

MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF CRASTER PARISH COUNCIL
Thursday 31st January 2019 – 6.00pm in the Craster Memorial Hall

Councillors Present

Chair: Cllr Ann Fettis

Parish Council members: Elizabeth Pearson, Rosie Robson, Mark Green, Henry Cummins and Margaret Brooks

In Attendance: 3 members of the public.

Clerk: Adam Shanley

2361 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Martin Smith.

2362 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were received.

2363 Embleton Joint Burial Committee

Councillors considered a request by the EJBC to approve the application of a loan from the public works loan board in respect of the redevelopment of the Cemetery House.

Cllrs Robson and Pearson presented the facts to date of what had occurred as part of the works. When the caretaker resigned the EJBC reviewed the management of the cemetery and it is now managed and maintained with no resident caretaker. The grounds maintenance is sub-contracted out and undertakers are required to make their own arrangements for grave digging and internments. The administration of the cemetery is now done by the Clerk and members of the committee.

Initially the EJBC, with the agreement of the Parish Councils, explored the sale of the house and the investment of the funds to provide an income to replace the lost rent. Offers were received in the region of £170,000, but with the current low rates of interest this would not provide an adequate income.

In July 2017 the Government launched the Community Housing Initiative and the EJBC approached Northumberland County Council to determine if they would be eligible for a grant under that scheme. With a positive feedback the EJBC proceeded to instruct an Architectural Technician to survey the property and develop a scheme of works to bring it to the Decent Homes Standard.

Based on this scheme of works the EJBC applied for and obtained planning permission and building control approval.

The scheme of works was used as the basis for a public tender and a contractor's proposal (Appendix 7) was selected at a fixed cost of £65,000.

Taking account of the cost of the preparation of the scheme of works and associated approvals, and a 10% contingency allowance, the EJBC have estimated that the total project is £75,000. On the basis of this estimate an application for a grant under the Community Housing Initiative was made and on 11th January an offer of a grant was received. A condition of the grant is that a loan is obtained to cover the difference between the project cost and the grant, £25,000.

A requirement of the application for permission to borrow is that there should have been public consultation. A flyer, (Appendix 10) has been delivered to every household in the three parishes and the response, though small, is supportive. The Clerk reported that he had received correspondence from the Clerk of the Burial Committee to state that he had received 7 responses from Parishioners of Craster, all of which were supportive of the loan for the redevelopment of the Cemetery House.

There was some concern expressed about level of rent per month proposed as an affordable rent. Cllr Green advised that he did not feel that £480 per month was an affordable rent. It was felt that £400- £420 per month seemed more affordable. Cllr Green advised that he felt that a letter should be received from

Ann Fettis
Secretary

Homes for Northumberland to indicate what they class as an affordable rent, together with comparable properties in the area.

Cllrs Robson and Pearson expressed concern about what would happen to the Cemetery House if this project wasn't seen through and redevelopment did not happen as the property at present is not in a habitable condition.

Cllr Green advised that he felt that a full cashflow should be provided for the project following receipt of guidance from Homes for Northumberland on what constituted an affordable rent.

The Clerk advised that, in order to enable the EJBC to plan the formal submission of the application to NALC, they were looking for a formal resolution from all three Parish Councils to be passed in support of the application. Two options may be explored:

Either, an application be made by Embleton PC for £25,000 with support from Craster and Newton with them underwriting the loan to £6,250 and £3750 respectively. Or, separate applications be made by Embleton, Craster and Newton in the sums of £15,000, £6,250 and £3,750 respectively. Either option agreed upon being needed to enable the EJBC to plan the project and work towards providing an affordable house to a local family.

Councillors were asked to formally vote on whether to support the application of the loan and it was agreed by casting vote of the Chair (having received 3 votes in favour of the application and 3 votes in favour of deferring the decision), to defer the decision until the following information was provided by the EJBC:

- 1) A written confirmation from Homes for Northumberland as to what actually constitutes an affordable rent level, together with comparables of similar local properties classed as "affordable".
- 2) A fully worked up cash flow for the project.
- 3) Written advice from Homes for Northumberland as to the details of any tenancy agreement needing to be drawn up for the letting of this property.
- 4) Who will be project managing the renovation works?
- 5) Will there be any 'get out' clause drawn up? If so, what will this entail? E.g. if one Parish Council decided they wished to sell the property, what would the position be then?

All Members expressed their willingness to hold another extraordinary meeting to decide on this matter as swiftly as possible so long as the necessary information is provided.

The Chair closed the meeting.

T Feltham
25/02/19