

# Village split on lodge

*Residents, merchants divided on plans for Warkworth's Masonic hall*

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THE INDEPENDENT

**T**HE WHITE-WALLED Percy Masonic Lodge has been a quiet fixture on Warkworth's Main Street for the past 80 years. All that changed this week.

The conditional sale of the Lodge to two entrepreneurs – and a bid to rezone it as a cookie factory with a 20-seat café – has effectively pitted residents against residents and some merchants against their own business association.

Faced with this dissent Trent Hills Council voted Monday to defer any decision until its meeting on Monday, June 16 at 7 p.m. to allow time for public input.

Mayor Hector Macmillan said: "We need to work together on some sort of compromise that suits the community."

The 75-member Percy Masonic Temple wishes to sell the Lodge so that they can build a new one-storey meeting place on land they've purchased on the outskirts of Warkworth. "Like every club we are all getting older and it's pretty hard to handle those stairs in the lodge," said Temple secretary Vic Dawson.

But at Monday's council meeting, resident Sandy Huber, who has lived with her husband Wally next-door to the Lodge for 19 years, said approving the rezoning "will be like letting a genie out of the bottle. We encourage new business but we know that not all businesses succeed."

"Are we going to get a pool hall or a bar in that building in the future?" she asked.

"I believe in change but I also believe in reasonable change and giving consideration to the people who already live there."

Currently the Masonic Lodge is zoned as a meeting place but the Percy Temple

has applied for it to be rezoned commercial – a condition of their sale of the building to baker Mark Pollard and architect Abel Branco.

Mr. Pollard and Mr. Branco have already purchased the Humphrey House residential hotel in Warkworth for \$250,000 and are spending another \$200,000 on renovations.

But it is their plans for the Masonic Lodge which have attracted the most attention in the village. In the initial application by the Masonic Temple to council, the future use of the building is described as housing "a small retail food market and bake shop with the potential for a residential unit or office space on the top floor."

At Monday's council meeting, realtor Jayne Atkinson representing the two partners, told council: "It will be a quiet 9 to 5 enterprise, not a Scott's variety convenience type of store. It will have a preparation kitchen, an outlet store and a 20-seat café for patrons to sit and enjoy their products."

Ms. Atkinson said the venture would not compete with existing business like the Lionheart Bakery. But she added: "It's an artisan community and there will be some overlap in products sold".

Mr. Pollard said: "It is not the only building we are looking at but it is certainly our destination of choice."

He said the intent was "to restore the building to its former glory and add something cool to Main Street", adding: "We have a staff of three and would like to hire three more locally," he added.

The Warkworth Business Association had sent in a letter supporting the rezoning application.

WBA president Meirion Jones said: "It's a long-stand-



The Masonic Lodge on Main Street in Warkworth.

ing policy of the WBA that we always support new development."

But Kerri Ellis, owner of the Remarkable Bean coffee house on Main Street, said: "I don't think we need another eating establishment, we have a bakery and three restaurants already."

The coffee shop owner warned council that "the roads of Warkworth are not paved with gold" and it is a constant struggle for merchants to make a living.

Another Main Street merchant Amanda Gardner, of the Cheeky Bee candle store, challenged the vagueness of the application for rezoning.

"Nobody is quite clear what they plan on doing there," Ms. Gardner said. "They go from business to retail and back again."

The Masonic Lodge sits at the junction of Main and Centre Streets with St. Paul's United Church occupying the adjacent corner.

Residents were divided into two camps on the proposed plans for the Lodge – those who support the development; and those who object to the prospect of increased traffic and noise in the southern half of Main Street that is now largely residential.

Villager John De La Court told council he was

"very much in favour of the rezoning" because it would lead to renovation of the old building.

Barry Stahl, speaking on behalf of St. Paul's United Church, said: "I think it's a great idea (and) will encourage employment."

But other residents raised the issue of limited parking. In a letter to council, Pat Johnston who lives opposite the Lodge said the junction of Main Street and Centre Street is already busy with parking for the United Church, school buses and tractor trailers delivering to Main Street.

"The new business would generate a continuous influx of traffic to this corner and that's not what it was intended for. It would be more advantageous for the business to be located in the business district of the town."

Councillor Rosemary Kelleher-MacLennan said: "It's good that people want to renovate the building but my big concern is the parking that will impact on the people already living there. If it is going to be a case that will increase the traffic."

At the time of going to press, *The Independent* understands that Councillor Dean Peters will suggest a public meeting between the developers of the Lodge, residents and merchants.