

**Report of the East North East Area Leader**

**Report to Outer North East Area Committee**

**Date: 10 September 2012**

**Subject: Open House (79/81 Lingfield Drive)**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Alwoodley	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary of main issues**

This report provides an update on the current position regarding Open House Community Centre, 79/81 Lingfield Drive. Since Moor Allerton Community Centre folded, the centre has been directly managed by the Council so that a long term solution could be found for the premises.

The report offers some history to the running of the centre, together with the efforts that have been made to find a new organisation to take on the running of the centre. It provides details of the interest shown in the building from both Lingfield and Firtrees Tenants and Residents Association (TRA) and the Moor Allerton and Shadwell Team Ministry. Following discussions the only applicant for a peppercorn lease is the Lingfield and Firtrees TRA. They have submitted a business plan setting out how they propose to run Open House together with a wellbeing application for £10,000 to cover the running costs for the first year. However, the plan cannot demonstrate sustainability beyond the first year.

The Area Committee now needs to come to a decision whether to offer a wellbeing grant to the Lingfield and Firtrees TRA which will in turn inform the decision on whether a peppercorn lease should be granted to the association.

## **Recommendations**

The Area Committee is asked to consider the information presented in this report and support option 2 which is to not approve a wellbeing grant, and recommend to the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods that the peppercorn lease is not offered on the basis that the Lingfield and Firtrees TRA have not put forward a sufficiently robust proposal.

### **1. Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Area Committee with details of the work undertaken to assess the future of Open House, and to recommend to the Committee the preferred option for the future of 79/81 Lingfield Drive.

### **2 Background information**

- 2.2 Open House is not part of the Area Committee's portfolio of community centres; it is a commercial property with a market rent of £7000 per annum. From July 2004 to August 2011 it was leased on a peppercorn rent to Moor Allerton Community Association on the basis of it being operated as a community centre. The peppercorn lease arrangement was approved by the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods.
- 2.3 In addition to the peppercorn lease Moor Allerton Community Association has also received grant aid from the Area Committee wellbeing fund - 2005/6 - £19,500; 2007/8 - £22,000; 2008/9 - £15,000; 2009/10 – £15,000.
- 2.4 When the Moor Allerton Community Association folded the council stepped in. With effect from 1 September 2011, the council's Area Support Team took over management of Open House to give some breathing space to find a long term solution. This arrangement was originally put in place until 31 March 2012 and was agreed by the Council's Executive Board. Subsequently this arrangement has been extended to give further time for local discussions with interested parties to reach a conclusion.
- 2.5 Historically there have been some tensions between the Trustees of Open House and members of the Lingfield and Fir Trees TRA. The main complaints raised by the TRA concerned the management and staffing of Open House.
- 2.6 Efforts were made to resolve the differences of opinion between the Trustees and the TRA, but these proved fruitless, and the tensions remain. Any future management arrangements would need to factor in a mechanism for conflict resolution.
- 2.7 Lingfield and Firtrees TRA are of the opinion that they can succeed in running Open House and have submitted a business plan outlining their proposals.
- 2.8 When the Council took over the management of Open House, the regular activities running from the centre were an IT class, an over 50s group, Citizens Advice Bureau, Youth Services, a police weekly contact point and MAECare's creative writing group. Lingfield and Firtrees TRA have also used Open House to hold meetings.

- 2.9 Due to the uncertainties over the future of Open House, the IT class has since relocated to Northcall, the over 50s group to Moortown Baptist Church, and CAB to Alwoodley Children's Centre and Northcall. MAECare creative writing class is taking a break. The Youth Service are still holding sessions in the building on Wednesday and Friday evenings and the police contact point sessions take place on Tuesday mornings. Existing users are aware that they may need to move elsewhere if the premises do close, and can all find alternative premises.
- 2.10 In accordance with the report agreed by the Council's Executive Board in September 2011, all the organisations that have been using Open House whilst it has been under the direct management of the council have had a free let. No other organisations have come forward asking to use Open House.

### **3 Main issues**

- 3.1 For the premises to continue operating as a community facility requires an organisation to come forward with a business plan and proposal which the Council considers robust enough to warrant granting a peppercorn rent.
- 3.2 A stakeholder meeting took place on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2012 to discuss the current and future usage of Open House and assess what interest there is in an organisation coming forward with a business case for operating the premises as a community facility. The meeting was attended by ward members, council officers, MAECare, Northcall, CAB, Over 50s club, Alwoodley Extended Services, Alwoodley Children's Centre, West Yorkshire Police, East North East Homes Leeds, Lingfield Tenants and Residents Associations, plus a couple of individuals who had previously been volunteers at Open House. The meeting concluded that every effort should be made to enable the premises to continue as a community centre and a further meeting was planned with interested parties to develop proposals to make this happen.
- 3.3 At the subsequent meeting Lingfield and Firtrees TRA indicated that they would develop a business plan for continuing Open House. They were advised to contact Voluntary Action Leeds for further guidance.
- 3.4 A public consultation session, organised by the council, took place on 23 January, 3pm – 6pm to seek the views of local people on what the priorities are for their community, including an opportunity for them to give their views about Open House. Flyers were produced and distributed widely around the area to promote the event, including sending them out with Allerton C of E Primary pupils. However there was little interest from local residents. Only one parent came from Allerton C of E Primary School, and the other residents in attendance were four members of the Lingfield Tenants and Residents Association.
- 3.5 The business plan submitted by Lingfield and Firtrees TRA in March 2012 offers proposals for year 1, with no indication of how the centre would be sustained in future years. The business plan includes a list of activities that the TRA are aiming to provide, however there is no evidence to demonstrate how these activities will be delivered, or how the demand for the activities has been identified. A list of projected income and expenditure has been provided with little evidence on how these figures have been arrived at.

- 3.6 The Council has asked for further clarification on the proposals, particularly concerning the income and expenditure projections for a community café and how any shortfall in grant funding would be mitigated against. The Lingfield and Firtrees TRA have provided further information but their case is still considered to be weak. It depends on receiving grant aid of £10,000 from the council for them to run Open House in the first year. Details of the grant application are contained in the Wellbeing report which is also on the agenda for the September area committee. The area committee should be aware in considering the grant application that should they not approve the grant, the council will not be in a position to offer a peppercorn lease on the premises.
- 3.7 Lingfield and Firtrees TRA claim to have the support and confidence of the vast majority of residents in the neighbourhood. Members should be aware that this Association chooses not to have any links with East North East Homes Leeds (ENEHL), and cannot receive funding from ENEHL.
- 3.8 The TRA assert that there is a demand for Open House to continue and refer to various meetings which have taken place, with attendances ranging from 6 to 150 residents. However, when asked for evidence of this, they have been unable to provide minutes and attendance lists for these meetings.
- 3.9 A petition was submitted to the Area Committee in January, which supports the continuation of Open House as a Community Centre and has 168 signatures. Postcodes are provided with the signatures but no individual addresses.
- 3.10 Moor Allerton and Shadwell Team Ministry includes St Barnabus, Alwoodley, St Paul's Shadwell, St John the Evangelist, Moor Allerton, St Stephen's Moortown. This Team Ministry have expressed concerns about the possible closure of Open House as they feel that it is a valuable resource for the local community. They proposed exploring the involvement of the churches with Open House and attended a meeting with ward members, the East North East Area Leader and members of the Tenants and Residents Association. The purpose of the meeting was to explore the feasibility of the team ministry establishing a partnership with Lingfield Tenants and Residents Association to run Open House. This was held on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2012.
- 3.11 The offer of support from the team ministry was conditional upon a partnership arrangement being put in place with open and transparent arrangements and an appropriate means of resolving any differences of opinion. Support would include volunteer helpers, some funding to assist with start up costs, and experience of running organisations and buildings across the city.
- 3.12 Lingfield Tenants and Residents Association have declined this offer of support and have indicated that they wish their business plan to be considered by the council as it stands. Their reluctance seems to be based on the previous history of Open House, and the tensions between the former trustees and the Residents Association.
- 3.13 No other parties have come forward with an interest in running Open House as a community facility. The Area Committee now needs to come to a decision whether to offer a wellbeing grant to the Lingfield and Firtrees TRA which will in turn inform

the decision on whether a peppercorn lease should be granted to the association. If a grant is not offered, the council will not be in a position to offer a peppercorn lease and Open House will close as a community facility.

3.14 Should Open House close, it would mean that there isn't a community centre in the immediate Lingfield area. However there are other facilities delivering services and activities for the local community within close proximity.

- Alwoodley Children's Centre on Lingfield Approach which provides a range of services for children and families including health visitors and early years provision (integrated day care and early learning), parenting support, and jobs and skills advice. They also provide outreach work to families in the community who are most isolated and vulnerable.
- Northcall, based at Cranmer Bank which provides a range of activities and advice sessions for children and families, including cookery classes, IT, fitness classes and a community café.
- MAECare, is a local voluntary organisation working with people over 60 in Moortown, Alwoodley and Shadwell. They are based at Cranmer Bank but use a variety of venues to deliver their services which include sport and leisure activities, advice sessions, and home visits.
- Moor Allerton Library in the Moor Allerton Centre on King Lane. As well as the regular library services, it offers IT facilities and training plus a careers advice service.
- FY2O is a purpose built meeting place next door to Moor Allerton library with internet access. As well as providing activities for young people in the area, other local community groups can use the space as a meeting point; all new groups welcome. It is also available to businesses for meetings or staff training sessions.
- St Johns C of E Church on Fir Tree Lane. The church lets its main hall, it can accommodate approximately 100 people. It is currently used by uniformed brigades such as scouts and brownies as well as for luncheon clubs, coffee mornings and keep fit classes.
- Moortown Baptist Church on King Lane. The church has a number of rooms available. The main church hall seats 300 people and there is also a sports hall and 2 large rooms that accommodate about 50 people. There are also two smaller meeting rooms available for hire. The Church also organises a number community based activities such as a youth club and luncheon clubs for senior citizens.
- Moortown Methodist Church on Alderton Rise. There are three meeting rooms available for hire and each one holds between 15-20 people. The main hall of the church is also available for hire and this can accommodate between 100 – 200 people. Regular activities include a social afternoon, lunches and a boys club, run by the Council's youth service.

- Arnold Ziff Centre on Stonegate Road – has the Oasis Cafe with a licensed bar, The Vine restaurant, large screen TV, meeting and function rooms, mini gymnasium, hall equipped for film showings and theatre, art and pottery facilities, computer suite with on-line access, facilities for younger children including a Toy Library, Makor Jewish Culture & Resource Centre and offices for key Jewish community groups.

The table below shows walking distances and times for each of these venues:

Facility	Distance (miles)	Walking time (minutes)
Alwoodley Children's Centre	0.2	3
Northcall	0.8	15
MAECare	0.8	15
Moor Allerton Library	0.5	9
FY2O	0.5	9
St Johns C of E Church	0.6	13
Moortown Baptist Church	0.6	13
Moortown Methodist Church	0.8	15
Arnold Ziff Centre	0.5	10

(Calculated using Walk.it.com, times based on medium walking pace)

- 3.15 It is also worth noting that a planning application has been submitted to the council for a change of use for the Lingfield Public House (which is opposite Open House on Lingfield Drive) to a community and welfare centre. The proposed use of this centre is for community, religious and educational use and will be available for anyone to let. The target date for a decision on this application is 3 October 2012.

## 4 Options

4.1 The options for the future of 79/81 Lingfield Drive are:

- 4.1.1 Option 1 - Status quo; The Council's Area Support Team continue to manage Open House as a community centre. The Executive Board agreed for the Area Support Team to manage the centre for a temporary period until a long term solution was identified. This could not be achieved without the appropriate financial and staffing support being put in place. Given the current budget pressures on existing Council community centres, this is an unrealistic option.
- 4.1.2 Option 2 - To not approve a wellbeing grant and recommend to the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods that the peppercorn lease is not offered on the basis that the Lingfield and Firtrees TRA have not put forward a sufficiently robust proposal. This option will result in Open House closing as a community facility. The property would be returned to Commercial Asset Management who would make it available for a commercial let at a market rent of £7000 per annum. There has been previous interest in the property for commercial purposes. Closure would result in the local area not having a community centre. However as paragraph 3.1.4 of this report illustrates, there are a number of community facilities and services within a mile of Open House, and there is a proposal for the Lingfield Public House to be changed to a community and welfare facility.

- 4.1.3 Option 3 - Offer a lease to a partnership of organisations who can take on responsibility for Open House. This has been explored through the meeting held with the Moor Allerton and Shadwell Team Ministry and the Lingfield and Firtrees TRA. However the TRA are not prepared to enter into a partnership, for reasons which seem to be based on the tensions between them and the former trustees, and there is no other interest in forming a partnership. The Moor Allerton and Shadwell Team Ministry do not wish to run Open House without a partnership arrangement.
- 4.1.4 Option 4 - Offer a lease to the Lingfield and Firtrees TRA. This is dependant upon grant aid of up to £10,000 to cover the running costs in the first year. This estimated figure is based on costs supplied by the previous lessee. The grant aid would be allocated from the wellbeing fund as a start up grant for a new organisation. The wellbeing fund should not be used for ongoing running costs, and there is no guarantee that the Area Committee would provide this level of grant funding in subsequent years. Lingfield and Firtrees TRA have no previous experience of managing a building and the business case they have submitted is less than robust, and only offers a one year plan.
- 4.2 The recommendation is for the Area Committee to support Option 2 which is to close Open House as a community facility. The only organisation who have applied for a lease to run Open House do not have any experience of managing buildings. They have provided a business plan, but it lacks the detail and robustness required to demonstrate that they can manage Open House successfully. In particular the business plan relies heavily on grant aid for year 1 and offers no financial modeling to demonstrate how it would operate in subsequent years.

## **5 Corporate Considerations**

### **5.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 5.1.5 A public consultation session took place on 23 January, as outlined in paragraph 3.4.
- 5.1.6 The Lingfield and Firtrees TRA claim to have widespread support for their proposal to continue Open House, however they have failed to provide evidence of this.

### **5.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

- 5.2.1 Open House Community Centre has been operated as a facility for the local community. Any new organisation granted a peppercorn rent will be required to present an equal opportunities statement which demonstrates that they will ensure that Open House is open to all.

### **5.3 Council policies and City Priorities**

- 5.3.1 The Council's policy on rental of commercial property allows for the granting of a peppercorn rent on premises which are to be used as community facilities

providing the relevant organisation can provide a robust business plan to demonstrate how they will manage the premises.

#### **5.4 Resources and value for money**

- 5.4.1 79/81 Lingfield Drive is a commercial property with a market rent of £7000 pa. This sum is lost to the authority if the property is offered on a peppercorn rent to a community association. Running costs for the property are estimated at £10,000 per annum in addition to the rent. Any organisation taking on the property would have to provide a robust business case demonstrating that they can accommodate these costs. The business case for the Lingfield and Firtrees TRA is dependant upon receipt of wellbeing grant aid of £10,000.

#### **5.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 5.5.1 The decision regarding the future of this property lies with Environment and Neighbourhoods Strategic landlord.

#### **5.6 Risk Management**

- 5.6.1 A risk assessment of the current position has been undertaken. The main risks to consider are a backlash from the local community should Open House close. To mitigate this, all existing organisations currently using Open House would be relocated to alternative local venues. Given the lack of track record of running buildings there is a significant risk that if the Lingfield and Firtrees TRA take over the property, they may fail to make it viable, resulting in a financial loss to the council of the rental income and any grant provided.

### **6 Conclusions**

- 6.1 Open House has been directly managed by the Council following the folding of Moor Allerton Community Association for a temporary period whilst a decision is made about the future of Open House. During this period, some of the organisations using Open House have relocated elsewhere due to the uncertainties over what is going to happen.
- 6.2 Lingfield and Firtrees TRA have submitted a business plan outlining their proposals for running Open House, however this has some shortcomings, and depends on receiving £10,000 grant aid from the Council's wellbeing fund. Moor Allerton and Shadwell Ministry have made an offer of working in partnership with Lingfield and Firtrees TRA but this has been declined by the Lingfield and Firtrees TRA. The decision for granting a peppercorn lease lies with the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods.

### **7 Recommendations**

- 7.1 The Area Committee is asked to consider the information presented in this report and support option 2 which is to not approve a wellbeing grant, and recommend to the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods that the peppercorn lease is not offered on the basis that the Lingfield and Firtrees TRA have not put forward a sufficiently robust proposal.



## **8 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

- 8.1 Report to the Council's Executive Board, 7 September 2011.
- 8.2 Report to Outer North East Area Committee, 3 July 2012
- 8.3 Planning application 12/03250/FU - Change of use of vacant public house to community and welfare centre with ancillary accommodation and additional car parking. The Lingfield, Lingfield Drive Moortown Leeds LS17 7EL

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available for inspection on request for a period of four years following the date of the relevant meeting. Accordingly this list does not include documents containing exempt or confidential information, or any published works. Requests to inspect any background documents should be submitted to the report author.