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Ingham Road
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22nd May 2018

Dear Sirs

Stow Recreation Fund

I am writing on behalf of the committee of the Stow Recreation Fund (SRF), Stow, Lincolnshire, for your advice.

In May 1943, a group of villagers from Stow set up a fund with a 'Wings for Victory week' that raised £187. We have a copy of a letter that was sent out to local landowners in February 1944, explaining that the fund 'For the provision of a Post-War village centre' had swollen to £264, due to fundraising efforts and donations, but more money was required. Plans were discussed for building a meeting place, including a war memorial, but there is no surviving documentary evidence of what was actually planned.

In September 1948, the Stow Cricket Club asked for financial assistance from the fund to buy a cricket field. An extract of the SRF committee minutes records 'This was turned down as the Committee thought the time not opportune either to buy land or lay a brick..... (and)... the Fund was created to provide a Village Centre for the benefit of all at some future date'.

By July 1949 the fund balance had increased to £837. The Parish Council then published notice of a public meeting to be held on 3rd October 1949 to discuss 'the provision of either a Playing Field or Parish Hall for Stow.' This led to division in the village, and one of the ladies who had given a 'subscription', a Mrs Waterhouse, wrote on September 30th 1949 that, if the decision was made to use the fund to buy a playing field, she would want her money back as she had given it expecting it to be used for a village hall, not a playing field.

Unfortunately, there are no minutes of the Parish meeting, (although a later newspaper article reports that it 'turned out to be very rowdy') but from an exchange of letters in November and December 1954, between the secretary of Stow and District Sports Club and the secretary of the SRF, it appears that the majority of the meeting did not want the money that had been raised to be put towards the purchase of a playing field. Another newspaper article from 1960, quotes a resident who was at the meeting in 1954 as saying that 'the people interested wanted only to make provision for the younger people of Stow. It was noticeable that the people in

opposition were the elder persons... The money was collected as a memory to those who gave their lives in the last war. What better memorial could any village have than to see the children playing happily in a field away from the dangerous roads of today'.

The Stow Parish Council minute books from June 1955 have ongoing references to the SRF and committee, as the Parish Council tried to broker a meeting between the Sports committee and the SRF committee, but the latter refused to engage. The Council agreed that a playing field with a children's corner was the most needed thing, and it was regretted that members of the SRF committee still intended to go ahead with the building of a Village Community Centre (Hall) which they were of the opinion would be a 'white elephant' and not a paying proposition. It was suggested that both committees could work together for the common cause of a sports field plus a dual-purpose pavilion that would serve the purpose of dressing rooms and where dances/ whist drives/ socials etc could be held.

Unfortunately, despite a local firm of solicitors being instructed to try and help broker an agreement, it appears that negotiations were unsuccessful as Parish Council minutes of November 1956 record a resolution that 'After hearing letters read about the Recreation Fund it was proposed.. and seconded.. that for the time being this matter should lie on the table' (No copies of the letters referred to are available).

Having stalled somewhat in the 1950s, the 1960s saw more fundraising in the form of coffee evenings, cheese & wine, clay pigeon shoots and other village events.

In 1964 the Parish Council approached the SRF secretary and Stow Rector about converting the old village schoolroom (owned by the church), into a community centre, but it was reported that the church would not be able to allow it to be sold for those purposes.

In 1966 the fund appears to have been renamed and a handwritten note states the aim of the fund was to be to build and maintain a village hall and car park. There is no evidence of who was consulted for this change of objects. In 1968 the fund was approx. £1,460.

By 1970, Parish Council minutes record that the fund was just 'ticking over' due to lack of interest in the village. There was very little further fund raising and most of the income thereafter was interest on the capital sum. No SRF committee meetings were being held, and at the Annual parish meeting there were discussions as to whether there was a need or otherwise for a village hall in Stow, and if the money could now be put to a different use to benefit the village.

A public meeting was held in May 1975. There are no minutes of the meeting, but a local newspaper report states that although the fund had previously been tied to the purpose of building a village hall, the committee was to look at ways of using the fund for something other than a village hall. The article also quotes a committee member as saying that one of the biggest problems had been attempts to register the fund as

a charity, and there was a suggestion that a further attempt be made. The Parish Council was to be requested to set up a joint committee to take over and re-invest the Fund under the provisions of the 1972 Local Government Act. This duly happened and in August 1975 the committee reported that the sum of £2,365 was invested.

The clerk of Stow Parish Council wrote to the Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils on 22nd December 1977, seeking advice on the Fund. A copy of the letter is not available, but there is a reply, dated 31st January 1978, from the National Council of Social Service, to whom the letter was evidently passed. Without sight of the clerk's letter it is not possible to know what information was provided but the response states

'On the information available there seems to be little doubt that the fund is held on charitable trusts for the purpose of a village hall. As such it can only lawfully be used for this precise purpose. However I note that the committee feel that there is now little chance of a hall being built in Stow. It will therefore be necessary to consult the Charity commissioners to discover what may be done with the money. In a case such as this the Commissioners would first normally wish to satisfy themselves that the original purpose cannot be fulfilled. Having done so, it would be usual for all shades of local opinion to be considered before permission is given to use the money for other similar purpose – one as near as possible to the original'

At a public parish meeting on 30th October 1978, it was decided that, if, as the committee believed, there was no legal way in which the money could be used except for providing a village hall, the fund should be left to grow until there was enough for a grant to be obtained and a new hall built.

In October 1980 a tender was submitted for a piece of land that had been put up for sale, but it was rejected in January 1981. In May 1981 the fund balance was £4,338. In 1984 a tender was submitted for the old village telephone exchange building, but it was rejected.

Since then, the minutes of the annual parish meetings have recorded that no suitable buildings or pieces of land have come up for sale in the village. The Parish Council continued to invest the capital, but now, with falling interest rates and changes in local council audit procedures, the Parish Council asked that the money once again be administered by a separate SRF committee. To that end, in November 2017, a separate committee was formed, and a new bank account has been opened, and the sum of £32,898.27 has been transferred into it.

The increased balance is due purely to re-invested interest, no fundraising has been done for many years now.

Stow has approximately 150 households. There are village halls in the surrounding villages of Sturton by Stow, Willingham by Stow and Ingham that provide venues for

most local activities. Stow has very few village organisations which would use a village hall. The amount of money in the fund would not buy a piece of land, let alone a building and support its maintenance.

With the 75th anniversary of the starting of the fund approaching, the money has been sitting in a bank account for long enough. We intend to advertise and hold a public meeting in the village to canvas opinion as to ideas for the use of the money, for the benefit of the residents, however we do not want to fall foul of any legal restrictions.

We naturally do not want the Fund to be used up on legal fees, and so should be grateful if you would confirm whether the Charity Commission requires us to take any formal action if the villagers want to use the Fund for purposes other than the provision of a village hall. The aim seems to have already evolved over the years, to take into account changes in perceived requirements eg a post war village centre, and later a village hall and car park, and so as the local needs have changed, we trust that the use of the Fund can reflect that.

We look forward to hearing from you, and if you require any further information in order to provide a substantive response, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully

Clare Ella
Secretary
Stow Recreation Fund