

Statement By Chairman – On Behalf of the Coddendam Centre
CIO – Parish Council Meeting 18th January 2022.

Nearly 3 years ago I was asked by Coddendam Parish Council if I would set up a charity to take on this Community and Sports Hall. With the support of Treasurer Ray Collins, founding Trustees, volunteers and what we envisaged as a partnership with our Parish Council, we established The Coddendam Centre CIO and we jointly celebrated a difficult, but successful transfer at the end of 2019.

The existing council reserves for the premises and the balance of the budget the PC had received from District Council & Community precept, were transferred to allow us to see out the rest of the financial year. The charity was not 'given' £50,000 as has sometimes been suggested.

The transfer included a commitment that the annual precept support of over 15 years would continue. It was jointly recognised that the community facility was unlikely ever to break even, although the charity shared a voluntary determination to reduce the demand on the precept by 50% in four years. We also came to an agreement that we would take on the PC's responsibilities for the estate and they would transfer the budget allocation. The transfer was on the clear premise and legal basis of 'unencumbered' ie, historical public loans and suchlike would not be the responsibility of the charity.

Despite the COVID challenge within six months of starting and what was eventually to prove £48,000 of repairs and reparation because of poor maintenance in the past, we managed at a particularly important time, to keep the premises going for the health and wellbeing of all, with the support of volunteers, all our benefactors including district and county councils.

In November 2020 we made it clear that had we known what we were letting ourselves in, we would have declined the original invitation!

It's been suggested that lesser organisations would have resigned or handed the premises back. We however had the encouragement of so many, including the collaboration of the shop, church, PCC, History club and local charities in the Coddendam Community Response Group plus from across the region. We thus managed in our first budget to reduce our demand on the community rates/precept by 15% and go on this year to reduce it a further 15%. In real terms, if you remove the estate management budget we took on for the PC (and which incidentally, you were instrumental in raising the costs to us by over 20%), the cost to the community that we are now debating will be £6,585 compared to £13,020 less than two years ago. £6,585 is less than £1.80 per month for each household.

In real terms our net budget proposal represents, 20.4% of the total precept, compared with 40.4% when under the control of the Parish Council. Even if you try to re-introduce the 15-year-old building loan, which you originally agreed was excluded, it will still have reduced the demand on the community by 14.7%. A not too shabby achievement under the circumstances, whichever way you look at it,

This week, after a wait of nearly three months, you announced that, if you take away the estate costs we are carrying for you, that you were going to give us a £235 contribution from the community precept towards running the Coddendam Centre. (1.8 % of our original budget proposal).

Whatever the challenges you face, suggesting we compensate you with our reserves or ask other charities to, is not in the spirit of the partnership you presented at the onset.

Our reserves are an audited minimum for the scale of business we run. We have already independently raised over £60,000 to meet costs of repairs and COVID and avoided making demands on you/the community. We have never come to you with a begging

bowl despite the appalling challenges we have faced and have already halved our call on the precept.

You have suggested we are providing subsidised services for those other than the immediate community. We are proud to provide services to a wider audience including local villages, all without whom, it's even more unlikely the Coddendam Centre would be sustainable. Our budget is not over-stated or under-stated, we had to explain to you last year that we were running a business to survive. Our budget is expertly honed, reviewed weekly and annual accounts independently audited. Our monthly forecast has been on target consistently for nearly two years.

You suggest we are too ambitious and hark back to the ancient objection that the Coddendam Centre when first built 18 years ago was oversped. We 'are where we are' and determined to make the most of it for the people of Coddendam. We've already expanded use, added value and improved environmental credentials.

This week you graciously and unexpectedly congratulated us on our progress. Unexpectedly, because at no point in the past in the past two years as far as we have experienced, have you offered empathy for the challenges we were facing. If anything, although we tend not to be the type of people who burst into tears, you have with respect made the budget process unpleasant and protracted. You have since indicated directly and indirectly that this budget is set.

Should you proceed on this path, although we have presented options including our resignation, our overriding impression, will be of a disappointment that you have retreated from what was to be a partnership and that as an organisation, you can no longer be trusted.

Thank you