

Much Hoole Village Hall Building Project

The partial funding of the building of the Much Hoole Village Hall was discussed without members of the public present as it was resolved at a council meeting held on the 12th December 2018 that allowing members of the public to be present would stifle discussion regarding the financial implications of the project. The motion was proposed by Councillor Gelder and seconded by Councillor Hayes.

Much Hoole Parish Council recognised from the outset that Councillors Alan William Taylor (Chairman), Thomas Brown and Eunice Houghton had a conflict of interests as they were both Parish Councillors and Trustees of Hoole Village Memorial Hall, Charity Number 521254 (known as Much Hoole Village Hall).

In view of these conflicts of interests the following steps were taken:

1. Declarations of Interest were made by these Parish Councillors at the start of all council meetings where the Village Hall Building Project was an agenda item.
2. Councillors Taylor, Brown and Houghton took no part in any meetings at which changes to the funding of the Much Hoole Village Hall Project were discussed and/or agreed. These councillors held dispensations up until May 2019.
3. The bank mandate in respect of the council's bank account with Unity Bank (Sort Code 608301, Account Number 20415976) from which all payments to Much Hoole Village Hall were made was altered so that Councillors, Taylor, Brown and Houghton were unable to authorise any payments, without prior authorisation from another Councillor. The following update regarding the operation of the bank account was noted at a council meeting held on the 9th October 2019.

To note that the bank mandate specifies that two signatures will be required to authorise external payments. Councillors Brown, Houghton, Woodcock, Hayes and Lea are authorised signatories for external transactions, which can only be initiated by the Clerk. Any payment over £5,000 must have either Councillor Hayes OR Councillor Woodcock as one of the authorising signatories so as to avoid any conflict of interest as and when future payments are made to the Village Hall. The Clerk is listed as an authorised signatory, but will not exercise this function other than in an emergency when authorising Councillors are otherwise unavailable. Authorising Councillors will be provided with passwords to view all statements and transactions online at any time. The Clerk is nominated on the mandate to move monies internally between accounts without the need for a second authorisation.

At a council meeting held on the 12th December 2018 approval was given to support the rebuilding of the Much Hoole Village Hall with a total budget of £311,885.00 Despite having dispensations Councillors Taylor, Brown and Houghton absented themselves and took no part in the discussions or votes.

At a council meeting held on the 8th January 2020 approval was given to further support the rebuilding of the Much Hoole Village Hall with an additional budget of £25,000.00 raised through the precept for the financial year 2020/21. This brought the total financial commitment to £336,885.00 and when interest receipts were added a total budget of £337,458.28 Councillors Taylor, Brown and Houghton absented themselves and took no part in the discussions/votes.

The Parish Clerk, Mr Russ Weaver, has administered internal transfers between the council's bank accounts to enable the payment of funds to Much Hoole Village Hall, with the following conditions:

1. The maximum amount that could be paid by Much Hoole Parish Council to Much Hoole Village Hall was £337,458.28
2. Much Hoole Parish Council would provide initial funds to increase the balance of the Much Hoole Village Hall Building Account to £50,000
3. Much Hoole Parish Council would provide additional funds to maintain the balance of the Much Hoole Village Hall Building Account at or around £50,000 on the production by Much Hoole Village Hall of invoices, architect's certificates to confirm that work had been completed, and proof of payment of the invoices.
4. All payments were authorised by two Councillors in accordance with the bank mandate (see point 3 above).