

## MINUTES OF THE BENENDEN ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 29 APRIL 2013 AT 8.00 P.M. IN THE VILLAGE HALL

**PRESENT:** Parish Cllrs. K. Barker, Mrs. J. Beattie, Mrs. L. Butler-Graham, Ms. E. North, G. Reynolds, Mrs. N. Thomas & G. Walden

**ALSO PRESENT:** Mrs K Bell (Clerk), Mr R Manning (County Cllr), Mr S Holden, Mr. F. Rooke, Mr. K. Harrison (ACRK) & approximately 40 residents

**APOLOGIES:** Mr D Harmsworth, Mrs A Patrick, Mr C Smith & Mr & Mrs Simmonds

### 1. Opening & Welcome

Mr Reynolds opened the meeting and welcomed all present. He began the proceedings by making an opening address in which he drew attention to the following:

1.1 All English Parishes must convene an Annual Parish Meeting between 1 March and 1 June each year.

The meeting was not a meeting of the Parish Council but a village meeting. The Parish Council was delighted to host the meeting as it was a vitally important opportunity to engage with the local community. It was also an opportunity for residents to learn more about the role of the Parish Council and the work that had been undertaken over the past year.

1.2 2012 was a successful year. Thanks were extended to everyone involved in the events and activities which took place including the Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk. Thanks were also extended to the Borough and County Councillors; Linda Hall, Sean Holden, Francis Rook and Roger Manning who as a County Councillor had devoted 10 years of his life to the people of Hawkhurst, Benenden, Cranbrook, Sissinghurst, Sandhurst and Frittenden. Mr Reynolds praised Mr Manning's efforts to improve the highways and safety by diligently acting on behalf of Benenden whenever requested and stated that the village was looking forward to the possibility of having the Youth Cruiser bus coming to Benenden, which Mr Manning had worked so hard to re-introduce.

1.3 In December, following KCC's approval of the new primary school planning application, five Councillors resigned; but the Parish Council did not let this knock the Council's activities off course and much had been achieved in the past four months.

1.4 During the year five councillors had joined and the people of Benenden were represented by Gordon Reynolds (Chairman and the Council's representative on the Governors of Benenden Primary School), Janet Beattie (Deputy Chairman and in charge of governance and finance), Liz Butler-Graham (Communications), Kent Barker (Planning and Village Hall management committee), Graham Walden (Village Hall Management Committee), Eleanor North (Village Hall Management Committee and the Village Shop Committee) and Nicola Thomas (Village Shop Committee). The Parish Councillors then took the opportunity to introduce themselves.

1.5 Tribute was paid to the former Parish Councillors; Dawne Bailey, Mary Kellett, John Clarke, Joan Hagens, Peter Blockley, Roger Lake and Jan Hemsley. They were thanked publicly for the huge amount of time and effort that they had put into the community of Benenden, some for very many years.

1.6 The Parish Council had been sad to say good-bye to Bonny Sullivan who had been the Parish Clerk for seven years, Karen Bell who became the Parish Clerk in December was welcomed but unfortunately had resigned for personal reasons. Moving forwards, the Clerk position had been advertised and Interviews would be held during May 2013.

1.7 Mr Reynolds then stated that it had been a busy twelve months and highlighted some of the Councils achievements; namely

**1.7.1 Communications:** Since December the Parish Council had increased the level of communications. Mrs Butler-Graham was focussing on ways in which to keep the electorate informed of parish Council activities. She was in the process of setting up a dedicated Parish

Council website to supplement the village site; the website would be going live shortly and would be providing useful information about activities, meetings and planning applications. All Parish Councillors now had Benenden Parish Council e-mail addresses, and the Parish Council had a secure database of e-mail addresses so that regular updates could be shared with residents. Since February the Chairman has had a regular slot in the Parish magazine, and notices had been put in the Church and school weekly news sheets, the notice boards were due to be revamped shortly, and the Courier and The Kent Messenger now had Benenden community representatives who report on village events and activities.

- 1.7.2 Public Toilets:** Thanks were extended to Mr & Mrs English for looking after the public toilets so diligently and carefully over the years. A welcome was made to Robert Payne who was the new contractor.
- 1.7.3 Footpaths:** Thanks were extended to Mr Philip Message who after many years of dedicated service, had decided to retire from looking after the considerable number of footpaths in Benenden. Mr Message would continue to look after the War Memorial. Jim Hyde had kindly agreed to carry on Phillip's excellent work.
- 1.7.4 Tree Warden:** Thanks were extended to Mrs Joan Hagen who had given up being tree warden after 7 years. Mr John Burbage has kindly offered to take over the role. The Parish Council had recently joined the Kent Men of the Trees, and Benenden had been registered to take part in the 2013 Trees in the Village Competition.
- 1.7.5 Highways:** KCC had done an excellent job maintaining the roads over the winter. The Clerk had been in regular communication with them ensuring that all reported potholes and road failures were dealt with. Thanks were extended to Tobin Bird and his team for their efforts with snow clearing.
- 1.7.6 Planning:** A significant proportion of the year revolved around the application for a new Benenden Primary school which was given approval. KCC was now working on the footpath alterations and the Harmsworth Trustees were in negotiations over the car park arrangements. All that was needed was for KCC to find the money, and for the village to pull together behind this fantastic project that the whole village would benefit from. 24 new houses set within a landscaped environment had been approved on part of the Benenden Hospital site, replacing dis-used clinical buildings; following the Parish Council's involvement, 8 of the properties would be for Affordable housing. 6 further affordable houses had been approved at Iden Green. However, the Parish Council was at present engaged in verifying the site selection process with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. In the meantime the Harmsworth Memorial Trust has put the sale of the land to the English Rural Housing Association on hold. Thanks were extended to Mr Kent Barker for taking on the Planning role within the Parish Council and for tirelessly reviewing numerous applications each week.
- 1.7.7 Jubilee celebrations:** Thanks were extended to Peter Ellis and his Jubilee team, as well as the school's PTA and the Benenden Players. From the PTA's tea party on the Green, to the Players' fantastic Variety Show, everyone enjoyed themselves thoroughly. Thanks were also extended to Barry Nash of Cheeseman's garage for making our Jubilee Beacon. The Parish Council had also arranged for the production of commemorative mugs.
- 1.7.8 Community Warden:** Thanks were extended to Adam Osbourne for continuing his efforts to keep Benenden safe and crime-free.
- 1.7.9 Benenden Village Hall:** Thanks were extended to John Clarke and his village hall committee for their work during the year. Although Michael Patrick had retired from his position as Treasurer the Parish Council was delighted that he would be remaining on the committee. The Parish Council was sorry to learn that Mrs Angela Patrick was standing down from her role as

secretary but delighted to be able to welcome back Bonny Sullivan who would be filling both positions. Thanks were also extended to Mr David Dalrymple who had retired from being Caretaker after 18 years and a warm welcome to Mr Bruce Gear who had taken on the caretaking of the village hall.

- 1.7.10 Auditor and accounts:** Thanks were extended to Mr Tom Dawlings for undertaking the auditing of the Parish Council, Harmsworth Trust and Village Hall Accounts. The unaudited accounts for the year ended 31 March 2013 for the Parish Council and the Harmsworth Memorial Trust had been prepared and were available in draft form. A few non material monitor amendments were being made to the documents which would then be reprinted.
- 1.7.11 Finance:** Mr Reynolds stated that the Parish Council had spent a lot of time reviewing parish finances and advised that the bulk of income came from the Precept, which is collected by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council as part of the Council Tax. The Parish Council had been affected by the Government's Welfare reforms now that Council Tax Benefit had been localised. This means that those who did not pay full Council Tax were now included within the Council Tax Base. The tax base had therefore declined and when divided by the precept this has increased the full Council Tax Charge. Cuts to welfare budgets had also impacted on *all* Council Tax raising authorities. The County Council, Fire and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council had made large savings to absorb the reductions in the tax base as they were not allowed to increase Council Tax by more than 2 per cent. Clearly it was more difficult for the Parish Council to make similar savings as we did not employ a significant number of staff and this was possibly one reason why the government decided not to restrict the Parish Council's ability to increase the precept. Now that the changes had been made to include those receiving Council Tax Support then this situation should not occur in the future and the tax base should remain more stable. Mr Reynolds advised that the Parish Council had set a realistic and sustainable budget for 2013/14 and that the Parish Council would continue to provide the same if not improved level of service in 2013/2014. After many hours of debate the Parish Council set the Precept for 2013/2014 at £28,725 - an increase of £5,725 on the previous year. Such an increase would enable the Parish Council to explore exciting village projects, such as the Street Cruizer Youth Bus and the Parish Plan. Any increase was regrettable, but it worked out at just £6.40 per Band D Council Tax payer *per year*, the equivalent of 12p per week.
2. **Guest Speaker:** Mr Reynolds introduced and welcomed the guest speaker, Mr Keith Harrison, Chief Executive of Action with Communities in Rural Kent. Mr Harrison advised that in his role as Chief Executive, he assisted rural communities with identifying and addressing their needs and helped with community-led planning initiatives, such as Parish Plans, local needs housing and access to services including transport and broadband. It was noted that ACRK also provided direct advice and support to community organisations, stimulated community action, particularly voluntary action, and encouraged good practice, developed and managed demonstration projects, provided professional support and advice to key service providers and raised awareness of rural issues and influenced decision makers. It was further noted that ACRK membership was open to any organization, community group or individual and benefits of membership included the monthly newsletter, "Rural News", the periodical, "Oast to Coast", invitations to participate in seminars, events and conferences at reduced rates and one to one advice.
3. **Minutes of the 2012 Annual Parish Meeting (Assembly):** Mrs Janet Beattie read out a précis of the minutes following which it was **AGREED** that the minutes were **APPROVED**.
4. **2013: Looking Ahead:** Mr Reynolds advised that much work was to be done during 2013 and proceeded to talk briefly about some of the planned initiatives. Highlights of which were:
- 4.1 Parish Plan:** The Parish Council was grateful to Robin Dalton-Holmes for agreeing to lead the steering committee in formulating the structure of the plan. Thanks were extended to all of the committee members who were Anthony Beattie, Emma Cunningham, Sheila Hume, Tracy

Claridge and Grant Mathews. The Committee would be requiring helpers to distribute questionnaires and Mr Reynolds encouraged those who could help in this respect to let the Committee know.

At this stage Mr Robin Dalton-Holmes was invited to say a few words on the progress of the Parish Plan. Mr Dalton-Holmes drew attention to the following:

- The Parish Plan Steering Committee got off to a terrific start with the February 2013 launch meeting. The launch produced a lot of ideals and some useful ideas and comments had been received.
- The Steering Committee met for the first time at the end of March and were now working on a survey which was due to go to all households in May 2013.
- By the end of September 2013, based on the survey and other evidence they wanted to have an agenda of issues which working groups could tackle over the autumn and winter.
- A draft report would be available in April 2014.
- Work was taking place on the future of the village shop and post office and groups would start thinking about housing, facilities for young people and ways of improving communication within the village.

**4.2 Village Shop:** Mr Reynolds advised that the proprietors of the existing Village Shop were trying to sell the premises. A sale had not been forthcoming thus far, and the proprietors would be closing in the near future. Not having a village shop was obviously of concern for the community, to this end the Parish Council had added 2 Parish Councillors to the shop committee, started by Alan Picket and now run by Steve Simmonds and would do everything it could to ensure that Benenden would continue to have a village shop.

**4.3 Village Green:** The Parish Council was contemplating levelling and re-seeding the edges of the Green. He also mentioned that as it was a very narrow carriageway the Parish Council would be grateful if everyone could make an effort to park so that cars could pass without needing to mount the kerb.

**4.4 Speedwatch:** The Parish Council was aware of concerns surrounding vehicle speeds in both Benenden and Iden Green and this was one of the issues which would be addressed in the Parish Plan. In the meantime, the Parish Council would investigate setting up Speedwatch initiatives with local police and would welcome support in organising them.

**4.5 Village Spring Clean:** The annual clean up would take place between 9.00 hours to 11.00 hours on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

## 5. Reports from Groups, Charities and Organisations

**5.1 Benenden Village Hall:** Mr Barker reported on behalf of the Benenden Village Hall Management Committee. He provided some background information on the BVHMC and the HMT, he also stated that the HMT now had Standing Orders, the Trust and the Village Hall were both running smoothly, accounts for the Village Hall and the Trust had been published, He then thanked all of the Village Hall Committee Members especially Joan Hagens, John Clarke and Michael Patrick.

**5.2 Benenden Alms Houses:** Mrs Beattie reported on the Alms Houses, her report is repeated verbatim as follows, "As most of you know this Charitable Trust was established in its present form in 1960 with the principal object of providing accommodation in the form of Almshouses for those resident in the parish of Benenden. We own one property in the centre of the village, which is divided into six flats; and one in Iden Green comprising three small terraced houses. Refurbishment of our buildings, both of which are old, inevitably leads to the running down of our reserves and in order to replenish these we have a policy of raising weekly maintenance contributions, our main source of income, at above the rate of inflation. Weekly maintenance

contributions are still significantly lower than market rents and will remain so. We have had another quiet year with no changes in our beneficiaries. This means that income has held up well and was £30,000 in 2012. Expenditure was £15,000, producing a surplus of £15,000 but this has now reduced to £8,500 because of the late arrival of a large invoice for work to update electrical fittings as part of a programme to ensure that we comply fully with health and safety regulations. In line with the recommendations of the Charity Commission we regularly review whether we are meeting the objects of the charity, plan for possible future expenditure, and try to learn from best practice in other almshouse charities. We have recently been looking into the appointment of trustees with skills and experience that will complement those of the current trustees.”

- 5.3 **Gibbon & Buckland Charity:** On behalf of Mr David Harmsworth the Clerk read out the following report, “The Charity made 30 grants to students and presented Bibles to each of the leavers from Class 6 of the Primary School. There have been no material changes to the Charity’s policy. There have been no changes to the 6 Trustees, who are Mr Simon Brown (Chairman (, Mr David Harmsworth (Clerk), Mr Tony Fullwood, Mrs Aurea Gregory, Canon Charles Hill and Mrs Mary Kellett.”
  
- 5.4 **Arnold Cole Trust:** On behalf of Mr Steve Robinson the Clerk read out the following report, “At the AGM in November 2012, The Trust was delighted to welcome Mary Kellett as a new Trustee. In total of £1,050 was distributed over the Christmas period to 30 beneficiaries and institutions within the Parish. Subject to available funds, we hope to repeat this in 2013.” The Clerk was able to advise that during 2012/2013 the Parish Council had received £402.50 which had been forwarded to the Arnold Cole Trust for distribution during 2013.
  
- 5.5 **County Councillor Roger Manning:** Thanked the Parish Council for making him welcome during his term of office. He stated that during his term of office at County Hall he had served on 5 – 6 Committees and Boards and hoped that he was leaving Benenden in a better state than it was 10 years ago. He hoped that his legacy would be the introduction of the Street Cruiser Youth Bus and improved highways. He finished by saying that it had been a privilege to have been the County Councillor for Benenden and thanked the community for allowing him to represent them at County level.

**6 Questions**

Mrs Eleanor North drew attention to the work which had recently been carried out by KHS on the bridleway at Dingledden. Mrs North stated that she had not received a response to her comments to KCC regarding the considerable expense at Dingledden Lane. County Councillor Mr Manning responded by saying that he would have preferred the money to have been spent on more necessary improvements within the village but when he became aware that the work was being carried out it was too late to stop the work from proceeding; he also stated that KCC had received some letters of appreciation from residents who had been satisfied with the work. Mr Reynolds expressed the view that the Parish Council felt that the quality of workmanship had been poor and that the expenditure would have been of greater benefit to the community if it had been spent on improving the roads within the parish.

There being no further questions of business, Mr Reynolds closed the meeting at 21.45 hours and invited everyone to stay for refreshments and meet the Parish Councillors.

Signed: .....

Date: .....