Berden Parish Council

Minutes of Berden Parish Council meeting held on Monday 19 October at 8.00pm

Present: Duncan Murdoch, Weston Steimel, Harry Wadsworth, Kathleen Merino, Diane Holt.

Public: John Burton

339.1 **Apologies**

Apologies from Debbie Thomson (holiday), Cllr George Braeckman, Cllr Ray Gooding.

339.2 **Declarations of Interest in items on this Agenda** None.

339.3 **Approve Minutes of Berden Parish Council from 7 September 2026**

- Some errors noted: Page 1: Kathleen Merino's name spelt incorrectly. Page 2: John Burton's point should read 'The restriction will be lodged with Land Registry and as such the payment could not be avoided'. Page 3 'Horses at the field 'should be 'horses kept near the field'. To be corrected by Debbie before uploading onto the website. The minutes were then approved by Diane, seconded by Harry and signed by Duncan.

339.4 **Community Consultation, Berden Hall Solar**

- Duncan has had a number of conversations with residents and the main concern with the funding has been the split of the upfront amount and then the annual payments. With this in mind he has amended the Community Benefit Agreement and sent it back to Berden Solar Renewables in time for their lawyers meeting. There is an email from the vicar which he has yet to respond to. The landowner has been very clear that he wishes the portion of money going to the church to be spent on the fabric of the building.

339.5 **Fireworks event 2026**

- All going well. Some men from Murphy helped to collect pallets for the bonfire and were very helpful both with this and with moving the fete items to the new barn (this needs to be weather proofed).
- Diane reported that she had attended the online meetings where cancellation was discussed. If the event has to be cancelled due to the weather, we are at risk for about £450. Simon confirmed at the online meeting that it will not be rescheduled, if this is the case, and the cost of the fireworks could be carried over to the following year. We would therefore incur £1000 expenditure to be recouped the following year.
- So far about 100 tickets have been sold online, tickets will also be available on the night.

339.6 Insurance

- John Walker has tried to get insurance to cover theft of the village trailer when it is out on the road (the Parish Council insurance only covers it while it is locked in the fete barn), but hasn't been successful so far.

339.7 Planning

- **Chapel Field.** There is the approval from March for just one house. Planning conditions have been discharged so they can in theory start on site. Then there is the refusal for three plots, which is off to appeal, and the appeal has been lodged. There is currently a sign saying Plot 1, with the other two plots marked out. The three-house scheme application has been revised and is currently with the planning inspector.
- **The Crump**. A new application for the extension which was previously approved a few years ago, but has expired. No comments.
- **Redhill.** Change of use of the fields at the back to garden, as yet undecided.
- **Rose Garth**. Application for an infill glazed panel between the annex and the house has been refused. An appeal has been lodged.
- **Cantlow House**. Change from thatched roof to tile was approved end of September.
- **Berden Hall Solar**. They have planning permission and are discharging their planning conditions: for biodiversity, construction traffic, footpaths, and drainage.
  Berden PC has objected on the grounds of construction traffic because their assessment of the cumulative impact excludes the work being done simultaneously by National Grid.
  Footpaths: The footpath that goes north-south, that goes right through the middle along the hedge line is going to have to be closed. They're going to get a temporary closure order anyway for a maximum of 6 months and they're providing an alternative footpath around the outside of the field.
  Biodiversity seems to be fine.

339.8 Property

- Chapel Field (again). Requested an easement to put electricity from the pylon through to their site and their foul drain across the Village Hall entrance instead of running along Chapel Hill. They have suggested there is a manhole cover under a layer of tarmac at the entrance to the Village Hall which they would like to connect to. John Burton will try to trace this with a metal detector. Harry believed the drainage from the new Village Hall toilet block was not in the corner

but began directly behind the toilets and ran down the road. Any required work should avoid the start of 2027 when the National Grid and the solar farm work will be dominating the roads.

339.9 Highways

VAS sign

- Debbie emailed for an update. Post meeting UDC confirmed that there are around 12 parishes including Berden that have received permission and these should go out for approval shortly.

339.10 Footpaths and ground maintenance

- Simons Field fencing. Harry has completely cleared all the excess vegetation so that the wire fence can be replaced. The ground is still too hard to put in some of the posts. Quotes so far are about £10 a fence post and about 10 to 15 are needed.
- ECC contract payment of £2,215 has been received but footpath contractor has not sent the invoice yet.
- Permissive footpath, public rights of way. This just relates to Berden Hall Solar Farm and the landowner has confirmed the extra footpath. He will also make available as permissive paths those that are marked up on the plan.

339.11 Accounts

- Diane reported: Late payments this month including Clerk's salary and the grant makes this look more than usual. The Repair Cafe is in profit, £798.20.
- The Parish Council has £36,851 in the bank account which is too much: the annual precept is £9,500 /£10,000 which is under a third of that.
- Should we consider getting solar panels installed at the far end of the field (rather than on the Hall roof)? It's not up to the Parish Council directly, rather the Village Hall committee, but unless anyone around the table has any objection, this could be pursued especially in view of the National Grid funding. The National Grid has £500,000 for Berden and Stocking Pelham and the surrounding 6-kilometer area with energy efficiency and renewable energy at the top on their list. There is also an Uttlesford Zero Carbon Communities Grant, for which the Village Hall and/or the Parish Council can apply. Either is allowed to apply for £10,000 a year, so this could include some batteries as well. The deadline is 4th of December, so there is time to apply for it. A Village Hall committee meeting next Monday will start the discussion, which could possibly include new double glazing, insulation to the roof, air conditioning, storage (not sure about storage?) etc.

- AGAR. Diane has booked a training session on the 26th of October. Paul Chapman to sit in as well. Not for this return, but for the next it will be compulsory to complete using the online portal.
- HMRC is stopping support for Apple so Diane will use her old laptop for the return.
- John Burton has asked to purchase some dog waste bags, which is under £100.
- Updates to the Welcome to Berden booklet – work in progress.

339.12 Solar/Battery/Substation

- **Berden Hall Solar Farm**. They are discharging their planning conditions. One concern is the construction traffic because it ignores the National Grid.
- **Pelham Substation, Maggots End**. The public inquiry will be in the New Year.
- **Hill Green Farm, Stocking Pelham**. This is the rumoured further solar farm on the far side of Stocking Pelham Church and Farm buildings but there isn't anything appearing on the planning register.
- **National Grid North London Reinforcement Project**. Duncan has complained to Murphy about the lorries through Berden. They are relentless. Our Police Community Support Officer has not replied to a request to come and assess the situation. It would be good to know when the volume of traffic will ease off. In the meantime, a request will be made that they sweep the mud off the road. Discussions with residents affected by the road widening are ongoing and include reinstatement of a boundary afterwards.

339.13 Grants.

- National Grid Community Fund. A request for everyone to complete the online surveys.

339.14 Parish Council Archives.

- Debbie is listing everything that can go to the Essex Records Office.

339.15 Repair Café

- This was a bit quieter in September, mainly because Diane and Alison weren't there, though they both worked on repairs in their own time. The café and donations money were combined, so the final breakdown is uncertain.
- The Café is very grateful to have the PAT tester that Murphy supplied us that has saved around £400. The only request for the next meeting is for some oil.

339.16 Berden Emergency Plan.

- Kathleen is working on the updates for the Plan including the procedure for emergency evacuation of the village. Someone is needed to set up a village WhatsApp broadcast group which will need to include gaining permissions for using phone numbers.
- The Emergency Briefing film is scheduled for Friday 13 November. Personal invitations have gone out to our M.P. and local Councillors, plus the Parish Clerks of Manuden and Stocking Pelham who will not receive the Mailchimp.

339.17 Playground

- Kathleen has a meeting to talk about the location and the access for the installation of a carrousel. The application is ready for the Stansted Airport Community Fund for £5,000 to go towards it. The National Grid Fund may also agree to fund some of it.

339.18 Defibrillator

- Reported to be in good order in September.

339.19 Cllr Braeckman

- Duncan emailed George on this construction traffic issue but no reply yet.

339.20 Cllr Gooding

Berden needs Ray's help as we are now entering the season of worsening holes in the road coupled with the impact of National Grid lorries.

AOB

Harry: Is the live Christmas tree is ordered? It was confirmed that it has been ordered.

Kathleen apologised for asking the next meeting date to be changed. It will remain on **Monday 7 December 2026.**