

**Minutes of the Extraordinary Ashford Parish Council Meeting
Held on Tuesday 5th September 2023 at 7pm in the Church Hall,
St Peter's Church, Ashford**

Present: Cllrs P Hughes (Chairman), J Bosley, K Furse, G Holder, B Kettle, V Lawson, and M Withey

Mrs V Woodhouse, Locum Parish Clerk

26 Members of the public

2309/01

Apologies

None.

2309/02

Declarations of Interest

Cllr Hughes declared a Personal Interest as a resident well known to him had told him in a personal conversation that the resident was considering bidding for the land in question. Cllr Hughes offered to stand down as Chairman for the meeting, however, the Council indicated it was content for him to continue as Chair.

2309/03

Minutes

It was **resolved**, with no votes to the contrary, to approve and sign the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Thursday 20th July 2023 as a correct record.

2309/04

Land in Meadowside

The Chairman explained that the piece of land in Meadowside is being sold via auction on 13th September 2023, he explained that around five years ago the Parish Council had considered the purchase of the land for use as a play area, however, it is deemed by Devon County Council to form part of the highway and it was found not to be an appropriate place for a play area, there are also services underneath. It was noted that the Auction Pack is still not available and therefore not all of the details of the sale are known. The Chairman opened the meeting to representations from members of the public.

Members of the public showed their overwhelming support for the Parish Council to purchase the land, they felt it is an asset to the village which is used as an open space and has hosted celebrational events such as the Queen's Jubilee and King's Coronation in the village and they would like the area protected for these community uses. However, members of the public were also mindful of the constraints on the Parish Council including the total cost of the purchase which, including any charges on the land and legal fees, is likely to be far more than the Parish Council can afford, the tight timescale in which to raise funds and organise a purchase. Members of the public did not feel that realistically the Parish Council would be able to afford to buy the piece of land and felt it would sell for a lot higher than the guide price.

Members of the public asked if there was a legal time limit by which the Auction Pack needs to be released. It was noted that the legal pack was expected by Wednesday but if it had not been received by Friday the Auction would not go ahead.

Concerns were raised about the piece of land being used as an access point to facilitate development in the adjacent field. The adjacent landowner confirmed that the land was outside the development boundary and indicated that they would be interested in purchasing the land in Meadowside and would be willing to consider making the land available to the village. Members of the public asked if the Parish Council could seek assurance for the village that it would be available for community use and asked that the needs of the village are considered in any future development.

Members of the public discussed alternative ways of funding a purchase, it was noted that the Parish Council could not take a loan without following a statutory process which is not a quick process, those present indicated that donations could be sought from residents although it was felt that donations would have to be significant and only possible if the Auction was delayed as the timescale is too tight, it was noted that the Parish Council had looked to boost funds through avenues such as grant funding and had approached the Fullabrook CIC, however, the timescale was again too tight to pursue.

The public did ask if the Parish Council could make an offer for the land prior to Auction, it was noted that the Auction House has confirmed that it would not consider any offers until the legal pack is available.

Given the likelihood of the Parish Council not being able to afford to purchase the land it was suggested that the most appropriate way forward would be for the Parish Council to seek an agreement with the potential purchaser to ensure the land is available for the village to use. Members of the public asked the Parish Council to do its best to ensure the land is available for community use.

2309/05

It was **resolved** that under Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item as it involves the likely disclosure of confidential information.

Members of the public left the meeting.

PART B

Cllr Hughes again offered to stand down as Chairman and leave the meeting given his personal interest declared at the start of the meeting. The Council indicated it was happy for him to conduct the meeting and Cllr Hughes indicated he would not steer the meeting to any decision and would abstain from voting.

2309/06

Meadowside

Members discussed the overwhelming response from those at the meeting for the Parish Council to secure the land for use by the village. Members considered and discussed at length, the purchase of the land. It was noted that the auction pack is still not available and therefore not all of the details are known, members considered all of the resources available to the Parish Council and ways of protecting the amenity for the village.

Members considered its current financial position and liabilities and ways in which its financial position could be increased within such a short period of time, including an increase in the precept and donations. After much discussion the Parish Council felt the resources available to it were limited and did not feel it could commit to an unknown amount for purchase or an open-ended addition to the precept, it felt that the timescale was too short, and members considered the risks if the Parish Council was unsuccessful in any bid to purchase the land which members felt was likely.

In the short time available the Parish Council felt that the only option in being able to secure the land for the use of the village would be to reach an agreement with the potential purchaser and it was **resolved**, with one abstention from Cllr Hughes and no votes against, to seek an agreement with the potential purchaser of the land for the Parish Council to lease the land for use as public open space for a period of 20 years at a peppercorn (nil) rent and to put a clause in the lease that if the land is to become part of a development, the Parish Council is given another suitable piece of land within the development for public open space.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.50pm.

Signed

Dated

IMPORTANT NOTE – IF YOU DO NOT AGREE WITH ANYTHING PLEASE CONTACT THE LOCUM PARISH CLERK AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND NOT LATER THAN 7 DAYS BEFORE THE NEXT MEETING. IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO AGREE ANY CHANGES, YOU SHOULD CONTACT THE CHAIRMAN WHO WILL DETERMINE ANY CHANGES AND INFORM THE COUNCIL PRIOR TO THEIR FINAL APPROVAL