

Community centre on green plan fails

CONTROVERSIAL plans to build a community centre on Hythe Green have been thrown out.

The action followed a week in which the chairman of the Hythe community centre trust resigned and launched a blistering attack on the town council.

A poll of 11,000 residents will still go ahead. Members of Shepway council's development control committee voted 10-1 against the planning application made by Hythe Town Council, taking just minutes to decide on the scheme which has divided a community.

The grounds of rejection were that The Green provides a unique recreational opportunity in Hythe for which Shepway council considers there is no adequate alternative. Nor does the council consider that a community centre will be of equivalent community benefit to the open space which would be lost.

Also, the proposal would have resulted in an unsatisfactory loss of recreational open space contrary to policies in the local plan.

The decision was welcomed by concerned families who had packed the public gallery.

A petition of 233 names stating that The Green should remain a recreation area had been sent to Shepway council. There were also 260 letters sent by local residents objecting to the lack of consultation, loss of open space, noise disturbance and stating there were already existing venues.

When the planning application was being discussed, Hythe town councillors who are also members of the development control committee, had to leave the room because they were considered to have an interest in the scheme. Cllr Wendy Harris stated she was not happy that town councillors could not speak on the issue.

Cllr Alan Roots proposed refusal of the plans. He said: "I am not happy with this plan at all. Our policies say we should protect open spaces. If there was a proven need for another hall, which I don't think there is, it would be different."

Before the meeting the chairman of Hythe Community Centre Trust resigned after just two months. Geoffrey Roberts of Saltwood cited the inability of the council to support the trust itself created as his reason for resigning.

Mr Roberts said: "The council is not capable of

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supporting the trust and councillors are easily diverted from mature business thinking. For a few years now the council's work has been degraded by pseudo-politics and pettiness."

Townsppeople will be asked in a poll if they would still like a community centre in Hythe and if they support the building of it at an alternative site in South Road, Hythe.

It will be from 4 to 9pm on Thursday, October 19. Polling stations will be at Seabrook Church, the former St Augustine's School, Mackeson Court, Sanford house, the Light Railway Restaurant hall and Palmash Hall.