

Oxhill Parish Council
Minutes of an Extraordinary Parish Council Meeting
held on Monday 12th December 2022 at 7.30pm
in The Old Chapel, Main Street

Councillors Present

Cllr Harbour (Chairperson), Cllr Connolly, Cllr Rivers-Fletcher, Cllr Robertson and Cllr Stuart

Attended by 14 members of the public.

22/97. Apologies

Cllr Chris Mills, Cllr John Feilding, Christine Coles (Parish Clerk)

22/98. To receive Declarations of Interest under the Council's Code of Conduct relating to business on the agenda

No interests were declared.

22/99. To discuss the sale of the Gardners Field

Councillor Harbour gave a brief history – Bass Brewery sold the Chapel Field in 1995 to the Gardner family for the purpose of it being used for the village. It would have been worth more for development. There is a covenant on the land that if it is sold before 2075, then 50% of the increased value over and above the purchase price and costs of purchase goes to the brewery.

There is in addition a covenant requiring the consent of Bass to the registration of any change of ownership.

The field has occasionally been used for village events such as the Jubilees and villagers' weddings.

The PC would like to purchase the land as a village green using money from the precept and from private donations.

22/100. Public participation session

Questions

Could the money not be used to put in a footpath from the Sett to the existing footpath as the 4 children that live in the Sett have to walk on the grass verge when they go to the bus for school? The Chair explained that the PC had explored this several years ago and the cost was proximately £15,000. At that time the PC did not have the funds available and those living in the Sett were asked if they would like to contribute to the project which they declined. Cllr Stuart stated that this could be explored at a future meeting but as it was not on the agenda it was not possible to discuss it at this time.

Had a separate valuation been obtained to find the market value of the field? The Chair said that this was something that the PC would possibly look into.

One village would like to support it but asked what are the timescales? Had a share scheme been explored? This could take up to 6 months to set up with the PC having a 50% share and the village having an equal share.

Another villager stated that from his discussions with the owners that they were open to offers but that an offer that was accepted would be over the market value.

Another villager stated that there was another option. He would buy it and rent it back to the PC for a peppercorn rent for a number of years. Cllr Stuart asked how long he would see this arrangement lasting. He replied he thought 10 years.

A villager stated that a developer could hold onto the land for a long time and that you should not rely on the planning authority to protect a bit of land. He would also prefer to put money into a share scheme that to gift money to the PC or the village hall.

Could shares not be sold so each house in the village has a share in the company? The Chair reiterated the timescales and whether there was time to put this in place, as the timescales are unknown, but did not rule it out as an option.

Comments were received via email.

While I think it would be excellent to have it as an ongoing amenity for the village, I would like to raise concerns regarding:

- a) parking for events on the field at what is a narrow part of Main Street; events at the Old Chapel have caused issues in the past.
- b) dog mess - a perennial problem and if the area is purchased and allowed for general exercise use I would suggest that a 'no dogs' policy is in place.

These concerns were noted and felt that they could be addressed at the appropriate time. Another email received stated:

I think a clear statement from the PC on the rationale for purchase needs to be made. Whilst the amenities of Ley's Field are not wonderful, such do exist. Furthermore, the vast majority if not all the houses of Oxhill have garden space. So, is there truly a need for an enhanced or additional children's play area and public open space or is this a means to simply delay or curtail village development?

The Main St field was of great benefit for the Jubilee celebrations of this and previous years, but is a once a decade event justification for purchase at public cost? Again, I think a strong case needs to be made to support purchase and it should be considered that is the land is acquired at cost by the PC then it will become a truly open, public space and therefore access by all can never be denied. The 2022 Jubilee event came down to a Church run, private event on private land. It may be challenging to repeat this arrangement if the land becomes 'public'.

Therefore, the option of an investment approach may be the best, albeit aligning the legal issues between the respective parties may be time consuming.

If sufficient support can be generated to enable a 'consortium' approach then all well and good, but the land would of course then be privately held, but perhaps an arrangement to lease it to the PC on a 'pepper corn' rental, full repairing lease approach could be developed. There will no doubt be lot of issues to iron out to secure this approach.

As above I note that a clear reason for acquisition is required. If it is to generate a public space then all well and good, but do we really need such. My assumption is however that

the proposition to acquire the land is the overtly prevent or delay development. This being the case, will such acquisition set an expectation that as, when, and indeed if other areas of land in the village are offered for sale/development the PC will aim to intervene in one way or another to prevent/delay such development?

I, like many, do not want to see our village further developed, but I do feel that the infill of Main Street would be far less of an impact than say the development to any scale of the Whatcote/Main St/ Green Lane triangle. There may be some positives to the development of Main Street, say for smaller housing units for retirement purposes.

The village is in want of appropriate housing I believe for first time buyers and indeed retirees – it is a great shame that the PCs support for such housing stock in respect of the recent Green Lane development still resulted in the creation of holiday accommodation. Main street is, in many respects an appropriate area for development and if such were to occur, then one would assume, hopefully, that pressure to develop elsewhere would be reduced.

A villager asked if there were any other parties who were going to buy part of the field as there are rumours around the village. The Chair explained that the person buying Oddcott was intending to buy the piece of land behind the house that has previously been used as a garden for the house.

The Chair then explained that the purpose of the meeting was to ascertain whether the village felt that the PC should attempt to purchase the field a vote was held. 13 of the members of public attending voted to support the purchase.

22/101.

To approve the following resolution:

'That in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted (item 22/102), it is advisable in the public interest that the public be temporarily excluded and they are instructed to withdraw from the meeting at this point'. It was agreed to accept this resolution. The members of the public left the meeting.

The meeting ended at 9.15pm

DRAFT