

Hooe Parish Council

Village Hall Project Committee Agenda

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Date: 6th February 2024

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I hereby give notice that all Councillors are summoned to attend a Village Hall Project Committee meeting on 12th February 2024 at 7pm at the village hall when it is proposed to transact the business stated below.

Signed: **J. Warrener – Clerk (Proper Officer/RFO) to Hooe Parish Council**

Public Attendance

The meeting will be conducted in accordance with Standing Orders and any person attending the meeting must abide by these rules. The Parish Council may choose to exclude a person under section 1(8) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 if a person fails to meet the standards and comply with the Chairman's requests.

Public Questions

Public participation on matters on the agenda are at the Chairman's discretion. In accordance with Standing Orders 3(e-k), the session will last for no longer than 10 minutes with a person speaking for no longer than 2 minutes.

Any other question should be put in writing to the Clerk in advance of the next meeting. Any questions raised for items listed on the agenda that cannot be answered at the Council meeting will be brought forward to the next Council meeting for response.

End of public participation

Business To Be Transacted

1. **To receive apologies and reasons for absence** in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 S85 (1)
2. **Disclosure of Interests**
Interests in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and the Parish Council code of conduct.
To receive councillors' declarations of interest regarding matters on the agenda and consider any written requests or dispensation as a result. Any changes to register of interests should be notified to the clerk.
3. **Minutes of the Previous Meetings** to be agreed and signed as a true record.
To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 17th August 2023 as a true record.

Matters For Consideration and Resolution

4. To discuss the options for the future of the village hall and agree any actions required.

In accordance with The Data Protection Act 2018 all attendees of the meeting are hereby notified that the meeting will be recorded as an aide memoire for the clerk when compiling the minutes. The recordings are held securely and are deleted after the resolution that the minutes are a true and correct record. Members of the public should be aware that being present at a meeting of the Council or one of its committees or sub-committees will be deemed as the person having given consent to being recorded (photograph, film or audio recording) at the meeting, by any person present. A person or persons recording the parish meeting are reminded that the "Public Session" period may not be part of the formal meeting and that they should take legal advice for themselves as to their rights to make **any recording during that period**.

Hooe Parish Council

Village Hall Project Committee Meeting

Monday 12th February 2024

Clerk's Briefing Note

1. Background to the Village Hall Project

- 1.1 On the 26th October 2022 the Village Hall Project Committee meeting agreed to adopt the options to consider building a new village hall on the recreation ground or to refurbish the existing village hall. The Committee also agreed that planning advice would be obtained from Wealden District Council's planning department on the options agreed to inform the process moving forward.
- 1.2 Following the planning advice received from Wealden District Council, Cllr Crawhurst drafted the 'Appraisal of Options for the Village Hall' report that was distributed to the public on the 27th April 2023 and the report was presented to the public at the Annual Parish Meeting on the 25th May 2023.
- 1.3 On the 17th August 2023 the Village Hall Project Committee agreed to have a review undertaken of Cllr. Crawhurst's 'Appraisal of Options for the Village Hall' report by the Parish Council's auditors, Mulberry & Co., following a small number of residents alleging that Cllr. Crawhurst had shown bias and predetermination in his report.
- 1.4 The auditor, Andy Beams from Mulberry & Co, produced a report on the 4th September 2023 and found no evidence of bias or predetermination, and he considered Cllr Crawhurst's report to be well thought out and logically presented, with a reasonable approach for the assessment of the identified options, and that the basis of the financial information used in the report were obtained from appropriate sources. Andy Beams considered that there was no predetermination to steer the outcome to a particular conclusion as part of the evaluation criteria.
- 1.5 Based on the findings of Andy Beam's report, Cllr. Crawhurst's report is shown to be a balanced and well researched report that should be accepted by the Parish Council as part of the decision-making process.
- 1.6 Cllr Leonard produced a report in January 2024 whereby he undertook a detailed analysis into the background of the village hall options which included how other village halls in the locality operated and considered the financial implications of the options under consideration. Cllr Leonard's report and supporting documents have been issued to all Councillors, emailed to those residents on the emailing list and uploaded on the Hooe Parish Council's website on the 15th January 2024. All the documents produced will be considered at the Village Hall Project Committee meeting on the 12th February 2024.

2. Primary Use of the Hooe Village Hall

- 2.1 Unlike most village halls locally, the Hooe village hall is managed by the Parish Council as a community asset on

behalf of the residents of Hooe. The Village Hall Project Committee should note that the main function of the village hall is that it is made available for use by the local community, being the council tax paying residents of Hooe, and should not be set up as its primary function to run as a business.

3. Village Hall - New Build

- 3.1 From the comments noted in Andy Beam's report, Andy confirmed that Hooe Parish Council is not able to make a business case to build a new village hall due to the lack of use of the existing village hall. There is no evidence there is the ability to increase the number of bookings long term, so the Parish Council is likely to be turned down at the first hurdle should the Parish Council seek a Public Works Loan or even a grant if such an opportunity become available.
- 3.2 Such a commitment would be a financial burden on the council taxpayers of Hooe for potentially the next fifty years without any certainty the new village hall will be fully utilised and be able to cover its operating costs as well as the loan repayment. Hooe Parish Council has a fiduciary duty of care to ensure the Parish Council's finances are managed in a responsible manner, and not to take unrealistic financial risks that may impact on the long-term financial management of the Parish Council.
- 3.3 Wealden District Council's planning department stated that the Parish Council must demonstrate a sound business case for moving the village hall from Denbigh Road to the Recreation Grounds, and the Parish Council is unable to produce evidence to support such a case.
- 3.4 Based on the reports produced by Cllr Crawhurst, Andy Beams and Cllr. Leonard which sets out the detailed arguments and long-term financial risks to the residents of Hooe, I suggest there is insufficient evidence available to support a new build village hall at this time.
- 3.5 The Clerk's recommendation is that the Parish Council considers to either accept or not accept the building of a new village hall as the first motion for consideration by the Village Hall Project Committee.

4. Refurbishment or Disposal of the Existing Village Hall

- 4.1 Cllr Leonard's report demonstrates an argument for both the refurbishment of the village hall and to consider the potential sale of the village hall.
- 4.2 If the Parish Council is to retain the existing village hall, the Parish Council will be required to undertake work long term to keep the building in good repair to meet the legal standards for public use, and to potentially include improvements such as a new car park. This will require the Parish Council to generate funds for such work, unlike the new build there are limited government grants available subject to the Parish Council being able to provide some funds, percentages vary dependant on the type of grant available at that time. For the Parish Council to apply for a grant, the Parish Council would need to demonstrate that there is an overall agreement by the local community to retain the village hall long term, although it is not in regular use or financially viable.
- 4.3 There is also an argument that if there are no prospects for the long-term use of the village hall, should the village hall be sold, otherwise the council taxpayers will be required to fund the repairs, maintenance costs and running costs long term so putting a financial burden on the council taxpayers of Hooe. The annual interest generated on such a capital receipt would be considerable and allow the Parish Council to use the annual interest accumulated to reduce

the precept on going. Any capital receipt received on the sale of the village hall can only be used for new projects and legally cannot be used to supplement the precept.

5. Legal Obligations / Community Consultation

- 5.1 The formal advice received from the East Sussex Association of Local Councils (should the Parish Council not elect to build a new village hall) is that the Parish Council will be required by law to put the remaining options to the residents of Hooe to decide whether they would wish to refurbish the existing village hall or sell the village hall.
- 5.2 A Community Consultation exercise must be shown to be independent and must be carried out by an appropriately qualified organisation to circulate the consultation documents on behalf of the Parish Council. It is unlawful for the Parish Council to use the electoral role to send out any consultation documents, so the Parish Council must provide a map of the area for the organisation to send out the consultation documents. All consultation documents sent out must have a unique number to prevent fraud and there will be one sent per household. It is likely that some people will receive a consultation document that may not live in the Parish of Hooe, so all consultation documents returned to the Clerk will be checked against the electoral role to verify it is a legitimate consultation document.
- 5.3 The Parish Council must receive a 30% response from the community to proceed with the option chosen by the council taxpayers of Hooe, and if they fail to reach this target the Parish Council will be bound to make the decision on behalf of the residents of Hooe. The process set out in this document is the standard protocol used by Councils nationally.
- 5.4 Should the Village Hall Project Committee agree that a Community Consultation is to take place, the Clerk would be required to draft the community consultation questions and matters for further consideration by the Village Hall Project Committee. In such circumstances the Clerk would recommend that a Village Hall Project Committee meeting is convened within four weeks after the 12th February 2024 to obtain document approval, and that the agreed consultation document is sent out to the residents of Hooe within four weeks from that date of the last Village Hall Project Committee meeting.
- 5.5 The Clerk's recommendation is to put forward a motion to hold a Community Consultation on the options to either refurbish the existing village hall or to sell the village hall, and to instruct the Clerk to draft the community consultation questions within a timescale agreed for consideration by the Village Hall Project Committee.

Jane Warrener

Clerk (Proper Officer) to Hooe Parish Council