
Debden New Village Hall Group

Ms Dawn French
CEO, Uttlesford District Council
5 April 2017

Dear Ms French

I have now had a chance to reflect on our meeting last Wednesday and to discuss the outcome with members of the New Village Hall Group (NVHG).

As I said in the early part of the meeting following [REDACTED] and Elisabeth Blackie's opening remarks and your summary, I was concerned there was an inference from the start that there was only one option on the table.

With hindsight, it was unfortunate that we did not start the meeting with a review of the email from Lt Col Blakey who suggested that all stakeholders, whether legally constituted or representing an interest group (in other words, the NVHG) should be included in a process of mediation. Notably, he also said the process should be inclusive "without causing division or hurt by being excluded, regardless of what has gone before". The view of our group is that this was a clear indication that no-one and no issue should be excluded.

The statement by Elisabeth Blackie that there was no point in the Recreation Ground Trust (RGT) taking part in mediation because the land swap was non-negotiable, was hardly in the spirit of Col Blakey's proposal. While the mediator cannot interfere with a decision by a trust, there is no reason why the central issue of the land swap cannot be included in the discussion.

The outcome of our meeting, that the parish council would enter into mediation with the Village Hall Trust (VHT) only, subject to the VH trustees agreeing, was, on reflection, illogical. On the assumption that the Simon Langman plan was the only option on the table, what would there be to "mediate" on? The offer by [REDACTED] to enter into mediation was ironic given that he has publicly stated that the council has no responsibility towards the village hall and has refused to allow it to be discussed at council meetings.

In summary, the outcome of the meeting did not conform to the framework suggested by Col Blakey who went to great lengths to set the parameters. My group believes we need to go back to the drawing board.

As I said at the meeting, the NVHG cannot support Mr Langman's proposal because this was not the project we were mandated by the village to pursue and we share the reservations expressed by the VHT about its viability. While we are content that he pursues an alternative plan, we continue to believe that the NVHG proposal, for which the MoD grant was made, is the only viable plan on the table and that the single objection to it can be overcome if mediation takes place in the spirit of Col Blakey's original email to you. It would be a tragedy if the MoD grant was lost if, in the event, the Langman proposal was stillborn when there is already a solution on the table.

Yours sincerely
Mike Fairchild
Chairman, NVHG