

SHCA

Sovereign Harbour
Community
Association

(Registered Charity Number 1146249)

Trustees' Report

May 2016

Since 2013 the SHCA Trustees have been heavily involved in meetings and discussions relating to the provision and future management of the Sovereign Harbour Community Centre, and have been working closely with Eastbourne Borough Council and East Sussex County Council in its delivery and operation.

2015 started with great optimism for the development of the Community Centre. The Council had appointed Sea Change Sussex (SCS) to develop the Community Centre on Site Five to a design agreed by their Architects, SHRA and SHCA and approved by the Planning Committee. SHCA were to take over the completed Community Centre and had been assured the funds of £1.6M for the agreed building were secure, and Site Five was available for the construction. SHCA produced a realistic and detailed business plan based firmly on experience with community centres and all was set to move ahead. SCS and its Project Manager have, however, been unwilling to enter into any meaningful dialogue with the Association, which has members with comprehensive experience of running community centres.

It now appears that SCS have no specific experience of either developing or running community centres. Instead of listening to SHCA advice they are now imposing a change of location from Site Five to Site Seven, and a unilateral change of the approved design, which undermines the business plan published by SHCA and agreed by the Council. The "customer" for this project appears to be the CEO of EBC, so presumably the activities of SCS are under his direction.

Planning consent was granted in July 2015 and SHCA Trustees were advised by the SCS Project Manager that the construction would commence in September 2015, ready for occupation in the spring of 2016. In fact the Residents Association Committee were hopeful that this year's AGM would be held in the new Community Centre. However, from this point on and despite all the positive work having been undertaken by both SHCA and SHRA difficulties were starting to appear.

September 2015 came and went but without any sign of the developers. During all of this time we were continually being advised by the Developers' Project Manager that further sub-soil investigation work was necessary on the site but that things were still moving ahead. The old portacabins that were situated on Site Five were demolished ready for laying the foundations and building the Community Centre. Eventually a sign was erected on the Site formally advising Residents that the Site had been acquired by EBC for the new Community Centre; in the event, the site was never "acquired" it was only reserved. The sign has since been quietly removed. Yet another broken promise.

The SCS Project Manager was now advising SHCA that the building would commence shortly and would now be ready for the autumn of 2016. Surprise, surprise this was later changed to Boxing Day 2016 when the building would be ready to be handed over to SHCA. A flow chart was provided so that we could plot the progress.

In meetings held in December 2015 and again in January 2016 with Council Officers, Ward Councillors, SHRA, SCS and SCS Project Manager, SHCA were still being told that everything was on target for the Centre to be handed over on the 26th December 2016 give or take two weeks.

In anticipation of the Centre at last becoming a reality the Association earnestly started fund raising to furnish and equip the Community Centre. At the same

time negotiations with EBC had started with regard to the lease of the building. A local Solicitor had agreed to offer his services to the Association on a pro bono arrangement.

At the same time the Trustees were requested to start thinking about the internal decoration, what colours the Centre should be painted etc. The long held vision for the Community Centre was clearly in sight; or so we had been led to believe.

Then, as shown in the SHRA report, in February 2016 SHCA were advised that the Community Centre could not be implemented on Site Five due to contamination and would now be built on Site Seven, situated near the Harbour Medical Centre in North Harbour – bearing in mind a month earlier everything was still on target for Site Five. If the site was contaminated to the extent we are now led to believe why was money spent on this site and planning permission given?

On 23rd March, at yet another hastily arranged meeting with the Council Officers, SCS, Ward Councillors, Council officers, SHRA and Architect the bombshell was dropped. The design of the Community Centre for which planning permission had been granted and had taken months of meetings and discussions to achieve the design we felt most suitable for the Harbour needs would not fit on Site Seven.

A new design would need to be agreed as Site Five design addressed the site's southern aspect whereas for Site Seven the emphasis will be on the East and West elevations. Site Five was the site allocated in the S106 Agreement. However, as soon as the S.106 agreement was published, past experience led us strongly to believe that SHL would never release the site. This was reinforced by the fact that, although we had been assured that Site Five was both clean and available, SHL insisted that an alternative site should be written into the S.106 agreement. Despite having voiced our very serious concerns, EBC officers insisted there was nothing to worry about.

It was at this point that the SHCA Trustees together with the SHRA decided to walk away from the management of the Community Centre.

Over the past 18 months members of SHCA have attended over 30 meetings including:-

- Design planning meetings
- Financial meetings
- Meetings with potential funders
- Progress meetings
- Meetings with Council Officers and Solicitor regarding the proposed Lease arrangements, etc., etc.
- Seminars on funding
- Potential hirers of the Centre

Apart from project meetings SHCA Trustees have had to prepare a new Constitution and an application to the Charity Commission to change the structure of the Association in order to safeguard the SHCA's Trustees once the building was taken over.

Countless hours have been spent obtaining quotations from companies for tables, chairs, IT equipment, staging etc. Bear in mind all potential funders require three quotations for each item, as well as telephone calls to potential funders and hirers.

To date SHCA has raised a total of £2237.07, mostly from Residents of Sovereign Harbour. We would like to assure those residents who have so kindly contributed that these funds are held in a restrictive account and cannot be used for anything other than towards equipment for the Centre when it is built.

SHCA were also in discussion with a number of possible funders and had hoped to receive a substantial sum from them. This was apart from the promises of funds already made including:-

- £10,000 towards IT and Audio Visual equipment
- £10,000 from the Devolved Ward Budget
- A commitment from Asda that if SHCA could show that, with the aid of their Community Champion it had raised £30,000 their Trust would consider giving a further contribution of up to £10,000.
- Rotary Club of Sovereign Harbour had also indicated that they would be prepared to do some fundraising for the Centre
- An application to Awards for All was in the process of being written to allow SHCA to employ a Marketing Manager for six months to contact all Harbour Clubs and Societies who have shown an interest in using the Centre and other potential hirers in/and around Eastbourne and to prepare a program of events etc. once the Centre opened. Most of the deadlines for the applications have now come and gone.

The way that EBC and SCS have ridden rough-shod over previous agreements has left SHCA with no option but to withdraw from the project unless the original agreed design is re-instated. If EBC insists on throwing all this hard work away then it must take full responsibility for running whatever SCS is determined to build; without the support that SHCA had been previously committed to giving.

Because of the design change being proposed, SHCA no longer has confidence in the viability of the project. We still believe that both Site Five and the agreed design remain viable within the cost and technical parameters of the project.

Sadly all trust between SHCA, EBC and SCS has broken down. This is somewhat surprising as Eastbourne Borough Council prides itself on its links with the local community.

However, whilst SHCA has walked away from the management of the project, we will continue to take every opportunity, in conjunction with SHRA, to keep pressure on the Council to provide the much needed and long overdue Community Centre in Sovereign Harbour.

Des Davis
Chairman