

## **BEARPARK PARISH COUNCIL**

At a **Special Meeting** of **Bearpark Parish Council** held on **Wednesday 10 January 2018 at 7.00 p.m.**

**Present:**

**Councillor M Wright** in the Chair

Councillors M Chard, E Hull, R Kemp, J Peart, E Wilding, M Wilson and M Wright.

### **17/93 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N Anderson and T Wilson.

### **17/94 BEARPARK COMMUNITY CENTRE – REQUEST FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

The parish council considered a report provided by Dr I Leslie on Bearpark Community Centre and a request for financial support. In his report, Dr Leslie explained the pricing structure and annual costs of the centre, together with a review that of the pricing structure that had been carried out. Also provided was a forecast for 2017 and expectation for 2018 & 2019, the operating forecast and net liability together with an explanation of some of the issues the centre had been experiencing and the overall viability of the centre. Details of a new management structure were outlined. This new structure would operate on a two-level basis. Firstly, a day to day operational management structure, comprising key volunteers and interested users and secondly, an oversight group (the trustees) who would ensure proper governance and meet with the operational team, once a quarter, to ensure plans, procedures and budgets were in good health. This would ensure openness and transparency and feedback on how things are going and all such discussions would lead to a more productive partnership and ensure a healthy relationship moving forward.

The oversight group would comprise 4-5 people. One member of the parish council would become an active trustee. Adequate systems would be in place to provide support and guidance to the management team. The trustees would meet with the parish council, formally, twice yearly to review investments, accounts, plans.

Without Parish Council support, the Community Association was not currently viable. However, with support for 2017 and 2018, it was projected that with the new fee structure and fee increases and with growth in centre usage, the centre will be operationally self-sufficient by 2019.

However, this could only be achieved if:-

- a) a strong, action focussed, management structure was in place.
- b) the Community Centre had continued support, from the Parish Council, for capital projects to improve facilities. Improved facilities will attract new users.
- c) the community association and parish council needed to develop stronger, trust based relationships

Following queries from Councillor, Dr Leslie reported that if the parish council could not commit to offering £3,000 for 2017, the Community Association would go into its overdraft and into 2018/19 with £7.8k of debt and there would be little appetite to continue given the financial circumstances.

Dr Leslie went on to talk about pricing and explained that the rates charged to groups needed to be standardised and the association had agreed to impose a 25% increase with immediate effect and a further 25% in July. This meant that user groups were being subjected to a 50% increase in their fees. Indeed, in some cases, some groups would be experiencing more than a 50% increase due to the amount they were paying in the first instance.

In terms of the potential future vision, the Council were informed that based on the knowledge of likely participation the projected income for 2018/19 would be £22k. As with any forecast, the figure could increase or decrease. Costs would also increase into 2018/19 due to the desire to make the centre an attractive proposition. This would mean that cleaning and caretaking would need to be reviewed and changed resulting in an increase in staffing costs. Administration would also increase as it had been recognised that proper, professional help and assistance would be required. A website would be required to assist with the promotion of the centre which would need to be managed.

There would likely to be an increase in energy costs, although it was hoped that the efficiency of the new boiler may offset some of those costs. By 2019 the full effect of the revised pricing structure would be reflected in the income and it was hoped that new user groups would be attracted to the centre.

Dr Leslie also informed the Council that as part of the measures to improve attractiveness of the centre, it was proposed to improve signage, decoration and ensure that a 'deep clean' took place to rid the centre of the clutter that had accumulated over a period of time.

Councillor M Chard explained that she was heartened to hear of the plans for the future and the hard work that had culminated in the report. Councillor Chard explained the importance of the structure and the importance of the trustees and felt that the suggested model appeared to be well thought out.

Councillor L Hull explained that her personal view as a parish councillor would be to support the centre, should that be the wish of the Council. However, Councillor L Hull was extremely concerned at the lack of money that had been put into the centre since 2009 for works which Durham County Council should have been responsible for.

Councillor R Kemp explained that she would be inclined to support the centre, providing that resources were available from the Parish Council. Councillor Kemp asked for clarification on the fees payable by the Artists Cooperative, given that they occupied a studio at the centre. Dr Leslie informed the Council that a fee was being charged for both the hire of the studio and that another rate was also applied for the hire of room(s) for their sessions.

Councillor E Wilding explained that she was pleased to see that the fees of charges had been reviewed and made more realistic. It was also good to see that comparative data had been gleaned from other similar areas in Durham. Councillor Wilding queried how the increase in fees had been received by the user group and whether they intended to remain based at the centre.

In response, Christine Pearce explained that a letter with details explaining the need to review the fee structure moving forward had been issued to all groups. All groups had signed a copy of the letter to signal their intentions to continue to use the centre and there seemed an overall willingness to do so. However, there was always a risk that a group may potentially leave the centre should availability arise elsewhere, however, most groups would wish to remain based in Bearpark for varying reasons. The fee structure was also competitive following the comparative work that had been carried out.

Councillor E Hull explained that it would be important for the Parish Council, and indeed the Community Association to issue a joint article in a future parish council magazine to convey the message to the residents of the village. Christine Pearce explained that this was a good idea and would be able to provide content for any future publication.

The Chair referred to the suggested grant applications to the National Lottery and queried if there was a contingency should funders not look favourably towards any future application.

Christine Pearce explained that other funding streams would be available should any application to the lottery be refused, however, all parties were hopeful that any application would stand a more than strong chance of success, should other funders, such as the parish council show their support for the centre.

Councillor E Hull queried whether the parts of the building that were not be used would be brought back into use in the future. Christine Pearce explained that the areas would need to be looked at again before any decisions could be made.

In terms of the building, Dr Leslie explained that asbestos in the building needed to be looked at and the asbestos management plan reviewed. There were questions regarding asbestos management and the structural condition of the building which needed to be posed with Durham County Council. These points would require a further meeting and were key factors for consideration. It was agreed that it would be important for the Chair of the Parish Council to attend this, along with Dr Leslie. Questions were also raised regarding the potential lease which would need to be considered as part of the overall discussion.

Dr Leslie and the Chair of the Parish Council both agreed that all of the information would need to be quantified before discussions could move on as all parties would need to be assured that the factors outlined above, together with the conditions posed by Durham County Council and the Parish Council could be met.

Councillor M Wilson asked Christine Pearce to arrange a meeting with the other two County Councillors for the Deerness Division to discuss whether the two other

County Councillors for the area would consider supporting the Centre, along with the Parish Council.

**Moved** by Councillor Kemp, **Seconded** by Councillor Wilding and

**Resolved**

That the parish council:

- (i) agree to make a the requested financial contribution of £3,000 towards the Centre with immediate effect from the 2017/18 budget, following confirmation by the Clerk and RFO that the amount could be contributed from savings made in other areas;
- (ii) that further discussion takes place regarding the conditions outlined by Durham County Council and the issues around asbestos, the structural condition and the lease of the centre;
- (iii) agree to financially support the community centre *in principle*, providing that the outcome of further discussions outlined in (ii) are resolved with all parties concerned (Durham County Council, CISWO, Bearpark Community Association and Bearpark Parish Council) and pending the outcome of further discussions between the three county councillors for the area.

**17/95 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Allotment Site and Open Space**

The Clerk advised the Council that three additional quotes had been received in respect of works to the allotment site access track, creation of a soakaway and removal of flytipping. The Clerk also advised the Council that a quotation had been received to clear the land next to the allotment site which was overgrown and attracting flytipping to the area.

**Moved** by Councillor E Hull, **Seconded** by Councillor Chard and

**Resolved**

That the Council:

- i. agree the quotation;
- ii. that measures be taken to ensure that the land did not fall into the same state in the future through undertaking the care, management and control of the land as a public open space in the public interest.