



The Newsletter of the Friends of Puddletown library — issue Number One

P L U M

Puddletown Library, Upkeep and Maintenance

January 2008

Dear friend

I regret that three months of silence should have followed our enthusiastic inaugural meeting in the Church Room in Puddletown at the end of September.

They may have been silent months but I can assure you that they have kept your committee on its toes. As usual with such enterprises as ours, we have good news and bad news to report.

I'll start with the bad: indeed, at one time, we thought it would be only bad news we had to tell you. You may know that soon after our meeting, at which we embraced the idea of using volunteers to make up for any cut in our library's opening hours which we knew the county council was likely to impose on us, we were informed that the proposed cuts were worse than we had feared. You may have filled in one of consultation forms which had been placed in the library, the surgery and the shop. These forms revealed that our librarian-staffed hours are to be cut from their present ten and a half hours a week to a mere six. We believe that the new hours will be imposed on us from September 2008.

As if this wasn't bad enough, we then began to hear rumours that there might be obstacles in the way of our using volunteer labour. Senior library staff wrote reports for councillors suggesting that a massive investment in new technology would be needed before volunteers could be used to change books. There were even hints that it might not be possible for libraries to opened

without a professional librarian being present.

As this is something we believe to be even more important now we know just how drastically reduced our 'manned' hours are to be, we were naturally alarmed here in Puddletown. The news also caused great concern to the many other communities whose library had been threatened with closure at the same time as ours was. As you may know members of your committee have, for more than a year now, been in regular touch with those working to keep open these other threatened libraries. You may have been with us when we showed our collective strength and the extent of our resolve when protesters from these communities picketed County Hall so vociferously early in the summer.

As a consequence of this new concern over volunteers, a meeting was held at Crossways at the beginning of December at which representatives of most of the communities agreed the text of a letter rigorously questioning the need for such a huge investment (*the expenditure of £1.7m was urged in one of these reports*). Not all these affected communities are ready or able to use volunteers to the extent that we are here, but they all feel that such eye-watering expenditure sits ill with the council's constant calls for economy.

The organisers of the Crossways meeting had invited our county councillor, David Crowhurst, to come and explain to us the need for such expensive new technology as

(continued overleaf)

The committee
of the Friends of
Puddletown
library
*invite you
to the*

Annual General Meeting

at 7.30pm on
Wednesday
30 January 2008
in the
Church Room,
Puddletown
*(in the corner of the
churchyard)*

*Among the items
upon which you
will be asked to
vote is a proposal
to levy a member-
ship fee of £5 a
year for adults, £8
for couples, £10
for families and
£1 for the under-
18s and students.*

he has oversight of the county's library system as the member responsible for what are now called 'adult services'. When he first received our invitation he agreed to come and said he would also ask the author of all these alarming reports, Paul Leivers, who as Head of Cultural Services for Dorset is in day to day charge of its libraries. However, two days before the Crossways meeting I had an e-mail from Mr Leivers telling me that neither he nor Mr Crowhurst could make it.

We naturally sent a copy of the letter expressing our doubts about the need for such huge investment to both these busy men and to the councillor quaintly named as 'libraries champion', Mr Tim Palmer. I had a pained e-mail from Paul Leivers assuring me that *'volunteers are, and will be, an essential part of the community-supported approach. We look forward to working with you in the New Year to achieve a sustainable approach.'* But as he said nothing about his grandiose plans for new technology, your committee thought we needed the help of another ally...so we turned to our MP, Oliver Letwin, who had been so actively supportive of our efforts in the summer. You may recall that he not only visited us here (and got us pictured in the Echo for good measure: see *above right*) but also helped us put our case to Messrs Crowhurst and Palmer at County Hall.

Once again Mr Letwin has come up trumps. And this is where, I believe, I can start to recount some good news. Within days of receiving a copy of the letter penned at the Crossways meeting — and within days of Christmas — he asked if he could come to Puddletown again. Once he had heard our concerns first hand, he fired off a most effectively worded letter to the 'three wise men', urging that the county library service make provision for the use of volunteer labour, especially here in Puddletown, **before** it imposed any cuts to our opening hours.

There is one more snippet of news which we believe may be of use to us. Paul Leivers has invited parties from all the affected communities to go to the main library in Dorchester to see how the present computerised book control system works. He has also suggested that some of us might like to go to Salisbury to see how Wiltshire manages its book control system. We hope that after these visits we might be able to emphasize Oliver Letwin's message that we are competent, after suitable training, to use Dorset's system and that through our own efforts we will be able to counter the pernicious effects of the proposed cut in the hours that our library will be available to us.

One last note on the matter of opening hours, which could be both good and bad news. Your committee was gratified to see that, even though our hours are to be cut so severely, the county council is proposing to open our library on Saturday mornings between 10am and noon. However, our excellent librarian, Marilyn Wheeler, tells me that this may be a mixed blessing. She herself won't be able to work here on Saturdays as she already does so at Wool — and she adds that, although you might expect that Saturday opening would be popular with readers, at Wool library it is the quietest day of the week.

We hope to be able to report more progress at our annual general meeting, which as you will see from the box on Page One, is to be held at the Church Room in Puddletown at 7.30pm on Wednesday 30 January.

I look forward to seeing you then.

I also hope that 2008 will be a year in which we can get down to making Puddletown's a library we can all be proud of.

Mike Chaney, *acting chairman*
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Puddletown library's champion :

Oliver Letwin MP, standing second left, with Friends' committee members (l to r) Sheila Lovell, Bill Maunder, Peter Bishop and Mike Chaney. This photograph was taken in the summer during his first visit to Puddletown to learn of our disquiet about the county council's plans.

Picture: Dorset Evening Echo

**“Once again
Mr Letwin
has come
up trumps”
Friends'
chairman,
Mike Chaney**

The present committee members are: Mike Chaney (chairman), Peter Bishop, Stephen Buck, Chris Leonard, Sheila Lovell, Bill Maunder and Rosie Wyndham, all of whom are available for re-election.