



Exmouth Town Council –Newsletter

Newsletter 6

November 2009

Rolle College Site

This newsletter concentrates on one topic in view of the unraveling story concerning Rolle College. This is an attempt to bring everyone up to speed with what is happening and upon efforts being made to bring about a good result for the town.

Disappointment

A lot of water has flowed under the bridge since the last newsletter which said ‘Exmouth Town Council made a last minute bid to delay a decision by Devon County Council’s Cabinet to NOT purchase the Rolle College site for educational purposes. The Cabinet nevertheless decided not to purchase which is disappointing to all those who hoped to see a continued use of the site for education’.

Turned into Action

The reaction from this decision galvanized the community into action in a way, possibly never seen before in Exmouth. There is a strong sense of unity brought about by incredulity arising from the decision. There are a number of reasons for this:-

- (1) That the Rolle College building which was owned by Devon County Council had to be transferred over by Government Statute for no consideration to the University of Plymouth;
- (2) That the University of Plymouth could, just some five years ago, build a brand new building with state of the art lecture theatre ‘The Owen Building’ for around £3 million and then walk away from it;
- (3) That the University of Plymouth is entitled to sell off the site and all its halls of residence as its own asset when this originally belonged to the community through the Local Authority;
- (4) That if the site is to continue to be used for Further Education the Local Authorities have to buy it back if not at market value for near market value;
- (5) That the University of Plymouth has no conscience about acting as a tough negotiator because it needs to fund its ambitions to become one of a select class of ‘World Class’ Universities. A worthy ambition but at a significant cost to our town;
- (6) That we were all led to believe by Devon County Council that purchase of the site was imminent for Further Education Purposes.

Decision Led by the Leader of Devon County Council

What has changed to result in the Cabinet of Devon County Council deciding that purchase was no longer viable?

- (1) The Government Agency (The Learning and Skills Council) with the funding for Further Education has run out of funds meaning that Devon County Council is the only body left with sufficient funds able to purchase the site;
- (2) There has been an election and a new leader is approaching the finances of Devon County Council in a different way;
- (3) To purchase the site may cost £3million but renovation and running costs could be significantly higher and Devon County Council in common with other Principal Councils is under pressure from Central Government financially to make savings reducing flexibility to maneuver,
- (4) The County Council says that it can provide for Further Education within the existing provision of colleges at Tiverton, Exeter and Bicton.

Where are the Facts?

Exmouth Town Council and local Community groups do not think that Devon County have considered all the options available and certainly have not sought to examine all the facts in sufficient detail. They have pressed hard to overturn the Cabinet Decision. The County Council Scrutiny Committee met on 8th October to review the Cabinet decision not to buy the Rolle Site. This was deferred after local representatives gave evidence (4 minutes each allowed for them to speak), so that the Leader and Portfolio Holder (like the minister for education at Devon County Council) could be present. It met again on 30th October where both attended and were given most of the meeting, about 2 hours to explain the reasons for the Cabinet decision. During this time the information put forward by the local witnesses was debunked and new information was provided at the meeting, leaving no opportunity for challenge.

The Scrutiny Committee upheld the Cabinet decision not to purchase. On 3rd November we all traipsed up to County Hall one more time to ask questions of cabinet. All our questions asked in advance and further supplementary questions on the day were swept away. The Leader did allow other County Councillors to speak but then declared the matter determined with no further vote being taken.

There is no covenant or gift of the land at Rolle College to the town which some people believe exists. The land and buildings were transferred by statute to the University of Plymouth from Devon County Council who had no choice but to transfer at no cost. The University are the 'Legal' owners of the site and this has HM Land Registry searches have been carried out to check up on this point. Like it or not we have to deal with this fact in law.

Exmouth Action

Exmouth Town Council has been appalled that the matter has reached this position without a full and detailed report looking at all possible education/community options for the Rolle College Site. As a result an Extraordinary Council meeting was convened on Monday 9th November to which the public were invited. Over 100 attended young and old. It was felt that 'The Community' had a right to be properly heard on this subject and strong views were expressed and support given for the Town to find its own solution was clear.

The Council reached the following decision by unanimous vote:-

- a) **That the Town Council Task and Finish Forum on Rolle be requested to urgently meet with key community representatives and the Property Director of the University of Plymouth to find out the key facts concerning the possible purchase of land and property on the Rolle College site;**
- b) **That the TAFF be requested to seek clarification on the facts surrounding the issue;**
- c) **That subject to (a) further meetings be held with all necessary interested parties including businesses to explore all opportunities with a view to seeking a positive solution for Exmouth;**
- d) **To keep progress in the public domain except where detailed negotiations on price may need to be conducted in confidence to achieve the best terms.**

Taking on the Task

The Task and Finish Forum has already been arranged for Thursday 12th November so things are moving fast to keep up the momentum. With this meeting we hope to establish the facts about the site directly with the University of Plymouth. Exmouth Community College is planning to hold an Extraordinary Meeting of its Governing Body to look at the situation from its point of view. The Community Groups are exploring the need to set up a Community Interest Company to act on behalf of the town through which possible ownership of the site could be arranged and the receipt of funds if this becomes necessary. The Exmouth Community Association is working to develop a business plan with all interested parties.

Look on our website for the Council Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on 9th November. Also a news page will be started on the home page of www.exmouth.gov.uk to keep abreast of developments.

Giving it our Best Shot

This is a big task for the town likened to David versus Goliath. The Town Council budget of £300,000 compares to the Devon County Council budget of £1.4billion and that helps to put our task into perspective. We will be looking to find a way to keep this site or a part of it for the community in some way or another. It is early days and there can be no promises that this endeavor will work but there are no rewards for faint hearts and everyone involved is going to give this their best shot for Exmouth and our young people.

Forth Coming Events

Watch out for:-

- Christmas Cracker weekend event in town starting on 4th December;
- New Year fireworks and more at midnight on the seafront;

For more information – contact the Town Clerk on 01395 276167, visit the Town Hall, contact your Local Councillor or visit www.exmouth.gov.uk

Any comments or views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Exmouth Town Council. The newsletter is edited by the Town Clerk.