

Hoe and Worthing Villages: Norfolk

Draft Minutes of 17 Oct 2018 Meeting

Hoe and Worthing Parish Meeting

Attendance

Trevor Wood (Chairman), Philip and Rosemary Cane, Carl and Glenys Watling, Margaret Barrett, John and Jenny Tuckwell, James Keith, Dick and Sue Malt, Sally Mullins, Celia Daniel, Alan Hughes, Tracey Green, Ivan Mayes, Simon Brock, Dominic Chessum, Roger Patchett, Philip Barrett, Kevin Green and Robert Richmond.

Apologies were received from Bill Borrett, Victoria Keith, James Sayer, Sue and Mike Chapman and Mike Mullins.

After welcoming everyone to the meeting, the Chairman began by thanking Sue Malt, once again, for making tea before the meeting; to Simon Brock for keeping the lawn tidy at the hall, to Sally Mullins for taking the minutes, Danny Danson for administering the website and to Dick Malt for maintaining the archive records.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 May 2018, available on the Hoe and Worthing website and also displayed on the walls of the village hall for this evening were proposed for adoption.

Celia Daniel requested that the paragraph relating to Saint Margaret's Church, under the heading 'Report from Local Groups', be amended as follows:-

Celia Daniel gave her report on St Margaret's Church at Worthing. An art exhibition will be held at the church from 23-26 May, where visitors can purchase items. Open Churches Week will also be taking place again during the first weekend of August. Norfolk Churches Trust sponsored Bike ride, drive, is planned for 8 September. She announced plans for a two week exhibition to be held at the church from 4-18 November, displaying local archive material from the First World War. There will also be a special service of remembrance.

Incorporating the above amendment, Carl Watling proposed that the minutes were a true record of the meeting, seconded by Philip Cane. There was a unanimous show of hands to agree with the proposal. Therefore the minutes were adopted.

The Chairman noted that since the last meeting, Ron Howlett, a long-time resident of Hoe, had sadly died.

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer circulated her report for the half year to 30 September 2018, to the meeting.

Margaret Barrett's announcement to terminate her tenure as Treasurer had already been circulated in the Chairman's Parish update for October 2018. She will officially leave after the next meeting in May 2019, after the end of the financial year.

With regard to current financial requirements, the Chairman asked Carl Watling, chairman of the parish events group, to explain to the meeting about the costs we are committing to the WW1 commemorations. Carl had applied for a grant towards the cost of a commemorative plaque to be placed on the wall at the hall, showing the names of the fallen from both villages. He was successful in achieving a grant of £480. The plan had been to purchase a stone bearing the names of those who died locally in the conflict but the final quote was far in excess of the grant provision and so a different material for the plaque was explored. A brass plaque, at a cost of £316 had been ordered as a result and two commemorative flags for our churches purchased at a cost of £100. The final outlay was £416 and therefore made no call on parish funds.

Much discussion then took place regarding the necessary repairs to the roof of the hall since it is leaking, there is also evidence of woodworm, and debris and dust are constantly being blown into the hall, making it an unpleasant environment for private hire.

The chairman outlined that a long term vision of the parish had been to refurbish the roof and flooring of the original hall structure, replace or block off the now-obsolete original and leaking doors and replace one of the existing windows with French windows to allow access to the patio. It had proved extremely challenging to find a source of grant funding for the projects, some of which had to be cancelled when the building was extended to allow urgent faults revealed in the original structure, due to years of neglect, to be urgently addressed. He listed the extensive repairs and improvements that had been made in recent years and indicated that its continuing operation and upkeep were only achieved because of the work of the events and maintenance groups, who had made an ongoing income possible for the first time.

The treasurer stated that based on a previous quote for roof repairs, an approximate figure for the work would be £7,000 which cannot be funded fully by the parish at the moment. The current annual income from our Precept is £1800, nearly half of which is spent on charitable donations, including £650 shared between the two Churches. However, the Chairman has discovered a scheme to obtain grant funding from Breckland District Council which will be on a 50:50 match funded basis, for applications made before March 2019. This would allow for us to go ahead with the essential roof repairs, although would not leave much surplus in the account for any other contingencies, unless it was agreed not to make the regular charitable donations.

Dominic Chessum queried whether it was in fact lawful for donations to be made to the churches from parish funds. He also queried whether a grant application would be viewed favourably if the parish was using its existing income to fund its own grants. The chairman replied that he had spent a considerable time, some years ago, researching the issue of lawfulness and the prevailing view then was that donations could be made provided it was on the basis the provision would be for the benefit of the whole community and was not awarded for the day to day running of the churches. In previous years it was agreed the church buildings contributed to the architectural heritage and built character of the villages, were available to all and the money would only be spent on the upkeep of the buildings' structure. He also acknowledged that our accounts would have to be submitted with the application as they have been with other applications to Breckland that were successful. He indicated however that a separate body was now administering Breckland grants and may apply different criteria.

Susan Malt read out a pre-prepared statement on behalf of the Hall Maintenance Group and provided an indication of the work necessary to achieve an income equivalent to the £650 paid to the two churches. James Keith suggested there may be a case for raising the charges for using the hall and Susan provided a picture of the rationale for setting those at their current level. She proposed that the parish should authorise payment to pay for the match-funded grant and not grant other funds from the parish account; this was seconded by Dominic Chessum.

James Keith acknowledged that the attention and maintenance of the hall in the past had been extremely wanting but directed the attention of the meeting away from that and towards addressing the issues before it. He spoke passionately in support of continuing the donations to the two Churches and outlined the need that existed to raise funds for the maintenance of churches. He indicated that if there was not local funding support then The Church may look to capitalise on its assets and perhaps charge rent; it may also consider savings by selling the building or closing the local churches. He proposed that the parish should agree to once again fund the same donations of £325 to each of the two churches and authorise payment to match fund a grant to carry out the roof work; this was seconded by Celia Daniel.

Celia Daniel expressed her agreement with James Keith and further proposed that the meeting might consider a rise in the precept to allow funding of both the work to the roof and donations to the churches. She indicated this would be possible if the precept was increased from £1800 to £2,450 per annum: equivalent to increasing each household's contribution by 11pence per week (from 33pence to 44 pence). The treasurer indicated however that this apparently small rise would represent an increase in the precept of 40% and although the proposal was initially seconded, after some discussion it was withdrawn.

The chairman summarised the existing arrangement between The Church and civil parish, with The Church as owners allowing its use free of charge and the civil parish meeting the costs of running, insuring and maintaining the building. He explained that before the recent extension went ahead every indication had been given to the parish that a very long lease would be made available but as our parish meeting has no legal standing as a 'body corporate', it is unable to enter into a legal agreement.

The treasurer stated that after reviewing the accounts she wished to revise her earlier indication that the roof work could only be afforded if payments to charities were not made. She indicated that in fact it would be possible to both pay the churches as before and fund the roof repairs.

The chairman put to the meeting the proposition made by James Keith and seconded by Celia Daniel; it was approved by eighteen parishioners and opposed by three. As this resolution was so heavily supported it was impossible for the alternative proposal to succeed and it was agreed it should not be put to the meeting.

4. Chairman's Report

The Chairman indicated that he would confine his report to only those issues that required a decision or further discussion, in view of the time. He began by thanking the Treasurer, Margaret Barrett, for all her hard work and dedication during the last 11 years that she has held the post.

Extensive 'Garden Town' proposal.

- The Chairman updated everyone, regarding the reported proposal to create in excess of 10,000 new homes, between North Elmham, Billingford and Bylaugh, under the 'garden towns' initiative. It is clear that a lot of the information provided to us initially was wrong and, to some extent, the panic has been removed from the situation. The Chairman stated that he had received an extremely comprehensive and professional reply to his lengthy enquiries about this from the Chief Executive of Breckland but the response from the council leader had been less helpful. In particular it failed entirely to address the concerns about the early action that was taken in respect of this development issue, which is the largest ever proposed in Breckland and so significant that our MP informed a minister of state the developers stood to make hundreds of millions of pounds in profit. In the circumstances residents are entitled to expect the relationship between the council and developers to be conducted with the utmost professionalism, caution, transparency and accountability. Information obtained by the chairman has been regularly circulated in parish newsletters and still no formal submission has been made to date. The chairman suggested that in the absence of a written proposal it was impossible for the parish to enter into a debate or take a view and any pre-emptive or precipitate conclusion might prejudice and devalue what we finally decide based on the facts. After some discussion the meeting agreed it was not possible to take the matter further at this stage.

Highways Issues.

Trees. There have been a significant number of trees, within the Parish, that have fallen down and blocked the roads after the chairman has written to the single owner over several years, indicating the likelihood of that happening. As correspondence to the owner of the trees was ignored, the county council's highways officer consistently failed to pursue the matter and the danger remained of further trees falling the Chairman bypassed the usual channels and arranged for a county arboriculture expert to carry out a survey. The engineer identified 20 trees in danger of falling immediately, and several others that are unstable or diseased situated at the roadside. A copy of the report was not provided to the parish and the council failed to indicate its contents to the owner or the action required but merely informed him of the concern raised by the chairman. The owner has given the chairman an undertaking to carry out the necessary work as soon as possible. As one previous incident cut off fourteen homes from the telephone and internet for almost three weeks and this is again a possibility, those residents have been updated.

Flooding. There are two areas of significant flooding within the Parish, that the Chairman brought to the attention of meeting. James Keith and the Chairman have worked to bring the matter of flooding along Hoe Road North to a satisfactory conclusion against a background of letters being ignored by the county council. A satisfactory solution has now been agreed which will involve clearing the existing inadequate culvert and installing a more substantial one in a more effective position. The second area of flooding is along Worthing Road near the large pond. The county council has refused to take any action over a number of years but our Highways engineer has finally agreed to carry out work to bypass the pond to the outfall which he is confident will work. The pond owner however does not share that confidence.

Brick Kiln Farm. At the last meeting, there was a general feeling of shock expressed at the level of deaths and serious injuries on our roads, that the hugely under-resourced county safety policy was clearly failing to address. There was particular concern for the safety of our residents around Brick Kiln Farm and for over a year the chairman has requested a speed buffer zone that part of Holt Road in Hoe and the 30mph speed limit in Dereham, a route that includes a number of safety hazards. The vast amount of correspondence he has written, pointing out the dangers to Northgate School, Quebec Hall, our residents and many others has been completely ignored by our county councillors and he has not even succeeded in persuading one to visit our residents homes. At a recent meeting with the Police, the Chairman had been told that the buffer zone would cost £6,000 and he has therefore asked the three local councillors to each pay an amount of £2,000 from a publicly funded grant they receive to support their parishes. After meeting with Bill Borrett he agreed to pay his portion and it is hoped he will be able to persuade his two Dereham colleagues to do the same, to bring this long-running issue affecting the safety and wellbeing of so many, to a successful conclusion.

Councillor expenses.

The chairman indicated that he had followed up on the information provided by Bill Borrett at the last meeting about the very large rise to their expenses both proposed and approved by county councillors. He determined that contrary to what the meeting was told, the report of the independent advisory panel on councillor allowances had recommended that no increase was appropriate. As he had been requested by a parishioner at the last meeting to stop the debate on the topic the chairman asked the meeting whether he should proceed on this occasion: the view expressed was that as the parish could do nothing about it then time should not be spent discussing it. In the circumstances the chairman declared his report concluded.

5. Reports from Local Groups

Carl Watling reported that the Events Committee were planning a quiz evening on 26th October, there are also various talks planned at the hall, a winter ramble and, of course, the unveiling of the commemorative plaque at the parish hall on 25th November, which will immediately follow a remembrance service at the adjacent church in Hoe.

Celia Daniel made the meeting aware of the WW1 commemorations taking place at St Margaret's Church, Worthing. There will be an exhibition from 4-11th November at the church, and a Remembrance Sunday Service at 10.45 am on Sunday 11th November.

6. Date of next meeting

29th May 2019 (Please note this has been changed from the date previously announced).