

**Notes of Open Meeting held on Sunday 13th January 2008 in All Saints' Church,
South Merstham**

Present: 57 persons

Apologies: Caroline Slater (Canada Hall W.I.); Peter and Suzanne Stephens (58 Nutfield Road); Councillor Graeme Crome; Denise Kinrade (6th Merstham Brownies); Nic Dodds; Kim Clarke; Pam Adams; Clive Davies

Introduction:

Peter Loosley (Churchwarden) introduced the meeting and outlined the form it would take.

The key outcomes of the meeting would be included in a summary in the next Crossways and be available to all present who would like it.

The public meeting had been called to explain the recent history of the redevelopment project; where we currently were with it and to seek some feedback from those present.

The open forum session would be chaired by the Rev Barry Goodwin, Southwark Diocese Parish Development Officer. Barry was a strong supporter of what we were trying to achieve here and had been kept closely informed of the project as it had developed through its various stages. The meeting would end with a final session summarising our findings. Peter then outlined some of the recent history as follows:-

As most attendees were probably already aware, in January last year we had been granted planning approval for a brand new development scheme which involved the demolition of the existing Canada Hall and the construction of a new church hall and community centre on the same site. The estimated cost of the scheme was roughly £750k and in April we submitted a formal application to the Lottery Fund for half of that sum on a matched funding basis – roughly £375k

Last September, we received the disappointing news that our bid had been unsuccessful. The lottery budget had been hugely over-subscribed and the competition for funds was extremely fierce. The Lottery felt that our application did not sufficiently demonstrate the need for the project and the consultation data upon which it was based had not been sufficiently open and inclusive and only distributed to current users of the hall.

Without this lottery funding, we were faced, at worst of meeting the whole of the £750k new build costs ourselves if we went ahead with the planning-approved scheme. As a fall-back position we had designed the original scheme to be phased in stages in case we only got some of the money we had bid for. However even Phase 1 alone would have cost around £400k.

To raise sums of this sort without a significant amount of grant or lottery funding would be extremely difficult if not impossible, particularly in today's economic climate. If attempted it could take 5 – 10 years to achieve and our need to have improved facilities and extra space is now urgent.

It was therefore decided by CHIG to look at other options and we looked again at what might be done to redevelop and extend the existing Canada Hall.

At the time the original scheme was produced, it was generally accepted that the existing Canada Hall was beyond its useful life. It had been erected as a temporary structure in the 1940's (albeit a very solid temporary structure) and there were known problems with the floor, drainage, and a close to time –expired roof together with a need for rewiring.

In any normal circumstances the building would be deemed beyond its useful life and uneconomical to repair and it was on that basis, allied to the fact that a new building would not attract VAT whereas a refurbishment would, that the decision was made at the time to demolish it and build new.

In rethinking our position, a structural survey was commissioned from the Michael Blacker Partnership and it contained nothing of which we were not already aware or which would physically rule out refurbishment.

CHIG believes that it would be possible to redevelop and extend the existing Canada Hall to provide adequate and updated facilities to meet our needs. To determine more accurately what those space and usage requirements are, we are planning to issue a questionnaire in the next couple of weeks to both existing and prospective users.

In the meantime fundraising continues, details of which are posted in church and Canada Hall and regularly updated.

There then followed a Q&A session chaired by Barry Goodwin and summarised briefly below:-

Q&A

Q. Did we have a figure for the cost of the refurbishment of Canada Hall to set against the cost of a new build?

A. Not yet as the requirement would need to be confirmed in more detail first (see later Q&A on the questionnaire)

Q. Any development needs substantial sums of money. The Lottery bid had proved unsuccessful, we had no firm commitment from Linden Homes as yet, was there any amount that the Local Authority were likely to provide?

A. Coun. M. Brunt explained that Linden Homes, in their development of Water Colour, had originally undertaken to provide the necessary land and build a community facility on the site. Recently they had applied to the Council to vary this provision. To remove the provision they would provide £350k towards community facilities. This application still has to go before the planning committee. Should their application succeed the above monies will be made available to share between different community schemes.

Project committees would have to submit an application if they wish to receive some of this money.

Local council money – there is less available for capital projects than previously.

Generally speaking there is less Local Council funding available for capital projects than previously.

Q. According to the press the local council has recently been granted in excess of £5million. Would we be likely to receive any of this?

A. Coun. M. Brunt explained that the council will receive £5.4million over 3 years but this will be mainly for green initiatives within the borough. [Most of the money will go to new projects and as such the Portland Drive Development will qualify for consideration]

Q. How much in total is already committed to the development of Canada Hall?

A. There are 2 separate funds 1) to cope with the running of the existing Canada Hall which shows a small surplus and 2) A Canada Hall Refurbishment Fund. These monies are held in restricted funds for use only on Canada Hall. The total in these funds to date inclusive of this year's fundraising is around £50k. Some of this will be needed for keeping the current building functional.

Q. Can we 'tap' our historical connections for funds?

A. Tim Whittle had previously written some years back, to the Canadian High Commission and Canadian Engineers. Neither application was successful.

We would continue publicising the redevelopment of the Hall on the church website with a view to attracting funders such as these.

Q. Hopefully we are starting a new phase – can all new developments be publicised and circulated to the wider community?

A. Communication up to now has been through Crossways magazine, the local press, public meetings and the leaflet drop. . We now have a database of representatives (individuals and group leaders), who will be emailed with any information as it appears. People present were invited to indicate on the 'register' if they too would like to be included in this. CHIG would keep its communication policy under constant review.

Q. How does the Portland Drive Development affect Canada Hall development plans? The Battlebridge Club, Newton Hazel Hall and the Oakley were all in a sad state so we DO need Canada Hall in this area. The (urgent) needs of the church were pointed out.

Q. An indication of when the questionnaire would be ready for circulation and a timeline for subsequent actions were requested.

A. Coun. M. Brunt with reference to the first question explained the efforts being made to break down the historic barriers within Merstham. The Portland Drive Development (P.D.D.) plans involve the Doctors – who need more surgery space; the library – whose role would include roles such as healthcare education etc.; the Epiphany church; community rooms and a cafe area. The P.D.D. project is now moving forward and the PCT have approved funding. It cannot however cater for all needs; we would still need a Canada Hall facility, on its present site, catering for the Water Colour development as well as the rest of South Merstham.

Rev. B. Goodwin agreed with M. Brunt stating there is a strong need for both facilities.

Rev. M. Randall stated the urgent need for more space for the children's groups, pointing out that the Vicarage may well not be available for use after she leaves her post in March.

A. Answering the timeline query – the questionnaire will be circulated to current and potential users and interested individuals. CHIG members are in contact with MCAG (Merstham Community Action Group) who can feed back information re other groups who may be interested in using our community facility.

The questionnaire will be refined after today's meeting and issued hopefully in about 2 weeks. The results should hopefully be collated and available around the end of March.

Q. Given that timeline do we need a 2-pronged approach in order to deal with immediate issues and those of a less urgent nature.

A. We are already looking at various options for providing extra spaces for Church use when the Vicarage is unavailable and will continue to work at this. This led to the following more general comments:-

It was suggested contacting local businesses to see if they would be interested in using a new hall facility for day-time meetings etc.

C. Dixie has been involved with the ongoing discussion about Canada Hall for 7+ years and he reminded people that questions were asked about needs and a wish list – now long ago. He expected that the needs and wishes would remain broadly similar today. We still need 2 different sized rooms with flexibility built-in etc. (He is happy to assist if any further help is required.) We need to improve the carbon footprint – with modern insulation etc. and he pointed out that in the long term, building costs will continue to rise.

One attendee had reservations about the way decisions had been made in the past and felt more consultation should take place with the wider community as to needs and aspirations. It was stated strongly that a decision needed to be made as to the way forward NOW.

It was wondered if the demise of the village hall at Nutfield meant we could have more potential users.

Canada Hall was an iconic building and any extensions needed to be in keeping/sympathy with the existing structure.

Q. Could the existing hall be joined to the Vicarage to serve jointly as a new facility with alternative vicarage accommodation found elsewhere?

A. Ownership and planning could be a problem.

Rev. B. Goodwin – No diocesan funds were available to help and there are very little funds available generally for capital projects.

Summary (Rev. B. Goodwin)

CHIG committee has worked very hard to keep this project going. They will take on board comments made about the consultation process and the questionnaire.

The good attendance at the meeting shows how important an issue this project is.

There is definitely a need for a church/community facility at this end of Merstham.

P. Loosley asked whether at this stage, a 'new build' was unrealistic and that therefore the questionnaire should be issued without reference to a new build.

This was not agreed – this could not happen until/unless we had a figure for the cost of refurbishment, therefore the option for new build must remain. And we would need to compare like-with-like in terms of size.

There was general consensus that the main purpose of the questionnaire was to establish the extent of the requirement and not necessarily whether it should be met via a new build or refurbishment solution.

Rev. B. Goodwin concluded by saying that Canada Hall would continue to try and meet the needs of the church and community. It was agreed that consultation was really important and people were encouraged to feed comments and views into CHIG to help them develop their proposals.

It was suggested we hold a prayer and gift day as had happened in the past.

The meeting closed at 12.45 pm.