

Report of the Village Meeting on the 29th November 2017

Meeting Procedure

I open the meeting as Chair of the PC, having called this public meeting, I will Chair it according to standard meetings law and procedure. I nominate David, as Parish Clerk, to minute the meeting.

I will point out the presence of Parish Councillors in the audience. They are here to hear the views and questions of members of the public about the issue concerned. They will comment or respond, as can anyone else present this evening. Anyone here is welcome to comment or raise questions. As Chair, after making an opening statement in a moment, I will not comment or answer questions but will run proceedings. Contributors should please give their name and “speak through the Chair”. I hope people will contribute fully, but am asking people to stick to a maximum of 10 minutes if you are making a speech, preferably less than that, so that others can be brought in. You are, of course, free to speak as you wish, consistent with me ensuring that all who wish to speak get a look in.

Reed PC: Chairman’s Opening Statement, Cabinet Public Meeting

Reed Parish Council has already made clear its wish for The Cabinet to remain a public house, notably in its response to the application for change of use which went before the NHDC planning committee in July 2017. In doing so the PC was representing the views of Reed residents who have

expressed opposition to the current owner's application for change of use from a public house and for *retrospective* permission for works on the Cabinet to convert it to a domestic dwelling. That opposition manifested itself in a number of ways. It was apparent at the well attended PC meeting called in 2016 to consider the owner's application; also by the large turn out of villagers and other supporters (70 people) at the subsequent planning-committee meeting in July 2017 to lobby councillors against granting the application. And, not least, it has been expressed through widespread support in the village and beyond for the *Save The Cabinet* Group's campaign.

Given this evidence of a widespread wish in Reed to preserve The Cabinet as a pub, Reed Parish Council has come to consider whether it can, or should, embark on further action to help achieve that end. The purpose of this meeting is to consult villagers and gauge what support there is in the whole community for a particular course of action the council could take. This is the putting together of an application to the Dept. for Communities and Local Govt. (DCLG) for permission for Reed PC to borrow a large capital sum to purchase The Cabinet and re-open it as a pub, should it come up for sale again in the future.

This process involves the parish council making an application which demonstrates two things to the relevant government Dept. (the DCLG):

Firstly, it must demonstrate that the application to borrow money is for the benefit of the community and has widespread support in the community.

Secondly, it must demonstrate that the money borrowed will be re-paid. In effect this means that a case is presented demonstrating the economic viability of the Cabinet as a pub/restaurant business.

If the DCLG grants permission to apply for a loan, the application is made to the **Public Works Loan Board**. This body will make the loan, for any period up to 50 years, at a fixed rate of interest, and at the rate which applies at the time. This is a preferential rate. For example, in June 2017 this rate was 2.75% for a loan of £375,000 over 30 years, giving annualised repayments of £18,008. Repayments on the loan would, of course, have to be generated by the The Cabinet as a business and made to The Parish Council to service the loan.

To sum up, the purpose of this meeting is to get the views of people in Reed about whether they want Reed Parish Council to apply for such a loan to keep The Cabinet as Reed's village pub, should it come up for sale.

The were 69 residents present as evidenced by the attendance register.

I now open the meeting.

Hazel Hewitt asked how would this affect us.

Graham Stuart said that it won't as the Cabinet will make a profit.

Edwin Kirby said he was a member of the Save the Cabinet Group. There was no planning permission for anyone to live in the Cabinet as a house, it's a pub what they were encouraging the parish council to do was the first stage process which could

last 12 months before the parish council needs to make the final application for the loan. Villages with working public houses tend to have higher property values.

Neil Hitchcock asked what would happen if the tenant defaults?

Carolyn d'Alaya said the parish council was buying an asset and would be able to sell the property as a house.

Neil Hitchcock again asked who would be responsible for the repayments during the time the pub was closed.

Mike Howes said NHDC would agree a planning application to turn the put back to house.

Jackie Streeting asked if there were several offers to buy the pub?

Mike Howes said the previous owners Albanwise were intransigent to offers which is why the parish council did not take action other than listing the pub as a community asset as it was assumed it would be bought.

Carolyn d'Alaya said there would be a rate reduction for the initial period of business where the parish council would build up cash balances against any periods of closure. Income would be received monthly but repayments would be every six months.

Alan Blower said the parish council would ensure that the rent was higher than the interest repayments.

Ian Barnes asked if consideration had been given to the cost of running the pub. Were the similar operations were costs were known?

Edwin Kirby said there were costings and viability studies on the Save the Cabinet Website. The Plunkett Foundation said there were 57 community run public houses and so far none had failed.

Mike Howes said the government would carefully check any business proposals put forward by the parish council. They were in favour of parish councils seeking money from The Public Works Loan Board to buy the pubs in the village. He said the plan A would be a private buyer, Plan B would be a consortium, plan C would be a community pub and plan D would be the parish council taking the loan to buy the pub. However if the application for the loan was in place it would give considerable weight to the parish council's opposition to the change of use application.

Jackie Streeting asked what would be the situation if he loses his application.

Mike Howes said that would be up to North Herts District Council. He went on to say the retrospective application for building works on the listed building have yet to be decided. If the appeal was lost he expected these retrospective applications for building work also to be refused. It would be up to NHDC to ensure the building was returned to its state at the time of purchase.

Ken Andrews asked if it was correct that the current owner was paying domestic rates. Given the evidence of the colour of the wheelie bins, the answer was yes. Mr Andrews said his

understanding that the business rates on the Cabinet were in the order of £20,000 per year.

Richard Hayden asked if the planning Inspectorate appeal was the final step.

Peter Lawrence said that he understood the only final step was to appeal to the High Court.

Martin Heath pointed out that the meeting was to decide whether to start the loan application process.

Neil Hitchcock asked again who actually makes the loan repayments. Answer from Richard Robinson, the parish council.

Neil Hitchcock asked where is the liability?

Trevor Cox said this would be sorted out before the second stage.

Patrick?. Said any problems with the repayment of the loan because of tenants or business problems the interest would simply be rolled up until the property was sold. The parish council was buying an appreciating asset.

It was pointed out that running a public house was not a job for the parish council. Carolyn d'Alaya said they would buy the expertise from the management company. Mike Howes said the ownership need not run for the full length of the term of the loan. The parish council would be in a position to sell after a period of successful trading.

Alan Blower said he saw the seeking of a loan as a tactic to be used at the planning enquiry.

Richard Robinson said that he assumed there would be another meeting before the second stage.

Mark Blaney said if the parish council was refused permission to apply for a loan it could work against the Save the Cabinet Group at the enquiry.

Richard Robinson asked when the parish council would be meeting to take this decision. The chair said as soon as practical following this meeting.

Margaret Addicott asked if the chairman wished to take a show of hands?

This was done with 65 in favour, one against and one undecided. Two people did not vote. The chairman thanked everyone for their attendance, their sensible questions and contributions.

The meeting closed at 9:10 PM