

Bredgar Parish Council
Opportunity to buy the Freehold of
Bredgar Recreation Ground
Public Meeting Wednesday 15th April 2015

Present: Chairman Cllr. Mr. B. Willis, Vice Chairman Cllr. Mrs. P. Twaites, Cllr. Mr. B. Clarke, Cllr. Mrs. S. Hickman, Cllr. Mr. G. Kite, Cllr. Mr. D. Priestley and Cllr. Mr. M. Pullen.

Also Present: KCC Cllr. Mike Baldock.

Clerk: Mrs. T. Hudson.

Chairman Cllr. Willis welcomed 54 parishioners to the meeting and thanked them for their interest in this opportunity.

Superfast Broadband

The meeting began with an update from Cllr. Clarke on the current situation regarding BT bringing Superfast Broadband to Bredgar.

Over the last three years the Parish Council (PC) has been campaigning to bring Superfast Broadband to Bredgar under the KCC County plan. Approximately 18 months ago, Bredgar was confirmed as being included in the plan in phase three. This was expected to be delivered between last October to March but unfortunately did not go to plan due to a problem with getting fibre to the cabinet by the Church. A new cabinet is to be placed at the school car park opposite the Church with fibre coming up from Sittingbourne. This will deliver Superfast Broadband to the majority of residents in the centre of the village; the speed will vary according to distance from the cabinet. At present information from BT indicates that only 'standard' broadband will be available in the outlying areas of the village, such as Hawks Hill Lane. The PC will continue to campaign and it is hoped that Superfast broadband will be delivered to the majority of properties by June 2015.

Bredgar Recreation Ground

Chairman Cllr. Willis presented the background to recent developments in relation to the recreation ground, and the Parish Council's recommendations in respect of acquisition of the freehold.

History

The PC has rented the Recreation Ground since 1949 on the basis of an annual Tenancy Agreement or a Lease. The land has also been home to the Bredgar Cricket Team for some 75 years; it was used for many years for the widely acclaimed Bredgar Fete, for Bonfire Nights and from time to time for Village School events, indeed the school will be using the recreation ground for their sports day this year due to building work being carried out at the school.

Valuation

Following the death of the owner of the recreation ground, Mr. Gerald Osmer, the ownership passed to Mrs. Osmer who has agreed to offer the freehold to Bredgar Parish Council.

The PC had been accruing funds for some time for either the purchase of the site or for the removal of the play equipment and pavilion in the event of the land passing to a different owner. With the current Lease coming to an end, the PC has been in negotiation with Mrs. Osmer to agree a price for the freehold of the land. In March, the PC resolved to accept an asking price of £40 000. The PC had a valuation from Page & Wells of £25 000 based on existing use. Mrs.

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Osmer has been exceedingly generous in considerably dropping her asking price from that suggested by her professional agents.

Funding

The PC explored the possibility of setting up a Charitable Trust but discovered that because the PC is a tax raising authority, funding would not be forthcoming. It would also mean that a third party trust would need to be set up which would have taken the land out of the direct control of the PC and parishioners.

Therefore the PC decided to concentrate on a direct purchase.

It transpired that the only possibility of a Government grant was Sports England but their programme required a ten-year lease; and that facilities were multi sport, multi pitch and multi seasonal. Without these criteria they advised the project would be low priority.

The PC decided not to pursue that route.

This decision led to the funding proposal established in four stages:

Stage 1

BPC reserves allocated	£17000
*Secured grants	£7000
Bredgar Cricket Club	£2000
**Bredgar W Railway	£2500
<u>Total</u>	<u>£28500</u>

Stage 2

Parish Fund Raising £7500

Stage 3 (apply May 2015)

Grant to be secured £7000

Stage 4 (safety net) – only required to the extent of any shortfall in stages 2 and/or 3

10-year loan value to be determined £10000

(Conveyancing, legal costs disbursements - £3000)

*£5000 grant from Cllr. Baldock, 2x Grants of £1000 each from other councillors.

** Donation from Bredgar Wormshill Railway.

Donations may be given to the Chairman or Clerk and will remain anonymous.

If £43000 is not achieved from grants and donations, two sources of loan have been explored:

- Public Works Loan Board, (central government), interest rate currently in the region of 2.3%, over 10 years
- SBC loan, offered at a matching interest rate

The loan, if required, would be repaid using the current £700 rent to Mrs. Osmer and rental income from the Cricket Club of £400 per annum.

Question:

The figures given add up to £53000?

Stage 4 will only be used as a safety net if the funds are not realised by grants and donations.

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Question:

What is the time scale?

Stage 3 application will be submitted on 5th May with evaluation throughout June and a decision by July. If a loan is required it can be realised within 5 weeks and once applied, the PC has a year to decide how much of the £10000 to draw down on.

Question:

Once purchased, what stops future Parish Councils from deciding to sell the land?

The PC has obtained an LDC recently, which is a formal planning permission for the use of the land. This doesn't stop a developer applying for permission to build on the land, however, the weight of public opinion and SBC would not look favourably on it. The PC will also ensure any future lease will have a suitable clause to prevent this.

Question:

In the worst-case scenario, how will the loan be paid off?

The current rent to Mrs. Osmer of £700, and the current lease payment from the Cricket Club of £175 which will be raised to £400 per annum will be used to pay a loan repayment of £1100/£1200.

The Cricket Club lease will be renegotiated with a minimum period.

Question:

Is 2.3% a fixed interest rate?

Yes.

SBC is the favourable loan as early repayment can be negotiated with no penalty.

Question:

If parishioners were to make further donations over time would the loan company accept irregular payments?

It would probably not accept small payments but the PC would accept payments at any time towards the costs.

Question:

With their own pavilion, if the Cricket Club failed who would pay for the removal of the building?

Subject to the new lease, if the Cricket Club folded the PC would probably own the structure.

Question:

Does the Parish constitution have any provision over who can use the recreation ground?

A freehold will be no different to leasehold in that respect. Custom and practice has established use, as well as the LDC document, which defines the uses that can take place. Historically, unauthorised use has not been a problem.

Question:

Will parishioners be kept informed of the running total, perhaps a poster in the Post Office?

This can be arranged.

Question:

Can cash donations be made?

This will not be a problem.

Comment:

The basic structure of the Village Hall was built from donations from parishioners in this way. When the old village hall burnt down the insurance was insufficient for rebuild, it took 5 or 6 years but was eventually rebuilt without any debt.

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Comment

The donation of £2000 from the Cricket Club will be in two tranches over two years due to current expenditure of new equipment.

Comment

The Cricket Club welcomes the opportunity to support this project, as it is keen to continue playing cricket at the recreation ground. This purchase of the land allows the cricket club to apply for a grant to build a cricket pavilion.

The meeting concluded at 8.30pm.