

**BENENDEN VILLAGE TRUST**  
**Annual General Meeting**  
**Monday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2026, 6pm, Iden Green Pavilion**

Present : Trustees – Kent Barker, Martin Dickson (Chair), Peta Grant, Julie Lewis, Chris Parkinson, Sally Ann Marks, Mike Taylor, Paul Tolhurst. Caroline Levett (Trust Manager). 8 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.

1. Apologies

Apologies received from: Trustees Simon Brown and Tom Dawlings, Members Bill Lewis and John Marshall, Rowena Walsh (Manningtons Chartered Accountants), John Betts (Village Hall Manager).

2. Minutes of AGM 28<sup>th</sup> July 2025

The minutes of the 2025 AGM had been circulated to all Members and published on the Trust website.

Paul Tolhurst proposed the approval of the Minutes of the AGM held on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2025 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

The full Trustees' Report was included within the Reports and Statements to year-end 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026 and had been circulated to all Members and published on the Trust website.

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

**Review of Activities during the past year**

2025-26 has been one of consolidation for BVT after several years of intense activity during which the Trust undertook a comprehensive review of its operations. Work in preceding years included, in conjunction with the Charity Commission, a review of its charitable purpose and the nature of its financial reserves and the start of a major strategy review, led by Paul Tolhurst, which is expected to conclude in the 2026-27 financial year.

This has paid dividends over the past financial year, with the Trust benefitting from greater clarity of purpose, a much clearer eye on strategic goals, a much-improved year-end financial position and significant year-on-year growth in hours hired at the village hall and its financial contribution.

However, BVT still faces some major challenges, most notably financial, since a great deal of the year's improvement in cash flow stems from generous support from Benenden Parish Council and other donors.

BVT 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, with no sign of diminishing.

Trustees thanked members of the Benenden and Iden Green community who have volunteered to help BVT in various ways during the year, whether aiding its finances or contributing to the general well-being of the parish, particularly Benenden Parish Council, Benenden Bonfire Society and Benenden Players. Trustees thanked its staff

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members who work hard to ensure the quality of the trust's operations - Caroline Levett, BVT Manager; John Betts, Benenden Village Hall Manager; Jen Gurr, Village Hall cleaner.

Martin thanked all trustees for their considerable input of time and expertise, without these contributions the Trust would not be able to function.

Martin gave particular thanks to Simon Brown, who stood down as a Trustee, but will remain an advisor to BVT. Simon joined as a trustee in early 2022 and immediately brought his legal expertise and tremendous energy to bear in reviewing BVT's constitution; in more clearly defining its purpose; in clarifying relations with its tenants; and in establishing which of investment reserves are permanent endowment and which are not.

This involved many, many hours in the archives and in exchanges with the Charity Commission, as well as input at trustee meetings. As a result, trustees' understanding of BVT aims as a charity, and its financial means to achieve them, have been transformed and brought into a sharp focus which had been lacking previously.

Chris Parkinson thanked Martin for all his work and involvement across all areas of the Trust's work. This was endorsed by Trustees and Members.

## Finance

To March 31 2026 BVT recorded total income of £102,823, against total expenditure of £77,724, a surplus of £25,099. This compared with income of £115,541 and expenditure of £105,142 in the previous year, a surplus of £10,399.

Substantial contributions to both surpluses were due to grants from Benenden Parish Council and other donors. BVT ended the year with cash balances of £56,881, against £31,784 in 2024-25.

There was a £3,944 year-on-year rise in takings from the hire of Benenden Village Hall, to £41,924, achieved through increased usage and an increase in hire charges. Fundraising by the trust was up thanks to a series of very successful film nights. There was a modest rise in rental income from tenants of BVT properties.

Expenditure in 2025-26 was lower than the previous year - partly due to grants related to the village hall and recreation ground, and lower than expected maintenance costs at St George's Hall. Running costs dropped from £23,780 in 2024-2025 to £18,049, helped by a policy of restricting spending to the absolutely necessary and seeking savings wherever possible. Expenditure at the village hall dropped from £61,888 the previous year to £43,812.

The Trust's permanent endowment reserves, held in the COIF Charities Investment Fund, produced an income stream of £22,305 during the year, helping bolster the cash holdings. The 2024-25 figures are not directly comparable, given BVT's shift in our permanent endowment holdings during that year from the accumulation section of the COIF fund, where dividend income is reinvested, to the income section, where it is distributed.

At the year end, BVT's investment in the income section of the fund - comprising all the trust's permanent endowment - was valued at £694,384, a steep fall from the valuation of £759,099 a year earlier. BVT's funds in the accumulation section - comprising reserves the trust has liberty to spend - also fell to £23,074 from £24,558. The poor investment performance over the past year was due partly to market volatility and global political upheaval, but also to poor performance by COIF's fund managers relative to their peers. For many years COIF performed well against other funds but its under-performance has now persisted for over 18 months, leading BVT to start a formal examination of whether it would be in the trust's best interests to move from CCLA, the fund manager responsible for COIF, to a better performing rival.

The trust is also in the process of drawing up a formal investment policy.

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## **Benenden Village Hall**

A number of regular hirers were lost to the hall during the year, but there was also a number of new arrivals. Regular hirers accounted for over two thirds of total income, while other hirers and ad hoc bookings accounted for the remainder. Total hours of hire rose by 236 in the year to 2,317.5, compared to 2,081.5 in 2024/25.

Trustees thanked John Betts for his diligence and energy which had contributed to this positive outcome.

During the year lighting outside the hall was upgraded, while at year-end work was under way for a major improvement of lighting inside the hall, with old fluorescent lights replaced by modern, dimmable LEDs.

Potholes in the hall car park were filled in and BVT has set up a working group to examine how to better manage the use of the car park. Use by drivers not connected to the hall can create congestion and health and safety issues at some times of the day. Lack of spaces can force hall users to park elsewhere. Overuse of the car park leads to faster deterioration of its surface with the burden of repairs falling wholly on BVT.

Many of the trees lining the north boundary of Benenden Recreation Ground were found to be suffering from Honey Fungus and the affected trees had to be removed, along with the stumps and roots, and destroyed. The area has been left fallow to ensure the fungus has nothing to feed on and died. The dead trees will be replaced with new saplings in due course.

At year-end preparations were under way to replace parts of the rubber safety mulch at Benenden playground, where hard use and encroaching grass had damaged the surface. BVT is indebted to Benenden Parish Council for earmarking a £6,300 grant to cover the playground maintenance, and also to the Benenden Bonfire Society for a £1,000 grant towards this work.

The Parish Council also funded the improvements to the interior village hall lighting with a grant of £4,320 and the removal of the fungus-affected trees on the recreation ground, saving BVT nearly £5,000. In addition, it undertook in 2024-25 to finance the maintenance of the Benenden recreation ground and that at Iden Green for five years, saving BVT approximately £6,000 a year, and made a £5,000 contribution to the village hall's new boiler.

During the year the trust opened discussions with the Benenden Bowls Club, which occupies land owned by BVT to the south of the village hall, about a new lease to replace a 60-year one that expired in 2017.

## **Fund Raising**

Fund raising has become an important part of BVT's activities over the past two years. Thanks to the initiative of Paul Tolhurst, the Trust held a successful initial film night in 2024-25 and followed this up in 2025-26 with two more. Together they raised a net total of £3,048 to support modernisation and improvements to the village hall, up from £1,016 the previous year.

## **St George's Hall**

Window and plumbing repairs were required at the Hall during the year, though maintenance costs were lower than in many previous years. But, as 2026-27 began, BVT is braced to face major repairs to leaks in the roof around a chimney stack.

During the year BVT negotiated a new lease with St George's Club, which came into effect in December 2025 and is currently in discussion with Benenden Pre-School regarding its lease.

## Strategy Review

A major running theme for the Trust's over the past three years has been a review of strategy begun in the autumn of 2023 at a time of deep financial worry and uncertainty over the direction of the charity.

The review's initial findings were that the trust was asset rich, but cash poor; that its finances needed to be brought back into balance; and that BVT's highest priority, core assets - in terms of fulfilling its charitable purpose - were Benenden Village Hall, the Iden Green Pavilion, and the recreation grounds and playgrounds at both locations.

The review is still ongoing. Financial and legal complications preventing trustees from moving on to final, actionable decision-making have now been resolved, and trustees expect to conclude the review in the autumn of 2026, with implications for the future of its non-core assets.

- Response to member questions and comments:

- ❖ It was clarified that although income appears to have fallen by 10% from the previous year, the figures are not completely comparable.
- ❖ A member, who is a trustee of another charity, advised that it too had moved to a new fund manager and Martin Dickson accepted an offer to discuss this.
- ❖ It was confirmed that another Film Night will take place in the autumn.

#### 4. Approval of Year-End Report and Financial Statements 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026

The Trust Report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026 had been independently examined by Manningtons Chartered Accountants and had been circulated to Members and published on the Trust's website.

There were no questions raised at the meeting.

Peta Grant proposed the adoption of the Statements which was seconded by Nancy Tolhurst and unanimously agreed by all those present.

#### 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 Simon Brown, Chris Parkinson and Paul Tolhurst stood down. Simon Brown resigned as a Trustee and Chris Parkinson and Paul Tolhurst offered themselves for re-election. Both were nominated by David Harmsworth and seconded by Nicola Thomas.

The election of all Trustees (Kent Barker, Tom Dawlings, Martin Dickson, Peta Grant, Julie Lewis, Chris Parkinson, Sally Ann Marks, Mike Taylor, Paul Tolhurst) as the Board of Trustees was proposed by David Harmsworth and unanimously agreed by all Members.

#### 6. Any Other Business

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 6.20pm.

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