

BISHOP'S ITCHINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Extraordinary Parish Council Meeting 28 February 2022 at 7.30pm

Present

Cllr Dugmore (Chairman)	Cllr Christian-Carter	Cllr Gates
Cllr M Mann	Cllr Thomas	Cllr Tressler

Absent

3 Vacant seats

In Attendance

Karen Stevens - Clerk to the Council

Public

17

22/42 Apologies

Cllr Tressler advised that, due to a prior engagement, he would be late

22/43 Declarations of Interest

As all members of the parish council are council-tax payers, they all declared an interest.

22/44 Dispensations

Dispensation forms signed and dated at the last meeting and valid for a year will cover this.

22/45 Public Forum

- i. David Howatson advised that he was concerned and shocked to receive the survey that stated that the parish council was proposing to spend over one million pounds on a new pavilion. Since receiving this, Mr Howatson has spent time looking at the history and feels that there are some basic flaws in the way the parish council has arrived at where we are. There was an original motion made in the parish council minutes but he has had difficulty following an audit trail through to where the current position of a building that is to cost 1.2 million pounds is. He cannot find any options exercise being undertaken or any evidence that the building has been future-proofed. Mr Howatson understands that an architect was employed but is unable to see that this was done as a tender exercise. Mr Howatson concluded that from what he can see there are major flaws in the process and therefore feels that the best thing the parish council can do is shelve the project and start again.

- ii. Carolyn Went (Chair of the Memorial Hall) advised that she was talking for herself and her family and would agree that new changing facilities are needed but not this proposal. Ms Went stated that she does not think the costings are future-proofed as we are talking about a building that will eventually be able to generate its own funds, but she cannot see any money in the budget to cover the period from the opening of the facility until it is able to generate its own funds.
- At present there is a football pitch that can be used by footballers that only requires nets and believes that creating a cricket pitch can easily be achieved but when it comes to netball, the existing court cannot be used for league games as there is not enough space between the edge of the court and the fence. The only way to overcome this problem would be to raise funds to enlarge the current facilities to meet league requirements rather than just using the current court as a practice court. Therefore, Ms Went cannot see where the parish council is getting its diversity of sports from.
- Ms Went advised that she is concerned about the ongoing revenue costs of the facility as it is likely to sap so much money that everyone else in the village will be disadvantaged particularly as it appears someone will need to be employed to lock/unlock/clean the accessible toilets. The situation over the lease of the community centre/Folletts could be considered a 'red herring'. Ms Went concluded that we all want something to replace the current facilities but not this and, as mentioned at the public meeting, modules may be the way forward.
- iii. Bethany Allen advised she lives in the village and is a mother with young children. She is conscious that the information on the website talks about the ability to use the facility as an alternative venue for birthday parties and so forth. Ms Allen stated that she would have grave misgivings about this from due to safeguarding – football matches going on at the same time, share use of toilets, inappropriate language etc. It therefore seems an optimistic view, particularly when there are other, more appropriate buildings/rooms within the village, that can be hired out and therefore there is only a need for changing facilities, toilets, and storage.
- Ms Allen stated that she has serious concerns that, due to the current economic climate, if this was to go ahead, many villagers would be pushed into economic hardship as a direct or indirect result of an increase in their council tax and enquired if the parish council would be setting up a discretionary fund to support these villagers.
- iv. Ann Parsons addressed item 5.3 on the agenda and asked that the timings of any future surveys be looked at. She stated that the current survey had been sent out during half term when many residents were on holiday. Also, the Clerk was on holiday resulting in the parish council office being shut therefore there was no way anyone could visit the office to ask questions. In conclusion, Ms Parsons questions what message the parish council thinks it is sending the village.

- v. Darren Windrum stated that he had made the point at the public meeting that he was for the project but does not think the current proposal is the right way to proceed. Mr Windham circulated research he had undertaken on modular systems that met with Sports England's requirements and included plans, costings together with possible funding sources. Mr Windrum advised that he hoped this would show an alternative route and it could become a viable option following discussions he had undertaken with gentlemen who work in the industry and give funding advice. Progressing along this line could solve the immediate issue of the changing rooms. Mr Windrum also advised that he feels a lot more could be made of the football pitches and if a 4G pitch was to be created a lot of revenue could be made (region of £134,00 per annum) and any profit could be re-invested to create better facilities.
- vi. Cllr Dugmore thanked the public for their contributions and thanked Mr Windrum for the time and effort he had taken to produce the handout.
- vii. Matthew Horsman raised the point that is something like this modular option was put forward it would surely make more sense particularly in the current economic climate when the parish council is proposing to saddle the next two generations of villagers with additional payments on their council-tax for what could prove to be a white elephant. Mr Horsman asked why the parish council why a modular building had not been previously considered.

22/46 Recreational Community Facility Project

- i. To consider using the current public survey as information only and NOT as a mandate to apply to the Public Works Loan Board to fund the Community Recreational Facility Project:
 The chairman advised that the public survey has proven to have fallen short of its objective as a tool to gather information. The information required to allow villagers to make an informed decision was found to be not complete or sufficiently extensive. A commitment was made to make the Business Plan (BP) public but, after reviewing the current BP, there are elements within it that, particularly numerically, that need to be scrutinised further before a finalised version can be publicised. Whilst this was being looked at, the 'timeline' has rolled on resulting in information not being made available at the appropriate point in the process. Unfortunately, this has been compounded when it came to light that the delivery of the survey forms had not happened in the way it was intended with some parts of the village not receiving survey forms and individual properties being missed. A reputable company had been employed to undertake the delivery and Cllr Dugmore is in contact with them to try to understand what went wrong.
 Cllr Dugmore summed up that, due fundamental information not being available, survey leaflets not being distributed to the whole village whilst other survey forms were received in the final week of the response window, the use of the survey to justify such a large imposition on residents is not tenable.
 Several points were then raised:

- That the survey is not a survey upon which a mandate could be based on because of the reasons cited above and therefore could not be valid or reliable,
- The information required to allow the residents to make an informed decision was not in the public realm and therefore if the parish council decide to go ahead with 'a' project then, a further consultation would need to be undertaken but the relevant information would need to be made available first,
- One lesson learnt is that whatever project is put forward needs to demonstrate the worst-case scenario regarding running costs,
- The survey will provide useful information that the parish council can consider therefore residents should be still encouraged to complete survey form,
- The survey situation has been shambolic and just has not worked which is disappointing,
- The parish council has been trying to bring a project forward for the past eight years and, over this period, numerous requests were made to residents for help, but the response has always been poor,
- The proposed facility includes several elements including creating parking,

Cllr Tressler joined the meeting at 19:56

It was **RESOLVED** that

1. The village survey be dismissed from any consideration as a mandate to apply for a Public Works Board Loan and that the
2. Responses will be considered for information only,
3. The parish council will commit that the feedback received on the forms is made public and includes the number of responses and the information contained within
(Proposed Cllr Dugmore, seconded Cllr Christian-Carter, five in favour and one abstention (Cllr Mann)).

- ii. To review and capture the issues raised with the survey, its supporting information and its accessibility:

The chairman advised that this was the opportunity to capture what went wrong with the survey process and the majority had been captured in the previous item.

Various comments were then made:

- Why had the parish council taken the pavilion project on. Following reflection, the pavilion group needed support to formulate a proposed facility but the parish council got far too close to the project to be totally objective,
- If a new facility is required, any project should be divorced from the parish council.

- An active group is needed to generate a solution and this needs to include residents. It will be an opportunity for everyone in the parish to decide if they actually want it and if there is the drive to move it forward,
- It was clarified that a tender process was undertaken to with regard to the employment of AT Architects – 12 competitive quotes were received that were analysed and a short list of four was drawn up for interview,

iii. To agree the tests any future survey of this type, needs to go satisfy prior to being issued to the public:

The Chairman advised that he had undertaken research looking at the consultation principles contained within Gov.UK, Stratford DC's consultation insight sheet and the consultation tool kits created by local councils. A discussion ensued regarding what should be included:

- Lay out core points,
- Set out the purpose of any decisions on the rear of the form,
- Avoid ambiguity,
- Clearly articulate the benefits – which clubs/teams/ages/demographic groups will benefit,
- Articulate what information is known to be true and what is hypothesis,
- Go through peer review trials
- Clearly articulate all likely direct incremental capital costs broken down into council-tax bands,
- Articulate all likely consequential incremental operational costs,
- Only issue surveys after the above has been made available online and in print,
- Use The Scene more effectively factoring in the areas that are not covered by the publication,
- Have a clear route to seek clarification on any points (telephone number/email address)
- Check survey is valid and will obtain reliable data,
- Get the survey independently verified before it goes to print,
- Relative timings in terms of when it goes out/comes in particularly when it involves a cost impact beyond normal precept increases when the time should be extended,
- Review examples of what is out there and then create our own consultation toolkit and then members of the public can have a reasonable expectation of how things will go, and they can hold the parish council accountable.

It was **RESOLVED** that, before any further consultation is undertaken, work on adapting, adopting, or creating a consultation standard for the parish council is prepared, reviewed (with appropriate peers) and adopted in a forthcoming parish council meeting. (Proposed Cllr Dugmore, seconded Cllr Christian-Carter, all in favour and one abstention).

- iv. To consider whether to proceed further with the project, in its current form and cost:

Each councillor was asked for their thoughts as to whether to proceed with the project in its current form and cost. Responses included:

- Given the current situation we are all finding ourselves in with the cost of living, Ukraine, fuel prices increasing, it cannot be seen how we can proceed with the project in its current form and cost,
- When the project was started in 2015, it was impossible to predict the current financial climate,
- A total rethink is needed,
- We know that those who have responded have done so without knowing the full facts and the residents are entitled to have details of the full costs,
- Building is not fit for purpose,
- Currently the football club is the only club prepared to use such dire facilities therefore how you can project future running costs or usage as a new facility will attract other users,
- In terms of timing, if we were to make the decision now, would this have an impact on people returning their surveys as the information contained in these would be useful. The fact that the surveys will not be used as a mandate for applying for a public works loan should reassure residents,
- Decision should not be prolonged,
- The current return is around 10% that is seen as high nationally,
- At least this emotive issue has seen people attending meetings and have shown that people are prepared to engage and provide ideas. It is hoped that, going forward, something can be agreed to provide much needed new facilities,
- The design we have is a fantastic building and would be an enormous asset to the village but at nearly 1.25 million pounds it has outgrown its original scope and objectives,
- Given the current financial crisis, it would be an unreasonable imposition on an already stretched population,
- The current facility is beyond repair and needs replacing but warrants a more modest solution,
- Irrespective of the survey, if we do not decide now, we are leaving a 1.2-million-pound spectre hanging over people and this is causing major worries for those who cannot afford to pay,
- It is about meeting the need and not the want which will be disappointing to several people,
- Need to recognise the parish council has got too close to the project and a working party, with agreed terms of reference, identified roles

and responsibilities, decision making capabilities and more importantly a budget sum agreed with the parish council should be formed to take the project forward,

- S106 funding of £134,000 is available for the pavilion project and this money is time limited.
- Form a working party to work alongside the parish council to look at a more modest solution
- Request to vary the S106 again so that the funding available can be used solely for the playground, or if we can find a way to open its use to either project,
- Regarding the current wording “in its current form and cost”, there is a difference between saying this project will not be paid for by adding to your council-tax but that is not to say that it could be paid for by grant funding. If we turned round and said this ‘all singing, all dancing’ facility is what you are going to get and it will cost you nothing, we would be told to crack on with it and we would not have all these people attending meetings. Concern was therefore expressed that if we follow this current wording to the letter, we will be back at square one again,
- Leave the project as it is for now but what we decide on is that this project is not funded by a Public Works Board Loan some residents will not pay for it through their council-tax,
- A fundraiser has been used but has only identified/applied to HS2,
- It was clarified that the fundraiser was only tasked with submitting applications to HS2 and Landfill Tax, but the project did not qualify for the latter,
- Because the parish council is involved, many funders will not consider applications as they will only work with charitable organisations,
- Sport England insist on certain criteria for changing facilities which are expensive because of the square footage involved and as they are statutory consultees for planning applications, it is “catch 22” as you need their backing.

A proposal was tabled that the project in its current form be terminated or shelved, a working party, with agreed terms of reference be formed to work alongside the parish council to provide facilities within a budget agreed with the parish council.

Cllr Thomas proposed that this be post dated to be effective from the completion date of the village survey. This proposal was seconded by Cllr Mann. The vote was two in favour, four against and one abstention and therefore was not carried.

It was **RESOLVED** that the project in its current form be terminated or shelved, a working party, with agreed terms of reference be formed to work alongside the parish council to provide facilities within a budget agreed with

the parish council. . (Proposed Cllr Dugmore, seconded Cllr Tressler, four in favour and three abstentions (Cllrs Gates, Mann, and Thomas)).

Following the above resolution, it was agreed that we do not want to risk the possibility of losing the S106 funding as we do not know the timescale involved in delivering a different recreational facility.

It was proposed to seek a further deed of variation of the previous deed agreed in May 2021 to make available for playground equipment. Cllr Kettle proposed that this be amended to broaden the proposal from 'Playground equipment' to 'playground equipment and associated facilities'. This was seconded by Cllr Gates and the vote was six in favour with one abstention (Cllr Mann).

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to seek a further deed of variation of the previous deed agreed in May 2021 to make available for playground equipment and associated facilities. (Proposed Cllr Dugmore, seconded Cllr Thomas, six in favour and one abstention (Cllr Mann)).

It was suggested that a post be made on Facebook to encourage residents to still complete the survey forms as the information contained within them will be useful.

22/47 Reports and Questions

- The lack of an article from the parish council was raised and the clerk advised that was due to her being on annual leave,
- Cllr Gates raised that he is still concerned regarding the issue of funding and public works loans because he feels we are likely to go round in circles if, villagers being asked to fund a replacement facility is still on the cards. It was suggested that this should be dealt with early on in terms of whatever guise this new project takes, we should not be asking residents to pay for it. The strength of feeling is so strong that people would be wasting their time if they even thought this was a possibility for funding the facility. Cllr Gates therefore suggested this be put on the agenda of the next available parish council meeting following the publication of the survey results,
- Plough Lane – the ditch is full to the brim. Jeff Hobday was there and Cllr Mann got the vegetation cut back for him but still nothing has been done. Cllr Kettle advised that he had emailed Mr Hobday again on 25 February 2022 and is awaiting a response,
- Cllr Mann asked if the parish council is going to write an open letter to the village explaining why they have wasted £25,000 to £30,000 of their money. In response, An opinion was expressed that the professional employed have not been effective. Another opinion is that the money has not been wasted as we have plans drawn up, planning permission in place and although it has not

come to the fruition that was intended with it, it was money that had to be spent to reach this point. It was only until we got to that point in the process was the actual cost coming back to us. We did not necessarily make the right decisions at the right times.

22/48 Date of Next Meeting

The next ordinary meeting of the parish council is scheduled to take place on Monday, 14 March 2022 at 7.30pm at the Community Centre.

Meeting closed at 21:07

Signed.....Chairman Date.....