

Notes on the Open Meeting on the Future of Harbury Library held on 10th March 2011 in Harbury Primary School.

Meeting Chaired by Dr. Tim Lockley, Chairman of Harbury Parish Council

Present: Cllr Lockley, Bob Sherman (Representative, Wight School Trustees), County Cllr Bob Stevens and approximately 80 members of the public.

Background Information: Tim outlined the current situation with Harbury Library. The Library is one of 16 throughout the county that have been highlighted by WCC as being unsustainable in their present form. Tim presented some statistics on library usage as follows:

- The Library costs £25 approximately per hour to run; this compares with a county average of around £70 per hour.
- Each visit by a library user costs £1.58 which is similar to the County average.
- Costs per issue is half that of the County average
- Members borrow on average 21 books per year.
- There are 17,000 issues per year.
- 60% of Library users are aged under the age of 16 or over the age of 65.

Tim said that the closure of both libraries at Harbury and Kineton would mean that a relatively large geographical area would be left with no Library service at a time when public transport is also being cut. The closure of the library would also disadvantage more vulnerable sectors of society as 60% of library users in Harbury are either children, teenagers or retired people.

The Way Forward: Tim outlined the followed areas which need to be addressed:

- How can the community make better use of the Wight School building?
- Retain the library service in some form for the village?
- Generate alternative revenue in order to contribute to the upkeep of the building?

The Wight School Trustees: Bob Sherman, on behalf of the Wight School Trustees, explained the status of the building. The Wight School is technically owned by the Archdeacon and is governed by the Diocesan Trustees. Two significant clauses in the terms of the trusteeship mean that a) the building must be used for educational purposes (although not, it was noted, for **wholly** educational purposes) and b) should the building no longer be required for such purposes, the Archdeacon has the power to recommend a sale if this is deemed necessary, although generally the building is treated as belonging to the village Church. Any funds generated by such a sale however would have to be paid back to Warwickshire County Council as repayment of the original gift of the building to the Trust following the completion of the new Primary School. The Trust's position is that it cannot take on the financial responsibility for the building without alternative income generating sources of funding. The site also includes the car park to the rear of the building and the land at the end of the car park which the Scout Hut is built on. The Pre-School currently have a 25 year license with the Trustees and are currently having renovations carried out to the side of the building, funded by an Early Years Grant. Repair costs on the building are currently at around £7500 - £10,000 per year.

County Councillor Bob Stevens: Bob Stevens explained that WCC needs to save in the region of £60 million over the next three years. Although the Library Service will need to

save around £2m in total, no decision has yet been made on the exact details of this although 16 libraries are earmarked for closure. The consultation will start on 17th March and will run until early June with a final decision being made by the WCC Cabinet on 14th July.

Questions: Tim opened up the meeting for questions, a sample of which are given below:

- Would it be feasible to have a café in the building? – Yes it could be and there is an existing kitchen, which will no longer be used by the Pre-School which could be used.
- What would it cost on the Parish Rates to generate £10,000 in extra income which could be used for the library/Wight School building – around £10 per household per annum although this would depend on which band the household falls into.
- What is the membership of the Library – 834.

A number of views were expressed on ways in which this issue could be resolved. In conclusion, Tim asked for volunteers to come forward for a small steering group which could investigate possible “business plans” for the Library and the building.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm.