

WELLS CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF WELLS CITY COUNCIL HELD VIA ZOOM ON THURSDAY 4TH MARCH 2021 AT 7.00PM

COUNCILLORS PRESENT (VIA ZOOM): Cllrs: L Agabani, S Briton, J Browne, S Cursley, O Hartley (Deputy Mayor), R Humphreys, A l'Anson, N Kennedy, J Osman, J Parker, J Rust, P Welch (Mayor)

IN ATTENDANCE (VIA ZOOM): Town Clerk/RFO: S Luck
WCC Staff: S Glendinning, A Westwood
MDC: Martin Cooke
SCC: Cllr T Munt
Wells Voice: Andy Vallis
Wells Civic Society: Chris Winter
10 members of public:

21/38/C APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
None

21/39/C DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
To receive Councillors' Declarations of Interest, made under the Council's Code of Conduct adopted 27th July 2012:
Councillors were asked whether they had any declarations of interest. No declarations were received.

21/40/C MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

The following members of public spoke:

- i. Kirstie Harris, Director of Project Factory. Involved in local projects such as Wake up Wells, Lantern Parade, Coronavirus Network. Member of the PACG. Already use the Portway Annexe to run workshops which are mostly free for the local community. These workshops have proved to help local people find new confidence, meet new people, improve mental health and find secure employment. Firmly supports the purchase of the building by WCC.
- ii. Nicola Dodds, PACG. Also firmly supports WCC purchasing the building. Wide local survey research has been carried out on community use for the Annexe. 3 proposals for the project:
 - 1) to become a hub to serve community needs,
 - 2) develop trusted partnerships to hold an analysis of community needs and current provisions,
 - 3) to ensure the project's ongoing sustainability.
- iii. Ian Robinson, resident of Wells. Expertise in risk management and would like to offer his assistance.
- iv. Nigel Fraser, resident of Wells. Experience with organising 'not for profit' events and would love to get involved. Also keen to hire the building for his own use as a cost-effective space.
- v. Jennifer Williams, resident of Wells. Was concerned Business Plan is currently not available to the public. Would have liked information on costs involved.

21/41/C PURCHASE OF THE PORTWAY ANNEXE BY WELLS CITY COUNCIL
Cllr Osman explained all Councillors have seen a Business Plan drafted in December 2020. It was not shared publicly as the plan included sensitive commercial information whilst in negotiation with SCC, but a new revised version can be released shortly. The newly formed Portway Annexe Committee will include members of the local community to obtain their help and expertise.

Cllr Rust proposed to defer the motion until 25th March (next Full Council Meeting) as 1) the Business Plan has not been updated, 2) there is no clearly defined purpose for the building, 3) there is no established or quantified evidence of demand for community use, council office space or commercial office space, 4) no impact assessment on other local venues, 5) no consultation with the citizens of Wells, 6) no assessment as to the affordability of the continued rise in the precept for the average Wells Council Tax payer who has been hard hit by COVID.

This motion was seconded by Cllr Parker and a recorded vote was requested.

Cllr Briton stated that the building cannot be sold to anyone else until mid-June.

The Town Clerk explained the financial negotiations with SCC. £590k has been accepted subject to a full survey/legal issues. Up to £500k can only be borrowed in one financial year, so the proposal is for £490k in 1st year, £100k in 2nd year. Loan would be for £620k (to include £590k for the building cost, stamp duty, survey and legal costs). Loan would be fixed, over 25 years. The Town Clerk thanked Cllrs l'Anson and Cursley for their support with the financial negotiations. The loan application cannot be made until WCC have agreed to purchase.

A very detailed discussion took place. Cllr Parker expressed concern that without a structural survey at this point, we are unclear as to the costs involved. Cllr Agabani stated that more involvement should have been sought from the local community. Cllr Browne stated that on behalf of the people of Wells we owe it to them to commit to this project and make it a success. Cllr Osman reminded Cllrs an independent report has been provided by Killens to support the purchase of this building and shared with all city Cllrs.

Cllr Rust proposed, seconded by Cllr Parker, to replace Motion 1 on the Agenda with the following:

To resolve to purchase the Portway Annexe subject to evidence of sufficient community support, such evidence to be obtained by open public engagement, and subject to an independent survey.

Councillors took a recorded vote on this motion:

Cllrs Agabani, Parker and Rust voted in favour

Cllrs Briton, Browne, Cursley, Hartley, Humphreys, l'Anson, Kennedy, Osman, Welch voted against

MOTION DECLINED

It was requested to carry out a recorded vote on the following motion made by Cllr Rust:

I am proposing that the motion listed for the Extraordinary Council Meeting be deferred until the 25th March Full Council meeting, in order for more detailed documentation to be produced to enable Councillors to make an informed and responsible decision.

Proposer: Cllr Jenny Rust, Seconder: Cllr Joe Parker

Cllrs Rust and Parker voted in favour.

Cllrs Agabani, Briton, Browne, Cursley, Hartley, Humphreys, l' Anson, Kennedy, Osman, Welch voted against

MOTION DECLINED

Agenda:

1. To agree the purchase.

A recorded vote was taken:

Cllrs Briton, Browne, Cursley, Hartley, Humphreys, l'Anson, Kennedy, Osman, Welch voted in favour

Cllrs Parker and Rust voted against

Cllr Agabani abstained

MOTION APPROVED

Agenda:

2. It is RESOLVED to seek the approval of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to apply for a PWLB loans of total £620,000 over the borrowing term of 25 years for the capital purchase of the building Portway Annexe.

- First financial year borrowing of £500,000 at a repayment cost of £25,545
- Additional second financial year borrowing of £120,000 at a repayment cost of £6,130

The total cost of borrowing will result in a precept increase of 5.54% costing the average band household £7.46 per year or 14 pence per week

(calculated as of rates applicable on 25th February 2021).

Proposed by Cllr Osman, seconded by Cllr Kennedy.

A recorded vote was taken:

Cllrs Agabani, Briton, Browne, Cursley, Hartley, Humphreys, l'Anson, Kennedy, Osman, Welch voted in favour

Cllr Rust voted against

Cllr Parker abstained

MOTION APPROVED

21/42/C ANY OTHER URGENT MATTERS OF REPORT

The Town Clerk reminded Councillors to email him if they wish to serve on the newly formed Portway Annexe Committee.

21/43/C DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of Wells City Council will be at **7pm on Thursday 25th March 2021**

Minutes signed by: **S Luck, Town Clerk**

Cllr P Welch, Mayor of Wells

Date: