

Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting of Elwick Parish Council held at 2.00pm on Monday 22nd March 2021

Present: Cllrs, H. Thompson, Chairman, E. Hurst, P. Hutchinson and R. Thompson, via Zoom and R. Musgrave via telephone.

In Attendance: M. Ireland, Clerk

The Chairman noted that the meeting had been called in response to an urgent request from the Hartlepool Rural Plan Group, to discuss a proposed vote on No Confidence in HBC.

- 1. Apologies for Absence:** Cllr B. Irving – unable to attend but had submitted her response by email with a proxy vote.
- 2. Declarations of Interest:** None
- 3. Proposal from Hartlepool Rural Plan Group:** The Chairman gave a brief overview of the circumstances leading to the calling of an emergency meeting of the Hartlepool Rural Plan Group (HRPG), at 7.00pm on Monday 15th March. She explained that the HBC Planning Committee had voted against the officer recommendation and objections from both Dalton Piercy and Elwick Parish Councils and the HRPG, in relation to an application to demolish Mayfield House on Dalton Road, and replace it with 5 x large detached dwellings. Even our own Ward Councillors present had voted in favour of the development. She further noted that it was only a year ago that HRPG members had made a presentation to the Planning Committee, whose members vowed to take it into consideration at every planning application for the rural area.

The Chair then invited Cllr R. Thompson to talk through the proposal, which had been circulated to all Parish Councillors in advance of the meeting. He informed colleagues that members of the HRPG present at the meeting, which included representatives of all the rural Parish Councils, had been dismayed and angered by the decision of the Planning Committee, and questioned the value of a Neighbourhood Plan that could so easily be cast aside by the Borough Council. It was recognised that HBC had suffered considerably over the last few years from cutbacks in the level of Government financial support, but it looked very much as if they were responding by allowing every application for housing development to be approved, without any regard to either the Local Plan or the Rural Plan, which were only adopted in 2018. With few employment opportunities, Hartlepool was in danger of becoming simply a dormitory town and HBC seemed only interested in the potential for Council Tax revenues to be obtained in the future.

The particular decision, that had been the catalyst for the Proposal being put to the Parish Council, had been made following input from Cllr Christopher Akers-Belcher, who had stated that the Planning Officer's conclusion that the development was unsustainable, was undermined by allowing of two dwellings to be built at Hart-on-the-Hill, only 400 meters closer to Dalton Piercy, and the fact that 1200 dwellings were to be built immediately behind the Mayfield House site, at High Tunstall. No mention had been made by any Councillor to either the Local Plan or the Rural Plan. It was understood that Sir Ron had explained that years ago there had been two barns on the land at Hart-on-the-Hill.

Several options were discussed, including:

- Making an official complaint to HBC;
- Making an official complaint of maladministration to the Local Government Ombudsman;
- Requesting the rural areas are transferred from Hartlepool Unitary Authority to Durham County.

There had been a UNANIMOUS agreement of all present at the meeting, to a vote of No Confidence in HBC.

A plan of action had been agreed – assuming all Parish Councils agreed to support the proposal for a vote of No Confidence, then there would be a joint meeting of the Chairmen to agree the wording; letters would be sent to the Mayor of the Tees Valley Combined Authority and the Minister for Housing and Local Government; the media (local, regional and national) would be informed.

Cllr Hutchinson stated that he was appalled that Rural West Councillors had voted in favour of the development.

The two proposals were then put to the vote.

1. “Elwick Parish Council agrees to join the Hartlepool Rural Planning Group in a vote of No Confidence in Hartlepool Borough Council”. **Unanimously Agreed.**
2. “Elwick Parish Council wishes to investigate seceding from HBC and joining Durham County Council.” **Unanimously Agreed.**

Also expressed unanimous support for the submission of a formal complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman of maladministration by HBC.

Cllrs also agreed that Elwick parish Council should make this an issue in the forthcoming elections in May.

Finally, Councillors agreed to support the circulation of a leaflet to every household and business in the rural community, explaining why the vote had been taken.

Cllr Hurst expressed concern that she was the only voice at present for Wynyard, and asked if she could discuss the proposal, in confidence for the time being, with the Chairman of the Wynyard Resident Association; this was **agreed**.

Meeting closed at 2.35pm.