

MINUTES OF THEALE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of an Extraordinary Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 12th February 2018 at 7.30pm in the Peter Gooch Room, the Pavilion, Englefield Road, Theale.

Present: Councillors D. Wood, B. Williams (Chairman), S. Coker, A. Clark, J. Richardson, I. Hopcroft, D. Lye, D. Baker & Z. Fenwick

In attendance: Clerk to the Council Jo Friend. There were nine members of the public present.

Apologies for absence: Cllr Clifford.

Declarations of Interest: None.

The chairman asked if anyone present was intending to film or record the meeting. The response was a negative.

213/17/18 Open Forum for Members of the Public

Chris Gittins addressed the meeting. He introduced himself as Chair of Governors at Englefield Primary School, an ex-head teacher of Theale Green School and an advisor on educational issues to the government and various charitable organisations. He is a resident of North Street and stressed that what he was about to say was not 'nimbyism'.

Initially, Mr Gittins had thought the proposal to build a new primary school on NSPF a good idea but, the more he has looked into it, the more he is of the opinion that to build the school on that site is the wrong decision. Mr Gittins outlined his alternative proposal, to use spare capacity and unused buildings at Theale Green for Theale Primary pupils. He suggested there was a lot of evidence for the benefits of 'all-through' schools and the Brooks Centre at Theale Green would provide suitable, self-contained accommodation for primary school pupils.

The current education system is designed to be competitive but why could schools not work together? Theale Primary has a good head and excellent provision in terms of education. It is a Church of England school and the diocese is looking for a secondary school to become a C of E school – this is an opportunity to create an all-through church school. It could be done in phases but it is possible.

Mr Gittins encouraged the parish council to encourage WBC to make strategic decisions regarding the education provision in Theale. He said he thought it possible that the £8m building pot could be used for the development at Theale Green. This proposal would remove the safety concerns that exist in relation to developing NSPF and removes the urgency that WBC feels it has with regards to the decision. He offered to help the parish council in any way it wished.

A member of the public said they were concerned about Theale Green's low pupil numbers. Mr Gittins explained that the school differs from all the other secondary schools as it has a very broad catchment area which stems from its original status as a grammar school.

Cllr Williams asked Mr Gittins if he had approached WBC with this proposal and, if so, what feedback did he get?

Mr Gittins confirmed that he had met with Alok Sharma MP, Ian Pearson at WBC and had a meeting arranged with the Oxford Diocese as well as receiving positive feedback from head teachers. He said the feedback from Mr Pearson at WBC was that he was in favour of this kind of approach but it may well be that WBC is immovable on this. Mr Gittins said that the next body to approach would be the Commissioner for Schools (South East) and that to have the support of the district council would be powerful. He again offered his help in any way that may be required.

There was a round of applause from members of the public.

A member of the public reported that, in recent weeks, the primary school head teacher had been seen in the recreation ground, the primary school grounds and at Theale Green School with a tape measure, measuring up. The person she was with doesn't work for Theale Primary or Theale Green. He said this made him wonder if there is a 'Plan B'.

As no one else wished to speak, the chairman closed the public open forum.

Several members of the public left the meeting.

SECTION B

214/17/18 Budget and Precept 2018/19

Members went through the proposed budget page by page. The clerk answered their questions and clarified some points for them. With regards to staffing levels, the staffing committee will be reviewing this as soon as possible. Cllr Fenwick suggested the council try to organise the Fun Bus to visit the village in the school holidays.

Members were of the view that many of the actions and projects previously agreed by council had not been completed owing to the substantial amount of time that had had to be spent on dealing with WBC's primary school proposal. The council had therefore not been able to spend all of the previous precept increase. It was therefore agreed that an increase in the precept could not be justified and a zero percent rise was agreed for 2018/19. The precept for 2018/19 was set at £96,476.

Proposed Cllr Williams; seconded Cllr Wood. Approved nem con.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.30pm.

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Chairman to the Council

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