

ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PARISH

Gordon Reynolds welcomed everybody to the meeting. The meeting opened at 7.35pm

MINUTES of the ANNUAL ASSEMBLY of the PARISH COUNCIL held on Monday 28th April in The Village Hall, Benenden.

PRESENT: Chairman – Gordon Reynolds, 6 Councillors, some 102 parishioners and Clerk

APOLOGIES: Steve Robinson

1. TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL ASSEMBLY HELD ON 29TH APRIL 2013:

GR asked if there were any questions on the Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Council held on 29th April 2013. Mary Kellett requested that the minutes be amended to include her resignation letter from December 2012 which stated the reasons for the resignation. The Chairman stated the minutes could be amended, but no resolution was passed for this request. It was resolved that the minutes be approved as a true record. They were proposed by Cllr Graham and seconded by Cllr Thomas and signed by the Chairman.

2. TO RECEIVE THE STATEMENT OF UNAUDITED ACCOUNTS 13/14 FOR BPC & HMT:

The Chairman reported Tom Dawlings had produced the accounts for the year 13/14 on Benenden Parish Rate A/C, Harmsworth Memorial Trust and Benenden Village Hall and asked for any questions on the Clerk’s report of the draft unaudited accounts for the year ended 31st March 2014. There were no questions and the Chairman advised the audited accounts would be presented to full council for discussion and approval.

3. STATEMENT OF UNAUDITED ACCOUNTS 13/14 FOR BVH & CHAIRMAN’S REPORT

Peter Ellis, village hall committee member read a statement on behalf of John Clarke, Chairman of the village hall committee. The report noted:

- The hall is running pretty efficiently and effectively
- Occupancy stands at about 30% compared to the national average of 20-30%
- A profit was returned of £6000
- The increased governance by HMT on the village hall committee had caused some discomfort to himself and other members of the village hall committee
- Representation of HMT on the committee has risen to four
- There was a lack of communication between HMT and the village hall committee over the car park expansion plan
- With deep regret, the Chairman finds his position untenable and therefore resigns as Chairman and as a member of the village hall committee.

Gordon Reynolds expressed his sadness at John Clarke’s resignation and thanked him and the village hall committee for all their work over the past 30 years, which has been appreciated.

4. TO RECEIVE THE VILLAGE CHARITY REPORTS

The Iden Green Pavilion

Bill Lewis, Chairman of the IG Pavilion Trust, read a report which noted:

- The pavilion has undergone a complete refurbishment, including new heating and lighting

Chairman.....

Dated.....

- The financial position as at December 2013 shows a healthy balance of £16.250 which has taken several years to build up and some funds will go towards the refurbishment
- There are many bookings with loyal clubs and associations hiring regularly and they are grateful for their support
- Residents are encouraged to attend the annual events including the Quiz nights, the BBQ at the end of May and the Blues and Jazz night on 5th July which is an open air concert
- Thanks goes to the Trustees of the Pavilion for their hard work
- Thanks goes to Fiona, the Parish Clerk and the Parish Councillors for their support throughout the year

Gibbon & Buckland Charity

David Harmsworth gave a report which noted:

- The Charity was formed when the schoolhouse was left by Edmund Gibbon for charitable purposes
- The charity made 16 grants to students, this was lower than usual
- Bibles were presented to each of the leavers from Class 6 of the Primary School
- There have been no material changes to the Charity's policy or governance
- The 6 Trustees are Simon Brown (Chairman), David Harmsworth (Clerk and Nominee of the Primary School), Mary Cruse (nominee of the Rector), Tony Fullwood, Aurea Gregory and Mary Kellet (nominee of the Parish Council)
- Application Forms for grants for 2015 need to be submitted by the end of September, applications should be between 16 and 25 and have lived in Benenden for more than 3 years.

The Arnold Cole Trust

The Clerk read a report on behalf of the ACT which noted:

- The Trust has continued to support Benenden parishioners by distributing funds in December to 30 people in order to help them with the Christmas festivities
- The Trust intends to continue with the practice in 2014

Benenden Almshouses Charity

Robin Dalton Holmes read a report which noted:

- The sad and untimely death of Anthony Beattie has meant Janet has not been able to produce the accounts for tonight's meeting
- Replacement windows have been installed at FeoFees
- It is hoped roof repairs will take place soon
- A Quinn Quennial surveyor has been appointed and will be project managing on-going repairs
- There are currently 5 trustees and a newly appointed Clerk

5. TO RECEIVE THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Gordon Reynolds read a report (a copy is filed with these minutes) which noted:

- *Parish Plan* - The Parish Plan Steering Group have been carrying significant work and a report on this progress will take place at the end of this meeting. The passing of Anthony Beattie who was a key member of this group, has been a serious blow but the group are determined to continue with his ideas and concepts, in his memory
- *Planning* - The planning committee has considered 110 applications during the year
- *Speedwatch* - Thanks goes to Clive Illman and his team for organizing and operating Speedwatch in the village, the results of which will hopefully be used to reduce speed limits throughout the village

Chairman.....

Dated.....

- *Streetcruizer* – Thanks to Cllr Butler-Graham for bring this facility to the village, it is a resounding success with 25-30 children attending each Monday evening
- *Defibrillators* – Thanks to Peter Ellis for securing 2 defibrillators, one for Iden Green and one for Benenden and organising the training. One will be by Peter’s house in Benenden and the other, at the telephone kiosk in Iden Green
- *Affordable Housing* –_The Council is currently negotiating with English Rural Housing to build 6 units of affordable housing at Iden Green, building to start in 2015
- *New Primary School* –_Following approval, a further application for change of site of entrance has been approved. A second application for enhancing the village car park is under consideration.
- *Cherryfields* –_TWBC are selling 5 plots of land at Cherryfieds, the Parish Council is purchasing 3 of them (central grass area, car park and area of grass at the right-hand side)
- *War Memorial* – Thanks to Peter Message for caring so beautifully for the War Memorial, quotes are currently being received to have the stone work cleaned
- *Kent Men of Trees competition* – Benenden was awarded £30 and a tree for gaining the Newcomer of the Year award. Thanks to John Burbage for all his work as our Tree Warden
- *Recycling* – There are now 3 bins situated in the village hall car park. The Parish Council would like to encourage all residents to lobby TWBC to make glass part of their household recycling programme
- *Clerk* – Fiona Chalk was appointed as the Clerk in June and thanks goes to her for her hard work in an ever more challenging and responsible role
- *Auditor* – Thanks to Tom Dawlings for drawing up the accounts. A new Internal Auditor has been appointed to give reassurance on finance, governance and audit matters.
- *Councillors* – Thanks to all Councillors for their hard work and dedication whilst trying to balance their duties with other commitments, thereby making a worthwhile difference to the village

The Chairman then made a statement regarding the recent publicity about a proposed solar farm incorporating some of his land. He stated that this meeting is an Annual Assembly meeting, not a Parish Council meeting and therefore this meeting is not an appropriate forum to discuss this issue. The PCI Group which are the applicants, will shortly be holding public meetings in Benenden, Hawkhurst and Cranbrook to explain their plans and listen to residents views and take their questions. A pre-screening application was withdrawn as the maps were incorrect but another one will be submitted. No commitment has been made for any of his land to be used, this decision will not be made until the outcome of the Environmental Impact Assessment is known. He also advised that the Clerk has provided some background information on planning law in regard to this which has been made available at this meeting.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS AS PROPOSED BY PARISHIONERS

Questions:

1. Who will be responsible for the upkeep of the road at Cherryfields as the Parish Council are not buying it and will the upkeep come from the Precept? GR confirmed that TWBC currently own it and unless a new buyer is found, they will continue to be responsible for its upkeep. The Parish Council will be responsible for maintenance of the grassed areas and hedgerows.
2. Cranbrook is listed as one of the ten slowest broadband areas, what is the Parish Council doing to bring faster broadband services to the village? GR advised that this will be covered in the Parish Plan presentation later, under Communications.

Chairman.....

Dated.....

3. Why did only 6 people put their names forward for nomination for election this year – is it due to the poor behavior of Councillors? Cllr North and Cllr Cook advised that their applications have been invalid due to minor technical details. Cllr Butler-Graham advised that she has resigned due to full-time work and family commitments. GR advised that vacancies will most likely be co-opted at the next Parish Council meeting.
4. Following the submission of an application for a solar farm on the Chairman’s land, how can he reconcile his duties with this planning application – the Chairman’s position is truly compromised. Cllr Barker advised that no planning application had been received and before any application was received, public consultation meetings are to be taking place with the applicant, PCI and people’s concerns should be addressed there.
5. If the Chairman does not want the application, then he could withdraw his land from PCI’s proposal, is he going to do so? GR advised that he is making no decision until the outcome of the Environmental Impact Assessment is known.
6. I propose a vote be taken now as to whether we want the solar farm in Benenden. Cllr Barker stated no application has been submitted so it wasn’t practical to take a vote on a proposed application that no-one has been able to consider. GR stated he was not prepared to comment any further as the meeting tonight was not the correct forum for such a discussion.

7. PRESENTATION BY THE PARISH PLAN STEERING GROUP

Robin Dalton Holmes advised that the Parish Plan project was launched on 23rd February 2013. It’s aims were published and circulated and responses gathered and analysed. The response was one of the highest percentage of returns for a parish plan. Anthony Beattie, whose sad passing recently has been a great loss for the village, together with his son Matthew, have been key to the analysis and progress of the plan. No member of the Steering Committee have been or are a Parish Councillor and therefore remain neutral.

Various points have come out of the responses, namely:

- One third of all residents have lived in the village for under 10 years
- Communications in the village could be significantly improved
- New residents find it difficult to find their way around the village and its activities

Communications – Peter Driver/Paul Leed

Areas of activity are technology and media and include:

- Mobile phone signal
- Broadband speeds could be faster – BT superfast broadband should be completed by April this year, giving 96% coverage
- Noticeboards need to be kept up-to-date
- Telecommunication providers and advice on improving connections will be circulated to parishioners
- Identifying information needs of different groups and how to meet them
- Better information sharing between different groups in the village

Youth – Grant Matthews

It is typical that people think ‘yobs’ when thinking of youth and there is a bit of a ‘them and us’ scenario. There are also lots of rules and litigation when working with youth. Areas of activities include:

Chairman.....

Dated.....

- Young Kent and KCC Youth workers are currently being worked alongside and hopefully this can be built on
- Work with youth on what they want i.e. days out/overnight stays
- Youth mentoring
- Employment opportunities in the village
- Using existing facilities in the village to engage youth i.e. village hall, open spaces to reconnect youth to the community
- A wide variety of villagers to assist with youth i.e tennis club, players, football etc.
- YOBS should mean Young and Old in Benenden Sharing

Health and Wellbeing – Peter Ellis

First thoughts included ageing and infirmity, maybe not! 3 main strands involve:

- Healthcare provision – communicating with local providers to bring in or bring back services – proving rather hard to do. Working with current local providers to improve services and awareness
- Wellbeing – the ageing population means we need to look at how we operate as a whole community, using good neighbor schemes and engaging and supporting each other
- Community responsibility – bringing in of defibrillators which can be used after 5-10 minutes training. Rural ambulance response time is about 20 minutes where as if the defibrillator is used within 5 minutes, it can double the chances of survival. 40 villagers have been trained so far. Training of first responders should also be a priority

Housing – Peter Davies

- Provision of affordable housing has a positive impact on other services in the village. Relevant plans such as adopted local plans, strategic development plans are being considered.
- ACRK and TWBC undertook a housing needs survey in 2008 which found 18 new dwellings are needed. A new survey is being undertaken
- Key worker housing/shared equity/private housing are all required
- Finding available land within planning limits is difficult – possible future sites need to be identified
- Design is as important as numbers

Highways – Roger Manning

There are short term issues and long term developments

- The village is unique that it has a north-south and west-east crossroads but the village is not built up around this area
- Parked cars help reduce traffic speed
- The hospital and school cause major vehicle congestion
- There are major industry's that contribute to traffic – Apple Pie Farm and Turks Yard
- There are over 100 self-employed residents
- Site lines in Iden Green are poor with some near misses
- Site lines at the main crossroads could be improved, maybe a mini roundabout

Chairman.....

Dated.....

Environment – Jim Hyde

As a KCC senior energy surveyor and renewable energy, Jim has a particular interest in this area.

- Air quality is good
- Good water courses that support a lot of life
- Noted as AONB, SSI, SSSI
- 66 miles of footpaths totaling 27.5 miles. Local people are adopting a footpath and walk it on a regular basis, 22 volunteers have covered most paths
- Access to paths to be improved i.e. gates to replace stiles for dog walkers. This has a cost implication but memorial gates with a plaque could be donated
- Renewable energy sites could be identified with a focus on what benefits will be given to the village in return i.e. compensation to be used for improving village facilities
- An Energy Plan to become part of the Parish Plan

Economy – Martyn Pexto & Simon Symonds

Responses indicated:

- Shop and Post Office are essential to the village
- 130 responses offered to take part in a further survey focusing on businesses
- Increase employment opportunities – use of existing buildings to make new premises
- Farmers market
- If the shop is sold, it may be given alternative usage. A temporary location may be a possibility
- Needs of both large and small business to be investigated
- Employment/work experience opportunities for young people

Asset Group – Kent Barker

An asset register of all non-privately owned property has been drawn up.

- Harmsworth Memorial Trust owns many assets. It has a sole trustee, the Parish Council. This arrangement gives rise to conflicts of interest and therefore a proposal to set it up a separate charity to the parish council, is being considered by the HMT. The parameters of the Trust could be widened to incorporate other small trusts/charities in the village to share expertise, clerical services etc.
- Relaxing of current restrictions on aims of HMT could allow new community facilities to be brought to the village.

Robin advised that to ensure all the information on the responses is digested properly, a delay in the publishing of the report is inevitable and will probably be next easter.

4 small monetary prizes were awarded on a random selection of responders:

Lucy Penny and Lucy Cunningham £10, Colin Narborough and Sally Durney £25.

Chairman.....

Dated.....