

Eastling Parish Council

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held in Eastling Village Hall on 15 February 2024

Present: Cllr Julia Bailey (Chairman), Cllr Annie Adams, Cllr Caroline Gilbert, Cllr Barrie Neaves and Cllr John Payne; and Mrs Wendy Licence (Clerk).

Also present were twenty-three members of the public.

Cllr Bailey welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Apologies

All Members were present.

2. Declarations of interest

None were declared.

Cllr Bailey reported that there will be a Working Party to look into the feasibility for a Village Green. The landlady of The Carpenters Arms had approached the Belmont estate for an option to lease the land. The Trustees are prepared to lease the land to the village but only via the Parish Council and not an individual to ensure continuity. There has to be an agreement in the village for this project. Any lease would have to be in the name of the Parish Council who would be responsible for the land and there would be strict conditions for the use of the area. Cllr Adams said that when there is a clear plan which sets out in detail what is being proposed, a consultation will be launched.

The Clerk reported that the proposed rent of £1,000 per annum would, at current figures, add £6.76 to the precept for a Band D property, an increase of 19.31%. Cllr Adams said that the proposed rental figure is still subject to negotiation.

3. Public Time

The meeting was adjourned for the Public Time

- Are you looking at fundraising?

Cllr Bailey said there would be a five or ten year lease so it would be an ongoing commitment.

- The village auctions regularly raise £800 and sometimes £1,000.

Cllr Bailey said the benefit would be for the whole village and funds from individuals are not a way to proceed with a community project.

- Could part of the land be rented back to the pub for seating?

Cllr Bailey said it would be all or nothing.

- Why can't the pub lease the land so it would be no cost to the village?

Cllr Bailey said Belmont have offered it to the Parish Council first and might not offer it to anyone else. Information will be on the WhatsApp group.

- There has been requests not to allow discussion regarding the Village Green on WhatsApp, and that the group should not be concerned with politics.

Cllr Bailey said the method of voting will be considered by the Working Party.

Cllr Neaves said the area could be community grassland and wild meadows with hedging along the church path to create a buffer and help wildlife and keep the area separate from the agricultural land.

Cllr Gilbert said that as the lease would be a short-term one it is important to keep the costs low. Belmont does not want the area to become a nuisance to neighbours.

Cllr Bailey said there could be break clauses in the lease.

Cllr Payne said the precept has been set to 2024-25 and nothing can be done for a year. It would not be right to set the precept for people who do not want a Village Green. The Council should try to buy the land, there are grants available and it could be a Coronation Meadow.

- Coronation Meadow- they provide financial and technical skills for this. There could be a Design Committee of people who have expertise

Cllr Bailey said the need for an emergency meeting was questioned, the purpose of this meeting is to speed up the process for a consultation.

- How can the Council consult without all the facts? The Parish Council might be in a difficult position if a decision is made without knowing all the facts and figures. Residents need to know the facts and figures before voting on the consultation.

Cllr Bailey said the consultation will take several months as the Working Group will have to ascertain the information. The consultation would then be a simple yes/ no vote.

- A village green would be something for future generations, it would be a legacy.

Cllr Bailey said that this is why the Council would like to buy the land and we did ask Belmont.

Cllr Adams said that if considering purchasing the area it could scupper the rental option and the Council would not be able to proceed with renting. The Working Group would have to see if this is realistic and explore this option as quickly as it could. Belmont has only given the rental option.

- Is there a reason why this has to be done quickly?

- Everyone has seen the amount of development in the nearby villages of Lenham, Harrietsham, Faversham and Charing. If Belmont is happy to lease the land it shows it is not important to them. A Village Green is the only way to stop development. Does a leased Village Green have the same exemption as an owned Village Green? Belmont might think in the future that it would be profitable to develop the land. A football pitch would not be feasible as the ground is full of flints; there could be issues with rubbish, dog fouling and a beer garden.

- Belmont would put clauses in the lease to help prevent issues.

Cllr Adams said that although the term Village Green is being used, the land would be classified as a community greenspace if it was rented not a village green.

- Many years ago, Belmont offered to give the land to the village, there may be scope for negotiation.

- Belmont is now run by a Trust and they have to be financially responsible.

Cllr Bailey said that when there was an offer of the land being gifted there was a condition attached that there had to be a cricket team. At the time there was concern following recent violence in the village and that any open space would be vulnerable. With regards to the timescale, we need to move quickly on this for the sake of the pub. The Council did ask to purchase the land but we have only been given an option for a lease.

- The scheme must be as simple as possible, wildflower meadows are difficult to establish and costly, and they need lots of maintenance. A green field is simple and the costs are low. The more complicated the project the more difficult it will be to get off the ground.

- Most residents are happy with a green space but a beer garden would be a concern.

Cllr Bailey said the pub has suggested having a few tables. The Parish Council would have the right of veto.

- Who will be on the Working Group?

Cllr Bailey said it will be Cllr Adams, because of her links with Swale Borough Council; Cllr Payne, for his financial expertise; Cllr Neaves, because of his knowledge of Village Green applications; Mr Jimmy West, for his local knowledge; and Ms Sarah Neaves, the pub landlady for her knowledge. Care would be taken regarding members' pecuniary interests. The Parish Council will make any decisions.

- If we take the green on, we would have to police it; if the pub takes it on it would be their responsibility.

- This must be carefully thought out. There are currently problems with parking on the junction and this is an urgent matter, could there be parking on the land?

Cllr Bailey said a car park would not be permitted by Belmont. The landlady's interest is in the view looking out from the pub and she would like tables and chairs there.

- There would need to be tight rules if the pub has an area.

- The previous objections need to be considered.

Cllr Bailey thanked everyone for their comments.

The meeting was reconvened.

4. To consider a Consultation for a Village Green for Eastling

Cllr Bailey **PROPOSED** that there be a consultation to be completed within six-months:
AGREED UNANIMOUSLY.

ACTION: Clerk to inform the agents that the Council will conduct a full consultation.

5. Any Other Urgent Business

Cllr Bailey reported that there is an opportunity for the village to have a free framed portrait of King Charles III.

Cllr Bailey thanked everyone for attending and for their comments. A separate WhatsApp Group may be established for the Village Green project.

Date of next Meeting: 18 March 2024

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 7.20pm.

Signed as a true record of the meeting

Chairman

Date: 18 March 2024