



St Leonards' Neighbourhood Association

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Charity Reg. No. 283568

OPEN LETTER SENT TO:

Trustees of the DA.

Management of the DA.

Parties interested in the future of Mount Radford lawn.

2nd September 2026.

Firstly we would like to congratulate The Deaf Academy on its 200th Anniversary, quite an achievement in a period which has seen so many political, technical, and environmental changes, well done.

In January 2024 you announced your intention to make Mount Radford Lawn, your ex-playing field in St Leonards Road, *"a multi-use space for the benefit of our Charity, the local community and the wider Deaf community"* and to do so as part of the celebrations of the 200th anniversary in 2026. The wider community of St Leonards were overjoyed at this intention after several years of uncertainty about the playing field's future.

Since then, a period of two and a half years, feasibility studies have been carried out, discussions with Exeter City Council Planning department and yourselves have taken place in the form of pre-planning applications and the SLNA has met and been in correspondence with yourselves on several occasions. As we understand it, from these discussions and our frequent contacts with Ben Hunt of Heavitree Parklife, your advisor on the project, there seems to be a dichotomy for you between using your funds according to the requirements of your charitable aims and your plan to make Mount Radford Lawn a social space, in other words, an acceptable balance between your charitable aims and the benefits to the communities of St Leonards. It has seemed as though the financial costs of carrying this out have also been a concern for the Academy. The plan set out below would not cost the Academy anything and could even be financially positive.

The two charitable aims of the SLNA are: 1) To promote community activities in the area of St Leonards so that it is a thriving and pleasant place to live. 2) To aim to build or acquire a community meeting place and activity facility. I hope that this explains how keen we are to work with you and others on this project.

As just one of several possible stakeholders in this venture the SLNA would like to make a suggestion as to how this might be achieved? It is along the lines of the administration of the very successful Heavitree Parklife, of which I am sure you are aware.

Mount Radford Lawn is a financial asset belonging to The Deaf Academy and, depending on the financial position of the Academy, prudent financial management could be to keep it that way.

A new organisation be set up in one of the nine ways open to the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector, such legal forms as a CIC, CLG, IPS etc. with ownership, governance and a constitution suitable for its aims. The governance group will have representation and governance by members of the community organisations which are to benefit from the use of a building and the recreational area. The Deaf Academy will be represented in this governance group and will be able to ensure that its interests are served according to the Academy's charitable aims. The new organisation, its buildings and facilities could easily be constructed to facilitate the Academy's students' *"full potential as individuals and members of their communities and society as a whole and so that their condition of life may be improved; and to educate the general public in the needs and capabilities of deaf people with a view to achieving greater integration between deaf and hearing communities."*

This new organisation could, being a charity, buy the playing field for its market value or it could lease it from the Academy for a reasonably long period and for a reasonable rental fee.

The building would be a single, adaptable building incorporating the spaces necessary to fill the requirements of its potential users within the confines of ground space and costs, built on a modular basis allowing for additions as necessary and affordable over time. The outdoor recreational space would be flexible enough for a collection of activities from informal play to sports such as Rounders and Pickleball. Its design would be as a result of consultation with the stakeholders and governance group.

Other wards and community areas in Exeter have their own base, some indoors only, some with outdoor space as well. Such facilities spawn clubs, groups, cafes, performances, choirs, etc, St Leonards has none and nowhere dedicated to these activities. The pupils of the Deaf Academy could easily integrate with these groups so that their "condition of life may be improved".

We understand that the development of this idea may be outside the day to day running of the Academy, but, in the interests of the Academy and of the local community, we are very willing to join forces with the Academy and work with them and others to bring it to fruition for the benefit of all.

I would ask the Deaf Academy to meet with us and other stakeholders for an initial meeting to consider these ideas. Hopefully to make this meeting and forward movement included in your anniversary year.

Yours sincerely,

Nigel FitzHugh, Chairman.