

10th December 2022

To whom it may concern:

Comments and observations from the Yateley Society regarding the proposal from the Starburst Foundation to lease the Yateley Village Hall

Trustees of the Yateley Society attended an initial meeting with YTC and other parties to discuss the way forwards for the Yateley Village Hall on 4/7/22 but heard nothing further despite several enquires as to progress.

We were encouraged to be contacted by the Starburst Foundation (Charity number: 1152478) on 24/11/22 and invited Peter Woodford (from Starburst) to our committee meeting on the 30/11/22 to share their plans to revitalise this important community asset and piece of Yateley's heritage.

We requested a copy of the Starburst proposal from the YTC Clerk on 8/12/22 as it was not on the YTC website initially. Having now had time to read the proposal, and noted that it was dated 28/11/22 (two days before we met with Starburst), we have some comments and observations to make:

1. YTC should be aware that the school previously owned by the current owner of Hurst Lodge School was put into administration by HMRC due to non-payment of taxes. It was also issued with a warning notice for regulatory failings by the Department of Education and had to apply for retrospective planning permission for planning breaches. The new school, which was established as a company in 2020, is in large premises (Yateley Hall) with only 124 pupils to support its outgoings. Its total assets in its last published accounts were £73,612, so its future and its ability to pay rent maybe uncertain. The involvement of Hurst Lodge School outlined in the proposal is far more extensive than the Yateley Society trustees were led to believe when we met with Peter Woodford initially on the 30/11/22.

The proposal also mentions that the Starburst Foundation pantomime makes a profit and that some of this profit could be bid for to support costs. As we know from recent events, theatre productions and the theatres in which they are performed are very vulnerable and so this support cannot be guaranteed.

We are concerned that YTC may be vulnerable if they accept this proposal but the School or Starburst Foundation experience financial difficulties again sometime in the future.

2. We would assume that any working group set up by YTC to assess this proposal would explore and challenge the financial viability of the proposed funding regime to understand whether it is sustainable and diverse enough to allow trustees sufficient flexibility to direct their activities in accordance with local needs and interests. For example, the programme of works envisages significant capital expenditure in 2023 but does not make it clear where this will come from, and the forecasted outgoings are a lot less than the historic expenditure of the village hall which was between £23-65,000 per annum in recent years. The listed outgoings do not include rates, licensing for the bar, stocking the bar, etc.
3. Hurst Lodge School is already having to apply for retrospective planning permission for planning breaches at its new premises in Yateley Hall.

4. We are very supportive of the idea of a Heritage room but being on the first floor means accessibility is an issue. Ideally a Heritage room would be an accessible dedicated area with reference books, computers etc. for use by visitors and manned by volunteers to answer questions, with the option to have one off displays and run 'bring your archives' sessions. In addition to this, given the proposed timetable of use provided in the proposal, there would be very few opportunities for local authority schools (and there are 5 within walking distance) to access and benefit from the facility. In contrast, Hurst Lodge School, where the majority of students are likely to live outside the parish, would have considerable access.
5. The Starburst Foundation proposal states that a new charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) called Starburst Property would be established which will exist purely to oversee the property attached to the charity.

The activities of the CIO will be as follows:

- To maintain the fabric of Yateley Village Hall for the benefit of the residents of Yateley and the surrounding areas.

The charitable objectives of this CIO are:

- To hold the property on trust for the purpose of a village hall, for the use of the local community of and around the civil parish of Yateley in the county of Hampshire, without distinction of political religious or other opinions. These include use for meetings, classes, education and other forms of recreation and leisure time occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life for the said inhabitants.

It is clear from the proposal that the intention is that during the week, the hall will be used from 8-4 by neighbouring Hurst Lodge School during term time. The proposal also mentions, in the context of the school: "Exploration of future working with ideas of Inclusive theatre and performance workshops, summer schools or regular classes." Hurst Lodge School is not a charity; It is a small private special needs school with 124 pupils, most of which will not live in Yateley.

The use of the hall for these periods would preclude its daytime use during weekdays by the residents of Yateley, the persons for whom the facilities are primarily intended. We are concerned that this may mean that the CIO would not be properly fulfilling its objects.

If the CIO was not economically viable, this would leave the Council vulnerable, as the modifications to the hall may need to be reversed to make it more usable by other hirers.

6. We note that Yateley Village Hall (charity number: 1163962), is a community interest company and has as its object: to hold the property on trust for the purpose of a village hall for the use of the inhabitants of the civil parish of Yateley in the county of Hampshire without distinction of political religious or other opinions including use for meetings lectures and classes and for other forms of recreation and leisure time occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life for the said inhabitants. It was established to help children/young people/elderly/old people/other charities or voluntary bodies and other defined groups. Its latest accounts say on page 2 that it ceased trading on 31st August 2022 but it still has funds and is still on the register of charities. Does this charity still exist? Depending on the answer, how will this affect what YTC can do with the Village Hall going forwards?

7. This proposal raises a number of issues that need to be understood and addressed by YTC before it can make a decision. We are very supportive of any organisation stepping up to manage the Village Hall, as it's an important part of our local heritage, but would not wish it to happen to the detriment of the wider community.

If we can provide any further detail on what has been mentioned above, then please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards,

Alison

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Chair

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