



CONSULTATION ON A CORSHAM COMMUNITY CAMPUS

A Report to Wiltshire Council



**Produced by Corsham Community Area Network and
Corsham Town Council**

JANUARY 2011

Executive Summary

This report forms part of the needs assessment for Wiltshire Council's (WC) proposal for a Community Campus at Springfield, Corsham. Through its Workplace Transformation Programme, WC realised that many of its buildings in Corsham were no longer fit for purpose. It asked Corsham Community Area Network (CCAN) and Corsham Town Council (CTC) to consult the local community to help gauge the level of support for a campus which would be more financially and environmentally sustainable and help meet the future needs of the community.

From the outset, the concept attracted a great deal of interest from a wide range of groups and individuals with, on the whole, enthusiastic support for a campus in the Springfield area.

Consultation was carried out in the form of a questionnaire which was widely distributed throughout Corsham Community Area (this report does not cover the analysis of the questionnaire responses, which is being dealt with by WC directly) and two public consultation events, with support from CTC and WC. These were well attended and generally positive; although there was naturally an element of concern and reservation from certain users.

Participants identified a wide range of possible benefits: things they liked included the opportunity to have better, more modern facilities; something for the whole community; high quality design; social integration; civic pride; at a lower overall cost. Other advantages mentioned include its location next to the Leisure Centre and Corsham School; the scope for enhancing the Springfield site generally and for attracting new users from across the Community Area and beyond.

There were reservations about the social club's future; youth centre accommodation; and transport. The reaction to the plan to replace the library was mixed - some people felt that the new location was less convenient whilst others liked the idea of a modern library with better parking and other benefits through its association with other community facilities.

Many people expressed their specific requirements of a Campus, especially the replacement for the Community Centre itself. The most significant needs mentioned include: a large hall and stage for dances, social events and shows etc; flexible space with rooms of different sizes to cater for the wide range of user groups; bar facilities to complement other social activities; indoor sports facilities such as skittle alley; kitchen; and, importantly plenty of storage space which can be dedicated to the variety of regular hirers.

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Report to Wiltshire Council

1. Introduction

Corsham Community Area Network (CCAN) and Corsham Town Council were asked by Wiltshire Council to consult local residents and likely users on its proposal for a 'community campus' in Corsham. This report, compiled by CCAN with the support of the Town Council, brings together:

- comments expressed at public meetings on 27 November and 1 December 2010
- views expressed in written statements, comments and a petition

The findings are intended to complement the quantitative analysis of a questionnaire. More information on the consultation process is listed in Appendix A.

Our starting point for the consultation was the same as that set out in the questionnaire:

"Wiltshire Council provides many different services in the Corsham area, including leisure, library and youth services. These services are currently offered from many different locations, some of which are housed in buildings no longer fit for purpose and which have become very expensive to run.

"Wiltshire Council is proposing to develop the current Springfield site in Corsham to create a 'community campus' providing a number of services for the Corsham community area all under one roof. The campus might include leisure, adult social care, youth services, a library, a cafe and internet services. Locating several services on one site will result in long-term savings in running and maintenance costs.

"A community campus in Corsham could be completed by mid-2012 and, if approved, would be paid for in part through capital funding already proposed for the Springfield Leisure Centre. Other funding could also be available from the sale of sites providing services that could be re-located to the new campus, such as those at the Mansion House and library at Corsham."

2. Summary of Consultation Feedback

At the November meeting, attended by members of over 35 local clubs and organisations from across the community area, there was strong support for the idea of having modern, purpose-built facilities on the site of the existing Community Centre at Springfield. During informal round-table discussions, as participants started to explore the potential of co-located services *and* community centre facilities, there was real enthusiasm for the idea, including the prospect of attracting new users and bringing together a wide cross section of ages and interests.

This support is not unconditional: there are clearly articulated provisos: *This would be a good scheme if the building is well designed; if there is no loss of community facilities; if it meets my club's needs; if it doesn't detract from services elsewhere in the community area; if it doesn't undermine the viability of The Pound Arts Centre or the High Street, if it's economically, socially and environmentally sustainable ...*

At this meeting the discussion focused on what could be achieved through change. Recognition of the need for change was reinforced by a statement from the Treasurer of Corsham Community

Association that the Community Centre could not continue in its present form, and the Community Centre Association had had to hand back the lease to Wiltshire Council.

At the December meeting one of the main user groups, the Social Club, was strongly represented. During the initial Q & A session, some Social Club members expressed their opposition to any change in the status quo. However, the financial position of the Community Association had not been mentioned at this second meeting.

As in the previous meeting, those attending took part in round-table discussions and a range of views and ideas were expressed. At both meetings Town Council Chairman Allan Bosley, on behalf of Corsham Town Council, put across the message that the Town Council sees the proposal as an exciting opportunity for both the town and the community area. Following on from these meetings, CCAN invited the Town Council and the Corsham Community Association to provide written statements. At Appendix B is a Note entitled 'Corsham in Context' on the significance of the Springfield area, coupled with the formal response to the consultation from Corsham Town Council. At Appendix C is a Note provided on behalf of the Community Centre with information on how it is used and run, with a table setting out details of user groups who account for an average of 600-900 people using the Centre weekly .

From comments at the public meetings and in written contributions, here is the essence of what people say appeals to them about the idea of a 'community campus' and how they see the potential of co-location:

What people like

- A modern building could be created to a modern specification
- Something that the whole community area could be proud of – of immediate benefit and also a legacy for future generations
- A one off opportunity to produce facilities that are really fit for purpose located in a building of outstanding architectural merit
- New, purpose built and attractive design could attract many more people and groups
- An opportunity for a genuinely high quality facility to attract regional/national events
- An opportunity to concentrate services at a location central to the population of Corsham, Pickwick, Neston and Rudloe - as well as the Community Area
- A good mix of facilities on one site could draw in a wider range of residents, and encourage them to use new services or venues
- An opportunity to 'integrate' club members and casual visitors and so maximise use
- An opportunity to catch up with some of our European neighbours and learn from their successful adoption of multi-use community buildings of high quality
- Sustainable, energy efficient building(s) could cut overheads and running costs significantly
- Major reduction in the community's carbon footprint
- Larger venue – other halls available in the area often not big enough
- Extended opening hours to optimise use of co-located facilities
- A higher profile – leading to raised awareness of the facilities available and what's on
- A way to retain a community centre in Corsham of benefit to the wider community and to local business

- A positive social impact – by mixing age groups and interests there's the potential to break down traditional barriers, improve mutual perceptions and minimise the risk of anti-social behaviour
- Potential for younger people to help others develop computer skills, etc
- Potential for complementing other facilities such as The Pound Arts Centre and the Town Hall – without undermining them
- Possible community project to generate energy – with spin off for extra income and PR boost to local government's green credentials
- A contribution to civic pride – something to use, to show off and to look after (so self-policing)
- An opportunity to use the released land in ways to benefit the local economy and community
- An opportunity for working together to improve use of and access to the wider Springfield location (with partners to include Corsham School, MOD, Westlea, Fire Service, surgery)

Here is the essence of people's reservations about the idea generally - the questions and fears that keep coming up:

What people don't like

- Ownership and management of the new site are crucial – will it be sustainable?
- Cost of the building project – can it be assured within the current financial situation
- Community ownership may not be feasible, or sustainable in the longer term
- Loss of council ownership is a real worry
- Managing change will be as important as managing the project if it is to command widespread support
- Who would own/assume overall responsibility for the new site? – mixed ownership not seen as conducive to good management and the ability to optimise use
- Loss of 'atmosphere' could lead to a 'white elephant' as with the Rudloe Community Centre
- The existing community centre has been extended over the years – will there be flexibility for future expansion?
- Will a new build mean scaling down? - library, the halls and other facilities need to be at least the same size as the existing ones – and take account of the growing population
- The old building wasn't adequately maintained – who will take on the responsibility, and will the same neglect happen all over again?
- Users may be put off by introducing higher charges for new facilities, use of rooms
- High prices for using the cafe/bar could put off many people from coming to or staying longer on the site
- Once the buildings are knocked down, will they really be replaced or will the land be sold?
- The need to sell sites might put the project at risk
- Plans for Mansion House and the Library too vague – empty buildings deteriorate rapidly
- What will happen to services and facilities in a transition period? - some users may be lost

The Location

The proposed Springfield location, which means co-location with the Springfield Leisure Centre, gives rise to mixed views:

On the plus side:

- The Springfield site is at the geographical centre of Corsham as it is today, taking into account new housing developments such as Katherine Park
- It's a good, spacious location, not immediately next to residential property
- Being next to The Corsham School could lead to fruitful joint ventures
- It's got added potential for being an attraction by being next to green space, with scope for tree planting, wildlife conservation, etc

On the minus side:

- It could have an adverse impact on the viability of the High Street
- It removes the Library from its very convenient position next to the shopping centre
- Without regular (and preferably free) public transport to link Springfield to the High Street area, people (especially older people) who use the existing library may be put off (the new location)

Views on co-location with Springfield Leisure Centre

Many respondents anticipated good things would come from having a community campus next to the Leisure Centre and close to The Corsham School. Most of the concerns relate to traffic and parking. Perceived benefits of co-location include:

- Parents waiting to collect children from the school or visiting the Leisure Centre would have the opportunity (and incentive) to use the facilities available at the campus
- The campus facilities could be designed so as to complement what the Leisure Centre can offer, provided the two could be treated as a joint initiative
- Running costs could be reduced by avoiding unnecessary duplication and sharing facilities such as a reception and cafe area
- The Leisure Centre attracts users from outside the area but, at present, the Community Centre is only open to members or user groups
- The campus could offer less expensive space for some leisure activities (at times crowded out by schools taking priority in the Leisure Centre)
- The 'Red Gra' facility owned by The Corsham School, if redeveloped, could be part of a community facility, and other 'partnership projects' might be feasible

3. Recurring Themes

Other comments recorded or received have been grouped together under the headings of Library, Community Centre Social Club, Facilities for Young People, Springfield Leisure Centre, Sports Facilities, Transport, Parking and Access, New Facilities and Uses, Aspects of Building Design and Green Space.

Library

Relocation of the Library is a controversial aspect of the proposal. Concerns were expressed at the public meetings and in direct comment to assistants at the Library. The majority of comments on the library come from users of the service who enjoy the convenience of the current location near to the High Street. The Chamber of Commerce has expressed its concern about the impact on trade in the Town Centre if the Library is moved. Some library users are also concerned that the proposal could result in a smaller library with fewer books and a worse service.

Many respondents, though, saw a new location as a good thing for the library service – if it came with extended opening hours and better parking and wi-fi access. They liked the idea of an ‘integrated’ library, and welcomed its proximity to The Corsham School and the Leisure Centre with the possibility of attracting new categories of user.

For Box Parish Council and residents it is essential to retain a library in Box; there is real concern that a new library in Corsham could lead to closing the one in Box. The message here is “hands off Box library”.

At the December meeting, Bill Hall (owner of the Martingate Centre) reminded people of his earlier offer to accommodate a library on the first floor of the Martingate Centre, thus retaining a location close to the High Street

Community Centre Social Club

Members of the Social Club present at the December meeting told us they believed that knocking down the Community Centre at Springfield would effectively bring about the end of the Social Club after over 50 years of existence. They want to retain a lounge bar and the range of facilities that are regularly used by members. They do not see a cafe/bar facility (as in the Olympiad in Chippenham for example) as a satisfactory substitute. There is also concern about the future of the staff employed in the Centre.

A petition ‘to save our centre’ was handed over at this meeting. It states that Wiltshire Council wants to knock down the centre and not replace the bar, and urges the Council to listen to the voices of the 384 people who have added their signature. Recurring messages in this petition are:

- Over nearly six decades this community centre has been loyally supported and specifically developed to meet the needs of both its members and the community at large, so what is needed is continuity – *so much goes on here – why get rid of a good thing? ; a nice club shame to lose it; a great loss to the community*
- The club atmosphere is crucial – *it’s the biggest and best club in Corsham; the community needs this club; it’s the community’s club*
- The bar is a major attraction for a wide range of groups, activities and events - *it generates much needed income; keep as it is – we want a bar; without the bar there would be no social functions*
- The Centre serves as a much valued focal point for the community - *it’s the community ‘centre’ – we need it; don’t kill the spirit in the community*

- It's a venue that lends itself to socialising – as used regularly by many long-standing members, by its own football club as well as by other groups as an integral part of their overall use of the Centre
- Membership gives access to a wide range of sports – with skittles mentioned most often, then darts and the successful football team
- The large hall plus stage are greatly valued – for entertainments, for dancing, for kung fu, for live music and band practice etc

Facilities for Young People

Better facilities for young people is a recurring theme in the Community Plan. Many participants recognised the limitations of Mansion House and warmly welcomed the opportunity to provide improved premises as part of the proposed community campus where there are already established facilities for young people including the Skate Park. In some cases this welcome came with a strong caveat: re-provision in Corsham should not detract from the need for high quality, accessible youth centres in Colerne and other parts of the community area.

There is however a clear conflict of views on provision of a new youth centre and access: some envisage any new facilities being provided only for existing members of the Corsham Youth Centre, while others want wider access. They would not want to see merely a relocation of Council youth services.

A representation made on behalf of the Mansion House Youth Group states clearly that sharing accommodation and computer facilities is not feasible. It calls for re-providing dedicated, independent facilities (including Youth Worker accommodation) within a new campus – on the basis of practical working routines and storage of personal and confidential information.

A representative of a youth group active within the community - and some local parents - would welcome the prospect of a centre on the campus offering high quality facilities and equipment, such as table tennis and snooker tables, electronic games, IT and projection equipment. They would want to see such facilities being open to a wider range of local youth groups (which might include Scouts, Brownies, Guides, etc; faith based youth groups and youth sporting organisations

Springfield Leisure Centre

The Springfield User Group and individual users of the Leisure Centre have attended the public meetings and made clear that they want to see the Leisure Centre remain in Council ownership. These views have already been strongly expressed in the context of Wiltshire Council's Leisure Review. They have also stressed that the Centre is highly regarded with its facilities, especially the pool, being used by people coming from the community area and beyond.

As for the campus proposal, the Leisure Centre users are generally supportive. They would welcome developments such as achieving savings from co-location and where feasible sharing of facilities (such as a cafe/reception area). However, they are concerned that the hoped for savings in maintenance and management costs would not materialise if there were split ownership and management operating on the one campus.

Sports Facilities

Outdoor facilities were not specifically addressed in the consultation questionnaire, but they came up at the public meetings. Indeed the sports theme generated enthusiasm and imaginative ideas. Various respondents felt that the campus idea could, if understood broadly and handled skilfully, bring with it the prospect of concentrating an exciting range of outdoor sports facilities around the Springfield site. It was suggested that good use could be made of land owned by the Council and by the school, and intensive, cost effective use of sports facilities could be encouraged by the provision of shared storage, locker space, changing facilities,

Again there was a feeling that 'partnership working' (bringing together in this case for instance the Leisure Centre, town and parish councils, schools, school sports co-ordinators and the emerging Sports Forum) could lead to making optimal use of existing plots of land and facilities (including the tennis courts and sports fields) – increasing participation and contributing to raising the general level of health and fitness in the community.

Transport, Parking and Access

Improved public transport is a high priority in the Community Plan, and the proposal for developing a community campus has prompted further comment on this theme. Many respondents highlighted the point that good transport links would be essential to encourage the widest possible use of the campus. These links should be:

- a shuttle service (low cost or ideally free) between the High Street area and the campus
- regular and reliable services between the campus and outlying communities to avoid isolation of the villages

The need for well-designed and secure car parking with sufficient capacity is a recurring theme. Specifically mentioned were the need to cater for library users and to provide 'drop off' points; the need to take into account the bouts of traffic congestion at the start and end of the school day; and the concern that Beechfield Road is already being used as a 'rat run'.

Some respondents pointed to the opportunity to encourage bicycle access to the site, especially with the proposed inclusion of additional youth and sports facilities. Specifically, it was suggested that the proposed Corsham Cycle Network, which would provide links to the campus from Rudloe and Neston, should be incorporated in the planning for the campus.

A number of other concerns were expressed around the access theme:

- the effect of increased traffic on residents' parking
- the proximity of the Fire Station
- the impact of extra traffic on the junctions at both ends of Beechfield Road
- the importance of adopting an equitable approach to the cost of parking at the campus and in the other Council-managed car parks

New Facilities and Uses

A number of respondents welcomed the opportunity to introduce new facilities as well as replacing existing ones: they mentioned specifically a cafe; an internet cafe and wifi; space in or near the library for reading and refreshments; a screen to publicise 'What's on' in the area; a nursery and

crèche; additional cultural/festival venues building on the success of the The Pound Arts Centre (providing they do not undermine the viability of existing facilities).

Some participants suggested inclusion of a Visitor Centre covering local history from across the Community Area: others felt the most appropriate place for a heritage centre would be the High Street, and so supported retention of The Corsham Area Heritage and Information Centre.

Many people felt sure that a better looking building offering welcoming, well designed and well heated spaces could attract new users, including advice surgeries offered by Councillors and voluntary organisations, and provide a focus for the Area Board, CCAN and neighbourhood projects.

The detailed input from Corsham Baptist Church (see Appendix D), anticipating their need for extended facilities on Sundays to accommodate a growing congregation, illustrates the potential for bringing in new users at new times to benefit from an imaginatively designed and well-equipped centre of sufficient size to cater for an increasing population.

Aspects of Building Design

There was enthusiastic support for having a building that would be:

- low maintenance and energy efficient (preferably carbon neutral) – a model of good environmentally-friendly design (and reflecting the Community Plan’s high priority accorded to improving the environment)
- aesthetically pleasing (unlike some of the buildings it would be replacing)
- ‘user friendly’ and provide disabled access, with lift access if on two storeys
- physically linked to a refurbished leisure centre – sharing reception; cafe facilities; information about local activities and clubs

Green Space

A number of respondents made it clear that they were firmly opposed to any build on ‘green field’ space and any removal of mature trees. Others saw opportunities to make the surrounding green space more attractive (by extra planting schemes for example) and to use the site for community projects such as an orchard and herb garden.

4. Community Use - Accommodation and Facility Needs

An often repeated plea, emerging from both consultation sessions and the petition, is that there should be no loss of facilities and no less space available as a result of relocation and replacement. A number of respondents noted the difficulties faced in finding suitable accommodation for larger events, including children’s activities, and welcomed the opportunity presented by the Campus proposal. Several participants, including the Town Council, stress the importance of taking into account the big growth in population size, and the need to accommodate an expanding community and voluntary sector.

Appendix E lists those organisations that have contributed to the consultation to date through attendance at the public meetings or with direct correspondence. This report reflects many of the requirements they have identified, and we hope it gives a useful idea of what the community is looking for in a new complex.

Some recurring themes and key points emerged relating to the size and type of accommodation and facilities that community groups would want to see:

- **LARGE hall and stage** - suitable for performances of various kinds and for large public meetings or other events, including annual shows and competitions; large scale dinners, parties and charity events, indoor car boot sales; school examinations. Because the existing hall can hold up to 280, it attracts bookings from outside the community area.
- **Raised stage and bigger back stage area with separate dressing rooms** complementing The Pound Arts Centre auditorium with its small 'green room'
- **Dance floor** – Many resident groups of the community centre are there because of the dance floor and spacious surroundings – maintaining this excellent facility is a high priority
- **Bar facilities** – access to bar facilities as an important social part of their organisations activities
- Some were keen to see flexibility by providing for **partitioning** of large rooms, while others were concerned about the risk of noise pollution (especially from the live music sessions)
- **Range of rooms of different sizes** for meetings and activities (Sometimes the whole centre is booked – for example for a Sci-Fi convention, bringing in over 1,000 participants. and for a Country and Western weekend)
- **Range of indoor sporting and leisure activities** – including two lane skittle alley and facilities for darts and snooker. Various local and regional leagues and matches are held at the Centre and are held in high regard.
- **More storage space** for regular users - stressed as a major requirement by many groups recognising the reality of shared facilities – the request is for storage space and more storage space
- **Better kitchen facilities** - to accommodate use by luncheon clubs and outside caterers supporting functions AND for use by groups where a cafe would be unsuitable, too expensive or closed
- Some functions are held at the centre because **room booking also gives access to the bar** (and the outdoor BBQ)
- More modern facilities and a higher profile could increase demand, **provided the charges were seen as reasonable**

**Corsham Community Area Network
Corsham Town Council**

10 January 2011