

WADHURST PARISH COUNCIL

THE MINUTES OF AN EXTRA ORDINARY MEETING OF WADHURST PARISH COUNCIL HELD REMOTELY VIA ZOOM ON THURSDAY 25th MARCH AT 7.00PM

Present: Cllr Gadd (Chair), Cllr Murphy, Cllr C Moore, Cllr Niell, Cllr P Moore, Cllr Tincombe (in part), Cllr Griffin, Cllr Crawford, Cllr Bullock, Cllr Morris and Cllr Anderson (in part).

Also, in attendance: Claudine Feltham (CF) (RFO/temporarily covering Clerk's role). There were no members of the public present.

1. To receive apologies and reasons for absence.
*Apologies were received from Cllr Maggs – a keyworker.
Apologies were received from Cllr Edwards – family commitments.
Apologies were received from Cllr Smith – family commitments
Apologies were received from WDC Cllr Standley – attendance at another meeting.*
2. To receive declarations of personal, prejudicial and disclosable pecuniary interests on items on the agenda and updates to members' register of interests.
None
3. Public Forum – time limit 15 minutes.
There were no members of public present.
4. To consider, and approve if appropriate, which agenda items are sufficiently confidential as to warrant exclusion of members of the press and public under the provisions of the Public Bodies (admissions to meetings) Act 1960.
Members reached a majority vote to consider agenda item 6 as confidential.
5. Proposal to agree if the WPC should, in principle, make an offer for the household waste site.
*Cllr Gadd thanked Cllr C Moore for all of the work she had put into this.
Cllr P Moore gave an overview: The parish clerk had been contacted by Peter Smith, ESCC property department to advise that ESCC were in the process of selling the Wadhurst Household Waste Site and had been made aware of our unsuccessful application to make this site an asset of community value (ACV), and enquired if the parish council would like to make a bid to buy the site. However, the deadline for receiving a bid would be 31st March 2021. Cllr C Moore did ask ESCC if they would consider an extension to the deadline but this was not possible as they had already received other bids and they intended to consider all bids together in April.
As a response to this Cllr C Moore pulled together the paperwork and had looked into a similar case being pursued by Forest Row, who had put together a viable business plan to buy their closed site. Forest Row Household Waste and Recycling Centre was very similar in size and number of visits that the Wadhurst site had. Forest Row are intending to offer a reduced service. The proposal for Wadhurst would be to follow a similar plan. It would not be replicating the previous service, but to re-open on reduced number of days and reduced types of waste that could be accepted, at a charge to the users.
The role of the parish council would be to purchase the site, and then lease it to a Community Interest Company (CIC) for a nominal rent for them to run the site. The emphasis would be on recycling and re use. MP Nus Ghani is supporting the re-opening of the Forest Row site, and we would hope that she could also support Wadhurst.
When considering the previous household survey, under the heading of 'would you support any sustainable energy project' the highest supported, at almost 90% was the household waste site. There were also considerations for composting service.
The operation would have to be a professional company; run by the CIC, at arm's length from parish council.
The Wadhurst waste licence has lapsed, but cannot see issue with this as was previously licenced as a site.*

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The main thing with this is it would require residents to use it, and pay for it. This would be in the form of;

- a) subscriptions from residents – for as many visits as they like*
- b) one off visit fee*
- c) sale of recyclable materials by the operating company (CIC)*
- d) sale of reusable items by the CIC*

Forest Row have been very helpful and have also offered a Zoom meeting with us.

Cllr Murphy enquired if the parish council had the power to do this? Cllr C Moore confirmed that the parish council were allowed to buy assets. Cllr P Moore explained that this was a different scenario than the ACV which WDC whilst this is a bid to buy the site from ESCC.

Cllr Gadd asked what Cllr C Moore felt about the possibility, having looked into this and prepared the papers. Cllr C Moore explained that in an ideal world we would have the time to prepare a full business plan, however this has just been presented to as an opportunity and feels that it would be now or never. If the site is sold to a third party, I cannot see us having the opportunity again. Where would you find an alternative site in Wadhurst? Considering the size, tonnage, types of waste and number of visits – we are very similar when compared with Forest Row and feel we would be able to take a similar model forward. Forest Row have used a management consultant and a lot of people to pull this together. I have spoken to the waste contractor that Forest Row are going to use and they would be willing to use same model for Wadhurst.

Cllr P Moore: when the parish council looked at the possibilities of keeping the site open several years ago, they looked at using the same model as it had been working on, with the same contractor, and it went from being possibly fundable to impossible on that model.

Whilst there are unknowns, there always will be, no matter how much time we could spend on the idea.

Cllr Niell asked if the CIC would fix the costs themselves, and if parishioners would pay the CIC directly, or if the costs would be included within Council Tax payments? Cllr C Moore confirmed that the CIC would set the rates. The purpose of the parish council would be to purchase the site and lease it to the CIC at a peppercorn rent. The CIC would then take over the running of the site. Cllr P Moore added that the opening of a recycling site will not be a profitable enterprise, it would be a service for the parishioners. However, Forest Row feel that they could break even by year 3. Cllr C Moore remarked that this project would only work if it broke even, as a community venture, it would need to be used by the parishioners. If it proved not to be viable then the site could be re sold. Cllr P Moore added that the parish council would be unable to guarantee the success of the project; it would need to be supported and it would need to be used. cannot guarantee that it will definitely work. It needs to be supported and used. There would be reputational risk if the project didn't work, but also there would be reputational risk if the parish council chose not to consider the options.

Cllr Griffin: 2 years ago, parishioner did want the site; a site that would be open 7 days a week taking all type of waste. Your papers suggest that the items that could be taken would be wood, cardboard, textiles, small electricals. You can chip wood, you can put cardboard out with your recycling waste, you can put small electricals out with recycling waste and you can dispose of textiles at a clothing bank. I am concerned that this is a huge amount of expense for an unviable project. Cllr P Moore confirmed that it would be the job of the CIC to work out the specifics. The CIC would need to be set up, there is a way forward to do this, a nearby parish is doing this. We have a chance, our last chance to try to do the same. I agree there are unknowns, and a degree of risk, but I feel that purchasing the site at a sub market rate is worth the risk. Cllr Crawford asked if the parish council would be the ones taking the loss if it did not work? Cllr P Moore confirmed that the CIC would have start-up costs which would be risk capital.

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Cllr Bullock: added that he had sympathy with Cllr Griffin, the project has too many unknowns and asked for Cllr P Moore to stop quoting the Forest Row business plan. If the site could accept metal that would have a better value at approx. £1000 a tonne. However, I do not see this as being at all viable and this would be a bad decision. Cllr Morris added that he also could not support the project at this time and shared Cllr Griffin and Cllr Bullocks reservations. Another concern would be if we went back into lockdown, how would the CIC deal with this? How would the council parish not be liable for the project? How much would parishioners be asked to pay for the service? Would there be a full parish poll?

Cllr P Moore confirmed that the purpose of this agenda item was to decide if the parish council should submit a sub value bid for the site in an attempt to offer the parishioners of Wadhurst the service. If it did not work out the site could be re sold. Whilst not all of the answers were known, the deadline of 31st March 2021 would not change, and so the parish council needed to decide whether to attempt a go at the project. If run by a CIC they would be a limited company. They would need funds for the start-up and this would-be risk capital, the parish council could say no to this should they wish. However, if an offer from the parish council was accepted by ESCC then the parish council would be buying as asset at a much lower value than the market value and if need be it could be sold on and the parish council get the site costs returned. A parish poll could be considered too. (Cllr Morris disagreed with Cllr P Moore's comments).

Cllr Gadd asked Cllr Morris to bring his comments to a close so that other parish councillors could give their input.

Cllr Murphy: do you have any ideas of legal costs? Cllr P Moore was not aware of the legal costs, as was not yet aware of what legal services would be required. The idea would be to put in a bid to then proceed with the project, the bid would be subject to contract.

Cllr P Moore confirmed that he was bringing the idea of the purchase of the site to the council to consider, as it had been put to the parish council by ESCC as an idea a few days ago, with a deadline of 31st March 2021. Cllr Tincombe added that as she understood the situation the parish council were considering to put in an offer, there would not be any legal fees prior to a contract. Cllr P Moore accepted that this was a difficult idea for the parish council and there was a degree of reputational risk, however it was also a risk not to consider this on behalf of the parishioners.

Cllr Griffin agreed that there was a time when parishioners wanted the tip to re-open, however, it has been closed for 2 years now, they now recycle more at the road side – if you asked them the same question now, I do not think you would get the same answer. Cllr Bullock added it was not worth putting in a bid.

Cllr Tincombe: commented that she felt there would be parishioners' interest to support the tip, that the parish council should proceed with the bid at reduced market value, then deal with the finer details afterwards. The opportunity should not be missed.

Cllr Niell confirmed her agreement with Cllr Tincombe, to place a bid at below market value, but then further consider the type of wastes that could be taken to the site. If it turned out not to be viable, then it could be sold on and the parish councils outlay for the site could be redeemed.

Cllr P Moore agreed that the project did not come without risk, that there would be risk capital with the start-up costs for the CIC. Cllr Tincombe added that we give grants to various other things in the village, this is not that dissimilar, it is like a grant to another company.

Resolved; *Cllr Tincombe proposed that the parish council make a bid to ESCC to purchase the Wadhurst Household Waste and Recycling Centre at sub market value, this was seconded by Cllr*

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Crawford and reached majority approval from Cllr C Moore, Cllr P Moore, Cllr Niell, Cllr Tincombe and Cllr Gadd.

Cllr Morris, Cllr Griffin and Cllr Bullock voted against the proposal.

6. Proposed details of what the offer of agenda item 5, in principle should contain.
This would be considered as a confidential matter, as agreed at agenda item 4.

7. Additional funding for the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) in respect of 'design code'
Cllr C Moore advised that the NP working group had intention to apply to Locality for a grant for the Design Code aspect of the NP, however this was quite a time consuming and onerous task which would hold up the NP. The NP working group would like to ask the parish council to agree to fund the Design Code costs whilst the NP would explore, in parallel, applying to Locality for the grant. Cllr P Moore added that the Design Code was part of the new government white paper, changing the way planning works. What seems to be clear is the government are trying to make the process more desk top computer style, in order to do so they have created the Design Code aspect. Design codes are like pattern books and a more definite set of rules. Cllr Griffin commented that the impression he had from the Chair of the NP was to steer the plan for zero development. Cllr P Moore explained that the purpose of the NP would be to shape development, not refuse any development. It is looking for sustainable development within NPPF. Cllr Morris challenged the comments of Cllr P Moore; the residents of Wadhurst have seen little of the plan in the last year. Cllr P Moore confirmed that the documents will be shared with residents once they reach regulation 14, as per the rules. Resolved: Cllr C Moore proposed that the parish council pay £8000 for the Design Code, whilst the NP apply for grants to cover this, this was seconded by Cllr Gadd and reached a majority approval. Cllr Morris voted against the proposal. Cllr Bullock abstained from the vote.

Meeting closed at 2052 hours