

ASSEMBLY

5 December 2012

Title: Response to Petition re Scratton's Sports and Social Club	
Report of: The Corporate Director of Adult and Community Services	
Open	For Decision
Wards Affected: Thames Ward	Key Decision: Yes
Report Author: Ray Descombes Senior Community Development Officer	Contact Details: Tel: 020 8227 2032 E-mail: ray.descombes@lbbd.gov.uk
Accountable Divisional Director: Karen Ahmed	
Accountable Director: Anne Bristow	
Summary: <p>The closure of the Scratton's Sports and Social Club building prompted residents to petition the Council to save the building for the local community. Subsequent fire damage has rendered the building unusable.</p> <p>The Council has indicated its willingness to transfer the use of this building to a local community association through a lease arrangement. Progress towards this arrangement is already underway.</p> <p>If it is not possible to transfer the use of the building to the local community the building should be let under the Council's normal commercial procedure. Another group with links to the locality has expressed an interest in proceeding in this way.</p> <p>In accordance with the Council's procedures for petitions, the lead petitioner, Sharon Cooper, has been invited to the meeting of the Assembly to present the petition.</p>	
Recommendation(s) <p>The Assembly is recommended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) note that the petition from local residents to save the Scratton's Sports and Social Club has received a positive response,(ii) note the steps that have been taken to ensure that the community will continue to be able to use the building for social purposes,(iii) support the option for the local community to take formal responsibility for the building through a lease agreement subject to funding being identified to meet the building costs.	
<p>If the local community is not in a position to take responsibility for the lease by 31 January 2013 Assembly is recommended to agree that officers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. pursue the option for commercial disposal (with consideration for community	

impact) and

2. explore funding for the required contribution to the roof repairs using the Backlog Maintenance Programme.

Reason(s)

Under the Council's Petition Scheme as set out on the Council's web site, petitioners are entitled to a debate at full Assembly if the petition has the support of 100 or more signatures from different addresses in the borough.

As this petition reaches that threshold it has triggered the requirement for a debate at Assembly.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 A petition was raised by concerned residents after the closing of the Scratton's Sports and Social Club in July 2012. The Petition headed "Petition to Save the Scratton's Sports and Social Club" contained 161 valid signatures (separate addresses in the borough).

- 1.2 The Scratton's Farm estate is a group of just under 300 houses to the south of the A13 and to the north of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

The Council specifically erected the building for use by the local community. It was extended by the Social Club using a grant from the Green King Brewery.

The previous lessee of the Scratton's Sports and Social Club decided to vacate the property and return the centre to the Council on Friday 13 July 2012 because the Sports and Social Club was no longer viable. The Council was only given two weeks' notice that this would take place.

On this small isolated estate there is no other provision for the social needs of the local community. Of the parade of 6 shops only one is in use for retail purposes and one is used by the local residents' association for their monthly meetings; the remaining shops are vacant and have remained un-let for many years. Attempts to pro-actively market these have been unsuccessful. The isolated nature of the estate and the lack of passing trade makes it unlikely in the present economic climate that they will find a future retail use.

- 1.3 When the building was first vacated there were three break-ins within 13 days. In the last break-in on 26 July 2012, a fire was set, which left substantial fire damage – and water damage was also caused by the Fire Brigade extinguishing the fire. This has left the building unusable at present. Police treated the fires as arson but were able to identify and charge those responsible.

Power to the building was turned off and security Orbis shutters have been fitted.

The building was discussed at the meeting of the Scratton's Farm TRA on Tuesday 31 July 2012. The meeting was attended by over 40 residents, along with Council officers. At this meeting the petition to save the Scratton's Social Club was given to Council officers.

2. **Proposal and Issues**

- 2.1 A public meeting was held on 7 August 2012 in Jo Richardson School. It was attended by over 70 residents and chaired by Councillor Channer. Council officers addressed the meeting and stated that an insurance claim was being submitted and money received would be used to restore the building. It was pointed out that the restored building could be made available to the local community but they would have to form a legal association to which the building could be transferred in line with the Council recent practice with regard to Community Centres.

The meeting agreed to support the formation of a local steering group to carry the process forward. The steering group has now met on four occasions to date. A meeting has been arranged for 1 December 2012 to formally establish a legally constituted community association to represent the community's interests and commitment in the redevelopment of the building.

- 2.2 An inspection of the fire damaged building showed that a significant amount of asbestos was present and this would need to be removed prior to a full insurance assessment and building works taking place. The removal of the asbestos at a cost of £30,000 was completed on 2 October 2012.
- 2.3 The insurance adjustor visited the site on 15 November 2012. At this meeting the reinstatement work was discussed and all of the necessary items are likely to be covered. However, as the roof covering was nearing the end of its expected effective life it may be that a contribution towards this cost will be required from the Council. It is possible that this contribution would be in the region of £20,000 - a proportion of this could be funded from the Backlog Maintenance Programme. The insurance assessor has indicated that the likely reinstatement cost covered by insurance will be £150,000 - £200,000. This will restore the building to a usable state with basic facilities meeting present building requirements. This will include new toilets, electrics, storage heaters and kitchen.

When the insurance assessment has been finalised and agreed, instructions can be issued to carry out the necessary building works

3. **Options Appraisal**

The options available to the Council with regard to the building are that once it is restored the Council could:

Option 1 - Lease to a Local Community Group

This would be on the same basis as the transfer of eight Community Centres in 2011. For this to take place a local association would have to be formally established to take responsibility for the lease.

The residents have agreed to hold a public meeting on Saturday 1 December 2012 to form a constituted community association which would be in a position to take responsibility for a lease. At the moment some of group have expressed reluctance for this community group to obtain charitable status. However not being a charity would make the group liable for national non-domestic rates and would limit their access to most funding from external funders.

Some of the residents and past residents of the estate have requested that consideration be given to leasing the building to a limited company which would run a bar and community centre for the benefit of the local community. This group has been asked to provide worked up details of their proposal showing a more detailed business plan and an explanation of how the interests of the local community would be protected. The promised plan has not yet been received however if this is to be commercial in nature it would likely fall under option 2.

Option 2 - Let the Building through the Council's Normal Commercial procedure

The building would be advertised through our usual commercial disposal process. The isolation of this area would limit the level of interest that this opportunity would generate. On the basis of recent experience it is likely that the building would attract offers from faith groups. However unless there is a demonstrable link with and benefit to the local community this approach would probably not be favoured by the council in view of the preference for the facility to be of direct benefit to the local residents. The proposal yet to be received in detail as discussed above might be seen as having such a demonstrable link to the local community.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 The lead petitioner and local residents have been consulted through meetings on 31 July and 7 August 2012, with two Ward Members attending the 7 August meeting.

5. Financial Implications

Implications completed by: Dawn Calvert
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- 5.1 The use of the building will be offered to the local community on a full insuring and maintaining basis therefore there will be no ongoing financial commitment for the Council.
- 5.2 The building costs will be covered by the insurance claim. However as the roof was nearing the end of its effective life a contribution equal to 50% of the cost of the roof reinstatement will be required. This contribution is likely to be in the region of £20,000. The budget required to fund the contribution needs to be identified. One source of funding could be the Backlog Maintenance Programme. There is the potential to fund £10,000 from this programme. This would leave a balance of £10,000 to be sourced.

6. Legal Implications

Implications completed by: David Lawson, Deputy Head of Legal & Deputy Monitoring Officer, Legal and Democratic Services

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- 6.1 The Legal Practice does not identify further implications in this report other than to continue to have due regard to S.149 of the Equality Act which requires public bodies to consider all individuals when carrying out their activities. Public bodies are

therefore required to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equal opportunities and foster good relationships between different people when undertaking their activities. Additionally, this provision encourages public bodies to understand how different people will be affected by their activities, so that their policies are appropriate and meet different people's needs.

7. Other implications

7.1 Risk Management

- i. Should the community association fold for reasons of insolvency or otherwise the lease would be terminated and the building would revert to the Council
- ii. There is a danger that the Community Centre could be used by one group within the community to the exclusion of others. This risk will be mitigated by a requirement, inserted in the lease, that the building remain fully accessible to all in the community; failure to comply would constitute a breach of the lease.

7.2 Property/Asset Issues

To avoid leaving the building open to possible vandal attack it is important that the completion of the building work be timed to occur after or at the same time as the signing of the lease.

Regular monitoring by Property Services will ensure that the lease conditions are complied with. Appropriate action can be taken if there is any breach of lease conditions

Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

Petition submitted by Ms Cooper