

Rossendale Borough Council

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Comment text:

The River Spodden rises at Freeholds Top on the northern edge of Shawforth Moor in Whitworth and flows down through what is known as the Whitworth Valley as far as Healey Dell, from where it turns off and soon merges with the River Roch. The Spodden forms a natural boundary along which the whole of Whitworth nestles, from Shawforth down to Healey Corner. The Spodden's name derives from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning spear and probably relates to the straightness of the river as it flows down the four and a half mile stretch of our Whitworth Valley. The River Spodden was fundamental in the development of the current township along the narrow valley, as its waters powered various industries down its course, then attracting migrant workers and creating settled communities. Whitworth's one and only main road follows this narrow valley and is served by a regular bus service, which helps to transport Whitworth residents to the various community activities and events on offer in the library today. However, Whitworth can be affected by floods and is often snowbound in winter, cut off from onward travel in either direction. At these times, the bus services have been severely affected and even stopped when roads have become impassable. FoWLG has joined local calls for action and witnessed Whitworth residents rallying to support those at risk of social isolation when our town has become geographically isolated by floods and heavy snows. From Shawforth to Healey Corner, there is a sense of community responsibility, together with an instinctive, deeply-embedded caring culture and shared civic values often lacking elsewhere in today's fast-moving world. In November 2015, LCC were proposing to close 40 of its 74 public libraries. At this time, Whitworth was faced with the potential loss of Whitworth Library, a centrally located facility – well used by residents across the township, from Shawforth to Healey Corner. The Friends of Whitworth Library Group (FoWLG) was created in January 2016 to campaign to save the library. FoWLG was formed as a politically neutral group and being such was able to garner support from all the local politicians and their electors in Whitworth. Numerous angles were addressed in the FoWLG campaign, which covered the whole of Whitworth. For example, over 4,500 individual Whitworth residents' signatures were collected from the then 4400 local households, which fully endorsed and justified the petition to save Whitworth Library. These signatures were contained in dossiers with other supporting evidence from individual residents and community groups, including schools, churches and care homes. These dossiers were presented by the Emmerdale actress and Whitworth resident, Meg Johnson, to Jennifer Mein, Leader of Lancashire County Council at the library's open day on Saturday 16 July 2016. These included approximately 1,500 signatures from Shawforth residents. Numerous publicity actions were utilised in the FoWLG campaign, including: special focussed events, such as the aforementioned open day in the library, which, with its varied activities for all ages and a number of special guest appearances, attracted over 500 residents from across the Whitworth Valley local newspaper coverage online releases in Rossendale's and Rochdale's press and on FoWLG's Facebook and Gmail accounts hardcopy flyers, available to pick up in all community meeting places, such as in Shawforth Chapel, and posted on all community noticeboards in the Whitworth Valley from Shawforth to Healey Corner our residents' views were shared in town, borough and county council meetings and even at Westminster, thanks to our MP and in the Whitworth Valley News (WVN), a quarterly magazine, compiled and produced by the Town Council. The magazine is hand-delivered to all households in Whitworth and aims to keep our townsfolk up to speed on recent developments within the town and on forthcoming events, and it also carries reports from local schools, churches, and community groups, together with advertisements for local companies. FoWLG have sent quarterly submissions to WVN to promote the library ever since it came into being as a campaign group in January 2016. The regular library events and activities always carry a full-page spread and additional 200-word special articles are also put forward, such as for the library's Christmas 2022 events which were already planned at the time of submission. There is always a two months' delay from time of submission to distribution of the magazine. Shawforth Chapel regularly features in the WVN too – for example, the current Winter 2022 edition

carries news of its regular events and drop-in facilities. FoWLG had always believed that our library was the glue that held our community together, but the FoWLG steering group was overwhelmed by the offers of support and levels of response from Whitworth residents, from Shawforth to Healey Corner. Their backing ensured the success of our campaign and Whitworth Library was saved as a fully-serviced Lancashire County Council facility and ever-developing community hub. Post-pandemic, Whitworth Library is beginning to run with new ventures again, including art courses and theatre performances. The recently launched Whitworth Home Library Service will be a bonus to those residents along the whole of our valley who are at risk from being socially isolated, often unable to leave their homes. These residents living in Whitworth, from Shawforth to Healey Corner, are looking forward to receiving library deliveries from cheerful, well-known, local faces on a regular basis. The Warm and Welcome initiative is also being delivered in Whitworth Library to help combat disadvantage and social isolation and provide a safe and warm haven where residents from the length of the Whitworth Valley can chat with friends, read newspapers, access books, information, computers and much more, whilst also enjoying a free brew in these unprecedented times. There is more convenient access to our local councillors in Whitworth. These are people who understand Whitworth and its residents' needs and views. As numbers are only slightly over the recommendations, dividing the Whitworth Valley community and redrawing Whitworth's two wards for electoral representation would not seem to be appropriate as Shawforth residents have always been important and integral to the success of our community's identity, its social-wellbeing, civic pride and cultural progress as a township. Losing Shawforth could only result in a decline in community cohesion in Whitworth. Members of the Friends of Whitworth Library Group (FoWLG) request that Whitworth should be reviewed as one ward with three councillors for these reasons.

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded