

**MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL  
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, VESTRY HALL, CRANBROOK  
ON THURSDAY 23<sup>rd</sup> FEBRUARY 2017**

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.

No interests were registered.

PRESENT: Cllr. Veitch (in the Chair) Cllrs, Bunyan, Clifford, Cook, Fairweather, Fermor, Goodchild, Hall, Kemp, Smith, Swann and Warne. Borough Cllrs. Dawlings and Holden.

APOLOGIES: Cllrs. Hartley and Holmes. Borough Cllr. Hannam.

233: Community Centre – The Way Forward.  
The Chairman updated Members on the current status.

Planning permission has been achieved which should not be underestimated. The situation with the Rights of Access through the Regal Car Park to Wilkes Field was being resolved. There have been numerous conversations between the Co-Op, TWBC and David Rivers, the Project Manager working on behalf of Guy Johnson. There was a meeting yesterday at which the Co-Op indicated that they would give their consent to access, however the written formal agreement may take a few months to complete.

Once that has been received we could look at the land transfer contract. The Chairman advised that she was in receipt of a draft copy, although had not put this before councillors because several amendments were required. A major clause in the contract is the time limit on the build start before handback of land, which she was confident could be removed.

The Chairman reported on the meeting she had attended with Cllr. Bunyan and the KCC library team including Mike Hill - Cabinet Member for Community Services and James Pearson - Head of Library, Registration and Archive, regarding their possible inclusion in the new Community Centre. Although content with their current provision they are under pressure to release capital and reduce ongoing costs. They gave the impression they were keen to come into the building but were not prepared to commit until we have a design to which we are committed.

The Chairman gave her view:

- Need – firmly of the belief that the community needs these extra facilities. Carole Wanless was also of that opinion, as stated in her report.
- Site – firmly of the belief that Wilkes Field is the best, most central site, and available now, we should not let it slip away.
- Cost of project – 2 separate estimates – we will not know the true cost until we get quotes from construction companies.
- £4m is too much. We cannot afford it. Even if a donor came forward, there would still be residual feeling that it was too big a project for the PC to undertake.

- Does not believe that size is the issue, 1174 sq metres is less than was stated in the original brief.
- She likes the design enormously and there was very little in the architects brief that the PC approved that she would want taken out.
- She had always said that the important milestone was the achievement of the planning permission, and that we would have to have a sanity check afterwards.
- She had spoken to the Architect and he was happy to come and discuss design.
- We had said right from the beginning that we would probably proceed with a design and build option from this stage onwards, utilising the expertise of construction companies. Architect can still be involved.
- Fund raising can start, so we need to establish a Fund Raising Appeals Committee
- Need a Project Steering Board to take project forward.
- We must proceed, albeit with a realistic approach.

The Chairman asked for the views of Councillors, the responses were as follows:

**Cllr. Fermor** – We have to produce a building for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and beyond. She would love to keep the roundel if possible as it is an iconic part of the design and in keeping with Cranbrook. She raised concerns regarding parking but was wholly in support of the proposed site but a less expensive scheme.

**Cllr. Hall** – Is a redesign proposed, with a smaller building? Is the footprint that the building will occupy the same? If the price is to be reduced you will need to remove the most expensive part, which is the roundel. The location of the building is making it extremely costly, would Guy Johnson not consider swapping it around and giving us the flatter part of the site?

**Response** - The current position abuts land we look over and own, so is ideal in that respect.

**Cllr. Fairweather** – Stated confusion over the two costings, one for £3m the other for £4m. He questioned how a feasibility study could be commissioned without a true costing. In London, some projects are funded by eatery concessions or retail units, has this been considered, as it could generate significant funding?

**Response** – Both sets of construction figures were provided by Quantity Surveyors but construction companies would be able to give a more accurate cost, what we have are educated estimates for the whole project. The idea of a café on the top floor had been discounted previously due to the height restrictions on the building and conditions in the Deed of Easement between TWBC and the Co-Op.

**Cllr. Swann** – There is definitely a need but we have let ourselves down on the consultation process, we need to do better. He likes the roundel but is unsure if it can be kept. The interior of the design is complex and could be simplified to save cost. We need a community centre not a village hall.

**Cllr. Kemp** – Modularity is the key word, to put this amount into a project the design needs to be future proof. He believes there is a need, but it has to be flexible for us now but with the ability to be extended for future needs. The original briefs have the requirement of a space for 300 people, this is the core element for the design. The current design got us through the planning stage but we need to go back and look at the core functions of the building, set a budget, aim for £2m but could hopefully achieve £2.5m and design something that we can afford. You need vision and a good concept.

**Cllr. Cook** – We do need a community centre, perhaps we need to revisit who expressed a need for space, to modify the design, other needs could have arisen since this design was agreed? Even if we go for modular development, all the groundwork would need to be completed initially.

**Response** – One thing that came out of the discussions with the team from KCC, was that the Adult Social Services may be prepared to become an anchor tenant, the current design has everything they need.

**Cllr. Warne** – We are poised at the ideal time to collate all the evidence previously gathered, this can be combined with the consultation undertaken for the NDP.

**Cllr. Bunyan** – We have the basic footprint, we just need to package it differently.

**Cllr. Clifford** – Sought clarification on access for the site, was it through the car park, because until that is resolved we have nothing. He also raised concerns on how we would raise sufficient funds, especially when there are fundraising efforts being made for other projects in Cranbrook. How are we going to sell the project, what will anyone offering a donation get in return? As Chairman of the Burials & Properties he wants to be assured that the Vestry Hall will continue being a community asset. Maybe there is a scheme that can take advantage of that building too?

**Response** – The access is through the car park for the Wilkes Field part of the development but not for the Cranbrook Engineering site, that has an alternative access. It may be possible to look at a small loan to cover what we cannot raise, there may be some sort of corporate sponsorship, these questions will have to be looked at by the Fundraising Committee when it is established. The current Parish Council has no intention of losing the Vestry Hall, it is much loved and it is expected that it will continue being used as a community facility. There may be a commercial opportunity for the Weald Information Centre which could contribute to the maintenance costs of the Vestry Hall.

**Cllr. Goodchild** – The need for the Community Centre is unquestioned, more so with the prospect of additional housing. Surely we should be thinking it needs to be bigger not smaller. The current site will help to join the two sides of the Town together. He remained supportive of a project steering group and a fundraising committee and believes that the greatest power in raising money is ‘vision’.

**Borough Cllr. Holden** - Is in support of what the Parish Council are doing and would continue to talk to KCC to encourage them to become tenants of the building. He felt it appropriate for the community to contribute through the precept if necessary but preferably without the need to raise it.

**Borough Cllr. Dawlings** - Applauds the Parish Council in finding a way forward, £4m is a lot of money so would like to see it achieved for less but firmly believes it is the right site.

The Chairman closed the meeting to allow Members of the Public to speak. Several comments were made regarding the cost of the project.

The Chairman reopened the meeting and proposed that Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Council establish a Project Steering Board to include Members of the Community, this was seconded by Cllr. Cook and agreed unanimously.

It was agreed that the Chairman devise the Terms of Reference and that the Project Steering Board should be given the mandate to consider alternative designs. She would bring those and a list of suggested names of Committee Members to the March Full Council for approval.

Cllr. Warne requested that the findings from the NDP are fed into the Steering Board to ensure they are discussing what people want in respect of a Community Centre.

Members felt that the establishment of a Fundraising Appeals Committee should wait until a revised design was approved.