

BRANDESTON VILLAGE HALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

Minutes for meeting on Friday 1st May 2020

This meeting was called during lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic and was therefore held via the online platform ZOOM as we were unable to meet in person.

Present via ZOOM: Sue Thurlow, Terry Robinson, Cara Duffy, Sandra Roberts, Paul Baker, Michael Cousens, Kathy Churchill, Jane Mitchell, Mary Ketley

Apologies: Karren Piper, Ruth Garratt

Agenda:

The meeting was called to discuss and vote on whether the Village Hall should apply for the **COVID-19: Small Business Grant Fund and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund** which is being offered by the East Suffolk Council to those affected by the Covid-19 crisis.

Full details of the grant can be viewed via the link

<https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/business/covid-19-business-grant-funding/>

Brandeston Village Hall was eligible to apply for £10,000

All committee members were sent this link prior to the ZOOM meeting and there was much discussion via email as to whether we should apply. Sue also contacted Maurice Cook, our district councillor, for his advice. This is a copy of the email Sue then circulated to the committee:

I have had a long conversation with Maurice Cook this morning who has explained the thinking behind this grant which is designed for the leisure and entertainment sector. His view was that we are just the organisation this grant is aimed at as we will be losing hire money and we can't do any fundraising for some time.

Thinking of our refurbishment plans I asked him about his own Enabling Fund – (we last had £800 from this fund for the new bark for the play area) - his response was that all councillors have given money into the current hardship fund leaving him with only £5,000 on which he already has 2 applications. So, it looks as though he would have little money left for our kitchen project and he sounded very unsure about what grant money he may have available in 2021. His comment was that if we could manage to keep the hall running and paying the necessary bills perhaps it may be wise to use this grant on the kitchen upgrade.

Due to the complex and unusual nature of the situation, and the differing opinions of the committee, Sue called a meeting so that we could vote on the matter. Some members felt our application was unjustified as we have a healthy bank account whilst others felt we needed to take up the offer due to lack of earnings from hall bookings whilst in lockdown.

Sue chaired the online meeting and due to the ZOOM format asked each committee member in turn their thoughts on whether we should apply for the grant.

Mary Ketley:

Lifted from an earlier email sent by Mary which expresses her view at the meeting.

“Funds will be lost this year, and we do not know how long the closure of the hall and the inability to run fundraising events will last and of course that is of concern. On the other hand, is it right that, given we have a healthy bank balance and no pressing repairs (as opposed to updating) can it be right that we take public money at a time of great economic uncertainty and pressing need of so many other groups? I do appreciate that those other groups - those in food poverty, the poorly housed and homeless - won't get the money instead. However, I do not see how we can justify an application when we are cash-rich.”

Mary acknowledged that it was a dilemma as, being trustees of the village hall, we are duty bound to do the right thing by the village.

Michael Cousens:

Michael supported Mary in her views. He agreed that we are entitled to the funds, but it is a question of ethics as we do not need it. At this point we have no view on what we would spend the money on. If there was an ambitious plan for the £10,000 then he might change his view but at this point he is not in support.

Kathy Churchill:

Kathy was in two minds initially as agreed with the points raised by Mary and was not comfortable with applying as there are others in more dire need of the funds. She felt that if we did apply for the £10,000 it should be put towards a specific project and not just added to the coffers. She also felt that if we were successful, we should offer as much support as we could to the church who were not eligible for the same funding.

Jane Mitchell:

Jane respected the views expressed so far that there were others more deserving of the funds but said that we need to bear in mind that it is not our money. Below is lifted from an email sent to the committee by Jane earlier:

We may or may not choose to apply but at the end of the day we need to be very clear as to the basis of any decision. I am trying to research this as fully as I can and am happy to share facts ascertained thus far:

- 1. It appears we qualify to receive £10,000 and are being actively encouraged to apply by East Suffolk.*
- 2. This money is centrally funded by Government and does not deplete local funds.*
- 3. There is no “pot limit” - if you qualify of course - so no-one loses out through us applying, it will not impact on anyone else's ability to receive the money.*
- 4. I am contacting other local village halls to learn from their views and am awaiting one or two return calls. The Chairman of Wickham Market tells me they are applying on basis they qualify and that their income will be down this year. Their hall was recently quoted for internal painting which is what they will use the money for. He tells me this is supported by Community Action Suffolk. Easton have applied.*

Jane stated at the meeting that this is legitimate funding that that has been specifically designed to help organisations such as ourselves. As a committee we have a responsibility to use any available assets to benefit the community and cannot find anything in the deed that suggests we have a right to impede any funds on offer. If we do not take up the grant, we could be in danger of being in violation of these rights, and the village as a whole could challenge us on this.

The end game of this funding is to keep the economy moving and therefore we should make sure that the money is used to support local business i.e. using a local company for the kitchen improvements.

Jane also questioned the hall being cash rich – we have strategically held funds in reserve to be used for future improvements of the hall and to safeguard the hall against any unplanned emergency spending. She believed that we should apply and that as a committee it is our responsibility to act in the best interests of the village.

Terry Robinson:

Below lifted from an email which clearly expresses Terry's view:

1 We need to consider our responsibilities, as trustees, to the Village residents. My understanding of our obligations is that we should try to act in their best interests. This grant is such a large sum – about what the VH gets from 4 fetes – that I think we should seek some feedback from the Village on the matter. This could be in the form of a Village email setting out the pros and cons and inviting responses. This would not be a scientific poll and we might not get many replies, but it would to some extent discharge our responsibilities.

2 Regarding the ethics of claiming the grant when we could get by without it, as has been noted, any grant we receive does not mean others will get less. The current Government financial support measures (including this one) are being made available to protect the economy and in particular to help small enterprises to survive. If we get this grant and spend it this could help to restart the local economy. For example, placing an order with one of the three potential suppliers of our new kitchen might well be critical to keeping them in business.

Terry backed this up at the ZOOM meeting and explained that the £10,000 would be the amount that we stand to lose if we take no bookings before next Spring. He supports the application but would like to see it spent with local companies who we might need for future work/improvements and would also like to make sure we support the church where possible.

Cara Duffy:

Cara was initially against applying for the same reasons expressed by Mary and Michael but would now be happy to apply as long as we use it for the kitchen refurbishment and that we use a local firm.

Paul Baker:

Paul's thoughts were similar to Cara and he would also support the application if it was used towards the kitchen refurbishment. Paul confirmed that to date there were no grants available to the church.

Sandra Roberts:

Happy to support the application and in favour of using it for the kitchen refurbishment and employing a local company to carry out the work.

Sue Thurlow:

Sue thanked everyone for their contribution. She reiterated her concerns following her discussion with Maurice Cook re the likelihood of the hall being able to secure grants in the future. Government funding was being reduced and the pots of money normally available to village halls were being cut by up to a third. Therefore, Sue is in favour of applying for the £10,000 grant.

Before the vote, Michael wanted to point out that according to paragraph 15 of our trust deed it states:

15. The Committee may receive any additional donations or endowments for the general purposes of the Charity and it may also accept donations or endowments for any special objects connected with the Charity not inconsistent with the provisions of this Deed-----

He said it is important to note that the wording says ‘may receive’. It is therefore not an obligation of the trustees, rather the decision should be made at our discretion.

Sue said that she had spoken to the absent committee members, Ruth Garratt and Karren Piper, prior to the ZOOM call and both were in favour of applying for the grant due to the obvious lack of income from events and fundraising this year.

Sue then called for a show of hands as to whether we should apply for the grant:

In favour: 7

Against: 2

It was therefore decided on a 7 to 2 majority to apply for the fund and that, if successful, we would spend it on the kitchen refurbishment and ensure that a local company was hired to complete the work to help rejuvenate the local economy.

Actions:

Sue to submit our application on Monday 4th May

Terry to source quotes from two other local companies to carry out the kitchen refurbishment. (We had already been quoted by Fishers Stainless Fabrications)

Terry to source quotes for sanding the floor of the main hall and meeting room as excellent time to carry out the work.

Sandra to confirm the quote for painting the main hall and meeting room.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – TBA