



2016 / 17 Budget Consultation

(f) 33 High Street

The property that houses the library and the currently empty premises next door (33 High Street) are owned by the Charlotte Coxe Trust (CCT). This trust was established in 1949 when the property was given by Charlotte Coxe “for the benefit of the inhabitants of Watlington”. The Trust is a registered charity and Oxford County Council is the custodian trustee of the assets of the CCT under the original charity scheme for the trust. There has long been concern that the inhabitants of Watlington had no effective say in the management of the CCT, and after much discussion the County agreed last year to set up an Advisory Board consisting of two Watlington Parish Councillors and the County Councillor for Watlington to represent local interests to the Trustee Body that administers the CCT for the County.

In July, the Annual Parish Meeting was very strongly in favour of the Charlotte Coxe Trust (CCT) being brought under local control rather than being run by the County. It was also in favour of 33 High Street being retained by the CCT as a source of ongoing income for the CCT fund rather than being sold. These were both options that had been discussed with the Trustee Body by the Advisory Board.

The Advisory Board has since met with the County Council officer who effectively manages the CCT for the County. He said that, although no decision has yet been taken at Council level, from the Cabinet members he has spoken to he believes that the County Council and the Charlotte Coxe Charity Trustee Body were supportive of the possible change of the CCT custodian trustee from Oxfordshire County Council to a Watlington based organisation, and had discussed this with the Charity Commission. The Charity Commission were also supportive and regarded it as a positive move. The Trustee Body is now going ahead with arrangements for this transfer of custodian trusteeship from OCC to the Parish Council.

Achieving this may take some time but will also cause the Parish Council to incur some legal costs as well as a significant additional administrative burden. As the Parish Council has effectively been mandated by the Annual Parish Meeting to undertake this transfer, it is clearly essential that we ensure that we have sufficient funds to meet these costs. We have no idea at present of the likely costs, but suggest that our Legal and Professional fees budget be increased £2,000 to cover them. We would expect that once the transfer is complete, the CCT will require little further direct funding from the Parish Council, although grants for specific tasks may be considered in the future.