

Statement with regard to replacement village hall – June 2024

2018, in a conversation with Cllr Hitchcock, he told me that he had designed a scheme for housing on the Haven Sportsfield Car Park, I had not realized until that time that the land was owned by MSDC, this was confirmed by Cllr Gibson who also talked about a social housing project on the site whilst driving the Monday Club minibus. I then requested a meeting with MSDC to discuss a replacement hall being built on the car Park site and attended a meeting in August 2018. Obstruction was on the cards from the outset.

Following the meeting a letter of agreement was issued by a Peter Stuart, Head of Corporate Resources, approved by a Cllr Ash Edwards, who became leader of the Council, emails were issued, and acknowledged, on the terms of **250 years at a peppercorn rent**. We have relied on those terms since that meeting and the Council had at all times been aware that we were doing so.

The Village Hall was put up for sale in 2020 but was interrupted by Covid outbreak until late 2021.

We submitted our second planning application in 2022 on a reduced scale of building after negotiating a deal with Abode Homes who contracted to build a new Hall in exchange for the old one. Every step was reliant on the terms as stated above.

Jan 2nd 2024 Abode took ownership of the old Village Hall.

Since October 2023 I have been trying to obtain the draft lease from the Council. We were then horrified to be told by Simon Hughes and Rob Anderton that the Council were going to renege on what had been previously agreed.

They were still willing to lease the land to the charity for the new village hall – but the term changed from **250 years to 65 years**, the **peppercorn changed from £1 to £1636 per year**, and they now wanted a performance bond as security that the hall would not be left half built.

Although he acknowledged that the matter was urgent, because the current hall has already been sold and the builder would need to get on with the building in the Spring – he and his deputy have refused all subsequent attempts to discuss the matter. We have bent over backwards to accommodate Mr Hughes – agreeing that there could be a break clause in the lease at 65 years – provided that a Village Hall facility was available somewhere at that time. We have also offered to lodge £50,000 with our solicitor and that I would provide a personal guarantee that the Hall would not be left half built. The monies deposited into Solicitor's acct would be used to complete the Hall or put the land back to its original state. To date we have spent £20k on legal, planning and design costs.

I requested a meeting with the Chief Executive but was refused.

Simon Hughes and Rob Anderton continue to obstruct any progress. Phone calls are stonewalled by them and they take weeks to respond to any correspondence.

We have bent over backwards to come to a conclusion and will not give up.

Statement to WPC - Presented June 24th 2024