

Hartshorn, Robert

From: Cllr. Owen, Bob
Sent: 20 May 2021 21:12
To: Hartshorn, Robert; Cllr. Ridgewell, John; Cllr. Whiting, Ross; Cllr. Phipps, Lisa; Cllr. George, Nigel; Cllr. Leonard, Arianna; Cllr. Leonard, Philippa; Cllr. Davies, D.T; Cllr. Hussey, Adrian
Cc: Reynolds, Jeff
Subject: RE: New Community Resource Centre at Ty Sign draft Cabinet Report

Good Evening Rob,

Thank you for your email and opportunity to comment. The current draft report and EIA notwithstanding, as you are aware I have made my views and concerns on this matter known to this council going as far back as 2018. And with considerable change with respect to this project, in terms of the site(s), the loss of support of Risca 5th Scouts group, the dissolution of the Ty-Sign Hall Charity set up to bring it to fruition but now in total favour of the Agape Church Group (ACG) there is a clear shift in emphasis. This, and other factors to (now) consider it is absolutely necessary that everything is factually presented - to ensure that Cabinet have all the information they require to make a fully informed decision.

In 2017, I along with all Risca ward councillors we became trustees of the Channel View Community Centre (CVCC) to oversee its management, myself also nominated for the position of treasurer. At that time we (the committee) were unable to access the centre's funds (it took approx. a year to sort this, a period in which I became aware of some significant personal differences of opinion on the new formed committee which was also weighted heavily towards the ACG and was being steered disproportionately towards an external issue, namely in the form of a new hall project as opposed to the actual management of CVCC. This was in the form of regular discussion around the centre's funds that they expected to automatically 'transfer' to a new facility but similarly to other users the ACG were just that, an end user hence I found their persistence with respect to the centre's funding and links to the hall project concerning, more so at that point in time as the funds were still not under our control. During this period, as treasurer I took it upon myself to self-finance the centre, paying bills etc from my own personal funds to ensure the hall remained available and open for use. In discussions around their belief of automatic right to the centre's funds (confirmed by Cllr George that this was not so, nonetheless I was met with what I can only describe as aggression from the newly appointed Chair and Sec (both ACG members).

In bringing my concerns to yourself around this period I recall you saying that you did not see people up in arms on Ty-Sign regarding their proposed hall. The reason for that was that the people of Ty-Sign were unaware of what was happening (people who I know living in close proximity to the proposed hall had no idea). Then with the ACG survey claiming 80% of people were in favour this was a con-trick as it was based on only 140-ish people surveyed, Risca East (I believe) has a population of 5,000+. To put this in some context 80% of 140 (112) as a percentage of total population = approx. 2%, additionally, ACG membership as quoted in the report (40) is whole membership (not Risca East residents). I am told that there are less than twenty members who live in the area of benefit, this approximates to 0.4% of the ward population.

As things transpired, in time we eventually got the funds under our control, and as the project site moved to the Spar field the ACG made a request of the committee for £6,400 to assist with their costs for surveys etc. I was personally against this (but not at the meeting where it was voted on due to annual leave), no declarations of interest were made even though some who voted were direct beneficiaries, and it was carried 4-3. As treasurer, before releasing the funds I took advice from the council, I also asked the CVCC Sec that if the project did not materialise if we would

recoup the funds, the reply to this was (which I have on email) 'you have to speculate to accumulate'. I must say I found this rather distasteful, the committee donating public funds, on behalf of the very people the group purport to want to support.

With respect to their first (failed) lottery bid I believe a figure in the region of £60,000 (CVCC funds) formed part of their business plan, and again, in their recently granted WG bid they put £60,000 as deliverable in principle for match funding (again CVCC funds). In my view this could be considered as using false information to obtain public funding (deception). I note also that our EIA makes reference to their business case, has it been fully vetted? I have been led to believe we have also invested in this project (please confirm), if this is the case we need to consider who we supported and how it was used, e.g. was it in support of the (now dissolved) Ty-Sign Hall charity? Furthermore we need to consider the fact that not too far back we invested in the St David's Church centre (a facility that is directly opposite, on the other side of the road), this facility has been revitalised and is now taking bookings for events etc., as has the TLC café, and this is less than 40m away.

The new proposed site is the last remaining green space on Ty-Sign, access to it will also involve the loss of mature trees that may be liable to TPO's due to their age and maturity, and it offers only duplicated services (nothing new) for the area. Furthermore the driver is not the community as highlighted by the approximate percentages as already referenced. With respect to the report, at points 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10 and the conclusion, as you clearly indicate quite correctly things have changed, I would say significantly in terms of the revitalisation of existing community offer.

To update somewhat on the CVCC and scout hut site, undoubtedly Jeff via Kevin Lodge will have fully appraised you on the recent change of emphasis with respect to the centre. We are currently housing (albeit temporarily) the Risca RCV UK Covid volunteer charity group. Their work during the pandemic has been recognised by CCBC and right across the third sector and luckily for Risca they are here to stay but require a permanent home. I am very pleased (as I know Cllr Philippa Leonard is) to be associated with the group (as trustees), and in view of the current investment in the centre, the fact we also have bookings starting to come back in I am looking at another angle on this, to review the site in totality.

I hope you will recall my approach to you some time ago regarding options for the centre, based around a possible asset transfer / other options for keeping the centre open, I did some work towards a strategy which with current funding levels I believed we could maintain the centre for up to three years if the council pulled out. The renewed situation changes that, it also puts the viability of any new centre in doubt. For CVCC I want to investigate a full retro-fit project, rebuilding the centre from the inside out, possibly incorporating additional space and giving consideration to the wider site (i.e. to include the scouts). I see this then as becoming the permanent home for RCV UK incorporated within a fully used, modernised brand new centre which will serve the area of benefit long into the future. I have already approached WG in terms of a funding bid and they are willing to discuss this with me but it needs to be fully joined up. I see this as the way forward, a community driven development not the prospect of a building taking up our last green space, under-utilised for the benefit of a few.

The new centre project has always been a resounding no from me due to the issues and concerns as outlined (there is more detail if required). I am certainly not one to see investment lost but it has to be for the right reasons and with full community consultation, your report sections as referenced above appear to affirm that the changes now make it a totally different proposition. More than happy to discuss my ideas in detail in open forum, and to be guided by you as to how the council could assist in taking this community project forward.

Regards

Cllr Bob Owen

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From: Hartshorn, Robert

Sent: 14 May 2021 09:42

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Cc: Reynolds, Jeff

Subject: New Community Resource Centre at Ty Sign draft Cabinet Report

Dear Councillors,

Please find attached a draft Cabinet report in respect of a proposed new community resource centre in Ty Sign. The draft Integrated Impact Assessment is also attached.

I would be grateful for any comments that you may have by the end of next week, Friday 21st May 2021.

Regards

Robert Hartshorn

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