



33333BIDDENDEN PARISH COUNCIL
Mrs Alison Swannick – Clerk to the Council
Tel: 07783223450 Email: Clerk@Biddenden.gov.uk
Website: www.Biddenden.gov.uk

19 April 2021

Mr John Slate BA (Hons), DMS, MRTPI
Independent Examiner
c/o Independent Examiners' Referral Service
npiers@rics.org

Dear Sir

Benenden Neighbourhood Plan

Thank you for sending the parish council a copy of your initial comments on the Benenden NDP.

The Parish Council has read the document and discussed issues further and wishes to be invited to any hearing that may be held. The reason is that Biddenden Parish Council believes that it is more affected by this development than Benenden itself, meaning that its roads, already overwhelmed sewerage system, and facilities are likely to be more affected than Benenden's. The development is remote from the village centre of Benenden and therefore could be termed as a new village, although it will have no amenities of its own. With this in mind, Biddenden Parish Council believes that all of Biddenden should be included in a referendum, not just roads nearby as the effect on the local population will be greater.

Biddenden and Benenden may be neighbouring parishes and come under different planning authorities, but settlements in the Weald have far more in common with each other than with their "parent planning authority". Parishioners in both Parishes work, shop and go to school across planning boundaries. In order for residents at East End to use the facilities in Benenden and not require car trips there would need to be a bus service to Benenden village to negate the use of cars. This would not be practical as I am sure Benenden Parish Council could not fund such a service and a commercial bus service would not find it commercially viable. It would appear that the preference is to have any development off to the fringes of Benenden parish rather than embrace it as being part of it. For the Benenden NDP and Tunbridge Wells Local Plan to be sustainable, Biddenden Parish Council believes that they need to consider not only the housing numbers needs but also the broader rural infrastructure which, as it stands, requires improvement.

Roads and Traffic issues

With no local amenities infrastructure extensive to serve the proposed development they would need to rely on the towns of Tenterden, Cranbrook and Ashford all of which require access through the Castletons Oak crossroad. You are already aware that Biddenden Parish Council believes the Castletons Oak junction is dangerous, and there have been a number of crashes there in the last few months alone. Biddenden Parish Council has been working with Kent Highways to make improvements

to the safety of the junction for a number of years. Initial improvements made a few years ago failed to provide a solution to the crashes. Kent Highways is currently reviewing the traffic flows to develop a new design but there is no solution to the problems as yet. Alternative routes out of East End towards Tenterden and Biddenden do not fare much better, unless you take a more circuitous route, and that is unlikely to happen when journeys are quicker using the lanes. This also applies to lanes likely to become rat runs into Benenden Village. Biddenden Parish Council would be interested to know if Kent County Council Highway Authority has offered any views, or their views been invited, on the traffic and highway implications of the East End allocations on the wider rural road network.

The Castletons Oak junction is crossed by the Cranbrook Road and Benenden Road. Visibility is not good and, as stated, seems to be an accident hotspot. Crossing the Cranbrook Road towards Biddenden on Benenden Road has its own issues. This road is already a main thoroughfare into Biddenden from East End. The speed limit on the road is too fast for the type of road which not only has large farm vehicles on it, but it has hidden driveways and accesses, a caravan park as well as residents who already complain about the speed and the number of vehicles using the road. The road has several bends which can cause visibility issues.

Sewage Issue

The Biddenden Sewerage system is not suitable for yet more developments to be using it. There have been 45 houses built at the north end of Biddenden already, plus infills and small developments over the years. The Parish Council is in contact with Southern Water who are currently investigating the problems and a report is due in the coming months. There are issues with sewage exiting drains in the Castletons Oak area. This, we believe, could be due to the hospital releasing sewage into Biddenden's system. There is a knock-on effect with sewage smells at Woolpack corner. Any heavy rain causes flooding from foul drains at various points within the village. Southern Water are currently looking at who adopted the pipes and pumping station at the hospital and the sewage leaks at Castletons Oak. They are also looking into the issues generally in the Biddenden sewerage system. For the village, this is critical as the system is overloaded and our residents do not wish to see faeces and paper on their highways, properties or playing fields which is the current situation.

AONB

East End also borders an AONB and a development of this type so close to such an area requires close scrutiny to ensure it does not infringe on existing policies.

With regard to Policy LE1, Biddenden Parish Council is concerned that the setting of the AONB is being compromised. Although Biddenden Parish Council is concerned with protected views, there appears to be a disregard for the residents in the AONB that would have to look at further spoiling of the AONB setting at the eastern end of the parish of Benenden. It is not enough to protect areas within the AONB alone but to protect the setting of the designated area so that views out are not further spoiled by urbanisation and increased street lighting which would negatively impact dark skies.

Biddenden Parish Council is grateful for the opportunity to be part of the referendum process but again, as previously stated, believes the whole of Biddenden Parish should be part of the referendum. The

affect of the development of East End cannot be understated. It will be Biddenden that will be most affected and its facilities and amenities used as well as having to bear increased traffic on its unsuitable and already busy rural roads, yet there appears to have been no consideration of or consultation with Biddenden Parish Council either before or during this process

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alison Swannick'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'A' and a long, sweeping underline.

Alison Swannick
Parish Clerk

Cc: Ms Deborah Dixon, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
deborah.dixon@tunbridgewells.gov.uk