
STANLEY TOWN COUNCIL



Annfield Plain Community Hut

Prepared for: Full Council, 20th December 2016

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INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared in connection with the Council's decision taken at the Ordinary Council Meeting held on 18th October 2016 to explore options to take over the Community Hut in West Road, Annfield Plain on an asset transfer basis from Durham County Council. (*Minute #173 of 2016/17 refers*)

In order to progress the asset transfer, the Town Council must submit a business case to the County Council for consideration by the 'Durham Ask' Steering Group.

BACKGROUND

The Community Hut is one of a number of small, one room community centres originally constructed by Derwentside District Council across the former Derwentside Area. A number of buildings identical to this one are still in use across Stanley, for example Shield Row Community House and The Haven in South Moor.

At present, the Community Hut is in regular use for a range of activities and regularly used by the Women's Cree, Lifeline (Drug and Alcohol Services) and Social Groups. The building has been used for many years as a Polling Station.

as the formal leaseholders no longer wished to continue as tenants of the building, as building compliance work had not been carried out to ensure the building was safe. Durham County Council have not allocated resources to continue the operation of the building and are seeking a new tenant. The groups currently using the building are not in a position to take on the legal responsibility for the management of the building, and do not have sufficient income to sustain the running of the building and therefore it is at risk of closure.

OBJECTIVES

1. To maintain the provision of the building as a small Community space in this part of Annfield Plain by taking over the management of the building under asset transfer.
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2. To build on the existing usage of the facility so that the Town Council's subsidy on the operating costs of the building will be nominal.

BUSINESS CASE

Governance

The Town Council is a Parish Council created by Statutory Instrument. It is a local authority with perpetual succession which has the power to raise revenue through a local precept. The Council has the power to employ staff to manage its affairs on its behalf and has existing staff capacity to ensure that the building is properly managed.

Partners/ Staffing

The current users of the building are key holders and therefore are able to open and close the building for their own activities. The Town Council would seek to retain a locally based part time relief caretaker to open and close the building for other activities and carry out routine cleaning and building checks. Building Management and marketing/ financial aspects would be handled by the Town Council's existing back office staff.

Market Analysis

The building is currently in use every day of the week from Monday to Thursday but is not used on Fridays or weekends on a regular basis. The current income from users does not fully cover the costs of the overheads, meaning that a subsidy of around £2,000 a year will be required from the Town Council unless the usage is increased. However the remaining capacity in the building would permit the building to cover its own costs if more regular users were encouraged to fill the slots in the diary. Some potential income from the use of the building as a Polling Station has been lost in the last year due to the issues around building compliance, which we would seek to regain now these issues are resolved. There has been some use of the building as a venue for the delivery of local employment skills training which could be built upon.

The building is not at present actively marketed at all. There is not as much a sign on the outside of the premises with a contact number to enable potential users to hire the building. Simply putting up a sign, advertising the availability of the room on the Town Council's website and in printed media and social media is likely to increase the usage of the room towards a more sustainable position.

Service Users

There is a core of users who use the building for social and craft activities and those who use the building for drop in sessions. The building would also be suitable for a range of social clubs, small children's parties, art groups, local training delivery, advice and outreach services, community meetings, Councillor surgeries etc.

The current usage is mapped below:

	am	pm	eve
Monday			Bingo Group
Tuesday	Womens Cree 10-12		
Wednesday	Lifeline - Drug & Alcohol	Smart - Drug & Alcohol	
Thursday	Womens Cree 10-12		Women's Craft Group
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

Competitors

There is a new Community Centre which has opened at the other end of Annfield Plain in the former Derwentside Homes rent office. This centre is operated by Annfield Plain Community Centre. The centre, whilst relatively close to the Community Hut, is serving a slightly different catchment area and is at present already operating fairly close to its capacity as it is combining some activities from the former Community Centre at Greencroft and bringing in people from Catchgate and Harelaw.

The Community Hut is more suited to small self contained social groups and more 'private' activities that are often best delivered in a small self contained unit. The Catchgate & Annfield Plain partnership have not expressed any concerns about the continued operation of the Centre.

The Annfield Plain area is poorly served by community facilities. In Stanley there is the Venue, PACT House, the Haven, Shield Row Community House and the St Stephen's Centre. The Community Hut co-existed with the former Greencroft Community Centre at the other end of West Road for over 20 years. There is not a risk of over-provision for community facilities. If this venue were to be closed, the opposite problem would exist - there would be only one hireable community space in the area which could lead to social and support groups being unable to operate in the Annfield Plain area as there are regular activities most days in the other Community Centre.

Pricing

The Community Hut is currently rented for very reasonable rates. There would be no reason to impose any significant increase on the existing users of the building who hold keys and lock up themselves as long as they participated in routine housekeeping and cleaning before and after their activities. Users who

were casual hirers would be charged a slightly higher rate to reflect the need for cleaning/ care taking costs but the pricing of the venue would remain very cheap. The target for the building would be self-sufficiency rather than income generation and a small subsidy would be acceptable given the added value to the local community of having the facility available.

BUILDING MANAGEMENT

Compliance

The building compliance work has just been completed by DCC in partnership with existing users of the building. STC currently maintains a service level agreement with DCC for compliance matters in the Civic Hall and would therefore have access to expertise to support it in maintaining the required standards.

The Council holds £10,000,000 public liability insurance with Zurich Municipal and would add the building contents to its insurance policy. As the building is likely to be leased rather than transferred to STC, the buildings insurance would be obtained by DCC as landlord and the cost passed on.

The Council employs staff who are trained to carry out risk assessments and would review and maintain the relevant risk assessments for the operation of the building itself.

Council staff and caretakers could advise casual hirers of the basic health and safety requirements in advance of each hire of the building.

Finance

The Town Council has made provision in its revenue budgets for the full operating costs of the building and some additional monies will be set aside for cosmetic matters like external painting, signage etc in the first year. The income generated from the building's use should be more than sufficient to cover any routine maintenance. The Town Council holds sufficient reserves to deal with any unforeseen urgent maintenance that could be required to the building and will have the ability to plan expenditure for higher cost significant maintenance over the lifetime of the lease.

Risk Assessment

This is a low risk activity for the Town Council. The Council is a large local Council and raises an annual precept and grant income of around £800,000 a year. In addition, the Council hold reserves in excess of £250,000 against unforeseen circumstances. The total revenue requirement to operate this building is estimated at around £4000 per year.

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