

# CLAPHAM RECREATION GROUND TRUST

## NEWSLETTER 4 – DECEMBER 2017

Dear Clapham and Patching residents

It's been a difficult period since the last Newsletter but some important issues have been clarified. There's much to do but the way ahead – if not exactly easy - is easier to see, and we shall continue to work towards solutions which benefit the community.

### The Community Shop & Café

The Trustees recently met with all 6 Directors of CPCSCP Ltd, and asked them to explain what they saw as the remaining obstacles to further progress on the lease. The Directors identified five points: foul water drainage, rain-water dispersal, the building's foundations, project timescales, and rent.

We explained that we were keen to help as far as we could, and made the following proposals:

1. Permanent under-ground works can't be allowed, according to our legal advice, as they would impact on the future use of the land for its primary purpose of recreation. However, there are removable solutions, such as the one already being used for the drainage for the temporary toilet.
2. We will allow a new, larger soakaway for the rainwater from the roof; this would have to lie outside the plot being leased, but we have no objection to it being situated south of the building near the eastern boundary, where it would lie under the new path leading to the play area.
3. A removable system (or shallow concrete pads) could also be used for the base on which the building will stand. We await details of what is proposed on these three points.
4. We realise that more flexibility on timescales is needed, as the Directors of CPCSCP feel it will not be possible to raise the necessary £100,000 for the new building within a year – we have no problem in extending this to two years. We are waiting to hear the Directors' proposals on relaxing other timescale restrictions in the proposed lease; however, the lease cannot be completely open-ended as, if CPCSCP find themselves unable to build within a reasonable time, it may be necessary to look for other options.
5. As you know, the Trust does not have any funds, and since Arun DC stopped being responsible for all costs associated with the Recreation Ground at the end of March this year, the Trustees have been bearing all costs personally – obviously this cannot continue. However, we have offered a rent of £165 per month for the first three years (with a rent holiday of up to 3 months while the new building is being constructed), even though this will barely cover maintenance costs. After 3 years, the rent would need to go up, as we need to build up a modest contingency reserve. In addition, we feel honour bound to repay at least some of the considerable amounts already owing to past

and present Trustees when funds permit. The Trustees themselves cannot benefit financially under the Trust. We would take into account the commercial rate at the time for similar sites; the Directors would be free to refer the proposed rent to impartial third party review if they were unhappy with it, and we have undertaken to abide by the findings. The figure of £3600 per year, as stated at the 1<sup>st</sup> December meeting, is incorrect.

If CPCSCP do not feel that the business should cover the full cost of the ground rent directly, we suggested that they could adopt one (or more) of the following suggestions:

1. Go back to the 'membership' model of the original Shop/Café Project group, which at one time had, we understand, over 100 members. At, say, £10 per head per year, this could contribute significantly to the costs
2. Add a slight mark-up to café prices – reports on TripAdvisor mention what good value it is, and its customers/supporters might be happy to contribute to its running costs in this way.
3. Additional fund-raising, similar to that undertaken by previous occupants when, for example, raffles were held to raise funds to cover costs.

The Directors were dismissive of these suggestions – but what do you think?

However, the Directors have since responded in less than positive terms, being somewhat ambivalent about proposals 1-4, and rejecting the revised rent proposal absolutely. The Trustees can't reduce the first 3 years' rent any further, but we have offered a guarantee that the rent after 3 years will not exceed £250 per month, and might be less, depending (a) on the Trustees' financial position at that point and (b) on the findings of an independent rent review, if CPCSCP choose to take that route.

We agreed with the Directors that it was difficult to move any further forward without a full, legally-drafted lease in front of us; we are just awaiting their confirmation of agreement to pay for this before asking our solicitor to start work. If, on the other hand, the current Directors do decide to walk away after all, we very much hope that a fresh team can be found to carry the project forward, as we continue to believe in the value of a Community Benefit Society that will deliver a shop/café for the community.

None of the Trustees were able to attend the Public Meeting called by CPCSCP on 1<sup>st</sup> December, and to date we have not received Minutes of the meeting. However, the Directors have stated that they regarded the meeting as positive; we understand that strong support was expressed at the meeting for a new shop/café, and that they have accordingly agreed not to wind up the Company 'for the time being'.

Unfortunately we gather that considerable hostility was also expressed against the Trustees by Directors, Parish Councillors and others. For our part, we will continue to make every effort to work patiently, courteously and cooperatively with all; we very much regret that some people from the villages (and beyond) are making this so difficult, and we are extremely grateful for the many expressions of support we have received from other villagers.

We gather that a number of questions were asked, including:

- Why do the Trustees need money at all?
- Why does it have to be so much?
- Why does it all have to come from the ground rent for the Community Shop/Café?
- Will the rent go down after a sufficient reserve has been built up and any debts have been repaid?
- Why are underground works not permitted?
- Isn't the shop/café registered as an Asset of Community Value in the Clapham Neighbourhood Development Plan?

We have put together the answers to these in the attached document. They are also on our web page at <https://www.claphamandpatching-westsussex.org.uk/q-a>, where we will add answers to any further questions which are put to us.

### The replacement children's play area

As previously reported, the two groups – the Clapham Playscape Project Group and the Clapham Playground Restoration group – presented their ideas for the new play area at the meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> November, chaired by County Councillor Deborah Urquhart. It was agreed that the best location would be mid-way along the Southern boundary of the Rec, that the area should be fenced to keep children safe and dogs out, and that there should be a disabled-accessible path from The Street.

However, there are some differences between the two groups' ideas. CPPG (whose approach the Trustees have already endorsed) would like to see a natural-looking 'playscape' area in keeping with its setting. They would like to use predominantly natural materials such as timber (perhaps even locally sourced), and – as well as more traditional equipment - they plan to include such features as a raised mound with a tunnel through it and a slide on top. CPR are thinking of relatively conventional equipment on a flat area – you will find a copy of their brochure in The Junction. Naturally the Trustees would very much like to hear what residents think – if we are successful in bringing the two groups together, perhaps elements of both approaches could even be combined.

After the meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> November, Cllr Urquhart had very generously offered to mediate between the two groups, to try to find a mutually acceptable way of moving forward together. The Trustees gratefully accepted her offer, and undertook to accept whatever solution she came up with. However, at the Clapham Parish Council Meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> November it was stated – we are unclear by whom - that (in view of the Trustees' original offer of a lease) her offer to mediate was unnecessary at best, and unhelpful at worst. Deborah has therefore, most regrettably, withdrawn her offer.

Cllr Haydn Smith has since clarified his own position, stating 'Personally I applaud Deborah's efforts to get the two groups together'. We now therefore earnestly hope that this process can be revived (ideally through Deborah). We will do everything we can to make this happen, although unfortunately it will now have to wait until the New Year. If we can't find an independent mediator, we will meet separately with each group and then bring them together. We are confident that combining the ideas, enthusiasm and skills of both groups (and anyone else who is willing to help) will be the best way to deliver a new playground as speedily as possible.

We originally made the suggestion to the Parish Council of a possible lease for the playground area back in July, but to date we have received no formal response. We have now deferred having a meeting with the Council to discuss this possibility, until a mutually acceptable way forward has been agreed between the two groups; at that point we will be better able to consider whether or not there is a role for the Parish Council, and if so what it might be.

## Other matters

We have received advice from South Downs National Park on the clearance of overgrown nettles, brambles and scrub from the edges of the Rec; we may need to get planning permission to prune one or two trees, but otherwise there are no restrictions on what we plan to do. This clearance will dramatically increase the amount of land available for everyone's use. We are also taking advice from a tree surgeon on the condition of the Memorial Chestnut and whether any remedial works are needed.

As always, if you'd like to contact the Trustees about anything, our email is [crgtrustees@gmail.com](mailto:crgtrustees@gmail.com).

... and a Merry Christmas to all our readers, and a harmonious and constructive 2018!

The Trustees

December 2017