

Hemyock Parish Council
Meeting to discuss potential purchase of Old School Court
held in the Forbes Lounge, Parish Hall, Hemyock at 7.30pm on 26th April 2018

Subject	Action
<p>1. <u>Present</u> Mrs H Stallard (Chair), Mr T Barton, Mr R Calcraft, Mr S Clist (Vice-Chair), Mr P Doble, Miss P Lawrence, Mr N Moon, Mr L Povah, Ms J Pritchard, Mr N Punnett, Mrs D Evans (Parish Clerk) and 11 members of the public.</p>	
<p>2. <u>Declarations of Interest/Dispensations</u> Mrs Stallard declared that she had a personal interest as she is a director of the Upper Culm Community Land Trust (UCCLT) and a director of the Upper Culm Community Land Trust Housing Ltd. Mr Barton declared that he had a personal interest as he is a director of the Upper Culm Community Land Trust and a director of the Upper Culm Community Land Trust Housing Ltd. Mr Punnett declared that he had a personal interest as he is a member and secretary of the Upper Culm Community Land Trust and secretary of the Upper Culm Community Land Trust Housing Ltd. Ms Pritchard declared that she had a personal interest as she is a member of the Upper Culm Community Land Trust.</p>	
<p>3. <u>Old School Court</u> Mr Punnett outlined the current situation. The last tenant is due to move out shortly and Westward Housing plan to put the building up for sale on the open market. WESTWARD Housing has given the parish council 6 weeks in which to make an offer to purchase the building before it is put on the open market.</p> <p>When the village school moved to its current site in the 1980s, a local charity converted the old school, now Old School Court, into housing for older villagers and/or elderly relatives of other parishioners. The building was subsequently purchased by Westward Housing, becoming part of its affordable housing provision. The site is close to all the village amenities.</p> <p>Mr Punnett talked through a paper he had produced for the meeting, including graphs and tables showing projections for a 50-year loan, costs and anticipated rental income figures.</p> <p>The clerk explained that she had contacted DALC for advice on the process of a Public Works Loan Board application. The advice received from DALC was that:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A parish council cannot be a housing provider • A parish council should not borrow money to invest • The General Power of Competence does not give a council the power to borrow money to invest nor become a housing provider • A CLT is the appropriate vehicle to do this and would have access to its own funding opportunities <p>The possibility of purchasing the building was fully discussed and matters raised/comments included:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project viability • Reason for selling • Reason to buy • Purchase price • Other costs • Why does council want to get involved? • Attempt to get building listed to protect it • Will westward provide last 10 years' accounts for old school court • This purchase should stand alone (outside of precept money) • This project would only benefit 9 residents – is that a community benefit? • Does the parish council have capacity to take on further responsibilities on this scale? • Concentrate on maintaining the parish council's current assets, not acquiring more. • Is this not a project for the ucclt? • If bought allow young to be residents too. • Think outside the box and build purpose built homes for the young and old instead. • This old building needs to be preserved. 	

It was suggested that a working party be set up to explore the options and to define precisely what the council would hope to achieve with a possible purchase of Old School Court.

The councillors then asked for comments from members of the public.

4. Public Participation

Comments from the public included:-

- Keep the building if it is viable to do so
- It is an ideal location in the middle of the village for older residents
- Keep the building for young as well as old
- There are steep stairs in the existing building and so it is not ideal for older residents
- Preserve this old iconic building
- Consider using it to provide homes for the disabled
- Only progress if it is viable
- 3-storey flats are not wanted
- If old people move into the dwelling this may release their homes onto the open market for others to buy
- Emotionally there is a desire to retain the dwelling but the council must be fully aware of the financial risks involved in such a project
- Is this not a project for the ucclt?

The clerk read out an email from a parishioner who commented as follows:-

On Saturday 21st April, I signed an "expression of interest" form that was displayed on the HPC stall at Hemyock Market. It appeared that the council was asking for support to get a valuation of Old School Court with a view to a 50-year loan to purchase for conversion to 9 x 1-bed flats. The valuation was to cost £1,000 and, by signing, I understood we were supporting this potential outlay. Whilst I fully support the retention of Old School Court for the parish, I would suggest that any plan to have a parish "consultation" should have been approved by the Parish Council. Why does the Parish Council want to become an owner of property for rental? Should the Parish Council be canvassing support without a mandate from the Council to do so? It is my view that this is a project the Community Land Trust is set up for and the CLT should be doing the work to retain the building rather than the Parish Council. Is it not incumbent on Hemyock Parish Council to assist community organisations to realise a vision, rather than take over and involve itself in expenditure that may turn out to be open-ended, with nothing to show for it at the end? I request the Council considers the above points and if it decides to go ahead, then a business plan and detailed expenditure is clearly and openly stated at the beginning of the project.

5. Old School Court

The councillors continued to debate the potential purchase of Old School Court.

Mrs Stallard suggested a working group be formed to progress this project.

Mr Moon suggested the parish council needed to establish whether it could borrow money on behalf of the UCCLT. In view of the advice from DALC, Mr Clist proposed that the clerk contacted the legal departments at Devon County Council and Mid Devon District Council to obtain free advice with regard to whether a parish council could do this – borrow money to buy the property and then let the property to the UCCLT?

Mr Doble said that the council needed to ask Westward Housing what the sale price would be before making any decision.

Mr Clist asked if there were any covenants attached to the site, perhaps when Devon County Council disposed of the asset.

Mrs Stallard suggested there might be charitable rules that would affect any potential sale of the site.

Mrs Stallard suggested that the council should agree to pay the £1,000 valuation fee. Mr Clist and Mr Povah responded that this would be a waste of money if the parish council were not permitted to purchase the building.

PROPOSAL: The clerk asks for MDDC's and DCC's legal advice to ascertain whether a parish council may purchase a dwelling in order to lease it to a community benefit society, for example, the UCCLT.

PROPOSED: Mr Clist
SECONDED: Mr Povah
DECISION: passed.

PROPOSAL: If MDDC and DCC advise that the parish council may purchase the dwelling then a valuer be instructed to make an inspection and provide a valuation at a cost of £1,000.

PROPOSED: Mrs Stallard
SECONDED: not seconded

Ms Pritchard thanked Mr Barton & Mr Punnett for their work in preparing the background information report.

Members of the council will inspect the property on 3rd May but not instruct the valuer.

6. Date of next Meeting Wednesday 2nd May 2018 at 7.30pm Forbes Lounge, Parish Hall

Meeting closed at 9.30pm

Signed Dated