



Queen Camel Parish Council

MINUTES of the EXTRAORDINARY MEETING
held in The Marples Room of the Memorial Hall
on **Monday 10th December 2018** at **7.30pm**

Present: Councillors **John Brendon (JB)** – Chairman
Chris Bennett (CB)
Kathryn Grainger (KG)
Bryan Norman (BN)
Simon Stapely (SS) – Vice Chairman
Claire Ward (CW)

In attendance: **Mike Lewis (ML)** - District and County Councillor
Patrick Pender-Cudlip (PPC) - Clerk
20 members of the public

Procedural Items

- 1. Welcome and introduction** - JB opened the meeting, welcoming all present.
- 2. Public session** - Several members of the public made comments on and asked questions about the Queen Camel Community Trust (CLT) proposals for the former site of Countess Gytha School (the Site or the Old School site). Points raised included the following:
 - The CLT proposals were rejected by the overwhelming majority of residents who attended the Parish Meeting on 6th December 2018.
 - The current CLT survey is not relevant because it focuses on the needs of the wider area rather than on what to the people of Queen Camel want to happen to their Old School site.
 - However the 2016 Parish Survey indicated widespread support among Queen Camel residents for the idea of using the Site as a Community Centre.
 - Using the Site as a Community Centre also features in the Council's draft Neighbourhood Plan.
 - The CLT's proposals will bring no substantial economic benefits to Queen Camel - one of the CLT's aims - and they are likely to have a negative impact on existing businesses in the village.
 - Residents are not objecting to the CLT itself or to its ambition to acquire and develop the Old School site but rather to its specific proposals for the Site and the lack of detailed information.
 - No one other than the CLT has published detailed proposals for the development of the Old School site so there are no serious alternative proposals currently under consideration.
 - If the Community were to lose control of the Site it would also lose any chance of keeping the car parking area by the bridge open to the public and this would mean a loss of amenity for the village.
 - The Parish Council and the local District Councillor risk losing their credibility if they continue to support the CLT proposals in the face of opposition from residents. The CLT itself also risks losing its credibility if it does not rethink its plans for the Site.
 - Many decades ago the village was divided about a plan to buy land for a playing field but happily a (narrow) majority was in favour and the playing field is now a much prized village asset. The CLT proposals represent a similar opportunity for the community to acquire another great asset and it would be a real shame if negative attitudes prevailed and it were lost to a private developer.

- However comparing the Old School site and the playing field is not really valid because they are quite different in scale, cost and the degree of management required.

In response to a request from the public gallery three Councillors indicated that as CLT members they have a personal (but not a pecuniary) interest; one of them is also a Board member (Director).

In response to another question it was confirmed that both the Parish Council and the Parochial Church Council had expressed interest in having office facilities at the Old School site if it were to become a community asset but there has been no discussion about how this might be financed.

[Clerk's note: *The Council debate on this issue is minuted under 01[1218x] below*]

3. Apologies – Andrew Dollard and Kit Stapely sent apologies for being unavoidably absent.

4. Declarations of interest - CB declared an interest in item 01[1218x] as a Director of the CLT.

Business Items

01 [1218x] Old School site – Councillors discussed the future of the Old School site and CB in his capacity as a CLT Director added some points of clarification [*denoted below in italics*]:

- The viability of the CLT proposals is a major concern and it is difficult for the Council to arrive at a considered judgement without more detailed financial information.
- The CLT might consider a parallel residential development with perhaps eight small housing units suitable for downsizing and starter homes: this would be economically viable and in accord with the wishes and needs of local residents as well as consonant with the CLT's declared aims. There are engineering solutions to the problem of flooding which should help overcome opposition from South Somerset District Council (SSDC) Planning Department and the Environment Agency.

Speaking as a CLT Director CB pointed out that the major grant for which the CLT has applied is solely for Community businesses and could not be used for residential development but the CLT was ready to discuss different options with the grant giver.

- The 2016 Village Survey showed strong support for the idea of using the Old School site as a Community Centre and this has become part of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- On the other hand views and circumstances change over time. Artisan workshops and a Community Centre might well benefit the wider community but inexpensive housing for Queen Camel residents would serve the village itself and its residents better.
- The recent CLT Survey seems one-sided, promoting only those options favoured by the CLT.

Speaking as a CLT Director CB explained that the 2016 Village Survey indicated support for the Site as a community centre. The purpose of the recent CLT Survey was simply to identify particular community needs.

- Unusually for a site of this kind the current owner, Somerset County Council, evidently intends to sell it without a Planning brief.
- Keeping the site in Community ownership would reduce the likelihood of planning blight and it would also make the provision of some public car parking space more likely.
- The CLT has been asked repeatedly for a business plan and financial summary with totals of likely revenue, costs and surplus for reinvestment in the business. In the absence of such information some residents feel they are being kept in the dark and cannot support the CLT's proposals.

Speaking as a CLT Director CB pointed out that the CLT has produced far more evidence in support of its proposals than those who have suggested other uses for the site although some figures have to be kept confidential for commercial reasons. He also pointed out that there is provision for housing

elsewhere in the village in the draft Neighbourhood Plan and that the CLT had already delivered 20 Affordable Homes in Roman Way.

A member of the public complained that letting CB speak as a CLT Director (rather than as a Councillor) throughout the Council debate was unfair as no other member of the public was allowed to intervene. ML confirmed that a Councillor with such a personal interest would normally speak at the start of the Council debate and then withdraw. PPC accepted the validity of the complaint and apologised to the Council and the public for this breach of proper practice. **[Clerk's note:** PPC subsequently referred himself and the Council to the SSDC Monitoring Officer; he was told that no further action was required unless a member of the public submitted a formal complaint].

It was RESOLVED 5-0-0 [For-against-abstained] that the Parish Council should maintain its support for the CLT's efforts to acquire the Old School site but the CLT should produce a business plan summarising revenue, costs and surplus along with the underlying assumptions, and that the CLT should also consider other possible options for the site, particularly social housing.

02 [1218x] A303 Dualling Scheme - BN and JB will represent Queen Camel at the Planning Examination in Yeovil. BN has also put in a personal submission (including an alternative design for Hazlegrove Junction and provision for retaining the old 303 as a local parallel road) and this has won backing from all three local parish councils (Sparkford, Queen Camel and West Camel) as well as Hazlegrove School. BN intends to get in his detailed submission early, probably before Christmas, to give Highways England (HE) as much opportunity as possible to rethink their approach.

It was RESOLVED 6-0-0 that BN and JB be authorised to submit representations on behalf of Queen Camel Parish Council at the Planning Examination.

The three parishes in conjunction with HE have also produced a draft Statement of Common Ground in which points of agreement and disagreement with HE's proposals are clearly identified.

It was RESOLVED 6-0-0 to accept the draft Statement of Common Ground prepared on behalf of Sparkford, Queen Camel and West Camel parish councils.

03 [1218x] Off-street parking – Following a short discussion

It was RESOLVED 6-0-0 that the Council offer an annual contribution of £100 in return for the general public being granted access free of charge to the private car park opposite the pub.

04 [1218x] Matters arising post-Agenda – SSDC had asked the Parish Council to forward observations on a planning application for land adjacent to England's Mead by 27th December. The Planning Officer kindly agreed to extend this deadline to 16th January which will enable the Council to discuss the application at its next meeting, on 14th January.

05 [1218x] Next meeting – January 14th, 2019 - 7.30pm in the Marples Room.

The meeting finished at 8.52pm

Signed:

John Brendon, Chairman

[14th January, 2019]