

Extraordinary Full Council meeting – 7th December 2022

There were several concerns raised prior to the business of the Extraordinary Full Council meeting held on Wednesday 7th December 2022, and the response to those queries and concerns are as detailed below.

Height.

The proposed height of the building has caused concern, particularly by those adjacent residents. The suggestion of lowering the roof height has been put forward to the architects. An indicative drawing of how the building could be changed to lower the height has been put together in draft for discussions with the planning officer.

Access.

The access, primarily the Brislands Lane/Lymington Bottom junction, is of concern to many, including the Council, who have been working with Hampshire Highways, and still are, to facilitate changes to make the junction safer.

Pedestrian Safety.

This is of paramount concern to the Council as well. Particularly if the Recreation Ground is to be used in primary school's park and stride initiative. The Council and the school are working with Highways to try and improve pedestrian safety, both for school children and dog walkers, along Brislands Lane and Gradwell Lane. A pedestrian footway is proposed along Uplands Lane and along the edge of the Cemetery, to ensure pedestrian safety at the Recreation Ground.

Loss of Green Field Playing area.

There will be an area of grass/green space used to accommodate the new facility. (50mx20m approx.) It is acknowledged that this area is important to some people. However, this location would result in the smallest loss of green space overall. The football training area can be moved to the former cricket pitch. There is no loss to cricket as the cricket square could be renovated in the future, if required, the football training area would not affect this.

Staff costs/long term financial burden.

It is proposed that the building will be run by a charitable organisation or trustee committee, like the Village Hall/Benians Pavilion. Any staff required is likely to be on a part time bases, eg. Caretaker and/or building manager or office/admin and would be paid for out of the committee's own accounts depending upon requirement. It is very unlikely that any full time staff would be required but there would realistically need to be a staff presence during most hiring times. Any salary costs have been included in budget/business plans for the running of the building. A community building is a community asset, the building is being designed to be self funding and future proofed, and would offer local employment.

Not achieving the need of the village. No benefits for teenagers.

The purpose of the building is to be a recreational and community hub for all ages but the purpose being primarily to focus on the youth of the village (eg. Scouts, martial arts academy). There will be a variety of activities for teenagers, including a youth club if any volunteers are able to run one. There is a financial provision solely for a youth club for teenagers, and a separate area identified within the building for that purpose should it come to fruition. Any additional ideas on how the village can cater for teenagers would be welcomed.

Another site was offered. Why was that not suitable?

The Council are aware that there has been a reference to a site in Alton Lane, but the Council were never made aware of this, and would have been considered previously if this was the case. There was also land offered, at a cost, at the golf club, however the location was deemed unsustainable, and unaffordable, due to the edge of village location and the necessity for users to have to drive.

Public liability on the long term loan and should there be a public vote?

Most Community Facilities are paid for with government loans, including the Recreation Ground itself. The government as part of their assessment criteria ask the Council to show that they will be able to afford the repayments, this was carried out and approved. Many Councils have long term loans on their community assets, it is usually the only way that they can be afforded. The Precept, the portion of the Council Tax that is requested by the parish council, is used for the provision and maintenance of parish owned land and facilities. The current financial contribution per household calculated on a Band D dwelling is £1.50 per week and is only likely to increase to reflect rising costs in utilities and services, as the Council has already provided evidence that, on the current precept, loan payments are affordable. The building is designed to be future proof, modular and adaptable, for use for many years, when other facilities in the village are no longer viable.

With reference to a public vote. Referendums are unusual, particularly in this regard and the Parish Council has a mandate to proceed with this project, by way of a consultation back in 2018 and the newly elected Council in 2019 voted unanimously to take the project forward in this current form. There have been presentations, public consultations, further surveys, a newsletter hand delivered to every house in the village, and follow up drop in sessions, so believe the public have already had plenty of opportunity to voice their opinion. A public vote by way of a postal parish vote could be a way of getting indication of support, or not, and this is being considered, but it would not be legally binding.

The main role of a Council is to represent the needs of the community as a whole and provide, enhance, and maintain community facilities within the village, and there is a proven need for a new, better equipped and 'multi use' facility which will benefit, all generations of Four Marks residents for many years to come.