

# UPDATE ON DRUITT HALL

A meeting was held Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> September to outline and discuss the plans for a new Community Hall for Christchurch which would provide a meeting place for a wide range of local organisations and act as a Hub to offer on-site management, marketing, mailing, membership and other support services for all local Societies and Clubs which wish to be included in the project.

The meeting was a very positive one.

Over 80 people attended, and another 40 sent apologies with messages of support because they were unable to attend. The room was packed with residents and members of the public concerned about DrUITt Hall, Friends of DrUITt Hall supporters, and members, volunteers for, and representatives of the following groups, (many of which are user groups of the current hall):

Age Concern, Brendoncare Clubs Dorset, Christchurch Aviation Society, Christchurch Citizens' Association, Christchurch and District Arts (cadARTS), Christchurch Food Festival Education Trust, Christchurch Community Partnership, Christchurch Lions, Christchurch Neighbourhood Cars, Christchurch Priory Church, Christchurch Round Table, Christchurch U3A, Country Markets, Countryside Volunteers, Friars Cliff Residents' Assoc, Friends of DrUITt Hall, the History Shop, the Labour Party, Longbow Legacy, Miniature Games, Regent Centre Board, Royal Naval Association Christchurch Branch, SAMRA (Stanpit and Mudeford Residents' Assoc) Transition Town Christchurch.

Also attending were 7 current CBC Councillors (including the Mayor), and a number of former councillors and mayors, and the Agent for Christopher Chope MP.

After a buffet, there was an introduction by Alistair Somerville Ford who is the Chairman of the Institute of Commercial Management, a registered charity. He has made an offer of funding to refurbish the current Hall and keep it running for **up to** 5 years, during which time local groups could use it as a meeting space and to increase their membership and activities, while the project to build a New Hall, funded by him, is progressed.

The New Hall would help the regeneration of Christchurch and would incorporate a local heritage and history museum. It might be sited in DrUITt Gardens or on another site.

Referring to background issues and plans to build a replacement DrUITt Hall going back over some years, he indicated that he wanted to put the past behind us and get everyone cooperating to move forward positively together. He then handed over to Michael Turvey, Secretary of the Christchurch Community Partnership, to facilitate an extremely lively and enthusiastic Open Forum.

When asked for their reaction Councillors declined to comment, saying they had not been informed of the proposal. Several residents expressed disbelief that this offer could be rejected by the Council. Cllr. Sally Derham Wilkes then volunteered to facilitate a meeting between Alistair Ford and the Council.

The Council proposal to demolish the current hall (Christchurch's only Coronation Memorial and in constant community use for nearly 60 years) without a realistic prospect of a replacement has been unpopular with residents. A total of 2,020 people signed one of the three petitions opposing demolition.

One of the Friends of DrUITt Hall said " This timely offer of funding moves things forward very positively at a crucial juncture. People will want to know that their elected representatives will act to progress this without delay."

We await news.