

Item 12: Thoughts on the future of Arden House

Ian Diggory, 14th February 2023

As reported under Item 16 of the January minutes, there was a meeting between Cllrs Wallage, Kellett and Diggory and two representatives from Believe Housing (BH) at Arden House (AH) to discuss possible options for reopening this community facility.

Following that meeting I was contacted by Damien Pearson from BH's Community Investment section who explained the types of grants that may be on offer to facilitate reopening of AH. He also put me in touch with someone who runs a cooking charity from a property that is leased from BH at a peppercorn rent. This property is similar to AH in having a tenant on the first floor, so there is a precedent for returning such properties to the local community.

I have contacted Andrew Savage who is the person at BH who deals with lease issues. He was aware that we had met his colleagues in AH. I told him that at this stage we were only interested in possibly registering an "expression of interest" in taking on a lease and that we need more information before making any decision. He agreed and suggested a meeting with him at AH. No date was set, but he said he would get back to me. He said any lease arrangement would take at least 6 months to set up, which may give us some breathing space to explore options and consult with the community.

Cllr Wallage and I had a call with Emily Burns (chief executive of DAY) to gauge their interest in taking on AH. Unsurprisingly DAY are preoccupied with JH purchase and AH would be a step too far for them. Cllr Wallage and I have discussed alternative organisation that might take on AH, such as the Village Partnership (VP). Cllr Wallage thinks they are unlikely to want to change their role as a volunteer led charity into something more formal such as a CIO or CIC and take on responsibility for managing AH.

However, even if we succeeded in identifying an organization to manage AH, one must consider the question of what exactly would be the purpose of AH if it reverted to the community? The village has functioned without AH for 3 years and the only people to enquire about its status appears to be Emily Burns and the PC. What sort of use would AH get? What groups/activities could be encouraged to use AH? How viable is AH as a community/business enterprise? This is where a business plan comes in, but unless that plan can provide realistic answers to these sorts of questions then we may well be better off putting our efforts and finances into supporting Jubilee Hall (JH), leaving BH to manage AH as they see fit.