

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
SPECIAL PROJECTS COMMITTEE
HELD ON 24th MAY 2006 AT 7.45 P.M. AT HARTLEY LIBRARY**

Present : Cllr Mr C Alford
Cllr Mr A Barnett
Cllr Mr J Gaywood (Chairman)
Cllr Mr M Harris
Cllr Mrs A Oxtoby
Cllr Mr B Ramsay (*left the meeting at 8.30 p.m.*)

In attendance : Mrs J Hoad (Clerk)
1 member of the public

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from Cllr Mr A Tremain.

2. Election of Chairman

RESOLVED: That, Cllr Mr J Gaywood be elected Chairman of the Special Projects Committee until the Annual Meeting in May 2007.

3. Election of Vice Chairman

RESOLVED: That, Cllr Mr M Harris be elected Vice Chairman of the Special Projects Committee until the Annual Meeting in May 2007.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Minutes

RESOLVED: That, the minutes of the meeting of the Special Projects Working Group held on 18th April 2006 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to an amendment deleting the words, "*The Working Group stated that if any error in judgement had been made then an apology should be made, but nevertheless...*" as contained on page 3, minute item 7, para 2.

6. Terms of Reference

The Committee reviewed its Terms of Reference.

RECOMMENDED: That, the Terms of Reference be amended, as set out in appendix 1 attached to these minutes.

7. United Reformed Church

The Committee considered a draft feasibility study on the future of the United Reformed Church as a Village Community and Heritage Centre and suggested a number of alterations to the report.

RECOMMENDED: That, the feasibility study as amended, attached as appendix 2 to these minutes, be approved and sent to the Synod for comment.

8. Date of the next meeting

To be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 9.55 p.m.

Signed:.....
Chairman

Date:.....

Special Projects Committee

Terms of Reference

- ~~1. To explore the means to provide access to the new Burial Ground at Manor Field, within the curtilage of the land owned by the Council and to undertake such investigations necessary to secure a solution.~~
- ~~2. To recommend to the Council final proposals for the means of access to Manor Field, including details and provisional costing of the work involved.~~
3. To consider any other projects referred to it by the Council and to report back after such investigations.

Note : ~~The design and establishment of the new Burial Ground shall remain within the Terms of Reference of the Burial Grounds Committee.~~

Delegated Powers

1. To seek any necessary advice.
- ~~2. To spend such monies considered necessary to achieve article 1 of the Terms of Reference from the budget provision for the new Burial Ground contained in the approved estimates of the Burial Ground Committee.~~
3. 2. To spend such monies as allocated by the Council. ~~for other projects.~~

Feasibility/Proposal Report

Proposed use of URC Church Ash Road as a Village Community /Heritage Centre

Hartley Parish Council

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Authorised: To be authorised by The Parish Council Special
Projects Working Group and the Main Council

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Present Position
3. Opportunities
4. Other Existing Venues in the Village
5. Draft Proposals
 - a. Site Acquisition
 - b. Use of Site Short Term
 - c. Use of Site Long Term
6. User Opportunities
7. Management Structure
8. Planning Issues
9. The Way Forward

1. Introduction

An Opportunity for the Residents of Hartley

Hartley is a spread out village of some 2,200 households with many flourishing community activities, there has though in recent years/months become a clear demand for more community facilities for the young and old alike that have nowhere to go. We are at present pulling together a Village Plan and Design Statement to give guidance for the future of the Village, with this we are well advanced. A survey of the village has highlighted a requirement for some form of Village community Centre in fact some 68% of our survey returns showed this as a need and also 90% said we needed more facilities/activities for younger people.

'The Sevenoaks District Leisure Strategy 2001' highlighted the needs of villages in the Sevenoaks District for Village Halls/Community Centres. Hartley was highlighted as the only villages devoid of a Village Community Centre and hence there was a requirement for one. At the time I believe it was viewed that there was not the availability of a site within the Village Centre which could be used to provide such a facility.

As in the past there has, as can be seen, been a clear requirement for a Village Hall/Community Centre but never the opportunity due to the lack of a suitable location. We now have the opportunity to obtain such a location following the closure of the United Reform Church in the centre of the village. Hence the need for this report to ascertain whether or not the opportunity can and should be grasped.

2. Present Position

We have recently been made aware of the closure of the URC Church, which is located in the centre of the village and adjacent to the WI hall. The Minister of the Church issued as press release, which stated that 'due to a very small membership they will be relocating their worship to the C of E Church of All saints. The buildings are held in Trust at the regional level of the Church, the Southern Synod, who will have assess the value and co-ordinate the marketing of the site under the auspices of the Charity Commission'. It also states that 'villagers will lose the parking facility in front of the Church'. This would create a serious problem for the WI who use the parking during their meetings.

Following this announcement a meeting was set up between representatives of the Parish Council and the Synod Trust Secretary with the Minister of the United Reform Church. This meeting highlighted the present position and was an open and frank discussion on the

future of the land on which the Church is located. When the Church closes the land and buildings are passed to the Board of Trustees, the Trustees would then be required under the Charity Commission to obtain an independent charity valuation that would report on the worth of the site based on a number of different potential or possible uses. This report has not as yet been commissioned. It is therefore the focus of this report to look at the proposals for the site and look at the feasibility of providing a much needed community facility on the site.

This site as you will understand is located in the centre of the village and consists of a Church Building (of Art Deco design) and an old small hall at the rear all located on a road-facing site of some 320ft deep by 50ft wide. The rear hall, whilst well past it's use by date, is used by a number of village activities who have already been served notice, and as stated the front car park capable of holding some 14/15 cars will be closed. This is used generally to prevent parking on the very busy Ash Road.

3. Opportunities

This could be seen as an opportunity to gain a local facility, which if missed would be lost to development. In Hartley as highlighted by Sevenoaks we DO NOT have a much-needed village Hall/Community Centre as a focal point to maintain village life and a sense of community belonging.

Therefore it is the councils view and that of many others that this Church in its present condition would make the basis of an excellent Community/Heritage Centre with a location in the centre of the village with good access and parking facilities. As it is located next to a WI facility and a commercial garage it would hopefully not impinge too extensively on an adjacent domestic property, though protection could be put in place either physically or by agreed rules to protect too much infringement.

Some groundwork has already been done on the subject with the results of the village survey. Whilst it may be possible for the village to raise the funds to refurbish the existing Church and build a new larger facility at the rear; the problem resides around obtaining the land on which the Church stands. We would also need to look at the projected ongoing costs associated with running such a facility.

4. Other Existing Venues in the Village

As part of any feasibility of this kind we must first look at any other facilities of a similar nature that exist in the village. These can be short-listed as: -

- a. All Saints Church Centre**
- b. WI Hall**
- c. Hartley Social Club**
- d. Hartley Country Club**
- e. Scout Headquarters**
- f. Parish Council Pavilion**
- g. Schools**
- h. County Library**

a. All Saints Church Centre - Ash Road

This centre consists of a medium sized hall and provides primarily for the needs of the Church since the majority of religious services are held in the hall. Although the hall is let out to users it is regularly over subscribed and of course the church takes preference on bookings. Charges are based on the type of booking type either Church, Charity, Local resident or general. Parking is limited to some 13 spaces and there are ongoing concerns, by residents, over the parking in 'The Warrens' when functions take place. Therefore a private hall managed by the Church of England with limited parking.

b. WI Hall - Ash Road

This once again is a private hall, limited in size with no direct parking facilities but use the URC car park at present. This hall also contains a floor that can be raised for plays etc. It is let out as required but because of the limited parking there are issues when a function is taking place. For the required uses it also is very over-subscribed.

c. Hartley Social Club - Ash Road

This is a private members club, although they have a small hall upstairs this is for hire by members only. Due to its size it is limited to small/events functions only.

d. Hartley Country Club - Culvey Close

As with the Social Club this is a members only club. They have a number of sports facilities and a medium size hall attached to the club buildings. Once again this has to be hired by members only.

e. Scout Headquarters - Larkwell Lane

The hall was built by the Scout Group on land leased to them by Sevenoaks District Council and consists of a number of small rooms and a medium/large hall area. Parking is limited as it is at the rear of a number of buildings also the planning permission granted was for Scout use only, an approach was made to Sevenoaks to extend this use but was refused. Unfortunately there are also ongoing issues with the neighbours.

f. Parish Council Pavilion – Church Road

This large area of open ground is owned and managed by the Parish Council as an open space. It has built on it a small pavilion, mainly aimed as a sports pavilion. This consists of changing rooms, a very small hall area and a limited kitchen area. Although hired out by the Parish Council it is very limited in functionality and is mainly used by the cricket and football teams of the area who have a block booking over the sports seasons. This facility is not convenient, as it is located some distance from the village centre.

g. Schools – Round Ash Way & Church Road

Whilst the schools are available for letting out they are very limited in what can be provided, both have very limited parking and are expensive to hire. There are also issues with ensuring that the caretaker is present (extra cost) and they are limited on time of use.

h. County Library

Whilst this facility can be used by the public it is very limited in size and has limited facilities.

To summarise whilst we do appear on the surface to have a number of similar facilities in the area these all have their limitations being either privately owned or restricted in parking/use. The Parish Plan (Survey & Reports) has demonstrated there is a need for a community owned and managed facility which would be open to all residents of the Village.

5. Draft Proposals

a. Site Acquisition

First is to establish the site into village control. This could be achieved by a number of ways but could be limited by the proposals from the Church Synod

Trustees. As we do not as yet have the Trustees proposals or valuations we must review the various scenarios that could be used.

1. **Lease from Church** - This opportunity would depend on the proposals made by the URC Trustees. In early discussions they seemed amicable to this suggestion but emphasised that because of their charity status any ongoing lease must be set at market levels. This at present appears to be the most favourable option providing the rent is acceptable and it could be obtained on a long lease. The URC trustees would remain owners of the freehold.
2. **Lease from other purchaser** - This scenario relies on the land being purchased by and owned by another body who might be prepared to lease it to the village community. This would appear to sit halfway between Donor purchase in 4. below and lease from the Church in 1. above. The owner could set its own rent whilst maintaining the freehold of the land. There must be an opportunity for a long lease here also.
3. **Kent County Council to buy and lease to Parish** - Whilst it is possible as KCC do own large sections of land I believe that, as with Sevenoaks District Council, they are not into purchasing land at the present time. This does not mean that we should not approach them to see if the opportunity exists. The leasing scenario should be as above with a long lease.
4. **Donor purchase** - This opportunity would only be available if a donor or donors where to purchase the land and donate it to the community. At present I see this as the least possible of the scenarios.
5. **Various Grant Scenarios** - As reported elsewhere in this report there are opportunities for grants from the Lottery and others. These all seem to stem around buildings or facilities and do not mention the purchase of land for community purposes so this could be an issue.
6. **Parish Council to buy against loans** - This option may be open to the Parish Council. This though could be substantial and could have an impact on the Parish precept of the Council Tax.

We must in all these scenarios ensure that the original Church building is maintained in situ. This can be achieved by listing the building as a feature of local interest. Whilst it is a long process to establish a graded listing it is straightforward to place in on the local list of buildings of local interest.

b. Use of Site Short Term

It would be intended to retain the Church and it is understood by the Synod Trust that the Church is in good state of repair.

The main church area as a medium size useable hall of approximately 42ft deep X 26ft wide and 14/22ft high (measurement to be confirmed internally). This could be rented out as necessary to existing hall users and to attract new uses, specifically those required urgently i.e. West Kent Housings 8-12 group, we could also run recreational evening classes which we hear are to be severely cut by KCC. This main church area can be refurbished using local manpower/finance to create a useable space for renting from day one.

The front car park area could be used by other organisations to generate an income. This area could also be made more secure and attractive.

To establish a Heritage/Research centre in the other front room, this room would hold copies of all the historical documentation and artefacts of the Village and could be managed by the Historical Society and used by various organisations and schools for research and education. This also could generate an income.

The old hall to the rear could be kept running as whilst it is not an attractive hall it is not as yet considered as unsafe although in need of serious cosmetic repair. We could initiate a youth drop in centre at this time to open up dialogue with the youngsters as to what they and others would require in the future.

c. Use of Site Long Term

Whilst we understand that the rear hall is serviceable but has a limited life there may be an opportunity to replace it with a larger more user-friendly facility which could host more indoor sport/community activities. The opportunity is there to provide a hall of substantial size together with a new rear car park.

6. User Opportunities

As speculated, on day one the creation of a Heritage Centre within the existing building would provide a home for the entire local records etc this would also leave the hall at the rear for the use of various activities, some which already exist, and other new ones. Some it is appreciated may well not generate an income.

Youth drop in (computers, coffee and chat)
Senior Citizen Clubs

Sports Groups
West Kent Housings 8-12 groups
Mother & Toddler group
After Schools Clubs
Hartley Players (Rehearsals etc)
Art Group
Book Club
Hartley Historical Society
Yoga Groups
Judo Group
Dance Groups
Gilbert & Sullivan Group
Badminton Club
Active Retirement Group
Keep Fit
Parish Council Meetings
Play Groups
Outreach CAB & Benefits and many more.

7. Management Structure

The Councils aim would be to create a Charitable Trust to manage the resource. The management board would contain local interested residents and representatives of the Parish Council.

Initial funding from Hartley Parish Council, Sevenoaks District Council and other Grant Aid would be sought to give a start-up fund (of typically £20,000) to cover the first year of operation.

8. Planning Issues

The site and buildings are within the built confines of the village and the use of the buildings, which are already defined for D1 usage, for community purposes would be acceptable in principle. Sevenoaks District Council confirm that such usage is something that should be encouraged. In terms of the detail, issues such as the impact on the neighbours and parking would need to be assessed; in both cases I can see no major issues.

Therefore is considered that there are no planning issues.

9. The Way Forward

Once approved by the Main Council copies to be passed to the URC Synod for comment.

To ensure that support from the community is forthcoming using the Parish Council Newsletter as the publicity media.

To obtain support of existing and new users who have not found a venue or are prepared to use it if made available.

To talk to prospective users to try and ensure the necessary support and commitment.