

## Benenden Primary School – Parking/Footpaths

Communication between Cllrs Dawlings, Holden and Thomas and Revd David Commander from 28<sup>th</sup> June

TD :

Nicola, as Chair of the Parish Council, is fully aware of the parking difficulties in the Village at Primary School opening and collection times. Sadly we had a very unsatisfactory meeting with Lindsay Roberts on this matter pre-Covid19. David I think is also well aware and I understand suggested that a solution could be parents parking as they always used to around the Green and walking to school through the Churchyard and Glebe field (is that correct?). The Benenden Village Trust has concerns about car parking in the Village Hall car park (when the Hall is in use) and muddy access to school from Recreation Ground (also the maintenance of the car park which KCC determined not to contribute to when planning the school).

Seán Holden, our County Councillor, has also become involved and had a meeting with Lindsay Roberts last Thursday. Seán and I met on site on Friday and it seemed that Lindsey showed a great deal more appreciation of the widespread parking concerns to Sean than when Nicola and I had gone to see her. So that is some progress.

The school parking area was intended for parents to simply drop off children and drive off. It is, however, a long way from the school entrances which are used (these are at the other end of the school). So the school parking area is not suitable as a drop-off area for younger children.

There is a staffed area in the morning overseeing children dropped off for school. Access is to that could be the school entrance from the Glebe field. This too could be used for access for children from cars parked on the Green (by walking across the Churchyard and Glebe field, with agreement from PCC). Fine in summer but not in the winter unless a surfaced path was put down.

Access from Village Hall and Recreation Ground would also be simpler through the Glebe field (the entrance from the Recreation Ground to the north west corner of the school is effectively by crossing a ditch which needs bridging in winter. Benenden Village Trust would probably agree to creating a pathway from the Village Hall car park to the play area which could T-off to the Glebe field.

On Tuesday Seán has arranged to meet with KCC's footpaths Officer at the school and invited me to join them. The footpaths that crossed the new school site have been officially diverted but much of the old footpath signage and stiles remain (some very overgrown!). This needs to be dealt with. The Officer may have a budget for footpath surfacing that we might be able to tap into. Seán too has some funds in his Member's Fund, that he would be prepared to contribute. The Village Trust and maybe also the Parish Council perhaps also might help with funding.

I will know more after the planned site meeting on Tuesday but Seán and I wanted to keep you both advised of what we are exploring. If, however, the suggestion of walking to school across the Churchyard and Glebe field is not something supported by you, David, and the PCC, then we would need to start thinking again.

DC :

The idea of a path through the churchyard and across the Glebe is something that the PCC considered in 2018 and 2019. I could foresee the need for it if we wanted to make it easy for the School to come to Church for services or Collective Worship. We had a classic "Catch-22" situation though: the School would not commit to coming to Church without a decent path; the Church would not commit to the finances of putting an all-weather path through the churchyard without the School committing to coming to Church! Given it is a CoE School it is important, in my opinion, that the School (children, staff, parents and governors) do have the opportunity to come to services and School events regularly in their Parish Church.

The cost estimate for a path just through the churchyard - from the main North door to the kissing-gate in the south-west corner of the Glebe - was circa £20k. The PCC supported the idea of a path through the churchyard (and still does, I believe); but does not support spending that amount of money if the School are only going to come to Church a few times a year.

For any path through the churchyard to be of use, it also needs a path through the Glebe to the School grounds. Both would be an asset for the community, I believe.

Now the School has some pupils back, I would estimate that there are about 12-20 families who park at the top of the Green every morning and walk their children through the churchyard and Glebe to School. (I presume they repeat this at the end of the School day.)

I have, since the last time the PCC discussed this, had an offer from a resident of the village to make a financial contribution to the cost of a path through the churchyard. This has been brought to the attention of the Fabric & Finance sub-group of the PCC, but not to a PCC meeting as yet. (Technology constraints of a number of members of the PCC have prevented video meetings, and we are not permitted to conduct PCC meetings by conference voice-only calls!)

I believe there would be support from the PCC to the idea of a path through the churchyard if:

- any path also continued through the Glebe
- finances can be sorted for both paths; the Church would consider contributing to this, I am sure.
- there is commitment to continue to use the Church building by the School. Currently we have agreed "once a term"; i.e. 6 times a year. More often would be preferable.
- planning permissions and a Faculty are obtained, of course
- the Diocese support the idea of a path through the Glebe. (The Diocese would have to support the Petition for Faculty for a pathway through the churchyard anyway.)

SH :

During my talk with Lindsay Roberts she did say a decent path, all the way, would allow the school to make better use of the church and she felt that mattered because it is a CofE school.

The meeting with Jonathan Bibby, the KCC paths expert, tomorrow I had envisaged as a technical one to establish what we would have to do to link a new surface to existing paths and the public rights of way which are there at present. He's also going to talk to us about what money there might be in the offing and what we might have to do to get it.

It would be easier to keep that meeting tight so that we can discover what we may be able to offer the community and then open out the next one to you, the headmistress, the parish council and others who would be involved. Can we go on like that please?

TD :

Sean and I walked the area this morning with Jonathan Bibby (KCC Footpaths Officer) starting at the north-east corner of the Recreation Ground on the border with the school and ending sheltering under a tree in the churchyard.

There is a footpath sign and an overgrown kissing gate at the NE corner of the Recreation Ground. This PROW has changed (now along path to beyond entrance to Primary School before turning south) so the sign can be removed by BVT (if they want).

The PROW from the middle of the south side of the Recreation Ground going south now runs along the edge of the Glebe field (not on the new Primary school side). There is a footpath sign that could be moved from the muddy crossing from the Recreation Ground to the School to the Glebe gateway. (The PROW runs from there due north straight across the Recreation Ground football pitch. It was considered it would not be worth the bother of getting this changed.)

If BVT wanted to make a pathway from BVH car park to play area the route this would take would need to be considered by the Trustees. The pathway could then T-off to the Glebe field gateway.

The PROW runs along the eastern and southern boundary of the Glebe field to the gateway to the churchyard. Halfway along the eastern boundary in an entrance into the school. This the Head Mistress had

suggested to Seán would be the pedestrian entrance of choice (and one that would be supervised at arrival and collection times).

The footpath across the churchyard goes from the gateway from the Glebe field directly to the NE corner of the Church. Extraordinarily there is a kissing gate (but no fence) on the route also some gravestones where people walk on either side. The PCC would need to determine the route for a permanent surface.

Jonathan Bibby would investigate the cost of putting down a surfaced footpath across the churchyard and along the south and east sides of the Glebe field. Something more rural than a black-topped pathway would be preferable. He would also investigate funding sources available to KCC including some new Government funding scheme to encourage walking/cycling to school. We noted other funding potentially could be from Primary School, Sean's Members Fund, BVT, Parish Council and PCC.

It was felt that parents could then park around the Green and walk to school on a hard surface. Same from Village Hall car park (issue here is need to give priority to Village Hall users and that the use of that car park and contribution to resurfacing was rejected by KCC when School was being planned). The school car park would be for use of staff only (could it also be a drop off area for older children?). The hope was that parking along the Rolvenden Road causing danger to residents and damage to the verge could then be avoided.

So, starting with establishing the cost of a hard walkway, this should provide a basis to consider funding and perhaps some solution to the parking chaos at the new school.

Happy to discuss but offer this as something to ponder and report to Parish Council and PCC and for me to BVT.

DC :

The kissing-gate in the middle of the churchyard with no fence either side is a result of the churchyard previously being made available for grazing by sheep. There was a fence to keep the sheep to the eastern side (the Glebe side) of the church. The sheep have gone, the fence has gone.....the kissing-gate has remained in splendid isolation!

SH :

As a further backup I have spoken to the TWBC Head of Parking, a very good officer called Jane Fineman, who will come and look at the road below the school with a view to putting in parking restrictions if it proves necessary. Once the present entrance is closed to children and the school is to be approached at the back on foot there should be no need to park on the road. It will be more convenient to go to the village green or the village hall and stop there to take the very young into school while the older ones can be dropped off there.

However, if for some reason people do Jane is ready to act, as she says they always are when children's safety might be at risk. She can't get here for about three weeks.