

Feasibility Study: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Thriving neighbourhoods have locales that are vital for sustaining informal sociability”

- 1.1 In May 2006, North Wiltshire District Council and Westlea Housing Association commissioned DOME Consultants to carry out a feasibility study of Rudloe Community Centre. This study sets out the findings and makes recommendations that could enable the Centre to more fully serve the local community and achieve a realistic level of commercial viability.
- 1.1.2 There is a strong consensus amongst the stakeholders about the Centre’s problems and the possible solutions. There is a widely held view that the Centre has suffered from a lack of direction and management. The design of the building addressed a use which does not maximise the use to the wider community. Nevertheless, the local community wants the Centre to prosper and to become a place that all can use.
- 1.1.3 The research suggests that there is untapped demand for the Centre: public services need venues like the Centre in order to work at a local level. The business community wants good quality facilities at a competitive price. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest the public wants an affordable venue for private functions.

1.2 Recommendations

- The Centre should be developed as a social enterprise with a view to establishing a Community Investment Company or similar
- Any changes to governance of the Centre will flow from the choice of business model
- A decision needs to be reached over the future ownership of the building
- The building would benefit from works to the interior layout in order to make it function more effectively
- There is potential for a twinning arrangement with Potley and Pockeridge Community Centre
- A development plan for the Centre is required, and a development worker post is essential
- The Council should resource a bid to the Big Lottery 'Reaching Communities' fund for a development worker post
- High quality facilitation is required to help the key stakeholders develop a shared mission, a sound business plan and a clear vision for the future

1.2.1 We have provided four options for future ownership and development of the Centre: the challenge lies in deciding whether to support the Centre and its community through a period of development, in order to build a successful social enterprise; and in deciding which organisation is best placed to manage a development programme.

9 CONCLUSIONS

9.1 The Centre can occupy the place where the business, public, community and voluntary sectors meet.

9.1.1 This section brings together the elements of this report and concludes that:

- The Centre may have a sustainable future if the appropriate resources are made available to develop it as a community resource
- The Centre should be developed as a social enterprise with a view to establishing a Community Investment Company or similar
- There are advantages in twinning Rudloe Centre with the Pockeridge and Potley Community Centre
- A business plan should be developed, and sound management practices need to be established in order to assist the change process
- Funding streams have been identified which could pay for the revenue costs of the development phase, and possibly beyond
- The study offers four options for future ownership: Option One – continued ownership, but with additional funding, and Option Three – disposal to Westlea Housing Association – are sustainable.
- High-calibre people should be recruited to any newly constituted Board from public, private and voluntary sectors and Centre users.
- The board members should be provided with high quality facilitation to help develop a shared mission, a sound business plan and a clear vision for the future.
- The interior layout of the building should be altered – Option 2 (Appendix vi) being the preferred option

9.2 Financial viability

- By changing the way in which the Centre is evaluated it can occupy the place where the business, public, community and voluntary sectors meet
- The Centre is unlikely to make large amounts of income from bookings, but it can do much better
- This will require proper marketing, additional human resources, and changes to the interior layout

A vision of the future

We can envisage a future for the Centre where:

- the community visits on a daily basis
- every member of the community feels welcome and at home in the Centre
- the community runs a social business
- the Club is seen as an integral part of the Centre and a builder of community cohesion
- a range of agencies operate local services
- the space is well-designed, practical and attractive
- people stop and enjoy refreshments in the community café
- local business people choose to meet
- people choose to hold private functions