**Questions arising from the Parish Meeting held in December 2017 and answers agreed by the Rettendon Parish Council at the meeting held on 30th January 2018**

**Why has the current PC used the Bell Fields as an item of expense in their precept for the last two years, despite no money being spent on it?**

Money has been set aside from the precept in anticipation of requests from the trustees for work to the Bell Fields. The intention of the Parish Council is to support work on the Bell Fields once the situation regarding the trustees is resolved.

**Why has the planning application for the pavilion on the Bell Field been allowed to expire?**

An extension to the last planning application was never brought to a Council meeting as an agenda item for discussion. It would cost money to renew an application, and no viable business plan was produced to support such action.

**Why has there been no explanation of this?**

As explained above, an extension to the planning application was never brought to full Council as an item for agreement. The issue was discussed at Council meetings in July and August 2016 (minute numbers 64-16/17 ii and 89-16/17 vi.) On both occasions it was agreed that any further planning application would only take place once the legal situation regarding the charities was resolved. The application made in 2010 was not allowed to lapse in 2013 but was renewed until 2016.

**There was a survey done 4 years ago where the majority voted for the building of the pavilion, why has this decision not been followed?**

It is the Council’s opinion the survey question was flawed, referring as it did only to a “multi-purpose building” with no further clarification. An initial indication of a cost of £120,000 with no supporting evidence was significantly lower than the surveyor’s report, commissioned in 2014 by the Parish Council, which gave an estimated cost of £253,000.

**There was no mention of the pavilion project being abandoned in the PC manifesto, has the PC misled the public to get elected, only to ditch the project?**

There was no Parish Council manifesto. As stated above, there was no viable business plan and the estimated costs were misleading. In addition, no genuine community support was identified.

The majority of councillors elected in 2015 did not mention the pavilion on their manifestos. The Bell Fields were discussed at each meeting following the elections, and it was agreed that the legal situation needed to be resolved before any other action was taken.

**Why has the precept increased but the only visible evidence of work by the PC is the addition of a dog bin and the buying of a defibrillator?**

The precept increased for the 2017/18 year following an estimate of running costs for the Council for the year. It took into account the maintenance of the Sonters Down Play Area. The Council has also undertaken other work in the parish, including three speed surveys on South Hanningfield Road, Old Woodham Road and Hawk Hill, replacement of two VAS signs on Main Road, new horse/pedestrian signage agreed by Highways to be installed in 2018 for Chalk Street and Warren Road, stickers for bins to help slow down traffic on several roads and training for the Clerk and Councillors. Ongoing projects currently being worked on include new signage on Hawk Hill Roundabout, survey for lights at peak times on the bridge in Battlesbridge, VAS for South Hanningfield Road, lights and a pedestrian/vehicle conflict survey for the entrance to Hayes Park, signage for Mayphil Park, speed limit reduction in Maltings Road, kerbs in Southview Road, lighting for Hawk Hill, and traffic along Hoe Lane.

Following careful consideration, the precept for 2018/19 will reduce.

**There has been an increase in the precept, but the PC is not supplying any money to the village hall or the Bell Fields, and now to the newsletter. Why not?**

The Village Hall needs to be viable, and the Management Committee has accepted itself that it should pay its own running costs, including insurance. The Parish Council would be prepared to consider any request from the Management Committee for money on its merits.

The situation regarding the Bell Fields has been addressed above.

There is no proposal to withdraw funding to the Rettendon and Battlesbridge newsletter.

**Is there money in the PC funds to pay for the new Pavilion?**

Prior to the Parish Council elections in 2015, the Parish Council had included in budget calculations a figure of up to £40,000 match funding required on any grants received against the overall costs for the Pavilion. This £40,000 is still held in the Parish Council accounts. It was mentioned in the draft business plan produced in January 2015.

**Why is the PC so intent on having the PC choose the trustees for the Bell Fields?**

The Chairman has explained at Parish Council meetings the reason for clarifying the position with regard to the appointment of trustees. When the current Council was elected, the governance of the Bell Fields charities was unclear, and legal advice had been sought. The charities’ governing document is the Inclosure Act 1861, and subsequent legislation, in particular the Charities Act 2011, is also relevant. This Act gives the Parish Council the power to appoint trustees for a four-year term. The Parish Council believes it is important that all due legal process is followed.

**If the trustees have money in the bank and people who want to rent the field, and it is being maintained properly, why do the PC want to change it?**

The Parish Council are aware of their obligation to abide by the law regarding the appointment of trustees to the Bell Fields charities, and they are committed to seeing that this is resolved. The use of the Upper Bell Field needs to be aligned with the purpose of the charity. Any licence signed by any user of the fields needs to be approved by legally appointed trustees, and comply with all relevant legislation.

**Venues**

**Why is the venue for the Parish Council meeting to be moved from the hall?**

The parish is large, and it is reasonable to hold meetings in different locations to make it easier for residents to attend.

**How about a venue in the East Hanningfield Road area?**

The Parish Council will consider any suitable building in any area of the parish.

**Rettendon Village Hall is central to everyone so why move it?**

There is no intention to move meetings permanently – only occasionally to make it easier for other residents to attend.

**Is the real reason because the Village Hall have put the rent up for the PC meetings?**

The reason for moving the meetings is as stated above. The cost of meetings, in any venue, is paid by residents through the precept, and is taken into account in budget calculations.

**Is the real reason because the PC has it in for the Village Hall and refuses to support them any more?**

The Parish Council would be happy to consider requests for support from the Village Hall, but cannot grant funds where there is opacity around the finances of the requesting body. The Parish Council would be happy to talk to the Village Hall Management Committee at any point in the future.

**Who is pulling the Parish Council strings?**

This is a serious allegation, and the Parish Council are considering taking legal advice before responding to this question.

**Sonters Down**

**The PC is going ahead with various things. Are they legal? How can we stop them doing that?**

The Parish Council have access to resources that lay down their powers – there are certain things they are obliged to do, and many things they can do. The Clerk is employed to ensure that the Parish Council do not undertake anything that is outside their legal power. If anyone has a specific concern, then they can approach the Clerk or Chelmsford City Council for further advice.

**What about the report over the Manorial Rights which has not been explained why this was done?**

As explained at the meeting held on 26th September 2017 (minute no. 122-17/18) the issue of manorial rights had been raised with the Chairman by several residents, and was a matter for further investigation by the Council as it affected a significant number of residents.

**The PC had said that the Sonter’s Down area was being completely paid for by the PC and that there would be no extra upkeep needed. Why has the PC now put aside £20,000 to pay for new play equipment, and £5,000 put aside for extras? Hace we been misled about the actual cost to the residents?**

The Play Area is being completely paid for by the Parish Council, and this was taken into account in calculations for the 2017/18 and 2018/19 precept. The Council holds significant reserves even once the £40,000 for the pavilion is taken into account, and if play equipment needs replacing in the future, they would like to be in a position to do this. The £20,000 will be held in reserve for this purpose. No extra money has been requested from residents for this, and in fact for 2018/19 the precept will be reduced. Residents have at no time been misled about the actual cost to the residents.

**Why is it that the minority of residents get what they want or will the majority have a say in it? Why was a survey not undertaken to make sure that a majority of residents was in favour of it before a decision was made?**

Any resident of the parish can bring an issue to the Parish Council for consideration. With regard to the maintenance of the Sonters Down Play Area, the Parish Council did not consider it necessary to undertake a survey of residents. They looked into the matter carefully and took appropriate action.

**From what I understand if we are not happy with this arrangement within 1-2 years we can hand it back to Chelmsford City Council for maintenance. Could this be confirmed.**

The Parish Council can hand back maintenance to Chelmsford should they feel that is the best way forward.

**What about the inspection of the field?**

The play area is inspected regularly and appropriate records are passed to the Parish Clerk. An annual inspection is undertaken by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, and the report is forwarded to the Parish Council.

**Who are the people inspecting and checking the equipment and the maintenance now? Are they qualified?**

The play area is maintained and inspected by Skippers Ground Maintenance who have experience in this work.

**Will the Working Party clear up the flytipping?**

Any resident can contact Environmental Services at ECC to report flytipping.

**Is the maintenance contract with the same contractor as that used by Chelmsford City Council?**

No.

**Why has the PC now decided to ask for ideas on how to approve the play area, did they not have these plans before taking over the extra expense of running it?**

The Parish Council decided the best way forward was to take responsibility for maintenance of the Play Area. They will continue to look at ways to improve the Play Area, and if residents have any ideas, the Council will be happy to consider them.

**Newsletter**

**Why is the PC going to edit the newsletter?**

The Parish Council have a responsibility to ensure that public money is used correctly. As they pay printing costs for the newsletter, they have taken steps to ensure the newsletter does not include material that would be inappropriate for a Council-funded publication. The newsletter is therefore sent to the Council for review before publication.

**Who is the newsletter down to?**

The newsletter is not a Parish Council publication and final responsibility for content rests with the editor. However, for the reason stated above, the Parish Council have asked to review each edition before publication. The Council would have to review their contribution towards costs should they feel that the content was not acceptable in a newsletter funded by public money.

**Why can’t we take over the newsletter ourselves?**

There is no reason this can’t happen, and is down to residents to decide.

**AOB**

**The gateways belong to Highways. Why haven’t they been asked to maintain them?**

Highways have been approached about maintenance of the gateways. However, with ever-increasing pressure on public funding, the Council have been advised that this would be very low on ECC’s list of priorities.

**Who has checked out about the gateways?**

Cllr Denise Fleming has done extensive work on investigating the position on the gateways, and her findings have been accepted by the Parish Council. Highways have advised the recent Clerks’ Forum that any non-essential work is very unlikely to be funded by ECC, and that Parish Councils will be asked to contribute more to work in their parishes in the future. This is due to pressure on the funding available to ECC for highways work.

**Has the PC agreed to go ahead and pay for these works?**

Yes – this was agreed at the meeting held on 31st October 2017 – minute number 152-17/18.

**Should you not go rushing off to get things done and not find out who they belong to to start with?**

Extensive work on this issue was done by Cllr Denise Fleming before any financial commitment was made. The Parish Council recognise that the expenditure is significant and the matter was considered fully before the decision was made.

**Where are the three quotes needed? For any work over £2,000 there has to be three quotes.**

The Parish Council are aware of their obligations regarding financial governance. The following has been received from Essex County Council regarding highways issues.

*Essex County Council appointed Ringway Jacobs as a Principal Contractor following a rigorous selection process carefully regulated by government.  This partnership forms the essence of Essex Highways, a partnership contract where Ringway Jacobs works with the County to provide maintenance to the Highway.  Thus, if we have our own direct labour put this scheme in place, Essex County Council have already carried out the Governance that allows Ringway Jacobs to carry out the work, and part of that process is an open book audit of their processes that occurs regularly.

However, works of this nature might also be passed through to a local Contractor.  In these cases Ringway Jacobs usually go out to a minimum of three contractors to make sure the quotes are aligned (that we are paying a fair market rate), encourages competition, and ensures we can be audited.

In both cases, Local Authority Governance is satisfied.*

**Why did the PC not look into this first?**

As stated above, extensive research was done before any commitment was made.

**Will the questions be answered?**

The Parish Council has taken the list of questions asked at the Parish Meeting, kindly provided by Barbara Wright, and has considered them individually to answer each as fully as possible.

If you require any further clarification on any of the answers provided above, please do not hesitate to contact the Parish Clerk.