

**DRAFT MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF ERLESTOKE PARISH  
COUNCIL HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 26<sup>TH</sup> APRIL, 2006 AT 7.00 P.M. IN THE VILLAGE  
HALL**

**PRESENT:** Cllr. P. Sinnett-Jones (in the Chair), Cllr. M. Gilbert, Cllr. S. Jonik, Cllr. R. Loraine-Smith, Cllr. J. Morgan and Cllr. D. Turner.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Mr. T. Coomer, Village Shop Advisor from Community First and 27 parishioners.

**28/06 APOLOGIES:** An apology for absence had been received from Cllr. J. Foote.

**29/06 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS:** Cllr. Sinnett-Jones declared a personal interest in the business to be discussed, having taken advice from officers at KDC.

**30/06 FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SHOP/POST OFFICE IN THE VILLAGE:** Mr. T. Coomer, Village Shop Advisor from Community First in Devizes outlined his role in the meeting. He indicated that at the present time there were 8 community shops in Wiltshire and 150 in the UK., with a large concentration in the South West area. It was early days in the life of community shops, but those of long standing were keeping going, with most of them making money.

He explained there were various degrees of community enterprise; some have a mix of employed staff and volunteers, grants could be given to community enterprise, but not to a commercial venture. He felt 25 volunteers would be needed and with the population of 186 in Erlestoke it was not likely to be viable – a population of 1,000 was needed to make the shop successful. It was felt generally that a realistic approach be taken.

Graham Simmons, the Rural Transfer Advisor from the Post Office, had outlined the options available to the village:

**Option 1:** Someone would become the postmaster and operate the post office between 16 and 20 hours a week for a salary between £6,200 and £6,600 a year. The postmaster would have to provide the site and fit out the premises and grants would be available.

**Option 2:** Run the Post Office from the pub with hours to suit with the landlord becoming the Postmaster which would present little start-up costs for the pub landlord.

**Option 3:** Run a Post Office service over the pub counter with hours to suit, but usually no more than 2 hours per day. The postmaster would be someone from a nearby post office. There would be no start up costs and the Post Office would pay a rent of about £5 a session.

**Option 4:** As Option 3, but using the Village Hall or other public facility.

It was felt that Options 3 or 4 were the most possible, but a review of the rural network of Post Offices would be carried out in 2008 and at the present time various schemes are being piloted. Problems which existed were the expiration of the Village Hall lease and

the fact that shopping habits had changed with most people shopping in the supermarkets. A mobile post office service might present the answer and the handful of parishioners without access to a vehicle, there was the Village Link, the Three Village Minibus Scheme and the PHAB bus. Cllr. Loraine-Smith suggested a web link with Tesco could establish a means of providing an Erlestoke portal which would enable goods to be purchased, with one delivery to a central point. This received a mixed reaction and the Chairman said that when an organic vegetable company had delivered goods to the shop it had caused problems with late payment and non-collection of goods.

The body behind funding was the South West Rural Development Agency Rural Renaissance and could provide £40-50,000 to £250,000 and DEFRA also funded rural shops. Mr. Coomer was funded by Rural Renaissance. Although it was possible to operate a shop in a small community, it would only be a small venture, open for a few hours per week. Any community venture which then became commercial could not be sold on for profit. Mr. Coomer said payment for bulk ordered goods could be assisted by grant funding up-front to assist and a computer could be provided. A Post Office provision is most important, but it would have to be decided where it would be and who would be running it. It was understood a garage in the village had been offered to KDC for use as a Post Office. There were no volunteers amongst the parishioners present to assist in running a community shop.

The way forward appeared to be a mobile or satellite Post Office service, but the Chairman urged those present to bring their ideas to the Annual Parish Meeting on Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> May. The Clerk was instructed to write to Graham Simmons to find out more about a satellite Post Office.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.50 p.m.