

BENENDEN VILLAGE TRUST
Annual General Meeting
Monday 29th July 2024, 6pm, Benenden Memorial Hall

Present : Athena Cripps, Martin Dickson (Chair), Kent Barker, Julie Lewis, Chris Parkinson, Sally Ann Marks, Paul Tolhurst. Caroline Levett (Trust Manager). 5 Members.

Martin Dickson welcomed those present and thanked them for attending, emphasising the important role which members play in decision-making and volunteering, and explaining the role and work of trustees in ensuring that the Trust continues to provide facilities for the village for generations to come.

1. Apologies Received from Trustees : Simon Brown, Tom Dawlings. Members : Peta Grant, Steve and Angela Simmonds. Rowena Walsh, Manningtons Chartered Accountants.
2. Minutes of AGM 31st July 2023 Paul Tolhurst proposed the approval of the Minutes of the AGM held on 31st July 2023 which was seconded by Chris Parkinson and unanimously agreed as a correct record. These were signed by the Chairman of the meeting.
3. Trustees' Report

A full Trustees' Report was included within the Reports and Statements to year-end 31st March 2024 and had been circulated to all Members and published on the Trust website.

Martin highlighted some items of the report and brought members up to date on events and developments since the year-end.

Trustees have spent a lot of time considering the purpose of BVT, how it serves the parish, and the legal, charitable and financial parameters within which it can operate.

Particular thanks was given to Simon Brown who has spent much time delving into the Trust's archives and has had long and in-depth conversations with the Charity Commission.

As a result of this extensive research and legal advice it has been established that BVT's charitable purpose is purely to provide recreation facilities open to all the residents. This excludes private fee-paying clubs and institutions, whether they be charitable or not. To the extent BVT's assets provide a home for such institutions, BVT is legally obliged by its charitable purpose to charge them a full commercial market rent. The Trust's charitable purpose also excludes the support of education.

It has also been confirmed that the Trust's permanent endowment must stay permanently in the Trust, and only income produced by the capital can be spent. Whilst BVT may appear well off, it is asset rich, but cash poor, and faces a cash crunch.

Outgoings have increased, on property maintenance and staffing costs.

There has been greatly increased expenditure on St George's Hall, and will continue to be. Martin thanked Chris Parkinson for his role engaging with contractors and tenants.

In addition to the day to day running costs of Benenden Village Hall, large capital spend will be required this year. Richard Stubbings has worked hard researching an appropriate new heating system for BVH, as the current system is reaching the end of its useful life. It is hoped that this project can be moved forward quickly.

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Martin thanked Paul Tolhurst for leading an in-depth review of BVT's strategy to agree the best way forward for the Trust to fulfil its charitable purpose, both now and for future generations, within a constrained financial framework. Martin thanked all trustees for their input into this.

The review is ongoing but trustees have reached a consensus that finances need to be brought back into balance by increasing revenues, cutting expenditure and reviewing assets. Trustees also agreed that BVT's highest priority assets - in terms of fulfilling its purpose – are Benenden Village Hall, the Iden Green Pavilion, and the recreation grounds and playgrounds at both locations.

Income can be improved through greater use of BVH, increased rent and fundraising/donations/legacies. Spending has been restricted, with all non-routine outlays carefully considered and more consideration given to good value for money.

Trustees would also like to encourage a return of more volunteering and are keen to hear from members with suggestions that that will help ensure BVT has the financial means to support recreation in the village for generations to come.

Martin thanked the Trust's staff- Caroline Levett, the Trust Manager; Jen Gurr, the hall cleaner; and John Betts, the Hall Manager, who has had an extremely successful first year in the role.

Martin thanked all trustees for their time and contribution to all the work of the Trust, and particularly Athena Cripps and Richard Stubbings, who have stood down as trustees, for their huge contribution to the work of the Trust.

Kent Barker thanked Martin Dickson for his hard work and contribution as Chairman of the Trust, and this was endorsed by all Trustees.

4. Approval of Year-End Report and Financial Statements 31st March 2024

The Trust Report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31st March 2024 had been independently examined by Manningtons, Chartered Accountants and were available at the meeting and had been circulated to members and published on the Trust's website.

There were no questions regarding the Report and Accounts, and Kent Barker proposed the adoption of the Statements. This was seconded by Sally Ann Marks, and unanimously agreed.

5. Election of Trustees

Under the Trust's Constitution, a third of Trustees stand down at each AGM, and if nominated can stand for re-election. Athena Cripps stood down as a Trustee at the meeting, and the longest serving Trustees are Kent Barker and Tom Dawlings and they offered themselves for re-election. Martin Dickson proposed their re-election and the election of all en-bloc. This was seconded by Judy Williams and unanimously agreed.

6. Any Other Business

Member comments :

- There remain concerns about the health of some of the trees on Benenden Recreation Ground.
- The trees at Benenden and Iden Green Recreation Grounds and at St George's Hall are monitored by a trustee and are surveyed by the tree surgeon which the Trust uses.
- Action has had to be taken with some diseased and fallen trees, and members were assured that the appropriate permission has been sought from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

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- There will be greater use of Benenden Recreation Ground with the return of football and likely more children using the space.
- The Trust is considering fencing around the whole area in the interests of safety and to reduce the risk of illegal incursions.
- Flooding continues in the corner of BVH car park during wet weather.
- The Trust does try to clear this as constantly as possible.
- Previous Village Hall Committee member advised that the drain pipe used to run into a ditch along the road. This ditch was filled in by a utility company and it was too costly for the then Village Hall Committee to install another drain.
- Village Hall line markings
- The village hall manager is in the process of refreshing the white line court markings in the main hall.
- Expert advice has been sought, and because of the type of flooring it is not possible to sand the entire floor or to use line marking paint. The only option is to use sports hall floor marking tape. The existing tape is being carefully and slowly removed and replaced, but this is a slow process.
- Memorial Hall seating
- A request was made that it be minuted that the chairs in the memorial hall are not safe for the seating of the elderly/those with mobility issues.
- Thanks
- Judy Williams commented on how very hard working trustees are and thanked them for all the work they do.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 6.35pm.

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