

Neighbourhood Development Plan

Responding to your feedback

The Regulation 14 version of Benenden's NDP was published on 25 August 2019 and the six week consultation period was extended after we encountered delays in printing the plan (for those without access to the internet version). The consultation period ended at the beginning of November.

I am pleased to say we had a great response to this phase of planning. Although our site allocations had not changed since we presented the Rough Draft Plan earlier in the year, much of the text and key policies had been updated following feedback. Now the review process is underway once again. In all we received input from:

- 5 Landowners
- 2 Developers
- 14 Statutory Bodies
- 22 Residents from Benenden Village
- 31 Residents from East End
- 6 Residents from Iden Green

As you may expect, comments from statutory bodies (Kent County Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council etc) focussed on planning policy. Input from some residents also made comments on policy, but most of their feedback concerned the location of the sites allocated for housing development.

As outlined in previous contributions to the magazine, the BNDP concluded that none of our 20 sites put forward for development is ideal. In a perfect world we would find a number of small brownfield sites, outside the AONB but adjacent to existing shops, work, public transport and leisure facilities. Unfortunately, most sites close to the amenities in the centre of Benenden are greenfield and of course, inside the AONB. They also border the conservation area or ancient woodland. The sites at East End are outside the AONB and brownfield but are two or three miles from many amenities. So, we will try to take a balanced judgement through the review and once again look at our allocations.

To this end a separate group of parish

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councillors and NDP volunteers has been set up to review all input and to recommend changes to the plan. Their role is to make sure our plan conforms to planning policy, regulations and guidelines. 'Locality', a government funded agency has set out the following key points:

- Any comments received by the end of the consultation period must be considered conscientiously
- All representations need to be considered, but it is legitimate for the Neighbourhood Plan body to take a different view
- A planning judgement needs to be taken
- Decisions on whether or not to amend the plan, and the reasoning behind them, should be recorded. This information will need to be incorporated into the consultation statement
- The Parish Council will need to agree the modifications and approve the resulting draft of the plan for submission to TWBC.

The review should be completed by mid January and amendments made by the end of January. We will also engage an independent consultant to offer final drafting advice. This amended document becomes the Benenden NDP Regulation 15 Plan. The Parish Council needs to approve the plan and send it to TWBC. TWBC will review and suggest further changes if required by Local Authority policy. Once TWBC and the Parish Council have agreed on the final wording the plan will become the Regulation 16 version. This Regulation 16 Plan will be submitted to an independent examiner who will undertake a further consultation with stakeholders and has the power to instruct TWBC and the Parish Council to make further changes if the examiner believes national planning policy has been ignored.

Residents of Benenden will get the opportunity to vote on the final plan after the examiner has approved it. Based on current progress and despite a great deal of work by volunteers on your behalf, I believe this will be in late summer 2020.

Someone once said "it will be all over by Christmas". But which Christmas? My genuine hope is by next Christmas!

Paul Tolhurst

Chair, Benenden NDP Steering Group

January 2020¹³