

**DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF HARDINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL ON
FRIDAY 25 MAY 2018 6.30pm**

ITEM UNDER DISCUSSION: To consider the adoption by the PC of the village phone box

Councillors attending: Henry Edwards (HE) (Acting Chair); Jane Strudwick (JStr); Virginia Lenihan (VL); Richard Burke (RB). In the absence of the Clerk, RB was asked to minute the meeting.

There were 3 members of the public present: Lynn Whitwell, Neil Hickman, Paul Hawkshaw.

The Acting Chair (HE) opened the proceedings at 6.30pm.

There were apologies for absence from Cllrs John Sharples, Tim Barrett, Glen Gower.
There were no declarations of interest from the councillors present.

The Acting Chair invited comments/statements from the public. Mrs Whitwell opened. She felt the future of the phone kiosk was being decided without proper consultation with the residents, and hoped that, as an agreement had been made with BT in 2009 that they would consult the PC before doing anything, and had failed to do so, the PC would definitely take up this matter with BT. Mrs Whitwell said the phone box was part of Hardingham's history, and featured in photo albums, on embroideries, and on the village map, and it should therefore be retained. She stressed that the box should become an asset to the village and not the rundown eyesore it currently is. Mrs Whitwell felt that monies from the PC's Project Fund should be used to cover the costs of remedial work, and while a working party could tidy the undergrowth and refurbish paintwork, the PC, being a constant in the village, should take overall responsibility. Mrs Whitwell finished her statement by urging the Council to secure the purchase of the box asap, given that "enough residents have shown support" for it. At the recent AVM, 15 signatories pro retention had been gathered and Mrs Whitwell said she knew of more in favour.

Mr Hawkshaw said that the box was part of our heritage, parting with it would be removing our identity and the box is what makes England England. Other parishes put their boxes to good use (book swaps for instance), so why not us? he asked.

Mr Hickman agreed with Mr Hawkshaw. He suggested that certain uses for the box could be tried out, plant exchange for instance, or maybe one enterprise for the spring/summer, another for autumn/winter.

HE then invited councillors to debate.

HE said there must be a clear commitment from any volunteers to repair the kiosk not only now but in the future. JStr said only a charity or organisation could buy the box for the given price (£1) and she herself had tried but failed to become a charity. She also said that she had contacted William Edwards regarding the Village Hall Charity Committee. However they are not allowed to support anything that is not within the Village Hall grounds. He has no objection to any group maintaining the box even though it is on his land. The WI were approached prior to the meeting. However due to the Chair's illness, the person standing in was not willing to make a commitment in her absence.

HE confirmed that the phone itself could not be reinstated, and added that the Council should not be rushed into a decision. VL noted the box was on the slant and needed to be lifted in order to be levelled. J Str stressed the need for urgency claiming the phone box “could be removed tomorrow and needs to be bought now”.

RB was concerned that the adoption of the box by the PC would mean the PC would be legally and financially responsible for the box in the future, and without research and informed discussion the whole enterprise was largely an unknown. He mentioned as an example that lead paint had in the past been used on countless phone boxes of that vintage, and that liability for any future accidents within or around the box might rebound on the PC. (Mr Hickman from the floor maintained that liability would not be imposed on the Council providing it had “taken reasonable care”). RB was sorry that his requests for costings of the restoration project had not been forthcoming, and were still not. He was keen that the restored phone box would be an asset to the village with high standards of restoration being applied, including levelling because large roots underneath the box appeared to be influencing the foundations. He asked that the project didn't become a quick-fix job. He received no reassurances. Mrs Whitwell from the floor felt RB was correct to be concerned about the proper use of taxpayers' money, but nonetheless the box must be bought without delay.

HE said the matter had been given a good airing. He also asked whether a leaning phone box really mattered. After all, he said, the Tower of Pisa was still standing. He added that he strongly believed the PC's Project Fund should not contribute to any funding required. The phone box was not sufficiently important for that, he said, and it would be irresponsible to use it. Any funding, he added, should come “from volunteers”. He asked that a Restoration Co-Ordinator should come forward. JStr offered to lead any volunteers.

JStr said Paul Hawkshaw had volunteered, and HE explained that Michael Sparkes had offered at the Parish Meeting to help with phone box repairs. JStr said she knew of one or two others who could be called upon if necessary.

HE proposed that, in view of the deadline to buy, the PC should purchase the phone box for £1 and worry about it afterwards. This was seconded by JStr, and opposed by VL and RB.

In view of the deadlock, Mr Hickman suggested from the floor that the proposal should read “The PC agrees to buy the phone box, but without committing itself to ongoing maintenance”. HE proposed same, and was seconded by both JStr and VL. RB remained opposed and the proposal was carried.

After asking councillors for AOB, HE closed the meeting at 7.25pm.