

Minutes of the Meeting of the Community Benefit Fund Committee

A committee which reports to, and is overseen by,
Bradford & Cookbury Parish Council (BCPC).

Date of meeting: Monday 6th August, 2018 at 7.30 pm
in Bradford & Cookbury Village Hall Committee Room.

Present: Parish Councillors - Nigel Manners (Chair), Bill Pennington, John Rennie, Kate Rowlands, Mike Welch. Parishioners - Paul Clarke (Secretary), Phil Drummond, Geoff Pitt, Chris Reed, Andy Smith.

1. Apologies: Parishioner - Catherine Smale.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 11th June, 2018. The Minutes were approved.

3. Consideration of applications for funding.

i) Declarations of interest:

Village Hall Car Park Improvement bid: Chris Reed is Chair of the Village Hall committee. Geoff Pitt sits on the same committee. It was observed that everyone present had an interest in the village hall car park as we all regularly use it, even now as this meeting progressed.

Snooker Room Equipment Refurbishment bid: Andy Smith is Chair of the Bradford & Cookbury Snooker Room. Mike Welch is a player and Chris Reed and Geoff Pitt are interested parties by association as they are on the Village Hall committee and the snooker facilities are in the village hall.

Bradford Church Bell Frame Repair bid: Geoff Pitt is the applicant, representing the Parochial Church Council.

Cookbury Churchyard Grounds Maintenance bid: Kate Rowlands, Mike Welch and Chris Reed have all done volunteer work in the churchyard. Geoff Pitt is a PCC member for both Bradford and Cookbury churches.

NOTE: At this point it was decided to examine the four bids received in principle first to see if they could be supported. Then they would be revisited immediately to see what level of funding could be allocated, bearing in mind the fact that, together, they were bidding for more money than was available.

ii) Village Hall Car Park Improvement bid.

Chris Reed tended the apologies of Caroline Hawking, who had submitted the application but was unable to be present. He fielded the questions relating to this bid, some of which centred on the levels of reserve/contingency funding maintained by the VH committee, its sources of income and its projected income for the year ahead. Other questions related to the history of this project, the actual work to be done and the choice of contractor.

The application was asking for £10,000, which represented 44% of the total cost of the project, which has been pending for some time but stalled because of funding concerns. If granted, this money would enable the project to finally get underway.

The bid was supported in principle.

iii) Snooker Room Equipment Refurbishment bid.

There was a general discussion regarding this village hall facility and the benefit of keeping the the equipment maintained to a high standard. The better the facilities in the village hall, the more people would visit resulting in more income for the hall as a whole, creating a win-win situation. It is a number of years since the snooker table was last refurbished. The Snooker Club itself is relatively new (Autumn 2017) and has not yet had the time to build up funds (through membership subscriptions and guest hire/fees) yet the table playing surface, perimeter cushions and scoreboard need to be renewed. The members and guests play on three evenings a week all year round. The club has an obligation to the VH committee to keep the equipment in good order.

The bid was for £891, representing 82% of the total cost of the project.

The bid was supported in principle.

iv) Bradford Church Bell Frame Repair bid.

Although a very detailed description of the work needed by this project was included with the application papers, Geoff Pitt briefly summarised the problem and explained how the PCC finds itself trying to part-fund such projects from its own restricted Bell Fund and other unrestricted funds. Questions were asked regarding the urgency of the work (very urgent, the nearest bell cannot be used until the frame is repaired), the level of reserve funding the PCC has access to (the figure looks high but the funds are not unrestricted) and the other sources of funding which could be tapped for this project (a number of sources which are being pursued).

Geoff explained that the PCC had hoped to be able to build up a fund for the church to cover such items as wear and tear and depreciation but the discovery of a crack in the bell frame had not been expected and the resultant extra £6,000 had come as a blow to this ambition.

The request for £2,000 represents just 26% of the total cost of the project, the rest having been raised from the other sources.

The bid was supported in principle.

v) Cookbury Churchyard Grounds Maintenance bid.

(This application arrived shortly after the agenda had been published and so was not named directly on the agenda.)

This application was for the purchase of two new lawnmowers and a strimmer to replace the heavy, ageing equipment currently used by the volunteers who maintain Cookbury Churchyard. In addition, funding for a one-off piece of contract work by a tree surgeon was requested and an enquiry included as to whether this tree surgeon could be brought back on a regular basis to undertake ongoing maintenance work at the site.

Members of the committee identified a number of deficiencies in the application. No final figure had been submitted as to the level of funding required. The volunteers submitting the bid had no constitution and no bank account into which any award could be paid. The request to pay the supplier directly for the new mowing equipment could cause contractual problems later. The request for follow-up work by the tree surgeon on a regular basis appeared to fall foul of the rule that ongoing core costs of projects cannot be supported.

Geoff Pitt pointed out that the volunteer group should have approached the PCC in the first instance and that the bid should have come via that route. After more discussion, the bid was deferred pending further talks between the two parties with a view to submitting a revised application in February next year in time for the 2019 funding round.

Awards decision.

The three bids which were supported in principle totalled £12,891 when only £12,000 was available. £12,000 represents slightly more than 93% of the amount bid for, so the committee decided to support all three applicants equally at a level of 93% of what they had requested. The representatives of each bid in the room indicated that the projects could proceed at this reduced level of award.

Therefore, the recommendation to be made to the full parish council to be determined at its meeting two days later on 8th August was for the following amounts:

Village Hall Car Park Improvement bid.	£9,309
Snooker Room Equipment Refurbishment bid.	£829
Bradford Church Bell Frame Repair bid.	£1,862
Total.	£12,000

4. Progress on Distribution of Community Benefit Fund Posters.

Paul Clarke noted that the hit counter on the news page of the Bradford & Cookbury Parish Council website indicated that the Community Benefit Fund poster had been viewed and/or downloaded over 30 times and the funding application forms over 40 times. The poster is also prominent on the local noticeboards but will now need to be amended following the full allocation of the £12,000 available for 2018 at this meeting.

The funding committee had wanted to know if it would be possible for its poster to be distributed with the Bradford & Cookbury Parish newsletter and if it could be put into the distribution boxes attached to the local noticeboards. Paul Carke was tasked with asking Pauline Jones this question and her response is summarised below:

‘The parish newsletter is no longer hand delivered door-to-door as this was becoming logistically very difficult and sometimes dangerous, especially in winter when volunteers are constantly having to get in and out of stopped cars which are needed to cover the widely-dispersed dwellings on narrow and sometimes poorly surfaced country lanes. Instead, copies of the bi-monthly editions are placed in the distribution boxes and topped up as required. In addition, the newsletter is now published and is available for all to read and download on the Village Hall website. The future is increasingly digital, but the availability of the paper newsletters at the noticeboards means they are still accessible by those members of the community who do not use a computer.

The best way for the funding committee to get its posters distributed is to provide Pauline Jones with a stock of A5 posters printed on thin paper which she can then fold into the newsletter before the copies are placed in the distribution boxes. That will ensure that the boxes are not stuffed with one item at the exclusion of the other. The current print run of the newsletter is 270 per edition, but this is steadily decreasing as the digital edition gains circulation. The bi-monthly editions are December-January, February-March and so on. Posters should be with Pauline no later than the third week of the month preceeding the edition chosen to include the poster.

In addition, the poster should be included on the Village Hall website (just as it is available on the parish council website). This can be done by sending a pdf copy to Pauline for forwarding to the VH site webmaster.’

Preparations for this can be made at a future meeting.

5. Future possibilities for the Bradford & Cookbury Parish Newsletter.

Nigel Manners and Paul Clarke had been tasked to supply paper copies of the A5 booklet, The BT Times, and the A4 booklet, The Sheepwash Chronicle, to show to committee members as examples of what neighbouring villages were doing with their bi-monthly newsletters. Both were brought to this meeting.

The funding committee had been interested to know if the producers of the B&C parish newsletter might be interested in bidding for funding to move away from the bi-fold, double sided, single A4 sheet format currently adopted. With more funding initially, a booklet form of newsletter similar to those produced in Thornbury (The Tatler), Black Torrington (The BT Times) and Sheepwash (The Sheepwash Chronicle) could be produced instead. Again, Paul Clarke had asked Pauline Jones for her views:

'The purpose of parish newsletters, whatever form they take, is to get information to parishioners. The current B&C parish newsletter achieves this, in tandem with school and church notices which download automatically with the newsletter from the VH website. In addition, all new residents are given a welcome pack with core information which remains largely unchanged over long periods of time, eg. contact numbers for medical and council services etc. Visitors to the village hall itself, i.e. most of us, also cannot fail to notice all the information on display inside and outside the main entrance.

If this was all incorporated into booklets instead, they could not be placed in the distribution boxes on the noticeboards as they wouldn't fit and the door-to-door delivery service would have to start up again. This is not difficult in true villages like Black Torrington and Sheepwash, but for reasons already stated it is not easy in a collection of dispersed hamlets like Bradford & Cookbury.

Much of the content of the booklets examined is repeated from one edition to another which helps to keep the booklet full but which is unnecessary and increases the cost of production which needs to be covered by more advertising. The fewer advertisers in the B&C single sheet are happy to pay a similar very low annual fee to that charged by the booklet producers and, together with the top-up funding currently received from the parish council, this is enough to fund the present B&C newsletter set-up.

A booklet-type newsletter would mean a lot of extra work for a very few volunteers but the final result - getting the information to parishioners - would not be appreciably different to what it is now. So a preliminary cost-benefit consideration concludes that the status quo is working OK in this parish and should continue.'

No further action will be taken on this item.

6. Consideration of a timed 'Window of Opportunity' for submission of funding applications from 2019 onwards.

A range of views was expressed by committee members regarding this suggestion. Some thought the funding committee should be meeting monthly on pre-published dates to consider any applications and, if necessary, advise applicants on any shortcomings and ways to improve bids to have a greater chance of them being successful. This would suit a situation where many applications for small amounts would need to be considered but would be less suited to the situation we have seen in this first year whereby the first three larger bids swallowed up the whole amount available.

It was suggested that if the receipt of applications was to be front-loaded at the start of the payment year, then the window for applications should open on 1st February, one month ahead of the expected arrival of funds, to give time for any inadmissible applications to be revised and resubmitted in time for funds to be allocated straight away in March. The 'window of opportunity' for bids would remain open for three months until the end of April.

It was pointed out that there may need to be a second 'window' later in the year for the re-allocation of any funds returned from previous awards for projects that failed to proceed. Such monies could then be used to top-up any allocations already made in the current funding year which were less than the amounts initially requested. Alternatively, they could be awarded to applications which had 'had the door closed on them' when the funding was fully allocated to projects submitted ahead of them that year.

Initially, the February-April window will be adopted for 2019. The A4 funding poster will need to be revised to make this clear and A5 copies produced for dispersal with the December-January B&C parish newsletter as detailed in item 4 above. (ACTION: Paul Clarke.)

7. Open Platform.

1. Geoff Pitt requested that a Microsoft Word version of the funding application form be added to the existing pdf version on the parish council website. He said that many who wished to fill in the form digitally find it easier to work with Word files rather than pdf files.

This will be done asap.

(ACTION: Paul Clarke.)

2. Paul Clarke was asked that, if he were to receive any more applications for the 2018 fund, he advises the other committee members of their existence. He will advise any applicants that the fund is now closed for this year but fresh applications for 2019 will be welcomed from 1st February next year.

(ACTION: Paul Clarke.)

8. Items for next agenda.

No specific new items were tabled over and above the issues raised in these minutes which need follow-up.

9. Date of Next Meeting:

TBA.