

**Minutes of the extra-ordinary meeting
of Severn Stoke & Croome d'Abitot Parish Council
Wednesday 31st August 2022 at 7.30pm
At Croome National Trust SOQ room**

Present: Cllr Freeman (Chair), Cllrs Faulkner, Garrard and Seward

In Attendance: Mrs L Stevens (Clerk and RFO).
District Cllr David Harrison, District Cllr John Michael. County Cllr Martin Allen.
Members of the Parish Hall Committee Laura McEwan-Hill and Richard Hill

Apologies: Parish Cllrs Halling, Rowe, Preston and Williams. RM (Hall Committee)
JH (St Denys' Churchwarden).

No other members of public present and no questions at public open forum.

1 & 2 **Declarations and points of order.** Meeting declared quorate. *Motion to suspend standing orders throughout the entire meeting in order to allow participation throughout by all present. Duly carried.*

3 **Parish Council Community Facilities Working Party. In relation to the parish hall:**

a **To update the parish council on the feasibility study and design (submitted by the Parish Hall Committee) and to consider options for demolition of existing structure and rebuild of new (either on existing site or alternatives).**

For info. Background situation as given in the Parish Hall Committee Design Brief:
In February 2020, following a serious flooding event, the building became structurally unsound, and a decision was taken to close the hall. A number of options were identified and following the 2020 AGM of the Parish Hall Committee it was decided to pursue a desire to rebuild the village hall. A meeting was held to consider the vision that the Parish Hall Committee has for a new hall building in order to produce a high-level design brief. From this a feasibility study was commissioned which contained one design option and cost estimates in order that further parishioner opinion can be sought (and funding arranged if the project gains public approval (on whatever scale and design)). Other design options are of course possible, but the feasibility study has shown that the current site remains viable and gives a basis for further discussion.

Cllr Freeman gave a brief presentation. Some presentation corrections were provided at the meeting and these corrections are reflected here:

- **Slide 1 Existing parish hall** – Hall unusable due to flood damage and has no floor. However, the hall committee consider that it is not in danger of collapse and it has been shored up at the rear of the building. Hall has been fenced off, with notices placed warning of the danger. Insurers will not provide cover as site may flood again during period that the flood bund is not built. Site requires demolition – current estimate for demolition is £50k when combined with rebuild as quoted within Parish Hall Committee Feasibility Study. There is no asbestos on site.
- **Slide 2 Option for replacement hall on existing site.** Parish Hall Committee Feasibility Study offers one option (among many) of a new hall on existing site estimated to cost £900K. This option should be presented to the public along with alternative less costly options and the option to simply not proceed. Building the replacement hall is not dependant on the completion of the flood bund, since the floor height in the one explored scenario (within the feasibility study) has been raised to 14.3m (bund is planned for 14.2m). Depends on new lease being negotiated with Landlord. Depends upon appropriate funding being sourced. Issues: possibility of further future floods; level of funding required; extension of lease may prove problematic.

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- **Slide 3 Issues of concern.** Feasibility Study option for rebuild requires a sig. budget. Estimated that if the Parish Council obtained a public works loan for £750k this would increase the annual household precept from £30 approx. to £170 approx. over a 30 year period. A referendum would be required, as this would be a public decision to pursue or not, or whether to explore alternatives. Parish Council has a duty to exercise appropriate caution. Is the current site too risky? Even with the new bund there will be a perpetual risk of future flooding. Does the parish still want the facility? – that is a question for the referendum. Is the proposed new hall too ambitious in scale? Should/could a smaller/cheaper building be considered? Current lease expires 11 years – PC pays ground rent. Would the landlord want to extend this lease? At what cost?
- **Slide 4 Other possible options.** Do nothing - demolish the old hall; foreclose on the existing lease; let the Landlord have the site back. Build a new hall on a new site with no flood risk - may offer opportunity for a more 'flexible' design at a lower cost? Parish Council has a good relationship with current landlord and they have other sites that may become available within the parish, such as the land along Birch Lane (opp Deerhurst Close). Nb. All other potential sites must be presented to the public for consideration. Use St. Denys Church? - the parochial council would welcome extended use.

Agreed: Parish Hall Committee to pass the feasibility study plans to A.Smith at MHDC to ask for opinion.

Agreed: Parish Hall Committee to install an extra layer of fencing around the parish hall, to deter those willing to use the considerable amount of force that would be required to break in.

Agreed: Parish Council to arrange meeting with landlord agent and seek clarification in writing regarding possibilities of lease and other options for sites.

Agreed: Parish Cllrs to attend Parish Hall Committee AGM to give support.

Agreed: Parish Council to table all options as discussed above at the next parish council meeting in September and begin to clarify options for referendum/survey.

Motion to formulate a response in principle to the Parish Hall Committee.

b

Points agreed for inclusion: 1) Recognise work so far. 2) Will need to take to full Referendum. 3) Collaborative project. The Clerk was instructed to draft a response on this basis:

“Severn Stoke and Croome d'Abitot Parish Council recognises the excellent efforts of the Parish Hall Committee and the work conducted so far. The Hall Committee conducted a survey in 2020 which gathered a good response rate and which indicated an appetite for a good sized, local facility. As a consequence, the Hall Committee have followed a program of work which explored all options for repair/replacement of the village hall, both on its current site and potentially elsewhere. This program of work, which has taken place over the last 12 months, has led to the production of a feasibility study which indicates a replacement hall is a viable option sitting on the current site. The next step is for the parish council to undertake a more detailed survey of all households providing a range of options and asking for preferences. Alongside that survey there will also be a formal Referendum question asking for a mandate (electorate approval) to raise specific funds via the council tax precept for the project. That mandate will only be enacted if the survey demonstrates once again a definitive need and preference for one option. Advice has yet to be sought on the level at which to set the threshold for such approval and this will also be subject to public debate at full parish council in September. The parish council firmly believes that this is a collaborative project and will work with the Parish Hall Committee to realise an outcome that reflects local opinion”.

Due diligence and option for Motion for demolition of the Parish Hall as soon as possible.

Deferred to full council on basis that only four parish cllrs were present.

c

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d **Motion of commitment to parishioner referendum¹, asking for resident preferences in relation to the parish hall options and, in consequence of any majority assent from the public via that referendum, seeking a mandate for action that is backed by an ability to raise money locally through a precept. Referendum to contain all financial illustrations and options.** Parish councillors’ position at this present time is that based on the current economic situation, the parish council must present all options and figures to the public via a referendum and obtain approval for pursuing the project before any decision is made. Those Parish Hall Committee members present all supported this. Formal decision deferred to full council on basis that only four parish cllrs were present and discussion will be required as to exact format and content of survey/referendum. Statement to the Parish Hall Committee can however reference the required referendum and survey.

e **Option for Motion concerning extension of the lease of the parish hall land.²** Cllrs confirmed that the process needs to commence asap. Pip Webster is away for a few weeks. Richard Hill to set up a meeting with Ben Knight (Savills agent) asap and both Richard and Cllr Freeman to attend. Prps: RG. Scnd: SF. Unanimous carried.

Parish Councillors confirmed that the it would acceptable for the Parish Hall Committee to talk about a potential options to develop alternative sites including the option that has previously been broached with Savill’s agent Ben Knight, on land along Birch Lane opposite Deerhurst Close. Cllr agreed that they would have no objection to the development possibility being made known in the course of the forthcoming AGM, as it is clear that all alternatives (to the option to rebuild on the existing site) must be presented to the public if they are to be able to make an informed choice. Parish Cllrs are invited to the AGM so that they could hear any questions and be available to answer them. Parish Cllrs and the Hall Committee are clear that no decisions on location have been made yet and that we remain in an early scoping stage only.

f **Confirmation of timescales.** Not possible at this time. Clerk advised that ideally a Referendum would occur asap.

Next Parish Council meeting– Wednesday 21st September 2022, 7.30pm at Croome National Trust SOQ meeting room.

Signed Chairman **.....Date**

¹ Clerk is seeking clarification on what format such a Referendum can take. Options may include both online and paper questionnaires returned by a deadline, rather than a poll on one specific day. This is to be confirmed.
¹ At this time the land is rented to the parish council by Merchant Venturers Ltd as trustees on behalf of the charity St Monica Trust.
