



WPC involvement with CCT

There were many previous exchanges between WPC and OCC on the CCT prior to 2013, mainly concerned with the lack of information how the CCT funds were managed. In January 2013 the first formal meeting between WPC councillors and OCC Officers took place which included as one of the four topics discussed was giving Watlington a voice in the management of the CCT and bringing 33 High Street into beneficial use. The meeting decided that Watlington would be better served by an arrangement for putting Watlington suggestions or proposals to the Trustees. This eventually led to a public consultation in December 2014 which generated only nine responses, 1 in favour of freehold disposal of 33 High Street, and 8 in favour of refurbishment of the building and its use for short term lettings.

Although occasional meetings with OCC officers continued, the poor turnout for this consultation effectively stalled progress on the future involvement of WPC in management of the CCT until mid-2015 when the suggestion was made by OCC that WPC take over the trusteeship entirely. Following further delays from a variety of causes, in February 2017 Watlington Parish Council agreed to go ahead with transfer of the trusteeship. Since then, there have been yet more delays, including covid, inclusion of the car park in the CCT land, access to 10 Davenport Place and subsequent planning proposals for 10 Davenport Place.

A "Shadow Trustee Body" was set up in 2016 with membership drawn equally from the parish council and from the Friends of Watlington Library (FOWL) with the intention that it be expanded to include other residents of the town once the transfer of the charity had been completed. In November 2018, WPC and FOWL signed a joint memorandum of understanding to establish a basis for managing the CCT once it had been transferred to Watlington control. In the period since then solicitors employed by WPC have carried out all the necessary checks for transfer of the CCT property from OCC to Watlington control, although a few questions remain.

WPC capability in running a charity

OCC has quite correctly questioned the parish council's capability in running a charity. WPC has a direct equivalent in the Town Hall charity body. Management of the Town Hall was passed to the parish council over 100 years ago and is now, and has been for over 20 years, run by the Watlington Town Hall Charity Body. The charity has a single physical asset, the Town Hall building built in 1643. In addition, the charity has a sinking fund established to cover long term repairs to the building such as replacement of the roof. The management body for the charity is drawn from parish councillors and residents of the town. In parallel with what is proposed for the CCT, WPC is the custodian trustee for the charity, but the charity body operates entirely independently of WPC. It receives an annual sum from WPC and generates income from letting the hall and the undercroft, with the latter being used as a fruit and vegetable market three days a week. The charity pays WPC an annual fee for use of WPC staff in cleaning the building and managing lettings. In recent years efforts have concentrated on making the hall itself more attractive as a venue for community events through improved heating and redecoration, as well as a battle to control damp in the walls. Rewiring of the building is currently being planned.

In addition to the Town Hall charity which parallels to a large extent the structure proposed for the CCT, there are other charities based in Watlington from which experience of charity management could be drawn to supplement that provided by the Town Hall Charity. These include the

Watlington Support Fund which includes in its governance that two of its eight trustees be appointed by WPC. This charity is an amalgam of several charities and has as its objective to provide support to local people with financial, health and disability problems. It manages a substantial fund for this purpose. A second substantial charity based in Watlington is the Watlington Club which has as its central asset a property placed in trust for the benefit of the residents of Watlington by Rev. Hillgrove Coxe, the husband of Charlotte Coxe. The Watlington Club has no direct link with the parish council. It is home to the local tennis, bowls and squash clubs.

Current position

The CCT Shadow Trustee Body has not met for some time, primarily because of a reluctance of people to commit further time to something that did not appear to be progressing, as well as the interruptions generated by covid. Attached is a copy of the email we sent in April 2021 summarising the situation as it was then.

You will be aware of the initiative from a Watlington resident, Jeremy Irons, to put a refugee family into the house for a year. That project is progressing well with a lot of the necessary infrastructure (power, water and drainage) now in progress. The parish council supports him in this work.

The future

There is no point in WPC involvement in management of the trust without a plan for future use of 33 High Street. The presence of an historic building in a prime position on the High Street standing unused for 10 or more years was the prime driver behind WPC trying to get involved in the management of the CCT in the first place. When / if the CCT is transferred to WPC as has been proposed, this will be a focus of the council's input into the charity body.

Although the Parish Council's wish is for the complete transfer of the CCT to Watlington control, it might be that OCC will find it easier to carry out the transfer in two stages; an initial phase where the capital assets remain with OCC as the custodian trustee (following the model described in the final paragraph of the previous page) but with a managing body set up with membership drawn from both OCC and Watlington. The existing Charlotte Coxe Trust Committee (this committee) would continue as it is to provide OCC councillor oversight of the transfer process. The new managing body would take on tasks to provide a gradual resolution of the issues needed to bring 33 High Street back into use. This sounds complicated, but it will provide OCC with full control of all the CCT assets until such time as it able to transfer them, but allow progress to be made on 33 High Street subject to full budgetary control by OCC.

We have over recent years had many suggestions from residents as individuals or groups for use of 33 High Street, some of which are very ambitious. At its simplest this could be refurbishment of the building to provide a two-bedroom home to be let under short term (annual) rentals, with the income from this used to generate a continuing income for other community projects. At the most adventurous (and expensive) end of the spectrum is development of a classroom building in the rear garden to be used to provide a studio for art and craft work or for cookery classes. While nothing is ruled out at this stage, a more middle of the road solution would be to use the ground floor as a space available for meetings or individual tuition classes, with the upper floor converted into a self-contained single bedroom flat. The upstairs bathroom at present is excessively large and could feasibly be split in two to provide both a kitchen and a toilet / shower room.

However, a fundamental requirement of whatever is decided is that it should generate at least some income to support ongoing maintenance of the trusts assets.

From: ian-WPC <ian-wpc@ian-hill.org.uk>
Sent: 09 April 2021 17:41
To: Greg Stacy; Steve Harrod; 'annabadcock1@gmail.com'; 'Sharan Uppal'
Cc: Kristina Tynan

Subject: Transfer of trusteeship of the Charlotte Coxe Charity

It is now over five years since we started on this transfer and eight years since we first met with OCC to discuss the charity. This is a short review of the progress made and the current state of the transfer. Very little appears to have happened over the past year mainly as a consequence of constraints resulting from Covid isolation. With the current easing of the situation we now want to get the process underway again and to understand what the current obstacles to progress are.

We are aware that this month is far from being an ideal time to push progress on this because of the OCC elections, the need for completion of end of year accounts and most probably a backlog of other work as a result of the shutdowns. Nevertheless getting a clear picture of what still needs to be done will allow all parties to focus on pushing this forward.

In summary, the position as we understand it is as follows:

- We have seen Charlotte Coxe Trust (CCT) accounts up to year ending March 2018, but nothing more recent than that;
- We have seen the lease documents for the parking spaces, garages and the flat above the library;
- We have the draft lease arrangements for the library dated 30 June 2016, but have no record of the lease ever being finalised;
- Our solicitors have carried out the necessary checks for the transfer of the property but still require an explicit statement of what would be transferred with the CCT, and possibly a few other issues;
- We have carried out our own due diligence assessment of the transfer, but this probably now needs to be refreshed;
- We are aware of the changes in the lease for the parking space that provides access to the rear of 10 Davenport Place, and have agreed the 50% overage split between the CCT and the County Council should the land accessed through this route be used to create a second (or more) residential property on that land;
- We are not aware what progress, if any, has been made by OCC in approaching the Charities Commission on transfer of the custodian trustee role to WPC.

The priorities for WPC are:

- Resolution of the remaining unresolved issues between LGP (our solicitors for the transfer of the assets of the trust) and the County Council;
- Establishing what the current position is regarding transfer of the trusteeship for the CCT.

Some months ago I suggested that a joint meeting of OCC staff from Law & Governance and from Capital Assets & Investments with representatives of WPC and our solicitors might be helpful in establishing the current progress and the outstanding issues yet to be resolved. If you are still willing to participate in such a discussion we would be happy to arrange an on-line meeting, or if you would prefer, join one organised by OCC. To get involvement of our County Councillor this should be arranged for a date as soon as possible after the election results are published.

Regards Ian Hill

Watlington Parish Council