

CABINET

14 September 2011

NORTH WINCHESTER YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ACTION AND PLANS FOR A
NEW COMMUNITY CENTRE IN NORTH WINCHESTER

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (ACTIVE COMMUNITIES)

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RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report provides background information in respect of the North Winchester Youth and Community Action group and its plans for a new community centre in north Winchester. A potential opportunity has arisen in the form of a well positioned site currently on the market which may be suitable to progress these plans.

This report has been brought to Cabinet at the request of Cllr Learney under Cabinet Procedure Rule 2.5 (b).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

None - this report is for information only

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out some background information and the current situation in respect of the North Winchester Youth and Community Action group and its plans to develop a new community centre to meet the needs of local people in that area. The 'north Winchester' area includes the neighbourhoods of Weeke, Harestock and Teg Down.

2 Background

- 2.1 In March 2008 an open meeting was held in Weeke Community Centre to discuss the need for dedicated youth facilities in north Winchester. The meeting was well attended and there was general agreement that existing facilities were not adequate to serve the area – the Weeke Community Centre is inadequate for wider community use, and development on that site is difficult because of the poor access to the site. An action group was established later called North Winchester Youth & Community Action (NWCYA).
- 2.2 After considering a number of options the group decided to fundraise and work towards a permanent new facility. They liaised with councillors, a range of relevant officers at the City Council, and the Winchester District Children and Young People Partnership. At the same time the Action Group worked with Street Reach and the County Youth Service to provide regular activity sessions for young people.
- 2.3 The former church site (St Thomas Moore) on Stoney Lane was identified as the preferred site for a new facility and there were some discussions between the group and the church administrator.
- 2.4 In early 2009 the relevant WCC Portfolio Holder met the Chair of NWCYA and suggested an application to a Government funding stream for capital projects aiming to co-locate services under one roof which, if successful, would provide the capital required for a new facility. WCC officers helped to construct the bid and it was supported by the Children and Young People Partnership and the Winchester Town Forum. The application was fully endorsed by Hampshire County Council's Director of Children's Services.

Unfortunately the bid was unsuccessful and such national funding streams seem to be no longer available.

- 2.5 During 2009 NWYCA operated youth club sessions from a temporary home in the Henry Beaufort School Community Lounge and also collaborated with the King Alfred Youth Activity Centre (KAYAC). However, the youth activity sessions were suspended for summer 2010 due to loss of volunteers, and with remaining staff unable to cope with number of young people wanting to access the sessions amongst other issues - activities resumed towards the end of last year. Currently NWYCA is benefitting from a grant of £16,970 from the County Council (East Central Hampshire Action Team) to develop and expand its youth and community programme for the period February – December 2011.
- 2.6 NWYCA is a member of the Weeke Community Plan (CP) Steering Group which is overseeing work to produce a plan for the Weeke neighbourhood. Much of the consultation & research identifying the need for a new community facility has been undertaken by NWYCA. The need for additional community facilities scored highest in the Love/Hate questionnaire, where people were asked 'What one thing would make a difference?' (The CP group are working with NWYCA, Past Matters and Community Action Hampshire to run a Community Event on Saturday 10 September, which will form a platform for the main CP consultation and NWYCA will be involved to consult with young people.)
- 2.7 In the autumn of 2010 NWYCA reviewed and updated its projected business plan and sought advice from WCC officers. The plan sets out how a future centre could be made to run without public sector subsidy. In revising their plans, NWYCA have suggested that a new facility may meet wider community needs, rather than simply be a facility for young people.
- 2.8 In early 2011, £350,000 was put forward for consideration in the WCC capital programme review, subject to prioritisation and the availability of funding – the intention being to assist in land acquisition. Unfortunately, due to lack of available funding, the project was deferred, so there is no budget allocated for this purpose in the capital programme.

3 The Current Situation

- 3.1 In August 2011 the church site was put up for sale. There is no sale price and offers are invited. The agent is looking for offers/proposals by the end of September. However, this is a private sale and an offer could be accepted at any time before the deadline if it was acceptable to the vendor.
- 3.2 Cabinet should note that as the site was last used as a church it would be regarded in planning terms as a facility or service use which Local Plan policies seek to protect. . Permission would need to be sought for the redevelopment of the land, including for example housing, and a scheme involving the loss of a service facility use would raise policy concerns

- 3.3 The sale of the site provides an opportunity which could be beneficial for local people in the north Winchester area in addressing needs identified by NWYCA. The existence of the group and their hard work to date provides a strong foundation.
- 3.4 Members have asked officers to look at possibilities. The agent has been notified of the Council's potential interest in the site, although no commitments have been made, and officers are beginning work on a business case and will report as soon as possible. The work will involve:
- Discussion with NWYCA about their ambitions and, particular, the strength and viability of their business plan.
 - Consideration of the Council's financial capacity to purchase the site.
 - Assessment of the site's value to the Council as an asset.
 - Risk management issues.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

4 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CHANGE PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

- 4.1 Work on the business case will take into consideration the ability of any future project to deliver desired outcomes as set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy and Change Plans.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 There are no resource implications arising directly from this report. However, should the project be advanced there is potentially a significant capital funding requirement which would be analysed in a further report. There are growing demands on the Council's shrinking capital resources, and any spending requirements will need to be considered against all other demands on the capital programme
- 5.2 Further, there may be revenue consequences from any proposals which would also need to be found either from within existing resources or from savings from lower priorities.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 6.1 There is a risk that, even if the Council was minded to purchase the site, the site may be sold before the decision-making process is complete and the funds allocated to the project. Other risk management issues will be considered as part of the business case.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES:

None