

**MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, VESTRY HALL, CRANBROOK
ON THURSDAY 22ND OCTOBER 2015**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and for the benefit of parishioners explained the format of the meeting, she would close the meeting after each item on the agenda to enable them to speak. There would be a three minute time limit for both councillors and parishioners. She invited anyone present to declare if they were intending to photograph, record, broadcast or transmit any of the proceedings. No declarations were made.

The Chairman read out the following statement:

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.

The Chairman registered an interest on behalf of the Parish Council in so much as we have an interest due to the fact that the Cranbrook Engineering/Hospice in the Weald site is interlinked with Wilkes Field where a planning application had been lodged for a community centre on land to be gifted to the Parish Council.

Cllr. Kemp declared an interest. As a private individual he was the applicant on both the submissions to the Department for Culture Media & Sport and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council regarding listing of the buildings on the Hospice in the Weald Site. He had also written a letter to Ruth Chambers, the case officer, on the planning and listed building applications.

PRESENT: Cllrs. Bunyan, Cook, Fairweather, Fermor, Franks, Hartley, Holmes, Kemp, Rook, Smith, Swann and Veitch. Borough Cllr. Dawlings and Kent County Council & Borough Cllr. Holden. Twenty two members of the public.

APOLOGIES: Cllrs. Clifford, Goodchild and Hall. Borough Cllr. Hannam.

Cllr. Cook asked for the votes to be recorded on all three items on the Agenda. This was seconded by Cllr. Fermor and agreed by the Chairman.

COMMUNITY CENTRE:

143: The Chairman invited Members to comment on the first proposal that Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Parish Council confirms its support for a community centre on Wilkes Field.

- Cllr. Rook – Cranbrook in desperate need of a community centre. Evident that we need a meeting place fit for purpose. We have looked at ways to make the Vestry Hall more suitable but we cannot put in lifts or stair lifts. This town needs a community centre fit for purpose.
- Cllr. Swann – Location is vitally important. A lot of research has been undertaken and Wilkes Field has been identified as the best site. The Parish Council will be gifted the land; we would not have to purchase land. It will bring the town together; there would be cohesion of the land to the south of the town joining up with the land to the west. Wilkes Field is right in the middle. He fully supports the resolution.

- Cllr. Hartley – Business Plan has flaws; we should revisit the business case. We need to establish what we want and then look at suitable facilities.
- Cllr. Cook – The Parish Council has been pursuing a community facility for a long time. The motion does not specify which community centre we will ultimately go for. It is for a community centre on Wilkes Field. He saw no reason to change horses.
- Cllr. Fermor – We are in the 21C and we have no community centre in Cranbrook. We should have a multi-functional building to satisfy the needs of our community. If the community centre is not built we are denying something that so many people want. Who would look after a redundant building site which over the years will end up like the Providence Chapel?
- Cllr. Bunyan – Convinced we need a community centre and that Wilkes Field is the right site. The current design has been carefully thought out, we had looked at the scheme, had tweaked it where necessary and taken advice. She supports the proposal.
- Cllr. Franks – Was agnostic and then listened to intense discussions which had been very informative. Not the kind of decision you make lightly but on the balance of probabilities it is the best on the table. He supports the proposal.
- Cllr. Smith – Agreed with comments made by Cllr. Franks. There has to be a balance between preservation and the community. This is an opportunity to do the right thing at the right time. There is still work to be done on the business plan.
- Cllr. Fairweather – There is a time for opinion and a time for action. We need to move forward and press ahead. He supports the proposition.
- Cllr. Kemp – New councillors had questions and one of these related to quality. There is uncertainty. Retailers are struggling. For a site as pristine as Wilkes Field we must have a design that is good enough; we do not yet have a design that is worthy of Cranbrook. We need to work through the business plan. The drawings do not add up. The community centre needs to be a fantastic place, it needs to sit at the heart of the Neighbourhood Plan. The scheme needs expertise. He did not believe this was a viable scheme which will regenerate the town.
- Cllr. Holmes – Always felt that the job of a parish councillor was to reflect the views of the community on a need for a community centre. As Chairman of the Economic & Community Committee he could certainly see that the community centre would bring community cohesion and he fully supported the proposal.
- The Chairman, Cllr. Veitch – She had carefully phrased the resolution for “a community centre”, it was not about the design or the business case. We really do need a community centre and Wilkes Field is the ideal place for it. The design and business case can always be looked at again.

The Chairman then closed the meeting to allow parishioners to comment, these included:-

1. Concerns regarding cost and the precept plus the fact that the Parish Council had paid £3,000 to the Developer for the Business Plan which was not impartial. Developer is calling the tune. Planners not happy with the scheme.

2. Cranbrook does need a community centre and commercial development. Lived in Cranbrook for 40 years and seen a decline in services with the loss of the Civil Defence Hall, Law Courts and Council Offices plus the Cinema. For a town to survive it needs to prosper. Had seen the plans and felt the centre is very versatile with public and private spaces. Talked to a lot of people and a lot of consultation had taken place. If we don't have the centre Cranbrook will die.

3. Born in Cranbrook 80 years ago. Served on the Parish Council for seventeen years and a Borough Member for seven years. When the Council Offices went the Age Concern lunch stopped and this was valued by at least 50 people. If he had a vote he would vote for the motion.

4. Cllr. Holden agreed and supported the motion. Thirteen societies lost their home when the Council Offices went including CAB. We do need a community centre and Wilkes Field is the best place. It is the right thing to do for the town, it can become part of the heart of the town, we need to do something now. The public benefit of demolition clearly outweighed the benefit of retaining these unhistoric buildings.

5. Did not know about finance or plans. Do we need it or not. Not met anyone who is against this. The Parish Council represents the people of Cranbrook. Make it happen.

6. Had been co-opted onto the Community Centre Committee. Would like a place for people to meet, open minded about Wilkes Field but a plan B should be considered. Been talking about a community centre a long time. Lived in a Band D property and could be paying an extra £50 per year or more. Parish councils are exempt from the 2% limit on the increase in the precept. Only Cranbrook and Sissinghurst parishioners will be paying extra council tax.

7. Moved from London 38 years ago, looked at lots of area but chose Cranbrook. The town is dying with derelict town centre buildings. Need to get some heart into the town. There will be niggles but get the centre built. Make the decision now to move forward and bring investment back into the town.

Cllr. Veitch reassured people that prior to any decision on taking out a loan, that there would be a referendum. We would also fundraise. Cllr. Swann has all the figures and will happily show people outside of this meeting. Cllr. Swann confirmed that the increase in the precept would be 36p per week – less than the cost of a mars bar. There had only been one person who had queried the increase in the precept. £40,000 had been put in the budget but that will not go up every year it has already been built into the budget process.

The Chairman then re-opened the meeting for the vote to be taken. Cllr. Veitch then proposed that:-

Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Parish Council confirms its support for a community centre on Wilkes Field

This was seconded by Cllr. Rook and all Members voted for the motion, except Cllrs. Hartley and Kemp who voted against. Therefore the motion was carried.

HOSPICE IN THE WEALD FURNITURE STORE, STONE STREET, CRANBROOK

Demolition of existing buildings, stabilisation of Grade II Listed Building, Environmental clean-up and Archaeological investigations – 15/505805/FULL + Listed Building Consent for the above – 15/505812/LBC

144: The Chairman invited Members to comment on the second proposal this evening that Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Council authorises the Chairman (or Chairman of the Planning Committee) to speak at the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Planning Committee in support of the applications as above.

- Cllr. Holmes – redevelopment of the Cranbrook Engineering site is vital to the economic regeneration of Cranbrook. Heaven sent opportunity to revitalise a sadly neglected area, the town needs a boost, it can only attract shoppers and tourist to the town. Too good an opportunity to miss, if you need to demolish the buildings – so be it. They are not pleasing on the eye, redevelopment will improve the visual aspect. Any delay in the proceedings will only cause damage to the economic prosperity of the town.
- Cllr. Kemp – Huge amount of history, use them. There is a great deal of detail, go with the detail. Modern conversions would be highly functional. Demolition is not necessary for a viable scheme. Conservation Area Consent was given in 2010 but the developers did not go ahead and they sat on the site for five years. National Policy has changed, the NPPF overseen by Greg Clarke is there to fix some of the problems. Section 12 states the importance of preservation. There is no need to demolish.
- Cllr. Fairweather – We are at a cross-roads. Preservation of a pile of wood or a brand new community centre. Get on with it.
- Cllr. Smith – It is a key building block and there is a balance but preservation and history should not be a stopper to enable building. He supports demolition.
- Cllr. Franks – He was aware of Section 12 of the NPPF but could see little evidence to resist the demolition. Architectural merit was also questioned. He supports the proposal.
- Cllr. Bunyan – Agreed that the building has an interesting and varied history but that will remain even when the buildings are demolished.
- Cllr. Fermor – Has the document in front of her from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport who only listed one part of the building and declined to list any other part. If one of our Government departments did not think it was very important there is no reason to save it.
- Cllr. Cook – A member of CCAAC accompanied DCMS on the site visit and there was little of interest to record. If there is a log taken of what is on site this is adequate. A record can be kept even if items of interest are moved to another site. The site has become an eyesore over the years and picking up on the point raised by Cllr. Kemp in 2010 the economy was in a mess and it was not surprising that the development did not go ahead. He supports the demolition with recording of anything that is found to be interesting, with anything found worthy of preservation being relocated elsewhere.

- Cllr. Hartley read out a statement. He stated that the document sent out with the agenda attempts to convince that the harm caused by the demolition of buildings on the Local List of Heritage Assets will be outweighed by the public benefit of the development that will follow. The harm caused by this demolition is not in dispute – it is the permanent loss of structures that form part of the town's medieval street, pattern and historical character, structures that have been deemed worthy of adding to the List after appropriate examination and appraisal. The benefit of development is not in dispute either, and the document identifies some of the good things that may result from the development of a derelict site in the Town centre. The document is based upon the hypothesis that beneficial development can only be achieved following the almost wholesale demolition and near clearance of the site. Official planning guidance and best practice directs that, in a case like this, demolition should only be considered as a last resort, when all other options have failed. This onus is on the applicant to make the case that there is no alternative to demolition. With a strong policy-driven presumption in favour of retaining such buildings the case for demolition has to be compelling to succeed. Should a compelling case be made the reluctant support of the Parish Council might reasonably be expected. In this application no such case has been made – there is no evidence in the application to support the argument that demolition is necessary to unlock all the benefits of redevelopment. No attempt has been made to incorporate the locally listed buildings into a scheme – there is no scheme, not even an indication of what the applicant has in mind for replacement buildings. If consent is granted the owner might quite legitimately demolish the buildings, sell up and leave – with no obligation whatsoever to anybody.

Cllr. Hartley did not read out the final paragraph of his statement as he had reached his three minute time limit.

- Cllr. Swann – The Developer is giving something to the town, quite rightly there has been a building on the site which has been listed. We have 300 listed buildings. There has not been anything noted of significance during the previous planning history of the site. We need to support the demolition and leave the Grade II listed building to be incorporated into a new scheme. We will now be able to see the listed building whereas now it is hidden.
- Cllr. Rook – lived here since 1977, moved here from Rye where his family built gas works. He was used to industrial buildings. When he came to Cranbrook he lived near to the Cranbrook Engineering site which was a garage and car spraying centre. The Engineering Works buildings were ad hoc, filthy and not fit for purpose. When it closed down there were various schemes put forward to knock it down, build houses and shops and the site was then sold to Guy Johnson. He had looked at part of the site with the University of Kent for an apprentice scheme for bricklaying and the building trades but unfortunately there was only funding for computer courses. Guy Johnson wants to redevelop a blot on Cranbrook's landscape – it is a bit like the former Church Boiler House in Carriers Road – you either love it or you hate it. Like the Boiler House, if the Engineering Works are demolished it will not be missed.
- Cllr. Veitch – Architectural was not her forte, but she is swayed by the comments made by the DCMS – yes the site has history but the buildings themselves are less important. History can be preserved. Demolition will give greater flexibility to the design of the scheme.

The Chairman then closed the meeting to enable parishioners to speak.

1. Accept that the listed building is an important part of the complex. The site has had an interesting and varied history but progress happens. If the whole site is listed then it could be like the Providence Chapel and allowed to fall down. Get rid of the Cranbrook Engineering site. Record what is there on the site, take a photographic record during the demolition. Do not stand in the way of progress.
2. Lived in Cranbrook for 25 years, has a business in the town centre and lives in a listed building which she maintains. The Cranbrook Engineering site is a shocking eyesore and visitors comment on it. It is an ugly building and the Parish Council need to look at supporting regeneration and the prosperity of the town. Knock it down.
3. Worked in the Hospice in the Weald and could not comprehend where all this history relates to. Falling to bits, damp, covered in moss with holes in walls and infested with rats.
4. Cllr. Holden – went up the Church Tower and looked out across the town, there are architectural examples from the 14C, 15C through to the 21C. The history of the town moves on. Put in a new chapter in the history of Cranbrook. Something worthy of the 21C. The Local Listing is a red herring. The DCMS have only listed one part of the site. Demolition clearly outweighs the retention of these unhistorical buildings.
5. Life Member of the History Society. In 1954 he was Chairman of the Teen & Twenty Club which met in the Ball Rooms courtesy of Mr. Green, the owner. He had heard about ancient timbers, there are ancient timbers in half the buildings in Cranbrook if not Tudor bricks. Outsiders come into the town and appoint themselves as guardians of our heritage – they have not been here long enough to have a share in my heritage. The Providence Chapel which is falling down has already been mentioned. He went to Sunday school there, his parents were married in the Chapel by his Grandfather. It upsets him that the building has not been preserved due to the pews having to remain.
6. What about the Vestry Hall. Cllr. Veitch responded that this was not on the agenda for this evening.
7. We already have the Providence Chapel which is a preserved building which cannot be used. Do we want another site the same.
8. We need to be clear why the building needs to be demolished. The reason is important. Is it only to allow the building of a community centre on Wilkes Field? Cllr. Veitch clarified that it is to enable the redevelopment of Cranbrook Engineering to go ahead.
9. Eyesore in the middle of the town. Delays are driving down the economy of the town.
10. Read out the comments made by the Parish Council Planning Committee when the applications were considered when Members made a Neutral decision. What had changed? Cllr. Veitch stated that this was accurate at the time but the experts had now spoken and we have the opportunity to look at the overall planning view on whether the redevelopment would benefit the town.

The Chairman then re-opened the meeting for the vote to be taken. Cllr. Veitch then proposed that:-

Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Parish Council authorises the Chairman (or Chairman of the Planning Committee) to speak at the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Committee in support of the applications as above.

This was seconded by Cllr. Cook and all Members voted for the motion, except Cllrs. Hartley and Kemp who voted against. Therefore the motion was carried.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT:

145: The Chairman invited comments regarding the Supporting Document which had been circulated with the agenda and as filed with these Minutes.

- Cllr. Bunyan stated that the document is accurate.
- Cllr. Cook agreed with Cllr. Bunyan – the document is accurate.
- Cllr. Fairweather – had read and supported the document.
- Cllr. Fermor – had read and supported the document.
- Cllr. Franks – had read and supported the document.
- Cllr. Hartley – Wording could be improved. Clumsy and unprofessional. There was a perceived threat which may not be justified.
- Cllr. Holmes – Agree with the document.
- Cllr. Kemp – There remains no proof for the need to demolish. No further comment.
- Cllr. Rook – Had some concerns on the benefits for retention, he had tried to find uses for the buildings and the only recent use had been a charity shop. Cannot find any fault with the document.
- Cllr. Smith – Supported the well written document.
- Cllr. Swann – Excellent document.
- Cllr. Veitch – Guy Johnson will, irrespective of what happens to the Cranbrook Engineering Site, gift the land for the community centre.

The Chairman then closed the meeting to enable parishioners to comment on the document.

1. Job of the Parish Council to work for the people of Cranbrook. Why would you want to retain the buildings? There are two people sitting round the table that should not be on the Parish Council. Cllr. Fairweather stated that everyone should respect that there are alternative points of view. This was reiterated by a parishioner who agreed that there are some people who are passionate about heritage.

The Chairman then re-opened the meeting for the vote to be taken. Cllr. Veitch then proposed that:-

Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Parish Council approves the supporting document for submission to the Tunbridge Wells Planning Committee in advance of the meeting when the above applications are on the agenda.

This was seconded by Cllr. Rook and all Members voted for the motion, except Cllrs. Hartley and Kemp who voted against. Therefore the motion was carried.