

Rudloe Green and Community Centre

Why would Corsham councillor Philip Whalley, who has no particular housing remit and who has fought tooth and nail against development in Corsham, make a representation at Wiltshire Council's Cabinet meeting in Salisbury in June 2018 in support of the 'regeneration' of Rudloe Estate which would see the demolition of Rudloe Community Centre and the loss of Rudloe Green?

It seems that Wiltshire Council's slogan 'Where Everybody Matters' should be qualified with 'But Some Matter More Than Others'. Would this councillor give over Corsham Recreation Ground on Meriton Avenue to 'regeneration'? The answer is, of course, no. But, in his eyes, sanctioning the loss of Rudloe Green (Rudloe's recreation ground) and Rudloe Community Centre is alright.

The upshot of the Cabinet meeting was that Wiltshire Council's assets (including the Community Centre and the Green) at Rudloe be given over to the GreenSquare organisation on terms to be agreed. **It should be noted that those terms have not yet been agreed and there is a far brighter, more prosperous future for Rudloe outside this agreement.** That brighter future sees the Community Centre and Green becoming the first Rudloe assets of Box Parish Council, the Community Centre becoming a family centre for therapies and other activities under the auspices of Camomile Family, a successful organisation already operating in Corsham, and the Green remaining a de facto village green as it has been for the past 75 years. See the case for this in the file 'Case for a brighter future for Rudloe Estate' in the accompanying paper.

GreenSquare's proposed 'regeneration' will be illustrated through options at the public consultation event on 4th July at Corsham School, Broadwood Avenue (4pm-6:30pm). But all these options will involve the demolition of Rudloe Community Centre and the 1970s homes at the 'top end' of the estate's central 'island' and the loss of the precious Green. Writers Iain Sinclair and Jonathan Meades describe regeneration as 'an incipient threat', 'a payday without end for the demolition community' and 'an outright fib'.

The outright regeneration fib is supported by the associated fibs **a.** that the outcome of deliberations by the, yet to be constituted, Steering Group will be anything other than one of the preordained outcomes required by GreenSquare and **b.** that the Community Centre is beyond repair and must be demolished and **c.** that the houses at the 'top' of the estate's central island have problems and also must be demolished.

With regard to fib a., it will be interesting to note the full constitution of the Steering Group, its minutes (which, I would hope, will be available to the public) and how much attention is given to those who require the brighter future of a successful Community Centre and vibrant Rudloe Green.

Regarding fib b., there are no major problems with the Community Centre that would require its demolition. Demolition would only be required because the Centre interferes with GreenSquare's plans. Confirmation of the state of the Centre could be achieved through examination by a structural (or other) engineer. In order to reveal the fib, I will institute and pay for such an examination.

Fib c. is extraordinary. If you had a problem with some aspect of your house, would any of the possible solutions be 'demolish the house'? A rumour is that damp is the problem, but our (myself and her majesty) first house, in an old terrace in Corsham, had a significant damp problem which

was remedied through a modern (chemical) solution. Also, renovation is far more cost effective and environmentally friendly than demolition and rebuilding.

And if, god forbid, GreenSquare does manage to get its way by playing the trump cards of 'sustainable development' and 'affordable housing' can you imagine the disruption, apart from the loss of the Community Centre and the Green, that will be caused to the life of the estate. The Bellway development across the Bradford Road started last October. Nine months on and every day brings a cacophony of noise, vehicle movements both on- and off-site, traffic disruption and so on. And this site will probably not be completed until sometime in 2020. Such loss of the normal amenity of everyday life on Rudloe Estate, with no Green for the kids to play on for the best part of two years (and the rump of a proposed green beyond that), would be disastrous for the community. And the proposed Rudloe Estate 'regeneration' would involve demolition before construction.

It should not be forgotten how we arrived at this state of affairs. It was through a previous 'regeneration' at the turn of the century when North Wilts District Council made the disastrous decision to demolish the old, successful Club and replace it with the current £1 million (best part of) offering which was, not long after, declared 'not fit for purpose'. And the houses built in place of the Club (Club Row) are completely out of character with the estate. So here we go again - piling miserable decision on miserable decision at the expense of the taxpayer/ratepayer.

It is worth repeating here a paragraph from the 17th April 2019 article on the Rudloe website, Rudloe Estate News webpage (<https://www.rudloescene.co.uk/news/rudloe/rudloe-estate/>) ... 'The North Wilts Open Space Study, here: http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/northwiltsopen_space_study.pdf, designates Rudloe Green as Public Open Space (specifically a Local Park in para 4.41, table 8) within an area, Corsham and Rudloe, "where the deficiencies of Public Open Space are most acute" (para 4.76). Also, the Wiltshire Open Spaces Study 2015 – 2026, which can be found here: <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/wiltshire-open-space-study-draft.pdf>, in section 8.1.3 (Existing provision to be protected), states that the starting point of any policy adopted by the Council should be that all open space should be afforded protection unless it can be proved it is not required'.

So Wiltshire Council's records state that Rudloe Green is Public Open Space and must be protected. But we have forgotten that Rudloe Estate is seen as a place (see first two paras above) where the slogan 'Where Everybody Matters' is conveniently forgotten and previous, important designations (protected Public Open Space) can be pushed aside. Forget GreenSquare's 4th July public consultation - the people have already spoken. They have confirmed that Rudloe Green must be protected. The one-hundred-and-four representations made by local people in the Village Green application of April this year affirm the importance of the Green in the life of the estate.

What is now required is that Box Parish Council take the initiative on this matter, not just through its Neighbourhood Plan which should confirm the importance of and requirement for Rudloe Green and Rudloe Community Centre but through immediate action on an alternative to GreenSquare's disastrous proposals. A proposed plan for a bright, prosperous future for the Green and Centre is given in the accompanying paper 'Case for a brighter future for Rudloe Estate'.

Paul Turner
29 Springfield Close
07803 295291

Case for a brighter future for Rudloe Estate

According to statistics published on the Box Parish website, at the time of a 2011 survey of Box residents, there were 1,755 households in the parish. Through recent research, we find that there are currently (in 2019) 658 households at Rudloe which is 37% of the Box Parish total.

From Box Parish Accounts 2018-19, we find that Box Parish Council's fixed assets (the value of all the property owned) is almost £18 million. The value of assets at Rudloe is nil, £0.

This state of affairs illustrates that the Parish Council's support is completely skewed to Box village itself; it is therefore about time that the Parish Council undertook to support significant community assets at Rudloe - Rudloe Community Centre and Rudloe Green.

The Parish Council should know that the Centre and Green are owned by Wiltshire Council and following a decision at its Cabinet meeting in June 2018, it was decided that these 'assets' would be handed over to GreenSquare subject to a formal agreement. That agreement has not yet come to fruition.

It is common knowledge, through a plan published in 2015, that GreenSquare proposes to demolish the Community Centre and all the houses (except one which is privately owned) built in the late 70s in the central 'island' of the estate. GreenSquare would then massively increase the density of the estate by building all over this newly-created 'bombsite'. An article dated 30th June 2019 here: <https://www.rudloescene.co.uk/news/rudloe/rudloe-estate/> (and a number of earlier articles) discusses what a disaster this would bring about for the Rudloe community.

One-hundred-and-four representations were made by the people of Rudloe in support of the April 2019 Village Green application. The representations indicated what a vital role Rudloe Green had played over their and, in many cases, their children's and grandchildren's lifetimes. Rudloe Green has been a de facto village green for 75 years and should remain so. Those children and grandchildren would never forgive Wiltshire Council and GreenSquare if the Green is built on.

There could be a bright future ahead for the Community Centre. Camomile Family (formerly Camomile Cafe), now a Community Interest Company, runs a successful enterprise in Corsham High Street (see <http://camomilecafe.com/>). The company is thriving so much that it needs to expand but cannot do so in its current location. Rudloe Community Centre would provide an ideal location with its substantial spaces, accessible toilets, a dedicated car park, bus stops close by and access to green space. Camomile pleaded their case at the Wiltshire Council Cabinet meeting in June 2018 but the proposition failed to find a sympathetic ear.

Being now a Community Interest Company and with its aims of family support, including not just children but parents and grandparents also, Camomile is in an ideal position to procure funding from different, perhaps charitable organisations. Notwithstanding this potential support, Box Parish Council could, with Wiltshire Council's support, take on the freehold (or perhaps have a leasing arrangement) of Rudloe Community Centre (the Parish Council's first asset at Rudloe!). Some of the Parish Council's 'cash in hand' (£183,000 as at April 2019) along with investment from other quarters (substantial Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments from the Bellway and proposed ex-RAF Rudloe site in Westwells Road are, or are proposed to be, spent elsewhere, not in Rudloe!) could be used to reconfigure/refurbish the Centre (although, actually, no significant alterations are required).

Camomile pays a substantial five-figure sum in rental alone for its High Street property. If Box Parish Council invested in this project, as the new 'landlord' of Rudloe Community Centre, it would, no doubt, be able to come to an agreement with Camomile on the rental rate. Assuming a suitable rate could be agreed, this would be a win-win situation for both parties. In addition, other organisations, clubs etc that have used the Centre in the past (eg karate, choir, bingo etc) could negotiate a return to the Centre with Camomile and/or Box Parish Council.

The Camomile enterprise seems an ideal fit not just for the building but for the Rudloe Community also. Its website highlights 'Babies & Children', 'Baby Massage', 'Hypnobirthing', 'Mums & Dads', 'Delicious Food', 'Shop' and much more besides. This project would offer a bright, prosperous future for the Rudloe community.

Paul Turner

29 Springfield Close

07803 295291

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