



Report of the Acting Director of City Development

Executive Board

Date: 22 June 2011

Subject: Response to Deputation to Council – West Park Residents Association Regarding the Future Use of the West Park Centre

Electoral Wards Affected: Weetwood
<input type="checkbox"/> Ward Members consulted (referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:
Equality and Diversity <input type="checkbox"/>
Community Cohesion <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Narrowing the Gap <input type="checkbox"/>

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In
(Details contained in the report)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report is in response to the deputation to Council made by the West Park Residents Association in April 2011 about the future use of the West Park Centre. A copy of the deputation's speech can be found at Appendix 1.
2. The deputation raised a number of issues about the centre and these are addressed in the report.
3. The deputation has highlighted the need for the future of the centre to be reviewed and the report recommends that an options appraisal is carried out to determine the future of the building, the future location of the services currently provided on site, and the local need for community and arts facilities.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 This report is to advise Executive Board of the current position of the West Park Centre and summarises the issues raised in the deputation to Council by the West Park Residents Association in April.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 The West Park Centre is a former secondary school in Weetwood ward. The building opened in 1951 and closed as West Park Girls School in 1989. In the intervening years the building has had a variety of uses, initially being used as a decant site for various school programmes in the City. Part of the centre was used by Opera North and until 2010 it was the home of Northern Ballet.
- 2.2 The building is 77,000 sq ft, mostly two storey. The centre has a large hall that can accommodate up to 400 people. Opera North had a number of acoustic panels installed in the ceiling of the hall which significantly reduce the amount of echo. This is one of the reasons the building is so popular with musical groups. The building has one other smaller hall that is regularly used. There are two further halls that were used by Northern Ballet and are currently disused. The remainder of the building is made up of former classrooms and some offices.
- 2.3 Artforms, the Council's schools music service, is the current major occupier. The centre is used as the service's office base and as the main site for service delivery. The Gordon Parry Centre is also on site which provides musical opportunities for children with disabilities.
- 2.4 Rooms within the centre are let to a variety of organisations including music and dance groups, service providers such as Gambler's Anonymous and local community groups.
- 2.5 The West Park Residents Association is a membership based, constituted residents association with the objectives: to maintain and improve the environment and amenities of the West Park area of Leeds; to represent the view of residents; and to take action to prevent any deterioration in living conditions in the area. Members are drawn from North West Leeds including residents from the Weetwood and Kirkstall wards. The association has a long record of community service and was first established in 1991. The deputation also represented the Spen Hill Residents Association and Moor Grange Action Group.

3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 The deputation to Council was from the West Park Residents Association. The text of the deputation can be found at Appendix 1. The deputation raised a number of issues about the centre which are set out below with responses:
- 3.1.1 **Issue: Consultation has not take place yet.** Response: The uncertainties surrounding funding have meant that the Artforms service, which is now the main occupier on site, has been waiting for a decision on its funding from the Department for Education. Until the status of this funding was known it was not possible to undertake a meaningful review of the centre.
- 3.1.2 **Issue: The space vacated by Northern Ballet Theatre has not been available to be let out.** Response: Northern Ballet occupied approximately 40% of the building and the Council contributed £6m towards the development of a new Dance Theatre opened in 2010. It has always been known that when they moved out the future of

the centre would have to be reviewed. This space has not been actively marketed because to do so could lead to new users taking space and then potentially shortly afterwards having to relocate elsewhere.

- 3.1.3 **Issue: Attendance Strategy staff moving out has led to a reduction in income.** Response: Attendance Strategy is a function of Children's Services and they have relocated to vacant space within Merrion House. The deficit incurred from the centre's operations is covered by Children's Service budgets.
- 3.1.4 **Issue: Many of the recommendations in the condition survey are minor and to say the centre needs a vast amount of money spending to make it fit for purpose is a nonsense.** Response: A full building condition survey was undertaken in September 2009 by qualified, professional building surveyors. This survey showed the building required expenditure of £2,182,876. Of this £201,233 was identified as priority 1 (work that will prevent closure of the premises and/or address immediate high risk to health and safety of the occupants and/or remedy a serious breach of legislation). Electrical works accounted for over 95% of the urgent works. The narrative of the report points out that the electrical installation is mostly original, approximately 58 years old and in poor condition and may constitute a fire risk. A further £716,453 of works was identified as priority 2 (Work required within 2 years that will prevent serious deterioration of the fabric or services and/or address a medium risk to the health and safety of the occupants and/or remedy a less serious breach of legislation). This includes a further £458,802 for electrical services. It also included £244,386 for mechanical service, the majority of which is allocated to replacement of heat emitters and pipework. There are a number of minor works and works required in 3-5 years identified within the report and these make up the remainder of the costs identified. However, it is the case that the building constitutes a large 1950s flat roof structure that will inevitably need substantial maintenance works of some form in the short to medium term.
- 3.1.5 **Issue: The centre could be used to rent out offices at a commercial rate.** Response: Any alternative use of the centre would, at the very least, require the works identified in the condition survey to be undertaken. To let parts of the centre out as commercial office space would require further works to be undertaken to bring the centre up to required standards, even for basic, low rent office space. There is alternative office space provision within the area with a property search of the surrounding area identifying a number of alternative office spaces already on the market.
- 3.1.6 **Issue: The centre is one of the best used Council owned facilities in Leeds and is relied on by local resident groups.** Response: It is clear from the lettings system that rooms within the centre are well used by a variety of different user groups. More detailed investigation of the number of users and types of groups that use the centre will form part of any options appraisal exercise. This will include use by the community groups identified and community provision in the area.
- 3.2 The centre was home to both Opera North and Northern Ballet. The Council has made significant investments in building projects for each of these organisations. The Grand Theatre project, home of Opera North, cost a total of £33m, of which £8m was funded by the Council. Northern Ballet's new home at Quarry Hill cost over £11.5m with Leeds City Council contributing over £6m. These represent significant investments in provision for the arts in Leeds by providing purpose built accommodation.
- 3.3 Although the deputation makes it clear that there is a desire for the centre to remain open, it does not explicitly cover the basis for continued operation. Council officers

are happy to work with local community groups to identify ways to develop a plan to sustain and maintain existing community provision in the area for consideration by Executive Board.

- 3.4 The deputation has highlighted concerns about the future of the West Park Centre. To continue operations within the building will require significant backlog maintenance to be carried out. An options appraisal is necessary to determine the future of the building and the future location of the services currently provided on site. This will include consultation with local ward members, user groups and the local community. The primary considerations will be the location of the Artforms service who occupy the majority of the occupied space within the building and community provision in the area. The plan at Appendix 2 shows space usage within the centre

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

4.1 Risk management

Continuing operations at the centre on the current basis risks incurring significant backlog maintenance and ongoing running costs. This risk can be mitigated by carrying out an options appraisal to determine the future of the building and the future location of services provided on site. Risk management will be fully considered as part of the options appraisal.

4.2 Public Interest Test

The recommendations in this report are not to be treated as exempt. Therefore, there are no Public Interest Test issues.

4.3 Forward Plan

The recommendations in this report do not relate to a key decision and therefore prior notification on the forward plan is not necessary

4.4 Scrutiny process: Call-In

The recommendations in this report are eligible for Call-In.

4.5 Equality and Diversity and Cohesion and Integration

An Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration impact assessment will be carried out as part of the options appraisal.

4.6 Council policies and City priorities

The Council's Policy Framework will be fully considered as part of the options appraisal, in particular the Vision for Leeds, the Council Business Plan and the Sustainable Economy and Culture City Priority Plan.

4.7 Consultation

Consultation will be included as part of the options appraisal.

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

- 5.1 Premises running costs are approximately £240k per year. The building is inefficient from an energy point of view which contributes greatly to the level of

running costs. The condition survey of September 2009 highlights nearly £2.2m of required maintenance, of which £917k was required within two years. None of this work has taken place.

- 5.2 The recommendations in this report do not have any constitutional or legal implications.

6.0 Recommendations

- 6.1 That Executive Board notes the response to the deputation from the West Park Residents Association.
- 6.2 That Executive Board gives authority for officers to undertake an options appraisal to determine the future of the building and the future location of services currently provided on site. The options appraisal will report back to Executive Board with recommendations later in the year.

7.0 Background Papers

- 7.1 Asset Management Service File

Appendix 1 – Text of Deputation from West Park Residents Association

Appendix 2 – Plan showing room usage within West Park Centre