

BILLINGBOROUGH PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a public meeting held on 3 June 2023 to evaluate if members of the Parish supported a proposal that the Council rent the Hall field with the view to developing it into a tranquil public space with seating for public use.

Present: Councillors Woodhead (Chairman), Surtees and Turner.

In Attendance: H Beaver (Clerk) and 22 members of the Parish.

The Chairman opened the meeting at 11.00am, welcomed everyone, thanked them for attending and outlined the proposal. Questions or comments were then invited.

The main comments/questions from parishioners were as follows, in the order that they were raised:

That the vision the Chairman had described was perceived as what is already present.

That there was already an abundance of wildlife in the field, that developing it would disturb the wildlife, and that unless proper paths were laid then the site would not be wheelchair friendly, as described.

That the horses had been in the field for many years and should be left there.

That there was already a park for recreation and sports, and a quiet area for sitting at the Springwells.

That by renting the field and developing it, this could help to protect it from being built on in the future.

It was questioned if Billingborough really needed another amenity area such as this?

As a badger set was present in the field, would any disturbance of the site be legal?

Would this just provide another area where anti-social behaviour would take place, especially at night?

Is there not already enough publicly accessible space, with many footpaths, Fen roads, etc as Billingborough is a rural village not a town or city in need of green spaces.

Succession planning is needed, no saplings are being planted in the field to replace older trees.

A replacement boundary fence is required.

There is already public access to the field as it has a Public Right of Way.

Planting further trees in the field would be a perfect memorial to the Late QEII, with a plaque of dedication alongside the entrance to the field.

There is a national re-wilding initiative, so why de-wild the village centre?

The field is in a conservation area, so why not conserve it and not humanise it?

Who is going to maintain the site long term. Volunteers come and go, so this would inevitably place another burden on the Parish Council and the precept.

The Chairman commented that currently any repairs would fall to either the Crown Estate Commissioners or its tenants.

The Crown Estate's ownership was questioned, as previously this field had been purchased for public use, by Buckminster Hall.

Again, the long term maintenance was raised as a concern and also security issues and the prospect of increased anti-social behaviour at the site.

It was commented that a number of emails had been received both for and against the proposition.

It was also queried as to how the meeting had been advertised.

A suggestion was received that the edges of the grass at the Recreation Ground could be left uncut as a compromise if this did not go ahead.

The question was asked if there was a way the field could be preserved as an open space.

As the maintenance of the churchyard is not as good as it used to be, and the field in question shares the boundary to the churchyard, the maintenance of the field would be impacted by the lack of maintenance of the churchyard.

It was noted that the field could be rented by the PC and rather than developing it, could improve the maintenance of the field, or if it not viable to rent it, to at least lobby the Crown Estate to improve the maintenance of the site.

A query was raised as to if there a Royal Charter on the site?

Concerns about the longterm maintenance of the proposed development were raised.

The written replies received so far had been 9/7 against.

It was queried what protection the fact that the field is in a Conservation area would give.

It was stated that the Council would discuss the comments raised at this meeting at its next meeting due to take place on Mon 5 June, and decide whether to accept the outcome of this meeting or to ballot the whole village, before making a final decision.

It was stated that the field was not needed for the current horses, they could be housed elsewhere, but the owners wanted to keep them there as they knew they were an attraction and admired by many.

It was again commented that current wildlife would be disturbed during any development works.

The amount of the proposed rental costs was queried.

There was a show of hands and there was a large majority AGAINST the proposal.

The Chairman said the outcome of any next steps would be published in the minutes of the next meeting.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 11.50am.