

From : **Councillor Eve Coles. Chairman Recreation Committee.**

## **ALTERNATIVE LOCATIONS FOR A YOUTH CENTRE**

The Recreation Committee has it as a major priority this year to try and identify a site for a Youth Centre which can command a wide degree of support. We believe that progress in the past has been hampered by a failure to reach consensus about a site.

The process of improving youth facilities began last January in a meeting with young people to canvass their views and find out more about the sorts of things they wanted. This meeting was organised by the Recreation Committee and chaired by Don Davidson. It was clear at that meeting that a Youth Centre away from the School campus was a key aspiration for young people in the town. Opinion was divided between those wanting a sports-oriented centre at Greystones and others wanting a more arts-oriented space in the Town Centre.

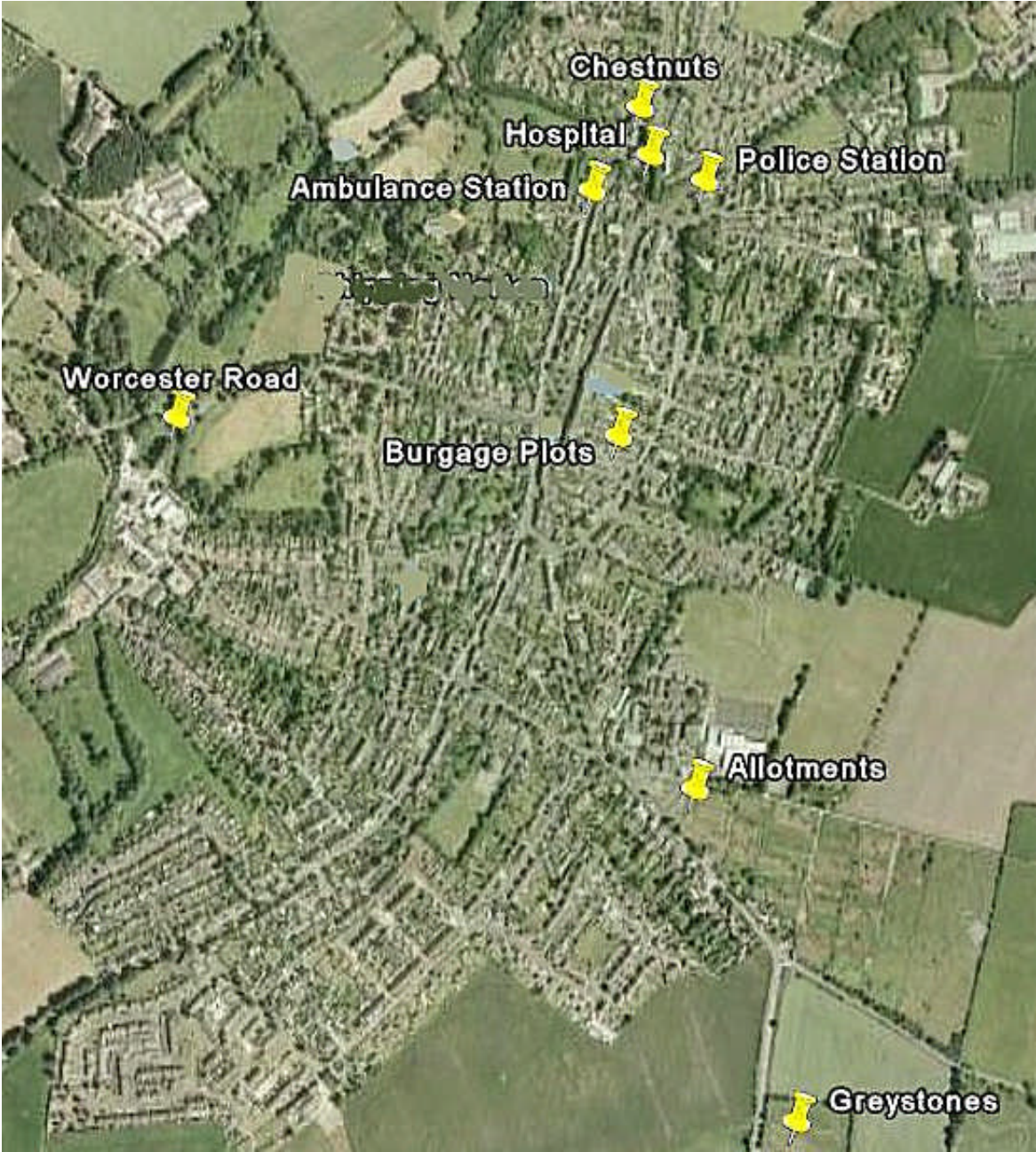
The young people accepted that it would take time to progress a viable plan for a Youth Centre. In the meantime a MUGA and events in the Town Hall received strong support as activities that could be organised quickly in the short term. We are absolutely delighted that Councillors Jo Graves and myself working with the Town Clerk and WODC have been successful in winning a Lottery grant for a MUGA and teen shelter on the Common which should be in place by next summer. Another Committee member (Councillor Withers) has now taken over Enigma and is planning to organise live music and discos in the Town Hall this winter.

I am very keen to maintain the momentum which is now underway. The Council have been asked to submit their ideas about the location of key facilities in the town as part of the Local Plan process. Obviously the Youth Centre is a very high priority. Two councillors have undertaken the job of summarising the main site options for a Youth Centre so these could be considered by the Recreation Committee. They have together produced the attached report.

The Recreation Committee have discussed parts of the report and have formed a strong preference for the present hospital site. We would now like to seek the views of all other Councillors.

Eve Coles

**THE MAIN OPTIONS**



## Allotments Site



## **Description**

The huge Allotments site is bounded by Burford Road Glyme Lane and the Coach Park. The land is owned by the William Fowler Trust who are charged to provide allotments for the “poor people” of the town. In the event that there is not sufficient demand for allotments the Trust is empowered to sell land or “use it for the good of the poor people”. It is a moot point as to whether the whole area is fully utilised or not and just how strong the real demand is for properly looking after an allotment (rather than being attracted to the “idea” of having one). There may be areas of the site which are not suitable for cultivation at all.

## **Strengths**

- Superb central and safe location. Convenient for the Leisure centre, MUGA and school playing fields. This probably means the Centre would not have to have a “ball” area of its own.
- Noise unlikely to be a problem – very few close residential neighbours
- The land effectively belongs to the town and could presumably be made available at a peppercorn rent.
- There is widespread comment that the allotments are not fully occupied or properly looked after and that perhaps part of the area could be put to better use. A Youth Centre would be seen to be a really positive “modern” utilisation of a small part of the land in line with the objectives of the original bequest (recreation for deprived members of the community)
- The site is very flexible and it should be possible to identify a specific “acceptable” plot after detailed consultation with neighbours, the School and allotment holders.

## **Weaknesses**

- The location is too close to the school and in these terms does not offer much advantage over the existing Youth Centre  
Young people will not be ideal neighbours for the allotment holders
- Young people would probably get blamed for any damage or thefts in the allotments
- A number of allotment holders would be very badly affected by this proposal and their understandable objection is guaranteed

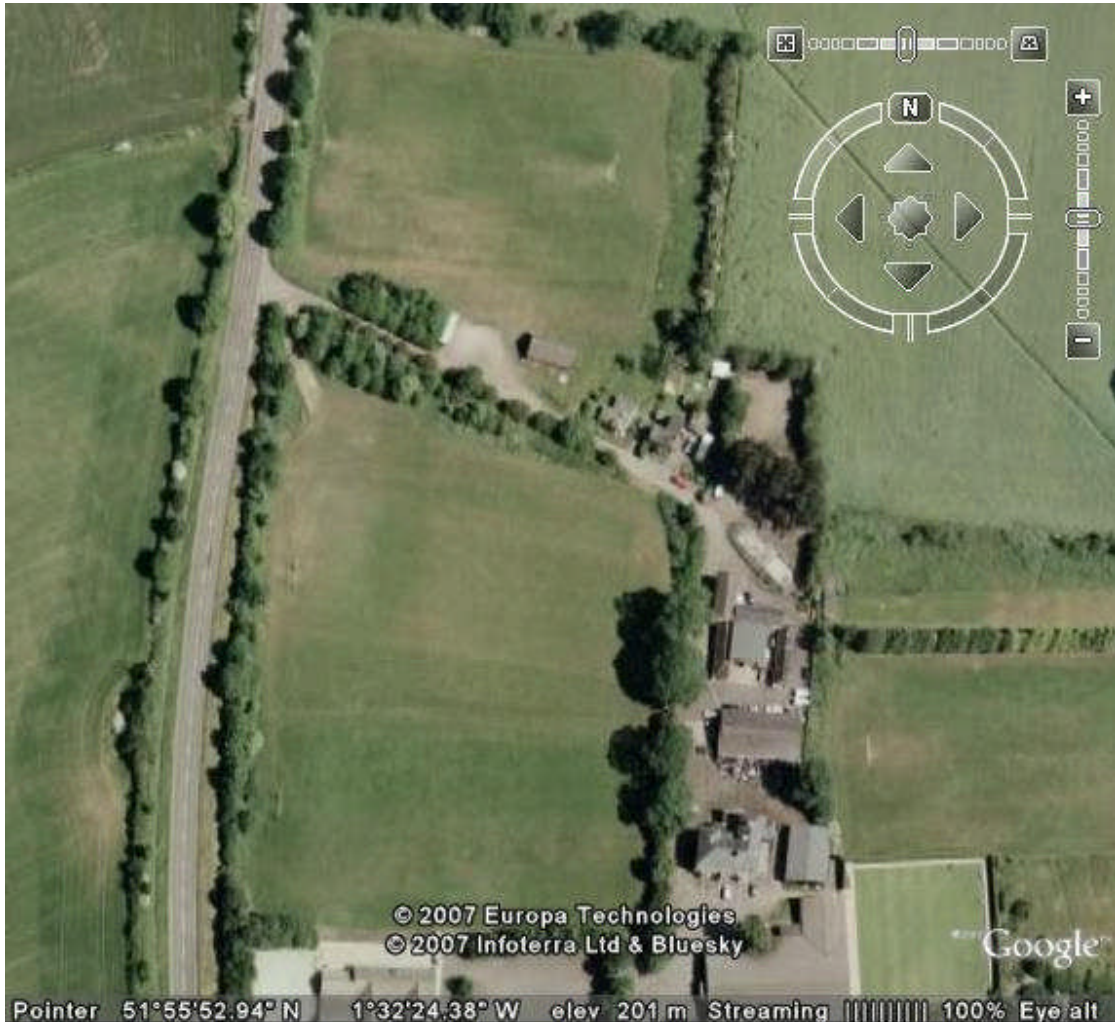
## **Opportunities**

- There is this single chance to make available a suitable piece of land at no real cost to local councils. All the other sites would involve some complex financial dealings. The area involved would really be a very small part of the total allotments area and seems a small sacrifice to make for such overwhelming benefit
- Having secured a piece of land , all efforts could be concentrated on raising funds (from Section 106, Local Fundraising, Lottery, etc) for the building itself and an endowment to ensure adequate staffing and continuing maintenance.

## **Threats**

- Using “allotment” land would probably provoke very strong resentment from a significant number of people. If there are other options it would probably be best to pursue those first. The allotments site is not under any threat. This option is not going to go away and will be available well into the future. Who knows if allotments will continue to be so popular when global warming produces a drought every summer?

## Greystones Site



### Description

Grey stones is primarily a Sports and Recreation complex set off the Buford Road just outside the town. The land mainly belongs to the Town Council. However an “industrial” area just behind Greystones House itself is owned by WODC and there is a piece of land owned by Thames Water. The site is home to the hugely successful and expanding Rugby Club. The Bowls Club, the Scouts, the Rifle Club (does this still exist?) and Chippy Swifts. Greystones House (which until recently housed the Nortonians and the Silver Band) is now completely unsafe and will cost a fortune to re-furbish. Behind the house are several industrial buildings leased by WODC to car breakers. There is also a house which houses WODC tenants. The whole area north of Greystones House, the Rugby Club and the Bowls Club desperately needs sorting out. The Chippy Swifts rent a football field at the northern extremity of the complex from the Town

Council. There is a changing room next to the field which is in a terrible state. The access roads throughout the site are in bad condition and there are continual disputes about their upkeep. The simple fact is that incredibly cheap, long leases were granted by a previous generation of City fathers to the sports clubs. The rents go nowhere near covering maintenance and overheads. Two clubs have developed their sites and now attract large numbers of members and visitors which makes for increased wear and tear on the roads. Additionally the Town Council is facing the huge costs of sorting out Greystones House which was originally intended as a social focus for the complex but instead has become run down and a major liability.

There is no doubt that the Greystones site needs a major overhaul. There are some big fundamental problems to be confronted. – Not least the fate of the house. Some people see the site as offering a quick and practical solution to the problem of finding a Youth Centre location. However, there is a danger that we could make an already very confused situation even worse with real potential for conflict with existing tenants.

Nobody has so far precisely pin-pointed a project to be evaluated. There is no possibility that Greystones House could provide any sort of usable Centre. It would need a complete re-furbishment and even then would provide a warren of small rooms which is not what is required. It would not be adjacent to any games-playing area – which is what people seem to think is most important. One viable possibility seems to be a new purpose-built centre (including changing rooms for the Chippy Swifts) carved out of the present football-playing area and probably placed close to the Burford Road itself. This is the option which is considered here.

### **Strengths**

- A location where sports activities and other more cultural pastimes can be combined on one site.
- Is therefore likely to substantially increase the usage of the Youth Centre by being next to popular sports facilities.
- Could well encourage the involvement of Rugby Club leaders in activities at the Youth centre and vice versa.
- Is well out of the town and much less intrusive than other options. Noise is unlikely to be a problem - no close residential neighbours
- A new build will allow a properly designed and custom-built range of facilities.
- Land is publicly owned and a Youth Centre combined with a Football Club would fit well with the original vision for the Greystones Complex.
- Opens up the possibility of forging links with the Town Football club which will be only one big field away across the Burford Road.
- .Is easily accessible for the many young people from the Hailey Avenue/Cornish Road area
- Would substantially widen the use of the Greystones complex and make it more justifiable and equitable for Ratepayers money to be spent on upkeep.

## **Weaknesses**

- The site is too distant from the town for many young kids. Parents might be reluctant to let them go there on their own. Some would regard it as unsafe.
- It is at one extremity of the town and would be relatively difficult for young people from the North End to reach easily. Development over the next five years will be at the London Road/Over Norton Road end of town so Greystones will become more peripheral for more people.
- It would be necessary to improve lighting and pathways and perhaps construct a cycle track
- Creating a new venue BEFORE the problem of Greystones House and the Industrial area is sorted out could provoke some neighbourhood disputes. (parking and upkeep of the road in particular) Greystones House will not be sorted soon.
- The Chippy Swifts and the Rugby Club may not turn out to be ideal neighbours! Youth centre visitors wandering around the rest of the Greystones complex could cause problems. Young people may get blamed for damage.
- The family in residence would certainly have to be re-housed.

## **Opportunities**

- The Local Plan process (just beginning) calls for the town to identify its major needs looking forward. Apart from a Youth centre we need more employment land. A new Youth Centre could be the catalyst for a long-overdue reconfiguration of the whole northern half of the Greystones Complex. If the Town and WODC were prepared to contribute their assets to a Partnership with an innovative company like Oxford Innovation, Greystones House could be demolished, the present low-grade Industrial Estate could be scrapped, the residential tenants offered new accommodation and the Thames Water plot of land could be acquired and absorbed into a large new area to be landscaped as modern high-tech employment units. However, this would all take time particularly if the Parker Knoll development is anything to go by!

## **Threats**

- It is essential that the chosen site commands absolutely 100% support. Greystones will have a significant minority who oppose it. We would also need to make sure that the Rugby Club was happy at the idea of a Youth centre as new neighbours!

## ***Albion Street Burgage Plots***



### **Description**

The land adjoining Albion Street between the Co-op and White Hart Mews represents the last remaining undeveloped Burgage plots in Chipping Norton Town Centre. These plots which are all privately owned were originally created when the market place was planned and laid out, probably as long ago as 1205, by a lord of the manor who wanted to make the town more prosperous. It was a remarkable piece of medieval town planning. The houses in the town centre were all part of the original plan. The building plots which they occupied belonged to the lord and like any modern developer he fitted in as many as possible all along the upper and lower sides, and probably also the ends, of the market place. It is noticeable even today that most of the shops on High Street have similar sized frontages, because although the buildings have changed they still stand on the original plots marked out nearly eight hundred years ago. To make up for the restricted frontages each one had a long strip of land behind it. It is these strips of land that make up the burgage plots. Several of the original strips have been developed – Co-op car park, Harpers, Albion Market – the remaining have been the subject of much discussion and possible uses. At present they contain derelict buildings and very little of any importance or significance. The total site is approximately xxx metres long and 100 metres deep. There is currently an attempt by a group of the owners to act collectively and obtain planning permission for housing.

## **Strengths**

- Located within the town centre
- Easily accessible from the population centres of Walterbush/Cornish/Hailey Ave areas and Over Norton Road Developments, and the area off Albion Street and the new housing on the Parker Knoll site..
- Large site and over time a youth centre could form part of development of the site as part of an enlarged town centre commercial area
- Space to provide an outside games area (MUGA?)
- Could pump prime the improvement of the appearance of Albion Street
- Could prevent the development of the burgage plots for residential housing.

## **Weaknesses**

- Site is not flat; increasing building costs
- Strong pressure for alternative uses e.g. housing
- Noise could be a problem
- Because of ownership by several parties may be almost impossible to purchase the preferred location.
- May accentuate the present problems of 'youth' on Town Hall steps/ Westgate because of proximity
- As possible residential building site is probably too expensive for OCC to contemplate purchasing.

## **Opportunities**

- A site where it is possible to start developing a recreated town centre around the Youth centre
- Would give the youth what they want; a town centre location
- Other organisations could move to the site/use the facilities such as a new library
- Application for 'Big Lottery Funding' to finance the building of the centre as a youth and community centre for the people of Chipping Norton
- Gordon Brown's Government committed to providing a youth centre in every town.

## **Threats**

- Talked out politically as too difficult to create and fund as a new site.
- Opposition from residents and businesses on Albion Street and Topside as it would draw youths past their houses/businesses.

## ***Worcester Road/Station Road Site***



### **Description**

Located on the junction of Worcester Road and Station Road this site adjoins the Travis Perkins Depot and is bounded by the two roads, Travis Perkins and is currently unoccupied and the land derelict. The phone Co-Op was interested in building new offices on the site a few years ago but the planning permission was refused. The site is approximately 600 yards from the Town Hall and is approached via well lit roads New Street and then Worcester Road; alternatively it can be reached from the west end of town via The Leys. Ownership is believed to be Field Reeves.

### **Strengths**

- Located relatively close to the town centre (600 yards)
- Approximately equal-distance from population centres of Walterbush/Cornish/Hailey Ave areas and Over Norton Road Developments, and the area off Albion Street.
- No present occupiers
- No existing buildings to demolish/remove
- Noise unlikely to be a problem no residential sites within 200 yards
- Large site could over time accommodate other community activities/buildings
- Space to provide an outside games area. Convenient for the MUGA on the Common
- No competing uses for site
- Would improve appearance of one of the main entry points to the town
- Currently owned by Field Reeves

## **Weaknesses**

- Site is not flat and will require earthworks increasing building costs
- River/stream at bottom of site – Potential flood risks?
- Danger from proximity to Worcester Road
- Not currently one of the sites discussed as a possibility by the youth of the town
- May be considered too remote located on the edge of an industrial estate to be safe for the younger elements (10 to 14 age group)

## **Opportunities**

- A site where it is possible to start designing with ‘a clean sheet of paper’
- Should be able to negotiate a long lease at reasonable annual rent
- Would move youth out of town centre and concentrate youth leisure activity in one area, Worcester Road/New Street.
- Other organisations could move to the site/use the facilities
- Application for ‘Big Lottery Funding’ to finance the building of the centre as a youth and community centre for the people of Chipping Norton
- Could create Public Toilets as part of the development to serve the Recreation Ground and play area.

## **Threats**

- Sufficiently out of town centre for vandalism to be a problem
- County Council unable to find capital funding and reluctant to provide youth workers for 7 day operation
- Talked out politically as too difficult to create and fund as a new site.
- Opposition from New Street residents as it would draw children down New Street past their houses.

# Hospital Site



## **Description**

The Hospital site is bounded by Over Norton Road, Spring Street and Horsefair. Once plans for the replacement hospital are firmly in place we assume the NHS will try and secure Planning permission for a residential development before selling the site during the course of the next year. It is assumed that one interested party will be the County Council who already own Castleview and the Ambulance Station.

This is such a valuable town centre “civic” site we should start making it clear immediately (or at least as soon as construction of the new hospital has begun) that we want to save it for community use. The fine main building which seems structurally OK should be retained. We must resist the loss of a community asset. “What is going to happen to the old hospital?” is a question that is being heard more and more frequently as people increasingly accept that a new hospital will actually be built. SAVING THE OLD HOSPITAL BUILDING is one of the strongest arguments for regarding the site as the front runner for a Youth Centre.

There are various ideas currently being pursued (by the special Town Plan committee) about how the retention of sites like this by the community might be possible to arrange financially.

## **Strengths**

- Located in the town centre. Safe. Well-lit. Close to Police Station.
- A number of the existing buildings can be refurbished to provide excellent sports and arts facilities.
- Noise unlikely to be a problem - no close residential neighbours
- Space to provide somewhere to kick a ball about (MUGA?) Playground?
- Land is publicly owned and likely to be developed one way or the other very soon indeed. More tangible than the “Burgage Plots Development”
- The prestige and history of the building signals very clearly to young people that we regard them as an important part of the community.
- Is a possible compromise between those young people who want an arts-focused town-centre place and others looking for proximity to serious edge-of-town sports fields
- The boundaries of the site can be flexible. Perhaps the whole of the hospital site is not required. Equally it may be that the Oxford House and Central Tyre consider the time appropriate to develop their own sites and this could be a chance to improve the access and visibility to all these premises.

## **Weaknesses**

- Refurbishing existing buildings rather than new build will inevitably involve some compromises
- Popularity of site unknown. Not really considered so far by anyone – including the youth of the town
- The complex and innovative financial deal required to be worked out will mean “superhuman” commitment from the town to make it happen.

## **Opportunities**

- This a now or never chance to establish a Youth Centre with space around it close to the centre of town on an important site – helping to keep the centre for community and commercial use rather than intensive residential development.
- Chance to consolidate a number of Section 106 agreements (Castle View and Hospital developments + London Rd adjacent to new hospital) to generate a substantial capital sum towards Youth Centre refurbishment and construction costs.
- To preserve a much-loved part of the Town’s heritage and keep a fine building at the heart of civic life.
- Subject to a detailed understanding of the spaces available perhaps the site should be regarded more as a potential COMMUNITY CENTRE. Is there scope for a Pensioners Drop-in centre? Could the library be accommodated here?

## **Threats**

- The complexities of working out an equitable deal between the PCT, OCC and WODC simply defeats the system! (witness “impairment” etc)
- This is the “posh” end of town. There may well be strong objections.

## **Ambulance Station, Chestnuts and Police Station sites.**

Adjacent to the Hospital site are these three other locations which could all be good choices for a Youth Centre. They share the same advantages as the Hospital in terms of location. All of them share one obvious disadvantage in that the selection of any of them as a site for the Youth Centre would not save the old hospital building. In addition each of them has at least one site-specific problem which probably makes them all a second best choice to the Hospital.

**Police Station: We have no indication that the Police Station will be available in the near future.** However it is being used increasingly as a HQ for the area staff and cars, and less and less as a location providing Public access. It is clear that the Police are looking for ways of cutting costs and it is difficult to see why they will not decide to station the Area HQ function out of town (perhaps in a Parker Knoll Industrial Unit?) and provide a front desk in town (in the WODC one-stop shop for example). This is pure conjecture but the more we complain about the absence of beat officers the more the police Force will be pursuing these kinds of budget-optimisation options. However for the time being our interests as a town are probably best preserved by pressing to maintain Police Services in the town rather than proposing the closure of the Station.

**Chestnuts:** Chestnuts is the fine old Victorian Villa at the entrance to Castleview which was once the Nurses Home. It belongs to OCC Social Services who we believe do maintain a presence of sorts there. However. It is clearly under-utilised. We assume that when the Castleview site is re-developed for housing the plan would be to demolish the building. However, this is conjecture. It would be perfectly possible (at considerable cost) to re-furbish the building but it is not clear how well the place could be adapted to satisfy latest Health and Safety and Disability Access requirements. The location of the building in the centre of a major residential development and right on the Over Norton Road close to the Town Centre would be ideal for a Youth centre. The main reservation which has been expressed is that **Chestnuts is actually a warren of relatively small rooms on three floors** – reminiscent of Greystones! Many people do not regard this as an optimum configuration for a modern Youth Centre which would need – above all - a number of spacious open areas for games, dancing etc. Perhaps the time has come for a guided tour since few people actually seem to know the Interior of the house.

**Ambulance Station:** Now owned by OCC and presumably destined to become part of the overall residential development. It has some strong supporters and if the existing structure could be utilised it might provide the lowest cost option of all the alternatives. However the ground slopes away steeply right behind the building and its **difficult to see how a ball-kicking area could be provided.** But perhaps the new MUGA on the Common is not too far away. The Hospital is overall a better solution but the Ambulance Station should be kept under review as a very viable “fall-back”.

## FINDING THE FUNDING FOR A YOUTH CENTRE

### Capital funding :

1. As the authority responsible for providing youth facilities we would expect the County Council to allocate some capital spending to the project as part of its normal budgetary process. Our understanding is that the County Council have recognised Chippy's need for a replacement Youth Centre and we have now moved very close to the top of the Priorities List
2. Section 106 agreements with developers will be an important funding source - particularly those involved with the Hospital and Castlevue sites. From now on we should be asking every new development to make a contribution towards the Youth Centre. West Oxfordshire Planners have not been as aggressive in the past as other Districts in extracting Section 106 monies from developers – according to statistics recently published by OCC. WODC seem to have preferred (as at Parker Knoll) in settling for a very high percentage of affordable housing. Perhaps we should be looking for a better balance of both into the future. We would expect to receive Section 106 contributions to a Youth Centre of at least £250,000 in the next five years.
3. We keep hearing about Central Government initiatives.

In 2006 we were told:

Key to the changes is £115 million of ring fenced funding. This will be available over two years, from April 2006, through the Youth Opportunity Fund and the Youth Capital Fund. Young people will be able to bid for the money, via their local authorities, for anything from a redesign of an underused community space to a youth café.

On 2007 we are told:

The government today unveiled plans to use unclaimed cash to establish a youth centre in every community. Abandoned bank assets will be used to fund "exciting, modern, up-to-date places", which will be set up by local authorities in public-private and voluntary partnerships, the minister for children and young people, Beverley Hughes, said. The new investment of £124m will be made between 2008 and 2011. A further £173m will be invested in the youth opportunity and capital funds, with an additional £25m for the most deprived neighbourhoods.

We need to start battering on the door of Louise Chapman at County Hall to find out just how we can access some of this promised money.

4. As far as we can calculate there are still substantial funds left in the Parker Knoll Covenant Fund. This was originally £400,000 which the County ring-fenced for spending in Chipping Norton. £120,000 is earmarked for the Enterprise Centre. Another (estimated) £100,000 has been spent on subsidising the sale of employment land to CETA. It was stipulated that any sum granted from the Fund should attract matching funding and should help promote the economic revival of the town after the closure of Parker Knoll.
5. Once we have a plan we should recruit a working party to research funding opportunities and to prepare grant submissions to organisations like The Big Lottery Fund. Awards for All. WODC. TOE. Sport England. Arts Council. There are people in the town with expert knowledge in this field and we need to secure their active involvement.
6. It is absolutely essential that young people themselves become engaged in organising a huge Fund raising effort in the town – as much as anything to ensure their sense of “ownership” in the final outcome. 2008 will need to be the Year of Youth and lets hope for a torrent of shows, gigs, parades and carnivals. The School and the Theatre should start preparing. Its time for the talking to stop and the buckets to start rattling!
7. The Town Council should undertake a simple referendum asking ratepayers permission to levy a special extra precept next year. £25 per household would yield £50,000.
8. The special Town Planning Committee is already exploring the feasibility of one important idea which could be important in securing the use of town centre sites at present owned by public bodies for important “civic” uses. These organisations (like the NHS and the Police) are under pressure to secure maximum return for their assets. Unfortunately for us this usually means they seek planning permission for yet more intensive residential development. If we are to avoid important town centre locations being lost for ever as “civic” sites, we need to explore whether organisations like the NHS could secure compensation for their town centre assets by a swap involving the local authorities (OCC, WODC and the Town Council) offering in exchange a parcel of land on the periphery of town with residential planning permission. Such a mechanism could crucially affect the viability of sites like the Hospital and the Police Station.

## Revenue Funding

This area could represent the biggest difficulty of all.

Problems have arisen in the past because the County Council have only been prepared to fund a limited number of Youth Worker days. There is absolutely no point in spending a fortune on a new building only to find we can't afford to open it. We will need to get a clear understanding with OCC about what revenue funding can be guaranteed. We will also need to be clear about the role which voluntary helpers and parents can play. Perhaps we can study the way the Rugby Club have developed their very successful network of Youth Teams or how the Over Norton Youth Club has managed to build up such a loyal following.

But at the end of the day there is certain to be a deficit and a need for supplemental funding.

The ideal would be to build up a sum of money as part of the initial fund-raising activity which could be used as an endowment. A capital sum of £200,000 might provide say £30,000 a year towards running costs.

Once the Centre is built could Section 106 agreements on new developments in the town be negotiated to help cover "running costs." Or could the County seek contributions in the same way they do for schools and libraries?

Some funding bodies would be prepared to back specific Youth activities and projects. We would need to learn the tricks of this trade from the school and the theatre.

Keeping a Youth Centre running will require the same kind of commitment and expertise that KOPO have demonstrated over the last five years. Is that realistic? Who will be our Ken Norman or Claire Jarvis? Perhaps – even at this early stage – we need to be talent spotting keen young parents with tenacity and presentational skills. This will not be a job for the usual candidates!! Perhaps some of our new youthful Town Councillors are up for it!

The William Fowler Trust – dedicated to providing recreational opportunities for the poor of Chipping Norton – is now piling up annual interest on a growing capital sum for which there seems to be no specific plan. Would it be unreasonable for the Trust to make an annual contribution?

If the Town Council entered into a joint venture with a commercial organisation to develop the potential of Greystones or the Q8 site it might be possible to develop a revenue stream into the future which could be dedicated to maintaining the Youth Centre.

We need to ensure that we are not bequeathing a financial liability to our heirs. Providing for the running of a Centre is just as important as funding the bricks and mortar.