Berden Parish Council

Minutes of Berden Parish Council meeting held on Monday 7 September at 8.00pm.

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

Public: Natalie Trapmore, Bronwen Burton, John Burton.

338.1 Apologies and reasons for absence

George Braekman absent (on holiday).

338.2 Declarations of interest in items on this Agenda

Duncan declared interest in Land east of Bonnetting Lane; recused for that item.

338.3 Approve Minutes of Berden Parish Council from 29 June 2026

Minutes of 29th June 2026 meeting approved, nominated: Diane, seconded; Harry, signed: Duncan.

338.4 Solar Farm Community Benefit consultation

Community consultation event held Friday; good turnout, strong questions, no objections to proceeding.

Comments from Parish Councillors and members of the public as follows:

- Harry: Must ensure that payments continue if British Solar Renewable (BSR) sells. Prefers annual payment rather than a reduced lump sum.

  Landowner's lawyer is reportedly surprised that payments would ever stop; clause being pursued. Landowner's lease already held in trust for three children and five grandchildren. Developer pays £6,000; landowner's trust pays £5,000 via reduced rent. Title restriction at Land Registry proposed to bind any future assignee.

  Payment structure: £11,000/year (RPI-indexed)

- Diane: Concern over split of money for first-year (£20,000)

  Landowner to have final say.

- Kathleen: Does the £20,000 offer date back to the start of the church tower restoration? Will the Landowner's family be bound by the agreement?

  It is thought to have been in the landowner's mind 'for a number of years'. The Trust is already set up for the children and grandchildren and so will be bound by the agreement.

- Ray: Will both parts of the payment be index linked?

  As both payments will be made by the solar developer it will be for them to ensure that both parts are index linked.

- John Burton: Can the guarantee be sold on?

  The landowner has a covenant in his lease and so a new buyer cannot avoid honouring this commitment. The restriction will be lodged with Land Registry so as such the payment could not be avoided. Added to this is the good relationship with the family. A lump sum would avoid this but would be a smaller amount.

- Bron: Reported comments at the meeting against the first £20,000 going to the church. Should the community be asked how the money should be split? Will the money have to be spent within a year?

  The landowner will think about this first payment and it is his decision on how it should be split. He is not the originator of the idea that the money should be spent in one year.

- Natalie: Some of the community is in favour of the £20,000 going to the church.

  We should wait to see what the landowner says and then the three village organisations can decide.

- Draft agreement: only Duncan's amendments so far; all Parish Councillors will be asked to review, particularly clause 4.

338.5 Fireworks Night 2026

- Date: 7th November; new location (field offered to the village)
- Subcommittee formed (John Walker and Simon Parry leading); social club not yet consulted, meeting tomorrow.
- Financials
  - Fireworks cost: ~£2,000
  - Break-even: 300 tickets (~£2,200 revenue)
  - Target attendance: up to 500; last year 600 attended, profit £3,600
  - Worst-case financial risk estimated at ~£400

- Key risks and actions
  - Event cancellation insurance: not previously arranged; Debbie to check with insurers.

- Horses kept near the field: committee to identify locations and confirm no rockets used.
- Parking and access: narrow lane, no cars on site; walking routes and parking being planned.
- Bonfire to be smaller than last year; no mass collection of garden waste.

338.6 Village Trailer

- Trailer owned by the Social Club but currently on Parish Council insurance (theft only). Not covered when in use on roads (third-party only); gap exposed when a car hit the trailer.
- Social Club considering hiring it out at £10/day
  - If hiring generates income, social club should carry the insurance.
  - Suggestion: raise hire fee to £20/day plus a ~£5 insurance contribution.
- Ownership and insurance liability to be clarified with Social Club (meeting tomorrow).
  - Clerk to advise insurers the trailer belongs to the Social Club (post meeting note: the trailer can only be covered under Parish Council insurance if the Social Club works under instruction of the Parish Council and does not have its own bank account. Therefore Social Club will need to arrange its own insurance).

338.7 Planning

- Land east of Bonneting Lane: refused 9th July (Duncan recused).
- Chapel Hill (application now for one large house): letter submitted 28th August; outcome awaited; likely to be approved.
- Redhill (garden conversion, footpath impact): letter submitted, undetermined.
- Rose Garth (glazing, listed barn): refused on heritage harm grounds.
- Old Bakery (bread oven excavation): undetermined; no objection.
- Berden Hall Farm Solar: noise condition comments submitted; noise output within existing levels. Three further applications submitted Friday: PRoW alterations, construction traffic, biodiversity/drainage; to be reviewed.

338.8 Highways

- Portable VAS sign: application submitted to Essex Highways; awaiting response (to be sited on pole alongside Gawlers).

- Potholes: significant repairs completed between Stortford, Farnham and Manuden.

338.9 Footpaths and grounds maintenance

- Simon's Field fencing. Hedge trimmed to 2m wide, 2m high all around with Frank Tinney's help. Posts for wire fence started; ground too hard; work paused until ground softens.
- ECC footpath contract: paths cut well this year; Debbie to pass on thanks to Mike and ask for invoice.
- Permissive footpaths (Berden Hall solar farm): landowner no longer offering permissive path along the central farm track. Landowner placing signs clarifying it is not a legal right of way; to be staked when ground softens. Duncan to update plan and circulate; to go on website/Parish notice board once finalised.

338.10 Finance

- Finance: accounts ticking over; Diane seeking approval for:
    - Village hall rent: £150
    - Grants to village hall and church: £400 each (Q2)
    - Church payment ring-fenced for churchyard maintenance confirmed
- Annual Governance and Accountability Return: new portal launching for 2027 submission; mandatory from 2029; Diane will use it for next year's return as practice.
- HMRC Basic Pay Tools: Intel-based version unsupported from Autumn 2027; Diane monitoring; may need to use a Windows laptop from April 2026 as interim.
- Debbie's pay rise calculated; September back pay: £29.25

338.11 Solar Battery, Substations and National Grid

- Berden Hall Solar: archaeological trenching ongoing; pre-construction consultation meeting with developer in the new year.
- Pelham Substation (formerly Pelham Springs): full public inquiry in the new year.
- Hill Green Farm, Stocking Pelham: no planning application yet; to remain on agenda.
- National Grid North London Reinforcement Project:

    - Two two-week full road closures reported (Newport to Pelham Substation) before February; not yet officially confirmed.
    - Duncan to contact National Grid contact to clarify scope and timing.
    - Grant funding strategy meeting: Thursday 10th September; online survey launched.
    - After Thursday: Mailchimp to go out encouraging village to respond; grants up to £50,000 available.
- National Grid Global Day of Service
    - Four volunteers to work in the churchyard
    - Murphy: two lorries, 12 men offered to move equipment from the barn; logistics being confirmed.
    - Natalie and John Walker visited barn; items to be sorted into "keep," "bonfire," and "unsure" piles.

338.12 Grants

See above re National Grid Community Fund.

338.13 Parish Council archives

- One crate remaining to review; legal conveyance documents to be retained; land ownership registration (including playground) to be resolved; original minute book (from Parish Council formation) to be considered for transfer to Essex/Hertfordshire archive storage.

338.14 Repair Café

- Saturday 26th September, 10am–1pm; four bookings so far.

338.15 Berden Emergency Plan

- Kathleen to draft evacuation strategy; to draw on Essex County Council website resources and examples from other authorities.
- Debbie to include information on the Emergency Plan in the next Parish magazine.

338.16 Playground

- Playground carousel: three quotes received; preferred option (£11,196) not wheelchair-accessible; accessible options more expensive and less appealing; ~£5,155 in ring-fenced reserves; potential match funding via community fund (up to £5,000); Ray to explore local contribution.

338.17 Defibrillators

- Reported to be in good working order in August 2026.

338.18 Village Christmas Tree

- Social Club will discuss at next meeting; community feedback and Parish Council preference for real tree to be taken into account; real tree supplier (10–11ft, up to £140) confirmed available.

338.19 Parish Elections

- Parish elections: May 2027; packs expected March 2027; no immediate action needed.

338.20 District/County Councillor

- Ray spoke for both:
    - Enforcement failures in Felsted area (traveller site); scrutiny meeting drew ~80–90 objectors; extraordinary meeting requested for greater transparency.
    - Section 106 interest: Uttlesford holding developer funds in interest-bearing accounts without passing interest to recipients; cabinet meeting to decide; risk of repayment demands with interest.
    - Essex highways: local member access constrained under new administration; members inquiries system overloaded.
    - Bus services: demand-responsive service being cut; residents in Manuden and surrounding villages losing access to Bishops Stortford routes; Stephanie Gill (Clavering) continuing to pursue.

Next meeting Monday 19 October 2026