

Holton Pits Preservation Group

Public Meeting

November 30th 2022

Holton Pits Preservation core group: Rachel Kellett, Gaina Dunshire, Marion Gaze, Kevin Moores, Jamie Leverette, Jamie MacDonald, Colin White, Caron Stainton, John Attridge

Around 50 people attended this meeting with over 35 apologies.

Welcome - Rachel

This is an important meeting - we need a decision from you at the end of this meeting as to which way we should go. We need to give you as much information as we know, so you can make an informed decision. We are, as always, guided by what you would like.

Here's the story so far

August 2022 - CEMEX put Holton Pits for sale, with a month to submit a bid

4th September – First community gathering at the Pits – what shall we do

11th September – All members invited to Holton Village Hall to vote on proposal to become an Asset of Community Value

18th September – Submitted our form applying to become an Asset of Community Value (ACV)

21 September – Submitted a reasonable offer bid to Fisher German/CEMEX

October 13th-15th – Letter from Rt Hon Therese Coffey office

October 15th-17th CEMEX wrote to all 17 bidders of Holton Pits

November 8 – Granted status of Asset of Community Value (define ACV)

Displayed was a letter from CEMEX suggesting we would have to up our bid by £75,000.

Warning - please treat the numbers at this meeting with confidence. Obviously it is not to our advantage to reveal them, but in the interest of transparency and to give you as much information as possible for you to make your decision, it is important you know what we are in for - financially and administratively.

A private local business - very generously - agreed to front the loan of our initial bid of £104,000. We discussed and thought we could raise this sum. It was not symbolic but rather a realistic bid. We had days to make this decision.

The news from CEMEX that we'd have to up our bid to £180,000 - which is more like £200,000 with stamp duty, legal fees etc, is a huge leap from £104,000.

So we have two options:

To buy or not to buy the Pits. We'd like to look at both options.

We have less than 6 months

Thanks to - Gaina

Alison Cackett - has been supportive throughout, and helped to get the ACV through early, as well as behind the scenes for example seeing if the Pits could be Sizewell mitigation land.
Wendy and John Mendham - have been supportive and encouraging throughout, and were the first to suggest the ACV avenue.

Dr Theres Coffey - through her we found direct contact with CEMEX, which has been very valuable.

Annette Dunning, Suffolk County Councillor - who has been supportive throughout, and offered advice.

This core group - who have been tenacious in building communication bridges with CEMEX, FisherGerman (the agents), and active on Holton community behalf.

RSPB - Jamie Murphy, Conservation officer, wrote a letter in support of HPPG for the ACV Holton Parish Council, who wrote a letter saying they were supportive of our bid.

SWT - ??

East Suffolk Council - have been valuable sources of information regarding potential building permission

Green View newsletter - who wrote an article about the background which has been delivered (by hand) to 4,000 homes in Halesworth and surrounding villages.

Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service - gave advice, provided species lists and maps

Bruno - from the East Anglian Daily Press, who has written two excellent articles for EADP and Beccles and Bungay.

1. Not to buy Holton Pits - Rachel

We don't have to buy the Pits, and it is important to realise this.

For a start all of us, the core group, would have a lot more free time!

The community taking on the Pits takes on a lot of responsibility, some of which is outlined in the next option. Why not let someone else take on this responsibility?

Why in these days of increasing pressure on our finances, would we deliberately invite more pressure - more fund raising etc. Change is change, which we'd have to accept. This is what we would accept:

Realistically whoever bids for Holton Pits, will want some kind of return on their £200,000.

Risky borrowing money. The money loaned is a large amount to repay

Of the 17 bidders, CEMEX could choose to sell to a benign buyer - someone who respected the Pits as they are, and make only modest changes, allowing public access to all the areas we currently have access to. Perhaps a few cabins, and expansion of fishing?

CEMEX could choose to sell to a more commercial buyer - who could fence off the entire area. Who could close the Southwold road entrance, and develop further industrial units. It is

a very profitable place, right on the main road. (And such a nice outlook). It could bring needed employment to Holton, and offer diversity of industry to the area, local employment.

Obviously we have no control or influence who CEMEX chooses.

In any case we will not sit on our hands entirely, but one of our members is particularly well versed on footpath law, and we will continue to fight for as much public access as we can. We would seek to work with the new buyer.

DISCUSSION

Could we try to negotiate to own or have right to certain areas, like the SSSI cliff face to Green Lane? Like the area excluding the valuable lakes?

Response: CEMEX made it clear they did not want to divide the sale of the site, and would sell it as one block.

Response: The lake was particularly important to some people who would not like it divided away. Both lakes were currently run by Woodbridge Angling Society.

2. If we buy it: some of the mountains we'd need to climb - John

We'd have to set up a structure - Charity or CIC. Open Bank accounts. This is a long process which will most probably not be done in the time we have remaining.

We'd need a core group of people who are committed and in agreement with each other to run the start up and be prepared for the long haul.

We'd have to organise fund raising

We would have to weigh up the liabilities and running costs with income from Fishing. Currently £2,000 a year, this would cover public liability and indemnity quotes that we had researched of around £700 a year.

Are we all in accord what we want to do with the Pits?

We'd need a management plan, and take expert advice from experts such as SWT? Would everyone agree?

What about the long term ownership / security?

For example an ageing trustee ship of the Millennium Green

In one important way, the Pits does take care of itself. It's not a pub, or village shop, that needs enormous structure and organisation.

DISCUSSION:

Could we partner up with an existing organisation, such as the Millennium Green (charity or CIC?), or Holton Village Hall (a charity)? This would avoid establishing CIC /Charity etc.

Could we bring benefit to Millennium Green/Holton Village Hall, as well as they benefiting us?

CPRE, The Countryside Charity, formerly known by names such as the Council for the Preservation of Rural England and the Council for the Protection of Rural England

Do we have any confidence that if we raise £200,000 this bid would be accepted by CEMEX? No!

3. How can we buy it? Funding options - Jamie L

£180,000 for the bid -
£10-20,000 for the administration/Solicitors/Land Registry / Stamp Duty
= £200,000 realistically needed to raise

Barring a miracle we will need a loan to cover this before the deadline.
If we can't get the loan, we can't bid.
We have a generous £104,000, but £200,000 is another step.

To pay off the loan we will need to obtain funding from somewhere:

Holton Parish Council?

Halesworth Town Council CIL money?

East Suffolk?

Suffolk County Council?

Sizewell offset land?

Community Ownership fund - used successfully by Racehorse - Matched funding including 20% of running costs. Racehorse team said they'd be happy to offer advice.

Heritage Lottery funding - ticks the boxes, and offers 95%

Public fund raising - pledges / share holding (Locks)

Plunket Foundation - Graham Elliot suggested that our next step should be to join the Plunkett foundation to get lots of free advice, or initially just talk to them.

Both funding options would not be through in time, but we could get an indicator by making 'expression of interest' <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-ownership-fund-prospectus/community-ownership-fund-prospectus--2>
<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/>

How

From advice and experience of the Core Group, we'd do best to employ a professional fundraiser to get funding. A fundraiser will either need paying or takes a cut of the funding (10%)

We the community would need to raise the down payment for the services of a professional fundraiser - this will be non-returnable. Estimated between £3,000 and £25,000.

Applications

For funding applications it would be beneficial if not crucial to show how we are sharing this public space, children activities, public events.

Length of time

None would be secure in 6 months time.

Lovell Blake / Cross Ram

Extra piece of land tangent

Commercial land goes for much more an acre - we estimate that the triangle of land private sale would be around £50,000. We have contact with the original buyer, would this be to our advantage?

DISCUSSION

Could we do a mix of Frustration and Bid. Work to make the site less and less attractive to a prospective bidder (of the 17), for example

- footpath campaign,
- are there newts? Keep recording the rare species.
- A suggested computer based dynamic map which people could add their findings as the find.
- Keep the Community bid in the news so that other bidders feel our strength and integrity of bid.

With Holton's population of 832 and Halesworth 5,000 and if each person gave £30, that would raise the cash. Could we leaflet every house and follow up with door knocking?

Suggestion for structure. We will need 3 sub committees

1. Fund raising
2. Outreach
3. Spoilers/Frustrators

Vote - Kevin

We have two choices

1. Not to bid, and hope to work with the successful bidder of the Pits, and secure footpaths and what space we can. We will (release the ACV?), inform CEMEX, try to persuade them to select a benevolent buyer and work with them.

2. To bid and raise £200,000 We will research funding options and come back to you as soon as we can with news if we can realistically meet the target of £200,000.

We are guided by what the people of Holton want us to do.

Many people could not come to this meeting and we are asking them to vote by email.

A vote was taken as follows:

NO - none

Abstentions - TW0

YES to buy - ALL (49 people)

CONCLUSION

Thank you all for your vote.

We, the Core Group, will have to start working.

We will also need help. There is enormous skill and talent here amongst us, and this is the richness of a community project, finding and channelling these skills for the benefit of the community. Can you be involved in other ways? Can you be a Trustee, could you help with fishing? Could you suggest other ways of fund raising?

Please fill out your support in the forms provided.

Three groups suggested:

1. Fund raising
2. Outreach
3. Spoilers/Frustrators

What ever funding we get we will need to raise money locally. We ask you to fill out the PLEDGE forms provided and say how much you can realistically pledge. We will not hold you to this, but this is an indicator.

We will email all people who could not come to the meeting with the same requests.

At the meeting pledges totalling £10,000 were generously pledged. After the meeting another pledge of £10,000 was raised, and a potential funder offered £20,000

At the meeting the following skills were offered:

Fundraising group

Graphic design

Art and Design

Fencing, Chain saw, Coppicing etc

Tree survey, Digger driving

Digger driver / NPTC qualified tree work /landscaping

Help with finance

Potential link up with Holton Primary School