

HOWE GREEN COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

Monday 23rd November 2009 at 8 pm
in Howe Green Chapel

MINUTES

This was a closed meeting for Howe Green residents only and invited guest speaker. A record was kept of members attending.

Martin Cross asked for any non-residents in the audience to make themselves known. There was no response.

Apologies for Absence

Peter Longhurst. Doug Marshal.

Purchase of Land to the West of Howe Green

Introduction by the chairman of the HGCA David Pearson

Our plan is to buy, through a limited company, the land west of the village for community use, to prevent its occupation by unwelcome residents and perhaps to prevent development there in the future. It is green belt, agricultural land so the uses to which it could be put are limited. For instance, it is not permitted to extend your garden into it.

The land is up for public auction so anyone can buy it. If the land were bought by unwelcome residents, the effects on the values of your properties would be drastic and might cost you tens or hundreds of thousands of pounds. Would you buy a house in Crays Hill?

However, beyond the sighting of viewers of the site who looked disreputable, there is no real indication that travellers are planning to buy the site. We just don't know. There is a danger: Crays Hill is being cleared and the inhabitants will be looking for somewhere else to settle. It's an auction, so we don't know who might want it or how much it will cost for us to buy it.

Access to the land is a factor in our favour. The Adverse Possession bid by Richard and Janet North is based on the fact that Richard actually built that access some 25 years ago, with the then owner's permission, and has used and maintained the track ever since. Previously the only entrance was through the wood to the house on the left and this is now impassable.

Should we make a pre-auction bid?

Discussion.

There had been various reports of pre-auction bids, from zero to three.

After proposal and secondment, it was decided not to put in a pre-auction bid.

It was agreed that we would not discuss bid amounts at the meeting because it would be unwise to reveal details to the opposition.

It was pointed out that, In addition to the cost of the land, an amount will be needed to cover expenses and to provide some working capital for the new company.

The chairman thanked the residents for the pledges and subscriptions they had made but that there was not enough in the fund to mount a realistic bid. The original idea of £500 per household might have worked if all 230 houses had subscribed. Fifty houses subscribing £2000 each would bring in £100,000 which would be a good target if we could reach it. We have received around 40 subscriptions so far and the average is way below £2000.

Some had said that they would subscribe more if push came to shove. It was pointed out that the time was then.

Discussion

The meeting was adjourned while pledges and checks were received and totalled.

The chairman announced that we had enough to bid at the auction.

He went on to announce that there was at least one syndicate in the village that was interested in bidding and that they may be able to out-bid us.

There was general agreement that the known syndicate should go ahead and we should not try to outbid them. However, some misgivings were expressed as to the motives of the syndicate.

Dave Dennison proposed that the chairman be trusted to satisfy himself that the syndicate are not working for travellers. Seconded, Dave Travis. Voted and passed.

A protracted discussion ensued on various methods of approach to the auction, including:

1. Bidding only by the group (HGCA or Syndicate) with the deepest pockets (to avoid competitive bidding)
2. Bidding by the HGCA and topping up by the syndicate if the bidding went beyond us.
3. A composite bid by HGCA and syndicate.

Proposal We do not bid against a local syndicate. Seconded. Vote: 33 to 12 – passed.

It was proposed that, if the local syndicate reach their limit and we still have the money, then we bid to our limit - we go the auction as a back-up. It was pointed out that syndicate could probably raise more funds than the HGCA has in its coffers. This was not voted on.

It was suggested that, in the time remaining before the auction, everyone approach their neighbours to encourage them to contribute more to the fund.

The point was made that contributing to a syndicate was not part of the original remit or proposal for the community. It was agreed that we would go back to the community with any proposal and take an email vote. (Only shareholder votes to count.) It was established that almost all in the room have email and those that haven't would be informed and have chance to vote.

Don raised a query about appointing a solicitor. The chairman stated that he had talked with David Phipps of Holmes and Hills and confirmed that he was willing and available.

The meeting was asked if there was any other syndicate or person at the meeting interested in bidding. None came forward.

It was agreed that a committee should be formed to handle the arrangements and report back to the community by email on any conclusions. It was agreed that the committee should consist of the HGCA committee plus nominated directors of the Howe Green Westland Co.

The chairman proposed Dave Travis and Dave Dennison as further members of the committee. This was seconded and passed by vote.

Any other business

Meeting closed at 10.05 pm.

Subsequent to the meeting and not part of these minutes: The syndicate members are residents of Howe Green. As I understand it, their primary aim is to keep unwelcome residents off the land. (They do not want to see a significant reduction in the values of their properties and are prepared to take steps to prevent it.) Secondly, for them it is an investment of a great deal of money which they would hope to recoup, at least partially, sometime in the future. Because of this, the syndicate may not consent to option 2 or 3 above. Your committee will investigate the possibilities and report back by email for shareholder approval of any proposed action. The syndicate will reveal their identities and will put forward their viewpoint if and when they decide to enter the bidding. This will depend on the contents of the Legal Pack which is not yet available.