

MINUTES OF COMMUNITY CENTRE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD IN THE ADDISON V.C ROOM ON 21st JULY 2015

PRESENT: Cllrs. Veitch (in the Chair), Bunyan, Fermor, Hall, Hartley, Kemp, Rook and Beryl Bancroft and David Summers.

The Chairman read out the following statement:

Declaration of Interests, Dispensations, Predetermination or Lobbying:

Members are required to declare any interests, dispensations, predetermination or lobbying on items on this agenda. Members are reminded that changes to the Register of Interests should be notified to the Clerk.

No interests were declared.

The Chairman reported that she had held an informal meeting at her home address the previous evening as an information sharing exercise and to help the new Members of the Council to understand the history of the project and why certain decisions had been made. Attendees included present and ex-councillors. The meeting was informal and not attended by a Clerk. She gave a brief outline on the issues raised at that meeting, from her personal notes taken on the evening.

Cllr. Veitch advised that she had established a Charity in the name of her late husband which was not yet fully operational. The purpose was to provide funds for projects that would benefit the parishioners of Cranbrook and Sissinghurst as a tax efficient vehicle to receive donations. The current Trustees are listed as a member of the Parish Council, a member of the Church, a family Member and a resident.

8/15: Planning Application:

The Chairman updated the Committee that Guy Johnson's team were in the process of preparing the planning application for the Community Centre & Enabling Houses site together with the Cranbrook Engineering site. This approach of a single application to cover both sites had been taken on the advice of Tunbridge Wells Borough Planning officers led by Jane Lynch. A single application would give greater flexibility to redesign. The interface of the building and a lot of the infrastructure is relevant to both sites. Cllr. Veitch stressed that our application would not change, the only amendments would be to areas under the control of Mr Johnson and the fees from the original application would be re-used. In response to Cllr. Hartley, Cllr. Veitch confirmed there had been no need to date to formally withdraw our application. She felt that on balance the advantages of a single application outweighed the disadvantages.

The main issues from the informal meeting were that some of the new Councillors did not feel the Business Plan demonstrated the need to build a single community building, that a further audit of existing assets such as the schools and churches was necessary and that there was a lack of evidence of a mandate to have a community centre. The Councillors that expressed concerns also thought that the hiring out of rooms at the Community Centre would take business away from the Town and that if such a large project were to go wrong, they as Councillors, could be accused of malfeasance.

In response to David Summers as to whether TWBC had given us any feedback on the Business Plan, Cllr. Veitch confirmed that David Jukes – Leader of TWBC, had sent it to Lynne Weatherly – Communities and Wellbeing Portfolio holder, for her opinion. Cllr. Veitch confirmed that she had not been informed of any concerns raised.

Cllr. Hall felt that a better policy would be to revise the Business Plan before it was assessed by the planners as she believed “they would just reject it”. Cllr. Veitch stated that when there was sufficient new information a revision of the plan would be done.

9/15: Access Permission:

The Chairman informed the Committee that there was no further movement with regard to this, also that Lorraine Theobald – Estates Surveyor for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council who had been dealing with the issue had resigned. However she was confident that the Co-Op would grant the necessary access once planning permission had been granted.

10/15: Loan Poll:

Cllr. Veitch tabled a loan poll document for discussion which she had prepared taking into consideration the suggestions raised by Cllr. Franks. She explained she had used the example of borrowing £2 million and the cost per year this would incur as she felt it was easier to understand. There was a full discussion on what should be included in the information and what could be omitted and how the information should be displayed. Some Councillors felt that there could never be too much information, others that too much would put people off reading any of it. Cllr. Hartley felt that it was completely inappropriate to have any poll on a loan until all concerns expressed were addressed. Cllr. Hall was concerned there was no reference to any money already committed by TWBC to the project, and that a poll would not be necessary if the project was financed solely by fundraising this would be the “acid test” of support for the project. Cllr. Veitch stated that she was strongly in favour of consulting with parishioners over this and felt the relatively small cost of conducting the poll would not only give us the answer as to whether they are happy for us to take out a loan but it would also help us gauge support for the project. David Summers reminded Members that he sat on this Committee to primarily represent Age Concern, however he was increasingly concerned that the costs were escalating and it was evident from this meeting that there were still issues that needed to be resolved. The flexible nature of the Council was a concern to him, he did not feel the project could move forward until there was a combined willingness for it to do so. Cllr. Rook stated that the poll was necessary to keep the project moving, a loan had to be considered, the Business Plan depends upon it as a “fall back position”, TWBC will not give planning permission without a viable Business Plan and we cannot fund raise until we have planning permission so we are caught between “a rock and a hard place”. He felt the current facilities in the town were no longer sufficient or fit for purpose so a new community centre was essential, we had arrived at the current design as TWBC had insisted the building must be “of significance”. The Committee agreed that until the concerns held by some councillors could be resolved it would be premature to ask Full Council to make a decision on a loan poll document.

11/15: Fundraising:

Joy Temple had attended as an interested parishioner and the Chairman asked her for her view. She stated that she shared the view of David Summers and believed that as the Parish Council has new members that have tremendous expertise, we should be looking at them to help us arrive at the right decisions. She also suggested that we approach KCC internal audit team for advice in bringing together the differing views now held.

12/15: Items for Information:

No items were raised.

The next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 18th August at 9.00am.