



Queen Camel Parish Council

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING
of the **PARISH COUNCIL** held in the skittle alley of the Mildmay Arms
on **Wednesday 29th June 2016** at **7.00pm**

Present: Councillors **John Brendon (JB)** – Chairman
John Carnegie (JC)
Andrew Hoddinott (AH)
Kate Oram (KO)
Terri Plummer (TP)
Simon Stapely (SS)
Simon Thornewill (ST)

In attendance: **Patrick Pender-Cudlip (PPC)** - Clerk
c.50 members of the public

Apologies: **Chris Bennett (CB)**

Procedural Items

- 1. Welcome and Introduction:** The Chairman welcomed Councillors and members of the public and explained the decision to hold an Extraordinary meeting. The Council had previously decided to canvas residents for their views on possible future developments in the parish, especially the Old School site (OSS), housing and facilities at the playing field. It had been known that Somerset County Council (SCC) would be disposing of the OSS in due course but the sudden and unexpected announcement that it would be sold by public auction on 15th July 2016 required an urgent response. The Council had therefore called an Extraordinary meeting, firstly to give residents an opportunity to express their views in person, secondly to enable Councillors to respond, and thirdly to agree the form and content of a questionnaire designed to elicit the views of as many members of the community as possible. The Chairman then invited those present to express their views about the OSS and other possible developments, especially housing and the playing field facilities.
- 2. Public session:** Members of the public responded vigorously to this invitation, expressing a wide variety of views, concerns and suggestions. A resident expressed disappointment at SCC's failure to secure the site and at the failure of the Parish Council and the District and County Councillor to take effective action to have this remedied. All were agreed that the OSS must be put to good use and developed rather than being allowed to become or appear derelict but there were major differences about what type of development would be appropriate.

Broadly speaking there was a division between those who saw the OSS as a valuable asset which could and should be used for the benefit of the whole community and those who feared that if it were taken over by the community it might turn out to be a liability rather than an asset. Much was said about flood zones and the history of flooding at the site, the possible effects of climate change, rainfall patterns and river improvement, the effectiveness of flood mitigation measures and the attitudes of the Environment Agency and the local Planning Department. There was also mention of restrictive covenants under whose provisions the site could only be used for educational purposes. The auctioneer's sale particulars were criticized for failing to mention these covenants, for omitting any reference to the Grade II Listing of the old schoolhouse, for glossing over the site's history of flooding and for gross inaccuracies in the site plan.

Given these failings and the fact that the community had been given so little notice of the auction, one resident suggested that the Chairman of the Parish Council should ask the Leader of the County Council to delay the sale so that residents and the Parish Council would have more time to consider its future. Looking to the future some felt that the church or community could make use of the site, perhaps as offices, a café, library, meeting place or car park, and possibly for craft workshops and business units, maybe funded at least in part via leaseback. Others felt that a better and more realistic option was sympathetic development by a private developer.

The Chairman thanked those present for their interest and all the suggestions which the Council would certainly take into account when discussing the OSS and the best way forward.

3. **Apologies:** CB sent apologies for being unavoidably absent.
 4. **Declarations of interest:** none.
 5. **Councillors:** It was proposed and seconded that Jo Pender-Cudlip (JPC) who had put her name forward be co-opted onto the Council. **Agreed 7-0-0**
[For-Against-Abstained]
- JPC** signed an *Acceptance of Office* form and joined the Council.

Business Items

01 (0616x) The Old School site: ST echoed the concern and annoyance felt by many residents about SCC's discourtesy in putting the OSS up for sale at such short notice and without warning the Parish or District Councils or even the County Councillor. In the circumstances he felt that finding out the views of residents was a matter of urgency. TP and KO recommended asking the District and County Councils for help in identifying possible sources of funds to develop the OSS site for community use, possibly including some educational provision for adults or children.

AH pointed out the costs and difficulties of developing and maintaining such a vulnerable site, particularly given climate change, and he feared that it might become a burden to the community in the future, He felt that the detritus generated by craft workshops and the like made them unsuitable for a conservation area in the heart of

a village and he suggested that a managed sale to a private developer was a better option. KO questioned how the Council could ensure that any private development would be sympathetic. JPC drew attention to problems obtaining insurance for properties located in flood zones and JB suggested that given the shortage of off-road car parking the site would be ideal as a car park. JB summed up by pointing out that nominating the site as an Asset of Community Value would give the Council more time to find out the views of residents. It was proposed and seconded that JB write to the Leader of SCC to ask for the sale to be delayed. **Agreed 8-0-0**

Clerk's note: *The following day JB emailed the Leader of SCC (John Osman) who replied by return, stating that the sale would be delayed until September, but would still go ahead unless Queen Camel came up with viable alternatives.*

02 (0616x) Parish Questionnaire: JC and AH felt that the draft questionnaire was well designed and would help the Council find out what residents thought about the various developments; other Councillors concurred. KO suggested adding a question about footpaths and bridleways suitable for wheelchairs, push chairs, bicycles and horses but agreed that views about this could be canvassed more effectively in a more detailed, future survey. AH suggested that such a survey should also look at stiles and gates. It was proposed and seconded that the questionnaire be used as drafted except for a further question about the approximate age of respondents, and that they be distributed by Councillors and the Clerk. **Agreed 8-0-0**

JPC pointed out that the website could accommodate downloadable versions of the Summary and Open questionnaires and also a version of the Summary Questionnaire which could be submitted online. This was proposed and seconded. **Agreed 8-0-0**

It was proposed and seconded that the Council would pay for the cost of printing the questionnaires if necessary. **Agreed 8-0-0**

Clerk's note: *SSDC (Tim Cook) very kindly printed 300 copies of an introductory letter and the questionnaires (900 sheets in all) f.o.c., for the people of Queen Camel.*

03 (0616x) Advance Notices: none

04 (0616x) Items for next month's Agenda: TP asked for a report from the CLT

05 (0616x) Matters arising post-Agenda: none

06 (0616x) Date of next meeting – 7.30pm on 11th Jul, 2016 in The Marples Room

Signed:

John Brendon
Chairman

Date: 6th July, 2016