



The Council Offices
Community Way
Croxley Green, Rickmansworth
Hertfordshire WD3 3SU

Cllr Sarah Nelmes
Leader
Three Rivers District Council
Three Rivers House
Northway
Rickmansworth
Hertfordshire
WD3 1RL

Dear Cllr Nelmes,

The Red Cross Centre, Community Way, Croxley Green, Rickmansworth WD3 3HB

WITHOUT PREJUDICE

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the situation informally on the telephone. I think you asked me about Croxley Green Parish Council's intentions for the building and suggested the Parish Council make a proposal to TRDC. This letter is an informal response to your request.

As I am sure you know, our Clerk wrote to Joanne Wagstaffe on 25th February this year. (copy enclosed). As far as we know, there hasn't been a substantive response to that letter. I do appreciate that Covid19 has placed an enormous burden and responsibility on the District Council over this year. The Clerk is keen to progress things with Three Rivers Council officers on a more formal basis.

At the same time our Clerk wrote to the British Red Cross (BRC), requesting a response to a proposal he had made to them previously. The BRC responded and there was subsequent correspondence. On 17th June he received an e-mail from Ian Fraser in their property team:

"As you are of course aware, the Society's freeholder for the property is Three Rivers Council, following a change of personal (sic) in their estates team I have made contact with their Interim Property and Asset Manager and have requested the Council's view on the Parish Council's offer. The freeholders view to the proposal is integral to making progress with the matter as consents and approval will be needed. Again my apologies for the delay."

As I am sure you know, the land was provided by Rickmansworth Urban District Council (RUDC) to build a community centre. This provided a home for the Welcome Club, a well-established community group providing services for the older population, which had previously been housed in the Dickinson Institute in Croxley Green.

The local detachment of the British Red Cross Society (BRCS) took responsibility for raising the funds and constructing the building to meet those needs, and its operational needs. The funds were mainly provided by Hertfordshire County Council and RUDC, supported by local public subscription. The site and building were let to the BRCS on a restrictive one hundred year lease.

Over the years the BRCS organisational structure and operational needs have evolved and it expressed a wish to be divested of the cost of operating and maintaining the building and deliberately stopped letting other local organisations use the building.

There is very strong local support for retaining the building, which TRDC has listed as a community asset, for the use of the whole local community. Before we started considering the future of the building we investigated the situation with other community buildings in Croxley Green and established that all of them are well used by a wide range of voluntary groups as well as sociable activities. There is a continuing demand for indoor space during the day, in the evenings, and at weekends.

With BRC approval we arranged for a detailed survey of the condition of the building. This enabled us to estimate the liabilities and risks inherent in taking responsibility for it and the likely costs of repairing and updating the building.

The Parish Council's vision is either to take over the remaining lease with the restrictive covenants removed, or to secure a new lease, or to take over the freehold, and use the building as a Village Hall and for the Parish Council offices. We have investigated the options and consider the best approach would be to endow a Trust to operate the building on behalf of the community with support from the Parish Council.

From our discussions with the BRC we understand the complexity of the BRC position, and of TRDC's position. Whilst the Parish Council could, in principle, invest council tax payers' money in something of benefit to the local community, we are constrained in what responsibilities we can undertake and what financial liabilities we could incur.

We have made preliminary scoping calculations and determined that the building is unlikely to generate sufficient income as a community facility to meet the costs of repair and renewal to update it. However it should generate sufficient income to operate and maintain it for the foreseeable future, once it has been renovated and updated.

I also explained that the Parish Council will have to make a major investment in our current building (or find alternative accommodation). The existing building, which was originally purchased second hand, had an anticipated design life of only 25 years from new. We have occupied it for more than 25 years and it is now, quite literally, falling apart.

When we spoke I suggested an informal group of councillors from TRDC and the parish council might meet to explore the options for the future of the Red Cross Centre and establish whether there is a way to secure a viable future for the building for the whole community. I appreciate that it could have no authority or delegated responsibility, but it could be one way to tease out the issues as a basis to negotiate a formal offer and subsequent agreement.

I have taken the liberty of copying this letter to the ward Councillors for Croxley Green as I know they take a keen interest in the future of the building.

I look forward to hearing from you soon,

Yours sincerely,



Chairman
Croxley Green Parish Council

[Postscript: Letter hand delivered to Three Rivers District Council on December 7 2020. Parish Council is unable to verify the letter was circulated further]