

Biddenden Parish Council
Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting held on October 17th 2008

Present

Cllr Mrs J Ashcroft

Cllr D Boulding

Cllr Mrs E Cansdale – **Vice Chairman**

Cllr M Conway

Cllr C Daly

Cllr T Lupton

Cllr H Richards

Cllr H Ruse

Cllr J Rymer Jones - **Chairman**

13 Parishioners were also present

Apologies for absence from Cllrs Barfoot and Friend.

- 1 The Chairman opened the meeting by explaining its purpose was for the Council to be able to respond to the District Auditors letter of September 17th and accompanying "Public Interest Report" into the provision of Biddenden Post Office.
- 2 **The Chairman then summarised the Report** for the benefit of parishioners present and drew attention to the key complaints, raised by Ms Clark and Mr Linnett, that led to the Auditors investigation. These were that,
 - 2.1 The Council did not seek adequate legal advice
 - 2.2 The Council did not have powers to acquire the land and erect a building for the purpose of providing a Post Office
 - 2.3 The Council made a decision to proceed with the project in January 2006 when crucial financial information was withheld from Councillors
 - 2.4 The Council decided to acquire a lease from Ashford BC without disclosing all the relevant information to Councillors
 - 2.5 That it unlawfully entered into a lease for the premises as a sub Post Office
 - 2.6 That it failed to follow the Council's Standing Orders in its decision making
 - 2.7 That it took decisions at meetings when members with a personal or prejudicial interest were present
- 3 **The Auditor found that,**
 - 3.1 The Council had legal powers to acquire the car park and toilets from Ashford BC, to convert the toilets into a Post Office and build new toilets
 - 3.2 The Council had powers to enter into a lease for the Post Office at less than market rent for up to 5 years
 - 3.3 Council meetings in January and March 2006 were not attended by members holding personal or prejudicial interests
but the Auditor found the Council was deficient in three important aspects,
 - 3.4 It did not have all the necessary financial information relevant to the running and maintenance costs of the new Post Office and toilets when it decided to proceed with the project
 - 3.5 It did not have the market rent information available to compare with the affordable rent it agreed to charge for the Post Office premises
 - 3.6 It did not comply with its own Standing Orders which would have delayed approval of the project until all financial information was available

