

Question to the EHDC Leader, Cllr Ben Crystall:

In September 2022 EHDC formally recognised the Water Lane Hall to be an Asset of Community Value, yet the perception in Bishop's Stortford is that the Council is still intent on proceeding with the proposal to dispose of the Hall along with its other assets on the Old River Lane site by transferring them to Cityheart for development of the site for a paltry sum or, possibly at nil cost in the case of the Hall, compared with the cost to the Council of their purchase.

In the meantime, there has twice been an extension of the lease of the hall to the URC church, demonstrating its ongoing utility and value to the community, though without any reasoned reply to alternative bids such as that of 17 March 2023 submitted by Community Initiative (BS) and Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation setting out several ownership and operating scenarios to preserve this asset.

Given that the Water Lane Hall was designated by EHC an Asset of Community Value, what process is EHDC now following to allow the community the option to retain the building for community use, noting its (EHCs) own policies including CFLR8, before it takes an irrevocable decision to hand it over to Cityheart, potentially for demolition?

Response:

From Cllr Crystall (EHDC) to your question at the Council meeting last night 14.12.23.

I want to thank Mr Woodward for his question, and for reminding us about Water Lane Hall's ongoing value for the community.

As we know, the United Reform Church leases the building and is responsible for the hiring of the hall and management of bookings. We hope that groups that currently use the hall will be able to continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

East Herts Council's medium term financial plan and budget proposals are due to go to Executive at a meeting on the 21st, December 2023. In these papers, to be published imminently, a sum of around £170,000 has been earmarked for maintenance works of Water Lane Hall. As the budget proposals will explain in more detail, we intend to keep the Hall operational for continued community use until timescales for building the arts centre are clear.