

Langrish Parish Council

Minutes of the Meeting of Langrish Parish Council held at the Cow Shed, Barrow Hill Barns, Ramsdean

on

Wednesday 27th September 2023 at 7.30pm

Present: Debbie Luff (Chair), Roger Hetherington (Vice Chair), Robert Bewes, Nigel Talbot-Ponsonby, Ian Blackwell, Cheryl Walder, Robert Mocatta, the Clerk and 3 members of the public

1. **Apologies for absence** There were no apologies for absence received.
2. **Approval of the minutes** the Minutes of Monday 3rd July 2023 were approved and signed.
3. **Matters Arising** There were no matters arising.
4. **Declarations of Pecuniary Interests** There were no interests declared
5. **Planning Report**
 - a) **SDNP/23/00386/FUL Barrow Hill Farm** the change of use has been approved
 - b) **SDNP/23/00201/FUL Barrow Hill Barns** The application is undetermined
6. **Ramsdean Green Report** NTP had spoken to HCC Arboriculturist who had noted and re-enforced the importance of the lime tree. They will direct the electricity company tree surgeons on how to take down the limbs close to electrical cabling. A requirement will be to inform the PC before the work starts.
7. **Langrish Meadow** IB reported:
 - a) Overall, the Meadow is in good condition. The swing seat has been replaced and the children have put back the goal post.
 - b) **The future of the Meadow** DL had asked members of the Parish Council to consider other uses for The Meadow to make it more attractive for wider use by Parish Residents. In addition, The Council had been informed that the St John's Church Building would be offered to the Parish Council by the Church Commissioners when it was closed in January 2024. Considerable cost would be involved to adapt the building for Parish use eg kitchen, toilets etc. DL suggested that an alternative for Langrish Meadow might be to sell it in order to help fund a Church restoration project for a Parish Hall.
To help the Parish Council in their consideration of the future of The Church Building, DL had invited David Mowlem to attend the meeting to explain the process for The Church closure and the costs and repairs that the Council could expect to encounter. Cmdr Mowlem's report was as follows:-

Church Closure Process

This process is in two parts. First is the closure of the church for worship at which point the building becomes the responsibility of the Diocese of Portsmouth. The second is the decision about disposal of the church building and there can be quite a long gap between these two. In practice though the church authorities very much like to have the disposal of the building worked out before closure for worship so that the building is not a burden to the diocese for too long. If the Langrish PC offers to take on responsibility for the building therefore the church authorities will bite your hand off in their willingness to agree! You will not need to pay for it but, of course the upkeep of the building will transfer immediately to the PC.

Churchyard

The churchyard is consecrated ground and it envelopes the church building through 360 degrees right up to the walls of the church. On closure, the churchyard will remain open and will also remain church property – along with the lych-gate. On the assumption that Langrish parish will merge back into East Meon, then E Meon PCC will assume responsibility for the maintenance of the churchyard.

The ‘Church Field’

The field bordering the churchyard which is fenced off from the main farmland stretching to the west belongs to Richard Jordan who used to live in Church Farm but who has now moved into the centre of Petersfield. If the use of this field, either for parking or as a substitute for the Reeds Meadow playground is part of your plan you should bear in mind that Richard has allowed this field to be used by the local community on a ‘grace and favour’ basis. Whilst he gives every indication that this arrangement can remain in place it introduces an element of uncertainty to its continued use for community purposes in the long term. It may be he would be willing to sell the land to the PC but you would need to negotiate that with him. At the moment the cutting of the grass in this field is included in the churchyard maintenance contract. The PC has usually responded to a request from the PCC for a contribution towards churchyard maintenance on the grounds that the churchyard is a community asset and, post closure, I was going to approach the PC and ask that it budgeted annually for this contribution and provided the funds automatically rather than having to be asked.

The Condition of the Church Fabric

You are probably aware that the church undergoes a survey every five years by a suitably qualified surveyor/architect well versed in ecclesiastical architecture. The last of these quinquennial Inspections (QI) was in 2020 and I can let you have the report. Another fabric inspection will be carried out by church authorities as part of the closure process and I wouldn’t have thought you would need to commission another one. The defects noted at the 2020 QI have all been dealt with or will have been by the end of this year but the surveyor did note that the north face of the roof would need to be re-tiled within the next 5 years, i.e., before 2025. We costed this and it would be in excess of £90,000 so, since the roof was not actually leaking, we have not embarked on the necessary fund-raising campaign. Post Covid and with the current cost-of-living crisis, the time did not seem right to launch such a daunting appeal in any case. There would be grants available for this sort of work of course but applications require considerable time and effort by someone and,

should the church be PC property, grants from ecclesiastical sources would not be forthcoming.

Other Building Considerations

As you know the church has no loo. I have an incipient plan to install an exterior 'site loo' for a cost of about £30,000 and Matt Luff helped me establish the outline project but, in view of the church closure, I have not pursued it. A more elaborate project to install a kitchen and loos would be feasible, probably in the north transept if funds were available. The heating is of a 'direct radiation' type powered by electricity which works well when the building is used for short periods (services) and infrequently (Sundays) but would be very expensive if used for every day heating in winter. The building is Grade II listed and various hoops would have to be jumped through to re-configure the interior for use as a community centre – removal of pews for instance. Organisations such as the Victorian Society, English Heritage and so forth would all have to approve plans. Not insuperable I wouldn't have thought but bureaucratic and time-consuming.

Parking

Existing parking is in the shallow lay-by adjacent to the lych-gate and on the opposite verge where plastic netting has been installed under the turf. Charles Sprinks drew up plans some 16 years ago to, as he put it, 'reinstate an existing access' to the field now owned by Richard Jordan. I looked at pursuing this but Covid followed by the emerging realisation that the church would probably have to close meant that I haven't taken it further. I discovered that the access would involve 'dropping the verge' which involves a higher level of permission and also that nowadays it is impossible to talk informally with planners to seek advice on the likely outcome of an application. Everything has to be formally done and paid for up front. All these factors put me off pursuing the matter but the PC members are, I'm sure, made of sterner stuff and might like to take up the cudgels. Charles Sprinks' plan is professionally drawn up and well argued and shouldn't be lightly dismissed: I would, of course, hand it all over to you. It would all take place on Richard Jordan's land and you would need to carry him with you on any such project.

Operating Costs and Sources of Income

There are all sorts of routine minor running costs such as PAT testing, electrical safety inspections, fire extinguishers, lightning conductor, bank charges and so forth and then the big ones, insurance and electricity. This year we have budgeted £1,750 for electricity and £1,385 for insurance but, with sustained use, the electricity charge would be much, much greater. I would have thought the PC would need to budget at least £5,000 a year for running costs and these would need to be covered by income. Some kind of fabric repair fund would need to be set up and we currently budget £280 a year for Gary White to clear gutters and drains twice a year. Using the building as a community centre sounds wonderful but exactly what these uses might be would need to be identified and the amount of income that could reasonably be expected from these activities. A business plan would need to be drawn up in other words.

Some Other Thought

The building is not currently accessible by vehicular traffic, and this would pose problems for major internal or external building works. It is difficult to see how heavy plant of any kind could be brought in across the churchyard, the lych-gate is a barrier and, inevitably, any solution would drive up costs of a project. Altering the building for community use or pursuing the parking project would involve gaining planning permissions with all the bureaucratic hassle that accompanies such things, as you well know! The PC members would have to be resolute and committed if they were to embark on these projects and then the actual contractors' work would need to be organised and overseen. Perhaps most importantly, the PC needs to be clear-eyed about how the building might be used. What activities would a community of a little over 330 souls be able to sustain when we have East Meon not far away with a well-established village hall offering a wide range of such activities? Would these activities bring in sufficient income to service the running costs and maintain the fabric? If, after a few years, it became clear the usage did not justify the expenditure would the PC really like to be left responsible for a Grade II listed building with, given its inaccessibility or scope for a garden being surrounded by gravestones, scant appeal to a developer or a private person for conversion to a residential or commercial use?

NTP said that with great sadness the PC could be buying into a problem unless predicated by the certainty of a large capital base to be sourced from which to be able to work.

DL Thanked Cmdr Mowlam for his thorough report which the Council agreed would form the basis of any future decision as to whether St John's Church should be taken on by the Parish Council from the Church Commissioners in due course.

In the meantime, the future purpose of Reeds Meadow should remain under review and that perhaps the way forward would be to survey residents putting the proposals for the future use of Langrish Meadow to the parish.

8. Lengthsman RM reported that Highways had approved work to clear the storm drains on C28 following on from the lengthsman work on Ham Lane.

9. Footpaths and Rights of Way Report It was agreed to write to Stroud Parish Council regarding the footbridge on North Stroud Lane as it was in their parish.

10. Roads Report IW said the police are still investigating the motorcycle accident. RM said that drainage work is about to start on Ramsdean Lane.

11. District and County Councillor's Report Cllr Mocatta said that HCC will be taking over parish by parish the management of the bus shelters for the whole of Hampshire

12. Financial Matters

a) The financial summary was agreed and approved

Meon Valley Meadows Hedge Cutting	250.00
H Marsh	650.00
Mrs S Marchant	108.33

13. Any Other Business DL said that the parish council must create a reserve for emergencies.

14. Date of the Next Meeting will be Monday 13th November, 7.30pm at The Cow Shed, Barrow Hill Barns.