

MINUTES OF THEALE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Council Meeting held on Monday 8th January 2018 in the Peter Gooch Room, The Pavilion, Englefield Road, Theale.

Present: Councillors B. Williams (chair), J. Richardson, Z. Fenwick, D. Wood, D. Lye, D. Baker, I. Hopcroft & P. Clifford.

Apologies received: Cllrs A. Clark & S. Coker

Present: Jacky Major (Clerk, Tilehurst Parish Council – Minute taking only) in attendance. Five members of the press were present, in addition to approximately 70 members of the public.

Declarations of Interest: None declared.

The chairman asked if any members of the council or members of the public, with the exception of the press, were intending to record or film the meeting. The answer was negative. The chairman also advised that if anybody wished not to be filmed, that they should make themselves known.

171/17/18 Open Forum for Members of the Public

All comments and questions raised during this open forum concerned the on-going primary school issue.

Before the open forum session commenced, the Chairman advised members of the public that a formal response would be made by the Council at a later date but confirmed that their comments, as parishioners, were welcomed and would be noted.

Cllr Hopcroft proposed that the open forum session should be extended from the 15 minutes allowed for within the Council standing orders, to 30 minutes. This motion was seconded by Cllr Clifford. With one Cllr against. Motion carried.

Councillor Baker proposed that the standing orders be suspended in order that factual responses could be given to the questions being asked.

Mr Andrew Button read out a pre-prepared statement summing up the situation, with regards to the proposed primary school, and what he perceived as being Theale's residents reaction to this. He confirmed that a petition had been set up and had attracted over 700 signatories in 4 days. He went on to suggest that an Extraordinary meeting of Council be agreed, and held in the shortest possible time frame, in order to discuss the matter and meet West Berkshire Council's deadline of the end of January 2018.

The chairman thanked Mr Button for his Comments

Mrs Cleone Wright called for the lease, held by Theale Parish Council for the North Street Playing Fields, to be released and said that an Extraordinary meeting of Council is being called for by residents. She felt that such a meeting would give both sides the opportunity to have their say and appealed to Council Members to set this up, as soon as possible.

Mrs Wright reiterated that Theale is a growing village which requires a new school. She concluded that there would be issues with whatever site was recommended but felt that allowing this to go ahead would benefit the parishioners.

Mr Matthew Sennett asked how many times, with an appropriate agenda item, this matter had been discussed within the last 12 months.

The chairman advised that she was not certain of the exact number, but is prepared to check and respond with an accurate number.

Another resident asked how many times, over the past 12 months, Theale Parish Council had met face to face with West Berkshire Council.

The chairman advised that, again, she was not certain of the exact number but would check and respond accordingly. She assured residents that a number of meetings had taken place, including meetings with Bill Bagnell.

Mr Gary Miles advised that he had moved to the village 12 years ago and that he had a three-year-old son, who currently attends the pre-school, he had a personal concern that his child wouldn't get into the school after pre-school. He expressed his anger as to why the school would not be built on the North Street Playing Fields and advised that he was aware that land, for football pitches, had been offered at an alternative site which were deemed adequate. He also stated that he felt that it all seemed a little silly.

Mr Andy Higgs stated that he had presumed that all of the meetings held with West Berkshire Council would be minuted, following the next parish council meeting, and released into the public domain but this didn't appear to be the case.

The chairman advised that, under the Local Government Act, items deemed confidential or sensitive could be discussed under part II.

Cllr Baker interjected, advising that he felt the public were being giving the impression that Full Council had met with representatives from West Berkshire Council and that this was not accurate given that neither full council nor the working group had met with them since September 2016. The chair responded and said that various members of the primary school working group or the clerk had met with them but at no point has she said that full council had met so there was no reason to believe so.

Mr Tim Manousos advised that his son attended the school, within the SEN Unit. He said that if the village is to grow, this new school is needed. He went on to say that, for his personal circumstances, the school had been good for his son and that since starting there he had come on "leaps and bounds". He stated that Theale was a beautiful village but that progress needed to happen. The children need a place to go, that meets their education needs, within the confinement of their village.

Another resident stated that local traffic was already heavy, with the introduction of the IKEA store further contributing to this. He questioned whether or not a traffic survey had been done and whether or not traffic, parking etc. had been addressed with concerns being passed to West Berkshire Council.

The chairman confirmed that issue has been highlighted and question had been asked of West Berkshire Council. The concerns raised are all documented on the planning portal, on West Berkshire Council's website, and can be easily accessed by members of the public. She advised that there was over three and a half years' worth of documentation available.

Mrs Jennifer Powlesland confirmed that she had a child attending the school and that she herself worked in state education and was well aware of financial pressures She questioned why £8m in funds was being turned away, when it could be invested into a new school, what were the obstacles?

The chairman confirmed that as far as the Council were aware, the funding was £7m and questioned how the funds available had suddenly increased from £7m to £8m.

She advised that this was a complex matter, which had confidential parts to it and this was why no formal public response has been given as yet. She advised that, having only received the letter from West Berkshire Council on Thursday, Council members needed to be given time to meet, in order for the matter to be discussed legally. Mr Gary Sangwell advised that he went to the local schools said that Theale is growing and this this needed to be addressed. He asked why this matter was not being addressed before the funding is lost.

Mr Lee Quinell stated that they all agreed that a new school was required. He said that there were concerns about the proposed location and the traffic and questioned whether it was in the interest of local residents for the school to be built on a busy road.

Mrs Jo Hammet stated that this has been under discussion for a long time. Several meetings have taken place and she has previously spoken about the new school.

In April 2016, a meeting took place where a list of question and queries were prepared and Theale Parish Council are reported to have suggested that they would give up the lease, if these issues were suitably addressed. It is believed that West Berkshire Council has addressed these issues and she is now questioning why the agreements made are not being adhered to by Theale Parish Council.

The chairman advised that Cllr Flint had previously proposed a list of items to be addressed but that the situation is not as clear cut as it looks. Theale Parish Council has taken legal advice on this and that matters are a little more complicated than they appear. She advised that this legal advice is still on-going and that it should be reiterated that West Berkshire Council are pulling the plug on this and not Theale Parish Council.

Another resident questioned how much contact there has been with West Berkshire Council since the summer.

The chairman confirmed that West Berkshire Council has been kept up to date on what has been happening.

Mrs Gabriella Wilcox questioned how she could get her 2 children to school, on time, if they were at two separate schools.

Mrs Michelle Carey commented that lateness and attendance would be affected by this. She had concerns that this would affect local traffic and childminders. She asked whether or not the community were going to be worked with on this matter and where is the community engagement that is required to achieve what is appropriate for the village.

Mrs Liz Quinell asked how many children had been born into the village within the last 12 months.

The chairman advised that this information could be obtained, if it were publicly available, but it is believed that in 2016, 25/30 babies were born in the village.

Having let the session extend to almost 45 minutes, the chairman closed the public open forum.

Members of the public left the meeting, with 17 residents remaining.

Notifications of Chairman's remarks – There were none to be raised.

SECTION A

172/17/18 MINUTES OF MEETING OF 4th DECEMBER 2017.

Members adopted the Minutes of the Meeting of 4th December 2017. Proposed Cllr Richardson; seconded Cllr Fenwick. Approved nem con.

173/17/18 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 4TH DECEMBER 2017.

Planning Presentation - Cllr Fenwick asked whether or not a site visit had taken place. Cllr Williams confirmed that one had taken place and that an agenda item will be included for a future meeting, in order that this matter can be discussed further.

SECTION B

174/17/18 District Council Report

Cllr Macro read out his report. This contained the following points –

- WBC are currently discussing cuts, aiming to save around £10m in the next financial year;
- WBC has been selected to take part in the pilot scheme whereby they can retain Business Rates collected within the district. It was estimated that WBC would be between £1.7m and £2m per year better off;
- WBC are in discussion as to the raise to be levied on the next Council Tax demands. It was indicated that the raise could be up to 3% on the council tax elements and 3% on the Adult Social Care element;

- Persimmon Homes have applied for a Discharge on Conditions at the Lakeside Site. It was reported that workers were on-site before Christmas and fences have been erected. Entrances to the site had not been secured and this has been reported to both Persimmon Homes and the Land Agents;
- 19 High Street, a meeting has been scheduled for Friday evening.

Cllr Macro left the meeting

175/17/18 Clerk’s Report

The Clerk’s report was read out by Cllr Richardson and Noted.

176/17/18 Planning Applications

17/02128/COMIND	Additional Drawings and amended plans	New 24/7 Fire Station – Land at Junction of Bath Road, Theale	Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service	No objection
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177/17/18 Theale Library & the Gateway Centre

Members were provided with usage figures, as previously requested, and it was noted that a meeting had been arranged for Thursday 18th January 2018. Cllrs Richardson and Hopcroft both indicated that they might be able to attend this meeting.

178/17/18 Crime Statistics

The Clerk provided members with a written report, which was noted.

Two members of the public left the meeting.

Cllr Clifford asked whether there were any plans to relocate the cash machine, located on the outside of the Co-op shop, suggesting that if it were to remain in situ bollards should be installed outside of the shop to restrict the movement of motor vehicles. He also suggested that CCTV should be reintroduced.

Cllr Williams confirmed that this matter would need to be discussed at a later date.

179/17/18 Closure of Theale’s Future Group

The Clerk provided members with a copy of the minutes from a previous meeting of Theale’s Future. Cllr Clifford noted that the group intended to offer the Parish Council the @theale twitter account. Whilst a formal offer was yet to be received, he suggested that this should be monitored and chased up at a later date.

Cllr Clifford proposed that Theale Parish Council look into this, with the intention of agreeing to taking over the twitter account.

Cllr Williams advised that if this were to be done, Council policies would need to be updated accordingly.

180/17/18 Cricket – Licence/Contract

There were no current updates on this however Cllrs Hopcroft and Clifford advised that they intend to arrange a meeting in the near future.

181/17/18 Planning Applications – Cessation of Hard Copies.

The Clerk provided members with a copy of WBC’s announcement ahead of the meeting. Members were asked to consider how the cessation of hard copies of the plans would affect them as a Councillor and members of the public.

Could this function be carried out at the Library and would it be appropriate to discuss the matter with library staff, with a view to utilising their resources?

Following a brief discussion, it was suggested that this be re-discussed at the upcoming

Budget Meeting.

182/17/18 SLCC Practitioners Conference

Members RESOLVED to approve the clerk's attendance at the Practitioners' Conference February. Proposed Cllr Richardson; seconded Cllr Fenwick. All members were in agreement. Some councillors felt that this approval was given subject to further discussion at the February full council meeting with members discussing with the clerk and selecting/agreeing to the workshops to be attended by the clerk. This was not voted on or agreed and the chair confirmed that she was sure that the clerk would know what to pick.

183/17/18 M4 Closures J12 - 11

Noted. The Clerk will be asked to upload details of these closures onto the parish council website.

184/17/18 Community Infrastructure Levy Monitoring Report

Noted.

185/17/18 Survey on increase in council tax to help protect operational policing

Members briefly discussed the survey and it is noted that any responses to the survey should be of a personal opinion and not that of the parish council.

186/17/18 Authorisation of Payments

Clarification was sought on the item listed as GDPR Expenditure. It was confirmed that this was payment of the fee for the GDPR Training Session, which had previously been attended by Cllr Richardson and the Clerk.

It was RESOLVED that items on sheet no.509 and dated 8th January 2018 be approved for payment. Proposed; Cllr Richardson; seconded Cllr Clifford. Approved nem con.

Members noted payment sheet no. 507 dated 18th December 2017 and the November Direct Debit sheet.

SECTION C

187/17/18 Items for Information

Cllr Williams read out WBC's reasons for refusing planning application 17/03215/CERTP. All further items on the information sheet were noted.

SECTION D

188/17/18 CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

There were no Chairman's Remarks.

189/17/18 Part II

In view of the confidential nature of business to be conducted it is in the public interest that the public and press be excluded and are instructed to withdraw.

Staffing Matters

Land at North Street Playing Fields

There being no other business the Meeting closed at 9.40 pm.

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Chairman to the Council