

Community Building Strategy and Action Plan 2012 - 2014

Contents

		Page
1	Introduction and Background	3
2	Developing Strong and Vibrant Communities	11
3	Maximising the Impact of Resources Available to Invest in Community Buildings where they are most needed	16
4	Handing Over Control to Local Communities	33
5	Supporting the Dedicated Volunteers who Run Community Buildings	44
6	Conclusion	58
7	Action Plan	61
8	Annex 1 – Original proposals for change – Five principles for investment	67
9	Annex 2 – Exit Strategy	68
10	Annex 3 – Asset Transfer Risk Assessment	71
11	Annex 4 – Preferred characteristics of the Asset Transfer organisation	75
13	Annex 5 – Application Process Timeline	77

Introduction and Background

Aim of the Strategy

This Community Buildings Strategy sets out the Council's future plans for its 120 community buildings and changes to how it works with and supports the voluntary Management Groups that run these buildings.

Background

Following Local Government Review (LGR) Durham County Council became the owner or sole trustee of 120 community buildings across County Durham (54 Council managed facilities, usually referred to as Communal Rooms and 66 community managed facilities, mainly referred to as Community Centres). This is significantly more than other authorities regionally.

During 2010/11 the Council carried out a review of its 120 community buildings in the knowledge that its involvement in the provision and support for community buildings had grown organically and had resulted in a lack of a transparent or consistent approach across the County. It was clear that this needed to be addressed and with the current economic climate it was considered to be important that the Council's involvement and support for community buildings needed to be treated like any other service area and rigorously reviewed. This included the need to consider whether the provision of, and support for, community buildings, which has remained largely unchanged since the 1960s, was still appropriate.

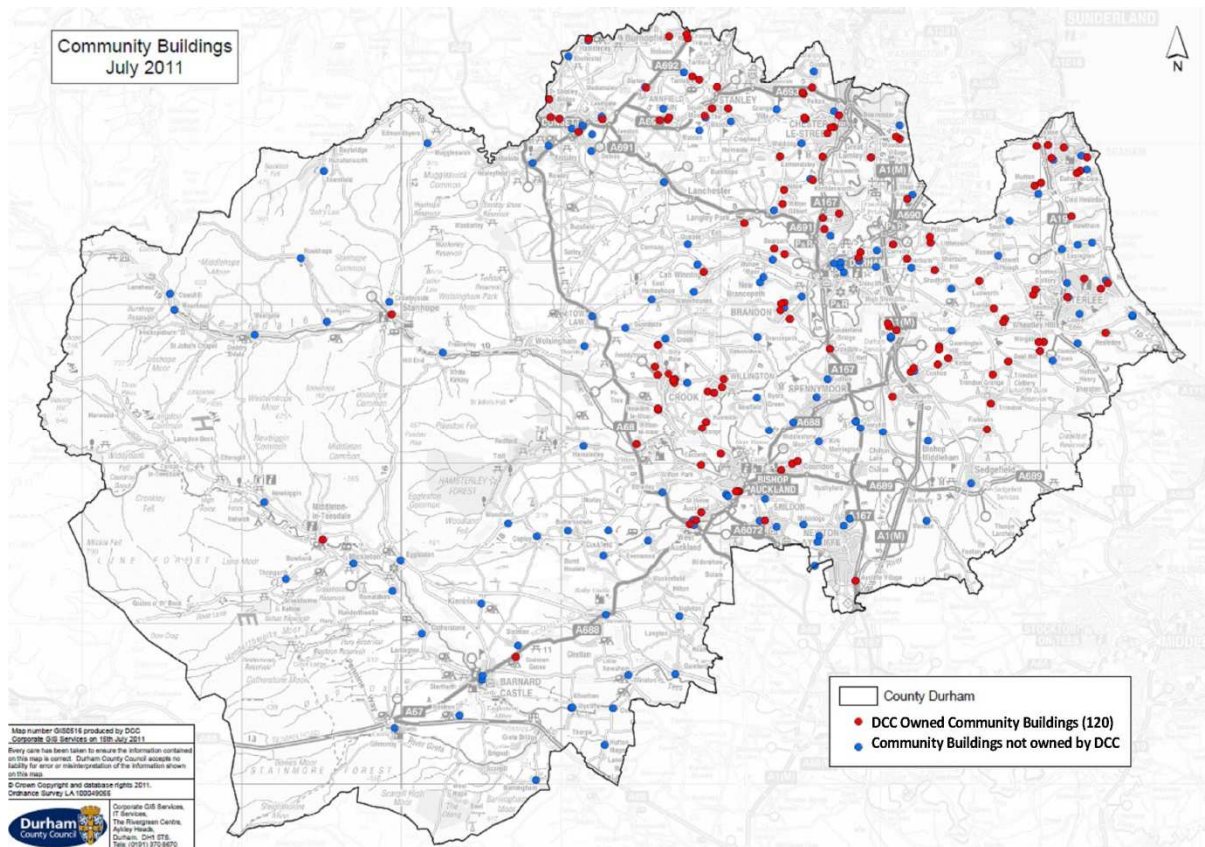
The Council therefore set out to address a range of issues, including:

- The lack of a clear role and vision for the Council's involvement in supporting community buildings;
- The lack of a transparent or consistent approach to supporting community buildings as a consequence of the ad hoc way in which former councils supported community buildings over time;
- The large variation in the type of community buildings the Council either owns or supports;
- The relatively poor physical condition of many community buildings;
- The low usage of some community buildings and close proximity to others;
- The large variation in the extent of Council involvement in community buildings across the County;
- The lack of clarity as to the cost to the Council of its support for community buildings.

Whilst this list of issues was not considered to be exhaustive, it highlighted the need for a review to be carried out and a strategy to be developed. Indeed, it was perhaps because the Council's support in this area had not been treated as a distinct service, but instead subdivided between a number of Council functions, that little change had taken place over many years. However, given the issues highlighted above; and as a consequence of the

opportunity provided by Local Government Review (LGR), this approach was deemed to be no longer tenable. Furthermore, in the face of the severe economic climate in which the Council is operating, it is necessary for the review to consider the same fundamental questions that all services have had to consider, such as whether that support should continue, and if so, in what form given the need to find efficiencies.

The location of council and non-council community buildings are shown below.



The Council's Approach

The need to make significant changes to the provision and support for community buildings has been addressed in four stages:

1. **Review** – The review of the Council's 120 community buildings considered:
 - a. The condition, compliance and access;
 - b. Leases and responsibilities;
 - c. Management and governance;
 - d. Usage;
 - e. Costs.

(The Review was carried out during 2010/11 and the findings were set out in the September 2011 report to Cabinet.)

2. **Proposals for Change** – Based on the review the Council considered a range of options for change and agreed that the preferred way forward was to prioritise investment into targeted community buildings on the condition that each building is

the subject of an Asset Transfer. This was considered to provide the greatest opportunity for a sustainable network of affordable centres. Five principles (annex 1) were also agreed to reduce the potential investment required to £4m and a criteria for prioritisation based on cost, need, size, settlement type and proximity to other buildings was applied to this option to enable investment to remain within the Council's current indicative allocation of £2.15 million. This option was applied and Council owned community buildings were placed within one of five categories:

- i. Invest from the current programme
- ii. Do not invest from the current programme unless resources become available
- iii. Do not invest and take immediate action to close or Asset Transfer
- iv. Confirm closure
- v. Full repair and insurance leases

(These proposals were agreed by Cabinet in September 2011 for consultation.)

3. **Consultation** – Before making any decisions the Council agreed that comprehensive consultation should be carried out on the proposed way forward and that views should also be gathered on the present Community Buildings Grant Aid system. This consultation, which involved almost 3,600 people, showed that:
 - a. The majority of people agreed that the Council's proposals for prioritised and targeted investment linked to Asset Transfer was the best way forward, although there were other factors that many respondents thought should also be taken into account;
 - b. Just less than a half of all Management Groups are presently interested in Asset Transfer and a further 36% said they would consider Asset Transfer but needed more information and had concerns about capacity and funding;
 - c. Support needs would need to be addressed;
 - d. Most Management Groups wanted the Council to invest in their building;
 - e. The majority of people agreed that the system of Grant Aid needed to change and wanted a new system that is fair, simple, linked to need and available to all buildings.

(The consultation was carried out between 19 September 2011 and 12 December 2011. The results of the consultation are provided in full in a separate document.)

4. **Strategy for Change** – Following the community buildings review and consultation the Council has set out this Community Buildings Strategy. The strategy outlines the way forward and plans to implement significant change over the next two years. In doing this the Council will take forward the proposals that the consultation showed that the majority of respondents supported.

The Council's vision and objectives for the future of its community buildings are set out below.

Vision for County Durham

Durham County Council and its partners have set a clear vision for an **Altogether Better Durham** by 2030. This vision sets the direction and provides the context for all partners working to improve quality of life in County Durham. At its simplest it is about two aims:

- Altogether Better Place
- Altogether Better for People

An **Altogether Better Place** is one where people of all ages and circumstances can meet their needs, whether material, social or spiritual.

Altogether **Better for People** carries forward the vision as it relates to people and therefore has many strands, including tackling deprivation wherever it exists, narrowing the gap in life chances across the County and reducing inequalities for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

This vision is driven forward through five priority themes. The proposals for community buildings set out in this strategy have an impact on all of these as follows:

- **Altogether Wealthier** – The economic benefits are often indirect but can be significant.
- **Altogether Better for Children and Young People** – The type and range of education and training available through community buildings can be diverse.
- **Altogether Healthier** – Community buildings traditionally provide a range of activities which are beneficial to health, including fitness classes and smoking cessation sessions and other activities contribute towards reducing social isolation.
- **Altogether Safer** – Crime and anti-social behaviour can be addressed by activities carried out within community buildings, which also facilitate cross generational work and help build community cohesion.
- **Altogether Greener** – Community buildings can represent a flagship building in the local area, promoting the value of energy efficiency and demonstrating renewable energy options.

Partners in County Durham recognise that the development of strong, sustainable communities depend on residents' active participation in decision making and making a positive contribution to improving the place where they live.

Vision for Community Buildings

The Council's vision for the future of its community buildings takes forward the overarching County vision for an Altogether Better Durham and seeks to enable community buildings to play a key role in shaping an Altogether Better Place, whilst tackling deprivation, narrowing the gap in life chances, strengthening local communities and bringing a wide range of activities and benefits to local people.

The Council recognises the vital role that community buildings play at the 'heart' of their local communities and the valuable work carried out by the dedicated volunteers who manage these facilities. The vision for community buildings is therefore summarised as:

“To ensure that by 2014 the County has a network of sustainable, well placed, highly valued and well used community buildings across the County, which are owned or controlled by local people.”

To achieve this vision we have set out four objectives.

Objectives

Objective 1 – Developing strong and vibrant communities

We want strong and vibrant communities in County Durham where people of all ages and circumstances can live, work and relax and where people work together to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area. Community buildings that are at the heart of the community play a key role in achieving this alongside the Area Action Partnerships (AAPs), which have been set up to give people in County Durham a greater choice and voice in local affairs. These partnerships allow people to have a say on services, and help organisations to focus their action and spending on issues important to local communities. We will:

- a) Help build strong links between the 14 AAPs and all community buildings.
- b) Raise awareness of community buildings and encourage their role at the heart of the community.
- c) Ensure that this strategy is aligned with the settlement pattern agreed for the County Durham Plan and associated Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
- d) Encourage community buildings to be used as the base for the delivery of services.
- e) Help promote community buildings and their activities through the wider County Durham Partnership and encourage AAPs to support the delivery of activities and services in community buildings.
- f) Help to establish a network of local community buildings across each AAP area and encourage the sharing of resources, wherever possible.
- g) Help community buildings to procure equipment and services in a cost effective and sustainable way.
- h) Ensure that each community building has a clear communication link with key officers within the AAP and within the central support team.
- i) Ensure that community buildings play a key role in the Council’s response to the Localism agenda.

Objective 2 – Maximising the impact of resources available to invest in Community Buildings where they are most needed

We want to continue to improve the quality of life of local people and ensure a sustainable network of thriving community buildings across the County. We will:

- a) Support community building Management Groups to achieve change over the next two years.
- b) Prioritise Capital investment of £2.15m in Council owned community buildings on the condition that the building is the subject of Asset Transfer, so that control is transferred to the local community.
- c) Prioritise investment in those community buildings in our main settlements and in the most deprived areas of the County.

- d) Wherever possible help to create a network of community buildings and other facilities, which are managed, owned or controlled by local people.
- e) Work with funders to maximise the potential funding available to community building management groups.
- f) Work with housing providers to consider the future of communal rooms that only provide a resource for local tenants or which can be better managed as part of the local housing stock.
- g) Close community buildings that are not viable and/or not supported by the local community.

Objective 3 – Handing over control to local communities

We want to hand over control of community buildings to local communities so that they can access a wider range of funding and be more innovative in the services and activities they provide. We will:

- a) Transfer all viable Council owned community buildings to the community.
- b) Ensure that the community building is viable and sustainable prior to Asset Transfer.
- c) Only pursue Asset Transfer where there is a well run and well supported community organisation, which is committed to providing a community centre that is accessible by all.
- d) Ensure each Management Group is an incorporated body prior to transfer.
- e) Establish a clear Asset Transfer application and decision making process.
- f) Where community buildings are closed, help local communities to access other community buildings or facilities.

Objective 4 – Supporting the dedicated volunteers who run community buildings

We want community building management groups to have access to a broad range of advice and support by working with a network of support organisations. We will:

- a) Develop a range of mechanisms to ensure that management groups have access to comprehensive information, advice and training. Including technical, specialist and independent advice.
- b) Provide intensive support, through a specialist support team for two years (2012/13 – 2013/14).
- c) Work with each Management Group to provide support appropriate to their capacity, needs and circumstances.
- d) Work with the VCS and others to provide a comprehensive network of support and advice ensuring that we do not duplicate activities.
- e) Build strong links with funders to enable better access for groups in County Durham.
- f) Wherever possible, provide training and bespoke advice where gaps are identified.
- g) Support community buildings to access appropriate energy efficiency advice and support, to help them to reduce their fuel costs.
- h) Work with community buildings to help them to increase their use and encourage more members of the community to engage in their activities.
- i) Ensure the Council's Community Buildings Grant Aid is distributed in a fair and transparent way for all community buildings.

Definition of Community Buildings

For the purpose of this strategy the definition of a community building is:

“A building that is open to the wider community, run for public benefit, a focus for neighbourhood activity and involvement, providing a range of locally based social, recreational, cultural and educational activities as well as volunteering opportunities.”

Community buildings are often, but not exclusively run by dedicated groups of volunteers who have the responsibility for all aspects of managing a building in line with current legislation. They can incorporate a wide range of building types, including purpose built community centres, converted houses or flats and historic listed buildings. They are very diverse and the range of activities provided in them is equally varied.

In County Durham it is estimated that the Council’s 120 community buildings make up 42% of the County’s total community buildings stock. Over 21,000 people take part in activities in these centres every week and more than 700 dedicated people are involved in voluntary Management Groups.

Community buildings play a key role in strengthening the local community, often providing the only public place where a wide range of people can engage in activities with their neighbours and frequently seen as the physical focus for the regeneration of communities. The opportunity for people to become involved in the management and running of their community building can also lead to a greater sense of pride in and responsibility for their local community.

National Policy Direction

Since the change of Government in May 2010 there has been a raft of changes and policy proposals directly and indirectly affecting the voluntary and community sector (including those voluntary groups and organisations running community buildings) and their relationship with both central and local government. The Government has called upon the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and small private sector enterprises to play an increasing role in the delivery of public services, as their objectives for ‘Big Society’ and plans for a reduction in state provision are advanced.

The main policy changes impacting on the role and future of the VCS and affecting the Council’s relationship with the sector are:

- **Big Society** – this is the outcome the government aims to achieve by enabling local councils and neighbourhoods to take decisions about their area, by encouraging local charities, social enterprises and VCS organisations to take on public services and by encouraging local people to play a more active role in society by volunteering and philanthropic giving.
- **Open Public Services White Paper** – this paper sets out how the government intends to reduce public sector service delivery by reforming the planning and delivery of what it defines as ‘individual services’, ‘neighbourhood services’ and large

scale 'commissioned services' by encouraging local councils, local charities or social enterprises to take control.

- **Localism** – the new Localism Act provides the legislative foundations for decentralising power to the lowest possible level, including individuals, neighbourhoods, communities and other local institutions. It has far reaching implications for how services are shaped, delivered and managed. This Act includes the Community Right to Bid which provides an opportunity for community organisations to bid to take over facilities that are important to them and the Community Right to Challenge which offers communities and the bodies that represent them the opportunity to express an interest in running services on behalf of the local authority.
- **Best Value Guidance** - Guidance on the new Best Value Duty sets out some expectations of the way authorities should work with voluntary and community groups and small businesses when facing difficult funding decisions. It gives a new, clear prominence to requirements on dealing with the voluntary and community sector and small businesses and aims to reduce the barriers that can prevent voluntary organisations competing for local authority contracts.

Government policy regarding community buildings and facilities, promoted by both the previous and present Governments, has been to encourage **Asset Transfer**. Successful transfers are seen as a means for more innovative use of facilities and an opportunity to open up new funding opportunities.

Asset Transfer

Asset Transfer is defined as the transfer of the interest/ownership in buildings or land from the public sector to a locally accountable community organisation. The transfer can be a lease (but a substantial one) or freehold.

The Local Government Act 1972 General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 allows local authorities to transfer land and buildings at less than market value, whether on a lease or freehold basis, where this 'would help to secure the promotion of improvements of the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area'.

Developing strong and vibrant communities

Objective 1 – Developing strong and vibrant communities

We want strong and vibrant communities in County Durham where people of all ages and circumstances can live, work and relax and where people work together to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area. Community buildings that are at the heart of the community play a key role in achieving this, alongside the Area Action Partnerships (AAPs), which have been set up to give people in County Durham a greater choice and voice in local affairs. These partnerships allow people to have a say on services, and help organisations to focus their action and spending on issues important to local communities. We will:

- a) Help build strong links between the 14 AAPs and all community buildings.
- b) Raise awareness of community buildings and encourage their role at the heart of the community.
- c) Ensure that this strategy is aligned with the settlement pattern agreed for the County Durham Plan and associated Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
- d) Encourage community buildings to be used as the base for the delivery of services.
- e) Help promote community buildings and their activities through the wider County Durham Partnership and encourage AAPs to support the delivery of activities and services in community buildings.
- f) Help to establish a network of local community buildings across each AAP area and encourage the sharing of resources, wherever possible.
- g) Help community building to procure equipment and services in a cost effective and sustainable way.
- h) Ensure that each community building has a clear communication link with key officers within the AAP and within the central support team.
- i) Ensure that community buildings play a key role in the Council's work to drive forward the Localism agenda.

Listening to Local Views

Over 3,600 people engaged in the Council's community buildings consultation, which demonstrated the importance of this issue to local people.

This consultation provided a number of strong messages regarding the role and value of community buildings. 157 people completed the on-line community building questionnaire and 77% agreed that the Council should invest £2.15m in Council owned community buildings.

The County Durham Community Buildings Partnership highlighted the role that they already play in supporting volunteers on Management Groups and bringing relevant organisations

together and highlighted how this could be enhanced through greater involvement from the AAPs and Town and Parish Councils.

DRCC and Chester-le-Street and District CVS and Volunteer Bureau also suggested that the Council and the voluntary sector should work together to provide comprehensive advice and support, to minimise the risks of duplication and/or confusion. They suggested that a clear communications framework should be established to achieve this. Similarly CAVOS highlighted the need for good communications.

Localism Agenda

The new Localism Act provides the legislative foundations for decentralising power to local communities, including community building Management Groups. It has far reaching implications for how services are shaped, delivered and managed. This Act includes the Community Right to Bid which provides an opportunity for community organisations to bid to take over facilities that are important to them and the Community Right to Challenge which offers communities and the bodies that represent them the opportunity to express an interest in running services on behalf of the local authority.

As part of this strategy the Council is encouraging community building Management Groups to take over control of their community building and will therefore provide intensive advice and support to facilitate this.

Supporting Community Buildings

In recognition of the value community buildings provide for local people, the Council will invest £2.15m in its community buildings, despite the present well publicised pressures on Council funding and the increasing tendency, nationally, to withdraw from the provision of this type of service.

The Council's on-line Community Buildings consultation showed that about three out of four respondents agreed with the Council investing £2.15m into Council owned community buildings, with over half the comments recorded highlighting the role of the community building as the 'heart of the community', a valuable lifeline or crucial to combating isolation for many. The majority of those who added additional comments thought that community buildings are good value for money. However, the majority of respondents also recognised the need for change and the need to prioritise and target investment to ensure future sustainability.

An Integrated Approach

The Council recognises that community buildings play a vital role in maintaining the health and wellbeing of local communities and as such they cannot be considered in isolation, but rather as the heart of the community or the hub of local activities. Successful community buildings will be those which meet local needs and priorities and play a major role in facilitating improvements in countywide objectives. As such there needs to be a strong link between community buildings and the activities that they provide and the work of all partners in the County.

Since 2009 Area Action Partnerships have become the focus for local engagement, empowerment and action to help ensure that the services of a range of organisations are directed to meet the needs of local communities. They give people in County Durham greater choice and voice in local affairs and have budgets for local projects and investments and help to inform the use of Member's Neighbourhood budgets.

Community buildings play a valuable role in meeting both local AAP priorities and countywide priorities, as shown below, and strong links need to be developed to support the sustainability of community buildings in the long term.

Value of Community Buildings

The activities carried out in community buildings and the benefits that flow from them can have a positive impact on many of the County's overarching Sustainable Community Strategy priorities, as follows:

- **Altogether Wealthier** – The economic benefits are often indirect but can be significant. Education and training activities can improve the ability of local people to access employment and community buildings can often play a key role in encouraging the most excluded to engage in learning. Pre-school and after school clubs can enable parents to participate in training and/or employment. Volunteering within community buildings can also help to increase confidence, improve skills and build capacity, thereby improving employability and encouraging entrepreneurship.
- **Altogether Better for Children and Young People** – The type and range of education and training available through community buildings can be diverse. They can provide a venue for young people and their parents to learn together and can provide the space and facilities for young people that they may not have at home. The Council's consultation has clearly shown that young people are interested in what happens to their local community buildings.
- **Altogether Healthier** – Community buildings traditionally provide a range of activities which are beneficial to health, including fitness classes, slimming clubs, smoking cessation sessions and martial arts classes. As well as contributing to physical health, many of the activities held within community buildings also contribute towards reducing social exclusion, an issue of particular importance to older people.
- **Altogether Safer** – Crime and anti-social behaviour can be addressed by activities carried out within community buildings, particularly through the provision of diversionary activities. By working towards common goals community buildings can help to facilitate cross generational work, promote understanding and help to achieve strong community cohesion. Community buildings have the potential to provide 'neutral ground' enabling interaction between diverse groups and hosting activities to promote better community relations.
- **Altogether Greener** – Community buildings can represent a flagship building in the local area, promoting the value of energy efficiency and demonstrating renewable energy options. They can also act as the focus for local community pride initiatives.

In addition community buildings can provide a local platform for consultation, help local people to engage in shaping local services, help to build social capital and responsive

citizenship, act as a base for the provision of local services and provide the infrastructure for small, frontline voluntary and community sector groups to thrive.

County Durham Plan and Infrastructure Delivery Plan

The spatial expression of the County's Sustainable Community Strategy is set out in the County Durham Plan and associated Infrastructure Delivery Plan. To ensure a coordinated approach, proposals for each community building will be looked at against the County Durham Plan. Planning implications or constraints will also be considered.

Service Delivery

Community buildings provide the location for the delivery of many local services and for many years community buildings have been used for this purpose. However, service delivery through community buildings has tended to emerge in an uncoordinated and organic way, with no long term objectives or plans, and as a result the sudden withdrawal of services has often left community buildings struggling to replace lost income.

In addition some community buildings have found that public service partners expect to use their location at no cost or very low cost, despite the costs associated with heating and lighting. This raises two issues:

- Most community buildings and management organisations are registered charities and required to operate under charity law, which would not permit subsidising a non-charitable body.
- In County Durham the fees raised by community buildings are a significant element of the income, needed to sustain the building.

By working with the AAPs there is the opportunity for community controlled community buildings to play a more strategic role in the future and for their role to be understood, valued and supported more effectively, with greater overall benefits locally.

The wider County Durham Partnership can also play a key role in promoting community buildings, their activities and the opportunities they provide for local improvements.

Working Together in an Area

Raising the profile of community buildings and the important role they each can play through the AAP can also help community buildings to work together in a locality, avoiding duplication and maximising the different opportunities each provides. Establishing a local network of buildings can also enable community buildings to share resources and procure services and equipment in a more cost effective way.

The County Durham Community Buildings Partnership provides an opportunity for community buildings to work together, learn from each other, seek help or support and find new ways of reducing costs and increasing income. Similarly local groups such as The Village Halls Consortium can provide an important opportunity for management groups to learn and develop.

Communications

Strengthening links and improving performance demands good, clear and appropriate methods of communication . This was also highlighted by key partners as part of the Community Buildings consultation.

A communication framework which creates simple but strong links between community buildings, key partners, AAPs and support organisations will be established through PartnershipLive, with additional facilities established for those groups unable to access the internet.

This will also involve establishing clear links for each community building with their local AAP and with the Council's central Community Buildings Support Team.

Actions Required

To drive forward this strategy the following actions will be taken. We will:

1. Establish a programme of work to link all community buildings to the work of their AAPs.
2. Establish a directory of community buildings to facilitate stronger links.
3. Promote community buildings as a base for the delivery of council services.
4. Provide information about community buildings and their activities to the wider County Durham Partnership and its members.
5. Work with the VCS to establish a network of community buildings to facilitate joint working and sharing of resources.
6. Ensure community buildings are linked into opportunities for bulk procurement.
7. Encourage all community buildings to link into existing networks and partnerships.
8. Establish named contacts in AAP and the Council's central Community Buildings Support Team for community buildings.
9. Ensure community buildings are linked into the development of the Localism agenda in County Durham.
10. Establish stronger links with Town and Parish Councils to ensure community buildings are well integrated into their local area.
11. Establish good mechanisms for communications with community buildings and all support organisations.
12. Help build links between countywide and AAP priorities and those of community buildings.
13. Work with community buildings to ensure that they have appropriate charging systems in place and ensure that all public sector partners are aware of these.

Maximising the Impact of Resources Available to Invest in Community Buildings

Objective 2 – Maximising the impact of resources available to invest in Community Buildings where they are most needed

We want to continue to improve the quality of life of local people and ensure a sustainable network of thriving community buildings across the County. We will:

- a) Support community building Management Groups to achieve change over the next two years.
- b) Prioritise Capital investment of £2.15m in Council owned community buildings on the condition that the building is the subject of Asset Transfer, so that control is transferred to the local community.
- c) Prioritise investment in those community buildings in our main settlements and in the most deprived areas of the County.
- d) Where possible, help to create a network of community buildings and other facilities, which are managed, owned or controlled by local people.
- e) Work with funders to maximise the potential funding available to community building management groups.
- f) Work with housing providers to consider the future of communal rooms that only provide a resource for local tenants or which can be better managed as part of the local housing stock.
- g) Close community buildings that are not viable and/or not supported by the local community.

Listening to Local Views

At the launch of the consultation a clear steer was given by key stakeholders, representatives from community building Management Groups and local councillors that option 5 (to prioritise investment into targeted community buildings on the condition that each building is the subject of Asset Transfer) was the right approach, with almost three quarters of stakeholders agreeing to this. Of those who agreed, the main issues stressed (by over 20% of respondents) related to the importance of the sustainability of community buildings, good targeting of resources and setting clear criteria for change.

The existing provision within the locality, the capacity of Management Groups and the impact of the building's condition on its place on the prioritisation list were all raised as important issues.

At the launch events 87% of the groups responding thought the criteria used to rank community buildings were fair.

Through the on-line consultation we learnt that over half of respondents from the general public agreed (strongly and slightly agreed) with the Council's proposed option 5 and around two thirds thought that targeting investment using the criteria proposed was appropriate.

During the consultation period 104 of the Council's 120 community buildings were open. The Management Groups or user groups of all except two of these engaged in the consultation. Of those who engaged 55 (54%) thought they were placed in the right investment category, eight groups were unsure and 39 groups (38%) thought they were in the wrong investment category and of these 89% thought they should be in the category for investment.

Key Partnerships and organisations responding to the consultation also agreed that option 5 was the most reasonable option. However they stressed the need for clear information about timescales for implementation.

To ensure that the criteria for investment could be accurately applied, all Management Groups were asked to confirm the usage figures for their building and asked for their comments on the building conditions survey information used. 72 groups thought the information on usage was inaccurate and therefore all groups were given the opportunity to provide accurate information to update their figures. 75 groups challenged the information set out in the conditions surveys. These had been done in an objective way to provide indicative costs and enable one building to be compared with another. In order to rank community building the important issue was to ensure that the surveys were all being carried out in a consistent and comparable way rather than whether any individual building could either manage without the works being carried out or find a cheaper supplier. Following the concerns raised in the consultation about the conditions surveys and to ensure that this approach was robust, a review of 10% of the surveys of functioning buildings was carried out in January 2012 and special consideration given to those community buildings where the Management Group said that significant works had been carried out following the survey. This review of the surveys showed that a consistent approach had been taken, none of the reviewed surveys showed anything out of the ordinary and where some works had been carried out this did not have a significant impact on the overall indicative costs of the works still required. It was therefore concluded that to ensure that a fair and robust mechanism is used to rank buildings for investment no changes should be made to the cost of works figures. Whilst this has provided a fair and consistent way forward it is accepted that prices may vary once detailed estimates for works are received.

Other issues regarding investment raised by Management Groups included the conditions set out in existing leases, lack of previous timely investment, issues related to adjoining residential properties, use of the building by other partners, staffing within the building and the impact of closure in localities with no other provision.

During the consultation period discussions were also held with housing providers regarding the Council's communal rooms, which are often an integral part of the housing provision, providing facilities and support for local tenants. Through these discussions it became clear that communal rooms could be considered differently through a partnership approach with Cestria Housing Association, Dale and Valley Homes, Durham City Homes and East Durham Homes.

Council Asset Management and Capital Investment

Any asset owned by the Council is managed to ensure that value for money is achieved from its use. In December 2010 the Council decided that to make best use of its resources surplus or under performing assets should be rationalised or disposed of in a systematic way. This procedure is outlined in the Council's Disposals and Acquisitions Strategy 2010/11.

In December 2010 the Council's Corporate Asset Management Plan 2011-14 and Capital Strategy was also agreed. This Plan sets out ways in which the Council will improve the quality of its land and property assets between 2011 - 2014, enabling services to deliver priorities and meet the needs of local communities. This Plan included setting aside £2.15m for community buildings.

Investment in Council Owned Community Buildings

The Council will continue to support community buildings in County Durham and over the next two years (2012/13 and 2013/14) will invest £2.15m to improve the condition of these buildings. This investment will be targeted in accordance with the following criteria:

1. Target investment on priority community buildings on the condition of Asset Transfer and selectively withdraw from low priority buildings. This will mean:
 - a. The Council will work toward transferring all of its community buildings to local communities. After two years, a decision will be made to close or facilitate an alternative Asset Transfer for any viable community building that has not completed the Asset transfer process.
 - b. £7.8m of will assets potentially be transferred to local communities.
2. Applying the following five principles:
 - a. Work (including access work) required in the longer term (i.e. beyond the current MTFP) will not be funded by the Council. It is envisaged that these longer term requirements will be met from other sources of funding secured or raised by the community buildings Management Groups.
 - b. The works that are the responsibility of a building's Management Group will not be funded. For the majority of community managed community buildings this will be the internal works and for some it will also be the external works as they have Full Repair and Insurance leases.
 - c. Work on currently closed community buildings but where no formal decision has been taken as to their future by the Council, will not be funded. Given the scale of the issues for the operational community buildings it is planned to close these community buildings and seek their disposal. If however, viable alternative uses have been identified during the consultation phase, these will be progressed in accordance with the Council's existing asset management procedures.
 - d. In line with practice elsewhere, and to encourage independence and generate additional resources, the Council resources will meet a maximum of 70% of eligible costs with advice provided for the Management Group to generate the remaining 30%.
 - e. A 10% contingency element is built into the allocation of resources given the high level nature of the building surveys.

3. Prioritising investment based on the following three factors:
 - a. Where the council currently provides a community building in an LSOA in the most deprived 10% nationally, or in the top two levels of key settlement (Main Towns and Secondary Settlements), that building will be prioritised for investment if there are no comparable or larger community buildings within that area, regardless of whether that building is provided by the council or another provider. If the Council provides more than one building within the LSOA/key settlement, only one will be selected for investment under this criterion, with priority given to community centres above communal rooms, given their greater flexibility for use and general pattern of management arrangements. If there is more than one community centre, investment will be provided to the building with the lowest refurbishment cost per use.
 - b. Having prioritised LSOAs and key settlements, any remaining funding from the capital allocation made available by the Council will be allocated on the basis of cost of refurbishment for a building per use¹, on the condition that there is not another functioning community building, regardless of ownership, within 800 metres of that facility of a comparable or larger size.
 - c. As a general principle where the council plans to invest in a building and that building is within 800M of another Council community building, unless that other building is based in a neighbouring LSOA in the most deprived 10% nationally, then immediate action will be taken to Asset Transfer or close that other facility.

To apply the criteria set out above a revised priority list has been established taking account of changes that emerged during the consultation phase. In moving forward each building will be looked at individually, an equality impact assessment will be carried out in relation to any building due to be transferred to the community or closed, the local need for the building reviewed against countywide and AAP priorities and appropriate advice and support provided. This will ensure that account is taken of provision in the locality prior to any final decision being made.

Present Leases

During the consultation process a number of Management Groups and other stakeholders asked about the status of existing leases and what impact this has on the Council's proposed way forward.

The 54 community buildings that are currently managed by the Council (i.e. primarily the communal rooms) do not have a lease as there tends to be no voluntary management groups in place to enter into a lease agreement.

Of those community buildings with leases, the detailed terms set out within the agreements vary greatly, with various requirements for both the Council (landlord) and the voluntary management group (tenant). The leases tend to fall into two broad categories - a Full Repair, Maintenance and Insurance (FR&I) lease, where the tenant is responsible for all

¹ Capital investment required per use. This provides a wide range of costs, from £14 to £2,557 per use and is calculated by dividing the cost of outstanding works by the number of uses per week. In order to ensure capital investment offers value for money, higher priority is given to buildings with the lowest cost per user. The number of uses per week may differ from the number of users per week as some people may use the building a number of times.

aspects of building maintenance (internal and external), and a split responsibilities lease where the landlord and the tenant share responsibilities. The usual split is for the Council to be responsible for all external, structural and main service repairs of the building with the tenant having responsibility for internal works.

Of the 66 community managed facilities, there are 16 community buildings that have a FR&I lease, 29 have split responsibilities and there are 21 where no lease can be found. As for the status of the leases, five of the split responsibility leases are known to have expired with the others having a number of years to run.

Because of the organic way in which community buildings have come into Council ownership, which has been over a number of decades and involving a range of Councils, there is wide variation as to the specifics within lease agreements. The key areas of variation being the length of leases and the precise nature of the division of responsibilities between the Council and the occupiers.

The leases granted to community building Management Groups are business leases under the 1954 Landlord and Tenant Act. The Act sets out the rights of both landlord and tenant including:

- Tenants right to renewal when the lease ends. The landlord can only refuse to renew a lease on very specific grounds.
- The process for amending terms and conditions on the lease.
- Details of when the landlord can terminate the lease.

Any change to a lease will therefore involve negotiation with the respective Management Group.

The occupiers of the 21 community managed community buildings without a lease in writing may not enjoy the rights outlined in the 1954 Landlord and Tenant Act however, this cannot be assumed for all cases and therefore for these 21 community buildings, any changes in the relationship with the Council will need to be the subject of negotiation.

During the consultation some stakeholders asked why a community building with a long lease, where the Council is responsible for all external repairs and maintenance, should enter into negotiations regarding Asset Transfer. The main reasons for this are:

- Asset Transfer opens up access to a range of funding and other opportunities which might not otherwise be available (more information on the benefits of Asset Transfer are set out in the next section).
- Asset Transfer puts more control into the hands of local communities.
- The Council is seeking to maximise what can be achieved with the Capital funding it has available for the benefit of local people. If the Council's approach was simply to fulfil minimum contractual requirements some those community buildings prioritised for investment would not receive any Capital funding, regardless of need and how much they are valued locally. As a result, if they are unable to raise the Capital funding required to pursue Asset Transfer, the building could potentially close.
- The Council's on-line consultation clearly showed that the majority of people thought that targeting investment was the right way forward. Of those who did not, only 8

respondents thought that focusing on fulfilling minimum contractual requirements was the right way forward.

- This approach is in line with the policy of successive governments over the last decade.
- Some leases were agreed many decades ago and no longer reflect the economic, political or social environment in which we operate.

Over the next two years, as this community buildings strategy is implemented, all Management Groups will have the opportunity to discuss their detailed concerns regarding their leases with the Council and seek independent legal advice if they have any concerns about the process. During this period the Council will provide support to Management Groups to ensure that they have clear information about their present lease before any changes are made. This complex situation will involve negotiation with Management Groups and as a consequence, in certain circumstances, it may be necessary to revisit the action plan and timeframe for certain buildings.

Individual discussions will also be held with Management Groups in buildings where the Trusteeship was handed over to the Council or a former District Council from the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation (CISWO) or other body. This complex situation, which is understood to affect seven community buildings included within the review, will involve additional investigations and discussions to ensure that original agreements are fully understood by all involved before any changes are considered. As a consequence some of these buildings (listed below) may move out of the Council's investment programme:

- i. Fencehouses & District Community Centre
- ii. Hesleden Community Centre
- iii. Thornley Community Centre
- iv. Chester-le-Street Community Centre (Newcastle Bank)
- v. Sherburn Hill Community Centre
- vi. Plasworth & Kimblesworth Memorial Hall
- vii. Great Lumley Community Centre

Communal Rooms

Within the Council's stock of community building are 54 Council managed communal rooms, which in the original proposals were considered alongside and in the same way as community managed community buildings. During the consultation key issues have emerged:

- Communal rooms are often converted houses or flats and are generally quite small.
- They are often linked to other local properties, for example providing a key part of the central heating system or laundry facilities for local tenants.
- They often only provide activities for older people or specific groups rather than being open to the wider local community.
- The groups that use these rooms did not generally have any appetite for Asset Transfer (only 9 out of 54 said that they were presently willing to consider this).
- Some are used by public sector staff or for IT or social care line equipment.
- In a limited number of cases the local Parish Council or another organisation such as Durham Alliance would consider taking over control of the building.

- There are strong links between these properties and housing provided by Cestria Housing Association, Dale and Valley Homes, Durham City Homes and East Durham Homes.

Through discussions with the local housing providers it has become clear that some of these properties, with strong links to the local housing provision, may be funded through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). This means they are funded through the rents tenants pay rather than from other Council funding, which is appropriate if they are integral to the housing estate and provide community and other facilities for local tenants, however, this would also mean that their future needs to be considered within the context of the HRA funding and as part of the housing stock.

In one part of the County the housing provider has offered to take control of all communal rooms in their area, continuing to support, maintain and clean those that are viable and sustainable and pursuing alternative housing related options for those that are not used or where demand drops significantly. In such cases the housing provider has offered to develop an asset management strategy that ensures that the facilities offer modern and safe environments for the use of groups within the community. This would involve addressing the investment needs, ensuring compliance with modern health and safety standards, Disability Discrimination Act compliance and other regulatory requirements. They propose to monitor use and demand for these communal rooms and if demand drops by more than 20% from the level ascertained during the consultation then take responsibility for the making a decision regarding the future use of the property or land in consultation with local people and the Council.

Based on this suggestion by one housing provider the Council will pursue this approach with all four. This would mean that some communal rooms could be removed from the present Council investment list and the costs of any works required picked up by housing as part of a wider housing investment package. Further discussions will therefore be held with the Council's Housing Service, housing providers and Members to identify the most appropriate way forward and where a viable alternative is possible will be reported back to Cabinet. In doing this the information and views gathered from the users of communal rooms, during the consultation, will be considered.

Revised Investment List

Following the consultation a number of changes have been made to the Council priority for investment list. Many of these changes do not have an impact on investment. The changes listed below are only those where there is a change to the category or changes in the rank if investment is dependent on funding becoming available:

- The following community buildings have moved to reflect changes in usage:
 - Bearpark Community Centre moved up 16 places into the invest category.
 - Framwellgate Community Centre moved up 10 places into the invest category.
 - Hunwick Community Centre moved up 3 places into the invest category.
 - Chester Moor Hut moved down 3 places out of the invest category to position 2 if funding becomes available.

- Thornley Community Centre moved down 8 places out of the invest category to position 6 if funding becomes available
- Fencehouses & District Community Centre moved up 2 places to position 1 if funding becomes available.
- Howden-le-Wear moved down 7 places out of the invest category to position 7 if funding becomes available.
- Wheathbottom moved up 2 places to position 3 if funding becomes available.
- Fairclough Court moved down 3 places to position 4 if funding becomes available.
- Hesleden Community Centre moved down 1 place to position 5 if funding becomes available.
- Pittington Village Hall moved up 4 places to position 8 if funding becomes available
- Shotley Bridge village Hall moved down 2 places to position 10 if funding becomes available.
- Holmside moved down 1 place to position 11 if funding becomes available.
- Earls House Community Centre moved down 1 place to position 12 if funding becomes available.
- Witton-le-Wear Community Centre moved up 1 place to position 15 if funding becomes available.
- Sherburn Hill Community Centre moved up 1 place to position 16 if funding becomes available.
- Jubilee Close moved up 1 place to position 17 if funding becomes available.
- Toronto Community Centre moved up 1 place to position 18 if funding becomes available.
- Bankfoot Grove moved down 4 places to position 19 if funding becomes available
- Following revisions to the investment list, which involved Bearpark Community Centre, Framwellgate Community Centre and Hunwick Community Centre moving into the 'invest' category three communal rooms (Beaurepaire Community Centre, Woodbine House and 23 Holme Dene, Hunwick) will move into the 'do not invest and take immediate action to Asset Transfer of close' category, as they will now be within 800m of a community building that the Council plans to invest in. However, as there is interest in Asset Transfer related to each of these buildings support will be provided to facilitate Asset Transfer resulting in no negative impact linked to this change. As all three buildings are communal rooms they will also be the subject of further discussions with housing providers.
- An error on the original priority list as a result of incorrectly coding Disability Access figures has been corrected. This had the impact of:
 - Bringing Bearpark Community Centre into the invest category.
 - Bringing Fencehouses & District Community Centre into the invest category. However this moved down again to reflect the revised usage figures received and is now in position 1 if funding becomes available.
 - Moving Thornley Community Centre into the group that will only receive investment if resources become available.

The revised list for investment is set out below. This list has been amended to incorporate the information gained through the consultation with individual management committees, the most significant element of which was the revised usage figures.

As the Council only plans to invest in buildings on the condition that they pursue Asset Transfer and the Capital funding (£2.15m) is to be spent within the next two financial years a clear timetable has been established for the completion of Asset Transfer process. This is set out in the next section. If community building Management Groups do not meet the deadline required (which will be set on a case by case basis) the funding set aside for this building will become available for other buildings lower down the priority list.

Community Buildings Identified for Investment (Invest)

Rank	AAP Area	Building	Previous Category and Rank
1	East Durham	Parkside Community Centre, Seaham	Invest 1
2	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Henknowle Community Centre, Bishop Auckland	Invest 2
3	Stanley	Stanley Community Centre	Invest 3
4	East Durham	Pride House, Eden Hill, Peterlee	Invest 4
5	Three Towns	Sunnybrow Community Centre, Crook	Invest 5
6	East Durham	Horden Youth & Community Centre	Invest 6
7	East Durham	Shotton Community Centre, Shotton Colliery	Invest 7
8	Three Towns	Rosedale Community Centre, Willington	Invest 8
9	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Coundon & Leeholme Community Centre	Invest 9
10	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Selby Close, St.Helens	Invest 10
11	Stanley	Tanfield Lea Community Centre	Invest 11
12	Chester-le-Street	Great Lumley Community Centre, Chester le Street	Invest 12
13	Mid Durham Rural	Brandon Community Centre	Invest 13
14	Mid Durham Rural	Langley Park Community Centre	Invest 15

15	Stanley	Annfield Plain Community Centre	Invest 14
16	Teesdale	Middleton-In-Teesdale Village Hall	Invest 16
17	Durham	Newton Hall Community Centre, Pity Me	Invest 17
18	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Shildon Centre	Invest 19
19	Derwent Valley	Citizens House, Consett	Invest 18
20	Chester-le-Street	Bullion Hall, Chester le Street	Invest 22
21	Chester-le-Street	Brockwell Centre (Pelton Fell Community Centre)	Invest 21
22	Chester-le-Street	Newcastle Bank (Ch-le-St) Community Centre,	Invest 25
23	EDRC	Trimdon Grange Community Centre	Invest 20
24	EDRC	Quarrington Hill Community Centre	Invest 23
25	Great Aycliffe & Middridge	Great Aycliffe Village Hall,	Invest 26
26	EDRC	Trimdon Station Community Centre	Invest 24
27	Durham	Bearpark Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 43
28	Chester-le-Street	Pelton Community Centre	Invest 27
29	Durham	Ludworth Village Hall	Invest 30
30	Derwent Valley	Blackhill Community Centre	Invest 28
31	EDRC	Fishburn Youth & Community Centre	Invest 29
32	Durham	Framwellgate Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 42
33	East Durham	Seaham: Seaton Community Centre	Invest 31
34	Durham	34 Broomside Lane, Belmont	Invest 32
35	Three Towns	Hunwick Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 38
36	Mid Durham Rural	Harry Carr House, Meadowfield	Invest 33

Do Not Invest from the Current Programme unless Resources become Available (Unlikely to invest)

Rank	AAP Area	Building	Previous Category and Rank
37	Chester-le-Street	Fencehouses & District Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 39
38	Chester-le-Street	Chester Moor Hut	Invest 35
39	Three Towns	20 Wheatbottom	Unlikely to Invest 41
40	East Durham	Fairclough Court, Peterlee	Unlikely to Invest 37
41	East Durham	Heselden Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 40
42	East Durham	Thornley Community Centre	Invest 34
43	Three Towns	Howden le Wear Community Centre	Invest 36
44	Durham	Pittington Village Hall	Unlikely to Invest 48
45	Chester-le-Street	Plawsworth & Kimblesworth Memorial Hall	Unlikely to Invest 45
46	Derwent Valley	Shotley Bridge Village Hall	Unlikely to Invest 44
47	EDRC	Holmside, Bowburn	Unlikely to Invest 46
48	East Durham	Earl House Community Centre, Seaham	Unlikely to Invest 47
49	Derwent Valley	Burnopfield Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 49
50	East Durham	Hawthorn Community Centre, Seaham	Unlikely to Invest 50
51	Weardale	Witton le Wear Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 52
52	Durham	Sherburn Hill Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 53
53	Chester-le-Street	Jubilee Close, Edmondsley	Unlikely to Invest 54
54	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Toronto Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 55
55	Three Towns	Bankfoot Grove, Crook	Unlikely to Invest 51
56	East Durham	Charlton House, Wingate	Unlikely to Invest 56

57	Durham	Arden House, West Rainton	Unlikely to Invest 57
58	Mid Durham Rural	Woodland Hall, Esh Winning	Unlikely to Invest 60
59	Three Towns	Hargill Haven, Howden le Wear	Unlikely to Invest 69
60	East Durham	McCrae House, Murton	Unlikely to Invest 61
61	East Durham	Resource & Social Centre, Seaham	Unlikely to Invest 62
62	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Monteith Close, West Auckland	Unlikely to Invest 76
63	Durham	Attlee Sq Sherburn Communal Room, Sherburn Village	Unlikely to Invest 64
64	Stanley	Burnside Resource Centre, Stanley	Unlikely to Invest 63
65	EDRC	64 Lansdown Road, Coxhoe	Unlikely to Invest 65
66	Teesdale	Stainton Grove Community Centre, Barnard Castle	Unlikely to Invest 70
67	East Durham	Wheatley House, Wheatley Hill	Unlikely to Invest 66
68	Three Towns	Stanley Way, Crook	Unlikely to Invest 71
69	Durham	Fyndoune House, Witton Gilbert	Unlikely to Invest 68
70	Durham	Southbrook House, Pitlington	Unlikely to Invest 73
71	East Durham Rural	9 Browns Close, Coxhoe	Unlikely to Invest 72
72	Weardale	Stanhope Town Hall	Unlikely to Invest 75
73	Chester-le-Street	Cedarwood, Fencehouses	Unlikely to Invest 77
74	East Durham	Murton Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 74

Do Not Invest and Take Immediate Action to Close or Asset Transfer (Do Not Invest)

This category previously only included buildings that were within 800m of a community building that the Council had proposed should receive investment. Following the consultation interest was expressed in the Asset Transfer of community buildings that had previously been closed. Following the consultation, these building have therefore moved into this category.

Rank	AAP Area	Building	Previous Category and Rank
75	Durham	Beaurepaire Community Centre, Bearpark	Unlikely to Invest 58
76	Durham	Woodbine House, Pity Me	Unlikely to Invest 59
77	East Durham	Byron House, Seaham	Do Not Invest 78
78	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Mickle Grove, Coundon	Do Not Invest 79
79	Mid Durham Rural	19-20 Sycamore Park, Brandon	Do Not Invest 80
80	Three Towns	23 Holme Dene, Hunwick	Unlikely to Invest 67
81	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Cornwall Place, Henknowle	Do Not Invest 81
82	Mid Durham Rural	Silver Courts Hall, Brandon	Do Not Invest 82
83	Chester-le-Street	Sanders Memorial Home, Chester le Street	Do Not Invest 83
84	East Durham	Alcote House, Shotton Colliery	Do Not Invest 84
85	Chester-le-Street	Fell Rose Court, Pelton Fell	Do Not Invest 85
86	East Durham	Parkside Peoples Centre, Seaham	Do Not Invest 86
87	East Durham	Roseby Road, Horden	Do Not Invest 87
88	Durham	Hawthorns Malcolm Ave, Co Durham	Do Not Invest 89
89	Three Towns	25a Hall Lane Estate, Willington	Confirm Closure 91
90	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Dorset Place, Henknowle	Confirm Closure 97

Confirm Closure (Confirm Closure)

Rank	AAP Area	Building	Previous Category and Rank
91	EDRC	80 Bede Terrace, Bowburn	Confirm Closure 92
92	Three Towns	Bedburn Close, Durham	Confirm Closure 93
93	Three Towns	Collier House	Confirm Closure 94
94	Derwent Valley	Crookgate Communal Room, Burnopfield	Confirm Closure 95
95	Derwent Valley	Dipton, Front St Communal Room, Stanley	Confirm Closure 96
96	Three Towns	Elite Hall, Crook	Confirm Closure 98
97	Chester-le-Street	Gairloch Drive Communal Room, Pelton	Do Not Invest 88
98	Three Towns	Grasmere Grove	Confirm Closure 90
99	Chester-le-Street	Hambledon Hut, Chester le Steet	Confirm Closure 99
100	Three Towns	Millfield, Crook	Confirm Closure 100
101	East Durham	Shakespeare Centre, Seaham	Confirm Closure 101
102	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Sycamore Grove, West Auckland	Confirm Closure 102
103	Chester-le-Street	Wood Street, Chester le Street	Confirm Closure 103
104	EDRC	Woodland House, Kelloe	Confirm Closure 104

Full Repair and Insurance Lease (FR&I)

Rank	AAP Area	Building	Previous Category and Rank
105	Stanley	Activity Den, Tanfield Lea	FR&I 105
106	Derwent Valley	Bridgehill Communal Room, Consett	FR&I 106
107	Stanley	Clavinging YC (formerly Annfield Plain Boys Club), Stanley	FR&I 107
108	Stanley	Communal Room - Annfield Plain, Stanley	FR&I 108
109	Stanley	Communal Room - Shield Row, Stanley	FR&I 109
110	Spennymoor	Croxdale Community Centre & Hall	FR&I 110
111	Derwent Valley	Dene Court Hamsterley Newcastle	FR&I 111
112	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Escomb Community Centre	FR&I 112
113	East Durham	Gully House, Wingate	FR&I 113
114	Derwent Valley	Leadgate Community Centre, Consett	FR&I 114
115	Stanley	South Moor Comm Rm - The Haven	FR&I 115
116	Derwent Valley	The Hut Burnopfield, Newcastle	FR&I 116
117	EDRC	Trimdon Village Hall	FR&I 117
118	Four Together	West Cornforth & District Com Centre	FR&I 118
119	East Durham	Wheatley Hill (Greenhills) Community Centre	FR&I 119
120	East Durham	Wingate & District Community Centre	FR&I 120

* Shaded buildings are Communal Rooms

Process

The process for investment is linked to Asset Transfer, which is covered in detail in the next section of this strategy. When work will start with each building is therefore dependent on the Management Group's capacity and constitution, willingness to pursue Asset Transfer,

ability to raise 30% of the Capital investment costs, the type of works required and other advice and support requirements. However, it is important that all Management Groups aim to achieve Asset Transfer with the two year window of opportunity (2012/13 and 2013/14) when the funding and practical support will be available.

The timetable for change at the end of this strategy (annex 5) gives an outline of the process over the next two years. How quickly each community building Management Group takes to move through each stage will depend on their capacity and how long it takes to address the specific issues related to their individual building. At the end of the two years a formal review of progress against this strategy will be carried out and closure plans considered for all buildings that have not been transferred.

The help and support available to Management Groups to progress towards Asset Transfer and address other issues are covered in detail later in this strategy.

Exit Strategy

There may be, despite the best efforts of the community and Durham County Council, community buildings that are identified for closure. The decision to close a community building is one that is not taken lightly by Durham County Council. However there are circumstances when a community building is required to close. This may be due to one of the following reasons, although this is not an exhaustive list:

- The community building is no longer structurally viable;
- The investment in the building required to comply with Building/Health and Safety/DDA Regulations places an unreasonable expectation on the Management Group;
- The Management Group no longer wish to take responsibility for the building and there has been no expression of interest from any members of the community to undertake the management role.

In these circumstances a clear process will be applied which supports existing Management Groups to fulfil their legal duties. The proposed Exit Strategy (annex 2) should assist in the transition process for the community building users and where. The Exit Strategy details the level of support that Durham County Council will provide in these circumstances.

Actions Required

To drive forward this strategy the following actions will be taken. We will:

1. Establish a programme of investment of £2.15m in community buildings on the basis that of a move to Asset Transfer.
2. Help to establish networks of support for community buildings.
3. Work with funders to maximise the funding that Management Groups might be able to access.
4. Implement an exit strategy leading to the closure of community buildings that are not viable for Asset Transfer.

5. Work with housing providers to establish the most appropriate way forward for communal rooms.
6. Provide clear information about existing leases and the responsibilities of the Council and the Management Group.
7. Provide support to enable Management Groups to access independent legal advice.
8. Work with CISWO to clarify issues linked to trusteeship of a small number of buildings.
9. Keep in touch with the users of communal rooms to keep them informed about developments and discussions with housing providers.
10. Contact all community buildings to inform them of the outcome of the consultation, their position on the priority investment list and the next stage.

Handing Over Control to Local Communities

Objective 3 – Handing over control to local communities

We want to hand over control of community buildings to local communities so that they can access a wider range of funding and be more innovative in the services and activities they provide. We will:

- a) Transfer all viable Council owned community buildings to the community.
- b) Ensure that the community building is viable and sustainable prior to Asset Transfer.
- c) Only pursue Asset Transfer where there is a well run and well supported community organisation, which is committed to providing a community centre that is accessible by all.
- d) Ensure each Management Group is an incorporated body prior to transfer.
- e) Establish a clear Asset Transfer application and decision making process.
- f) Where community buildings are closed, help local communities to access other community buildings or facilities.

Listening to Local Views

The consultation showed that the Council's proposal to prioritise investment in its community buildings on the condition that it is transferred to the community is supported by Management Groups, stakeholders and the public.

During the consultation 101 Management Groups made their views known about Asset Transfer and taking greater control of their community building. Forty said they were interested, 25 said they were not interested and 36 did not know. 26 groups raised concerns about the proposal to encourage all groups to move towards Asset Transfer and seven groups thought it was not appropriate for them. The majority wanted more information (62) and many raised concerns about funding (39) and capacity (17). However, six groups said they were ready to start working towards Asset Transfer immediately, the majority confirmed that they would pursue Asset Transfer in order to keep the building open and nine groups confirmed that they were satisfied with their Full Repair and Insurance lease.

What is Asset Transfer?

National Context

Local authorities are allowed to transfer land and buildings at less than market value, whether on a lease or freehold basis, where this 'would help to secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area'.

One important factor when making the decision to transfer assets is the Local Authority's need to meet its fiduciary duty to manage its assets in a way that makes best use of

resources. Local Authorities face particular pressure to realise market value for their assets as a means of reducing pressure on council tax levels. However, this needs to be balanced against the high value for money often achieved through community buildings by delivering services to client groups the Local Authority finds difficult to access in any other manner.

Nationally there have been a considerable number of community-based organisations which are taking on responsibility for managing assets that were formerly owned and managed by Local Authorities.

Community Asset Transfer has gained impetus from two influential sources: the Quirk Review Report 'Making Assets Work', published in May 2007, and Communities and Local Government's Community Empowerment Action Plan of October 2007. This was reinforced by the establishment of the National Asset Transfer Unit, the Government's Localism Agenda and the Localism Act, which received Royal Assent in November 2011.

Durham County Council Context

Durham County Council has previously undertaken individual Community Asset Transfers. The lessons learnt from these have shown that a clear steer on the Asset Transfer process and greater support offered to the organisation receiving the transfer will help local communities to meet their aspiration for Asset Transfer more quickly and more effectively.

This strategy sets out the Council's Asset Transfer process and puts in place a framework that will support a strong partnership with local communities pursuing Asset Transfer.

One of the most recent Asset Transfers was Gully House November 2010, a former Older Person's Communal Hall.

Durham County Council Definition of Asset Transfer

The Council aims to create a transparent, positive and proactive framework to support successful Asset Transfers. For this purpose the following definition is used:

"Asset Transfer is the transfer of a community building(s) from Durham County Council to a voluntary or third sector organisation on a long term Leasehold arrangement"

The underlying principles linked to this definition are:

1. Any proposed Asset Transfer must support the aims and priorities of the Council and aim to create the widest public value.
2. Any Asset Transfer must not undermine the general principles of the County Durham Plan.
3. The Asset will be offered on a long term leasehold arrangement, recognising the conditions placed by external funders, security of tenure will be for a minimum of 25 – 30 years.
4. The Asset Transfer process must ensure that the building is 'fit for purpose, fit for the future'.
5. The Council will use Asset Transfer as a catalyst to greater community empowerment, to build the capacity of the local community and individuals, and inspire others to create locally responsive solutions to community needs

6. Recognising the commitment, skills, expertise and knowledge of existing Management Groups, preference will be given to an expression of interest submitted by the existing Management Group. Each application would be subject to the application of an assessment tool to ensure a fair and consistent approach. Support will be provided to the Management Group through the assessment process and beyond. This support is detailed in the next section of this strategy.
7. Where there is no Management Group, the Council will offer support to those within the local community who wish to develop a management group.
8. Where there is no Management Group interest a voluntary and community sector or not for profit organisation may submit an expression of interest for a community building transfer, if they can demonstrate the social economic or environmental benefit to the community.
9. Requests from profit making organisations will be not be considered for an Asset Transfer and such requests will follow the procedures as outlined in the Acquisition and Disposal Policy 2010/2011.

Benefits of Asset Transfer

What are the Benefits of Asset Transfer?	
Advantages for the Community	Advantages for County Durham
Preserving key buildings. Asset Transfer provides a sustainable future in terms of controlling the asset, which can provide a stable source of income and a base to make a long term difference in regenerating the local area and strengthening community life.	Helps build stronger third sector organisations less reliant on grants.
A place of 'our' own, providing a focus for engagement.	More effective service delivery to 'hard to reach' groups.
Provision of a community base for service delivery.	Helps meet community cohesion and empowerment objectives.
Increases the opportunity to access funding.	Provides choice of provision for service users.
Greater control over the asset enables greater confidence in running other events and can contribute to the regeneration of an area.	Allows community buildings to be managed/owned by the people who use them.
Allows income generation by renting out rooms and spaces to organisations, developing local social enterprise opportunities and the resulting unrestricted	Develops strong community organisations which can deliver on health, social care, arts, sports, and employment and support smaller

income supports community activity.	groups to thrive.
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Risk Management of Asset Transfer

“In our view, there are no substantive impediments to the transfer of assets to Community management and ownership. If there is a barrier, it lies in the fact that people, both in the public and community sectors, are often not sufficiently equipped to understand, assess and manage the risks that are inherent in the process of asset transfer and asset management”

Making Assets Work, Report of the Quirk Review, p 13

The background research carried out for the Quirk Review indicated that in the past local authorities and community organisations have identified some risks in the transfer of land and property assets and this was a reason why many had tended to avoid it. However, evidence from the Asset Transfer Unit would suggest as experience of transfers has grown, more authorities and groups feel comfortable in progressing this approach. Indeed, a range of good examples of Asset Transfers that have been successfully carried out, several of which were featured in the Quirk Review report, indicate that it is possible to manage the risks involved. The existence of risks should not be seen as a reason for not pursuing Asset Transfer to community-based organisations.

A risk management plan has been prepared and will be implemented as integral part of the application and assessment process (see annex 3).

Asset Transfer Process

Demand for Asset Transfer Identified from the Community Buildings Consultation

The majority of respondents to the community buildings consultation agreed with option 5 – to prioritise investment into targeted community buildings on the condition that the building is the subject of an Asset Transfer.

Of the 101 groups that made their views known on their willingness to take control of their building through Asset Transfer, the demand for Asset Transfer can be broken down into three response areas:

- Yes, we are interested in Asset Transfer 40
- We are unsure and need more information 36
- No, we are not interested 25

Qualifying factors to allow a transfer to progress

The qualifying factors to be included in the Asset Transfer application process are, as follows:

Sustainability of the organisation

There are a number of community buildings that have existing Management Committees which were established in the 1970s and 1980s using a standard unincorporated governance structure supported by a standard constitution. These constitutions in the main have not been altered or amended to adapt to changing economic and social circumstances. It is also anticipated that there will be a number of new organisations wishing to take on greater control of a community building who will need guidance and support in developing an appropriate governance structure and constitution. There are some disadvantages for an unincorporated organisation, they are not recognised as a legal entity and cannot enter into contracts, including employment contracts. Liability is not limited and places a greater risk for the individuals.

Annex 4 outlines the traits that should be demonstrated by an organisation seeking an Asset Transfer. These traits will inform the framework used within the application and assessment process. Key elements include:

- The Management Groups taking on Asset Transfer must be an incorporated body;
- The Transfer must be community led, not for private profit, and able to demonstrate community support;
- The Board must be competent to manage the building;
- The Management Group must have a robust current work programme and plans for the future;
- Robust policies and procedures must be in place.

The application and assessment process will identify areas of support to be offered to the Management Group with regard to increasing their sustainability.

Viability of proposal for a community Asset Transfer

Broadly this will require:

- Plans regarding use of the building;
- Income and expenditure projections for three or five years;
- A robust business plan.

This is a key issue and it is envisaged that many organisations will require substantial support around the development of a business plan with detailed financial projections. Assessment of viability will be on a case by case basis and will inform the decision making process.

Proposals for on-going use of the building and extent to which these meet Council policies and priorities.

Clearly a key priority will be the on-going availability of community facilities. However proposals may come from a range of different community and voluntary organisations; in particular consideration will be given to those organisations that demonstrate how the services delivered from the community building contribute to the County Durham Partnership's strategic objectives at a local level.

A condition of transfer is that the building is accessible by all members of the community, specialist organisations should be expected to include an element of wider community access and activity.

In recognition of the impact of community buildings on the regeneration of a neighbourhood or community, preference will be given to expressions of interest from existing Management Groups/Committees/Trustees and local community organisations before consideration is given to single service, regional or national community and voluntary organisations.

If during this process it emerges that the area may be included within a wider regeneration scheme the Asset Transfer might be stopped or put on hold to ensure that this can be taken into account.

Circumstances when Asset Transfer should not be progressed

There are a small number of factors to be taken into consideration that would prevent the progression of an Asset Transfer application:

Lack of organisational or community support

Some organisations may not wish to proceed with a community Asset Transfer for a variety of reasons. An Asset Transfer will not be progressed where there is no support for the building from the community or voluntary sector and a management structure cannot be identified.

An Asset Transfer should not undermine the principles of the County Durham Plan

A community building may be intrinsically linked to the long term future of the local community. It is therefore important that an Asset Transfer does not obstruct or limit the future regeneration of an area, as determined within the County Durham Plan or its associated documents.

The structure of the building

There may be circumstances when the structural survey of the building has revealed that the cost of repair and conversion to practical delivery may make the Asset Transfer an unrealistic option for both the community organisation and Durham County Council.

Application Process

Asset Transfer Application and Assessment Process

Central to the Asset Transfer process will be a robust decision making and application process. The process will ensure a supportive and sustainable approach to the transfer of a Council Asset. The Expression of Interest application form aims to give clear guidance as to the specific areas of information required to achieve a successful and sustained Asset Transfer. The process will include clear criteria against which each application will be considered. The criteria applied to all applications will identify any training or support needs of the organisation and produce a rationale for all decisions reached.

Stage 1: Pre Application

There are a number of community buildings that would require community development prior to the application process. This may be for number reasons, for example; there is no existing management provision; in this instance, open community events will be held determine the level of community support for an application. Competing bids for the same building may require negotiation and agreement to determine a way forward that is satisfactory to all parties.

There are a number of groups that have indicated that they would like more information before deciding on Asset Transfer. A programme of Information and Advice seminars will be required to provide the 'Don't Know' and 'No' groups access to all the information they need to make a final decision.

Stage 2: Expression of Interest

The Expression of Interest will identify if consideration should be given to the resources and time required to progress to full application and an agreement will need to be reached with the community as to the time line for this element of the application process.

At this point key issues that need to be addressed will also be highlighted. This may also raise the issue of the long term viability of the building.

Stage 3: Full Application

Following the successful submission of the Expression of Interest, the organisation will be invited to submit a full application. This would be prepared by the Management Group with support from relevant services within Durham County Council and VCS organisations.

The decision will be based on a number of factors within the application form including:

- Incorporation (or working towards Incorporation)
- Full structural survey undertaken
- Product/Service Delivery
- Partnership working
- Experience/skills audit completed
- Capacity
- Need Analysis

- Projected utilisations
- Cash flow forecasts
- Projected income and expenditure
- Risk assessment
- SWOT analysis
- Independent Professional advice obtained

Stage 4

Assessment of each application will be undertaken by the Community Buildings Support Team, who will produce a report and seek advice from an Asset Transfer Panel (see details outlined below). The decision to agree Asset Transfers, the allocation of funding from the £2.15 million investment fund and the closure of buildings will be taken by the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships. The organisation will be notified of the decision.

Timescales for the Asset Transfer

The application process timeline presented in annex 5 will be applied to each building to ensure a fair and transparent process for all. There have been realistic time scales attached to each stage of the application process. It must be noted that stage 2 and stage 3 can be delivered simultaneously reducing the overall timeline.

The timeline has attempted to accommodate the organisational differences and recognised that there will be varying levels of experience, skills and community involvement, whilst aiming to ensure completion within 2 years. This has been achieved with the addition of flexibility at key stages within the application process.

The exit strategy can be introduced at any time should all options for Asset Transfer be exhausted.

Assessment and Decision Making Process

Throughout this period, as the Community Building Support Team work with management committees, an Asset Transfer Panel will be established to be made up of:

- The Head of Service for Partnerships and Community Engagement
- Senior officer representation from assets, planning, legal and neighbourhoods (capital programme team)

The Panel will act as an advisory group for the Support Team. The decisions to agree asset transfers, the allocation of funding from the £2.15 million investment fund and the closure of buildings delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the portfolio holder for Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships.

Investment Programme

Durham County Council recognising the importance of community buildings that are fit for purpose fit for the future has allocated £2.15 million to ensure the asset is not going to become a liability for those organisations undertaking the transfer.

The Capital works programme will be managed by the Council's Direct Services and carried out in line with existing Council protocols prior to Asset Transfer. To facilitate this, a Capital

Investment Officer will be seconded to the Community Buildings Support Team from Direct Services.

In some cases an external funder offering substantial investment may require the building be transferred prior to capital works. In such cases an exception to the requirement outlined above will be considered by the Assistant Chief Executive.

Use of Neighbourhood budget within Community Buildings Investment Programme

The role of Elected Members is key at every stage of implementation of the Community Buildings Strategy and Elected Members may wish to use their Neighbourhood Budgets to enable the Management Group to achieve the 30% match funding in line with the Asset Transfer investment requirements. However, as part of the business planning process the community building Management Group would need to demonstrate that this type of financial support is not needed on an on-going basis. In line with the Neighbourhood Budget criteria, it is envisaged Members can only make a single capital contribution to a community building.

Support Offered to Organisations

It is recognised that the delivery of this Community Buildings Strategy will be resource intensive. There is a wide range of expertise available within the voluntary sector and any support package offered to organisations will reflect the partnership working between Durham County Council and the voluntary sector. This support offer is described in depth in the next section of this strategy.

The range of support required during the Asset Transfer application process, as identified by the Asset Transfer Unit, will involve a bespoke support package for each Management Group, developed at the earliest opportunity.

At the start of the Asset Transfer process, few Management Groups will meet all the criteria required for a successful Asset Transfer application. The support structure will therefore:

- Be flexible, to accommodate the varying support levels required by each individual organisation.
- Provide a structure of training and support that will result in a network of stronger, sustainable and viable community building organisations.
- Ensure that the needs of the community are reflected in the service delivery of community buildings.

In addition to the support offered by the Council's Community Buildings Support Team (as set out in the next section of this strategy) help will be given, to each Management Group pursuing Asset Transfer, to secure independent legal advice and to help facilitate an in-depth building condition survey.

Actions

To drive forward this strategy the following actions will be taken. We will:

1. Introduce a positive and proactive approach to Asset Transfer.
2. Promote the benefits of Local communities having control of community buildings through the delivery of seminars and training.

3. Use Asset Transfer as a catalyst to greater community empowerment through extensive training programme for Management Groups and Trustees and provide support to maximise the use of the building by the community. This will be delivered in partnership with the voluntary sector to avoid duplication.
4. Minimise the risk to community building Management Groups and Durham County Council through the application of risk management action plan.
5. Agree a bespoke programme of training and support for each asset transfer organisation. This will be undertaken at the beginning of the Asset Transfer process based on the required areas of support as identified by the organisation.
6. Implement a robust application process that is designed to support those organisations wishing to take on the Asset Transfer of a community building.
7. Implement a robust decision making process, using Delegated Powers to the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the portfolio holder, that incorporates an assessment that leads to transparent decisions. The criteria for the assessment will be supportive and at each decision making point a review of any further support will be undertaken.

Supporting the Dedicated Volunteers who Run Community Buildings

Objective 4 – Supporting the dedicated volunteers who run community buildings

We want community building management groups to have access to a broad range of advice and support by working with a network of support organisations. We will:

- a) Develop a range of mechanisms to ensure that management groups have access to comprehensive information, advice and training. Including technical, specialist and independent advice.
- b) Provide intensive support, through a specialist support team for two years (2012/13 – 2013/14).
- c) Work with each Management Group to provide support appropriate to their capacity, needs and circumstances.
- d) Work with the VCS and others to provide a comprehensive network of support and advice ensuring that we do not duplicate activities.
- e) Build strong links with funders to enable better access for groups in County Durham.
- f) Wherever possible provide training and bespoke advice where gaps are identified.
- g) Support community buildings to access appropriate energy efficiency advice and support to help them to reduce their fuel costs.
- h) Work with community buildings to help them to increase their use and encourage more members of the community to engage in their activities.
- i) Ensure the Council's Community Buildings Grant Aid is distributed in a fair and transparent way for all community buildings.

Listening to Local Views

Support

The consultation clearly illustrated that to implement the proposed changes a comprehensive range of support would be needed. Strong messages were received that this should be appropriate to individual needs and capacity and should be provided by the Council working together with the County Durham Community Buildings Partnership, VCS and other independent advisors.

Stakeholders stressed the need for a dedicated team who would ensure good communications.

The type of support Management Groups and stakeholders said would be needed covered (The number of Management Groups requesting this type of support during the consultation is given in brackets, the other issues listed were raised by stakeholders):

- Funding and financial advice (70);

- Business models, plans and policies (52);
- Training, sharing good practice and capacity building (48);
- Independent legal advice (including specific advice on leases) (36);
- Marketing and promotion (35);
- Increasing volunteer involvement (32);
- Asset Transfer process (30);
- Signposting to other advice e.g. planning (30);
- Mentoring and peer support;
- Running an effective community building;
- Income and service development;
- Accounts and financial management;
- Opportunities for working with others;
- Mediation;
- Procurement.

Forty three groups also highlighted that consistent contact with the Council would make an important difference to them.

A range of suggestions were also made about making information, including guidance and policies/procedures available on the website and using standard forms.

Increasing Use and Income

The consultation through the Citizen's Panel suggested more people would use community buildings if they had more exercise related activities (43% of respondents), particularly if they were available on weekday evenings and if advertising was improved (77% of respondents).

Over 400 young people engaged in the consultation demonstrating their interest in the future of community buildings. Their comments revealed a very different view and some interesting perceptions.

Some (26 respondents) thought young people are not allowed in community buildings and the staff are not nice (11), others thought they were generally for 'old people' (10) and that people smoke and drink there (7). These comments suggested that there is much that community buildings can do to change the perceptions of young people.

When asked what would encourage them to use community buildings young people had a wide range of ideas, including:

- More games and better activities (74)
- More activities for teenagers and young people (42)
- Better advertising (77)
- Making them more friendly places to be (11)
- Asking young people what they wanted (18)

A full range of activities were suggested including arts and crafts, street dancing, shows, cake baking and internet access.

Grant Aid

Grant Aid to community building Management Groups is a key element of the day-to-day support and the Council is keen to ensure that it is awarded on the basis of clear and consistently applied criteria and is administered in a way that is most appropriate for Management Groups. Within the community buildings consultation it was therefore proposed that Grant Aid should be awarded to support:

- Sustainable energy management;
- The development of the Management Group;
- The development of a business plan;
- A combination of all of the above.

The feedback on this element of the consultation was mixed.

The launch events illustrated that most people did not agree with this approach (57% of groups). The main reason for disagreeing was that this approach did not take into account need. Neither did these groups agree that the AAPs should administer the Grant Aid, 47% thought it should be administered centrally, 37% thought it should be administered by another group, such as Parish Councils or CVSs and 17% agreed it should be administered by AAPs.

When the same questions were considered by community building Management Groups 68% agreed with the Council's proposal to change the criteria for Grant Aid, but 28% stated that they wanted the Grant to remain as a broad revenue grant and 13% wanted the Council to be more flexible in its approach. The majority (37%) wanted the grant to be administered centrally whilst 23% agreed that it should be administered by AAPs.

The issue of Grant Aid administration was covered at the AAP Forums held in November 2011. At these meetings 71% thought AAPs should administer the Grant and 26% thought they should not. 29 respondents thought that AAPs could bring greater knowledge, understanding and empathy with local needs to the decision making process, whilst 21 respondents were concerned about the AAPs capacity. 21 respondents thought AAPs will know which criteria are most suitable for their area, whilst 15 respondents thought a countywide criteria would be much fairer and more transparent.

Of those who responded to the on-line consultation 60% agreed that a combination of the Council's proposed criteria should be adopted. When considering administration of the Grant Aid 56% agreed that AAPs should do this, 23% disagreed and 22% did not know or neither agreed or disagreed.

The Grant Aid consultation meetings aimed to bring together as many as possible recipients or potential recipients of the Grant. These groups raised the most concerns about the criteria although only four groups stated that they did not agree with the Council's proposals. They stressed the need for the application process to be simple and fair and should not be allowed to penalise those who were not proficient at bidding for funds. The majority thought the Grant should be based on needs or usage of the building, available to cover any revenue costs and available to all.

The majority attending the Grant Aid consultation meetings (21 groups) wanted the Grant to be administered centrally, whilst 12 groups agreed that it should be administered by AAPs.

Although mixed views were given regarding the criteria and how the Grant should be administered there was general consensus that the Grant is important and the process needed to change. The majority wanted a new system, which is fair, simple, linked to need and available to all, to be adopted.

A clear message was also given that Management Groups needed significant advanced warning of any change.

Identifying Support Needs

The Council is committed to meeting the support needs of Management Groups to help them through the changes associated with the implementation of this strategy. To achieve this during the consultation period the Council carried out the following:

- a) Listened to Management Groups to ascertain the type of support they thought would be needed.
- b) Talked to key stakeholders in the voluntary sector about the type of support they would suggest.
- c) Looked at national best practice and what type of support had proved to be valuable or successful in Asset Transfer.
- d) Worked with key funders in the County and region to understand what would be needed to ensure that Management Groups are best placed to access funding.
- e) Worked with energy efficiency advisors to identify the type of support and opportunities that could help community building Management Groups to reduce their costs.
- f) Worked with Locality (formally the Development Trust Association) to identify the support needed to facilitate a positive Asset Transfer.
- g) Looked at successful Asset Transfers, the lessons they had learned during the process and opportunities for mentoring/buddying support.
- h) Looked at the valuable role that could be played by key partners within the County Durham Partnership, particularly Town and Parish Councils.
- i) Considered the capacity building support that would be needed where buildings do not have a functioning or effective Management Group.
- j) Listened to Management Groups when they set out the issues that most worried them, such as their present lease arrangements, insurance arrangements and present utility costs.
- k) Looked at the toolkits and support aids already available, such as 'Hallmarks' and PreVISIBLE.
- l) Considered the type of electronic and other training aids and equipment that might make accessing support easier for Management Groups.
- m) Worked with the County Durham Community Buildings Partnership, Teesdale Village Halls Consortium, Durham Rural Community Council (DRCC) and the six CVSs in the County to consider what support is already available and what is needed.
- n) Worked with a range of Council services to consider Health and Safety and compliance issues in community buildings.
- o) Considered how help from the private sector, as part of their corporate social responsibility activities could be used to give Management Groups some of the skills they may need.

p) Worked with the Institute of Local Governance (ILG)

Having taken these steps we were able to identify:

1. **The type of support needed** - What is needed over the next two years to successfully deliver this strategy.
2. **How support can best be provided** – Taking account of the support that is already available and who provides it, building on existing resources and working with the VCS and others to provide a comprehensive network of support. Also identifying the gaps in support that need to be filled, particularly related to the implementation of this strategy.
3. **The practical tools** – The training sessions, toolkits, web-links, electronic documents and support aids that can be established.

The Type of Support Needed

The type of support needed falls into two groups:

- a) The support that is needed by a specific community building, to meet their individual needs.
- b) Generic support that can be made available to groups of representatives from community buildings, through training etc.

Some support can be provided by the Council, other support will require independent specialist advice and some may be provided by others, including the VCS, Town and Parish Council or other local groups or organisations.

The following key types of support needed are considered in more detail below:

- i. Asset Transfer Support
- ii. Legal Advice
- iii. Funding and Financial Opportunities
- iv. Repairs and Maintenance
- v. Energy Efficiency Advice
- vi. Health & Safety and Compliance
- vii. Social Enterprise
- viii. Grant Aid
- ix. Utility bills
- x. Staffing

Asset Transfer Support

The support and resources that are required to facilitate Asset Transfer can be considered in five stages, each linked to a key aspect of the Asset Transfer process. These stages are as follows and are set out in detail in section 4 of this strategy:

1. **Pre application** – including support to establish a Management Group, advice on governance, advice on lease arrangements, understanding of utility costs and repair and maintenance history, general capacity building, increasing usage and encouraging volunteer involvement.

2. **Expression of Interest** – including business planning, marketing, financial management, policy development, accessing funding and building management.
3. **Application** – including understanding of local needs and priorities, completing the forms and documentation required and partnership working.

As part of the Asset Transfer process, the Asset Transfer Unit have advised that building on the work already carried out, each community building would require the following resources:

- Two days of external legal advice.
- Two days of external Survey work.
- Diagnostic to determine the support needs of each Management Group.
- Two days of business planning (assuming that Management Groups have already received general support and training around pricing, marketing and fund raising).
- Generic support, to enable Management Groups to prepare for Asset Transfer.

Legal Advice

A range of legal advice will be needed by Management Groups taking forward the implementation of this strategy. This advice falls into three main groups:

- a) Legal advice and support from the Council on the existing lease, what this covers, where responsibilities lie and the process for establishing a new lease.
- b) Independent legal support to ensure that Management Groups are clear about their individual position, understand the options that they have and the broad consequences of any decisions they might face. This type of support can be provided by a paralegal advisor (i.e. someone who is trained to perform legal tasks but who is not a qualified solicitor or barrister).
- c) Independent legal advice from a qualified solicitor or barrister.

The work to-date has shown that for a small number of buildings the ownership, deed of trust and lease arrangements are complicated, for example for some buildings the lease responsibilities are described as 'shared' with no explanation of what this means and for other buildings the Council is the Trustee rather than owner and must itself comply with agreed requirements and seek approval before any Asset Transfer work can progress. Before any Management Group can consider change and move forward these outstanding legal issues will need to be addressed and clarity provided regarding the present situation.

In addition the Management Groups of the Council's 120 community buildings fall into a range of groups, including those that are registered as charities with the Charity Commission, those that are unincorporated voluntary associations, those that were set up under the Miners Welfare Institute in the 1920s and operate as unincorporated organisations registered under a scheme with the Charity Commission, companies limited by guarantee some of which may also be registered as charities and community interest companies (CICs).

To protect the individuals involved the Council has decided that assets should only be transferred to an incorporated body. Legal support will therefore be needed to assist Management Groups to achieve this status.

Management Groups will also want to seek independent legal advice regarding changes to their existing lease to ensure that they can be confident that any decisions made are in the best long-term interests of their local community.

Funding and Financial Opportunities

The proposals set out in this strategy 70% investment in 36 properties and support to assist all buildings to raise the 30% or 100% of Capital required if they wish to continue to function as a community building. All Management Groups will therefore need support to access the level of funding needed and some will need intensive support and training as they will have no previous experience of this type of activity. 70% of Management Groups raised this as a support need during the consultation.

In addition the proposal to establish a fairer and more open system of Grant Aid may mean that some buildings will receive less funding or not be eligible. This will mean that they need to find more resources to meet their on-going revenue costs. Training may be required to help Management Groups to access new sources of funding or to increase the use of their building and change their charging policy.

Repairs and Maintenance

Any Management Groups taking on Asset Transfer will need to take responsibility for repairs and maintenance of their building in full. This responsibility will involve a range of activities including ensuring a repairs and maintenance fund is established, monitoring the building to take proactive steps to prevent problems and being able to access reputable suppliers. Management Groups taking on responsibilities for repairs and maintenance may therefore require specific training or may simply need access to a list of approved traders or access to opportunities to work with other buildings to achieve shared benefits.

Energy Efficiency Advice

Energy costs are a significant burden for community buildings and with rising costs in recent years have become an increasing proportion of the buildings overall running costs. Managing energy consumption in community buildings is also often difficult. The buildings are often cold, draughty and hard to heat. It has been estimated that simple management changes can save community buildings 14% on their fuel costs.

Improving energy efficiency in community buildings can help reduce fuel costs but it can also provide an opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of alternative forms of energy to local communities, encouraging them to make energy saving changes at home. A warm comfortable community building also provides a better environment for volunteers and users of the building and makes it easier to increase use and rent out rooms.

To manage a community building efficiently Management Groups need support to carry out an energy efficiency audit and advice on how to improve the fabric of their building and introduce management practices to reduce energy usage. Opportunities also exist to support Management Groups to access cheaper fuel through joint procurement via the Council.

In addition some community buildings presently have their fuel costs subsidised or paid by the Council and others use their Grant Aid to cover these costs. The proposed changes will

potentially end these arrangements and support will be needed to enable Management Groups to increase their income in order to meet these costs.

Health & Safety and Compliance

Community Building Management Groups need to ensure that regular inspection and servicing are carried out in relation to the following:

- Electrical fixed wiring
- Fire Alarms
- Emergency Lighting
- Automatic Doors
- Lifts
- Air Conditioning
- Heating Controls

In many cases the Council's Technical Services Team has carried out these inspections. Following Asset Transfer the community building Management Group will take over full responsibility for all of these issues. It will therefore be important that these responsibilities are handed over in way that ensures a good understanding of the requirements and importance of maintaining key systems and checks.

Social Enterprise

A social enterprise is a business that aims to improve communities, tackle social problems and improve life chances. Social enterprises are businesses which like other businesses do things to earn money and make a profit, however it is how they work and what they do with their profit which makes them different. A social enterprise does not exist to make profits for its owners or shareholders nor does it rely on volunteers and grants. It makes its money from selling its goods or services and reinvests its profits back into the business or the local community and covers its own costs in the long term.

Understand more about establishing a Social Enterprise is something many community building Management Groups would like to know more about as they consider Asset Transfer.

Grant Aid

The consultation clearly showed that both Council and non-Council community building Management Groups value the present Grant Aid provided by the Council. Although mixed views were given in response to proposed changes to the criteria for and administration of Grant there was clear consensus that a new system, which is fair, simple, linked to need and available to all is needed.

Many respondents highlighted the value of this grant in helping to cover the cost of fuel bills or staffing costs and a high proportion wanted the Council to be flexible and allow the Grant Aid to be used for a wide range of revenue costs.

Staffing

Over the years some Council owned community buildings have benefited from caretakers or cleaning staff and some have benefited from ex-staff maintaining key holding and other roles on an informal basis.

Following LGR and more recent staffing reductions these arrangements either have or will shortly cease. Some community buildings therefore need additional support to ensure that they can increase their income to cover these costs or attract new volunteers.

Provision of Support

The Support Landscape

The level and extent of support already available to community building Management Groups is broad. Support is provided by the Council and other public sector partners; the voluntary and community sector and available from the private sector. An indication of the support presently available in County Durham from these different sectors and providers has been gathered in developing this strategy, although in some cases this support is limited and will not be of the level the Council will require in order to take forward the Asset Transfer and Investment Programme set out in this strategy.

Council Support

In addition to existing support available to community building Management Groups, the Council will establish a temporary Community Building Support Team for two years, to take forward this strategy. This team will sit within ACE and include:

- A **Community Buildings Project Officer**, with responsibility for delivery this strategy and action plan over the next two years and specialist skills in business planning, accessing funding and project management.
- A **Capital Investment Officer** to be seconded from the Council's Direct Service Team to coordinate the delivery of the Capital Works investment programme. The Officer will work closely with community building organisations. This role is vital to the Investment programme and will be able to advise on a range of capital works issues.
- Two **Community Buildings Support Officers**, to work with and support each community building through their individual process (Asset Transfer, Closure, etc), provide Health & Safety advice, ensure compliance issues are being addressed, provide generic community development support and ensure that each community building is linked into support networks that are sustainable in the long term.
- A **Community Buildings Training Officer** to provide the support mechanisms, toolkits, training materials and key documents and to deliver training.
- A **Community Buildings Advice Officer** to be a central point of contact for all advice issues, signpost Management Groups to specialist or technical support, provide administrative support, ensure good communications, monitor compliance related activities and coordinate work with others providing advice and support.

The need for a dedicated team offering a high level of support was a key finding in the consultation carried out in this strategy as well as being reinforced by the experience of the Asset Transfer Unit.

Town and Parish Councils

The Council will also work closely with Town and Parish Councils to provide the type and level of support needed by community building Management Groups and they have been

offered the opportunity to be involved in the development of this strategy throughout the consultation period. Many Local Councillors are involved with Community Building Management Groups and they are committed to exploring opportunities to extend this involvement, possibly through taking on leaseholds or supporting other groups to do so.

In taking this strategy forward key discussions will be held with Town and Parish Councils to explore opportunities for further support and engagement with local Management Groups. Dialogue will also continue through the Durham Co-ordination Group of the Society of Local Council Clerks to develop appropriate mechanisms to take this work forward.

Multi-Agency Support

The Council's Community Buildings Support Team will focus on delivering the change required to take forward this strategy. Many of the other support requirements can be met from existing provision within the VCS and through the valuable work done by the County Durham Community Buildings Partnership and The Village Halls Consortium (TVHC). The Council will use its existing mainstream resources (Grant to TVHC and Grant Funding Deed to VCS infrastructure organisations) to help facilitate this. In addition a support fund will be set aside to be used to purchase independent specialist advice and/or support over the next two years.

Access to Funding

The need to access advice and support to raise funds was the most frequently mentioned support need, highlighted during the consultation, with 70% of groups raising this.

The Council met with potential funders on 22 November 2011 and was pleased that a broad range of funders were interested in the work that the Council was carrying out and felt there were opportunities available for community building Management Groups. The main conclusion from this meeting was the view of the funders that, disappointingly, groups in Durham had attracted less funding than expected, but reassuringly, there is a range of potential funding available to groups. However, this needs to be tempered with the view expressed by local management committees that although there may be available sources of funding, they will need help to prepare funding applications. Funders noted the links between the work of community buildings and opportunities for training, helping people to build the skills needed for work and the potential of community buildings to be involved in delivering the youth agenda or health agenda, all as ways of accessing funds that are presently available.

However there was a general view that Management Groups would need help and support with preparing funding applications.

Area Action Partnerships

Area Action Partnerships were established to give people in County Durham a greater choice in local affairs. The strength of partnership that can develop between a community building Management Group and AAP can be evidenced across the county. This has demonstrated the key role that AAPs and community buildings have in the local community. The support offered to community building Management Groups by the AAPs can be linked to the four themes on which the AAPs are based:

- 1 **Engagement:** building permanent relationships for the purpose of applying a collective vision for the community.
- 2 **Empowerment:** support the use of community buildings to enhance local economic opportunities.
- 3 **Local Action:** AAPs will contribute to the sustainability of community buildings by:
 - Use of community buildings for meetings;
 - Using the centres as base for community projects developed through Area and Neighbourhood Budgets;
 - Increase usage through promotion and marketing support.
- 4 **Performance:** support the development of neighbourhood plans placing community buildings at the heart of a community long into the future.

County Durham Community Buildings Partnership

The County Durham Community Buildings Partnership brings together public, private, voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations with a shared interest in supporting and sustaining community buildings throughout County Durham. They represent the interests of VCS groups and the buildings they run to policy makers to help ensure that evolving strategies take account of their contributions in any decision making that affects local communities. In doing so they focus on improving communications on matters that affect community buildings, share information and good practice, stimulate joint working, research matters of shared interest and promote the principals set out in the County Durham Compact. The County Durham Community Buildings Partnership can play a key role in supporting local Management Groups as the Council takes forward this strategy.

The Village Halls Consortium

The Village Hall Consortium (TVHC) was founded in 1995 to help improve the quality of life of local communities by improving facilities, access, fabric and activities within Village Halls and Community Centres. The Consortium aims to support the provision of improved and accessible facilities to meet community needs, encourage participation in capacity building training opportunities, develop effective communications and improve the long-term viability of community buildings for all residents. The TVHC have a key role to play as more Management Groups seek to find the type of support they provide, as this strategy is taken forward.

Asset Transfer Unit

The Asset Transfer Unit is delivered by Locality in association with Community Matters and the Local Government Association, and funded by Communities and Local Government. The Unit helps to empower local people and organisations to transform land and buildings into vibrant community spaces whilst supporting the development of a thriving third sector. They are the leading provider of expert advice, guidance and support concerning the transfer of under-used land and buildings from the public sector to community ownership and management - helping organisations to develop those assets and deliver long-term social, economic and environmental benefits.

The Asset Transfer Unit is supportive of this strategy and has committed £25,000 of advice to help drive forward the Asset Transfer work. Their support has included on-going advice from a Development Manager, organising a seminar on Asset Transfer, establishing a buddying pilot for 20 organisations in the County with four organisations that have already gone through Asset Transfer and providing additional support for Asset Transfer through two

days per week of staff time for a time limited period, which will provide a valuable role in filling gaps in the provision of support presently available.

In addition any community building Management Group pursuing Asset Transfer can apply for two days of bespoke support from the Asset Transfer Unit.

Institute of Local Governance

In partnership with the Institute for Local Governance and Northumberland County Council the Council is hoping to commission a piece of work to consider how social enterprise can play a key role in transferring assets to local communities. 'Social enterprise' is defined in its broadest sense to include a wide range of non-profit organisations (including registered charities which operate as companies limited by guarantee, industrial and provident societies and community interest companies). This work will look at how assets such as community buildings can be transferred to social enterprises with the aim of providing clear recommendations on how to support Asset Transfer where there are realistic prospects for success by social enterprise (autonomously or in partnership with community groups or for profit businesses) which can deliver sustainable facilities.

Grant Aid

The Council will continue to provide Grant Aid over the next two years. During (2012/13) it will be distributed as it is presently to ensure that all recipients have clear warning of change. During 2012/13 the AAPs will be requested to carry out joint work to develop proposals for use of Grant Aid in 2013/14. These proposals will be requested by September 2012 in order that the Council can put in place new criteria that is appropriate locally but can also be fairly, openly and consistently applied across the County.

Following agreement of the new criteria in September all existing recipients will be informed of the planned changes and all Council and non-Council community buildings will be informed of the revised opportunity to apply for the Grant. It is anticipated that with a new criteria that has been designed locally and agreed countywide it will be most appropriate for the administration of this grant to be handled at a local level, by the AAPs, alongside and in the context of other funding provided locally.

VCS Infrastructure Funding

In December 2011 the Council agreed to amend the procedure followed in allocating funding to VCS infrastructure organisations. The annual funding pot for 2012/13 and 2013/14 is £200,000. Each year since 2009 an element of this funding has been given to infrastructure organisations to fund the work that they do to support community buildings. Although funding will now be allocated via made to a Member/Officer working group it is envisaged that a proportion of the £200,000 will be available to facilitate the type of work needed to continue to support community buildings.

Peer Support

One of the most effective ways of providing support for buildings going through Asset Transfer is to put them in touch with other community building management Groups that have successfully gone through this process. The Activity Den in Tanfield Lea has already offered this type of support and produced their own Asset Transfer checklist, which highlights some of the issues that they came across during the Asset Transfer process.

Training, Toolkits and Documentation

Many of the support needs outlined above can be provided via training, toolkits and easy to use documentation. A range of toolkits and support packs will be established to ensure that Management Groups have easy access to the type of help and support they need.

Training

As part of the support package a comprehensive training programme will be established. This will be developed by the Community Buildings Training Officer and utilise skills within the public, voluntary and private sector to provide training in the areas needed. In addition some specific and specialist training will be bought in to facilitate and support the changes needed.

Community Buildings Pack

One of the first support documents to be made available to each community building will be an individually developed 'Community Building Pack'. This pack will bring together existing information about the building held by the Council, including details of the lease, insurance, utility bills and the repairs and maintenance work that has been carried out over the last ten years (where this is available).

PartnershipLive

The recently established PartnershipLive communications facility linked to the County Durham Partnership website provides an ideal facility for information and documentation linked to community buildings to be shared and for Management Groups use the information they need whilst easily sharing information that they have found valuable. Access and training on the use of this system will be made available to community building Management Groups.

Websites

Dedicated pages will be established on Durham County Council's website to provide access to information, advice and the standard forms required.

Quality Standards

Two quality standard tools already exist and are in use by community building Management Groups in County Durham:

- **Hallmark** – Hallmark is a quality standards scheme for village halls. It was launched by the Association for Communities in Rural England (ACRE) in 2007 and promotes effective well managed community buildings through a system backed by peer assessment. The Hallmark scheme has two main benefits: it provides funders and other organisations with a benchmark for a well managed community facility and it gives village hall volunteers the confidence that they are running their building in the correct way. Community building need to find efficient ways of operating at the centre of community life – an issue specifically addressed by the Hallmark scheme.
- **PRE VISIBLE – VISIBLE Communities™** is based around a set of seven core principles, which underpin strong sustainable community organisations:
 - A VOICE to represent issues of local concern;
 - An INDEPENDENT and politically neutral organisation;
 - A SERVICE provider for local people;

- An INITIATOR of projects to meet locally identified needs;
- A BUILDER of partnerships with other local organisations and groups;
- A strong LOCAL network of people and organisations;
- A way to ENGAGE local people to become active in their communities.

The PRE VISIBLE review is a simpler approach concentrating on the management systems and policies that a community organisation has in place via a series of online questions and guidance notes, although this is not an accredited standard.

Actions

To drive forward this strategy the following actions will be taken. We will:

1. Recruit Community Buildings Support Team
2. Develop a range of mechanisms to ensure that management groups have access to comprehensive information, advice and training. Including technical, specialist and independent advice.
3. Provide intensive support, through a Community Buildings Support Team for two years (2012/13 – 2013/14).
4. Work with each management group to identify and provide support appropriate to their capacity, needs and circumstances.
5. Establish a support network, to provide a comprehensive range of support and advice by working with the VCS and other ensuring that we do not duplicate activities.
6. Build strong links with funders to enable better access for groups in County Durham.
7. Provide training and bespoke advice.
8. Support community buildings to access appropriate energy efficiency advice and support to help them to reduce their fuel costs.
9. Work with community buildings to help them to increase their use and encourage more members of the community to engage in their activities.
10. Help community buildings to find volunteers with the skills that they need.
11. Provide access to Grant Aid in a fair and transparent way for all community buildings through AAPs from April 2013.
12. Encourage Management Groups to engage in the County Durham Community Buildings Partnership and The Village Halls Consortium.
13. Establish web and other tools and templates to help Management Groups through the process.
14. Continue to work with young people to encourage involvement in community buildings.
15. Share with community buildings the information received during the consultation about what would encourage more people to use the facilities.
16. Support community buildings to improve their marketing and promotion.
17. Establish new procedure for the allocation of grant aid.

Conclusion

The Way Forward

Over the next two years the Council will aim to Asset Transfer or close all of its 120 community buildings.

The Council's investment of £2.15 million to improve the condition of its community buildings, and to provide a significant level of support and advice to help community building Management Groups take control of their buildings, represents a major commitment by the Authority in the current economic climate. However, this strategy highlights that not only does the community buildings sector have the potential to play a key role in the achievement of the Council and its partners' vision, but the consultation has shown widespread support for the approach being taken by the Council.

Whilst there is support for this strategy, it is also evident that to implement it will require a substantial effort and result in a number of difficult decisions with regard some community buildings where either their condition, or level of support in local communities mean they close during the implementation of this strategy. However, through the investment available means that where there is the appetite in a local community to take responsibility for a community building, then they will be offered every chance to do so.

Equality Impact Assessments

Assessing the potential impact of change to the Council's current approach to community buildings has been a key part of the process taken to date. An overall impact assessment on the review was presented to Cabinet in September 2011 and this was followed by an assessment of the subsequent consultation process, the findings of which have influenced the development of this strategy.

As part of the consultation process, meetings with community building Management Groups and users sought to gather information on the potential impact of progress on community groups with protected characteristics. This information was used to inform a further Equality Impact Assessment on the process for reassessing the priority attached to community buildings set out in this strategy.

As detailed in this strategy, the final decision on each potential Asset Transfer or closure of a community building will be delegated to the Portfolio Holder and Assistant Chief Executive, who will be advised by an Asset Transfer Panel. As part of this decision making process, individual Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out for each building and these will be taken into consideration by the Panel before they make their final decision.

Risk Assessment

A number of risks have been identified linked to Asset Transfer. Experience from across the country has shown that these risks can be mitigated to ensure a successful outcome.

The key risks are as follows:

- a) The receiving organisation does not have the capacity/skills to manage the asset.
- b) Possibility of the Local Authority lacking in capacity to support the asset transfer adequately.
- c) The community organisation does not have the funds to purchase and/or refurbish the asset.
- d) The community organisation cannot afford to maintain the asset on an on-going basis.
- e) Confusion in roles between the local authority and the community organisation.
- f) Limited potential for enterprise development based on the asset/in the area.
- g) Reliance by the receiving organisation on a small number of volunteers.
- h) Use would not fit with wider strategic aims of the local authority.

Annex 3 highlights the key risks and how the approach and actions set out in this strategy will help to reduce or mitigate these risks.

Timetable for Change

It is anticipated that implementation of this strategy will take two years. There are tensions within the timeline as each community building Management Group will be at a different stage of readiness to progress. It will not be feasible to transfer some community buildings to the community and therefore an Exit Strategy will be implemented and this has also identified within the timetable for change.

The timetable aims to reflect the individuality of each building. The timetable for each building will therefore be influenced by their decision making process, access to funding, developing community support and the organisation's commitment to Asset Transfer. The flexibility within the application process will allow for a negotiated approach.

The timeline has clear motivational deadlines for those organisations that have responded that they do not know or do not want to undertake an Asset Transfer. There will be numerous opportunities and support offered to both the organisation and the community before the deadline is reached. However, the delivery of the investment programme, dependant on the completion of Asset Transfer, will need to identify entry points for those organisations that are categorised as 'invest when resources become available'.

Communications

Throughout the consultation the need to establish strong communications was highlighted by a range of different groups. A communications strategy to support the implementation of this strategy will therefore be introduced from February 2012. The purpose of this strategy will be to:

- To communicate the results of the community buildings consultation;

- To communicate the Council's Community Buildings Strategy following the decisions made by Cabinet in February 2012.
- To support the implementation of the Community Buildings Strategy, ensuring that all community building Management Groups know how the Council plans to move forward, what is expected, the support available and the timescales required.
- To ensure key stakeholders support the Community Buildings Strategy through an understanding of the benefits.
- To be able to react quickly and consistently to enquiries from the media and stakeholders requiring information.

Action Plan:

No.	Objective	Action	Milestone	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility
1.	Objective 1 Developing strong and vibrant communities	Establish a programme of work to link all community buildings to the work of their AAPs.	Community Building seminar. Establish named contacts in AAP and the Council's central Community Buildings Support Team for community buildings	February 2012	February 2012	Gordon Elliott / Donna Jefferson/ Lee Stephenson/ Andrew Megginson
2.		Establish a directory of community buildings to facilitate stronger links.	County Durham community buildings directory completed	February 2012	May 2012	Janet Lester
3.		Promote community buildings as a base for the delivery of council services.	Provide information about community buildings and their activities to Council services.	May 2012	May 2013	Donna Jefferson
4.		Provide information about community buildings and their activities to the wider County Durham Partnership and its members.	Information shared via the CDP	April 2012	October 2012	Donna Jefferson
5.		Work with the VCS to establish a network of community buildings to facilitate joint working and sharing of resources.	Initiate work with VCS	March 2012	October 2012	Clare Marshall
6.		Ensure community buildings are linked into opportunities for bulk procurement	Establish training and links with procurement.	March 2012	March 2013	Donna Jefferson
7.		Encourage all community buildings to link into existing networks and partnerships.	Share information on existing networks and partnerships.	May 2012	July 2012	Janet Lester
8.		Establish named contacts in AAPs and the Council's Community Buildings Support Team for community buildings.	Share information	April 2012	Ongoing	Janet Lester
9.		Ensure community buildings are linked into the development of the Localism agenda in County Durham.	Share information	April 2012	On-going	Clare Marshall
10.		Establish stronger links with Town and Parish Councils to ensure community buildings are well	Disseminate best practice and examples of effective	September 2012	January 2013	Clare Marshall

		integrated into their local area.	partnerships between Town and Parish Councils			
11.		Establish good mechanisms for communication with community buildings and support organisations	Arrange network meeting with support organisations.	April 2012	June 2012	Janet Lester
12.		Help build links between countywide and AAP priorities and those of community buildings	Share information on priorities in community building pack.	April 2012	September 2012	Janet Lester
13.		Work with community buildings to ensure that they have appropriate charging systems in place and ensure that all public sector partners are aware of these.	Work with VCS to provide good practice on charging.	April 2012	September 2012	Community Building Team

No.	Objective	Action	Milestone	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility
14.	Objective 2 Maximising the impact of resources available to invest in community buildings.	Establish a programme of investment of £2.15m in community buildings on the basis of a move to Asset Transfer.	Establish programme based on capacity of Management Groups	April 2012 Jan 2013	June 2012 March 2014	Gordon Elliott/ Donna Jefferson
15.		Help to establish networks of support for community buildings.	Identify and support local networks.	June 2012	December 2012	Janet Lester
16.		Work with funders to maximise the funding that Management Groups might be able to access.	List of good practice funders available, promoted regularly and establish joint work.	April 2012	June 2012 (ongoing)	Janet Lester
17.		Implement an exit strategy leading to the closure of community buildings that are not viable for Asset Transfer.	Agree time lines for closure with buildings identified for immediate closure.	April 2012	June 2012	Donna Jefferson
18.		Work with housing providers to establish the most appropriate way forward for communal rooms.	Discussions with housing providers.	April 2012	May 2012	Gordon Elliott/ Donna Jefferson

19.		Provide clear information about existing leases and the responsibilities of the Council and the Management Group.	Provide clear information packs. (Develop good practice base.)	April 2012	September 2012	Janet Lester
20.		Provide support to enable Management Groups to access independent legal advice.	Establish links through support team.	April 2012	September 2012	Janet Lester
21.		Work with CISWO to clarify issues linked to trusteeship of a small number of buildings.	Identify trusteeship issues and clarify all	January 2012	March 2012	Janet Lester
22.		Keep in touch with the users of communal rooms to keep them informed about developments and discussions with housing providers.	Establish links for regular contact.	February 2012	April 2012 Ongoing	Janet Lester
23.		Contact all community buildings to inform them of the outcome of the consultation, their position on the priority investment list and the next stage.	Produce letter/pack.	February 2012	March 2012	Janet Lester

No.	Objective	Action	Milestone	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility
24.	Objective 3 Handing over control to local communities	Introduce a positive and proactive approach to Asset Transfer.	Cabinet considers Community Buildings Strategy	February 2012	March 2012	Janet Lester
25.		Promote the benefits of local communities having control of community buildings.	Delivery of seminars and training that promote the benefits of Asset Transfer.	March 2012	December 2012	Janet Lester
26.		Use Asset Transfer as a catalyst to greater community empowerment through extensive training programme for Management Groups and Trustees and provide support to maximise the use of the building by the community. This will be delivered in partnership with the voluntary sector to avoid duplication.	Comprehensive training programme delivered to those organisations.	February 2012	April 2012	Janet Lester
27.		Minimise the risk to community building Management Groups and Durham County	Community Buildings Asset Transfer risk	March 2012	March 2014	Janet Lester

		Council through the application of risk management action plan.	assessment agreed and implemented.			
28.		Agree a bespoke programme of training and support for each asset transfer organisation. This will be undertaken at the beginning of the asset transfer process based on the required areas of support as identified by the organisation.	Training needs identified and agreed with the first round of the first round of expression of interest submissions.	April 2012	June 2012	Janet Lester
29.		Implement a robust application process that is designed to support those organisations wishing to take on the Asset Transfer of a community building.	Distribution of Expression of Interest applications to community buildings ready for Asset Transfer.	February 2012	May 2014	Janet Lester
30.		Implement a robust decision making process, using Delegated Powers to the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the portfolio holder, that incorporates an assessment that leads to transparent decisions. The criteria for the assessment will be supportive and at each decision making point a review of any further support will be undertaken.	First review of Expressions of Interest progress to detailed applications.	March 2012	July 2014	Donna Jefferson

No.	Objective	Action	Milestone	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility
31.	Objective 4 Supporting the dedicated volunteers who run community buildings	Recruitment of Community Buildings Support Team	Community Buildings Team recruited.	March 2012	April 2012	Donna Jefferson
32.		Develop a range of mechanisms to ensure that management groups have access to comprehensive information, advice and training. Including technical, specialist and independent advice.	Establish full training programme.	February 2012	April 2012	Donna Jefferson
33.		Provide intensive support, through a Community Buildings Support Team for two years (2012/13 – 2013/14).	Community Building Team briefed on support required.	March 2012	April 2012	Donna Jefferson

34.		Work with each management group to identify and provide support appropriate to their capacity, needs and circumstances.	Support needs identified at the beginning of the application process. A bespoke package developed for individual organisations.	May 2012	September 2012	Donna Jefferson
35.		Establish a support network, to provide a comprehensive range of support and advice by working with the VCS and other ensuring that we do not duplicate activities.	Establish working group with VCS.	February 2012	April 2012	Donna Jefferson
36.		Build strong links with funders to enable better access for groups in County Durham.	Share strategy with funders.	February 2012	April 2012	Donna Jefferson
37.		Provide training and bespoke advice.	Carry out training needs assessment.	February 2012	March 2013	Community Building Training Officer
38.		Support community buildings to access appropriate energy efficiency advice and support to help them to reduce their fuel costs.	Work with the Energy Team to establish.	February 2012	September 2012	Donna Jefferson/ Lynsey Pattison
39.		Work with community buildings to help them to increase their use and encourage more members of the community to engage in their activities.	Build links with AAPs.	February 2012	September 2012	Shealagh Pearce/ Lee Copeland/ Andrew Megginson
40.		Help community buildings to find volunteers with the skills that they need.	Work with VCS Volunteer Bureaus	February 2012	Ongoing	Janet Lester
41.		Provide access to Grant Aid in a fair and transparent way for all community buildings.	Establish programme of change.	February 2012	April 2012	Donna Jefferson/ Joanne Williamson
42.		Encourage Management Groups to engage in the County Durham Community Buildings Partnership and The Village Halls Consortium.	Share links.	February 2012	May 2012	Janet Lester
43.		Establish web and other tools and templates to help Management Groups through the process.	Set up links and publicise.	February 2012	September 2012	Janet Lester/ Clare Marshall
44.		Continue to work with young people to encourage involvement in community buildings.	Share outcome of consultation and strategy.	February 2012	Ongoing	Cathy Smith
45.		Share with community buildings the information received during the consultation about what would encourage more people to use the facilities.	Establish mechanisms to share information and receive ongoing feedback.	February 2012	Ongoing	Cathy Smith

46.		Support community buildings to improve their marketing and promotion.	Identify opportunities for marketing and promotion.	February 2012	September 2012	Clare Marshall
47.		Establish new procedure for the allocation of Grant Aid.	Joint AAP Panel agree new procedure.	March 2012	September 2012	Principal AAP Co-ordinators

Annex 1: Original Proposal for Change – Five Principles for Investment

The proposed five principles are:

- (a) Work (including access work) required in the longer term (i.e. beyond the current MTFP) will not be funded by the Council. It is envisaged that these longer term requirements, Priority 4 work as explained in paragraph 48 of this report, would be met from other sources of funding secured or raised by the community buildings management committees.
- (b) The works that are the responsibility of a building's management committee will not be funded. For the majority of community managed community buildings this will be the internal works and for some it will also be the external works as they have full repairing leases.
- (c) Work on currently closed community buildings but where no formal decision has been taken as to their future by the Council, will not be funded. Given the scale of the issues for the operational community buildings set out in this report, it is proposed that a decision is taken to close these community buildings and seek their disposal pending the outcome of a review into the options for asset transfer. If however, viable alternative uses are identified prior to the next phase of the review being reported to Cabinet, it is proposed these can be progressed in accordance with the Council's existing asset management procedures.
- (d) In line with practice elsewhere, and to encourage independence and generate additional resources, the Council resources will meet a maximum of 70% of eligible costs with advice provided for the management committee/users to generate the remaining 30%.
- (e) There is a 10% contingency element built into any proposed allocation of resources given the high level nature of the building surveys

ANNEX 2 - Community Building Exit Strategy

Stage 1 - Pre Closure

Action	DCC Support Resources
All Buildings whose current status is CLOSED , will transferred to the Asset Team for disposals as per the procedures identified in the Acquisitions and Disposal Policy 2010/2011	Assets
Key Point of Contact Officer (KPOC) Identified	PACE – Community Buildings Support Team
(KPOC) will Inform the Divisional Elected Member(s) of the decision to close	PACE - Community Buildings Support Team
Work with Trustees to establish a contact list of all Service Users within the building. The list should include the requirements of the Service Users.	PACE - Community Buildings Support Team Elected Members
Meeting held with all users of the Community Building to discuss potential closure.	PACE - Community Buildings Support Team AAP Co-ordinator Elected Members
Undertake a community audit of all local community facilities and their capacity to meet the requirements of the Service Users	PACE – Community Buildings Support Team AAP Co-ordinator Elected Members
Equality Impact Assessment undertaken	PACE - Community Buildings Support Team
Initial meeting with management group to discuss closure of a building.	PACE – Community Buildings Support Team Elected Members Assets AAP Co-ordinator.
Review of constitution with the group to confirm dissolution process	PACE - Community Buildings Support Team

<p>Arrange open community meeting to discuss potential closure, ensuring that the meeting is clearly advertised locally as per the term of the constitution and ensure that the Charity Commission is informed.</p> <p>Contact information gathered for those members of the public who attend the meeting, identifying interest in establishing a new neighbourhood group.</p>	<p>PACE – Community Buildings Support Team</p> <p>Local Community</p> <p>Elected Members</p> <p>AAP Co-ordinator</p>
<p>Support current users of the building to access to alternate venues. Any barriers within the transition period need to be minimised</p>	<p>PACE – Community Buildings Support Team</p> <p>Elected Members</p> <p>AAP Co-ordinator</p>

Stage 2 - Building Closure

Action	DCC Support Resources
<p>Meet with Assets to discuss closure arrangements as per the Durham County Council Acquisition and Disposal Policy 2010/2011</p>	<p>PACE - Community Buildings Support Team, Management Committee, Elected Members and AAP Co-ordinator</p>
<p>Advice on dissolution process (Management group may request independent advice at this stage)</p>	<p>PACE - Community Buildings Support Team, Assets, DCC Solicitor</p> <p>Elected Members</p>
<p>Management Committee formally advises Durham County Council of intention to close the building.</p> <p>Allocation of remaining assets (once all debts are settled) to local groups (as outlined in the Constitution). This can be linked to an open meeting to engage the wider community in this process.</p>	<p>Management Committee. PACE – Community Buildings Support Team, Elected Members</p> <p>PACE - Community Buildings Support Team, Management Committee , Elected Members and AAP Co-ordinator</p>
<p>Link with all utility suppliers to ensure all contracts are cancelled and final gas, electric and water meter readings are given to utility suppliers; ensure</p>	<p>PACE – Community Buildings Support Team</p> <p>Management Committee</p>

<p>all accounts are up to date and are independently audited and ensure all Charity Commission returns are completed and submitted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return keys to Assets Service for disposal. • Keep community updated on future use of the site where community building is currently sited. 	<p>Elected Members AAP Co-ordinator</p>
<p>Community Buildings closed and classed as surplus to requirements and transferred to the Asset Team for disposals as per the procedures identified in the Acquisitions and Disposal Policy 2010/2011.</p>	<p>Assets</p>

Stage 3 - Post Closure Support

The level and range of support required will vary depending on the response from the community.

COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER

Managing Risks in Asset Transfer

Identified Risk	Consideration	Outcome
<p>The receiving organisation does not have the capacity/skills to manage the asset</p>	<p>Lack of skills and capacity within the community organisation to manage a building is a commonly voiced concern which can greatly affect whether an asset transfer is successful or not. Some of the results may be that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations are raised in vain • Time, effort and money spent by the organisation are wasted • The transferred building and organisation do not operate to their full potential • Little use is made of the asset 	<p>There is a need for the organisation taking on the building to demonstrate the skills and capacity to manage it. This could be through a skills audit or other means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An agreed organisational development plan will be developed and implemented, to include skills training in building management • A DCC Community Buildings Support Team will ensure that the organisation taking on the building has access to on-going expertise and advice • Clarity of expectation in any formal agreement about the minimum level of usage expected • A viable long-term business plan will be developed at the outset, although there should also be a recognition of the scope for innovative development as a project progresses • The local authority will offer to provide compliance advice • Ensure that any lease on the building includes a clause which states that "In the event that the community organisation ceases to trade, appropriate arrangements are in place to protect assets for

Identified Risk	Consideration	Outcome
		community use” (this would include transfer to another appropriate community organisation or possible reversion to the local authority)
Possibility of the Local Authority lacking in capacity to support the asset transfer adequately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient support given to the third sector organisation leading to a failure of the organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A bespoke support and advice package will be available to all transferring organisations. Support will continue post asset transfer
Community organisation does not have the funds to purchase and/or refurbish the asset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure of project or organisation may result Time, effort and money wasted Wider community is let down Building/asset does not achieve Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support will be given to identify and apply for funding All community buildings have had a conditions survey at outset. This included an assessment of the asset’s fitness for purpose and Disability Discrimination Act considerations There is a need to fully consider long-term income/expenditure at outset and the community organisation should be provided with a clear financial picture before and after transfer for each potential transfer Transfer on a long lease will give the receiving organisations more opportunities to raise grants and investment funding to support improvements
Community organisation cannot afford to maintain the asset on an on-going basis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk that the organisation collapses Organisation may incur financial liabilities that it can’t meet Long-term health and value of the asset declines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The receiving organisation should develop a robust, long-term business plan at the outset – the cost of doing this will be a valuable investment Durham County Council will support the organisation to Develop, fund and implement an agreed organisational development plan

Identified Risk	Consideration	Outcome
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure organisation has access to on-going financial expertise and advice • Provide procurement advice to underpin quality revenue streams • Promote opportunities for use of community buildings
<p>Limited potential for enterprise development based on the asset/in the area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asset may not generate enough revenue to be financially sustainable • Council's commissioning/procurement policy may be insufficiently aligned to their asset transfer programme • A policy shift from effective grant-aid programmes to contracts and competitive tendering may threaten the asset's viability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide access to specialist business support advice • Involve other local asset managers in testing out the viability of the business plan • Provide assistance on preparing business plans and carrying out marketing prior to transfer • Consider which local services across County Durham Partnership are integral to the viability of the asset (and vice versa) and ensure these are procured accordingly.
<p>Reliance by the receiving organisation on a small number of volunteers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals may become overburdened and be unable to maintain effort on the project, threatening their health and that of the project • A lack of individuals to take over may threaten the project once the current volunteers move on • It may not remain possible to keep the building fully open, limiting its use for the local community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The management committee can be given overall control and required to work through collective responsibility. Planned rotation of committee members can then ensure that the committee is never left too weak to operate and new members can be absorbed and brought 'up to speed' gradually • Advice will be put in place to help organisations undertake succession planning through use of 'role descriptions' etc. • Forming a network of trustees covering a whole local authority can help in the recruitment of new board members • A focus on working with long-term VCS infrastructure organisations can ensure support is

Identified Risk	Consideration	Outcome
		available after the wave of initial enthusiasm for asset transfer may have waned
Use would not fit with wider strategic aims of the local authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability of local authority to implement sustainable community strategy impaired • Community organisation unable to form stable partnership with the local authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of criteria for assessing asset transfer ensures management groups address local need • Monitor use of buildings • Durham County Council involves community organisation in development and revision of priorities through AAPs

Annex 4 The preferred characteristics of the transfer organisation

A management group taking on Asset Transfer should have:

- a) Up-to-date governing document
- b) A detailed Business Plan, which is revised annually and has short, medium and long term objectives
- c) Clearly identified roles and responsibilities for Management Committee Members as Directors and/or Charity Trustees
- d) Elected Officers, elections and regular meetings in accordance with its governing document
- e) A clear, realistic and funded Building Management Plan including a Maintenance Programme, Building Health Check List and any future refurbishment plans.
- f) Evidence of compliance with all Charity Commission and Companies House requirements
- g) Procedures for managing conflicts of interest
- h) An understanding of the local community and it's current needs, procedures to monitor the quality and relevance of its services, seek feedback and ensure that its services are fully accessible and appropriate to its Community
- i) Regular financial updates for the Organisation and its Trustees/Directors/Management Committee Members to ensure they understand their legal obligations
- j) Appropriately examined or audited annual accounts containing the Annual Report
- k) Written policies covering payment to the organisation and its Trustees/Directors/Management Committees Members and volunteers
- l) A Reserves Policy
- m) Procedures for paying/re-claiming the correct amounts of tax, NI and VAT
- n) A consistent charging and lettings policy that balances the needs of the organisations with the needs of the local groups
- o) A separate trading company with a clear legal relationship, where applicable
- p) A clear recruitment policy and written procedure for the recruitment, induction and support of employees and volunteers
- q) Contracts of employment and written conditions of service for all staff

- r) Relevant equal opportunities procedures to comply legislation in its work and recruitment/employment of staff
- s) The correct licences, permissions and insurance cover, where applicable
- t) Evidence of compliance with good health and safety legislation and practice
- u) Evidence of compliance with the Children Act and the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006

Annex 5 Application Process Timeline

The proposed timeline for Asset Transfer has assigned realistic timescales to the elements required at each stage of asset transfer. It must be noted that activities within stage 2 and 3 can be undertaken simultaneously reducing the overall time line. The time line has taken into account organisational differences such as levels of experience, skills and community involvement. The proposed timescale will accommodate the range of organisations involved in the Asset Transfer process, this has been achieved by the addition of flexibility at key stages of the Asset Transfer process.

Gaps may be needed between each stage to allow time for work to be carried out or funds to be raised.

The Exit Strategy (Annex 2) can be introduced at any time within the timeline should all options for Asset Transfer be exhausted.

2. Proposed Asset Transfer Timeline

Stage	Element(s)	ACTION	Timescales
Stage 1: Pre Application	Not all community buildings have a formal community management structure. The pre application stage would consist of consultation and community development (with the community, interested parties, Town or Parish Council and Members) to assist in the formation of a community group able to progress an Asset Transfer.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Asset Transfer seminars and training for interested parties 2. Letters outlining the Asset Transfer process as pertaining to a Community Building is issued. 3. Community consultation event to consider the future of the building. 4. All interested parties brought together to form a Management Group 5. Support package agreed 6. Community Development Action Plan agreed. 	<p>3 Months</p> <p><i>(can be extended by mutual agreement)</i></p>
Stage 2. Formal Expressions of Interest	<p>Presentation of business case and feasibility assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why the Asset is needed, to include an open community meeting. • Aims and Objectives • Support from others 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Distribution of Expression of Interest (EOI) 2. Submission of EOI 3. Desktop assessment by Council Officers, identifying strengths and weaknesses. 4. Written notification of the Council's decision. 5. Stage 2 support package agreed 	6 weeks

Stage	Element(s)	ACTION	Timescales
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate effective management of Asset 		
<p>Stage 3.</p> <p>Submission of detailed Business Plan (for the whole organisation)</p>	<p>Evidence of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporation (or working towards Incorporation) Full structural survey undertaken Product/Service Delivery Partnership working Experience/skills audit completed Capacity Need Analysis Projected utilisations Cash flow forecasts Projected income and expenditure Risk assessment SWOT analysis Agreement on delivery of capital works investment. This will be undertaken on a case by case basis. Independent Professional advice obtained 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting(s) with Interested party(s) and supporters Site visit Support package delivered Detailed assessment by relevant Council Officers Written report and options prepared for Community Building panel consisting of relevant Senior Officers 	<p>3 months</p> <p><i>(can be extended by mutual agreement)</i></p>
<p>Stage4.</p> <p>If approved 'in principal', a full assessment of the proposed Asset Transfer is undertaken</p>	<p>Assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Test against existing facilities (possible duplication) Test against local policies Test against local Neighbourhood Partnership Action Plan Agree Post Transfer Support Plan (if required) and Investment Capital Programme. Decision taken by Portfolio Holder and Head of 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment Report prepared. Written report by to Community Buildings Panel Formal decision taken by Portfolio Holder and Head of Service. Written notification of the Council's decision. 	<p>Maximum 3 months</p>

Stage	Element(s)	ACTION	Timescales
	Service. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test against National Policies and relevant legislation, inc. State Aid, Regulations, Local Government Act, etc. 		
Stage5. Completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft heads of terms issued • Completion of all agreements and documentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post Asset Transfer support from Durham County Council agreed. • Lease signed and the Transfer of the Asset Complete 	Maximum 2 months <i>(can be extended by mutual agreement)</i>