

BCC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 12 SEPTEMBER 2017
WITNESS STATEMENT JENNY HUNT CHAIRMAN STOKE MANDEVILLE PARISH COUNCIL

The Localism Act 2011 s89 enabled lists of community assets of value to be compiled. Such assets had to comprise buildings and other land which further the social well being or social interests of the local community. Parish/Town Councils and other Community Groups and Organisations have the right to nominate such assets.

Early in 2015 Stoke Mandeville Parish Council reviewed assets within the Parish. Those identified included the BCC Sports and Social Club, a long standing asset originally established for BCC employees but later opened up to the local community including those from the nearby National Spinal Injuries Centre. Our reasons for submitting a bid were because of the particular importance of this site to the residents of Hawkslade and Stoke Leyes where no significant green space for sports or leisure exists. The site is the last green space in this area of our Parish and that side Aylesbury Town. The Sports field in itself is unequalled in quality. **At no time during the nomination process were we aware of any proposals of BCC for the future of the site.** . Since that time planning permission has been granted for 432 houses along Lower Road, 125 being on land directly opposite the Sports and Social Club and 190 on fields adjoining. None of these provide any such facilities and there is little land available with HS2 and the VALP taking a vast amount of agricultural land in the area.

February of 2015 – In learning of the Parish Council’s intention to nominate the site as an Asset of Community Value, BCC Facilities Management invited the PC to meet with them to discuss the proposed bid. Such meeting took place on **24 February 2015** with Oster Milambo and Gill Smith from BCC Facilities Management and Emma Jewson from the Agents Carter Jonas. It was made clear to us that the BCC budget was under significant pressure and that BCC would be seeking residential consent for this site. Also that “BCC would engage in consultation with the public and stakeholders to identify a mixed use redevelopment proposal for the whole site that would accommodate both housing and a community sports facility”. [letter to this effect received from Carter Jonas dated 25 April 2015]. The “sports facility” emerged to be an astro turf football pitch. The Parish Council agreed to reconsider the bid but ultimately decided to press ahead with the nomination.

19th March 2015 – submission to AVDC for the facility to be listed as an Asset of Community Value.

29th May 2015 – The nomination of the Parish Council was accepted by Aylesbury Vale District Council. Bucks County Council was sent a Notice of this decision and as the owner of the land was advised it is required to notify AVDC if they wish to enter into a relevant disposal of such. The registration is also with the Land Registry. Should the land be put up for disposal community interest groups would have six weeks to submit an expression of interest and six months within which to submit a bid.

21 July 2017 – We were alerted from a report on local Radio Station ‘Mix 96’ - “Loss Making Club to Close” in order to save £54k pa in revenue and to be sold off. The Cabinet Report for the meeting on **22nd July** was obtained R04.17 dated 19th July 2017 and on reading this I contacted a local member of the Cabinet for advice.

23 July 2017 - I wrote to BCC Cabinet Members, the Cabinet Member for Resources and our own county councillors criticizing the way the matter had been handled, advising of the Asset of Community Value Registration and that the Parish Council had not been advised or included in the work concerning the future of the Club. We would have expected this in view of the fact that this site is in our Parish and our nomination for the Registration of Asset of Community Value, to have been advised even as a matter of courtesy. It is our understanding that our elected County Councillors were also not aware. The Cabinet Member for Resources in responding to my letter of 21 July offered to meet with me as Chairman of the Parish Council. This did not go ahead due to holidays.

3rd August – the decision to close the Club and Sports Field was taken by BCC.

8 August 2017 – An extraordinary meeting of the Parish Council was held due to approaches from member of the club and the public. The Call In having already been requested.

We are grateful for this meeting to enable us to “have our say”. However, opportunities existed for BCC to contact the Parish Council for discussion about potential closure, as it did so readily in February 2015. There was no opportunity for the Parish Council, users of the site and members of the public to comment on these proposals prior to any decision being taken. In doing so the County Council has failed to follow HMG Cabinet Office Guidelines on Consultation, the most recent Principles for which were published in 2016.