

## **Submission from Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council to the initial consultation on the Electoral Review for Tunbridge Wells**

Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council has resolved not to make proposals as to the arrangement of ward boundaries within the Borough, but to give the following detailed information about the parish and its relationships to its surrounding parishes.

However, the Parish Council wishes to stress the absolute importance of keeping the parish as a whole within a single ward.

### **Introduction to the Parish of Brenchley and Matfield**

Brenchley & Matfield parish lies approximately 11km north-east of Royal Tunbridge Wells, 13km south-east of Tonbridge and a little over 3km south of Paddock Wood. The parish has an area of 22km<sup>2</sup> and its 25km perimeter is shared with the neighbouring parishes of Paddock Wood, Capel, Pembury, Horsmonden and Lamberhurst. The boundary shared with Capel is very short, however, and most residents would be unaware of any connection with Capel. In terms of perception, the parish is largely divided from Lamberhurst by the A21 and from Capel/Five Oak Green by the A228.

Brenchley and Matfield are the two main villages. Smaller settlements include Petteridge, the largest, and hamlets at Castle Hill, Keys Green, Kippings Cross, Market Heath, Mile Oak, Chantlers Hill, Walnut Tree and Tibbs Court.

Although a number of commuters live in the parish, in contrast to Paddock Wood and Pembury the parish retains its primarily rural character as typical High Weald countryside with small villages and dispersed farmsteads and hamlets.

### **Current Landscape Context**

The Parish lies in the northern part of the High Weald in gently undulating land, traversed by streams draining north to the Teise or Medway. 78% of the parish lies in the High Weald Area of Natural Beauty (HWAONB) and all but a small north-eastern area lies in the High Weald National Character Area (NCA). The surface geology consists mainly of Tunbridge Wells sandstone, with the underlying Wadhurst Clay outcropping where it is uplifted by faults and folds in the rocks.

The villages of Brenchley and Matfield and the hamlet of Castle Hill follow the sandstone ridgelines of the long northern High Weald slope. The land slopes steeply down to the more open Low Weald area, in which lies the hamlet of Mile Oak. Other small settlements lie in the broad plateau area of the High Weald and the landscape is dominated by orchards and woods, interspersed with arable fields and pastures.

The parish is identified as lying in the Kent Fruit Belt Character Area. Although the number of orchards has reduced in the last two decades, the remaining orchards of apples and pears support thriving cider and juice businesses. Large quantities of blackcurrants are grown for sale to make Ribena. Vines, cherries and cobnuts are also grown. Sheep, cattle and horses graze many of the small Wealden fields and a number of fields are used to grow hay and silage to support them. There are also some larger fields in the northern and south-eastern areas of the parish where arable crops are grown. Coppice woodland is still widespread and supports local fencing suppliers.

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The plateau area of the High Weald is cut by an intricate system of steep-sided narrow streams (ghylls). The wooded ghyll valleys characteristically support ancient semi-natural woodland vegetation, often with high biodiversity value. The streams were dammed in places, forming numerous ponds, and many of these are now used as fishing lakes. The ghyll valleys are crossed by ancient drovers' routes, characterised by sunken lanes with woodland verges.

The landscape of the parish has a mix of historic and more modern farmstead buildings, including former barns and oast houses, reflecting a working and cultivated landscape. Many of these have now been converted to residential or business use. Buildings are generally well integrated into the landscape, in scale with the surrounding mature trees and native hedgerows.

### **Historic assets and landscape**

The earliest identified settlement in the parish is an Anglo-Saxon ringwork at Castle Hill, protected as a scheduled monument. Brenchley began as a small clearing in the forest, which developed into a hamlet centred on All Saints' Church. All Saints' was constructed in 1233.

The parish has 166 listed buildings, of which three are Grade 1 and fourteen are Grade 2\*. Many of the listed buildings lie in Conservation Areas in the centres of Brenchley and Matfield. In the 19th and early 20th Centuries several gardens and ornamental parklands were created, four of which are listed in the Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens.

The parish has retained a number of medieval and post-medieval fields, together with a substantial amount of ancient woodland.

### **Brenchley**

The small village square in Brenchley is surrounded by picturesque historic buildings, some dating from the 15th century, contained within a larger Conservation Area that includes considerable green areas. In the south of the Conservation Area lies the Grade I listed All Saints' Church and its churchyard, containing ancient yew trees and many listed tombs and features. In the north-west lies the 16<sup>th</sup> century Brenchley Manor (formerly The Old Parsonage) with a renaissance archway (both Grade 2\*) and an ancient oak known as the 'Domesday oak'. In the early 20th century, there was just a small amount of new building in Brenchley. Pixot Hill, Porters Wood, Broad Oak and parts of Windmill Hill were developed after 1930, while more recent developments after 1970 included Church Close, The Lawns and Broad Oak Close. The most recent development, a Rural Exception Site, provided seven affordable homes at Market Heath.

### **Matfield**

The original village of Matfield was centred on the village green (a registered common) and around Standings Cross. The historic centre of the village is a Conservation Area, with the largest village green in Kent at its heart. Surrounding Matfield Green, along Maidstone Road and Maycotts Lane, lie many listed buildings. The most notable are the Grade I listed Matfield House, together with its Grade I listed stable block with clock tower. Other buildings are typical of the farms and cottages that grew up around commons, together with the hostelries and other businesses that served not only villagers but also travellers on roads that were turnpiked. Another area of historical importance within the village of Matfield is the area around Standings Cross, which contains several listed

buildings. Further south is Ebenezer Strict Baptist Chapel, rebuilt in 1937. St Luke's Church, on the southern outskirts of the village, was constructed in 1876 and encouraged further housing development in its vicinity. After 1930, the east side of Maidstone Road was further developed and ribbon developments were built along Foxhole Lane and Coppers Lane. Since 1945, houses have been built at Oakfield Road, Chestnut Lane, Birch Close, Central Villas and Webbs Orchard. In the 1970s, planning approval was given for a permanent 6-plot residential Gypsy and Traveller site at Cinderhill Wood. Wish Close was built in 2010 as a Rural Exception Site to provide six affordable homes in the parish.

In May 2018 a Rydon Homes planning application for twenty homes on Maidstone Road was approved by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, with all homes being reserved by January 2021. In May 2020 TWBC approved a Fernham Homes outline planning application for 45 dwellings on an adjacent site, followed by the approval of Reserved Matters in March 2021. The first phase of the completed homes on the Fernham site was marketed in February 2022.

### **The historic parish**

Historically, the parish of Brenchley included both Matfield and much of what is now Paddock Wood parish. Paddock Wood was originally a rural part of Brenchley parish with scattered farmsteads. The village of Paddock Wood grew up after the advent of the railway in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, became a separate parish in 1860 and grew into a small town as it was subject to a substantial house building programme in the 20<sup>th</sup> century which continues today. (The Borough Council's draft Local Plan which is currently undergoing examination envisages a strategic urban expansion of 3,490-3,590 dwellings at Paddock Wood/East Capel).

The Chapel of Ease of St Luke, Matfield was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and provided a living for the then vicar of Brenchley's son. St Luke's Matfield's vicar is presently the vicar of St Mary's Lamberhurst (resident in Lamberhurst) but in the next few years when the current vicar of Brenchley retires the opportunity may be taken to reunite the churches of Matfield and Brenchley under one vicar.

### **Transport**

The A21 crosses the south-west area of the parish, providing a road link to London, the coast and the national motorway network.

The nearest rail station is at Paddock Wood, two miles to the north, with direct services to London, Maidstone and Strood and the South-Eastern coast, and connections through Tonbridge to the South coast.

Several bus routes pass through the parish but have limited scheduled services. Bus Route 6 links Matfield to Maidstone, Paddock Wood and Tunbridge Wells, with no services in the evening and only four on Sundays. Bus route 297 links Brenchley and Matfield to Tenterden in the East and Tunbridge Wells in the West, with the last departure from Tunbridge Wells at 19.20 and no service on Sundays. These bus routes are slow as they meander through other settlements with numerous stops. Bus route 296 currently links Petteridge and Brenchley sporadically to Paddock Wood, Horsmonden and Tunbridge Wells, with three daytime services that only operate on Mondays,

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Thursdays and Saturdays, of which only one service to Paddock Wood provides enough time for shopping or a visit to the optician before the last return service leaves. However, Kent County Council is now proposing that the 296 service should close.

For London commuters, Centaur offers a coach service from Matfield into London, with two services each morning and evening.

The lack of a frequent, fast bus service, especially in Brenchley, and the pattern of dispersed settlements and converted farm buildings, mean that it is difficult to live in the parish without a car and consequently the rate of car ownership is high. Responses to the Business and Employment Survey, conducted in 2020 for the Neighbourhood Plan, indicated that nearly 90% of employees of businesses in the parish travel to work by car, with only one employee using public transport and one employee cycling to work.

A good network of public footpaths, including the High Weald Landscape Trail, links various parts of the parish, enabling walkers to enjoy the landscape, flora and fauna. Most of the footpaths become very muddy and slippery in Winter owing to the clay ground. There are only four short bridle paths of total length 1.6 km in the parish.

National Cycle Route 18, from Canterbury to Royal Tunbridge Wells, runs through the landscape of the High Weald but is entirely on-road and without cycle lanes as it traverses the parish. It is unsuitable for casual cyclists or children, due to high vehicular speeds, traffic rat running along narrow, winding lanes and poor road conditions.

Pedestrian safety is a significant problem within the parish, where there is a lack of footways and ever-increasing traffic. The volume and speed of traffic not only makes the parish's roads feel unsafe for non-motorised users but also damages their landscape character and biodiversity. The large increase in dwellings planned in East Capel, Paddock Wood, Pembury and Horsmonden will exacerbate these problems.

### **Parish Community**

Brenchley and Matfield Parish has an active community, with more than twenty-five clubs and organisations catering for all ages and interests. The Parish Council website provides information for residents and visitors on the Parish Council, local services and facilities. The Parish Council and both villages have popular Facebook pages, while Roundabout, produced monthly by a team of volunteers, is a printed and online magazine with information on local events and issues. There are numerous annual events, including fetes, church festivals, Christmas carols, concerts, the Horticultural Society Spring and Summer Shows and Brenchley Fireworks. Regular activities include monthly Ready Call lunches, coffee mornings, films and talks, walking groups, book groups and knit-and-natter. This wide range of activities and numerous opportunities for social interaction help make the parish a desirable place in which to live, work and visit. Residents living near the boundaries of the parish with Horsmonden and Pembury may use some of the facilities in those parishes, in preference to or as well as those in the parish and in Paddock Wood or Tunbridge Wells. Residents working in London tend also to socialise there rather than in the parish.

### **Retail**

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Although the number of shops in the parish has significantly declined, Brenchley still has a Post Office/newsagents also selling some groceries and providing click and collect service for some online retailers. Matfield has a part-time Post Office three mornings a week at Matfield Village Hall. Matfield has a butcher's shop selling meat, eggs, cheese and fresh produce but the butcher's shop at Brenchley, which had been operating for over 200 years, has very recently closed when the lease expired and the building's owners decided to sell the property. At Kippings Cross, where the A21 crosses the southern end of the parish, there is a 24 hour petrol station with a small M&S food store and a fast-food restaurant.

The closest supermarkets are at Paddock Wood (Waitrose and a small Tesco) and Pembury (Tesco and a Morrisons Daily Store). Online supermarkets and retailers are also used increasingly.

The closest department store and hardware store are at Paddock Wood. There is a petrol station (not 24 hr) at Paddock Wood and a 24hr petrol station in Pembury.

### **Health services and personal care**

There is a surgery/dispensary in the centre of Brenchley and the practice runs a second medical centre in Horsmonden. Brenchley Dental, offering both NHS and private dentistry, is situated at Market Heath. Volunteers linked to All Saints' and St. Luke's churches provide Ready Call services to take residents to medical and dental appointments in the parish and at local hospitals.

The closest pharmacies, physiotherapy clinics and hairdressers are at Horsmonden and Paddock Wood. There are mobile beauticians and hairdressers who serve the parish. Opticians are at Paddock Wood. Chiropodists are at Paddock Wood, Pembury and Goudhurst.

The closest hospital with A & E services is the Tunbridge Wells hospital on the far side of Pembury. Ambulances are based at Paddock Wood.

### **Other emergency services**

The closest fire station is at Paddock Wood and the closest police stations are at Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge.

### **Schools and Nurseries**

Brenchley & Matfield Church of England Primary School is a one form entry school situated west of Brenchley village at Market Heath. It serves both villages and is also attended by some children from Paddock Wood, although this may change in the near future as the school will need to accommodate children from the new housing currently being built in the parish.

The closest non-selective secondary school is Mascalls Academy at Paddock Wood, but there is at present no safe and convenient route to access it on foot or by bicycle from either of the villages. Some children from the parish attend the grammar schools and non-selective schools in Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge, which they reach by car or by bus. Minibuses from private secondary schools at Pembury and Goudhurst collect and deliver day pupils from the parish.

Brenchley Pre-School rents premises on the same site as the primary school and offers nursery and pre-school sessions from two years of age. Kinderversity Day Nursery, based in two rooms at

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Brenchley Memorial Hall, offers daycare for children aged 0-5 years, as well as breakfast, after school and holiday clubs for children up to 11 years of age.

### **Churches, Halls and Meeting Rooms**

All Saints' Church in Brenchley and St Luke's Church in Matfield (both Church of England) and Ebenezer Strict Baptist Chapel in Matfield offer places of worship. People of other faiths need to travel outside the parish.

The village halls are privately owned by their respective Charities and administered by Trustees.

Brenchley Memorial Hall, built to commemorate parishioners who gave their lives in WW1, has a main hall in which social events, exercise classes and meetings can be held. Its Meeting Room is available for rental and also houses the Parish Archive, which is open twice a week.

The Scout Hut in Brenchley provides a base for scouting activities and is also available for rental, as is the main hall of the Primary School when it is not required by the school. LOGS Youth Group meets weekly either in All Saints' or at Brenchley and Matfield Primary School.

The more modern Matfield Village Hall offers both a Main Hall and Meeting Room. Exercise classes, the WI, Brownies, History and Horticultural Societies meet here regularly. Matfield Pavilion, owned by the Parish Council, is used for Parish Council meetings and as a Parish Office, besides being rented by Matfield Cricket Club, youth groups, Girl Guides and for small community events.

### **Pubs and eating places**

The Little Bull Café in Brenchley village centre and Grays Café at Brenchley Memorial Hall are open during the day for meals and refreshments.

There are five public houses: The Halfway House, south of Brenchley village towards Horsmonden; The Castle Inn at Castle Hill (currently the subject of a planning application to convert it into a private dwelling); The Hopbine Inn in Petteridge; the Star in Matfield and the Poet restaurant/pub, also in Matfield. The Halfway House and the Hopbine also provide delivery and takeaway services.

There is a Burger King restaurant and takeaway at Kippings Cross near the petrol station.

Some mobile food vans visit Matfield and Market Heath during the week.

### **Sports and Recreation**

Sports facilities for cricket, football, bowls, tennis and squash are available at sports clubs based at Brenchley Memorial Hall Grounds. The grounds are landscaped, with numerous benches on the Centenary Field to enjoy far reaching views of the High Weald. To the east of Brenchley village is Castle Hill Cricket Club, with a large pitch and pavilion, providing playing opportunities for both adult and youth teams.

In Matfield, outdoor activities are centred on Matfield Green, which is owned by the Parish Council. The Green is home to Matfield Green Cricket Club (adults only) and boasts a croquet lawn and stocked pond that provides fishing for the under-12s. The Parish Allotments are situated in Matfield.

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There is a recreation ground and a children's play area, owned by the Parish Council, at Market Heath in Brenchley, opposite the primary school.

Porters Field in Petteridge, also owned by the Parish Council, provides a recreational area with a very small amount of rustic play equipment in a rear wooded area.

There is as yet no playground in Matfield but a small amount of play equipment is to be provided as part of a current housing development. Acquiring a site for a larger, fully equipped public playground in Matfield has long been a priority for the parish council.

Cinderhill Centenary Wood, approximately a kilometre from Matfield village centre, is leased from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council by the Parish Council. It offers a 12 hectare area in which to explore heathlands and grasslands, ancient woodland and streams, with a network of paths and permissive bridleways. The youth football pitch at the entrance to Cinderhill is not currently in use.

The adjacent Brenchley Wood Local Wildlife Site is an 8 hectare secluded beech and oak ancient woodland, rich in wildlife and archaeology, managed by the Kent Wildlife Trust.

The nearest public swimming pools are at Tunbridge Wells, Cranbrook and Tonbridge (all much the same in terms of travelling time by car). The closest public gym is at Paddock Wood.

The closest theatre and cinema are in Tunbridge Wells, but as noted above there are no evening bus services to them.

### **Employment**

The 2011 Census indicated a pattern of employment and economic activity in the parish similar to that in other rural English village areas, with the exception of a low unemployment rate of 2%. 72% of the population was economically active and 16% of the population was retired. The pattern of employment categories of residents in 2011 was similar to other English villages, with land-based occupations having declined to only 4% of the population. However, farming and farm-related businesses continue to play an important part in the life of the parish.

The Brenchley and Matfield Parish Plan Survey in 2016 suggested that 61% of residents worked outside the parish (of whom 24% worked in London and the suburbs) and, of those that worked within the parish, 24% worked from home.

### **Tourist facilities**

There are no major tourist attractions in the parish and no hotels, but there are B & Bs and Airbnbs which are popular with tourists coming to enjoy the Kent countryside. The parish is quite a central location from which to visit the many historic houses, gardens and other tourist attractions in West Kent and East Sussex, if you have a car.