

Minutes of an Extra Ordinary Meeting of Bradfield Parish Council held on

Tuesday 27th September 2022 at 7.30pm in St. Peter's Church Hall, Bradfield Southend.

Present: Cllr. A. House (Chairman)
Cllr. M. Ashbrook
Cllr. R. Balsdon
Cllr. K. Dearing
Cllr. P. Henwood
Cllr. P. Isherwood
Cllr. T. Wale
Cllr. R. Wyatt
District Cllr. R. MacKinnon
Mrs. H. Pratt (Clerk)

There were 19 members of the public in attendance.

The meeting was opened by Cllr. House and as a mark of respect in memory of our late Queen Elizabeth II, all able, stood for a minute's silence.

99. **Apologies.**

Apologies of absence were received from Cllr. S. O'Reilly.

100. **Declarations of Interest.**

Having discovered that some Declarations of Interest predated the last election, the Clerk circulated declaration of interest forms to all councillors for completion before the next meeting.

101. **Public Forum.**

Emails received from two members of the public prior to the meeting, raising concern about the village hall project were circulated to all councillors ahead of the meeting. A show of hands from members of the public indicated that approximately 75% were supporters of the current plans for a new village hall and 25% against.

101.1 **Points made by parishioners.**

Supporters made the following points:

- Bradfield, historically, has a good record of fundraising having raised funds to build the original hall in 1951, to develop St. Peter's church in 1965, to make improvements to St. Andrew's church in 1967 and for the Jubilee playground in 1977.
- In the Parish Plan questionnaire, 66% of respondents wanted a new hall.
- Planning permission has been granted for a new hall and for a safer playground.
- Despite three COVID lockdowns, approximately 33% of the funds required have been raised.
- Bradfield has grown, in 1951, there were only 1,000 residents, today there are closer to 10,000. Many of these residents will use the hall, therefore providing revenue to pay for the hall and outdoor facilities.
- It has taken 18 years to reach the current position. During this time the condition of the existing hall has deteriorated. In particular, the kitchen, toilet facilities and electrics do not meet with modern requirements.
- If another group was to take over the development, the community would have to wait a long time for them to make this much progress.

- Bradfield Village Hall has not kept up with most other village halls in terms of facilities. Most parishioners have modernised their homes, how can they be expected to use a facility that hasn't kept up?
- Parents dropping off/collecting children for school need safe parking provision.

No comments were made by those against the proposal.

102. **To consider the reasons why BPC cannot support the Bradfield Village Hall Management Committee (BVHMC) Development proposals.**

This discussion is to formalise a list of concerns which BPC has about the village hall development project. Many councillors and parishioners have concerns about the development project, but all understand that a new village hall is required.

WBC has given planning approval for the new hall so concerns relating to changes in the design/location can't be reasons for non-support.

Most councillors have individually submitted a list of their reasons for non-support of the project to the clerk, these have been anonymised, broadly grouped, and circulated to all councillors. One group of concerns related to the personnel involved in the project and were not discussed. Comments made during the public session were considered in the discussions and reasoning for the response to the BVHMC letter.

Reasons for non-support were grouped into the following areas:

102.1 **Funding.**

The following concerns were raised:

- Costs are increasing and the Business Plan of March 2022 is fast becoming out of date.
- The cost of the project is constantly increasing (for economic reasons) and there is concern that the required funds cannot be raised.
- The last estimated cost of the project was £2,200,000, but since that time, building costs have significantly increased, and therefore BPC's support would be like writing a blank cheque.

It was noted that BPC are not paying for the project or responsible for it and as such it is not BPC's problem if there are insufficient funds. BVHMC has gone out to pretend to get a better estimate of the cost of the project and some idea of the short fall.

Some grants being applied for are dependent upon community support for the project and the parish council is a key component of the community. If BPC were to support the project, it may be possible to raise the required funds, however if BPC doesn't support the project sufficient funds are very unlikely to be raised.

102.2 **Public Support.**

Some concern was raised by councillors about the level of public support; however, this was difficult to gauge from the meeting. It was noted that any potential increase in precept to pay for any potential loan could only happen after a referendum.

102.3 **Location and Size.**

The location and size of the hall proposed in the project have already been approved by WBC. As such BPC cannot use these issues as reasons for non-support of the project.

102.4 **Transparency and Openness.**

Various concerns were expressed by councillors about how open and honest some financial statements have been. Questions were asked about whether the BVHMC are acting within the Charity Governance Code for Openness and Accountability by refusing to publish some information or discuss issues which do not coincide with the views of the committee. The lack of openness leads to a lack of confidence and an increasing blame game situation. Comments made to BPC representatives on the BVHMC indicating that they cannot share information with BPC add to these concerns. Minutes of BVHMC are not available in the public domain as they contain financially sensitive information.

A representative of BVHMC responded that the issue of openness and transparency would be addressed.

102.5 Actions resulting from the meeting.

The Clerk will send a letter to BVHMC (a copy of which will be placed on the website) raising the issues of transparency/openness and funding.

Once estimated costs are available, a discussion can be held between BVHMC and BPC to better understand the likelihood of a loan being required.

103. Planning Applications

103.1 Planning Applications on which BPC has been consulted by WBC:

103.1.1 **22/01622/FUL – Land at Heath Road.**

An artificial cricket pitch which is 30m x 2.74m.

It was agreed that BPC **objects** to this application on the grounds that if an artificial cricket pitch is developed in the shown location, it will not be possible for football matches to be held on this piece of ground. Concern was also expressed that the outfield extends over the footpath and about full consultation with the owners of the land.

104. **The meeting concluded at 9pm.**

Next meetings: Tuesday 4th October 2022 at 7.30pm in St. Peter's Church