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Theydon Bois Parish Council
The Parish Office
The Village Hall
Coppice Row
Theydon Bois
CM16 7ER

Dear Councillors,

Youth Centre building and land

I have become aware of the contents of a letter of the 13th May addressed to the Parish Council by Councillors Berry, Dodman, Emmett, Sowerby and Vincent, which I presume will be referred to at the Council meeting to take place on Thursday 28th May.

That such an ill-conceived letter could have been produced by a faction within the Council following the open discussion of this matter at the meeting of the 5th May is appalling, and only reinforces my view that it was the wisest course for me to have pursued independently the putting in place of the Village Green Registration application. Whilst the application remains in place and is not resolved no development can take place on this site. It is this alone that has made Essex County Council prepared to discuss the possibility of the disposal of the site so that it can be retained on behalf of the village.

My discussions with Essex County Council have been in an entirely personal capacity throughout and not on behalf of the Parish Council so the question of my "authority" to deal with ECC does not arise. However, I have been happy to work jointly with Councillors in seeking a way forward which would result in the village retaining these facilities. No "offer" has been made on behalf of the Parish Council or anyone else. The purpose of the exercise has been to prevent development, to establish whether the property could be bought and, if so, the likely price that would prove acceptable to Essex County Council and to the village. So far, the development of ten houses has been thwarted, in spite of planning permission having been obtained by ECC after appeal.

To repeat what I told the open Parish Council meeting on 5th May, having been prevented thus far from developing ten houses, ECC subsequently proposed a reduced development of three houses with the village getting the remainder of the land for a nominal sum. This was subject to numerous onerous conditions, not least the withdrawal of my Village Green application, which would have immediately opened the door for ECC to carry out the development for

which they have existing permission. The details were passed to the barrister, who had originally been advising me, for advice. His response was such that the discussions moved no further forward at that time. I subsequently asked ECC how much they might consider selling the entire site for. After apparently taking professional advice, they indicated that they would expect a figure of the order of £600,000 for the whole site to which I expressed my view that, in the circumstances that currently surround the site, specifically the village green application with all of its uncertainty and cost of a Public Enquiry and related cost for all parties, that figure was entirely unrealistic and that a more realistic approach would be no better than half that figure.

ECC chose to put that figure to their Members, describing it as "an offer" and have now made it known that an offer of that sum would be accepted.

Bearing in mind that this would enable the village to retain all of the land without any housing development, including all of the Scout site, on which they currently hold a lease with only 11 years remaining, my own view is that this is a very attractive proposition and is the reason that I put the matter to the Parish Council on 5th May. The purpose of this is to establish whether the Parish Council as a whole is prepared to pursue arrangements for public consultation with a view to putting in place a Public Works Loan for the acquisition of these community facilities.

I am strongly of the view that, if successful, the ownership of this site should not be by the Parish Council but, if not by the Village Association, as in the case of the new village hall, then by a charitable trust created for the purpose. This was also discussed at the 5th May meeting and would bring benefits of stamp duty and other tax savings, including reduced council tax. An added advantage is that such an arrangement keeps the facilities outside the local political arena with its pointless infighting on the part of some people, as is evidenced by the letter to which I am now replying.

The irony is that the last paragraph of the letter in question confirms that the signatories have "no objection to the purchase of the property for £300,000 providing it has the approval of the majority of residents" What a grudging attitude to what I hope and expect will come to be seen as a very satisfactory outcome for our village.

Yours faithfully



Roy Newland