

Grundisburgh & Culpho Parish Council
Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council held on Tuesday 22nd May, 2018
in Grundisburgh Village Hall

NOTICES had been posted according with regulations.

Present: - Messrs. S Barnett (in the Chair), C.Burch, G.Caryer, J.Dunnett, D.Higgins, P.Kendall, R.Youngman, Mrs.J.Bignell, Mrs.S.Grahn, Mrs.A.Willetts and approximately 150 members of the public.

1. Apologies for absence Mrs.M.Bean, Mr.J.Lapsley

2. To receive members declarations of interest. Mr.G.Caryer, Mr.P.Kendall, Mrs.J.Bignell and Mrs.A.Willetts as Trustees of Grundisburgh Village Hall declared a Local Non-Pecuniary Interest in matters concerning Grundisburgh Village Hall.

The Chairman noted that although the Parish Council was Custodian Trustee of the Village Hall and site it has no role in the Management of the Village Hall.

Chairman's Opening Statement The Chairman explained that the Meeting is an Extraordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held in public not a Public Meeting. There is a difference. A Public Meeting is a meeting where members of the public can participate throughout and a meeting held in public is where the public are welcome to attend and, as tonight, can and indeed are encouraged, to participate in an open forum, but the public part of the meeting will be closed by the Chairman and the Parish Council will go into normal session, and at this point though the public may stay they are not able to speak. This Extraordinary Meeting can only deal with the items on the agenda.

Having asked for a note of those wishing to speak in the Public Open Forum in the minutes before the meeting an initial list was in front of him. The Chairman asked residents not to repeat what others had said so that more issues could be raised / questions asked. Once the initial list was gone through if residents wish to speak please raise your hand and when recognised please state your name before asking your question or making your statement.

Councillors will not speak during the public open forum unless called by me to answer a question. Councillors will have their opportunity to speak in the Parish Council section at the end of the meeting.

The meeting is for the Council to consider the request made to us in general. What is our view, what questions need to be answered ? Do we as the Council accept that the request is worthy of progress, which would require a meaningful consultation complying with the requirements of the Public Works Loan Board. If that is agreed, to decide on the form of that consultation.

3. Public Open Forum – relating to item 4 It was proposed by Mr. Barnett seconded by Mrs.Willetts, to unanimous approval, that the formal meeting be suspended, and members of the public invited to address the meeting. The following issues were raised:

- The proposed new hall has the same floor space as the old hall. Was this good value for money?
- It had been claimed in a report that unreturned ballot papers would signify a YES vote. A councillor indicated they would not and the Chairman added that although requests had been made to treat uncast votes either way it was not likely. This meeting though was to consider and decide on any ballot.
- A plea was made that views and statements should be positive and everyone's concerns should be answered.
- It was suggested that Mr.Kendall and Mrs.Bignell should abstain from voting at this meeting.
- Every resident in the parishes should take part in a referendum.
- Why apply for a PWLB Loan before the results of grant applications are known ?
- Matched funding could be a useful component of raising funds.
- Lottery grants for community buildings are only available for economically deprived areas.
- Grant applications are complicated and time consuming.
- A Mortgage could be a vital component.

Public Open Forum – relating to item 4 cont...

- A start could be made using available funds which would then make it easier to obtain grants to finish the build.
- A PWLB Loan would bear the brunt of funding.
- Grants are available for specific items but would have no impact on the main costs.
- Local businesses will be involved.
- A PWLB Loan can be drawn down in tranches.
- Inflation over a lengthy period of time would drastically reduce the overall cost of a loan thus reducing the burden to future generations.
- The old hall could be sold to a builder who would be willing to delay demolition until the new hall is built.
- The counting at a ballot should not be carried out by electors from the parishes.
- Planning permission can be extended if the building of the new hall is not commenced within the statutory three-year period.
- Nothing has happened since outline planning permission was granted in 2014. Why ?
- Can the current hall be extended and a car park built on the new hall site ? A new planning application would need to be submitted

Most points were answered at the time and others during the following discussions

4. To discuss a proposal from the Trustees of Grundisburgh Village Hall that the Parish Council should apply to the Public Works Loan Board for a loan of £450,000 to partially fund the building of a new village hall and to agree the Parish Council’s response.

Mr.Youngman questioned why only one quotation for building the new hall had been obtained. No local builders had been asked to quote. The cost of £840,000 was excessive. The costs were out of control. A more realistic approach would be to set budget of £500,000 and stick to it. Local builders should be used.

Mr.Kendall refuted the claim that Hopkins Homes had offered to build the new hall. They expressed no interest in building the hall. The costings for the new hall were provided by professional quality surveyors and experience has shown them to be reliable. Local businesses have offered assistance.

Mr.Dunnnett said that when the Village Hall management was transferred to the new Charity in 1962 it was a very poor state. A huge fund-raising effort was made in the village, much of it matched funding, to restore the hall. This is a sad comparison to the efforts being made to build a new hall.

Mrs.Willetts objected to this criticism. She maintained a PWLB was the only way. It is cheap money and the principle is “those who use it pay for it”.

Mrs.Bignell said that many hours of work and lots of money is needed to keep the old hall in operation.

Mr.Dunnnett said that the Parish Council had no mandate to approve a loan with only four members having stood in a contested election. There should be a postal vote referendum.

Mr.Higgins said that only 20-25% of residents used the village hall and many resented the imposition of an increase in their council tax for a facility they did not use.

Mr.Kendall refuted Mr.Higgins figures and quoted a large number of potential uses for a new hall put forward by villagers.

Public Open Forum relating to Item 4. At this point in the meeting it was noticed that several members of the public wished to address the meeting. Mr. Youngman proposed seconded by Mr.Dunnnett, to unanimous approval, that the formal meeting be temporarily suspended, and members of the public invited to address the meeting. The following issues were raised:

- How can an increase in council tax be imposed on people who do not want it ?
- How much money has the Village Hall Management Committee available ?
- Should the project work to a budget ?
- Many young people in the village are “just managing” and an increase in council tax would be most unwelcome.
- 180 people returned questionnaires concerning their current and suggested future use of a new hall. Whether or not this was a representative sample was questioned.

Public Open Forum relating to Item 4 cont...

- If a Loan is approved this would double residents Council Tax Parish Charge and double the overall precept
- The new hall would be the most expensive Village Hall in Suffolk Coastal.
- How much will it cost to maintain the new hall ?
- The proposals for the new hall are based on an “Open Budget”. A simpler building such as Offton & Willisham would cut costs considerably.
- One building, comprising a Pavilion and Village Hall+ on the Playing Field was suggested. It was pointed out that this would be impossible because of Fields in Trust regulations. Confirmation was requested.

4. To discuss a proposal from the Trustees of Grundisburgh Village Hall that the Parish Council should apply to the Public Works Loan Board for a loan of £450,000 to partially fund the building of a new village hall and to agree the Parish Council’s response continued....

On return to the formal meeting Mr.Higgins proposed, seconded by Mr.Dunnett, that the Parish Council defer a decision to apply for a PWLB Loan to consider other options during a three-month period including using existing funds to start construction and to apply for grants to complete the building. This resolution was rejected 3 members voting for and 5 against.

Mrs.Willetts proposed seconded by Mr.Barnett that the Parish Council is mindful to ask the Public Works Loan Board for a loan of £450,000 repayable over 50 years on an annuity basis subject to the outcome of the consultation with all Households in the parishes of Grundisburgh and Culpho.

The Chairman indicated that he felt the best outcome was a high turnout of votes and that a postal vote was essential to get that higher turnout. He added that almost half of votes cast now are postal and the turnout of Council run referenda (Option 1 below) had been quite poor due to excluding postal and proxy voting. Given that he supported a Parish run ballot of households (Option 2 below).

Cllr Higgins asked the Chairman to explain the form of this so that the public could hear the option he had submitted. The Chairman summarised Option 2. This resolution was approved with 8 members voting for, 1 against and 1 member abstained.

Consultation Option 1

A Parish Poll/Referendum organised by Suffolk Coastal District Council would be on a polling day basis with no Postal or Proxy voting and the Polling Station open 4pm to 9pm (estimated cost £350-400). If extended all day the extra costs are unknown

The Parish Council would be responsible for informing residents of the poll as no polling cards would be issued by the District Council. This could be via a hand delivered letter as for the Annual Meeting (apart from the rural/Culpho copies which would be posted).

There are possible timing issues which would need to be resolved with this option. There are clashes between the Loan Board requiring a month’s consultation for loans and where the government specify Referenda of this form are used if County or District Councils wish to increase Council Tax above a threshold. The law covers all Councils but subject to an annual decision by the government has so far excluded Parish Councils.

Consultation Option 2

A ballot organised by the Parish Council would be postal but could include a facility to hand deliver at a village location. An independent location for receipt of ballots is possible (courtesy of the St.Mary’s Church). Initial consideration of how to do this entails numbered and coloured ballot papers delivered in sealed envelopes to houses to prevent any fraud and use of a similar process as the District Council for any counting of votes with nominated representatives of opposing sides present as observers at an otherwise closed venue. This option would have to be organised by a paid employee of the Parish Council and an external assistant or a significant extra hours allocated for our Clerk. A group of volunteers unconnected with either pro or anti campaigning would be needed to do some of the legwork.

The Chairman proposed, seconded by Mrs.Willetts, to unanimous approval, that a budget of £1,000 be agreed to fund the ballot including any extra staff requirements.

Consultation Option 2 cont...

Mrs. Willetts recommended that the Parish Council should appoint an odd numbered working group of 5 or 7 with a budget of up to £1000 to organise and carry out the consultation with the village. This would include making sure what they proposed met with Public Works Loan Board guide lines. The recommendations from the working group as to how the consultation will take place to be approved by Parish Council.

The Chairman proposed, and it was agreed that the Parish Council should not take a view as a corporate body but should supply factual information to residents. Members could express their own opinions as individuals but not as parish councillors.