

Minutes of the Extraordinary Council of St Ives Town Council held in the Council Chamber, Guildhall on Monday 4th October 2021 at 7pm

PRESENT

Chairman – Councillor K Arthur (Town Mayor)

Vice-Chairman – Councillor S Tanner (Deputy Town Mayor)

COUNCILLORS

Arthur L

Messenger K

Hynes S

Bradford R

Mitchell A

Ryall J

Harris T

Hodson C

Wells J

OFFICERS

Town Clerk

IN ATTENDANCE

Admin Officer

64. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –
Councillors A Dale, J Beveridge, R Gaunt and L Rogers

65. CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

66. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBER/ OFFICER INTERESTS

None

67. REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION

None

68. MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Chairman signs as a true and correct record the minutes of the Council Meeting held on 9th September 2021.

69. THE FORTHCOMING DISPOSAL OF THE EDWARD HAIN HOSPITAL SITE

The Chairman welcomed fellow councillors, Friends of Edward Hain and members of the public to the meeting. She explained that it had been a decision of the Council to convene a separate meeting to discuss the request of the Friends that the Council consider putting itself forward as a preferred purchaser to seek to acquire the former Edward Hain, prior to its release onto the open market. She invited the Friends to address the meeting.

A representative of the Friends addressed Council.

She set out why the Friends had reached this conclusion and noted the Council’s concerns about the need to have a viable end use for the building. She explained that the Friends had been giving this detailed consideration. The Friends were in the process of seeking Charity Commission approval to change the objectives of the charity so that they extended the use of the site to include health and well-being (they were also seeking to rename the Charity to the Friends of the Former Edward Hain).

If well-being objectives were included, this opened up a number of potential uses for the building. There had been very positive discussions with senior partners of the Stennack about scope to link the building to activities and services there. There had also been discussions with those involved in social prescribing and this also opened up numerous possibilities. There was limited space in town for services and health and welling related groups to meet- examples included weight management, smoking cessation, mental health, older persons day care, yoga. In addition, gaps had been identified in the provision of dentistry in the town. It was a long list of options.

The aim of the new service would be to keep the community healthy, happy and engaged. All these ideas would help to form a business plan in the future. The Friends were also continuing to engage with the SW director of NHS property services and he had recently provided a site plan. In addition, discussions had taken place with Alder King about a potential commission of a survey and red book valuation, when needed. The Friends were willing to pay this cost.

- The Friends could also demonstrate a track record in delivery and funding. They had funded the £150,000 investment into the new day room, prior to closure
- They had supported and funded the successful Winter project, run by Age UK
- They had raised large sums of money and were capable of raising more

The Friends were not asking the Council to commit to purchase the site at this stage. What they were asking, was that the Council agree only to take the next step. In the short term, the site could be let as carparking and this would generate a valuable income stream.

In addition to well-being, the Friends agreed that a Phase 2 of the development might involve accommodation for key workers in the building and housing outcomes but this was as yet, only an agreement in principle.

The Friends were seeking to demonstrate that they had given serious consideration to potential future uses for the building to support the purchase. In conclusion, there was a clear vision for the future of the site.

Councillors were invited to ask questions and comments of the speaker. The following is a summary of the key points:

- Confirming the Council's decision to become a priority purchaser would be a good first step and a firm basis to establish a group to look at options and the viability of the site.
- This was a one-time historic opportunity to retain it for community use.
- Did the Friends have enough resources to fund the purchase and were they permitted to use donations for this purpose (in response, the Friends confirmed that they held £645,000 on deposit and were of the view that the Charity Commission would confirm that donations received could be used for the purpose as set out).
- The Council had no expertise in running care, well being and health services and had a turnover of less than £1million a year. Why were the Friends asking the Council to become involved – they were not the right organisation and did not have the expertise or any statutory responsibilities for the service.
- Why didn't the Friends ask Cornwall Council to lead the project? The Friends indicated that they did not believe that that was the right route to safeguard the asset for the Town.
- There was a concern that acquisition was only part of the cost. The mainstream revenue to run the building could run into hundreds of thousands of pounds

- It was likely that the purchase price could far exceed the cost of the Friends' funds – how would the rest be secured?

The Council also debated the next steps. There was a view that the Council should at least make the first step to agree to put itself forward as a priority purchaser. It could then better understand the process and what was possible. At this stage the Council would not be committed to proceeding and would not be until a contract was signed.

The Council also heard from Jerry O'Riordan, a descendant of Edward Hain. He explained some of the history and the rationale behind the acquisition in 1919 for the people of the town, funded as a charitable trust. Unfortunately, under the 1946 Act all such assets were transferred to the NHS with no specific protection for the site.

He urged the Council to resolve to become a priority purchaser. He was confident that there were a number of funding opportunities and wanted to assist in making contact with fundraisers.

Development Brief

The Mayor asked the Clerk to explain the basis for a development brief for the site. She explained that this was a planning tool. It could give some protection to the site, regardless of whoever ultimately owned it and sought to develop it because the type and nature of development could be set down in a policy document which was given weight in planning decision making. Cornwall Council would be asked to support the Council in adopting the brief. This could be done, regardless of any decision to acquire the site.

Options

The Council expressed the view that there was nothing to be lost in putting itself forward as a priority purchaser. The Clerk was asked whether NHS Property Services were likely to engage with the Town Council early and perhaps undertake a joint valuation. The Clerk read out correspondence from NHS Property Estates which was clear that it would not agree to a joint valuation but simply jointly agree the basis of the valuation which was essentially market value. It would treat with the Council through the ePIMs process but could not be seen to give the Council any unfair advantage over any other public sector estate partner.

In response to questions about where other interest might come from, the Clerk advised that Cornwall Council had the ability to express an interest, as did Homes England with the potential as a housing site. Some Councillors expressed the view that it was essential for Cornwall Council to be involved, given their statutory duties in relation to public health and adult social care.

Next Steps

- Were the Council to proceed, it was proposed that the Friends should indemnify the Council against any of its costs, for example the valuation and any legal advice.
- It was proposed that a task and finish group be established to consider next steps but this would depend upon progress and could not be a long term working group at this stage.
- The Council could resolve to commission a development brief, regardless of the outcome of attempts to purchase the site to seek to safeguard it. There would be a cost to this.

Conclusion

Councillors gave thanks to the Friends group, which had worked tirelessly for the last 4 years to save the service, since the consultation had been issued. They also paid tribute to

former Councillor Joan Tanner who had also been the previous chair and trustee.

RESOLVED – that the Council

- i) Confirm with NHS Property Services its intention to be considered as a priority purchaser and
- ii) Regardless of the outcome of that process, to progress the commission of a development brief for the site

Next Meeting: 14 October 2021

Meeting closed at 8.10 pm

Chairman