

Are we ready to roll up our sleeves for our library?

If the worst comes to the worst and Dorset County Council pulls the plug on our library from the end of March next year, will we be willing and able to keep it going on our own?

That's the question Friends chairman Mike Chaney is putting to the communities of Puddletown and Tolpuddle. He asks because the county council has now offered to improve the deal it will give us if we're willing to run the library if it stops paying for a professional librarian to work there next year.

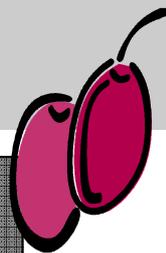
On Maundy Thursday afternoon, the manager of the Dorset library service told Mike of the greatly improved offer to our community if we are ready to run the library ourselves – if that becomes necessary from April 2012. 'There's no doubt that this is a substantially better offer,' says Mike. 'They are now saying that, instead of just leaving us with the shelves and some books, we will go on getting new books and a regularly changing stock of books from library headquarters in Dorchester. Just as important, your committee believes, is the library service's decision to leave in place the self-service console installed a couple of years ago. It is this

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PLUM

The Newsletter of the Friends of Puddletown Library

April 2011



A delightful evening - and a handsome profit: what perfect harmony



Michael Partington

THE FRIENDS broke new ground last month when they staged a concert at Athelhampton. Not only did we enjoy an evening of world-class classical guitar playing but we also raised a healthy £280 for Friends' funds.

Our soloist was Michael Partington, the son of a library campaigner from Milborne Port. He teaches guitar at an American university in Seattle but was spending a holiday with his family when he offered to play for groups in Dorset and Somerset who are trying to defend their libraries from threats of closure.

And while we're talking money...

ALTHOUGH treasurer Stephen Buck was able to report a healthy credit balance to the Friends' annual meeting earlier this year, he points out that if the group is to take over the running of our library next year we will need to raise more money. 'Many members are scrupulous about renewing their subscriptions every year,' says

Stephen. 'But many are not. Five pounds is not a great price to pay to help to fund the work of fighting for our library and perhaps preparing it for an independent life. 'So will members who still owe their subs for 2011 please let me have their fivers at 3 High Street, Puddletown, as soon as they can.'

If you do email, send details to chaneatley@tiscali.co.uk. An electronic newsletter is so much easier to deliver

Your vote could save our library

You may have noticed that Dorset County Council is asking your opinion of its plans to close not only Puddletown's library but 19 others in villages and small towns right across the county. It has put forms in the library asking a lot of questions about the way you use its library service and what you want to happen here in the future.

'We hope you'll take the trouble to fill in a questionnaire, if you haven't already done so,' says chairman Mike Chaney, 'because the form gives you a chance to vote to keep our library going just the way it is. All you have to do is vote for Option 2 — the Ad Lib* proposal. This rejects

the council's plans and asks that savings be made in other ways: by reducing opening hours in the bigger libraries, for example, and by buying fewer books.

'No friend of libraries wants to economise on books,' says Mike, 'but cutting off the funding altogether for 20 of Dorset's 34 libraries seems even worse. Our way of saving would also mean that we wouldn't lose our popular library manager, Marilyn Wheller.'

** Ad Lib represents all friends groups in Dorset. It has been negotiating with the council for months and has often sent speakers to argue our case at many committee meetings.*

But if they just won't listen, it will mean a lot of hard work...

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technological wizardry that has enabled volunteers from the Friends group to keep our library open on four days every week after the county council reduced the professional staff's working hours to only six a week.

'The retention of these self-service machines means that, if the council is so misguided as to cut us off from its bigger libraries, we would still be able to issue books and have them returned without having the chore of recording manually who was borrowing what and when,' says Mike.

The fact that the self-service machine will still be in our library would also mean that the computer link with library HQ in Dorchester would be retained — and that users of our library would still be able to use the public computers.

'The computers may be old but the link is very important as people without a computer of their own need access to broadband if this library is going to be able to meet the needs of our community,' argues Mike.

'Another important concession the council is offering is to provide the services of a professional librarian for three hours every week. Although this is only half the support we get at the moment, it will help to keep our volunteers on the right track and help us maintain our book stock in the best possible way.'

Mike welcomes the improved offer of help to communities that opt to take over their library from the council but points out that if the Puddletown Friends do so it would be a huge and continuing burden.

'Just to maintain the present opening hours would mean

asking our volunteers to work more than twice as often and twice as long as they do now,' he points out.

'Some of us are getting a bit long in the tooth so we will urgently need to find more people willing to give their time and energy to this worthwhile project.'

Talks have already begun between the parish council, the Village Hall, the Puddletown Society and our group to ensure that if we do get to run the library, we'll do it well.

'We don't know in detail yet what the library service is going to offer us but we do know that a team to attend the parish AGM on 17 May,' says Mike. 'We must make our feelings clear and remember that no offer can be as good as what we have now. So we ask you to back Ad Lib's case for the council to keep on paying for all our libraries to stay open.'

Please send any contributions for the next Newsletter to 11 High St., Puddletown DT2 8RT