

HARBURY PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of the Extraordinary Parish Council Meeting
Thursday 6 July 2023 at 7.30pm
Harbury Village Hall

Present

Cllr T Lockley (Chair)
Cllr J Balch
Cllr A Knowles

Cllr S Allen

Cllr K Thompson

Cllr A Potter

Cllr J Dominick

Absent

None

3 vacant seats

In Attendance

Mrs Alison Biddle, Clerk to the Council

Public

5 members of the public

23/110 Apologies

None.

23/111 Declarations of Interest

None declared.

23/112 Dispensations

There were none.

23/113 Public Participation

A resident asked about the current turbine company as the original one no longer exists. The proposed turbine design does not seem to be as commercially successful as others. Also, as there are now twice as many charge points than originally proposed, will it generate enough electricity to make it worthwhile? The temporary mast installation will require a ton block of concrete. Does this need to be removed afterwards? Does the pole need a fence around it to prevent people from trying to climb it?

A member of the project group explained that WCC has now taken over the management of this side of the project which includes the future maintenance of the turbine. The project team is currently researching alternatives to using concrete for the mast. It is only the extension to the car park which is included in the proposal to the parish council.

23/114 Harbury Future Energy Project

1 Installation of Wind Mast & Concrete Base

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the installation of the temporary wind monitoring mast and a concrete base subject to the concrete being removed when no longer needed.

2 WCC & Contractors

It was **RESOLVED** to give consent to WCC and their appointed contractors to carry out the relevant works for this project on parish council land to include the alterations to the car park entrance, the installation of the mast and turbine, the charging points and the battery store.

3 Extension of Car Park

The chairman summarised the proposal to the parish council:

- The extension is included in the planning permission. It will provide 6 new parking spaces to compensate for those lost to EV charging spaces in the existing car park.
- WCC has taken responsibility for delivering the rest of the project, i.e. the turbine, the charging points and alterations to the existing car park, and the battery storage unit, but they will not be including the extension to the car park.
- The local project team has identified the UK Shared Prosperity Fund as a possible source for the shortfall in funding of £46,000 (estimated cost is £71,000. The PC has already allocated £25,000 from the Eastfields Solar Farm contribution, leaving £46,000 to find).
- The project team is unable to apply to UKSPF under Harbury e-Wheels as this group does not meet the criteria. Hence their request that the parish council applies to the fund. If the PC agrees to do this, this part of the project, i.e. the extension of the car park, will become the responsibility of the parish council.
- The deadline for applying to UKSPF is 14 July 2023 so a decision is needed tonight as to whether the PC is willing to make the application and take on responsibility for this part of the project.
- The proposal raises significant issues for the council in terms of finance, legal framework, and process. The chairman asked the council to consider each issue separately.

Councillors made the following comments and observations:

Finance

- This is not the parish council's project and the proposal to apply to the fund has been made at too short notice. There is too much risk and we had previously been assured that the PC would not be involved.
- There would be increased financial commitment and workload but having read the proposal and associated documents, gradually coming to terms with what the project involves and beginning to see the benefits so have fewer concerns than initially.
- Would rather have the extension than not but think it will cost more than the estimate of £71k.

- What happens if the bid for funding is unsuccessful?
- We are already considering a possible extension to the car park at the rear of the village hall so is this needed?

Legal

- What exactly would the council be liable for? The council would be liable for the car park and its future maintenance but it would not be responsible for the EV charging points.
- The car park extension would be covered by the council's insurance.

Workload

- The procurement exercise would be a lot of work especially for the clerk. Would people complain that the clerk's time, and therefore public money, was being used for this project?
- The scale of the project is beyond anything we have done to date, so there is a genuine concern about workload. A project manager would be required.
- A member of the project team is willing to be co-opted to the council to focus on this project which would help to mitigate the impact on the clerk's workload but he would not expect to be fully involved in other aspects of the council's work and take on all the responsibilities of a councillor.
- The council currently has 3 vacant seats and is feeling the impact of this. The clerk works part time and is already very stretched so the council should not add to her workload. A short term increase may be acceptable, but the council needs to be fair to the clerk.
- It is a very tight timescale for spending the money if the bid is successful.
- A decision on the bid is not expected until September which allows several weeks to look at how to manage the workload.
- A member of the project team can still help without the need to be co-opted.
- If the bid is successful, the council still has the option of refusing the funds if it has any qualms about proceeding.

The chairman invited the clerk to voice her concerns. She also highlighted the impact on her workload. Councillors volunteered to help in any way they could. The clerk was grateful for this but pointed out that councillors and the clerk have different roles and there are some tasks which councillors cannot legally do and must therefore be left to the clerk. She also pointed out that the bid does not include VAT which the council would have to pay and then claim back at a later date. This is not a problem but might affect cash flow.

Decision

The chairman asked for a show of hands. It was **RESOLVED** to accept the proposal that Harbury Parish Council applies to the UKSPF for £46,000 towards the cost of extending the car park and assumes responsibility for this part of the project from now on. If the bid is successful, the situation will be reviewed in September.

It was also agreed that the HR group would meet with the clerk to discuss her workload which would also be reviewed in September.

The meeting closed at 8.40pm.

Signed Chairman Date.....