



DITCHLING PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Ditchling Parish Council Extraordinary Meeting held at Ditchling Village Hall, Ditchling on Tuesday 10th September 2024 at 7pm

Present: Cllrs Barna, Farrands, Godley, Ingham, Linstead, Madden (Chair), Orme, Rowling, Sansom, Seddon and Stapleton

Tracey Euesden (Clerk)

Public Participation:

5 members of the public were present.

53.	Apologies for absence. All Members were present
54.	Declarations of interest. Cllr Ingham declared a personal interest in agenda item 8.
55.	To Invite representation from Community Land Trust Group Mary Flynn introduced herself as a representative of the Community Land Trust Group (CLT) and before making her statement, she advised that she was not aware of the content of the Ditchling Gardens Working Party's report. The Clerk confirmed that it had been sent to the CLT with a copy to Tom Warder at Action in rural Sussex (AirS). The report was also available on the Council's website and on the notice board. A copy of the report was made available to Ms Flynn during the meeting. Ms Flynn described the work undertaken so far by the CLT which had come together following a presentation made at the Annual Meeting of the Parish in April 2024. With the support of AirS, the group had met on three occasions since and had invested significant time and resources in researching the formalities required to form the group and had explored the various funding opportunities to bring forward affordable housing in the parish. She referred to the property being a bequest to the Parish Council and reiterated the group's aims to work in partnership with the Parish Council in order to provide affordable housing in perpetuity.
56.	To Consider report produced by the Ditchling Gardens Working Party and to discuss motions proposed therein. At the Chair's discretion, members of the CLT were permitted to take part in this part of the meeting where questions were posed or clarification points were required. A lengthy discussion ensued during which the following points were made. It had become clear that the Parish Council had not fully considered the implications with regard to viability, timescale and financial forfeiture in transferring its only asset of value to the CLT. Initial studies carried out by AirS had indicated that there would be little interest from social housing developers due to limited number of homes that could be provided and this had led to

uncertainties amongst some councillors about the success of a CLT project being successful on that particular site. However, it was suggested that as AirS had been involved in several successful schemes, it would be unlikely to offer its support to this particular project unless there was a reasonable chance of it coming to fruition.

Members enquired about how many people in the community would benefit from the CLT scheme and were advised that the results of a Housing Needs Survey would establish what type and size of housing is required and for what demographic. It was acknowledged that these results would be representative of the current need and would not necessarily reflect the future housing requirements of the community. In answer to an enquiry about how the development would remain as social housing in perpetuity, the CLT representatives explained that conditions would have to be in place to review the eligibility of the occupants to assess whether there were any changes in personal circumstances that might exclude them from benefitting.

Questions were raised about whether funding for the project was guaranteed and whilst there are various grants available, it is inevitable that some loans will be required which will need to be repaid via rental income or proceeds from shared ownership schemes once the homes are occupied. Concerns about the uncertainties of the final scheme being financially viable in light of the up-front obligations and future surety of tenure were raised. The need for further funding to cover feasibility and housing needs studies was highlighted, along with the ongoing maintenance costs if the council were to decide to continue with the CLT scheme which, as previously acknowledged, could take some years to be realised.

Some members referred to the opportunity to realise proceeds from the sale of the property to invest in wider schemes which would provide greater benefit to the community at large. Whilst it was acknowledged that some of these capital projects could potentially be funded by grants and Community Infrastructure Levy, it was noted that the application process was becoming increasingly difficult (two recent bids to the South Downs National Park and Lewes District Council had been unsuccessful). It was also acknowledged that many grant providers operate “match funding” schemes for which the Council would not be in a position to apply. In the absence of a significant increase in the precept, the Parish Council would need to concede that achieving the priorities of its Business Plan would be highly unlikely.

Whilst the Parish Council is not obliged to provide affordable housing, Members acknowledged its duty to serve the needs of and enhance the quality of life of the community. The work undertaken so far by the CLT was commended and It was proposed that, notwithstanding the outcome of the upcoming vote, the Parish Council should develop a working relationship with the CLT and work together with the aim of bringing forward affordable housing in the parish in the future.

57. **To Consider suspension of Financial Regulation 11.1(h), which requires 3 quotations, in relation to the motions to appoint an agent in connection with Ditchling Gardens (items 9ii and 9iii of the Working Party report).** *Despite repeated efforts to obtain 3 quotes, one supplier has not responded and one has provided approximate costs only. Proceeding with the remaining quote will allow the council to move forward without unnecessary delays while still adhering to the principles of fairness and financial responsibility.*

*It was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** to suspend Financial Regulation 11.1 (h) for the duration of the meeting.*

58. **Vote to take place on Motions discussed:**

58.1 Motion 1 “The council no longer wishes to pursue options for social housing on the Ditchling Gardens site and resolves to put it up for sale.”

In Favour: 9

Against: 1

Abstain: 1

Motion Carried.

58.2 Motion ii “The council Resolves to appoint Batchellor Monkhouse at a cost of 1.5% of the sale price (minimum £5,000) to advise and act for the parish council on the sale process for an open market sale subject to agreement of satisfactory terms of business.

In Favour: 11

Motion Carried.

58.3 Motion iii “The council notes the list of alternative projects and requests the Clerk to report back to a future meeting with a view to the council deciding which projects it wishes to prioritise.”

Against: 11

Motion Rejected. Members concluded that priority should be given to the Business Plan 2024-2027.

The meeting closed at 8.40 pm