

Minutes

The Minutes of a Special Meeting of Ampfield Parish Council held in St Mark's Room, Ampfield on Thursday, 27th February 2014 starting at 7pm.

PRESENT: Miss M.I. Rothwell (Chairman) – Presiding
Mr E. Butcher, Mr A. Clark, Mr P. Edwards,
Mr J.A. Jones, Mr B.W. Nanson, Mr G.C.A.Roads,
Mr D. Stevens

2 members of the public were also in attendance.

2076 Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Mr Martin Hatley who had other commitments.

2077 Declarations of Interest

No pecuniary, or code of conduct, interests were declared by Councillors.

2078 Chairman's remarks

Miss Rothwell welcomed everyone to this special meeting of Ampfield Parish Council which had been convened to discuss the future of Ampfield Village Hall. She explained that the freehold of the Village Hall was not owned by Ampfield Parish Council but by Hampshire Women's Institute. The Women's Institute no longer had an active presence in Ampfield. The Hall was run by a Management Committee under charitable status. The Village Hall Management Committee held the property under a long lease of nearly 100 years. As part of the proposed housing development at Morleys Lane, alongside which the Village Hall was situated, the Parish Council would assume responsibility for the new green spaces, Hall carpark and allotments.

The Chairman, together with the Chairs of the Finance and Planning Committees, had had informal talks with the Women's Institute about the future of the Hall and the possible purchase of its freehold by the Parish Council. It was envisaged that the Hall's charitable status would continue and that it would remain a community asset.

2079 Process to be followed

A report about the future of the Hall had been circulated to Council prior to the meeting, and copies were available to members of the public in attendance. Miss

Rothwell explained that Council would consider the report and its recommendations. The meeting would then be suspended to allow members of the public to speak after which a vote would be taken by Council. Should Council be in favour, in principle, of the purchase of the Hall they would go into closed session to discuss finance and related issues in which case the public would be asked to leave. Council would then write to the Women's Institute setting out its position and asking them to discuss any proposals made at their next Trustees' meeting on 10th March 2014.

2080 Future of Ampfield Village Hall

Miss Rothwell advised the meeting that there had been concerns about the performance and viability of the Village Hall and its Management Committee. Little of any consequence had been undertaken by the Committee in the last 18 months or so and financial arrangements were in need of attention. The Women's Institute had expressed concern about the situation and that the Management Committee might be in breach of their lease.

Many parish councils of similar size owned their village hall for the benefit of the community. Ownership of the freehold by the Parish Council would permit enhancement and development of the building should it be desired. Any monies spent on improvements to the Hall would be enhanced by the Parish Council's ability to recover 20% VAT. The Section 106 agreement for the proposed development at Morleys Lane would include a provision for the Hall to be improved. This would be very welcome but the fact remained that a considerable amount of money would thus be spent on an asset that did not belong to the community. Ownership of the new Hall carpark, green open spaces and allotments at Morleys, which would be adjacent to the Hall, would come under the Parish Council. It would, therefore, seem a good fit for the whole area to come under Council management. It was considered very important that the future of the Hall be safeguarded as a community asset. Risks associated with any malfunction of the Management Committee would be mitigated if the freehold was owned by the Parish Council.

2081 Question and Answer Session

The meeting was suspended at 7.10pm and members of the public invited to speak. In response to questions it was confirmed that if the Women's Institute would not sell the Hall then there was nothing else the Parish Council could realistically do to help preserve its future as a community asset. It was confirmed that the Hall used to be much busier in the evenings than it was now. The need to strengthen the Management Committee was raised. It was noted that, at the moment, the Parish Council and the Village Hall were entirely separate entities. The Parish Council hired the Hall for its meetings and, as a "user" was, under the lease, entitled to be represented on the Management Committee. Miss Rothwell's presence on the Village Hall Management Committee was on this basis. It was

recognised that a change of ownership of itself would not affect the lease or the fact that the Management Committee were “sitting tenants”. However, if problems continued with the management of the Hall, the Parish Council, as owners of the freehold and lessors, would be in a better position to safeguard its future. The meeting resumed at 7.15pm.

2082 Voting on options

Miss Rothwell reviewed the report’s options and recommendations and asked Councillors to vote on the proposal that Ampfield Parish Council should pursue the purchase of the freehold of the Village Hall. Council voted unanimously to pursue such a purchase. It was also agreed that Ampfield Parish Council should write to the Hampshire Women’s Institute confirming their interest in the freehold purchase and their willingness to cover some of the Women’s Institute’s reasonable legal costs, and giving an indicative offer price. It was also agreed that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council be authorised to take forward negotiations on a purchase, up to a limit set by Council.

Council asked members of the public to leave at 7.20pm and went into closed session.

Note: paragraphs 2083 & 2084 are commercial in confidence.

2085 Date of the Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Council would be held on Monday, 10th March 2014 in the Village Hall, Ampfield starting at 7.00pm

2086 Closure

The meeting closed at 8.10pm.

Chairman.....

Date.....