

**BRENCHLEY PARISH COUNCIL  
PROPOSED REBUILDING OF BRENCHLEY & MATFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL  
A POSITION STATEMENT**

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1. Nothing in this Position Statement should be construed as indicative of support to, or endorsement of, the proposed re-location and re-building of Brenchley & Matfield Primary School, or of any issues related to those proposals.
2. This Position Statement is made with reference to *Shaping the Future*, the Council's strategy for the development of our parish, published in 2017. The document is here appended, for ease of reference.
3. The Council supports the retention of the school in the parish, providing high-quality learning for local children, and to be a beacon of pride for the community.
4. Since 2014 the Council has been engaging with representatives of the school, to discuss their proposals, and have received three presentations from them. As their plans now appear to be at an advanced stage, with a planning application expected to be submitted before the end of 2018, and with the stated aim of opening the new school in September 2019, the Council wishes to make the following statement.
  - a. One of the main reasons put forward for building a new school is the scale of repair and maintenance needed to keep the current building operating effectively. Four years ago, the cost of remedial work was estimated at £500,000. However, since that time we have not been aware of any plans to raise that sum. We have also not been presented with credible evidence that any option other than building a new school has been explored or appraised. *We urge the governing body to publish a summary of any studies that have been undertaken to inform its strategy for securing the long-term viability of the school.*
  - b. We are surprised at the projected timescale for building a new school, and to develop the existing site for housing. Given that work is still underway to provide a draft Local Plan for the area, and that no recommendations have been made about housing allocations for the parish, we do not think that the time is yet right for a decision about where a new school might be located. *We urge the governing body to delay finalizing their plans until the draft Local Plan is published.*
  - c. Having appraised the financial information that has been made public, the Council has serious doubts regarding the viability of the initiative. *We urge the governing body to publish evidence that a full risk-analysis has been undertaken and provide information that it has considered the impact of a worst-case scenario where the initiative stalls due to lack of funds.*
  - d. Although much has been said about the "community benefits" that would accrue from the proposed development, it does not appear that any thought has been given to the impact of a fifty-house estate being built in Brenchley. We have seen nothing in the presentations given to the Council that recognizes the visual impact of a large cluster of houses in an elevated position, on the edge of Market Heath. Similarly, nothing has been said about the significant increase in traffic that will be generated by the development, nor how it is proposed to manage/minimize its impact on an already busy and dangerous stretch of road. These are significant omissions which should be addressed in any future presentations. *We urge the governing body to give consideration to how such a development would conserve and enhance the AONB, which will be a key test that a planning application will have to satisfy.*

- e. Too much reliance is being placed on support from the Parish Plan Survey. Whilst the report from the Survey notes that “There was strong support for having a primary school in the Parish” (p.22), there were also “Concerns that a 25-35 home development is too large, not in keeping with the character of the parish and would place too great a strain on infrastructure” (p.23). Given that it is now proposed to build 50 houses on the site, it is misleading to overlook the views of residents. *We urge the governing body to avoid overstating community support for a new school, and to refrain from misusing the information in the Parish Plan Survey report.*
- f. It is also being claimed that the proposed re-location of the school has been “signed-off by the neighbourhood plan”. The Council is unclear what this means, since work on developing the neighbourhood plan is still at an early stage, and the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has taken no position as yet on the School's proposals. *We urge the Governing Body to avoid giving any impression of such support and clarify how it sees its own plans fitting in with the Neighbourhood Plan*
- g. We would like to understand the proposals which have been made to local residents, for the purposes of raising the £150,000 mentioned in the recent presentation made to the Council, in particular the investment proposition and whether this is supported by community groups and the residents which have been targeted. *We urge the governing body to ensure that they are giving a full and fair description of the investment proposition and the basis which underlies this.*

**BRENCHLEY PARISH COUNCIL**  
**SHAPING THE FUTURE: THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR PARISH**

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### **A pragmatic approach to development**

With the development of a Local Plan for our area, Councillors are mindful of their responsibility to speak-up for the interests of the community. Our aim is to ensure that any development which is proposed for our parish takes place only in the locations considered appropriate for development, and on a scale in keeping with the character of our villages and hamlets.

The purpose of this strategy document is to set out the principles that will guide our approach to pursuing that aim. We believe that it represents a realistic and pragmatic attitude to the development "agenda", and reflects commitments made by the Council in previous statements.

### **Sharing the burden**

There is currently pressure across the country to increase housing supply. That pressure is particularly acute in the South-East where housing shortage is most pronounced. Given that the borough of Tunbridge Wells is in one of the most prosperous corners of the region, it is inevitable that the district will be obliged to deliver its share of government-imposed targets.

However, we will aim to ensure that the impact on Brencley and Matfield, in the pursuit of those targets, does not destroy the character, heritage, and sustainability of our settlements. Alongside that, we will support development that adds to the vitality of the parish and which enhances the social infrastructure to underpin the well-being of the community.

### **Our promises to the community**

1. All planning applications will be assessed on their own merits, and will be subjected to careful scrutiny, having regard to planning policy, both national and local.
2. We will robustly resist inappropriate or harmful developments, including developments that:
  - a. are considered too large, in terms of the numbers of units, having regard to all circumstances, but particularly the site location;
  - b. are high-rise, or in prominent positions;
  - c. generate heavy traffic, lead to a greater erosion of road safety, and cause further parking problems;
  - d. are unsympathetic in design; and which
  - e. have the potential to reduce existing business capacity.
3. We will seek to protect the character of the village centres and Conservation Areas by limiting development in or near those areas, by *inter alia*, supporting appropriate sustainable development along the A21 corridor, where it crosses the Parish.
4. We will support appropriate small-scale developments in sustainable locations, particularly of smaller units suitable for first-time buyers, renters, and down-sizers - as indicated by residents in the Parish Plan Survey.
5. We will support Affordable homes specifically for local need, as identified in a Housing Needs Survey to establish the extent of the provision that is required.
6. We will oppose the loss of sustainable commercial or agricultural premises to housing.
7. We will seek to secure appropriate community benefits, to accompany relevant development.
8. We will defend the integrity of the AONB and promote the rural environment that is such a key element of the Parish's character; in particular, we will aim to protect the Limits of Built Development of both villages.
9. We will pursue the preparation of a Development Design Statement, to influence the design of developments.