driver advised that the Speedwatch group no longer operates, as is common across many villages, and its effectiveness was limited.</li> <li>❖ BPC would support anyone wishing to resurrect a Speedwatch group. This could be for very local areas rather than whole village wide. Cllr Driver to include an item in village magazine.</li> </ul> <p><u>b. Highways Improvement Plan</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BPC HIP is due for review this year</li> <li>❖ Item 1 - BPC had wanted to have the 30mph limit extended back towards the Grange entrance on Iden Green Road and a Stop sign at the junction. This was turned down by KHS as the necessary criteria was not met but instead KHS advised it could increase the size of the warning signs on the approach from 600mm to 750mm and change to yellow backed to make them more visible. BPC agreed to this and also suggests signage on both sides of the road. The Clerk to confirm this with Nigel Rowe, Community Engagement Officer, who will look to cover costs from his budget and will confirm if this is possible.</li> <li>❖ Item 2 - Install Vehicle Activated Sign at suitable location on Mill Street, and Item 3 – extend 30mph speed limit on the B2086 to current 40 mph limit : Nigel Rowe is in the process of getting advice and will keep BPC updated. BPC agreed it would still like to take these items forward.</li> <li>• Nigel is to be replaced by Emma Richmond, and will set up a meeting to look at the current HIP in detail and look at any new items BPC may wish to add.</li> <li>• TWBC Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Cllr Astra Birch, has advised that TWBC has been allocated a pot of money from the PR2 fines for Highway Improvements and will be</li> </ul>	<p>CL</p> <p>PD</p> <p>CL</p>

	looking to work with Parish and Town Councils. Details of how the scheme will be implemented has yet to be finalised. The Clerk to send a copy of BPC HIP to Cllr Birch.			CL
8. RESOURCING/ FINANCE	<u>a. Monthly Finance</u>			
	TRANSACTIONS FROM 1st December			
	Brought Forward Current Account			8424.36
	Brought Forward Savings Account			75551.41
	Brought forward			83975.77
	Income			
		Payee	Reference	Amount
		Unity Trust Bank	Interest	472.08
	TOTAL			472.08
	Expenditure			
		Supplier	Reference	Amount
	DD	Nest	Pension	128.77
	DD	Corporate Finance	Printer Lease	178.80
	FEE	Unity Trust Bank	Monthly Charge	6.00
	BACS	G Hagan	Flags	288.59
	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
			Volunteers Wildflower	
	BACS	Benenden Community Shop	Meadow	54.60
	TOTAL			3102.41
	Balance			81345.44
	Current account bank statement 104 31st December 2024			5321.95
	Savings account bank statement 008 31st December 2024			76023.49
	Reconciled			81345.44
	January 2025 Payments Approved			
	DD	Nest	Pension	89.46
	DD	Information Commissioner's Office	Data Protection	35.00
	FEE	Unity Trust Bank	Monthly Charge	6.00
	BACS	Employee	Staffing Costs	1089.99
	BACS	o2	Telephone	31.80
	BACS	F&C Cleaning Services	Public Toilets	1428.00
BACS	Edf	Public Toilets	114.25	
BACS	TP Jones	Payroll	63.40	
BACS	P Driver	Weed Puller	28.95	
BACS	Benenden Village Trust	Village Hall Heating Donation	5000.00	
BACS	Counselling Centre	Donation	100.00	
TOTAL			7986.85	
All invoices listed have been examined, verified and certified by the RFO				
<u>b. Grant Requests</u>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>£5,000 grant application from BVT towards the Village Hall heating project received. Previously approved by BPC.</li><li>The Resourcing Committee recommends a donation of £100 to the Counselling Centre. This was unanimously agreed by the Parish Council.</li></ul>				
<u>c. Precept</u>				

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TWBC has acknowledged and confirmed precept of £52,000 for 2025/26.</li> </ul> <p><u>d. Interest Rates</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wef 18<sup>th</sup> February interest rate on savings account will reduce from 2.60% gross/2.63% AER to 2.50% gross/2.52% AER.</li> </ul> <p><u>e. Bank Transfers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It had been agreed that the Clerk should be able to transfer funds between the current and savings bank accounts.</li> <li>• This has not been actioned by Unity Trust Bank. The Clerk to follow up.</li> </ul>	CL
9. ENVIRONMENT & MAINTENANCE	<p><u>a. Beacon Field Wildflower Meadow</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cllr Driver has purchased the weed puller as previously agreed and has carried out some weeding in the field.</li> <li>• Cllr Thomas has signed the Statutory Declaration - Landlord and Tenant Act as required by KCC and the Clerk has forwarded to KCC Solicitor.</li> </ul> <p><u>b. Village Asset/Maintenance Report</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cllr Hagan reported that the salt bins appear to be full.</li> </ul> <p><u>c. Leaning Oak Tree</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cllr Driver had highlighted concerns raised about an oak tree on the Hillyfields path which is leaning and might fall.</li> <li>• Photographs from 2025, 2021 and 2009 were compared.</li> <li>• In 2020 a limb half fell across the path and rested in a tree in Benenden Place garden. The then KCC footpaths officer inspected the tree and the work to remove the limb was approved.</li> <li>• In 2021 Benenden Place owners reduced the limbs further.</li> <li>• The tree does not have a TPO attached to it, but is recorded as a veteran tree in the Ancient Trees Inventory. Its status as a veteran tree does not preclude any works being carried out to the tree. Updating the entry with photos and any action regarding the tree should be recorded on the ATL.</li> <li>• The Clerk has contacted TWBC Tree Officer for advice and he will be making a site visit.</li> </ul>	
10. VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS/ COMMUNITY	<p><u>a. Parish Councillor Vacancy</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The notice for a vacancy has been approved by TWBC and published.</li> <li>• Electors have until 31<sup>st</sup> January to request an election to fill the vacancy.</li> <li>• If ten electors request this an election will take place, if not BPC can fill the vacancy by co-option.</li> </ul> <p><u>b. Allotments</u></p> <p>Report from Benenden Allotment Association :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 vacant half plot. Twenty one individuals either jointly or singly renting plots.</li> <li>• 2 communal compost bins commissioned.</li> <li>• Standpipe 1 now in place.</li> <li>• Fund-raising quiz saw 85 attendees and £1,300 raised towards allotment improvements.</li> <li>• Remaining grant funds (just under £400) will fund completion of water installation. Anything remaining to fencing.</li> <li>• Quote for £5,000 for parking area received. Two other quotes to be sought and grant applications progressed.</li> </ul> <p><u>c. KALC Community Award</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BPC agreed its nomination for the Award.</li> <li>• Cllr Hagan to draft.</li> </ul> <p><u>d. Memorial Hall AGM</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2pm.</li> <li>• Cllr Lewis agreed to attend the meeting.</li> <li>• Parish Councillors had no items to raise.</li> </ul>	GH
11. CORRESPONDENCE/ PARISHIONER QUESTIONS	None.	
DATE OF NEXT MEETING	Date of Next Meeting: Monday 17 <sup>th</sup> February 2025, 7pm, Quinlan Centre, Benenden Hospital	
	The meeting closed at 8.15 pm.	