

BUCKFASTLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Extraordinary Town Council Meeting held in the Room 3 at the Town Hall on Wednesday 22nd August 2018 at 7.00 pm.

Present: Councillors Andy Stokes (Chair), Pam Barrett, Pamela Forbes, Janet Jones, Ron Fox, Linus McCloskey and Judith Hart (Town Clerk).

In attendance: 9 members of the public

Part I (Open to the Public)

18/74. Apologies for absence and declaration of members' interests: Cllrs Simon Rines, Dan Simpson, Greg Porter, Huw Cox and Neil Smith. No apologies received from Mark Maish.

Councillors invited to declare any interests: None

18/75. Questions and comments from the public:

Cllr Andy Stokes began the meeting by explaining that the Town Hall is a community resource, used for many activities as well as housing the Town Council offices and the Library. He outlined the costs involved and income that comes from rent and grants. Cllr Stokes outlined the historical context and highlighted that Buckfastleigh Town Council became the corporate trustee of the charity in 1952.

The current Town Council was elected in 2015 and realised that a large proportion of the precept is spent on the Town Hall, staff and resources. The new Councillors wanted to do more with the precept than just run the Town Hall, so it was separated from the Town Council as a charity with its own bank accounts and staff. This enabled Members to see the real costs.

Remedial works were carried out and reports on necessary future work commissioned. Some of the recommendations have been implemented and health and safety standards have been raised, however one part-time administrator cannot deal with the volume and complexity of issues which arise. Councillors are struggling to manage as Town Hall trustees as well as being a councillor and many in full-time employment.

Member of the public: *There is little promotion of Town Hall activities on the website and utilisation of space is the biggest shortcoming which she could help with.*

There is currently no management committee and ideally there should be a two-tier structure.

The building use is inflexible for some users due to its infrastructure for eg. there is no soundproofing between Rooms 2 and 3 which limits use due to the conflict of noise. It would be good to have a fully automated booking service and the building needs better promotion and marketing.

Member of the public: *It is understood that money is needed to make the improvements.*

Cllr Stokes explained the long-term effects of the withdrawal of the £10,000 Council Tax Support Grant to the Town Council by the government.

It was agreed that a dedicated board of trustees is required. More money is needed to satisfy and comply with modern day standards.

Cllr Pam Barrett: It is no longer possible to patch up the building and make it a sustainable community resource. A lift is needed to provide access to the first floor. There is a viable possibility to bring in external funding for this, but a core group is needed to achieve this. We need to evidence community need, business need and what the hall can sustain. We have had interest and support from organisations who can assess what the building can achieve.

Member of the public: *A community building is not a suitable place for corporate events and weddings and referred to the previous improvements which were well received by the community.*

Cllr Andy Stokes confirmed that the views of the community will be sought before any improvements are made.

Member of the public: *The Drama Groups would like to continue to use the Town Hall, but he understands that risk assessments have changed. It is difficult to afford the increased room hire costs, it has become too expensive.*

The building needs to be fit for community use, but the books also need to balance. Community training has been provided to enable groups to access third sector funding. The Council is not prepared to carry the current level of risk as a trustee. Cllr Barrett referred to the Victoria Park example as to how to continue as a community asset. The Council would like to make the Town Hall better for the whole community, but it cannot continue to subsidise the building to the current level and provide other services such as the children's activity programme.

Member of the public: *I support the Council and its aspirations to invest. The Town Hall is an amazing building.*

Cllr Pam Barrett: The Council wants to improve the building and generate income and would like to help the groups who use the building. She thanked the public for their support.

18/76. Proposal to create a new, independent board of trustees for the Buckfastleigh Town Hall and Institute:

The Chair introduced the initial proposal and Cllr Barrett summarised the main points. Annual operational maintenance such as electrical safety has been good but there are other requirements such as testing the scaffolding towers. There is a complicated outstanding VAT issue to resolve as HMRC looked at the Council and the Charity as one body when an Option to Tax was taken out to recover the VAT accrued from previous refurbishment. There is a need to be completely separated into two entities which may resolve the VAT issue. If the Town Council stops being the corporate trustee and a new board of trustees is set up under a company limited by guarantee only the charity is required to submit accounts as the trader and the trustees would be protected by liability insurance. The Council would advertise for trustees/directors of the company and appoint following selection.

It is believed that the asset belongs to the charity, but it is currently not registered with the Land Registry which the Clerk is pursuing.

Member of the public: *Are there other options to manage the building?*

The Town Council is looking at the simplest option to begin with as a charity trustee and the possibility of an operations committee.

The Chair moved to a vote on the proposal.

Decision: Members unanimously agreed to adopt the proposal. It was also minuted that Cllrs Simon Rines and Dan Simpson support the proposal.

Action: Cllr Pam Barrett to produce a draft advert for the trustee positions.

Meeting closed at 8.10 pm.