

North East Derbyshire District Council

Cabinet

28 October 2015

Former Clay Cross Junior School

Report No PRK/13/15-16/AWC/BH of Councillor Pat Kerry, Portfolio Holder with Responsibility for Economy, Finance and Regeneration

This report is public

Purpose of the Report

- To inform Members of a proposal to restore the former Junior School in Clay Cross and to bring it back into use as a community asset by a Community Interest Company based in North Wingfield, Positive 4 Young People.
- To recommend NEDDC write to the County Council in support of the proposal

1 Report Details

- 1.1 In 2007, the County Council closed the Clay Cross Infant and Junior Schools which were located on Market Street in Clay Cross town centre, and replaced them with a new facility on Pilsley Road.
- 1.2 The Infant School building was demolished soon after closure, and the site is now the location of a County Council extra care facility. The Junior School has been empty and unused since its closure and is now beginning to fall into a bad state of disrepair.
- 1.3 Clay Cross has been a focus of regeneration activity in recent years, including a major development on Bridge Street, the extra care facility referred to above, an urban extension proposal for the former Biwater site, and an application to site a new supermarket (Aldi) in the town centre.
- 1.4 The relocation of the schools from town centre to a residential area resulted in a significant reduction in footfall at school drop off and pick up times in the town centre, and its associated economic impact.
- 1.5 The extra care facility will help bring back some much-needed activity into the town centre, and the vacant Junior School presents a similar opportunity.
- 1.6 The value of restoring and reusing the Junior School has already been recognised and acknowledged by NEDDC in a number of ways:

- The Clay Cross Regeneration Frameworks (2009 & 2013) identify the importance of retaining the school building.
- The school building falls within the boundary of the Clay Cross Town Centre Conservation Area, which was designated by the District Council in 2010.
- The Clay Cross Town Centre Planning Brief, adopted by NEDDC in 2011, recommends and supports the reuse of the Junior School for civic/community purposes. This brief was prepared with the cooperation and support of both Parish and County councils.

- 1.7 The County Council originally proposed disposing of the building at auction, but it was felt that there was little commercial value in the building, a view that was supported by an independent appraisal commissioned by NEDDC which showed the building had little or no development value, even for residential. Discussions were also held with the developer of the extra care facility, Chevin Housing, to determine private sector interest in the building, but they considered it an unviable proposition.
- 1.8 Finally, NEDDC officers approached Clay Cross Parish Council to discuss options for the Parish relocating from their current building adjacent to the school and redeveloping their site, but the Parish declined this option as they considered the building to be in too poor a condition and the proposal too large in scale.
- 1.9 Officers became aware of potential interest in the building from a well established and respected Community Interest Company based in North Wingfield, Positive 4 Young People (P4YP), and subsequently arranged several viewings of the building with County Council estates.
- 1.10 Working with NEDDC, P4YP have developed a robust business plan for the property, together with an adjacent building, which has been enthusiastically received by all parties. The buildings would be used for a mix of social, community and revenue raising activities including:
- Rentable community space
 - Conservation and heritage projects
 - Arts and crafts, including exhibition areas
 - Inclusion projects for schools
 - Fitness and leisure classes
 - Community kitchen
- 1.11 The building is in a vulnerable condition, and will deteriorate further if left in its unprotected state for another winter. The roof is close to collapse, and with no security on site there is the ever-present threat of vandalism and theft of original architectural features and fittings.
- 1.12 P4YP have held positive discussions with DCC, but progress has recently stalled due in part to DCC's reluctance to offer a long lease on the building. P4YP are highly experienced at securing public funding for their activities, and it is their firm view that funders would only invest in a property that has a lease of at least 99 years.

1.13 NEDDC officers have supported P4YP from the outset and have facilitated discussions with DCC and other partners, but further intervention is now required to bring this to an acceptable and swift conclusion with respect to the terms of disposal of the properties. This is a unique opportunity to bring an important and valuable building back into use, to generate business rates, to create economic and social activity in a town centre that is a NEDDC priority, and to contribute positively to the townscape.

1.14 It is recommended therefore that a letter is sent from the Leader of the District Council to DCC's Leader expressing strong support for the proposal and a request for DCC officers to recommend to DCC Cabinet disposal of the two buildings at terms that are reasonable and that align with P4YP's business plan.

2 Conclusions and Reasons for Recommendation

2.1 To unlock discussions between DCC and P4YP and to expedite the disposal of the two buildings.

3 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

3.1 If left in its current state, the school building will fall into further disrepair and will become unviable and not-fundable as a restoration project.

3.2 Redevelopment of the building/site for housing has been tested and has proven to be unviable.

5 Implications

5.1 Finance and Risk Implications

5.1.1 A potentially positive financial implication is renewed payment of business rates.

5.2 Legal Implications including Data Protection

5.2.1 No implication for NEDDC.

5.3 Human Resources Implications

5.3.1 No implications for NEDDC.

6 Recommendations

6.1 That the Leader of NEDDC write to the Leader of DCC to express support for the proposal and request disposal of the two properties on reasonable and acceptable terms.

7 Decision Information

Is the decision a Key Decision? (A Key Decision is one which results in income or expenditure to the Council of £50,000 or more or which has a significant impact on two or more District wards)	No
District Wards Affected	Clay Cross South Clay Cross North
Links to Corporate Plan priorities or Policy Framework	

8 Document Information

Appendix No	Title
Background Papers (These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Cabinet (NEDDC) or Executive (BDC) you must provide copies of the background papers)	
Clay Cross Town Centre Regeneration Frameworks Clay Cross Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal Clay Cross Town Centre Planning Brief	
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