Notes from Meeting of Weir Meadow Working Group

27 Feb 2018 in The Hub, Ide at 18.30

1. Present: Rich Cloke (chairman), Tony Stearman, Nick Bradley, Cheryl Haddy, Dawn Chapman, Stuart Brooking

2. Apologies: Andy Bragg, Mark Thomas, Doug Bell, Pip Kersey

3. Our last meeting was on 14 Sept 2017 at the Cricket Pavilion ( minuted).

4. NB recapped on negotiations over buying Weir Meadow: in response to the CC’s asking price of £50k (exc VAT) in July 2017, we offered £25K. The CC’s then reduced their asking price to £40k in September 2017. In October 2017 the CCs confirmed that they intend to retain access to the two northern fields across / around the edge of Weir Meadow. On 15 Feb the CCs provided a sketch plan of the suggested access route.

5. In a telephone call by NB to the CCs after 15 Feb, the CCs had suggested we might also like to buy the two northern fields.

6. Andy Bragg had, separately, also wondered about the pros and cons of buying the northern fields, as a way of overcoming the need for a farmer tenant to take large plant across Weir Meadow after we buy it. Andy had met with Nick on 20 Feb, and followed that up in an email on 21 Feb, making the case for the village buying the fields and subsequently letting them. He had done this because he was going to be abroad on 27 Feb.

7. It was clear that the need to provide access to a farmer tenant was going to cause significant problems. The current tenant, Richard Parr, of Weir Meadow and the two northern fields, put large plant through the field intensively by day and night over a sustained two day period when harvesting maize in the autumn. To accommodate this would need money spending on re-enforcing the entrance ; and fencing off the western route around the edge of the meadow.

All agreed that it should be avoided if at all possible.

8. At the same time, there was not the appetite to buy the 18 acres of northern fields: it would be complicated to explain the rationale to potential donors; the parish Council may not wish to become a landlord to farmers; and it could still leave the issue of access unresolved. Asking other landowners to buy the fields, and then farm them without demanding access could work, but , again, felt too complex for those at the meeting.

9. The CCs have said that access to the northern fields is not possible, but provided no expert evidence or reasoning for that assertion. We know that there is a place of access flush with the road from College Lane, free of hedge, post and railed, where the two fields adjoin. We agreed that there was scope for challenging the CCs assertion that this was inadequate, since we could envisage ways of fashioning a wider turning circle into the margin of the field. And College Lane itself is not especially narrow by Devon lane standards. Access can be gained from up the hill, by Marks Farm.

10. We decided, therefore, to ask Pete Skinner [RC will do this] for an expert professional view on the feasibility of accessing the northern fields from College Lane, before deciding how to respond next to the CCs £40k offer.

11. Next meeting to be called by RC when we have further advice to hand from Pete Skinner.

[End]