



JAMES CAIN
(Rep no. 719485)
MATTER 11(Item 5)

CHRISTCHURCH AND EAST DORSET CORE STRATEGY
EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC

REPRESENTORS' STATEMENT RELATING TO:-
MATTERS AND ISSUES 11 – OTHER MATTERS
ITEM 5 – DRUITT HALL

On behalf of Drutt Hall Association Limited

August 2013

Background

1. Coles Miller Solicitors LLP is instructed by Druitt Hall Association Limited (DHAL) to submit this Statement and to take part in the relevant Hearing Session relating to Matters and Issues 11 – Other Matters (Item 5). A duly made representation was submitted (20th December 2012) during the Schedule of Proposed Changes to the Pre-Submission Document on behalf of the Friends of Druitt Hall – the DHAL has since become a registered company.
2. This Statement relates to the proposed removal of the following sentence within the Core Strategy Vision:-

“The provision of a new community facility in Christchurch town centre will be supported.”
3. The removal of the sentence was proposed for the first time in the Schedule of Proposed Changes (December 2012) to which there were over 30 public responses of opposition and zero responses advocating the withdrawal of the subject sentence. There has been overwhelming public support for the continuation of a community hall use on the Druitt Hall site and there have been positive references with regard to its importance for the past 10 years within policy documents of the local planning authority.
4. During a recent planning application submitted by Christchurch Borough Council to demolish the existing Druitt Hall (LPA Refers: 8/12/0480), there were over 200 letters and over 1000 signatures on a petition in opposition to those plans (refused 22nd January 2013).
5. The DHAL has now obtained outline planning permission (LPA Refers: 8/13/0185) to construct a new community hall on the existing Druitt Hall site (approved 28th June 2013). During the determination period of this application, there were over 730 letters of support. The existing Hall was built 60 years ago and is now a tired structure in need of replacement. The intention of DHAL is to build a replacement Hall.
6. Given this overwhelming public support for a community facility around the High Street, the proposal to withdraw the sentence from the Core Strategy set out in paragraph 2 of this Statement appears to have been put forward without taking account of the desires of the people of Christchurch. This brief history of Druitt Hall is considered relevant when testing the soundness of removing the subject sentence as it is evident that there is an overwhelming desire and need for a community facility in the shape of a large meeting hall within Christchurch town centre.

Tests of Soundness

7. It is submitted that the removal of the sentence supporting a new community facility in the town centre is unsound on the basis of not being positively prepared, not being justified and being inconsistent with national policy.

Positively Prepared

8. If the sentence were to be deleted there would be conflict between doing so and other proposed policy provisions within the Core Strategy. Policy LN6 of the Core Strategy recognises the existing demographics of the town of Christchurch and the need to support a significant elderly and retired population through the provision of community facilities.
9. In terms of whether the document has been positively prepared, there is a clear underlying strategy to meet an objectively assessed requirement (community facility for largely elderly demographic) and the removal of the sentence would be contrary to this. Furthermore, the Core Strategy identifies the town centre as being a focus of residential and commercial growth and therefore the need for such a community facility is only going to increase as the population rises. This is set out within Core Strategy Policy KS1 which identifies Christchurch as a 'main settlement' which '*will provide the major focus for community development*'.

Justified

10. The need for a new community facility in a central location is apparent. There is a dearth of alternative meeting space within the town centre of Christchurch, particularly lacking is a large meeting hall around the High Street. Some existing meeting places around the High Street provide too small a facility or are too expensive. Other potential meeting places are located too far from bus stops to be accessible by the elderly and immobile.
11. The weak justification put forward by the local authority for the proposed deletion of the subject sentence is on the basis that a community facility can still be considered under Core Strategy Policy LN6. In the interests of consistency, the aspiration for a new community facility in the town centre should be specifically referred to within the Core Strategy Vision.
12. There has also been correspondence as highlighted within Mr Christopher Chope's (MP) representation (Ref: 654962) to suggest that the phrase '*will be supported*' could be construed as the Council being exposed to a financial commitment. Given that the Core Strategy will set out the broad development strategy for the joint councils until 2028, any day to day financial commitments should pale into insignificance compared with the long term aspiration for a community hall. The wholesale deletion of the sentence is not justified on this basis. The people of Christchurch have shown a strong desire for a community facility to be maintained around the High Street and of course the Council has an obligation under a covenant to provide land for a replacement Hall within Druitt Gardens.

Consistent with National Policy

13. Paragraphs 7, 23, 69, 70 and 71 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) need to be assessed in relation to this topic. The decision to delete the sentence is evidently not compliant with the NPPF. Paragraph 7 highlights three dimensions of the economic, social and environmental roles that the planning system plays in achieving sustainable development. There is an established need to support '*strong, vibrant and*

healthy communities...with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being".

14. Paragraph 23 of the NPPF recognises the need to place town centres at the heart of their communities, for the retention of existing markets and the allocation of community facilities within the town centre. There is a thriving indoor market which takes place weekly on every market day and an aspiration for a replacement facility around the High Street would allow this to continue in accordance with the NPPF.
15. Paragraph 69 promotes the notion of inclusive communities and the requirement to *'involve all sections of the community in planning decisions'*. Without proffering any reasoned justification for the deletion of the subject sentence, the local authority is patently ignoring a large section of the community that wishes for a new facility.
16. Paragraph 70 outlines the need to deliver social, recreational and cultural facilities that services the needs of the community. Positive planning is required to provide *'community places (such as meeting places) to enhance the sustainability of communities'* and to *'guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs'*. Any decision to delete the aspiration for a new community hall would clearly be contrary to this national policy provision.

Summary

17. In terms of being positively prepared, justified or consistent with national policy, where is the public support for not having an aspiration for a new community hall within the town centre? The decision to propose the deletion of the subject sentence appears to have been taken by some members of the Council contrary to the wishes of the people of Christchurch.
18. It would be an unwarranted and unsound change of policy to drop the longstanding aspiration for a providing a new community hall around the High Street.
19. Why doesn't the Council have an aspiration any longer for a new community facility and where is the evidence base (social or economic) to show unequivocally that a community facility is no longer required?
20. It is respectfully requested that this Statement be read in conjunction with the Response form and appendices submitted by Coles Miller Solicitors LLP during the Schedule of Proposed Changes consultation on 20th December 2012. The author will be accompanied by Elliot Marx from DHAL (who has submitted a duly made representation during the course of the process) at the Hearing Session should the Inspector have any operational, historical or business-related questions.