

BENENDEN VILLAGE TRUST
Annual General Meeting
Monday 28th July 2025, 6pm, Iden Green Pavilion

Present : Trustees - Kent Barker, Simon Brown, Martin Dickson (Chair), Peta Grant, Julie Lewis, Chris Parkinson, Sally Ann Marks, Mike Taylor, Paul Tolhurst. Caroline Levett (Trust Manager). 7 members.

Martin Dickson welcomed those present and thanked them for attending. The trust plays an important role in the life of the village, and members play an important role in the life of the trust, whether it be in decision-making or volunteering or as a sounding board about matters affecting the village.

Martin also welcomed Rowena Walsh the Trust's accountant from Manningtons.

1. Apologies

Received from Trustees: Tom Dawlings; Members: Judy Williams, Sarah Pain, Steve and Angela Simmonds, who thanked everyone involved for their continued hard work. John Betts, Village Hall Manager.

2. Minutes of AGM 29th July 2024

The minutes of the 2024 AGM had been circulated to all Members and published on the Trust website.

Chris Parkinson proposed the approval of the Minutes of the AGM held on 29th July 2024 which was seconded by Peta Grant and unanimously agreed as a correct record. These were signed by the Chairman of the meeting.

3. Trustees' Report

The full Trustees' Report was included within the Reports and Statements to year-end 31st March 2025 and had been circulated to all Members and published on the Trust website.

Martin Dickson highlighted the following items and events from the report.

The past year has been dominated by giving attention to the Trust's finances, so that the Trust can continue to fulfil its purpose, which is to provide recreational facilities for residents of the parish now and in the future.

Other highlights of the year included important improvements to the structure and running of Benenden Village Hall; the return of regular football matches to Benenden Recreation Ground; the start of popular film nights to raise funds for the work of the Trust; and the Trust's celebration of the centenary of recreational gifts to the village by the first Viscount Rothermere.

Finance:

- BVT ended the year with a headline surplus of £11,000 income over expenditure but this disguised a continuing underlying drain on resources.
- The positive cash flow was only achieved after drawing down £35,000 from BVT's reserves in the COIF Charities Investment Fund; by a generous £5,000 grant from Benenden Parish Council towards the cost of a new heating boiler at BVH, and £550 from the Bonfire Society to support playground repairs. Without these contributions the deficit would have totaled nearly £30,000 - and in a year when BVT clamped down on all but unavoidable expenditure.
- The outlook for the current year is a little better following actions BVT has taken to boost revenues and contain costs:
 - ❖ Boosted revenues from hire of BVH.

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- ❖ Active fundraising. With thanks to the initiative of trustee Paul Tolhurst, and a group of volunteers, Benenden Players and Grant Matthews who provided the catering, BVT held a very successful film night, and a second one just after the year-end. Thanks to all who attended. More film nights are planned and trustees hope these will become a regular part of the village calendar.
- ❖ BVT initiated discussions with its commercial property tenants at St George's Hall (St George's Club and Benenden Pre-School) with a view to negotiating new leases and raising the rental of their premises to what the Trust has been advised are market rates as it is obliged to do given its charitable status. Particular thanks to trustees Simon Brown and Mike Taylor for bringing their legal and property knowledge to these ongoing discussions.
- ❖ This financial year BVT has begun a review of all lines of expenditure in the hope of eliminating or reducing costs. Thanks to Mike Taylor for leading on this.
- ❖ In addition to the £5,000 grant from Benenden Parish Council last year, BPC has also undertaken to pay the cost of mowing and hedge cutting at the Benenden and Iden Green recreation grounds for five years from 2025-26. This will save BVT £5,000-£6,000 a year. The Trust is very grateful for this support, which demonstrates the strength of the community working together for the common good.
- These actions will help to diminish the negative cash-flow but are unlikely to eliminate the gap and the Trust will continue to push initiatives that may help do so.
- The Trust remains hostage to unexpected large costs resulting from the elderly nature of its two main buildings, Benenden Village Hall and St George's Hall, which have incurred very large repair and replacement costs in recent years, and which are unlikely to diminish.

Trustees would be delighted to hear from members who have the skills or time for volunteering, or would consider gifts or legacies to the Trust, that will help BVT ensure that excellent recreational facilities are still available to Benenden and Iden Green residents in the decades to come.

Martin thanked the Trust's staff, Caroline Levett BVT Manager, John Betts BVH Manager and Jen Gurr BVH Cleaner, for their hard work over the past year and trustees for their very considerable time, expertise and contributions to the work of the Trust, without which BVT would simply be unable to function.

Sally Ann Marks thanked Martin for his huge amount of work and involvement across all areas of the Trust's work. This was endorsed by Trustees and Members.

▪ Member questions and comments:

❖ BVH hire/occupancy

- Hire charges are reviewed annually and were increased wef 01/04/25. Standard hire charges were increased by approximately 5% and rates are discounted for parish residents and regular hirers.
- BVH has lost 3 regular hirers who have found more suitable venues.
- There is competition from the newly opened Sissinghurst Village Hall and competition remains from other halls locally and within the village.
- Due to the design of BVH there can be issues of noise between the main and small halls if separately hired. The dividing wall between them was lined in recent years and is better than in the past, but remains a challenge.
- Occupancy is concentrated at certain times of the day and often fully occupied in the mornings and early evenings during term time but is quieter early afternoons and later in the day.
- Promotion of BVH is needed to fill the vacant slots and to reach outside of the village. There have been some enquiries to fill the vacant slots.

❖ BVH main hall

- The acoustics and heating efficiency are affected by the high ceiling.
- Insulating the ceiling would be very expensive but might be improved by baffle boards.

❖ Football

- The use of the Recreation Ground for football matches and the changing rooms in BVH are charged for.

❖ St George's Hall Rents

- Research highlighted the requirement to charge market rates and BVT cannot justify the low rents charged in the past.
- Increases for both the Club and Pre-School are being discussed with both and negotiations are ongoing. At this point in time the Trust cannot determine the future use of the building.

4. Approval of Year-End Report and Financial Statements 31st March 2025

The Trust Report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31st March 2025 had been independently examined by Manningtons Chartered Accountants and had been circulated to Members and published on the Trust's website.

Rowena Walsh was present to answer any questions regarding the accounts, or questions could be directed through Caroline Levett and passed on to Rowena. There were no questions from the meeting.

Peta Grant proposed the adoption of the Statements which was seconded by Chris Parkinson and unanimously agreed.

5. Election of Trustees

Under the Trust's Constitution, a third of Trustees must stand down at each AGM, and if nominated can stand for re-election.

As the current longest serving Trustees Martin Dickson, Julie Lewis and Sally Ann Marks stood down and offered themselves for re-election. All three were nominated by Kent Barker and seconded by Peta Grant.

Kent Barker proposed the election of Peta Grant and Mike Taylor (both currently co-opted) as Trustees and this was seconded by Janet Beattie.

The election of all as the Board of Trustees was proposed by Ruth Clarke and unanimously agreed by all Members.

6. Any Other Business

Member comments:

❖ Fundraising

- The Trust was encouraged to make film nights regular events. Other villages hold regular successful film nights.
- Trustees were encouraged to organise more fundraising events.
- BVT was fortunate and grateful to the Players and Grant Matthews for their support, but more volunteers / support is needed.
- Trustees have discussed other fundraising opportunities but have yet to move this forward.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 6.30pm.

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