

# Fleetville Community Centre New Build Project

## Our Initial Response to Public Engagement Comments

99% of respondents were positive about the proposals for a new Community Centre, a figure which is in itself most heartening as the project gathers momentum.

Text taken directly from comments is printed below in *italics*.

Examples of the supportive comments have been:

*Would be lovely to see this community centre upgraded.*

*Just continue doing what is being done now BUT in a more modern building.*

*The Community Centre is a great feature of Fleetville and has served the area well.*

*Exciting! Great start.*

Several comments made brief reference to suggestions, sometimes mixing thoughts about different kinds of spaces, comments about how the new building should/could look and hoped-for features they would like to see.

Examples include:

*A place that is aesthetically pleasing, sits well in style with the school over the road, and has character, both outside and in. A sense of space with clean white walls for exhibitions, and plenty of plants etc.*

*A large main hall with good acoustics for music and other performances, with coffee/meeting area.*

*Several soundproofed rooms for workshops and meetings running at the same time. Full disabled access and good signage.*

*Easy re-configuration of rooms to maximise use. Lighting, power, tables, full blackout, wi-fi in every corner of the building. Good heating and cooking facilities. On-site IT equipment.*

### **Flexibility**

A Community Centre is required to accommodate spaces for a wide variety of groups and activities, and for different numbers of people. It is difficult to manage a centre with specific spaces which are unable to be used for purposes other than that for which they have been designed. The Management Committee is therefore considering two options, both of which have been indicated in community comments. The first is to enable larger spaces to be

divided into smaller spaces; the second is to enable similar activities to share types of space. Two examples of the latter might be:

A centre that will have facilities for young people:

*Drumming workshops, martial arts, young people's disco.*

*A youth area would therefore be able to accommodate a range of activities.*

*Youth club for 7 to 11 year olds.*

*This area needs somewhere that caters for the needs of the local youth and a youth club would be a great facility*

A space for practical activities:

*Some specific rooms e.g. art rooms.*

*One room dedicated to being a hackerspace.*

In both cases these two different kinds of space would accommodate a variety of related activities.

### **Sport activities**

Several comments request facilities for various sporting activities. For example:

*Sports hall with high ceilings. Indoor sports area.*

*Changing and shower facilities.*

*a small sports hall for activities such as Kung Fu, yoga, tai chi and other physical activities.*

The Management Committee would support the inclusion of a specialist space which can be used for physical activities using limited equipment and not requiring large playing areas; for example carpet bowls, mat activities, fitness equipment, and so on. These could also form part of the mix of activities provided in a youth area. A few comments referred to more ambitious inclusions, such as climbing walls, pools and large courts. The Management Committee believes these are better provided in more specialist centres, such as Cotlandswick, Batchwood and Westminster Lodge, with available floor areas and where specialist staff are in attendance.

### **Performance**

Several comments recognised that at present Fleetville Community Centre is unable to provide suitable spaces for any kind of musical activity, dance, drama or other performance or rehearsal need. Along with cinema or lecture/conference space, the Management Committee feels that this is a further

example of a group of activities which can take advantage of a single flexible space. Comments included:

*A small-scale cinema.*

*A small auditorium suitable for presentations, small music concerts*

*Main space to be equipped with projection facilities to allow for income generation via conference and meeting hire*

*A large main hall with good acoustics for music and other performances*

*Studio space, facilities for rehearsals, music, drama, small performance space.*

*Larger area for music.*

The Management Committee is confident that from such a mix it can create a space with facilities which will be well-used and, where necessary can provide a sense of occasion while also being suitable for utilitarian functions such as classes and rehearsals. By being designed flexibly it should be possible to sub-divide into two or more smaller spaces.

### **Spaces for young children**

There are currently two regular groups, a playgroup and a kindergarten. A future building should be able to accommodate at least one such group. Although there were few specific comments about such spaces, it is clear from respondents that these groups generate much equipment which needs permanent storage. They also require their own toilet and washing facilities and it would be highly desirable if there was controlled entry to such areas of the building.

In spite of such specific requirements, the way in which storage for equipment and furniture is designed should make it possible for the space to be available for adult use and general purpose activities at other times.

The Management Committee would fully support the inclusion of young children's spaces on this basis, and even if there was no actual requirement at the time the new building was being designed, there should be passive provision in the designs for any future young children's use.

### **Garden**

An outdoor space is clearly important to respondents. Examples of comments received were:

*outside veg garden for education and clubs*

*A garden with art work, scented plants and herbs.*

*lovely exterior and garden*

## *Raised garden beds*

At present two areas at the rear have fenced-off garden spaces for the kindergarten and playgroup. The Management Committee also agrees that an attractive and welcoming open space would be beneficial at the main entrance. There has been a suggestion that a cafe (see below) which can open onto a garden space would be a pleasant addition. There is an increase in the popularity of community gardening at present and there is no reason why the Centre should not be in a position to provide such a facility. It has also been suggested that garden space does not need to be restricted to the ground floor, and if first floor accommodation is provided over part of the building, a roof garden might be possible.

## **Cafe and welcome space**

It is clear that a cafe is important to many respondents. For example:

*A cafe with nice decor with the possibility for children and young people to train there.*

*Cafe with access to garden.*

*It would be nice if the building could incorporate a cafe, so that people in different activities have more chance to meet*

In a community centre it is probable that a cafe should be seen in a wider context. For example, part of a breakout space for natural intervals within activity sessions; casual visitors meeting friends; visitors making inquiries from the duty manager; space for exhibitions or for other community activities such as a community library or information point; computers which are available for spot use; and finally circulation space linking main door, hireable spaces, lift, stairs and toilets. The Management Committee acknowledges that the facilities currently available fall short of its aspirations, and we are certain that a cafe space will be an important hub for the centre. It will investigate how the cafe element might be run, whether it should be staffed or whether the vending model would be more efficient; or a combination of both.

The Management Committee will also investigate the possibility of including a welcome desk with improved back office facility, not only for the manager but for others who have specific staff roles.

## **Catering**

*large fully equipped kitchen*

*accessible kitchen facilities*

*Kitchen with catering standard facilities for large functions*

*More than one kitchen*

Some large events need generous kitchen space and this is reflected in some community comments. A facility which can double as a demonstration/training kitchen is also mentioned and would certainly be beneficial. The Management Committee will certainly need to give much thought to these spaces, as there are regulations governing food preparation rooms which need to be considered.

A facility which is likely to be popular is a kitchenette or coffee point within a proportion of the hireable spaces, sufficient for a group to prepare their own drinks and snacks without the need to hire or use the main kitchen, or for when a separate cafe is not open.

### **General hireable spaces**

A wide range of activities take place in a community centre, yet Fleetville is a centre which is short of spaces, even though we have more in number than many other local centres. While respondents have not been specific about general activities, they have concentrated instead on the standard of those spaces. The Management Committee agrees with many respondents who would like to see a high standard of presentation and facilities for those rooms. Adequate storage for regular groups who find it impractical to take equipment and other items away each week; audio-visual facilities; hearing loops; good acoustics, comfortable temperatures and lighting appropriate for the nature of the activity. It is also important that internal walls and partitions are sufficiently sound-proofed. It should be possible, for example, for a musical group and a prayer meeting to occupy adjacent rooms without undue interference.

### **The building itself**

Many respondents were keen to make suggestions about the building itself.

*I want you to use the most up-to-date sustainable building ideas to maximise recycling and use less energy, and be as low impact on the environment.*

*The buildings must be as environmentally sustainable/energy efficient as is possible – could be a real exemplar for the community in this respect.*

*Would Passivhaus be a possibility, with lobby areas with double doors to avoid too much loss of heat?*

*A place that is aesthetically pleasing, sits well in style with the school over the road, and has character, both outside and in. A sense of space with clean white walls for exhibitions, and plenty of plants*

The Management Committee agrees that it makes sense to commission a sustainable building, and one which is visually attractive too. So it agrees with these and other similar comments. It is also a requirement of the proposed new District Plan.

### **Car parking**

Car parking, inevitably, is important to respondents, but it is the one subject which is not entirely the Management Committee's problem to solve. Ideally, we would like to have more parking spaces – that may or may not be possible. But there is a whole mix of issues related to Royal Road and the access to it: street parking, residents' parking, school parking, garage access, heavy vehicle access, a large number of child pedestrians – and all in a short road with a single access point. Many discussions will have to take place with St Albans City & District Council during the next two years.

### **Finally**

We thank respondents for taking the time to contact us and offer their suggestions. You may, of course, continue to do so.

Meanwhile, we will include as many of your suggestions as we are able and are appropriate to form our design brief for the new building. At present we are at an early stage in our discussions. We will have more information about the proposed design during 2017.