

Hooe Parish Council

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Minutes of the Village Hall Project Committee Meeting of 11th March 2024

Attendees: Cllr A. Loyd (AL), Cllr G. Kirk (GK), Cllr D. Carey (DC), Cllr R. Clifton (RC) & Cllr B. Leonard (BL)
In attendance: J. Warrener – Clerk (Proper Officer/RFO)

32 members of the public present. Meeting opened at 7pm

Public participation on matters on the agenda 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.

Q1 – Point 1.3 of the Clerk's briefing, please can you explain what it means?

A1 - BL explained certain consultations are statutory, this one is not statutory, because it is not statutory the outcome is not binding on the Parish Council. It doesn't mean to say the Parish Council are going to ignore it or disregard it, but clearly as it says it is the weight of the community response is what the Parish Council want to achieve by it.

Q2 – At the last meeting I was under the assumption that there would be a draft of the questions for the consultation for the Parish Council to consider and the public might have had an advanced copy to offer you some comments at the beginning and end of the meeting?

A2 – BL reported that a couple of residents have made the same comment. BL considered it to be inappropriate to issue unapproved documents for this critical consultation and such information could not easily be retracted and might contribute to widespread misinformation before the vote and jeopardise the outcome. BL indicated that tonight's meeting is for Councillors to debate the content which is to be issued at the start of the consultation, so none of the Parish Councillors have yet had the opportunity to debate its content, therefore BL believes it is inappropriate to issue the document.

Q3 – Can we look at the document now?

A3 – BL stated no, for reasons already outlined, BL considered it inappropriate as Councillors may consider the contents to be bias or misleading that could affect people's voting and if the document is already issued. BL stated it is for this committee meeting to decide the content of the consultation.

Q4 – Will you allow the public to comment later in the meeting?

A4 – BL said that it is at his discretion, but if that is what people would like they can comment at the end of the meeting.

Q5 – Can anyone comment on your debate as you see there are so many people here?

A5 – At the last meeting there were multiple opportunities for the Chairman to stop the meeting, the Chairman must decide as the public are not formally allowed to engage with Councillors during their deliberations.

Q6 – Perhaps there should be a more formal meeting then?

A6 – BL advised he is trying to explain the rules, the Parish Council must conduct the Council deliberations without the public's interruptions or comments, but the Parish Council accepts the sensitivity of the subject matter and as the Chairman may allow questions at his discretion.

Q7 – While you are deliberating are we allowed to listen to what you are saying?

A7 – BL stated yes.

Q8 – Last time I could not hear, you need a microphone.

A8 – BL explained the acoustics in the village hall are not good and will do our utmost to speak loudly as possible.

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)
Cllr Crawhurst has declined to take part in the village hall decision.

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.

None declared.

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 12th February 2024 as a true record.

Motion carried.

Resolved the minutes of the 12th February 2024 are signed as a true record.

Matters For Consideration and Resolution

4. To discuss the options for the community consultation for the village hall and agree any actions required.

BL recapped on the last two motions made by the Committee, one was to reject the building of a new village hall on the recreation grounds and the other to pass a motion to hold a community consultation in respect of the two remaining options to renovate or sell. BL explained the Parish Council is to consult with the community because if the Parish Council went with the renovation option, to apply for a government loan or grant would require proof the Parish Council has the support of the community. BL went on to say that the Parish Council are unable to make the final decision because it would jeopardise being able to raise the funding that the renovation option might need.

BL referred to the Clerk's briefing note point 1.1 to 1.12 which sets out the Parish Council's obligations and our options at this Committee meeting for the community consultation. BL asked all Councillors whether they had read the Clerk's briefing note, proposed consultation documents and responses received from the public and the response was yes.

BL confirmed some responses had been received following the last Committee meeting and would like to add that from the evidence some of the comments leads us to remind residents there are fifteen plus documents on the website produced to inform the residents and Councillors. BL suggested any person interested in the future of the village hall should read the documents on the website which sets out the whys and wherefores discussed since last year until present.

DC indicated there is lots of support from people sitting here this evening who would wish to know what comments were made by the public.

BL agreed to categorise the public comments raised.

GK believed some good points were raised but it was apparent the residents had not read all the documents.

BL explained the first response asked for more detail on the renovation type and costs that the Parish Council might be asking them to vote on. BL added that a couple of people commented that the renovation option was too broadly outlined, not clear enough as to how much the Parish Council is going to do and when the Parish Council are going to do it, wanted a lot more information in the consultation about costs.

BL mentioned there was a lot of discussion about whether the Parish Council had done enough to promote the hiring of the village hall and one person said that there should be more promotion by the Parish Council. BL indicated there were concerns about the hiring costs which are at £10 per hour were too expensive and BL said that he didn't think there is very much to do to reduce that rate.

BL indicated there was confusion over the use of the word renovation and refurbishment. BL apologised having checked the dictionary there are two definitions and one implies improvements, and the other one doesn't. BL advised that the Parish Council hasn't decided the extent of any works to this building and this consultation in his view is just to determine whether the community want to retain it and are prepared to pay, that is the purpose of the community consultation.

BL said that one person has implied BL has just come up with the idea to refurbish the village hall. BL explained it is not a new idea, it has been in all the discussions that the Parish Council has ever had, do you keep this village hall or do you build a new village hall.

BL noted that a resident commented that the individual costs should be broken down and consulted upon individually which is a bit difficult at this point.

BL advised one response reminded the Parish Council there is a grant currently available for repairs to village halls. BL explained the Parish Council has investigated this and the detail is somewhat misleading as the £3 million grant scheme does not allow Parish Councils to apply for more than £5,000 to which the Parish Council must put up 80% of the funds themselves. BL said that the Parish Council's priority would be to apply for potential grants if the renovate option is chosen so minimising the cost to the community. BL pointed out that the Parish Council cannot guarantee grants are available for the specific work type to be carried out, at the time we want and at the cost we want.

BL explained that a resident complained about the failure to issue a copy of the draft consultation to the public that is going to be approved tonight. BL reported another resident gave a personal view on which of the two options they would choose, and they mentioned the village hall is used as a polling station, hold the Parish Council meetings and their wish is for more volunteers to come forward in the community and be responsible for fund raising and advertising the use of the village hall. BL said that the resident suggested the formation of a working party so a number of improvements could be considered.

RC said that without a village hall it is only half a village, and it is important to have a place where we can collect and enjoy ourselves. RC explained years ago the village hall was used five nights a week for whisk drives etc. RC suggested there isn't the people now that will organise things and it is a great shame, but it is wonderful to see all these people here tonight who are obviously interested. RC went on to say we need to get the village hall in good working order, get the car park done so people can park like at the church's facility.

GK agreed with RC that a car park is needed, and the kitchen upgraded.

AL said that the Parish Council needs the views of the villagers where we go next, so the Parish Council has a mandate to spend money for the area of services to take place to support the community.

BL went through the Clerk's briefing note and explained 1.1 identifies the legal position and 1.2 states the final position. BL read out the statement 'it is an expectation that the Parish Council will consult with the local community if matters of importance and where there is a long-term financial commitment on council taxpayers'. BL said that it is for the Parish Council to make sure that people understand they will be required to pay and are happy with that decision so that is why we must consult with the community.

BL stated that 1.3 reminds the Parish Council that in order to apply for a public works loan or government grant, the Parish Council will need to have substantial support from the local community. BL explained it is not binding on the Parish Council, but the weight of any community response will be taken into account when making the final decision.

BL stated that 1.4 & 1.5 talks about the proposal to send out the mailing to all households in the parish and how that is done, by a company that specialises in mailing of this type.

BL stated that 1.6, 1.7 & 1.8 give details of the likely budget that we may need to approve to achieve the consultation. BL advised that the consultation as well as including sending out the paperwork will include the freepost return of the paperwork for which the Parish Council must obtain a post office licence and pay for every response, purchase leaflets and banners. BL recommended that the funding be taken from the village hall earmark reserve 322.

BL stated that 1.9, 1.10, 1.11 & 1.12 talks about the dates of the consultation, the opening and declaration of the results of the consultation and recommends it takes place at the next Village Hall Project Committee meeting, data protection comments and how we might handle any issues that arise. BL advised that it is proposed that the public are allowed to give further feedback at the Annual Parish Meeting on the 29th May 2024 and a further Village Hall Committee meeting be convened to consider the results of the consultation and possibly decide on which one of those two are to be chosen.

BL explained that Councillors have also received a confidential attachment to the Clerk's briefing note to protect the integrity of the consultation process, certain matters cannot be discussed in public so should any Councillor wish to discuss points 1.13 to 1.19 a vote will be needed to exclude the public to discuss any point.

BL confirmed each Councillor has received a copy of the proposed consultation documents which will be addressed to every household in Hooe in a window envelope, will consist of three pages and a postal prepaid envelope. BL asked Councillors whether the proposed letter explains who can vote, when they can vote, how they do that and does the letter explain that adequately?

AL said that if it is too long people won't want to read it.

GK considered the letter was about right.

AL indicated it is to the point.

BL reminded everyone what we are doing, why the Parish Council needs the view and that a substantial response is needed from the public, who can respond, and that the consultation is not a binding consultation plus the data protection element.

RC believed this to be a complicated way of asking for a yes or no.

BL replied that the Parish Council must tell the public what its about and by what date.

DC asked whether you are to print on the back of the letter?

BL answered we haven't decided yet.

DC suggested the position should not be stated too strongly.

BL said that you have to explain what the options are.

DC said that most of us know them.

BL replied that it is not good enough, the Parish Council must presume there are people out there who don't know why they are being asked to vote.

BL advised the covering letter has been kept to one page, the Councillors job is to decide if that is sufficient, it tells people why we are asking for their vote, what to do with a small amount of detail on the two options. BL explained the third page is what the resident will return and where they record their preference of one of the two options, see details in the Clerk's briefing note.

BL reported in the overview it explains where we are currently at and directs people to the website for all the relevant information. BL indicated there are four short paragraphs about the keep and renovate option and two short paragraphs about the close and sell option. BL asked Councillors to consider with the summary of the keep and renovate information, does the text convey adequately what we would do if this option were chosen. BL said that it talks about improvements that may be made, it doesn't say anything is to be done or will be done, it indicates the kinds of things we have already expressed that would be ideal to look at if this is chosen as the preferred option.

GK expressed some concern there wasn't enough detail as some residents have said that they would like to know more. GK suggested if you have the choice to keep it or sell, it is quite hard to decide if you don't know how much you are going to be spending should you wish to keep it. GK said that it is a chicken and egg situation.

BL replied we have a survey report which is now four and half years old quoting a figure of £155,000 and as DC rightly pointed out last time, we may not do all those things although the survey did point out they haven't looked everywhere and made disclaimers. BL pointed out the Parish Council does have a figure which the Parish Council may spend over a number of years, but somethings might need doing sooner, later or be left.

BL asked whether we got across to people that we might not get grants, the Parish Council cannot guarantee whatever the Parish Council spends, we will get in grants, we can't guarantee a single penny. BL suggested if people decide they want the village hall renovated, it will be up to the Parish Council to decide how much of the council taxpayer's money is to be spent. BL explained the Parish Council will try its upmost to get grants for some of the money, but the problem with grants they are time specific, there may be a grant today, but if you are not ready to take it, it will be gone tomorrow and therefore we can't guarantee anything. BL remarked that we don't know what the total bill will be for the next 25 years and if the village decides to keep this building BL said that he advocates the Parish Council should be looking for the long term, and not let the building fall back into disrepair in the next 10 years.

BL asked Councillors do you agree with this philosophy, if the renovation option is what the community wants and the Parish Council agrees with that, we will be looking to keep this building going for the long term, open to the community, heated, not allowed to get black mould around the walls and the Parish Council does whatever is necessary to keep it useable.

DC argued do not use the black mould syndrome again, it has been going on for years and this is due to lack of use.

BL explained he is using it as an example, if we are to keep the building long term and the black mould becomes a problem, we have to deal with it.

DC remarked in recent times it hasn't been such a problem.

BL said that none of us know what could befall this building in terms of emergency repairs at any time in the future.

BL asked to recap on the question, do we adequately convey what we will do if this option is chosen?

AL responded yes, improvements and upgrades over a period of time to keep it open.

RC said that is more constructive.

DC implied we don't know what the figure is, so we can't put the figure in the document although concerns have been raised by the residents.

AL stated that would put us in a straight jacket particularly if next year's costs go up ten or twenty percent.

GK said that what if the vote is to keep it open and we can't afford it.

BL answered if the community support the renovate option and say they want it open, BL argues that the public have decided no matter what to keep it open, and it is up to the Parish Council to carry out its fiduciary duty to ensure the Parish Council gets value for money. BL agreed with GK's point that where the costs even to the Parish Council are making the decision too much, we might have to go back to the community. BL explained it is a balancing act now because we don't know how much it is, but we do know it is not insignificant amount, and should spread those costs over a realistic timescale.

BL suggested we looked at an example, the windows could blow in should there be a storm and the building would have to close, we would have to effect emergency repairs, so if we decided the windows were something we would do sooner rather than later at a cost of £20,000 we could either get a loan or a grant. BL suggested lets assume a grant was not possible we just had to find the money, we could either go for a public works loan and spread it over a number of years paid by the council taxpayer or we could not get a loan, we would have to level the entire cost to the taxpayer in maybe one or two tax years and BL reminded Councillors that £20,000 divided between 200 council taxpayers equates to £100 for every household in one year for just the windows.

DC indicated BL is promoting the answers.

GK replied I asked BL to explain what would happen if the Parish Council can't afford it and BL was just answering my question.

BL explained that he was using an example of what could happen.

DC said that BL is loading the questions.

BL replied do you think the Parish Council can do a cheap job to bring this building back into more use?

DC replied what needs doing other than the windows?

AL added if the Parish Council has a mandate and that is what we decide to do, then we prioritise things, the worst window first and spread the cost. AL explained there will be a time if we don't get the village hall being used, the decision will have to be made again.

BL asked whether there is a general consensus that the summary for the renovation conveys what the Parish Council is likely to do if that option is chosen. BL added that the Parish Council cannot give detail, but the Parish Council must make it clear that the works the Parish Council might do are not insignificant or cheap.

BL asked Councillors whether the weight of the community support that will be needed is conveyed adequately, and the reasons why we could not fully implement long term financing if the Parish Council doesn't get this support, so this led as up to the example used.

BL indicated if the Parish Council needs to spend £20,000 on whatever, and can't get a loan to spread it over a number of years, it will be a onetime hit on the council taxpayers, so in order to show that we have done the consultation and we have the community support, does the document sufficiently cover that?

AL answered yes, the last paragraph covers that.

RC disagreed with the need to put it down on paper, and those good people here today don't want to lose the village hall and with the help of these good people here can run raffles, this that and the other to help raise funds.

AL responded that we are trying to be realistic.

BL remarked when he joined the Parish Council, he was horrified that a key requirement on any major Council spending had never been actioned by past Councils, and that is the requirement to tell the council taxpayer what their liability might be. BL said that he entirely agreed that £155,000 from a surveyor, you know what surveyors can be like, if you go to buy a house a surveyor tells you warts and all, and none of it maybe true. BL said that if it is true and the Parish Council need a considerable amount of money, the Parish Council will need the council taxpayers of Hooe, the people who are to vote, to realise the cost falls with them.

BL asked Councillors does the document adequately convey that there will be a long-term financial liability on Hooe's council taxpayers, grants will never cover everything, but it will be our priority to make sure that it is the first place the Parish Council looks. BL explained once that financial liability and these financial commitments are made irrespective of the eventual use of the village hall, we may have little ability to back track on those future liabilities so we will not have the ability to just stop paying the loan anymore.

RC asked why would you say the Parish Council can't pay the loan?

BL replied if the community changed their mind because the village hall isn't being used much and then we have signed a loan agreement which has committed future council taxpayers' money, the Parish Council cannot be back tracked.

AL suggested that we all agree that this section keep and renovate covers what we need to cover. AL explained it says if the Parish Council chooses this option, with the support of the residents, we will be looking at long term improvements, upgrades and there will be a cost and to try to get grants where possible, some fund raising and whatever else over a period of time. AL stated that no further details are required as people will switch off from reading the document, and those who don't know what has been going on, and not been involved, we want to inform them, so they can make the right decision for them.

BL indicated the keep and renovate option covers what we know and doesn't imply anything that is not true.

AL replied yes.

BL went on to the close and sell option, which is very short, BL asked whether the content conveys adequately that there will be a long-term benefit to the council taxpayers with the scope for many new community projects to be funded. BL asked does the Parish Council make it clear in the document that the overriding reason for the disposal option being on the ballot paper is down to sustained low use by the community. BL said that there is little evidence of future uptake together with our fiduciary duty to be aware of the cost verses the community need.

DC considered it is not just down to the community as part of the misuse or lack of use, it is down to the Parish Council and the other people sitting out there, if they want to over come the problem, more bookings need to be made to use the village hall.

AL suggested by publicising in this way, it reminds everyone there is a village hall and they can use it.

BL wanted to remind everyone that the statement about we must be aware of our fiduciary duty about cost verses community, came from the auditor from his recent report. BL explained the Parish Council cannot just ignore the village hall is not being used.

BL went on to the response form, does the form explain clearly what to do/

AL said that it is straight forward.

BL suggested it is very simple to complete the form and to return in the prepaid envelope. BL asked is there any suggestion that we are promoting one option over another or is there any leading or bias for either option.

AL and GK both agreed it is balanced.

DC asked whether the Parish Council is going to commit themselves if they get one answer or the other?

AL indicated it will depend on how many people decide to vote, if you only get half a dozen out of hundreds that could vote, it will make our decision a lot more difficult.

DC suggested what if the Parish Council doesn't like the look of the results.

BL replied we are not going to do that.

AL implied if there is a strong option for one over the other, that will influence our vote.

BL wish to remind Councillors that in the Clerk's briefing notes that the consultation forms will be returned and opened at the next meeting of this Committee, the envelopes will be opened in front of the public.

DC wondered whether the Councillors are going to view the results?

BL explained we will declare the result and then we are offering the opportunity for further views at the Annual Parish Meeting and then a Committee meeting is scheduled in June.

AL indicated the more people that vote the better.

BL put the motion forward to agree the consultation documents.

Motion carried. All agreed.

Resolved to accept the contents of the village hall consultation document as written and be sent out to the council taxpayers of Hooe.

BL proposed the date as the 3rd April 2024 to post out the approved consultation documents and agree the deadline for the date the clerk is to receive the documents are on the 30th April 2024.

Motion carried. All agreed.

Resolved that the village hall consultation documents are to be sent out on the 3rd April 2024 and returned to the Clerk by the 30th April 2024.

BL advised that the next motion to be discussed is the cost of the consultation, this includes the cost of mailing out the documents, cost of a post office return service, cost of receiving back the votes, the cost of promoting the consultation will be around £1,000.

RC asked whether it is necessary?

AL asked RC how can you send the letters out?

GK asked is it going out 2nd class?

BL replied yes, all council taxpayers must receive an option to vote. BL understood it is a lot of money to spend, but it is less than £5.00 per household.

AL asked does this include the banners and posters, paying to put it in the Parish News?

BL responded yes, £5.00 to give someone a say in the future where we might be asking them to cough up considerably more than that over time. BL believed it is value for money.

AL asked is the £5.00 by household or votes?

BL answered by household.

AL said that if more than one person lives in a property, the unit price works out less.

BL suggested by promoting the community consultation will assist with maximising the response from the community to give the Parish Council the widest choice of the financial outcome. BL indicated if the Parish Council wants to apply for any grant or government loan, the Parish Council must demonstrate it has its community support.

BL explained in his view it is important to send out this consultation to every household, so it does require the Parish Council to promote the consultation for those three weeks. BL reported that previous Parish Councils didn't promote the financial costs of any options that they wished to consider for the village hall, and it is our duty to do this as a Parish Council.

DC said yet again you are raising another point about an old Parish Council, which I was on for many years and the village hall wasn't run by the Parish Council for years and years, so I wish you to withdraw those comments.

BL replied he would clarify the comments, that in the period since previous Councils decided that they wanted to do something for the village hall possibly a new one, possibly keep this one or change this one, which I know you were involved in as I came and saw the model in the village hall here. BL explained according to the records we can establish only one attempt to send out anything you may wish to call a consultation; I would not call it a consultation.

DC answered here you go again finding fault with the previous Parish Council.

BL said that you have asked me to withdraw my comments and I am not going to because I have seen evidence of the A5 leaflet that was posted by Councillors to every household in Hooe, and I saw the detailed responses from which were around 39 people. BL stated that it is an appalling response rate for potentially considering spending a million pound on a new village hall. BL continued by saying that there was an appalling turn out, it is appalling that the leaflets never mentioned the cost of construction and never mentioned the running costs. BL said that it is a failure of their fiduciary duty, and I won't withdraw the comment, but BL said that he did not blame DC, I blame the previous Parish Council who made this decision for failing to tell the people the real cost of what they would be paying.

DC said that it never got to that.

BL explained it should have been declared before they paid to have models and spending £3,000 on plans before you asked the community do you support this.

AL asked to draw the line under that now.

BL replied I was asked to withdraw a comment and I am not prepared to.

BL said that the proposal is to promote the consultation to maximise the potential turnout response, to pay to have the Parish News delivered to every household in April which will cost about £100, put a free article in the Bexhill and Battle Observer, provide posters and banners (examples provided).

The Clerk and BL went around the village and looked at possible sites the Parish Council could promote the consultation at both ends of the village, and to decide how many we might need to put up at the various locations to promote awareness. BL indicated that half the budget is for sending out the information and the other half is to promote the consultation. BL asked whether Councillors wished to comment on the poster, banner design or wish to change the wording?

GK asked how much the banners would cost?

BL explained that the large banners printed in colour were £44.00 plus VAT and the small banners are £29 plus VAT. It is the smaller size posters that are quite expensive.

AL considered the price to be very reasonable, but we are only setting an outline budget so we may not spend it all.

BL proposed a budget of £1,000 is agreed for the consultation process and that the cost be taken from the Village Hall Project earmark reserve 322.

RC raised his concern whether they will get seen as everyone drives 40 to 50 miles per hour through the village.

AL replied I hope the residents don't do that.

BL said that the banner will be readable even if people are speeding through the village, which I hope they don't.

Motion carried. RC abstained.

Resolved that a budget of £1,000 be allocated from the Village Hall Project earmark fund (322) to pay for the village hall consultation promotional information and documentation.

BL asked Councillors to accept the administrative process that talks about how the documentation is to be sent out, how it is to be received, and that we are to meet publicly to open, count the vote and declare the vote. BL proposed the Parish Council accept the administrative process to manage the community consultation recommended by the Clerk.

Motion carried. All agreed.

Resolved that the administrative process set out in the Clerk's Briefing Note be implemented for the issue, receipt, opening and the declaration of the vote for the village hall community consultation.

BL explained the last one is not a motion but an agreement of the dates for the subsequent meetings. BL recommended the opening of the postal votes and declaration of the votes be held on Wednesday 8th May 2024 at 7pm in the village hall, that at the Annual Parish Meeting on the 29th May 2024 at 7.15pm in the village hall will allow the public a further chance to comment and a further Village Hall Project Committee meeting be held on Wednesday 19th June 2024 to consider the results of the community consultation.

Are all those dates agreeable to Councillors?

The overall response was yes.

The Village Hall Project Committee meeting was suspended at 8.21pm to receive further public questions.

Q1 – Should the form not say what the financial burden on the precept will be, like you were saying about the windows a cost of £20,000, that's about £100, should you not say the precept will go up by 50% on the form?

A2 – BL stated there is a comment on the document that outlines an example cost to council taxpayers, and there is a statement on the form if this cost is X, the burden, liability whatever word you wish to use for a band D and band E are shown. BL explained that although we could not say what the renovation is going to cost X, we have said that if a loan of X is applied for, this will be the cost.

Q3 – In regard to fund raising there are a lot of publicly minded villagers who have raised a lot of money for the village hall. I suggest that money has all been spent by the Parish Council on the sports pavilion etc. and we are being asked to do it all again with no guarantee that it won't be used on something else.

A3 – I can confirm that all the money raised which was around £14,700 for the village hall project is held in a reserve account and the Parish Council has stated on several occasions this money is held and can only be spent on the village hall project.

Q4 – I understand it was more like £90,000?

A4 – BL reported that the money raised was mainly through the precept and some grants and not fund raising as suggested. BL said that he remembered when his precept doubled overnight, and it stayed like that for a number of years. The Clerk explained when she came into post this was a big issue as to what money was held for the village hall project. The Clerk said that due to the lack of information held, all the bank statements going back several years were obtained and an analysis of what money had been received, where it had come from and where money had been spent. The Clerk explained she had produced a detailed financial report detailing where the majority of the money came from which was from increasing the precept, some grants and fund raising. The Clerk advised this report was given to one of the fund raisers in the community at that time.

Q5 – It was asked whether accessibility had been taken into consideration when producing the form, i.e. larger print, people that can't read, if they can't access information from the website and are you test it to see that it works?

A5 – BL explained the font is 16, in black and white and have tried our utmost to accommodate everyone's requirements wherever possible. BL asked if anyone has specific difficulties, please contact the Clerk who will assist.

Q6 – There has been a lot of discussions about costs, which is perfectly understandable but what we haven't heard about is the potential community benefits and enhancements and the actions by the Parish Council to meet its obligations to maximise the use of the village hall because that is part of the equation.

The second point is about promoting it which you had the opportunity tonight to run that pass a proportion of the community, there is at least one statement I think I heard you say that could be misleading. I have concerns about a balance of views that is to be put across in that information to those who have not been involved so far.

A6 – BL asked can you recall the statement you believe is misleading?

Q6 – It is to do with the disposal of the village hall and what could be done with the funds, as there are controls on that and it does not come across as correct.

A6 – BL explained in the document it is specifically mentioned that funds can't be returned to the council taxpayer, and the Clerk has explained the document says it can only be used for new capital projects. BL stated the Parish Council is

restricted for the Parish Council can do with such large proceeds from a sale and you possibly misinterpreted my comments.

Q7 – What is the Parish Council thinking of doing with the village hall then, if you sell what is the Parish Council thinking of doing with the money?.

A7 – BL said that the Parish Council has not even discussed that yet.

Q8 – What is the point of selling it?

A8 – BL explained in the same way that we haven't discussed the refurbishment that might take place, we haven't discussed what we would do with the proceeds after a sale.

Q9 – Will you be allowed for houses to be built on the plot?

A9 – BL reported on the documentation that can be seen on the website, the planning advice from Wealden District Council stated if we are to dispose of the site, they would only permit one house to be built on this large plot.

Q10 – We could do with some affordable housing.

A10 – BL said that he accepted their point but if the community chose to go down that route the Parish Council would have to explore the options.

Q11 – You are going into great detail about these huge costs and the precept will go up if you refurbish the village hall, but you are not going into any detail about if you sell it and build some fancy house on it, people might not want you to do that.

A11 – BL replied the document the Parish Council have approved simply says the Parish Council would sell the village hall for development, which is all we are able to say. BL explained if the community and Parish Council says we are going to dispose of the village hall there would be no doubt a further consultation about the sale of the village hall, and such matters as what is to be allowed to be developed and whether a covenant is to be placed on the land, all of that discussion is to premature.

Q12 – I would like to support DC statement that you have overstated the cost as in my previous life I was a fund raiser and this isn't about not being able to get grants, its in cloud cuckoo land, there are grants out there, you just have to work at it, its really hard work getting grants. The cost should not be given to the council taxpayer without exploring the opportunity of grants.

A12 – BL replied the document going out doesn't state any costs, it simply states an example, if the costs fall on the council taxpayer this will be what they are. BL explained the Parish Council has been very careful it doesn't imply we will spend X. BL advised the figures that have been quoted during the discussion are factual figures produced by a surveyor. BL added the Parish Council hasn't decided whether we are to accept that surveyor's report or commission a new one which would give the Parish Council a lot more information. BL said that the resident was right we cannot sit here today and say we are to spend thousands of pounds of council taxpayers' money, but we have to be honest if we did that the council taxpayers will pick up the bill.

Q13 – You would if you did proper fund raising.

A13 – BL said that we cannot state that as a guarantee, that any proportion of that money would actually be from a grant, and we are trying to be honest.

AL responded that most grants available to the Parish Council require a percentage to be put down by the Parish Council.

Q14 – This is not necessarily a job for the Clerk, you will all have to do it yourselves.

Q15 – I wish to raise a question regarding the £14,700, we did get a grant for £8,900 just as the project started, so it can be done. Just a reminder if you don't spend it on the village hall that may have to be returned.

Q16 – My personal view is that I feel very strongly as a lot of people here do, is there any way when you are sending out the questionnaire you can encourage in the same way to people to engage much more. It is the positive things about the village hall rather than the negative things and to get a balance.

AL said that hopefully this will remind people we have a village hall, to come and use it and let us know what you would like to see in it.

BL mentioned that he has been a Councillor since last May and he has seen a significant improvement in the attendance of these meetings and the participation from the community. BL said that it is not about the seven people sitting around a table making a decision and not involving you. BL stated the Parish Council is committed to transparency and openness, so all the documents on the website telling you everything we have done to date, and every decision that we have made. BL explained because of that research and work and the more people that come to the meetings and come to the Annual Parish Meeting will be aware of the outcome of the vote. BL suggests that it is everyone's chance to lobby the Parish Council yet again, so the Parish Council are not sitting behind closed doors as some Councils do and make decisions. The parish Council takes seriously what people are saying and the Parish Council values everyone turning up here and giving up their time.

Q17 – You said earlier that the responses you receive will influence your vote, after the consultation the Parish Council will still have the final vote?

A17 - AL responded yes, the more people that vote the stronger the vote one way or the other will influence what we are to decide. AL said that whatever happens the Parish Council will be fund raising, surveying the building to keep it open, providing services, entertainment whatever to get people into use it or whether it be closing it down, selling it on we have to physically do the work. AL explained the more people that return the forms the better as it gives us a stronger mandate to act.

AL said that if 100 people out of 400 people vote it will be a difficult decision, but if you get 300 to vote that would be a good turnout.

BL said that if everyone here tonight went and told four other people or households, so everyone knew this was coming, and returned their preference we would be absolutely delighted with the response.

Q18 – You cannot not include a paper that doesn't include examples that you are selling, because some people might read that and say this will be a big financial burden on us, and it may not necessarily be the case.

A18 – BL explained the document does not say a figure only an example, and it does not say we are to spend a particular sum of money, but it does point out for each amount we might have to borrow, what the cost to the council taxpayer will be over time. BL said that the Parish Council would be in serious trouble if an auditor looked at our consultation and said that you did not tell the council taxpayer what a loan might cost.

Q19 – Are you putting a figure in there, are you saying for every thousand pound we borrow you will say how much we pay back?

Q20 – BL responded yes, the exact quote in the document is for every £100,000 of loan, setting out the cost to a band D and band E council taxpayer would be X. BL explained that X could be spread over a number of years, we haven't decided yet as we would have to take those decisions whether the cost of x is spread over 20 years, 25 years depending upon what the loan was for. BL said that we haven't stated what the cost to the council taxpayer will be, as we can't. BL noted the lady here said that we might be lucky and get 80% of all of our costs from grants. BL indicated the Parish Council must be honest about the costs to the taxpayers.

Q21 – All the people here do they realise that before this lot took over, that this hall was open without a fire certificate so not insured and they were using this hall on their own risk. If anything happened to us how would they get the money back, that was down to the old Parish Council, they never did anything right.

The public participation finished at 8.43pm

The Village Hall Project Committee meeting finished at 8.43pm.

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.

Signed:

Chairman: Cllr. Leonard