

26 September 2005.

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Consultation on proposal for new Community Hall – Stonehouse Primary School

Please find enclosed a copy of the report from the open meeting of Stonehouse Community Council.

We trust that when you begin the next phase of consultation that we will be contacted early within the process. We would also seek immediate feedback on your proposals that are put before the committee for consideration.

Best regards

George Smith
Chairman, Stonehouse Community Council

Enc – report of the meeting with observations and objection to be considered.

I refer to the Community Council open meeting held on Monday 19 September 2005 in 4/5 the Cross, Stonehouse to which you were invited to consult with members of the public about the proposals to build a new community hall.

The meeting represented a cross section of the community and voiced their opinion concerning the proposals that you outlined. Some of those present had also attended at your presentation held in the Primary School some weeks previous and had voiced their objections and observations at that time

You commenced the presentation by stating that the village required more modern and better facilities. You suggested that the Council had been working in conjunction with the Primary School. You stated that the 2 Councillors for Stonehouse (Ian McInnes & Jackie Burns) had approached the council with a view to spending a sum of £1.6m to build a new facility.

You also stated that there had been site investigations carried out on 3 sites:

1. Murdoch's field at Violet Crescent
2. Tilework park at Union street
3. Stonehouse Primary School

You intimated that the engineering reports on the sites indicated:

1. Murdoch's field was too boggy
2. Tilework Park had problems with access as well as a cost to provide services being connected into the existing services. You stated that there would have to be an additional sub-station which would give additional cost.
3. You intimated that the approach for the school was a joined up approach with school development.

You informed the meeting that the consultation held at the school had seen approximately 220 people attend. There were 148 consultation cards issued but only 28 had been completed and returned.

You said that the feedback from that meeting and other such meetings such as the Community council meeting would be used to influence the next steps.

The people in the meeting then began to comment on your proposals outlined above. These are outlined below:

One resident stated that the proposals were not big enough to accommodate all that was required in the village. He stated that parking was not adequate and that the replacement was not enough to cover all of the activities. He thought that the location at Murdoch's park was probably big enough to provide what was required.

Another resident made a statement to the effect that the village required a proper facility and that the Council had tried to provide what was in effect a school gymnasium, built ahead of the new school, and tried to sell it back to the community as an adequate provision. He stated that the 2 councillors should have rejected the £1.6m as being totally inadequate. He urged that the Council look at the grounds of Stonehouse Hospital, which had been donated to the village by the Lockhart family 100 years ago for community use. The fact that the NHS was trying to sell the ground for profit was not acceptable to the village and that the Council should have either negotiated with the NHS for a suitable plot within the hospital grounds to build or made a compulsory purchase order to obtain the land.

He stated that the Council should have looked at:

- 1 What we had in the village
- 2 What we need for the village
- 3 What would that cost to build
- 4 Where would we build it
- 5 How long would it take to build
- 6 Gone out for consultation on those suggestions and not try and 'sell a solution' that had already been taken.

His opinion was that the village had waited for many years to have a proper facility and that it was better to get the facility right than to try and use a meagre sum of money to seek a quick fix.

He outlined that the potential traffic problems that would be created with traffic of cars, buses and people coming onto an already busy road – Townhead Street – was not acceptable on the grounds of health & safety.

Another resident said that the Primary School had a separate agenda from other organisations within the village. He suggested that in his experience as an architect that the money would be better spent in upgrading the current school rather than knocking the school down and replacing the gymnasium as a first step to be followed by the school being built to dovetail into the gym. He referred to the proposed use of American red cedar and cladding, which he had used on his house. He stated that from first hand experience this gets dirty and green and is a high maintenance substance. He also reflected that the inadequate car parking would be a problem when there was any large function in the large hall (gymnasium) since there were only 31 spaces.

He suggested that an alternative venue would be the old 'Rex Cinema' in Laurie Street, which was owned by the Sheeran family. There is ground adjacent, which could be used for car parking. He was confident that if approached the family might sell the building.

Another resident asked about the floor space available within the new proposal to compare with what was currently available in the 2 halls (Public Hall and Institute). The answer was that the total floor space in the new proposal was 310 square metres compared to 953 square metres. What was being proposed was giving the village only one third of current available space.

Another resident asked about the building materials being proposed since all of the buildings in the surrounding area were made of sandstone and the new building would not look in keeping with it's surroundings.

Another resident spoke on behalf of the various playgroups in the village that currently compete for space for the young children. One playgroup meets for 5 mornings and 3 afternoons and would therefore be the sole user of the new small hall. The resident stated that the Care Commission guidelines would not be met with the new proposal on toilet facilities and kitchen facilities. There was also a lack of storage space for the essential equipment. If the playgroup were granted use it would preclude the hall being let to anyone else for 8 of the 10 half day lets.

Another resident suggested that there was ground owned by the Council between Boghall Street and Murray Drive and that this would be appropriate enough for a new building.

It would appear that the Project manager had not consulted with any of the groups who currently use the facility since various members of groups were at the meeting representing the views of the groups.

Another resident stated that £1.6m was not enough to provide what was required for the village and was indeed only papering over the cracks for a quick solution. The proposals did not reflect the views of the community and fell seriously short of their expectations.

At this point in the meeting Councillor Ian McInnes gave his view. He had listened to what was being said at the meeting and also reflected on the previous consultation held in the Primary School, which he had attended. His view was that what was being proposed was not adequate for the needs of the village. He stated that the Council had to go back to the drawing board and think again.

Another resident stated that there had been no 'near neighbour' consultation with absolutely no resident in Townhead Street being asked their views. The residents of the Townhead Street were raising a petition on the matter.

Another resident stated that the school has first priority on the large hall that is, in effect, their Gymnasium and not a community hall. This wholly limits the use that the village can make on the facility.

The community Council had obtained a copy of the lets in the halls. On one-month typical figures, looking at the Institute only there were 40 lets between the hours of 0900 and 1700. There were a further 20 lets between the hours of 1800 and 2100. Since this reflected only one hall it was obvious that the new proposal could not accommodate the usage required for the village.

Another resident asked where the proposals fitted with the exercise being carried out on the village centre and the traffic calming which was due to commence in the Autumn of 2005.

Another resident asked about the future growth in the village and whether the proposal had taken into account an additional 1000 people in the village over the next 10 years. The answer was that the project had not considered this.

There was a resolution from the meeting that 'the proposals for the siting of a new facility at the school and the size of the proposal was wholly inadequate for the village needs' This was carried at the meeting with nobody offering any opposition.

There were other questions from the body of the hall:

1. Is it a school gym hall or a community hall?
2. Why only £1.6m being spent compared with elsewhere in the county where sums of £7m have been spent on similar halls?
3. Has the money been advanced from the new school budget?
4. The kitchen facilities are not adequate enough to support functions – what exactly is the kitchen equipment being installed?
5. Has the decision already been made to site the facility in the school?
6. Why is the council not genuinely consulting with the population?
7. How much would it cost to put the facility in Tilework Park?
8. What will happen to the existing halls?
9. Will alcohol be allowed for sale especially when children will be in the hall the next morning after a function?

10. Consultation form - why not address and post code - open to fraud with people who do live in the village completing them?
11. Do you accept that the consultation paper is open to fraud?
12. Why is it headed Parent/Public feedback - is this because the facility is a gym hall and not a proper community facility?
13. What happens if the will of the people is that they reject the proposals and seek an alternative, properly funded?
14. Should the construction go ahead - what happens when the new school is being built – will the facility be closed during the duration of the construction?

Summary

It was the firm view of all of those who attended at the meeting of the Community Council as well as the meeting, which took place in the Primary School that this proposal was not offering the solution required for the village to replace the 2 existing community halls with one hall built at Stonehouse Primary School. In summary it was felt that the proposal looked as if there was a desire to build a new gymnasium for the new school ahead time and to sell it as a community hall that the school has first call on. The venue of the school was not a good venue since it limited the size and scope of the requirement. It doesn't have adequate parking. It has too many restrictions being associated with the school. It is not a large enough construction to cope with existing demand and to 'future proof' its requirements for the next 10 years and beyond.

Other venues should be properly examined and costed. Proper consultation should be undertaken and a requirement established for what exactly the village needs by way of facilities to hold meetings and events. It has taken many years to agree that the existing village halls are inadequate and there is not much point rushing a decision to meet a political outcome in time for the 2007 elections.

The stated view in the open meeting of the Councillor for the area (Ian McIness) was that the proposal did not meet the needs of the community and this view should carry a great deal of weight since he was responsible for getting the money and raising the expectations for a replacement hall.

Your summation of next steps indicated that although almost all of those consulted rejected the proposals for the school location and size of the facility you, as the Project Manager, would be recommending the proposals as the only way forward. This view was firmly rejected by all those present and you should not advance this as either a preferred option or a deferred option.

You were asked to go and search out other possibilities within the village and to consider compulsory purchase of sites.

You were also asked to give the costs of either preparing the alternative sites as viable or for the engineer's survey and costs to replacing the existing halls either by way of refurbishing them or knocking them down and replacing them on their existing sites.

The consultation exercise on Monday evening should have given you sufficient information to come to the conclusion that the replacing of the 2 existing halls within the village with a single building with only a third of the available floor space should not be considered as a viable option and should not be advanced as such.

George Smith

Chairman, Stonehouse Community Council

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