

Dear xxx,

Thank you for your e-mail dated xxxx Oct 2020, and for your comments regarding the new planters and replacement of the bollards on HCC land by George House.

I hope that you will find the information below useful. It covers the main issues raised by yourself and other residents who contacted the PC.

Planters

(Residents' comments in black; PC's response in blue)

- Who will maintain the planters? **Volunteers will care for and water.**
- '[Planters are] expensive'. **The PC always aims for best value for money for items that are fit for purpose.**
- On-going maintenance costs? **Occasional replacement of worn-out plants.**
- North-facing position - planting difficult. **The planting plan has been provided by a professional horticulturalist**
- GH residents were against the project (2019 annual meeting and subsequently). **There has been on-going consultation with GH residents. The PC acknowledges that some residents had reservations, and these were expressed in an e-mail to the PC in November 2019. In response to this, some of the VI working group members met with the residents and the outcome was a revised plan that was approved at the March 2020 PC meeting. Two of the GH residents attended this meeting to offer their support.**
- Will there be similar planters in other areas of village? **There are no current plans but the PC will take suggestions from the village and include in affordability discussions.**
- Design of planters is 'domestic', and current plants (i.e. the ones GH have put in themselves) look 'domestic'. **The planters are appropriate for their position next to a Georgian listed building. The underplanting of the square planters is temporary. We now have planting suggestions from a professional horticulturalist.**
- ...'expenditure involved in the works around George House is in the region of £4,800 (including VAT) which represents approximately 75% of unrestricted cash available to the council.' **This is figure is correct (with the VAT element reclaimable), but the money is accounted for in the budget 'pot' for village improvements (approved for the 2020/21 budget) and does not come out of any reserves that the PC holds.**
- Who constitutes the VIPWG? **'[It is] lacking in oversight and transparency'. This working group is made up of Cllr John Thornton, Cllr Neil Mason and five village members. As a working group, it cannot make any decisions on behalf of the PC, and any recommendations must be considered and voted upon at a full PC meeting. As with all PC business, there must be transparency, which is achieved with the publishing of proposals on meeting agendas, opportunity for members of the public to comment at PC meetings, and the publishing of resolutions within minutes. The PC is aware that public consultation has been more difficult this year with not being able to hold an annual meeting of the parish, but it is keen to improve this going forward, for example with a website page dedicated to village improvement project updates, and the recent bus shelter consultation.**

Bollards

The Parish Council discussed this at length at its meeting on Monday 02 November, and thought it might be useful to give you a breakdown of points raised and decision made, as follows:

Cllr Tony Higham proposed a revised motion to 'pause' the contract to replace the bollards at George House (the original proposal on the agenda had been to cancel the project and contract).
Main points:

- He has been in contact with several villagers who were surprised at the overall cost and considered that the work did not need to be done.
- The PC has sufficient buying power with other contracts that the contractor would not balk at a 'pause' with this one.
- The bollards that had been manufactured could be sold.
- A pause would allow village-wide consultation on this project.

The Clerk, as Responsible Officer, confirmed that the contract was signed in September by both parties and that there was no provision for a 'pause', that the mediation clause was only useful for dispute rather than one party simply withdrawing.

In discussion, the main points raised by councillors were:

- The PC recognised the strength of feelings of those who had written or spoken at the earlier agenda opportunity.
- The project had been addressed in many PC meetings without challenge, indeed the previous meeting had addressed a minor identified shortfall in the specification.
- The Chair had mentioned work at George House in the PC's bi-monthly report in the Hambletonian, with no comments.
- A legal contract had been signed in good faith, was in place, and it would be deeply dishonourable to pull out, which is what a pause would be.
- JK Engineering had sub-contracted elements of delivery complicating the picture. There was no legal basis to assume we would keep the bollards.
- Although the project has been raised over a number of years the lack of an Annual Parish Meeting this year was unhelpful and the PC needed to significantly widen its consultation to ensure village confidence. This has already begun with the bus-stop which has not been raised at an APM. This was agreed by all councillors.

I trust that the above helps to explain why councillors voted against Cllr Higham's proposal (2 votes for; 4 votes against).

You will see that I have also attached a copy of a document produced by the Village Improvement working group, which gives important background information on the inception and development of the overall project.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Quinn

Cllr Paul Quinn OBE (Chair, Hambleton PC)