



HHU3A Chairman  
23 Southway  
Burgess Hill  
West Sussex  
RH15 9SY

12<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Councillors,  
Mid Sussex District Council  
Oaklands Rd,  
Haywards Heath  
RH16 1SS

Dear Councillors,

#### **Potential Closure of Clair Hall – Cabinet Meeting 14<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

Since the announcement that MSDC had potential plans to permanently close Clair Hall we have been inundated with calls and enquiries from our members. From our perspective this is a much used and needed facility. We used the facility on a weekly basis to accommodate various group meetings alongside our social and information meetings. The venue provides an opportunity for people to get together not only to learn about a specific interest but to combat loneliness and isolation – something that has been very much at the forefront of government thinking, even more now with the impact of COVID. Our group members are buoyed by the fact that at some point group and social meetings will recommence but if Clair Hall is set to remain closed when restrictions are lifted this will have a negative effect on their well-being.

It is accepted that there are other venues within Haywards Heath that can host small group meetings but from our experience these are fully booked most of the time. Once meetings can resume, there will be greater demand for large rooms while social distancing restrictions continue. Our needs require the availability of small and much larger facilities.

We have read the report prepared by Judy Holmes for the Cabinet meeting on Monday 14 September and would like to make the following observations:

*Recommendation 2.iii. Request officers to commission work to develop a business case for the potential inclusion of a modern community facility as part of the future regeneration of this site or other sites in the town centre.*

**This implies that there is no guarantee that a modern community facility will be built, or when this would happen.**

*49. An alternative, low-cost option would be to establish the site as a chargeable car park, requiring drivers to pay by phone using the MiPermit app. This would require a change to the Council's Off Street Parking Order (which is likely to take approximately 3 months), but would provide a straightforward, low cost means of managing the use of the site until such time as its longer term future is decided.*

**This discriminates against the older population as many people in the age group do not have Smart phones and therefore would be unable to use the proposed payment method.**

*51. Officers are working closely with Places Leisure to map all regular users of the hall and will be contacting them individually with a view to better understanding their needs and supporting them to find suitable alternative local venues where required.*

**We believe this should take place before any decisions are made regarding closure of the Hall.**

*63. Clair Hall has ramped access to the front doors, level access throughout the public areas and accessible toilet facilities; The Hall is in an excellent location for public transport.*

**Clair Hall is a most suitable venue for our members, with excellent public transport available, convenience of car parking and easy access to the building. Some of our groups have been requesting a move to Clair Hall from other halls due to access difficulties elsewhere.**

*Equality assessment 1.3 Evidence is available from the list of users of Clair Hall. We will work with the users of the Hall to try to assist them with securing alternative venues. Many groups that use the hall are reassessing their needs for physical meeting places following the pandemic and the government guidance and may therefore no longer wish to or be able to physically meet.*

**No-one from MSDC has contacted the Haywards Heath & District U3A to identify our plans and requirements for the future. Whilst some of our groups have utilised technology to keep in touch during the pandemic all our members are looking forward to resuming face-to-face meetings and social gatherings as soon as this is possible.**

*Part 2 Assessment of Impact. Providing a venue for specific age groups. Clair Hall provides a meeting place for groups catering largely for older people such as U3A. The Council will work with the groups who use Clair Hall to investigate possible alternative suitable venues, which might include the new Age UK hall close to Beech Hurst.*

**There are issues here which must be assessed including the need for sufficient car parking and access to public transport.**

*Part 3 Key findings. The main groups using Clair Hall as a meeting place with connections to the protected groups relate to age. • • Engagement with the users of Clair Hall to determine their requirements for entertainment and meeting facilities, and to advise on alternative arrangements.*

**When will this happen? No time frame is provided for this action to take place. U3A members are keen to restart meetings as soon as that is possible so need this action to happen as a priority.**

It is our opinion that Clair Hall should remain open until alternative premises have been identified with a clear time frame for any proposed development to be built, to avoid unnecessary loss of an important amenity and upsetting disruption for our members.

We would like to request that any decision is deferred until discussions have taken place between MSDC officers and the U3A to ensure that suitable alternative premises are available.

Yours sincerely,

Wendy Gundry  
Chairman – Haywards Heath & District U3A