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At the heart of all things local **Western Gazette**

Internet gives volunteers their vitality

WE have had the Stone Age, the Iron Age, the Dark Ages, the Middle Ages, the Modern Age, the Age of Canals, the Age of the Train, the Age of the Car and the Age of the Plane.

So what Age are we in now? I offer two candidates – the Age of the Internet and the Age of the Volunteer.

At first sight, these might seem to be incompatible descriptions of our times. But they are actually two sides of the same coin.

We all know that this is the Internet Age. Today, you can connect with the world from an iPhone, a BlackBerry or a PC.

You can conduct research, get in touch with communities and virtual communities and organise things in minutes that would previously have taken months.

But one of the features of the Internet Age is the degree to which it has given power to the unofficial, the local and the voluntary.

Movements, campaigns and organisations that would once have required a great bureaucracy to sustain them can now be mobilised virtually solo online.

Information that would once have been the preserve of the bureaucracy is now available to every community group online. And, slowly but surely, power is shifting from the old bureaucracies to the new communities.

IN MY VIEW

By West
Dorset MP
OLIVER LETWIN



In my more optimistic moments, I am tempted to think that we are on the verge of a social revolution as great in its impact as the Victorian social revolution that brought clean water to our cities, millions of children to literacy through Sunday School, and ushered in an era of unprecedented dynamic prosperity.

All of these feelings went through my mind last week, as I sat, spell-bound, while a talented architect took a group of us through the brilliant concept for a new Sherborne arts centre.

The days of conflict in Sherborne Arts are now a thing of the past.

The trustees of Sherborne House, Artslink and the trustees of the new community arts centre are working together harmoniously to create a fantastic new "arts quarter" in the town, with Sherborne House at one end, the new arts centre at the other, and the lovely garden between the two.

If ever there was proof that we are in the Age of the Volunteer, this is it.

It is work from the bottom

up – with a group of highly motivated and incredibly well-organised volunteers taking the project of the arts centre forward.

But these volunteers are technically adept, totally online and completely plugged in.

They are already in touch with people all over the country who can bring one kind of expertise or another to the project.

So there we were, watching a slide show of the proposed new building, mounted from the architect's computer.

And, lo and behold, in place of what used to be two dimensional drawings, we found ourselves taken on a guided tour through the computer-generated model.

This group of volunteers was producing for us a technological miracle that enabled them to illustrate an architectural concept in a way which would have left Brunelleschi, Bramante or Bernini, not to mention Wren, Hawksmoor, or Lutyens, gasping for breath.

The Age of the Internet and the Age of the Volunteer are one – and they are right here in West Dorset.

MORE ONLINE

You can read more of Oliver Letwin's recent articles for the Western Gazette on our website: www.westerngazette.co.uk

Below is a copy of the Western Gazette's report on the presentation to the Council on the 19th April 2010:

Arts centre sketches win universal praise

BY TOM KNIGHT
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CONCEPT sketches for the new £1.5 million Sherborne Community Arts Centre have won praise from civic leaders.

The images were publicly unveiled at a Sherborne Town Council's meeting on Monday evening.

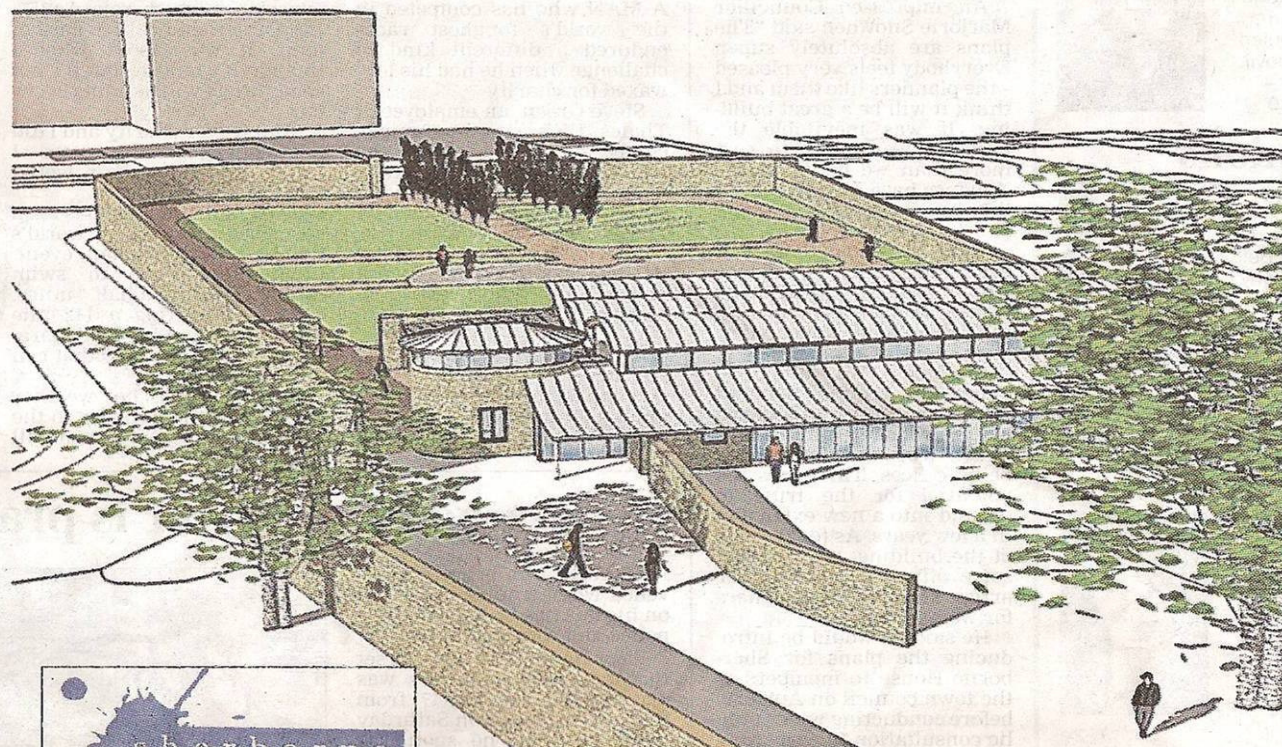
It is hoped the centre, combined with Paddock Gardens and a revamped Sherborne House, will create an arts quarter in the town to rival that of Bridport.

Arts centre trust members Michael Peart and Richard Hickman said the building would be adaptable, efficient and in keeping with the town.

Mr Peart said he had been immediately impressed by the drawings produced by architect Brian Watts of Phillip Proctor Associates.

He said: "We wanted to have a building that had a 'wow' factor but had its feet in Sherborne – that was the concept we gave to Brian. Being so close to Paddock Gardens and Sherborne House, we wanted to provide whatever link we could. We want a building that will lift this part of the town."

He said initial conversations with planning and conservation



NEW QUARTER: Sherborne's arts quarter takes shape at the back of Paddock Gardens in this concept sketch by Phillip Proctor Associates, with the new Sherborne Community Arts Centre in the foreground and, inset, the new logo for the community arts centre, designed by local artist Andrew Purnell

TURN TO PAGE 2

Plans for arts centre revealed

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

officers and West Dorset District Council leader Robert Gould had been positive.

"Everyone we have spoken to has said that we should go for it and that Sherborne deserves this," he said.

Mr Hickman said the centre's four studios could be combined to make a large performance area and there would also be room for an outdoor stage.

"We don't envisage rock festivals going on there, but we can see a jazz evening," he said.

He the project cost had risen to "considerably more" than at first proposed, chiefly because of the demand for a large multi-purpose reception area in the same vein as the foyer at The Exchange in Sturminster Newton.

The building is set to be ecological and energy efficient to keep running costs low and achieve self-funding. Among the features being considered are solar panels and ground-floor heating, which would cost around £60,000 to install.

Mr Peart said: "The investment will allow us to run at minimum cost. But we're not going for 'eco-bling'. We're not going to stick a windmill on the top or anything like that."

The meeting also heard that a competition to find a logo for the new centre had been won by local artist Andrew Purnell, whose paint splash design earned him the £200 prize money.

An impressed Councillor Marjorie Snowden said "The plans are absolutely super. Everybody feels very pleased - the planners like them and I think it will be a great building. It was inevitable the building was going to cost more than we had thought. What we have is a plan to get the maximum use of the site."

John McQueen, land director of Redcliffe Homes which owns Sherborne House, welcomed news that the arts quarter appeared to be taking shape.

He said: "We intend to allow the ground floor of Sherborne House to be used by Sherborne House Arts Trust, with the upper floor being offices. This gives the potential for the trust to expand into a new extension in a few years. As for the rest of the building, we envisage some offices going to other artists and graphic designers for workspace."

He said he would be introducing the plans for Sherborne House to members of the town council on April 28, before conducting wider public consultation in early May prior to a formal planning application being submitted later in the month.