

CRIMPLESHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Parish Council, convened on Thursday, 29th April 2021. Commenced at 7.30pm with Councillor David Lane in the chair.

This meeting was held virtually in accordance with The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Present:

Cllr Kevin Cornwell
Cllr David Lane
Cllr James Lane
Cllr Barry Satur
Cllr Mark Sawatzki
Cllr Gary Dodds

Apologies: Cllr Jeff Carter, Trustee: Mrs Pam Biggs, Mrs Margaret Carter & Mr Paul Bishop.

In Attendance:

Clerk – Mike Inder

Public present: 7

1/21E **Apologies for absence.**

Apologies had been received and were accepted from the above-named people.

2/21E **Declarations of Interest**

None.

3/21E **Public Forum**

The chairman asked if there were any comments or questions from the public at this juncture for the cllrs to consider in their deliberation of the playing field and/or village hall, there were none. He stated he would invite public comment and participation after the cllrs had deliberated the matter.

4/21E The clerk was asked to provide a background report to the playing field and village hall matters that had initiated this project. He read the opening paragraph from the Options Paper that he had published:

At the meeting of the Parish Council in November 2020 Cllr Satur provided a report on the early stages of a proposal to replace the current village hall on Market Lane with a new-build village hall on the playing field, the rationale being that the village hall, as an aging building, was becoming increasingly expensive to maintain and had also been the beneficiary of significant donations from the Parish Council to support it. This project raised a few questions relating to the ownership of the village hall and the playing field. It was understood that the Parish Council, having subsidised the Playing Field Trust with costs of ground maintenance for a number of years was handed control of the playing field by the 2 remaining Trustees. This was thought to have completed the administration but on checking the Charity Commission website it appears the Trust has not been closed down nor the transfer of trustees completed. The Village Hall remains under the trusteeship of members who have tried without success to recruit new trustees to replace them with their intent to retire in the near future.

The simplistic view would be that the PC could become Sole Trustee for both the Playing Field (retrospectively) and Village hall in the future and that they could then determine how they operate and any future relocation of the village hall and sale of the old property. Initial research has revealed that the Parish Council as a Sole Trustee needs to be more fully understood along with the relationship of the 2 charities and their charitable aims and how they are served or amended appropriately. After seeking advice from a Norfolk Association of Local Councils specialist on Charitable Trusts and Parish Councils as Trustees it was recommended that both the charity governance documents were obtained and trustees (including those who still hold a legal responsibility for the Playing Field) engaged to publish an options appraisal to inform stakeholders including Fields in Trust and the Charity Commission of the situation and to determine the preferable course of action for the village as a whole community.

Chairman's Initials

Subsequent to that Options Paper being published the clerk informed those present that he has attended NALC Charity Training and sought advice from colleagues who have undertaken recent similar projects in nearby villages. Following that he arranged the scoping meeting with Birkett's Solicitors, a NALC partner organisation with charity specialists and offering discounted work for local authorities. Their advice has been used to shape the plan to date but it has become evident that the village hall trustees perspectives are not fully aligned and that more information and discussion to agree next steps was required.

Cllrs with assistance of Mrs Cornwell, who has been assisting Mrs Biggs with the administration over recent times, discussed a comprehensive number of matters relating to the village hall, summarised under the headings below:

Finance: The summary position regarding funding is that with the exception of the major repairs such as the flooring recently replaced in the back room and the more significant main floor that is in need of a major repair likely to cost c£20k, then without the COVID business continuity grant and the PC donation the VH would have shown a c£300 profit. So the VH is viable in its current form provided grants can be obtained for major works. If under PC ownership use of the Public Works Loan scheme (government loan at favourable rates of interest paid back in annual instalments over a number of years from the precept) could be possible for some aspects of major works.

Infrastructure: The building except for the main floor has seen full renovations of the roof and windows in the last 10 years or so and is therefore thought to be in a sound condition overall. It was suggested a structural survey may be a worthwhile investment before capital expenditure.

Utilisation: Pre-pandemic the hall had been used by a dance class weekly and they have restarted post lifting of restriction, there were also coffee mornings and pop-up pub events, both of which members of the public present stated remained going concerns that could return soon. The PC also would return to holding meetings in the hall post 17 May 21.

Trust: The 3 registered trustees are all senior in years and indicated that new trustees would be needed to share some of the responsibilities and take over in due course to keep above the minimum (understood to be 3).

VH Management Ctte: There are no active management ctte members currently and appeals for volunteers over the last 18 months have not attracted anyone. It was suggested that the detailing of the exact requirements and commitment needed to be more fully advertised to attract potential volunteers. The roles and responsibilities needed to be clearly set out to cover the key aspects:

- Caretaker/cleaner.
- Key holder
- Bookings manager
- Treasurer
- Charity Contact/Secretary

It was suggested that these roles could be fulfilled individually or by a couple of people combining elements. The weekly/monthly time to carry out these roles is not more than a couple of hours.

If there were no volunteers forthcoming the Trustees would probably need to ask the PC to assist with alternative arrangements and that may still be an interim step and level of involvement short of becoming Sole Trustee with managing responsibility.

Future New Village Hall: The idea of a new village hall was instigated by the observation that the VH was in need of annual subsidy of c£900 to meet operating costs including the repairs to date and that was perhaps better invested in a new hall with less maintenance requirements and built to be more eco-friendly. It could be relocated to the playing field where parking to accommodate the number of users could be facilitated. This would be a major project and examples of the scale envisaged such as Wereham village hall would cost circa £1M and need significant grant funding and fund raising as well as a community project to demonstrate the business case for such a large capital project. Counterviews were voiced that the area had other large village halls in neighbouring villages and we would be competing with them to attract business from users for larger events and that perhaps the smaller, 'cosier' feel of the Crimplesham village hall might be filling that niche requirement. The historic aspects of the village hall were also voiced as sensitive, given the commitment, personal investment and work that was required to keep it for the village when under threat of being sold for private adaptation to residential purpose.

Playing field: The clerk made clear the urgency of resolving the playing field ownership without delay to return the PC to a legal position and to not be at financial risk of uninsured liability for the play equipment (which is still officially closed due to the pandemic, albeit impossible to enforce). It was reiterated that the fixed fee for the legal work quoted at £5k was for both the VH and PF aspects and if there was to be a separation of the 2 elements that it would require a re-visit to obtain a new quote for the PF to proceed asap and although that should come in at a reduced cost in the short term, if the VH element was to result in the PC being Sole Trustees and managing it then that may attract additional costs that combined would have cost more than the £5k.

PC Budget: The clerk as Responsible Finance Officer, provided a model of the current 21/22 budget with the £5k legal fees included and demonstrated a £1,350 shortfall and how that could be met using elements of the contingency fund and other Ear-Marked Reserves. He further explained those funds diverted would need to be replaced in the next budget and that would lead to an increased precept demand, increasing the council tax parish portion by c£1.50 per month per household in 22/23. However, there was no palatable scope for increased costs if the solicitor's proposals to the Charity Commission did not meet approval and further legal work to achieve acceptance was required.

Proposals: The following proposals were made following the discussions which had led to a feeling that more information and public opinion was needed to ensure the council and trustees acted in the best interests overall:

Cllr Cornwell proposed that the projects of PF and VH be separated at this juncture to allow the urgent PF work to proceed whilst more efforts were made to fill the VH management ctte and key positions to continue under their current operating model. This was seconded by Cllr J Lane and a vote was carried in favour.

Action: Clerk to contact Birkett's Solicitors to inform them of the Council's direction and to request a revised fixed fee quote for the Playing Field aspect only.

Cllr Dodds proposed to publish a questionnaire to go to each household with a brief background of the situation regarding the village hall, detailing the requirements for a working ctte and the positions needing to be filled to operate. This was seconded by Cllr D Lane and voted for in favour.

Action: Cllr Dodds to draft a questionnaire with assistance from Mrs Cornwell on the history/background and to forward it to the council for approval. Then to produce the flyers and pass to cllrs for distribution. A survey return method and location to be arranged.

It was also suggested that in addition to the newsletters other avenues for publicity should be used such as social media, church services and through individual email distribution and word of mouth, members of the public and council present agreed to that course of action.

- 5/21E It was decided to establish a VH Working Group consisting of the Parish Council, VH Trustees and any members of the public who wished to volunteer. The VH Working Group Terms of Reference were set out and it was clarified that there were no delegated powers for decision making and that recommendations would have to be presented at a full council meeting for anything that had an impact on the council. The clerk asked that any volunteers contact him with their contact details.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions and the meeting was closed at 8.50pm

Chairman.....

Date.....

Prepared by
Mike Inder, Clerk & RFO

Chairman's Initials