

Church Fenton Parish Council

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of Church Fenton Parish Council held on Tuesday 2nd May 2017 at the Cricket Club, Busk Lane, Church Fenton

Present: Cllr Sarah Chester (Chair), Cllr Craig Blakey, Cllr Jo Mason, Cllr Andrew Mason, Cllr Rebecca Hunt, Cllr Stephen Newbould

Jeremy Sherlock (Clerk);

12 members of the public

122. Apologies, Declarations, and Dispensations

None

123. Community Shop

The meeting had been called by the Chair to discuss the potential of establishing a Community Shop. The existing shop/ Post Office will close on 17th May and there is concern that it will not reopen once closed. The Chair felt that there was need for urgent action including financial contributions so that the shop can remain open whilst a longer term arrangement can be explored.

The Clerk circulated a paper which raised a number of issues that the Council needed to consider including:

- a. Does the business planning work to date provide justification for the Council to offer financial support?
- b. How would any funding support be phased?
- c. There is not currently a constituted body to run the community shop. Funding for feasibility/ business planning can be commissioned by the Council as it would allow recovery of VAT.
- d. There is no Council budget for the Community Shop. A small amount of funds (say £200-£300) could be made available through careful budget management. If additional funding was agreed the following could be considered:
 - i. Defer all or part of the approved street lighting scheme. This would require the decision to be rescinded which requires a special motion. £3,390+VAT of the approved figure of £5,730+VAT covers priority 1 repairs.
 - ii. Utilise reserves – there is £5,000 in the revenue reserve which is intended to cover cash flow and unanticipated/ emergency expenditure. If this is used there would need to be a commitment to restore the reserve levels in next year's budget, either through the precept, or by deferring the final phase of street light works.

A group made up of Councillors and members of the local community has been established to consider a community shop. They have been working with Plunketts who are a Charity who help with the establishment of Community Shop who have done some initial work. Following these discussions the group has requested the following:

1. A Council loan of £1,000 to cover the Bond required by Menzies for the continued supply of Newspapers.
2. A Council grant of £1,000 to assist with Business Planning and the costs of setting up a business
3. A Council grant of £1,000 for set up/ stock/ cash flow costs.

If the Council approved funding the group will also request £50 contributions from local residents to assist with initial costs.

The Clerk advised that notwithstanding any intentions of the Community Shop group to return funds at this stage any contribution would need to be recorded and budgeted as expenditure as the potential income could not be guaranteed.

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This funding would provide continuity for the shop, but the Post Office will close for a period as it is not possible to meet the Post Office requirements in the timescale. If reopened it would become a Post Office “local” which provides some reduction in service, but can match the opening hours of the shop.

If funding is approved the intention is to set up a Community Shop Company as soon as possible with local residents as shareholders. The shop would be run on a temporary basis with support from volunteers. A detailed business plan would then be prepared on the basis that the building becomes more of a community hub, rather than replicating the current arrangement.

There were some serious reservations expressed about the Council providing money to a venture where there is little evidence about viability and demand. It was commented that the existing shop was closing because it was not well used by villagers. It was suggested that it was inappropriate for the Council to fund a venture prior to a business plan being available particularly as this would put pressure on Council budgets. It was also questioned how resources could be found to acquire the building as this seems the only way to provide a long term future for the shop.

Conversely the view was expressed that the Village Shop has been identified in the Neighbourhood Plan consultation as an important feature in the Village whose loss would undermine community cohesion. It was felt that it was appropriate for the Council to spend what is currently a relatively small amount of money to provide the opportunity to develop a long-term solution. It was commented that community shops have a 95% success rate.

The group advised that if funding is approved that a Company would be set up as soon as possible.

It was agreed that any funding support would be made from reserves, with a commitment that any shortfall in the reserves level would be addressed as part of next year's budget exercise.

Agreed that the development of the shop /post office on a community basis be supported as follows:

- 1. Up to £1,000 be approved to support the development of a Business Plan and the establishment of a company led by the Parish Council where appropriate.**
- 2. Up to £1,000 be approved to cover the Bond required by Menzies for newspaper supply**
- 3. Up to £1,000 be approved to cover the initial set up costs/ stock/ cash flow**
- 4. The funding approved in 2 and 3 will not be released until a suitable legal entity has been established for the community shop**

Date and time of next meeting – Thursday 18th May 2017 at 7:30pm at the Village Hall, Main Street, Church Fenton (Parish Meeting and Annual Meeting)

Meeting closed at 8:35pm

Jeremy Sherlock; Clerk; clerk@church-fenton.net; 07981 371937