

BASSINGBOURN-CUM-KNEESWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Full Parish Council
held on **TUESDAY 25th February 2020.**

Present :- Cllrs Douglass (Chairman for the public session), Catherall, Freeman, Geraghty, Hallett (Chairman for items 1 – 5) , Hirtzel, Leith, Oakley, Ridsdale, Sams, Spenceley and White.

District Cllr Cathcart, Mrs V Tookey (Clerk) and Mrs B Isherwood (RFO) were also present.

45 members of the public were also present.

Chairman opened session by stating that this was an Extraordinary Meeting requested by Councillors Leith and Catherall raising concerns over procedures followed regarding a lease of The Limes. And the meeting was to discuss The Limes only.

She opened the meeting for the public session. However, the majority of those present were there to raise concerns about the closure of the Pavilion. At Chairman's discretion the group were allowed to speak.

Questions were raised about why the pavilion had been closed, why the council had not been maintaining the building, the length of time the pavilion was likely to be out of use with the explanation that the football club could face fines and why wasn't local help being used. Although Council had prioritized maintaining access to the shower/changing areas, this was not considered enough by the Club members present.

Chairman stressed that Council aimed to open the pavilion again at the earliest opportunity and would communicate with the football groups.

At that point 32 members of the public left the meeting during which time there was a short adjournment. r

The meeting then re-opened reverting to the agenda, with Cllr Hallett in the chair. He invited those present to share their views regarding the possible acquisition of The Limes. Council heard how important it was as a space for the library, how the need for such a space had been proven, and how important the venue was as a meeting place for the community. District Cllr Cathcart also explained that SCDC has a statutory obligation to maximize its assets which allows it to offer the building to the community. If the community did not take the lease, then it would seek to dispose of the building on the open market.

1	Apologies for absence : Cllr Dixon due to previous commitment, and Cllr Hodge due to annual leave. County Cllr Susan Van de Ven also has a previous commitment.
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2	Declaration of Interests : None were declared for this meeting.
3	<p>The Limes</p> <p><u>3.1 Possible Lease of The Limes and was the decision compliant with PC procedures</u></p> <p>The individual items raised are covered in response attached as appendix A. The timeline prepared by the Chairman was also accepted. Attached as appendix B.</p> <p>Cllr Leith stated that some councillors felt aggrieved that they had not been able to either make comments or take part in early discussions, nor offer their expertise in certain areas, including the preparation of a business case. He went on to say that council's current processes are not clear regarding information sharing before a decision is made. Points were made that the decision taken was very clear in that Council would need to agree the conditions of the lease, and that the Councillors who were present clearly understood what was being put forward as a proposal. The response to SCDC was not legally binding.</p> <p>District Cllr Cathcart also took the same view.</p> <p>On proposition of Cllr Leith, seconded by Cllr Spenceley it was agreed to revisit Council's Standing orders to include clear guidelines on information sharing, and how and when members can join Working Groups.</p> <p><u>3.2 Discussion of the business case for agreeing to lease the property</u></p> <p>The individual items raised are covered in response attached as appendix A. Cllr Leith continued in that the business case was not robust and went on to explain areas not covered including the long-term maintenance costs of the building. Cllr Douglass reiterated that it was not until the 9th January that SCDC made it clear to Bassingbourn cum Kneesworth Parish Council that the offer of a lease was to go to SCDC Cabinet. The Working Group therefore had little time to prepare a full business case. District Cllr Cathcart stated that he had looked at costs of running similar buildings e.g. Whaddon to assist with further risk assessment. Possible figures for repairs and upkeep were discussed along with the reasons for the Council having the powers to provide a village hall. Following which Cllr Leith proposed that financial regulations be reviewed in order to include detailed guidance as to what information a business case should provide in order to make decisions. Cllr Spenceley seconded this, and motion was carried. Clerk pointed out that Financial Regulations had already been reviewed by Council in December 2019. She also pointed out that Standing Orders and Financial Regulations are always reviewed at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May of each year.</p>
4	<p>Discussion regarding the possible lease:-</p> <p>The question had been raised as to what terms would be acceptable from the Council's perspective in view of the previous discussion.</p> <p>Discussion regarding repairing obligations ensued, with agreement that a survey needed to be commissioned. Council will also need to appoint solicitors to review the Lease.</p> <p>The lease document does not yet exist and once it is available will be discussed by The Limes Working Group, who will make recommendations to full council.</p>
5	Consideration of tenders for survey of The Limes and Pavilion

	<p><u>5.1 To consider and agree surveys for the two properties</u> The RFO had circulated quotations from three companies for a survey of the Limes and a survey of the Pavilion. On the proposition of Cllr Douglass, seconded Cllr Freeman it was agreed RFO negotiate a price for the two surveys to be undertaken on the same day up to a maximum of £3000. This was carried. The surveys to be circulated as soon as received.</p>
	<p>There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.30 pm.</p> <p>Signed Chairman 17th March 2020</p>

Appendix a

3.1 Possible Lease of The Limes and was the decision compliant with PC procedures:

<p>were all interested Cllrs included in discussions</p>	<p>Everyone has been included from the beginning. Attached is a note of the series of meetings where the issues have been raised. The working group was set up in June. Paul wrote to Michael Ridsdale on the 14th of November - at the bottom of that email there was a request for agenda item that he be added to the working group (no direct request to the Clerk officially and the earliest agenda it could have been on would have been December, as the 19th November agenda would have been published.)</p>
<p>was information / progress / options communicated to Cllrs in a timely fashion</p>	<p>Working group was formed in June 2019. District Councillor continued to update council. Bridget Smith (leader of SCDC) telephoned Elaine Douglas asking the council to raise £400,000 following which Mike Hallett, Hilary Hodge, Nigel Cathcart and Val Tookey met with Kate Swann on the 31st of October with the brief that the preference was for a long lease. Hilary had prepared a paper on the community benefits of such a lease which was given to Kate Swann. No working group meetings where to be held until an offer came forward. The issue was going firstly to the November cabinet was then deferred to the December cabinet following which there was the invitation to meet with the Chief Exec. The meeting with Chief Exec took place and the group were asked to take the terms of transfer letter to the 21st January meeting of the parish council. With the request</p>

	for an answer to be given urgently as she needed time to put the matter back on the agenda for the cabinet, and to have papers prepared for the March meeting. She explicitly told the group that should the parish council not take on a lease the building would be sold for redevelopment
what are the stated benefits / objectives of the initiative	Mostly in the draft business case presented on the 21st of January by Hilary - further copy is attached
to what extent were financial liabilities of competing alternatives explore	Nigel Cathcart is to obtain further information regarding the structure and of the building. The draft business case gave some examples. The main one being the village college which had previously been used but was no longer available. There are no other buildings which could replace The Limes.
what were the criteria used to select the best option from competing solutions	this is the only place suitable for the library it has a central location and there is potential to increase the use for social welfare wellbeing access ability is good.

3.2 Discussion of the business case for agreeing to lease the property to include

to what extent was research performed to validate costs in the Limes proposal document	documentation from South Cambs District Council giving 16/17; 17/18; 18/19, 19/20 revenue and costs had been received.
to what extent was research performed to ensure all reasonably anticipated costs were not excluded from the proposal document	impossible to say what capital expenditure will be needed - will come from a survey
to what extent was research performed to forecast revenues for the project	Will come from survey
what sensitivity analysis was performed	What if – council doesn't take the lease – no base for Library/no community building to tackle health and wellbeing, rural isolation

Appendix B THE LIMES : timeline

March 2018 Full Council meeting – The Limes offer from SCDC was discussed and agreed by PC as a favourable idea and would need to be discussed further with SCDC

Paul, Richard and John were in attendance at this meeting

4th September Finance and General Purpose meeting – Discussion of the meeting held with Kate Swan, and Housing Director, Anita Goddard. The suggestion was that the Limes would be run as a community facility on a lease of 99 or 125 years. No running costs were provided at this meeting. Councillor Hallett advised that the District Council were not keen to agree to a freehold in case at a later date the Parish Council decided to sell it on the open market if we found it not viable, and could therefore be sold for private housing.

Acknowledged at PC meeting that there were still questions to be asked, but the feeling was that Councillors were still interested in taking on the lease. This was then put on the agenda for the next full PC meeting. Richard was in attendance at this meeting

September 2018 Full Parish Council meeting – The F and GP committee proposed that the PC should continue to pursue the discussion for taking over the Limes building for community use. Mike R suggested asking for the Freehold, and Paul expressed concern over revenue streams for the pavilion and the Limes. It was proposed and agreed that discussions would continue between the PC and SCDC. Paul and John present at meeting

March 2019 email from Kate Swan - Advised that both options had been put to the Project Board and an Independent Surveyor was being asked to provide a valuation for lease and a freehold valuation.

May 2019 Full PC meeting – it was reported back to PC that the meeting was encouraging, and a draft lease was being prepared for the council to consider. Paul in attendance

4th June 2019 EPC meeting – Working groups were formed and agreed by PC. The Limes working group elected was : Elaine Douglass, Mike Hallett, Mike Ridsdale, Hilary Hodge, and Nigel Cathcart. This was voted on by PC and agreed. Paul was at this meeting

18th June 2019 EPM – The Chairman, (ED) stated that 2 meetings had now been had with Kate Swan from SCDC. Some figures had been supplied but were basic due to the fact that the Limes community accounts included everything from washing machines and dryers, the oil and maintenance to the properties and grounds including the Limes building. We were still awaiting sight of a draft lease as until this had been received, no discussion or commitment could be made by the PC. Paul and John still had concerns over who would use the building. It was acknowledged that it was too premature to decide this. Mike H advised that the SCDC were keen to dispose of it and if the PC did not take it on it was likely that SCDC would sell it for development. Hilary proposed that the working group continue discussions with Kate Swan and prepare a paper to go to councillors. Paul, Jack, Richard and John all present at meeting

September 2019 Full PC meeting – Nigel reported that the Legal Services at SCDC were working with the Portfolio Holder at SCDC regarding the possible transfer.

October 2019 – Nigel reported that the matter was going to Cabinet and that there would need to be a reasonable case for such a move.

31st October 2019 at the Limes – Meeting with Kate Swan, Mike H, Hilary, Nigel and Val. Bridget Smith, Leader of SCDC was keen to pursue BCKPC taking over the freehold option. The working group representatives urged that the PC was not keen in taking on that option as they already had another capitol project on the go and did not feel comfortable taking on a Public Works Loan after the problems that had resulted from the Gamlingay Hub and Melbourn Hub projects. The matter was going to Cabinet in December.

November 2019 – Nigel reported that the Portfolio Holder was supportive of the lease option at a peppercorn rent to the PC. It was also reported that SCDC were now NOT enthusiastic about a Freehold option, although they should try to acquire best value and PC would have had to raise in the region of £400,000.00. Paul, Richard and John present at meeting

December 2019 PC meeting – Nigel reported a meeting of the Cabinet had been held in 'camera' so he had no further details for us. At this point we still had no details of a proposal

The Limes working group were then invited to attend a meeting with Bridget Smith, Kate Swan at SCDC Cambourne on 15th January 2020 to discuss best way to approach the transfer for both parties. This meeting then changed to 9th January 2020 and Hilary, Mike H, Nigel, Val, Barbara and Elaine attended. The meeting was with the new Chief Executive Liz Watts and also Kate Swan plus one other representative. At this meeting they presented a draft Terms of Transfer which we agreed to bring back to the PC for discussion on the 21st January and would respond asap as they wanted to get this item on the agenda for their February Cabinet meeting. It was made very clear that should the PC **not** agree to take over a lease, then the building would be sold for redevelopment as enquiries had already been made. A paper was written by Hilary with input from Mike, Val, Barbara and Elaine to present at the PC meeting on 21st January.

21st January 2020 Full PC meeting – The paper was presented by Hilary for discussion and was agreed with one abstention that '**subject to an acceptable lease**' the PC would take on a lease for 99 years at a peppercorn rent. Nigel stated very clearly at this meeting that the building would be sold for redevelopment if we did not take it on. This decision was relayed to SCDC who would have to take it to the next Cabinet meeting to see if they were agreeable to this. There were half a dozen members of the public in attendance at this meeting who applauded the decision to further the life of this building as a community facility.

Note:

It is very clear that we made the decision to go for the lease option and the sale of the Freehold was removed from the table by the Portfolio Holder, leaving us with only the lease option. Those present at meetings are shown.