

NOTES OF TANTERTON VILLAGE CENTRE MEETING

Thursday 4th February 2016.

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 50 people were in attendance at the start of the meeting.

It was explained that whilst this was not a Neighbourhood Council meeting, the event had been facilitated by the Neighbourhood Council. An independent Chairman (County Cllr Gooch) would preside over the meeting; notes would be taken and would be circulated to both the Tanterton Village Centre (TVC) and the Neighbourhood Council.

A member of the public questioned why the notes would not be made available by email to all attendees and he was informed that the notes would be publically available to everyone via the Parish Council website.

It was stated that TVC would give a presentation on the Centre and this would be followed by an open forum with a question and answer session. Following the open forum it was understood that the Friends of the Centre would also be making a presentation.

TVC PRESENTATION

6 members of the TVC including the Chairman, identified themselves to the meeting. A power point presentation was delivered which explained the history of the Centre to date. It is understood that the power point will be made available with these notes.

Background - The City Council and an organisation called Signpost previously managed the Centre before Signpost went into liquidation in May 2013. An action group carried out a consultation to assess the level of interest in the Centre and this led to the submission of a business case to Preston City Council. A Charitable Company was formed with the Trustees limited by guarantee. In January 2014, the City Council accepted the business case, subject to a legal agreement and the new lease was signed in April 2014, a year after the Centre had been closed.

Improvements - The Centre was in a poor condition and during the first 2yrs the Trustees carried out various improvements – painting the hall, erecting signs, purchase of new equipment, installation of fire alarms, computers, CCTV etc.

Finances – It was explained that the Centre receives a grant from the City Council which reduces by 20% over 5yrs until it stops and a grant from the Neighbourhood Council. Full income and expenditure details were itemised on the power point.

Events – The Centre will be used by the Trustees and volunteers and will host public and private functions. There is a youth club for pre-teens, beavers, friendship group, stay and play tots club and a Saturday kick-off café. The trustees are trying to do more, but they need more volunteers and suggestions as indicated in the leaflet. Suggestions already received include an older youth club, tea dance and a licenced cinema. The Trustees are keen to encourage more 'paid hirers' so that the Centre can be a venue for all including the vulnerable and disadvantaged.

To conclude it was stated that more hirers and volunteers were needed and those present were thanked for attending and supporting the meeting.

OPEN FORUM

NOTE - For ease of reference, questions and answers have been collated under topic headings as several issues were repeated and referred back to during the open forum.

Trustees - In response to a question, it was confirmed that 4 out of 12 of the Trustees were also Members of the Neighbourhood Council. It was also stated that there are 10 places on the Neighbourhood Council and Councillors are elected by the public. If a resolution affecting the Centre is brought before the Neighbourhood Council, the Councillors have to* declare an interest in the matter and under the Code of Conduct they may not vote. On this basis, it would not be possible for the Trustees to influence Council business affecting the Centre. As a point of clarification, a Member of the Council stated that a Councillor may decide whether or not to declare the interest – he does not *have to** declare the interest.

Hirer Comments – A hirer stated that they had been operating in the Centre but there were difficulties with cleanliness and private functions were not given any guidance on where things were or how they were operated. It was also stated that there was so much Anti-Social Behaviour outside the Centre that parents wouldn't let their children attend and as a result, the hirer had moved to a different venue.

A different hirer stated that they had left the Centre because Board members had made the situation untenable. The doors had been locked so volunteers couldn't get in and notes had been left about how filthy the Centre was. Eventually the volunteer cleaners left following abuse. In addition, the board members had allegedly responded to a complaint by stating that they were not an extension of Social Services and it was questioned how they could state that, if they wanted the Centre to be a place which cared for the vulnerable.

Another attendee stated he had attended as he was interested in bringing scouting age groups to Ingol. He understood that all areas have some difficult youngsters but the situation would improve if activities were provided. He had sympathies with the cleanliness and hoped the management would come up with a scheme to improve the situation.

Anti-Social Behaviour – The Trustees confirmed that the CCTV has been reactivated and can be used to identify trouble causers. The Trustee who oversees health & safety and security has received good advice from the police and PCSOs who are aware of the issues and are dealing with an incident where a camera was stolen. The Police and Crime Commissioner has granted funds for extra cameras on the doors.

A member of the public stated that if the Centre provided courses and things for the youths to do, they wouldn't vandalise it and would have more pride in their community. It was stated that several youngsters had offered to volunteer to help.

Cleanliness – The Trustees advised that a Trustee regularly cleans the Centre but more volunteers are needed to set up a rota and keep on top of it as it can take in excess of 4hrs. Several attendees referred to cleanliness during the meeting. Comments included that when hirers pay £10 to hire the Centre, they expect it to be clean and that the Trustees should enforce cleanliness by making sure that the previous hirer leaves it tidy for the next. Churches and other Centres manage the situation – why can't the Trustees?

A member of the public stated that the above was unsatisfactory and measures should be put in place to improve the situation. You can't promise new activities to youngsters and then take them away. If new groups come to the Centre, they must be looked after. Can the Trustees explain why volunteers are not coming forward?

Volunteers – It was stated that 40 volunteer forms had been left in the office with offers of help but no one appeared to know where they were and it was alleged they had been moved to the loft.

A Trustee confirmed that the paperwork was not in the loft but appeals had been made for volunteers on flyers and the website. Concerns were expressed that volunteers won't work with the Trustees due to a conflict in personalities.

Management – An attendee identified himself as the previous manager of the Centre and stated that when he was running the Centre, there were 2 cleaners and a manager but currently no one was in place and the Trustees were running a 'rudderless ship' and people don't know who the Trustees are.

The previous manager stated that he had offered 900 voluntary hours to run the centre but his offer had been refused. In answer to his question why, it was stated that it was not an unconditional offer as the manager was seeking paid employment at the end of the term. He had also requested that the Trustees didn't oversee his work. The offer was declined as this was unacceptable to the Trustees.

Working together - A resident stated that they had attended on an impartial basis and was disappointed that everyone was falling out as they need to work for the community. Intact was cited as a good example of a community group and it was felt more should be done to achieve that here.

Another resident stated that they had volunteered at the Centre previously but had left due to too many arguments. They had attended tonight with a view to coming back but were disappointed that there were still too many 'personalities' involved. It shouldn't be necessary to produce posh leaflets or pay someone to take notes of meetings, everyone should be working together for the good of the community.

A Trustee stated that they were prepared to put the difficulties behind them and start again and if it can be done, then the meeting will have been worthwhile.

Accountability - A member of the public reiterated that hirers and volunteers had been lost through the behaviour of the Trustees. The Neighbourhood Council had tried to intervene and meetings with the Board and City Council had gone the same way. Anyone speaking up on behalf of the community was automatically assumed wrong and advice was taken from other areas. Volunteers are coming forward – but they are leaving and no one has answered the question why.

In response, it was stated that a meeting had taken place regarding nominations for 3 community board members and the Trustees were prepared to appoint new people. Concerns were expressed that the outcome of that meeting had not been conveyed to attendees.

A view was expressed that TVC is a properly constituted body accountable to the Charity Commission and Preston City Council with no obligation to take advice.

A counter view was expressed that the Centre is funded through the Parish Precept and Council Tax therefore, residents should have a voice on how it is run.

A Trustee replied that the Centre is supported by public funding which reduces each year. There is a Service Level Agreement with the City Council and a quarterly report is submitted with information on the accounts, volunteers etc. The City Council is happy that the Service Level Agreement is being complied with.

The Chairman interjected at this point and stated that the Trustees responsibility is to the Trust. If residents are unhappy with the way public money is being spent, they need to raise their concerns with the City and Neighbourhood Councils.

Moving forward - A representative from Intact stated that TVC had only been established for 2.5yrs and should be commended for what they had achieved. Initially Intact was run by volunteers for 5yrs and it's a tough job. You need unity not infighting. The Trustees have provided details of how much the Centre costs and where the money goes.

It's not easy to decide whether to employ paid staff to promote the Centre or whether to employ a cleaner to get it up to scratch first – but residents have been given an opportunity to raise concerns and the board have promised to look at them and find a way forward.

A member of the public also stated that there had been a lot of talking and it was important to draw a line under the problems and ensure that the good ideas are talked through – but it is clear that everyone must work together and there must be a management structure.

The Trustees confirmed that they had discussed a business plan and a paid employee but they need a cleaner, caretaker, manager and youth worker and they can't fund them all. The Trustees reiterated that they are 3 people short and they would welcome new members.

The previous manager reiterated his concerns that communication has to be a 2 way process and the Trustees should have a manager reporting to the board.

Youth issues – several youths entered the meeting stating they should be in the Centre in a youth club – not out in the rain with nowhere to go. They stated that when the Centre was boarded up and the keys were handed to the board they were promised that they could use it to watch TV, play on games consoles etc. but now they had nowhere to go and they didn't want to go to Intact they wanted their own place.

A Trustee replied that following a positive response to the leaflet advertising the meeting, they were hoping to set up a youth club on a Friday night.

A member of the public alleged that there had been an altercation between a board member and the youngsters in the past and a youth worker should be employed not volunteers or members of the board.

Friends of TVC – The Friends group gave a presentation stating that the Centre was only open 8.5hrs a week. Income, not including grants, is being exceeded by expenditure and given that the grants will eventually taper off, the Centre will be bankrupt once the grants cease.

70 children from Tanterton have to go to Intact because TVC have let them down.

40 people have completed forms to volunteer, but no one has been accepted. 7 activity groups have been refused by the board but the centre has only achieved 286hrs of usage.

A Trustee reiterated that attendees wanted to forget the past and move forward and it was hoped that volunteers would come forward now that the youth club offer had been made.

A counter view was expressed that the Centre needs managing properly and should be open every day. There should be a community café and a business plan drawn up by someone who knows what they are doing.

It was questioned why the board were not learning and getting advice from Intact and it was confirmed that there are links between the 2 organisations.

It was suggested that the youth worker from Intact should help in Tanterton and as he was present, he confirmed he would be happy to help. After speaking to the youngsters it was suggested that funding could be obtained to run a boxing club with coaches from Larches and Savick attending the Centre. It was stressed that the youngsters present would need to attend.

It was generally felt that this would be a major step forward – but again it was reiterated that the management of the centre still needs to be addressed. It was also stated that there needs to be a main contact point and an email address to put forward suggestions and fill gaps in the calendar.

Attendees were advised that there was a website and promotional pens were distributed with the web address.

In conclusion it was stated that the Centre closed down 2 years ago but the community pulled together to get it opened and it was time to do the same again to make it a success.

On this positive point, the meeting was drawn to a close.