

Berden Parish Council

Minutes of Berden Parish Council meeting held on Monday 29 June at 8.00pm

Present: Harry Wadsworth, Duncan Murdoch, Kathleen Merino, Debbie Thomson, Weston Steimel, Ray Gooding.

Public: Raph de Albuquerque, Howard Farmer

337.1 Apologies and Declarations

- Apologies from Diane (holiday), George Braeckman (holiday)

337.2 Declarations of Interest in items on this Agenda

- Duncan declared interest in land east of Bonnetting Lane; recused for that item

337.3 Approve Minutes of Berden Parish Council from 18th May

- Proposed: Kathleen, signed: Duncan

337.4 Nuisance rooks

Raph de Albuquerque joined the meeting to discuss the increase in rooks in the village:

- Large rookery in Little London destroyed after landowner felled trees in winter; rooks have relocated into Berden.
- Nesting now around the playground and rear of John Burton's house
- Concerns: noise, displacement of songbirds, egg raiding, aggressive flock behaviour
- Proposed mitigations:
 - Village email asking residents to use anti-rook/anti-squirrel bird feed. Debbie to email once recommended feed has been identified.
 - Kite decoys (~£30 each) placed strategically and moved regularly. RA to confirm price.
 - Hawk sound playback (tested; effective for a couple of days)
 - Nest removal in winter (not tree removal: too costly)
- Action deferred to September/October (outside nesting season)
- John Burton also involved in researching kite options

337.5 Planning

- **Land east of Bonnetting Lane:** no further information; Highways noted road not over-capacity.
- **Chapel Field (3 large houses):** representations due by 16th July
 - Essex Highways, Ecology, and Environmental Health: no objection.
 - Previous objection (highway visibility) now weaker given Essex sign-off.
 - Grounds still available: openness of countryside, unsustainable transport, not true infill, not central to village.
 - New driveway now directly opposite neighbouring properties (previously faced the bank): noted as material change.

- Badger sett on site: Essex Ecology approved a one-way gate; inspections required every 6 weeks.
- Roof heights raised vs. original proposal; loss of field views for neighbours
- Concern raised about remaining land behind the plot: risk of further incremental development.
- Draft objection letter to be sent by Thursday for review.
- Option to request planning officer refer application to committee rather than decide under delegated powers.
- **Park Green (garage):** no comments
- **Oakwood House:** no comments
- **Brick House link extension:** no comments
- **Berden Hall Farm solar (great crested newt licence):** largely procedural; survey already in place.
- **Berden Hall Farm solar (archaeology):** contractor arrived on site early with fencing and equipment.
 - County archaeologist approved trenching (~300 trenches across whole field); Uttlesford sign-off pending by Wednesday.
 - Skylarks: fields sprayed with herbicide and rolled before skylark mitigation was in place; email of complaint sent to Solar Renewables.
 - Planning enforcement officer (Sarah) notified; must attend site within a fortnight
- **Great Mimms:** extending garden into fields – refused.

337.6 Highways

- **Portable speed sign (VAS):** licence application submitted; ~6-week process; at least 4 of 7 parishes have dropped out due to bureaucracy; only one suitable post identified (alongside Gawlers, inbound from Stocking Pelham).
- **Potholes:** temporary fills breaking up after wet weather; need refilling; new county administration has cancelled the Members Initiative and Highways Warden schemes; all work now via central NOVA system, which Ray Gooding considers inadequate.

337.7 Footpaths and grounds maintenance

- **Simons Field fencing:** damaged posts replaced; mangled wire removed; west-side wire not yet replaced; north hedge (grown ~2m into field) being cut back slowly.
- **Footpath cutting:** contractor not responding to messages but paths are being cut; approval given to proceed with invoicing ECC.

337.8 Finance

- Accounts issued by Diane on 25 June approved.
- There was no expenditure over £1,000 to approve.

337.9 Solar/Battery Units/Substation

- **Berden Hall (see above).** Development unlikely to start until next year. Management of construction traffic discussed.
- **Pelham substation (formerly Pelham Springs)** full public inquiry, likely November/December or new year.
- **Crabbs Green battery storage:** appeal dismissed 15th May; refused on landscape, listed building, conservation area, and tonal noise grounds.
- **Hill Green Farm, Stocking Pelham:** flagged as possible future solar farm site; will liaise with Stocking Pelham Parish Council if application emerges.

National Grid: Transformer Delivery

- Massive transformer (5.2m wide, 5m+ high, 36-wheel lorry) arriving from Taiwan, likely in the new year.
- Must pass through the village; hedge along the village hall frontage is an obstruction.
- Land surveyor has already surveyed the road and village green.
- Boundaries of the green unclear; Essex County Council records uncertain.
- Water meters in the verge at risk of being struck.
- Suggested opportunity to negotiate: new wall/railings, improved hedge, coloured surface treatment, and a flush pedestrian walkway along the route.
- Road likely to be closed temporarily with police or traffic management escort.

337.10 Parish Council archives

- Debbie and Diane to arrange time to list items for transfer to Essex Records Office.

337.11 Grants

- National Grid Community Fund

Fund covers Hackney to Berden corridor; pot of £2M+, ~£500k allocated for the immediate substation area.

Internal reorganisation at National Grid reduced staff; key contact who knows Berden's community activities is still involved.

Parish Council to compile a wish list of projects and desired community outcomes.

Ideas raised:

- Village hall insulation, double glazing, and air conditioning (extreme heat/cold refuge).
- Acquisition of a field near the village centre for parking, events (fete, fireworks, open gardens).
- Oak-framed storage units and covered social space.
- Large field (adjacent to Simon's Field and recently sprayed clear) flagged as a candidate; email sent to Frank to consider.
- Kathleen reported that there were no other grant opportunities at the moment but very grateful for the 'Love Essex' funding for the Repair Café.

337.12 Repair Café

- **13 June** raised £311 (donations £233, café £78); ~27 repairs completed; new Sum Up card reader purchased (£59.99); second reader needed; next event 26th September; Big Green Week inspector visited at close of event which was unfortunate.

337.13 Playground

- **Inspection report:** no urgent items; recurring issues (overhanging branches, guano, adventure trail woodwork) carried over from last year; tools found in playground, now removed.
- **Carousel replacement:** quotes coming in far higher than expected (~£13,000 installed vs. ~£4-5k anticipated); accessibility requirement (wheelchair-accessible unit) needed to qualify for grants; two further quotes awaited; strategy: get standard and accessible quotes, then apply for grant funding.

337.14 Defibrillators

- Checked and in good order as of May.

337.15 New District Councillor

- George Braeckman won by 110 votes (255 vs. 145 approx.); low turnout on a hot day.

337.16 Cllr Gooding

- **Essex unitary authority / LGR:** new Conservative administration pursuing judicial review of the LGR process; estimated cost ~£5M; concern about adult social care and children's services fragmentation across smaller unitary areas.

AOB

Village email list: Kathleen shared suggestion that village MailChimps should be consolidated to one email per week; heritage events flagged as high-volume senders.

Next meeting Monday 7 September 2026