

Item no.

Report to: Resources Scrutiny Committee

Date: 9th January 2007

Report of: Head of Asset & Property Management

Subject: Community Centres

Ward: All

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an update in relation to the development of a property strategy for Community Centres as previously reported on 13th September 2005 and 14th February 2006.

2.0 Consultation

- 2.1 The Head of Regeneration and the Community Steering Group (a working party of senior officers and Members) have been consulted on this report.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Specialist feasibility studies have been undertaken for each centre by independent consultants with an overview of findings presented to Local Members on 13th December 2006. The centres receiving consideration are Thornley, Deaf Hill, Seaton, Hesleden and Eden Lane.
- 3.2 In general the findings of the reports indicate that a majority of the buildings should be retained. However, prior to significant investments the consultants are recommending that the Community Development Team are tasked with working with the Community Associations to develop business plans and implement action plans to demonstrate that the correct services are being provided and they can demonstrate long term viability. (A breakdown of key findings are attached as Appendix 1)
- 3.3 A separate consultancy firm was appointed independently by Eden Hill Community Association to consider the centre at Eden Lane (also known as the White house). The findings of this report have been supplied to the District Council. Although the Community Association feels that the study was not as positive as they would have hoped, the findings will be considered when developing future community facilities in North Peterlee.

4.0 Position Statement and Option Appraisal

- 4.1 It is essential that each centre is considered on an individual basis with a separate report detailing findings and recommendations presented to Executive. The Steering Group will be tasked with considering each centre over the forthcoming months so that recommendations are made before the end of the financial year.

Item no.

5.0 Implications

5.1 Financial

Once a final recommendations are approved via Executive it will be necessary in conjunction with the Head of Regeneration and Partnerships, to source a package of funding which may include bids to external sources, but may also require a submission for monies through the Capital Programme.

5.2 Legal

Any legal work concerning a community centre is a complex process. Consideration must be given to any existing trust agreement, consent obtained from both the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation and the Charities Commission.

5.3 Policy

No current policy exists in relation to community centres; however, a report was presented to Executive on 7th November 2006 outlining a proposed Community Centre Policy

5.4 Risk

A full risk assessment has been completed.

5.5 Communication

There are no communication implications at this stage of the process.

5.6 Corporate

The actions associated with the report comply with the Councils Corporate objectives to make the most of opportunities for investment, economic growth and employment and reduce inequality in the District.

5.7 Equality and Diversity

No direct implications.

5.8 E-Government

No direct implications.

5.9 Procurement

No direct implications.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 It is recommended that the content of the report be noted.

Background Papers/Documents refereed to in the preparation of this report

- i. District of Easington Risk Assessment
- ii. Copies of Previous Reports

Dale Clarke. Head of Asset & Property Management.

APPENDIX 1

Summary of Findings

Deaf Hill Key Findings	
Factor	Descriptor
Building Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Structure of building is sound and only aesthetic refurbishment is required• Broadly compliant with DDA requirements
Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building is used to approximately 65% capacity• Building is open all day throughout week, most of weekend and most evenings• Fairly diverse user groups
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong steering group• Community is fairly active in decision making• Facility has bid for funding• Facility delivers multiple services from site• Strong partnership links with some organisations

This building should be retained and additional support should be provided to assist the Management Committee to maximise use of the building and to increase the number of representatives involved in the running of the building. Support should also be offered to increase partnership working with other Centres in the village.

The minor issues raised in the building survey should be addressed.

Heselden Key Findings	
Factor	Descriptor
Building Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Structure of building is basically sound• Fairly extensive refurbishment is needed over next ten years to comply to health and safety standards• Does not comply with DDA requirements
Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building is used less than 20% of time• Building is only open on selected days of week with limited flexibility in opening hours• Very few groups use Facility
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Steering Group exists – but is not strong• Some involvement of community in decision-making• No funding bids have been submitted• Few partnerships links exist with organisations

Easington District Council should invest in the community building to bring it up to an acceptable standard. However, this should only occur after a sustained period of mediation and development work. Membership of the Management Committee should be widened and a significant increase in the use of the Centre should be achieved and monitored as a condition of expenditure.

Item no.

Seaton Key Findings	
Factor	Descriptor
Building Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure of building is basically sound. • Fairly extensive refurbishment is needed over next ten years to comply to health and safety standards • Does not comply fully with DDA requirements
Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building is used less than 20% of time • Building is only open on selected days of week with little flexibility in opening hours • Very few groups use facility
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steering Group exists – but is relatively weak • Some involvement of community in decision making • No funding bids have been submitted • No or few partnerships links exist with organisations

In light of the limited number of users of the Community Centre, proximity to Centres in Seaham and the cost of refurbishment it is impossible to justify investment in the building unless the Management Committee are willing to work with representatives of Easington District Council to develop plans to increase use and income generation of the building.

Thornley Key Findings	
Factor	Descriptor
Building Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure of building is basically sound • Extensive refurbishment is needed to meet health and safety • Does not comply with DDA
Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building is used 41-60% of the time • Building is open most days and has some flexibility in opening hours • Fairly diverse user groups
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong steering group • Community is fairly active in decision-making • Facility has bid for funding • Facility delivers multiple services from site • Strong partnership links with some organisations

The building should be replaced as it is in a significant state of disrepair. The large size of the building means that it attracts a number of users specifically for this reason; however the running costs of the building are too expensive (approximately £30,000 per annum).

The current Management Committee is relatively strong and very limited support is required. However, the building condition means that replacement is the only reasonable option in the long-term. The decision to replace the existing building should be supported by mediation to facilitate the process. In addition, a new build would require significant fundraising support and may provide opportunities to develop a Social Enterprise.

OVERALL FINDINGS

Findings relevant to all four Community Centres are presented below.

The need to build capacity and enable individuals to contribute as effectively as they can is an essential part of developing sustainable Community Buildings in Easington. A portfolio approach is needed to address the skills and experience of existing Management Committee members, the total amount of time available from these volunteers, and also the need to attract new and diverse Management Committee members.

Business planning exercises are currently informal at best or non-existent at worst. Training is needed to ensure business planning becomes an integral part of centre management.

All of the Centres could benefit from further promotion. There is a need to improve the signage to the Community Centres (County Council issues) as well as providing District of Easington signs at each council-owned Community Centre.

Whilst there is wide spread support for the concept of Community Centres within Easington District Council, this does not appear to have been mentioned within relevant strategies and plans. There is a need to more firmly place Community Centres within the wider context of local authority documents.

There may be some merit in some staff time for a “trouble shooter” or “champion” for a number of Centres to share. If this approach is to be taken, care will be needed to ensure it is done as sensitively as possible.

There is a need, with the support of the council, for the Management Committees to access external funding and be more proactive about it, if investment internally and externally is to be made to the Community Centres.

It was clear from consultation with all four Centres, that there was an expectation that funding from Easington District Council would be the main source of sustainability. It should however be noted that the Management Committees themselves have responsibility for fundraising and developing appropriate income generation activities.

The findings of the study indicate the need for mediation work with the Management Committees of three of the Centres (Hesleden, Seaton and Thornley) to achieve the recommendations outlined.