

**MINUTES OF AN EXTRA MEETING OF BRENCHLEY PARISH COUNCIL ON THURSDAY 16th
NOVEMBER 2017 IN BRENCHLEY MEMORIAL HALL AT 7.30pm**

Present

Councillors C. Woodley (Chairman) presided, R. Wickham (Vice Chairman), J. Grant, A. de Guingand, K. Sparkhall, Mrs. N. Marriott, Mrs. L. Butler, Ms C. Brooks (Clerk)

In attendance

Two members of the public.

1. To accept apologies for absence

The Council accepted apologies from Cllr. Mrs. Warner who had a private engagement and Cllr. Batty who had work commitments.

2. To record declarations of interest in any item on the Agenda

Members are reminded that if any have a *prejudicial* interest in an agenda item, this should be declared at the start of the meeting.

Personal interests could be declared at this point or, alternatively, could be declared at the time a specific item is being discussed if that member wishes to speak on the item in which s/he has a personal interest. In case of doubt about such an interest Councillors have been advised to contact the Monitoring Officer before the meeting.

None declared.

3. To adjourn to allow public participation

4. Planning and Development

4.1 To agree the Appointment of Consultants to support the Neighbourhood Development Plan

Cllr Sparkhall outlined the process used by the Interim Steering Group (ISG) to consider consultants for the NDP. A Panel drawn from the ISG, together with the Chairman of the Council, conducted the interviews. The Clerk was also present. It was the unanimous view of the ISG that Feria Urbanism be appointed. An assessment of the rationale for this recommendation is given below, together with an indication of its financial implications.

The proposal being recommended is significantly more expensive than the alternative, but it was felt that the approach of Feria Urbanism was sufficiently superior to justify recommending their proposal. The ISG propose to follow the structure that Feria suggest, that is to have initial consultations focused on specific groups around the community. These visioning events will be by invitation and are intended to bring out ideas so that more targeted work could be undertaken. There would then be a 3-day event to look at major issues, a design forum and required policies. This full public meeting would be the measure by which it could be seen if there was enough community engagement to proceed with the NDP.

Cllr. Mrs. Butler clarified that the proposal by Feria Urbanism allows for a break in the contract after Task 6 (The Interim Report for Steering Group), which is predicted to be presented around Easter time. It was felt that it is critical that a contractual break is made at this point, and that the Steering Group (SG) would report to the full Parish Council to reconfirm costs, and to ensure that the scale of input from the community was sufficient to proceed. It would also allow for a more accurate reflection of the path of the TWBC Local Plan, which is likely to be published in Draft around that time.

Cllr. Sparkhall confirmed that costs for the NDP would fall over three financial years. In the current financial year 2017/18 there is a £9k government grant available. However, this grant would need to be invoiced in this financial year and Feria's schedule dictates costs of just under £10k up to Task 6. The Clerk was asked to request information on whether any proportion of the grant would need to be repaid if unspent in year one.

The majority of the costs would be due in the second year, up to approximately £20k, with the balance in the financial year 2019/2020. Whilst there may be other grants available in the second and third years this is an unknown quantity and therefore should not be factored into our calculations.

Cllr. Woodley commented that Feria Urbanism are also consultants on the NDPs of neighbouring parishes Horsmonden and Paddock Wood, and to Hawkhurst and Cranbrook & Sissinghurst. This would be advantageous as there would be less likelihood of conflicting or contradictory information being included in NDPs.

It was agreed that a modular approach from Task 7 to Task 14 may allow the Steering Group to contribute a greater level of skill and therefore reduce costs. This would need to be agreed with Feria.

Cllr. Grant asked if the funding commitment required to undertake the NDP had been fully considered. He was particularly concerned that, whilst it is intended for the TWBC Local Plan to be published in Draft in the Spring, this was by no means a certainty, and aligning any part of our NDP to that may be problematic and ultimately costly. Cllr. Mrs. Butler clarified that the break after Task 6 this would safeguard that eventuality.

Cllr. Grant also asked for it to be made explicit at a very early stage what can be achieved by the NDP and what cannot; this could be gained by a direct and targeted publicity campaign. It was agreed that this would be made clear in the early discussions with Feria on the engagement events. Cllr. Woodley commented that an impact on the Local Plan can only be achieved by an NDP, as a Parish Plan could not provide that security. Demonstrating value for money in committing to the NDP process and outlay is vital and Feria have a very robust process and track record.

In response to concerns raised by Cllr. Wickham that the NDP would not prevent undesirable development, Cllr. Mrs. Marriott commented that there continues to be a risk that, even with an NDP in place, material considerations are overridden by the Borough when considering potential development sites. The Parish Plan Survey did not have a housing need section, or a design statement, and the NDP process will cover these in depth; accommodating development in the parish would therefore be much more specific.

Cllr. Marriott commented that any examination of the NDP would need to demonstrate an extensive background work, and effective consultation, and that the process would be expected to take 18 months to two years. Cllr. Butler commented that Feria's schedule was more in line with this expectation.

RESOLVED to accept the recommendation of the ISG that Feria Urbanism be appointed as the consultants to the Neighbourhood Development Plan for Brenchley and Matfield.

RESOLVED to include in the contract with Feria Urbanism a condition for a break-clause be exercised after Task 6, to ensure satisfactory progress has been made, and to enable Members to consider whether it would be in the Council's interest to proceed with the NDP.

RESOLVED that the Steering Group prepares the application for the Neighbourhood Planning Grant, for the Clerk to submit to the relevant body.

4.2 To agree the budget for a Neighbourhood Development Plan

In response to the recommendation of the ISG that the expected additional costs should be covered by the precept over the three financial years, Cllr. Woodley commented that the precept has increased over the past two years and proposed that consideration be given to funding these costs from the Parish Council's existing general reserves. Cllr. de Guingand responded that this decision should await the budget setting work he is currently undertaking with the Clerk, and that this would inform the decision on the precept which would be discussed by the Council.

RESOLVED that the recommendation of the ISG to fund the NDP from the precept be considered by the Council when the budget and precept figures are available.

The composition of the formal Steering Group was discussed with gratitude expressed to the members of the ISG for their achievements in bringing the recommendations to the Council. The composition of the Steering Group would remain as on the ISG with all members having agreed to continue.

RESOLVED that the ISG be formally instituted as the Steering Group (SG) for the development of a Neighbourhood Development Plan for Brenchley and Matfield.

A volunteer had been identified to take on the administration role and it was agreed that it would be beneficial for a member of the SG to have a finance brief, to work closely with the Clerk to ensure compliance with the Council's financial regulations.

Cllr. Sparkhall raised the issue of a Chairman for the SG and it was agreed that it would be helpful for a brief outline of responsibilities to be obtained, to encourage a member of the community to step forward. The Clerk offered to obtain this from other parishes, and would circulate it to the ISG.

5. To be advised or urgent Business as may be previously notified

None.

6. Date of next meeting

Full Council Meeting, Monday 4th December 2017, 7.30pm