

CROXLEY GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF the EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER
ON THURSDAY 7 AUGUST 2008

Present: Cllr Norman in the Chair
David Allison - Clerk
Amanda Taft – Minute Taker

Cllrs Bains, Brading (arrived at 8.01pm), Brand, C Jefford, Martin, Saxon, Seabourne (arrived at 8.05pm), Seeley and Vassiliou

Voting Members: 10

Public: 9

CC559/08/S Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs Bennett, Birch, Dann, Hollands, Shafe and Wynne-Jones

CC560/08/S Declarations of Interests by Members

The Chairman stated that he was on the Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) Leisure and Community Safety Policy and Scrutiny Committee but had not been involved in discussions about the maintenance contract for the Green and Stones Orchard. Cllr Brading stated that he was a member of the Executive Committee of TRDC (Public Services and Health Portfolio) and therefore had a prejudicial interest although he also had not taken part in any discussions at TRDC on this matter.

Those Councillors present agreed that these Members could join in with the discussion although if it became embarrassing for them they could stay out of the discussions.

CC561/08/S Representations from the Public

The Chairman welcomed and thanked the members of the public for attending the meeting.

Mr Neighbour expressed concerns for the wildlife, flora and birds in Stones Orchard. He added that the Parish Council Rangers sympathetically cut and manage this area in order to promote and encourage wild flora and associated fauna – see attached.

Mr Grant made representations and read from a document he had prepared – see attached.

Mr Ridley asked what date the pre-tender questionnaire was submitted. The Clerk replied that the questionnaire was delivered by hand on 21 April and was within the timescale required by TRDC. The Clerk added that he heard no more about this until the TRDC letter dated 24 July was received by the Parish Council on 29 July. When another question was asked, the Chairman interrupted and stated that questions should not be expressed during representations.

The Chairman thanked the public present for attending the meeting and it was requested that their concerns be put in writing to TRDC with a copy to the Parish Council for information.

CC562/08/S Maintenance Contract for the Green and Stones Orchard

The Chairman introduced this item and the Clerk added that there were a number of considerations to be discussed. The Clerk informed those present that after the letter from TRDC stating that the Parish Council were unsuccessful in their application, he had received two letters from TRDC regarding the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE). He added that this was a very complex area of law and personnel management and it may be that specialist advice

may need to be sought at some point which would require Council funding if TUPE Regulations need to be explored in more depth.

Secondly, the Clerk stated that there were practical issues to be considered which are a routine part of the maintenance of the Green and Stones Orchard which include dog waste bins, litter bins, vehicular access across the Revels site to footpath 7, planting (of trees and bulbs) in Stones Orchard, plaques on seats, the grass around the War Memorial (especially before the Remembrance Service), preparation of the Revels site for the Revels and the firework display.

The Clerk was asked to write to Mr Brooker at TRDC about the Council's concerns given the Parish Council had looked after these areas for some 15 years with such expertise and had offered to do it for no charge to the District Council. It was stated that many compliments are received about the Green and Stones Orchard both to the Parish Council and to Councillors themselves. It was also asked whether these areas could be given back to the community and the Clerk was asked to include this in his letter to Mr Brooker.

A Councillor asked whether the cost of the new contractor would be added to Special Expenses and this should be a matter taken up with TRDC in the letter.

The Chairman believed that the loss of the maintenance contract means the Parish has lost the status of 'village'. Members considered that other work would have to be found for the Rangers and this situation clearly demonstrated the importance of a time recording works schedule. It was agreed that this item be placed on the next Environment and Amenity Agenda by which time the Parish Council may have received the pre-tender evaluation report from TRDC and Cllrs will have had time to think about suggestions of further work areas for the Rangers'.

It was proposed by Cllr Saxon and seconded by Cllr Bains that the Clerk writes to Mr Brooker at TRDC to ask:-

- how, after 15 years of maintaining the Green and Stones Orchard, the Parish Council have not even reached the tendering stage;
- about the events that are held on the Green, namely the Remembrance Day service at the War Memorial, preparation for the Revels and the new year's eve firework display;
- about routine maintenance such as the dog waste bins, litterbins and vehicular access to footpath 7;
- about tree planting in Stones Orchard and the memorial plaques on the seats
- Also, that the Clerk pursues the possibility of the lease or direct land ownership of the Green and Stones Orchard being transferred to the Parish Council.

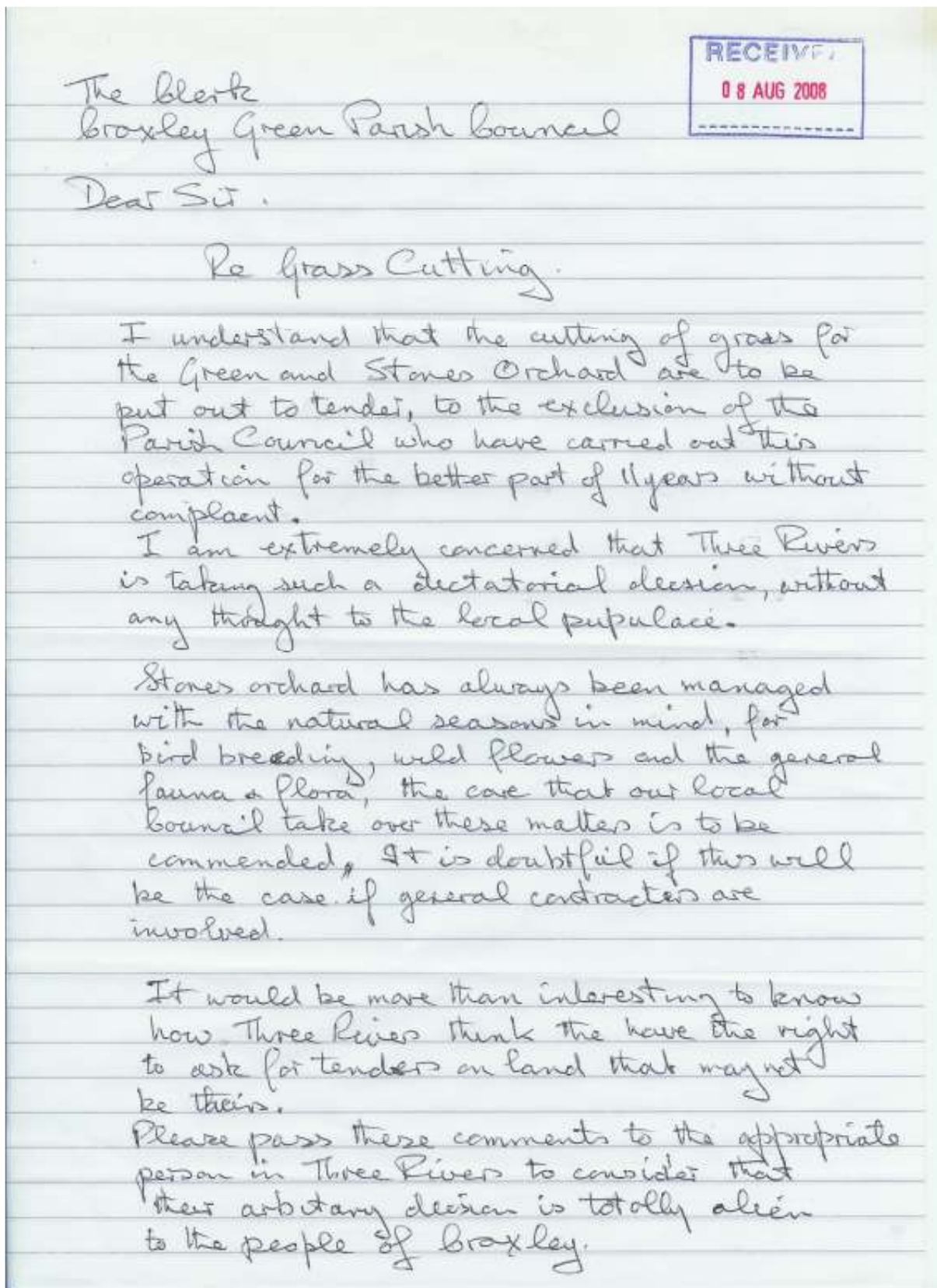
Cllrs Brading, Norman and Seabourne abstained from voting and the proposal was agreed.

CC563/08/S

Closure

There being no other business the Chairman closed the meeting at 8.55pm.

The following letter is from Mr D Neighbour, 21 Fuller Way, Croxley Green which he used as the basis of his public representations to the Parish Council at their meeting held on 7 August 2008:



The following is from Mr B Grant, 93 Frankland Road, Croxley Green which he used as the basis of his public representations to the Parish Council at their meeting held on 7 August 2008:

RECEIVED
07 AUG 2008

Grass Cutting on the Green and Stones Orchard Croxley Green

My name is Barry Grant. For 20 years I have been a member of the Revels Committee, the last 10 years as secretary. I am also chairman of the Keep Croxley 'Green' Group. Formerly I was a committee member of CCYFC where we took responsibility for cutting and maintaining our own pitches.

I therefore have a keen interest in the cutting of the grass on the Green and I have encountered grounds maintenance issues in my long-term involvement with other local organisations

Some key points:

- ✓ The Government states that parish councils, as the tier of government that is closest to local communities, have a central role to play in improving local quality of life.
- ✓ DEFRA guidance in relation to a Quality Parish Council states that in proportion to its size and skills it should deliver local services on behalf of principal local authorities when this represents the best deal for the local community.
- ✓ The Green is Common Land. Parish Councils have powers in relation to their regulation and management.
- ✓ Croxley entered the Herts. Village of the Year competition for the first time this year and was commended in the environment category.

It would appear the intention is for TRDC to amalgamate its Grounds maintenance (in house) contract with its Environmental maintenance contract (private contractor) when it expires next year. TRDC officers prefer the contracts to be combined (in house) in order to provide a better co-ordinated, more efficient and effective service as well as providing some economies of scale.

The Parish Council grass cutting contract expires in November and TRDC would like this to be incorporated into the above mentioned combined contract to be conducted in house. I understand that there are 2 tenders, one for The Green/Stones Orchard grass cutting and another for everything else but you can bet that the 2 contracts will be given to the same contractor! The Director of Community and Environmental Services at TRDC advises he has had over 16 applicants, many of which have extensive grounds maintenance experience and has therefore precluded a PC tender. This appears to allude that the Parish Council is incapable of cutting a strip of grass on a regular basis, despite the fact the Parish Council is reliable, in situ and accountable. What could be more "green". The Parish Council has even offered to cut the grass for free!

I would like to think that our Parish Council and local residents views have been taken into account but it does seem that the plan for amalgamation has been conducted at the whim of a few TRDC officers.

Will the frequency and timetable of cutting be maintained? This is unlikely as most grounds maintenance contracts allow for frequencies to be flexible around a predetermined sequence to enable the maintenance program to be adapted to varying weather conditions.

In my experience, as Revels Secretary, I have received nothing short of fantastic cooperation and coordination from the Clerk and the Rangers at the time of the Revels when successive cuts of varying lengths are required to show the Revels site and the Green to their best advantage. The rangers take full regard of the changeable weather conditions in the weeks preceding the Revels

As for accountability I believe our Parish Council should also have the responsibility for cutting local grass verges to a reasonable standard. This is clearly too much of a burden for Herts CC judging from the poor service it provides in Croxley.

The fact that Stone's Orchard and the Green look so good throughout the year is down to care and the accountability of the Parish Council and its Rangers. You only have to visit these areas to appreciate the care and expertise that has gone into not only their maintenance, but their improvement, with the planting of trees and hedges, sympathetic cutting of paths to maintain a wildflower environment, planting and maintenance of flowers/bulbs. Many people in the village are working hard in conjunction with the PC to improve local quality of life in our village and we want our Parish Council to deliver local services and go that extra mile according to a plan that is dictated by the requirements of its parishioners. Local residents will see the outsourcing of these services as being a retrograde step.

This ridiculous situation cries out for transparency and a common sense approach. Can TRDC also advise me of the other Parish Council Services that are being considered for outsourcing as I feel this is the thin end of the wedge. I am not the only one who feels extremely concerned and uncomfortable with what is going on here.

- ATTACHMENTS END -