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**TOWN HALL
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26th October 2015

Dear Archdeacon

Former St Mark's Primary School Building, Bell Street, Herston, Swanage

I am writing on behalf of Swanage Town Council in support of the proposed acquisition of the former St Mark's Primary School off Bell Street, Swanage by the Swanage and Purbeck Development Trust as an Enterprise Hub. This matter was discussed at September's full monthly Council Meeting at which the project received the Council's unanimous support.

Swanage, like many coastal towns, struggles to provide meaningful employment to enable young people and families to be able to afford to live in the area, and thus maintain a sustainable community. The former school buildings at Herston are in fact located in the second most deprived of 29 neighbourhoods within Purbeck District. 28% of households in Swanage South ward are defined as either hard pressed or on modest means, and the majority of these households will be found in the eastern part of the ward around Herston. Hence, the opportunity of establishing an Enterprise Hub in this area to provide training and improve job prospects is of key importance.

This specific opportunity is also extremely important because of the lack of new edge of town sites for education and employment purposes in Swanage, due to its seaside location and setting within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We, therefore, have to rely on sites within the existing town boundaries. The re-use of existing community buildings, such as St Mark's, for other community uses is well-established best practice, as endorsed by the government's Community Assets programme and the inclusion of a policy in the Draft Swanage Local Plan.

Representatives of Swanage Town Council, the Town and Community Partnership and the Development Trust have recently formed a 'Swanage 2027' steering group to take forward policies that will deliver a strong and vibrant community over the next 12 years. Local churches are key partners in this and are often represented at Town and Community Partnership meetings. Hence, some disappointment has been expressed that the strength of community feeling voiced by residents and parishioners in support of retaining the former St Mark's School for community use appears not to have been taken into account when the development of the site was planned.

The Town Council acknowledges the difficult financial decisions that have to be taken about the retention or disposal of assets in the current economic circumstances. However, this has not prevented a number of key partnerships being formed to assist the local community in Swanage. For example, Dorset County Council are in the process of agreeing that the management of the former St Mark's school playing field will be transferred to the Town Council for use as a community open space. Elsewhere in the town the Town Council has agreed to lease its former plant nursery to the Dorset Wildlife Trust for a therapeutic gardening project to help those with mental illness. A partnership of some sort between the Salisbury Diocese and the Development Trust to establish an Enterprise Hub would be another excellent example of such a project.

In summary, the Town Council fully supports the proposals of the Swanage and Purbeck Development Trust in its endeavours to acquire the former school site on Bell Street, and asks that you look favourably on the request by the Trust, which will help the development of a thriving, sustainable community that is so important to us all.

Yours sincerely

Martin K. Ayres

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