

Ide Parish Council

Weir Meadow Working Group

Minutes of a meeting held remotely on Zoom on Monday 29 November 2021 at 7.30 pm

1. Present: Richard Cottle (Chair), Mel Liversage (Parish Clerk), Phil Willcock, David Howe, Cheryl Haddy, Nick Bradley.

2. Apologies: Richard Cloke, Trevor Gardner, Mark Thomas.

3. Draft minutes of last meeting held 18 Oct 2021 were approved.

Action: Mel to post on website.

4. Fund raising

Nick updated the meeting on the total raised so far in the Appeal for Funds: £38,596 (£37,696 received in the account, and £900 pledged). A second wave of appeal letters with brochures had gone out during November. CH is publishing the thermometer graphic in each month's Ide Times; and NB has included FAQs and answers in the last two editions.

5. NB reported that he had responded to Jenny Tuckett's helpful enquiry with a letter making the points that:

- one of the PC's original drivers was to buy the land to protect it from development by either the present owners, or a future owner were the Commissioners to put the land on the open market;
- this also applied to the Orchard;
- Parish Councils are free standing bodies who can own property. It would need an Act of Parliament to take over land that a PC owned;
- the PC could and would not dispose of the land unless that were the settled will of the village - so, highly improbable;
- unlike District and County Councils which have to provide expensive services from dwindling budgets, and unlike the Church Commissioners who have to provide for clergy and churches with dwindling congregations, Parish Councils are under no pressure to raise large sums of money by selling off assets, because their commitments are modest, and they are not capped when demanding their precepts.

6. Loan application

6.1 DH and NB reported that we will hear the result of the Orchard group's application to Viridor Credits for £33,000 in the second week of January. If this is successful, we will need to borrow little or nothing to buy the Orchard; and little or nothing of the £40,000 for Weir Meadow. But we will be looking to a long term 50 year fixed rate loan for the £130,000 needed for Northern Fields; and a short term, probably variable rate, loan for the reclaimable £8,000 VAT on Weir Meadow and £11,560 VAT on the Orchard.

6.2 To apply for any loans we have to know and consult on the amount we wish to borrow (though we can borrow less than we apply for if extra funds come in). We must have completed a consultation exercise of the residents in the village, and obtained a favourable response. The published NALC advice is to conduct a survey (paper or online) setting out the essential details of the

loan we intend to apply for, with a simple YES/NO answer reply sheet. A public meeting(s) is also recommended. We need to demonstrate public support through this process - no numerical level of support is laid down. No formal referendum is required.

6.3 DH raised two points:

- that there is an advisory four week minimum period for the consultation to run if we are borrowing over £100,000, which we almost certainly will be.
- that we will need to confirm our understanding of the rubric: should the required parish council resolution to apply to DALC for borrowing approval be obtained before or after running the consultation exercise.

ACTION: NB check with DALC on this order of play

Update 2 Dec: Cara Stobart of DALC advises the Parish Council to make clear its intention to apply for a loan at a Council meeting: this was done and agreed at the IPC meeting on 15 September 2021. Then consult. Then make the formal resolution as prescribed in the guidance notes. This order of play, she advises, will guard against any issues that might arise in connection with the '6 month rule' (a measure which prevents a Council from revisiting decisions within six months); and provide a clear evidence trail which is transparent to the public, and allows for any adjustments based on community feedback, particularly if we are looking to raise the precept for the project (which we are).

6.4 Bearing this advice in mind, the timetable will therefore be [some of this is update reporting and timetabling, not pure minutes of the meeting]:

- December 2021 prepare text of consultation survey questionnaire with input from Parish Councillors - amount to borrow long term will either be £130,000 or £163,000, plus short term borrowing of £19,560 to cover VAT. Short term loans to be repaid once VAT has been reclaimed.
- Sometime after 7 January 2022, receive result of Viridor application or Orchard.
- On Wed 19 January 2022 at IPC meeting present:
 - proposed text of consultation survey questionnaire for approval
 - draft 2022/23 Budget to include projected PWLB borrowing repayments and projected increased precept income, subject to consultation and approval.
- On Thursday 20 January 2022 start 4 week consultation exercise with paper survey, supported by website post, and a clearly stated deadline Thursday 17 February 2022.
- Sat 22 January 2022 hold two public consultation meetings, at 1pm and 5pm, to explain why and how the loan proposal will work, and how much the repayments will be, as part of the consultation exercise.
- 4 week consultation period ends Thurs 17 Feb 2022
- Plan Extraordinary IPC meeting on Wed 2 March 2022 (avoiding half term 21-25 Feb) to put resolution to IPC to apply to DALC for borrowing approval (Resolution to Borrow), with amount depending on Viridor and consultation outcome.
- Also at this meeting submit a formal Report to Council as a document with 1-2 page summary of the project, the completed application form for approval to borrow, showing need, costing and benefit. This is all in our appeal brochure.
- First week of March 2022 submit application to DALC for borrowing approval. DALC will take perhaps 2 weeks to give approval, → into late March. DALC submit application to Dept for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- DfLUH&C may take 6 weeks to approve the loan → late April or mid May 2022.

6.5 NB and DH and ML will liaise to prepare the documents in advance as far as possible:

- survey letter and return slip for 19 Jan 2022
- Budget for 19 Jan 2022
- application for borrowing approval form for 2 March 2022
- Report to Council for 2 March 2022
- precise wording of the resolution to borrow to comply with guidance for 2 March 2022
- draft minutes of the meeting at which the resolution is passed will also have to accompany application form

ACTION: NB, DH, ML and parish councillors prepare survey questionnaire text during December; circulate to councillors for comment.

ACTION: NB & ML set up the 2 public meetings with survey materials and log of attendees.

ACTION: ML prepare draft budget for 19 Jan to include PWLB and precept figures

ACTION: NB, DH, ML prepare Resolution to Council; application form; survey; budget; and Report material in advance.

ACTION: ML book hall for 2 March 2022 at 7.45pm

7. Burns Night party

CH reported that she has booked the hall for the night of Sat 22 January 2022 for a Burns Night fund raiser party.

ACTION: CH

8. Dogs in Weir Meadow and Northern Fields

8.1 NB reported on his online searches to see how other local authorities deal with this issue. They vary depending on the facility's circumstances. All children's Play Areas with play equipment are fenced off and have no dogs. All the Playing Fields that I have visited or seen online have at least some access for dogs, many with restrictions such as cordoned off cricket squares, or instructions to keep dogs on leads. Pure cricket grounds tend to be not accessible to the public and so have no access to dogs. Many council playing fields have no restrictions, but have signs instructing owners to clean up, and provide dog poo bins.

8.2 We agreed we will need to consult residents, obtain the range of views that there will be, and come to a solution specifically for Weir Meadow, incorporating the ability we will have to utilise the N Fields too.

Also agreed that must maintain current focus on land purchase, since however we resolve dog access, we will still buy this land.

8.3 RC suggested we include a question in the survey about what people would like to see the N Fields used for. NB felt if this might be better asked at the open meetings, and the survey kept simple and focussed on the borrowing question.

9. Next meeting Tuesday 18 January 2022, 7.30pm on Zoom.

NCAB 2 Dec 2021.

Approved 18 January 2022