

BENENDEN NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN REFERENDUM – 3RD FEBRUARY 2022

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED:

- 1. Does the NDP require a simple majority in order to be accepted?**
 - YES. The question on the ballot paper will likely be *‘Do you want Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to use the neighbourhood plan for Benenden to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area’*. A simple YES or NO answer is required.
- 2. Tell me about the proposed housing numbers for the NDP:**
 - The Benenden Alms House Trust site on Walkhurst Road – 25 new homes (including 12 affordable rental homes)
 - Uphill, on New Pond Road – 18 to 20 homes (including 7-9 affordable homes)
 - Benenden Hospital site (south) – up to 25 homes (including 7 affordable homes)
 - Benenden Hospital site (north) – 22 to 25 homes (including 6-7 affordable homes)
- 3. Is it true that 90% of new housing is to be sited at the hospital sites in East End?**
 - NO! The housing allocation proposed by the NDP has always been around 45 new houses close to Benenden village, and up to 50 new houses at the two hospital sites in East End. That makes a calculation of 47% in Benenden and 53% in East End, so a long way from the rumours of 90%!
- 4. Why have the plans of the hospital sites changed in the Final Draft Plan from that set out in the previous Regulation 16 Draft Plan consultation.**
 - The Independent Examiner requested that the NDP site maps are brought in line with the TWBC Draft Local Plan maps, to include the areas of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) located at, or near the sites. This is because the NDP gives protection of these sites under Site Specific Policy 3 and Site Specific Policy 4:

“A management plan shall be submitted outlining proposals for the ongoing protection and enhancement of all the LWS and once approved, the future management of the sites shall be carried out in accordance with that plan, to protect the significance of the designated LWS in terms of its biodiversity”.

So, inclusion of the LWS in the site maps strengthens their protection, not reduces it. Simple as that!
- 5. So are the Local Wildlife Sites at the hospital sites protected:**
 - Yes - see Q&A number 4 above.
- 6. What are the main advantages of the NDP? How will it help protect what we love about the village?**
 - The NDP allows us to control where and how new housing can be built in the parish.
 - The NDP protects the parish from any speculative development of our green fields.
 - The NDP is our opportunity to identify local green spaces and distinctive views that we would like to protect.
 - The Plan also contains policies to protect our dark skies; Local Wildlife Sites; designated habitat areas and environmental assets, and provides protection for the shops, pubs and other commercial buildings we value.
 - The NDP sets out building design policies for all future development relating to layout, existing local character design, sustainable construction, and much more.
- 7. For how long is the plan valid?**
 - The Plan runs until 2038, but it will be subject to regular reviews and 5 yearly updates carried out by the Parish Council.
- 8. Six affordable house were built in Iden Green in 2016, and a further twelve new houses on Walkhurst Road in the last 2 years. Why do we have to have any more new houses?**
 - The government has set a target number for the TWBC 5-year housing supply. Because of the sheer volume of land put forward for development by landowners in Benenden (about 350 hectares), the parish could have been allocated over 200 new dwellings, but the NDP Group has persuaded TWBC to reduce this to around 100 new dwellings.
 - Results from the NDP consultations held with residents found that one of the top priorities was to provide affordable housing for local families. In addition, there is an identified housing need in the parish of around 30 affordable homes over the next 5 years. Our plan will deliver around 35 affordable homes, maintaining a healthy and balanced community alongside the market housing required to provide these homes.

9. Does the NDP mean that there will be no more consideration given to applications from developers to build on green fields in Benenden?
- Every planning application requires due consideration by the Local Planning Authority, but with an NDP in place which demonstrates that the parish has existing and proposed housing allocations to fulfil the identified affordable housing need, then any speculative development is extremely unlikely to be allowed.
10. Are fields surrounding the new developments at risk of speculative purchase by developers intending hammerhead development?
- The best protection from progressive or ‘hammerhead’ development is to allocate sites that have clear, strong boundaries, such as those included in our plan. Also the plan demonstrates that the housing needs of the parish have been met, thus minimising any risk of further speculative development throughout the parish.
11. I’ve heard the Government are planning to change how planning rules work, and how housing targets are set. Shouldn’t we wait until that’s settled?
- The Government will still push Local Councils to build houses, with a strong focus on brownfield sites, and sites outside National Parks and AONBs. With continued population growth it is unlikely the Government will reduce housing targets. And in the meantime, without an NDP for protection or a borough with a 5-year housing supply in place, it seems that Benenden landowners are more than happy to put their land forward for development.
12. What’s does a 5-year housing supply actually mean?
- This is a complicated calculation but basically each borough council is given a 5-year housing target number set by the government. Evidence must show that the council is meeting these targets. TWBC has failed to meet these targets for quite a few years now. They are close, but not quite there. When a council does not meet its housing supply numbers, then development can be considered outside the Limits to Built Development. We can see evidence of this happening on recently permitted sites in Iden Green.
 - Hopefully when the new TWBC Local Plan comes into force, the housing supply targets for the borough will be met. But this is not guaranteed, therefore if our NDP is ‘made’ we will have given our parish the greatest protection against speculative development we have in our power to do so.
 - Every time a housing development is ‘built out’ the TWBC has to reduce its projected 5-year housing supply by the number of dwellings built. This creates more pressure on TWBC to pass speculative development planning applications. Our NDP, once passed referendum, minimises their ability to do so in Benenden Parish.
13. What happens if the new, agreed, developments, lead to a huge increase in traffic?
- New houses will mean more traffic, there is no getting away from the fact that homeowners throughout the parish are dependent on cars. However the plan does mitigate this by allocating sites in different areas of the parish, and encouraging the creation and use of ‘all weather routes’ where cyclists and pedestrians can move around the parish safely.
 - Under the NDP, all proposals for new housing must provide a minimum of 1 electric car-charging point (NDP Policy T4 Renewable Energy and Low-Emission Technology).
14. Will priority for the village school be based on length of time in the village
- School admissions policies are outside the scope of the Plan. The admissions policy for the primary school is handled by Kent County Council. Please see <https://www.benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk/Admissions/>
15. How do we protect our pubs and shops and other business?
- Policies set out in the Business chapter of the NDP makes sure that anyone planning to convert commercial properties to houses must be able to demonstrate that there is no real demand for the business anymore. So the best way to support our pubs, shops and businesses is to keep using them. Just keep supporting our local shops and pubs, as that is their best protection!
16. I want to build a house in my garden for my relatives. Can I still do this? What about two houses? Can I sell part of my garden for development?
- The NDP Policy HS3 Windfall Sites will allow development such as the conversion of redundant barns or outbuildings. Within the Limits to Built Development area new residential units will be considered while taking into account existing housing densities, Conservation Areas and other relevant planning policies.
17. Will the NDP help ensure that the new housing developments are architecturally appropriate for a Wealden village in the AONB? There seems to be a lot of plastic weather-boarding about!
- Yes, policies in the Design and the Built Environment chapter outline how houses will be designed to fit in well with existing housing in the village and across the parish.

18. How do we keep Benenden as a Dark Skies village when there is going to be so much new housing. Can the Parish council limit external lighting?
- The NDP Policy BD5 Dark Skies – sets out that all external lighting requirements for any development, should be carefully designed and strictly limited, with no noticeable impact on the dark skies enjoyed by the parish. The NDP opposes street lighting.
19. How much of the new housing is going to be social housing?
- The NDP proposes development of around 95 new homes, with between 32 and 38 of the houses on allocated sites being affordable housing, including those managed by the Benenden Almshouse Trust, which secures affordable rental homes in perpetuity (i.e. forever) for those in need locally.
 - Legal agreements set up between the housing associations that look after the affordable housing in Iden Green and at Vere Meadow in Walkhurst Road, and the Parish Council, ensure that prospective tenants/occupiers have a connection with the village.
 - The housing associations can only accept those on the Housing Register with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council for affordable housing, so if you are in need of housing in the village you should make sure you are on the list here: <https://tunbridgewells.gov.uk/housing/housing-register>
20. Can we insist that affordable housing is actually affordable?
- The definition of affordable housing will be met by the criteria set out in the NPPF, namely each development will contain some or all of the following:
 - a) Affordable housing for rent
 - b) Starter homes
 - c) Discounted market sales housing
 - d) Other affordable routes to home ownership
 - Importantly, the NDP supports the Benenden Almshouse Trust; who secure affordable *rented* homes for those in need locally. The rents charged are below market rent (generally over 10% lower)
21. Does the plan impose eco/sustainable new house-build designs on developers?
- The NDP encourages all new development to be environmentally sustainable, to include the use of renewable energy technology. Zero-carbon and low-emission development is strongly supported.
22. What responsibility have developers got to ensure that there are viable public transport links with the new East End development?
- The Plan requires developers to fund a minibus service from East End for local school kids, and to support the Kent County Council Hopper Bus trial and other public transport initiatives.
 - Kent County Council Highways have not highlighted any concerns about any major increases in traffic resulting from the site allocations. However, they have already implemented a Casualty Reduction Scheme at Castleton Oak crossroads, and this includes a reduction in the national speed limit to 40mph on all four approaches to the crossroads.
23. Does the parish council plan to lobby for better infrastructure for the East End development, for example a shop, café or community centre? Without this there will be a large increase in car movements into the village and to surrounding villages.
- The Plan requires, and Benenden Healthcare Society has agreed, that developers of the hospital sites will:
 - i. Provide a building (or use of) for community facilities (such as a play group)
 - ii. Include an area for sport and recreational use, and a children’s play area at East End
 - iii. Include public access to the Hospital café (which will also provide a small retail outlet)
 - iv. Include financial contribution towards the provision of an active travel link to the village.
 - v. Include financial contribution towards the purchase and maintenance of a mini-bus for the use of Benenden Primary School to serve school times.
 - vi. Promote and support the Kent County Council Hopper Bus trial and other public transport initiatives.
24. Does the parish council have plans to welcome and integrate so many new villagers?
- This is under consideration by the Parish Council with suggestions such as the use of the village magazine (delivered to every household in the village) as a conduit to welcome new parishioners.
25. I can’t get a doctor’s appointment for love nor money. Is there anything in the planning conditions which will force developers to provide more money for doctors in the area?
- The provision of healthcare is beyond the remit of the NDP. Developers are required to make a financial contribution (known as S106 agreements) towards health care and education and this is calculated per residential unit.

26. There's been a real increase in anti-social behavior in Cranbrook, and in Tenterden too. Will there be a greater police presence in Benenden once new houses are built?
- This is beyond the NDP remit, but more housing does mean extra cash for the police collected through Council Tax. The Police will deploy their resources where they believe the need is greatest. The Parish Council is in regular contact with the Police and Crime Commissioner for this parish.
27. Can the parish council do anything to ensure that the houses are sold to people who will actually live in the village, rather than being sold for buy to let, or as second homes?
- No. The parish council does not have control over the sales of market housing. However, recent agreements set up between the housing associations that look after the affordable housing in Iden Green and at Vere Meadow in Walkhurst Road, and the Parish Council, ensure that prospective tenants/occupiers have a connection with the village.
 - The housing associations can only accept those on the Housing Register with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, so if you are in need of housing in the village you should make sure you are on the list here: <https://tunbridgewells.gov.uk/housing/housing-register>
 - The NDP supports the Benenden Almshouse Trust securing affordable rental homes for those in need locally.
28. Why does the NDP propose so many new houses away from the village centre?
- About 50% of the proposed housing allocation is at East End. This has nothing to do with the distance from the village centre. Two brownfield sites outside the AONB were put forward for housing development by Benenden Healthcare Society, and residents feedback was that priority should be given to brownfield sites for development. This is also in line with Local and national planning policy. Any brownfield site which does not already provide employment opportunities would be prioritised, wherever it is situated in the parish.
29. Will the historic Garland Wing sanatorium building at East End remain?
- The NDP **does not** propose demolition of the Garland Wing. Permission to demolish this building was granted in 2013. In fact the NDP requires the developer to look at viable options for conversion and re-use of the Wing as separate residential units if at all possible.
30. If the plan is rejected at referendum, what will happen to the hospital sites?
- The hospital sites are brownfield sites, outside the AONB. Current local and national planning policy dictates that sites like these should be developed first; before greenfield sites.
 - Our plan has policies that limits the amount of development allowed on allocated sites, protecting the Local Wildlife Sites and improving current amenities at East End.
 - The hospital trust would pursue development of the hospital sites without the NDP (it is already up for sale as a development site). The allocation of the sites in the NDP gives control over development and protects the Local Wildlife Sites located there.