

The British Red Cross site in Croxley Green is a community asset that Three Rivers District Council have been working to protect for over three years.

Since taking over the Property Portfolio at Three Rivers I have sought to involve Croxley Green Parish Council over the future of the site. I have met with Parish Councillors and listened carefully to their ideas, shared ours, and I have been keeping them up to date on the situation.

In addition to speaking with the Parish, I have also met with concerned residents individually to listen and answer their questions.

I am grateful to have been provided the opportunity at Council to respond to claims about Three Rivers' intentions over the site with the facts.

It is simply **not** true to suggest that Three Rivers want to "remove" a community space. The Council continues its efforts to provide a brand new, and crucially **more widely used**, community space on the site.

I used the hall as a child, but since then the British Red Cross have restricted use of the current hall for many years. The building itself also now needs significant investment and is in a dilapidated state.

Three Rivers would like the new hall to be unrestricted so that people of all ages in the community can enjoy it.

As far as I am aware, there has been no 'offer' from the Parish that would meet the objective of Three Rivers to have a more widely used community hall. It is in fact unclear how the Parish proposal would allow for **any** community use.

As I understand it, the Parish requested the British Red Cross assign them the lease for free to allow the Parish to move their entire offices and store their ranger equipment in the current building.

While I understand the Parish's desire for new offices, it is highly uncertain that the building could be used as office premises (almost certainly requiring planning permission for change-of-use) and not get in the way of enabling a more widely-used community hall – a key objective of Three Rivers.

Ultimately, the British Red Cross have the lease to the site and control what happens next.

Three Rivers have been engaged in negotiations for some time to agree the formal surrender of the lease and at this stage both parties are working towards an agreement in principle. It has proven difficult to agree to the terms which meet the British Red Cross's expectations.

Once agreement is reached, as the site is brownfield, affordable housing would be included on top of the new community hall as a critical step in relieving pressure on Green Belt. Lib Dem-run Three Rivers are fighting to protect as much of our Green Belt as possible from the huge Government housing targets.

Without using brownfield for housing, the Council is simply ineligible to protect any Green Belt.

We do not want to risk our Green Belt.

But we also want to see the site brought back into use to provide the **maximum benefit** to the community – a new hall, affordable housing or potentially other community uses.

For me, the proposal of Three Rivers is a win-win. It will provide a brand new and more widely used community hall and crucially help at the margin to protect our Green Belt.

From my meetings with the Parish, I asked whether the Parish would be interested in putting themselves forward to run the new hall for the benefit of the whole community. While other community groups have expressed interest, I've **not** yet had a response from the Parish. I am keen to further discuss this with them.

Three Rivers and the Parish have increasingly been working well together. In particular, our co-ordinated responses to Killingdown Farm planning appeal. I have been supporting the Parish and Residents Association in their appeal submissions, including recommending they have a joint representative to strengthen their appeal evidence. I was pleased they accepted my advice.

I really hope this positive and constructive relationship can be built upon to the benefit of the community.

Cllr Dominic Sokalski

District Councillor for Croxley Dickinsons

Three Rivers Lead Member for Resources (Finance) and Shared Services

ENDS