

Capitalising on Our Investment: Realising the Full Potential of the Community Centre

Background

St Anne's Community Centre has provided a valuable facility for the Church's congregation for many years and has been the venue for many memorable Parish events. In addition, it has accommodated a very wide range of community groups in its different sized rooms, supported by a ground floor kitchen and toilets and an upstairs kitchenette. For many years it housed a playgroup. It offers much more than just a "Parish Hall".

It is an old building, but over the last few years, mainly through grants obtained linked to community benefit, the fabric has been repaired and the facilities upgraded to a good standard.

During the last, say, two years Covid has disrupted all social activities and so it is hard to judge how busy the Centre would have been. At the 12 December meeting, Clare listed a surprising number of users and, as life returns to more usual, it could be anticipated that use would return to at least pre-Pandemic levels. The fact that managing the bookings etc is quite a heavy job, implies that there is a fair level of interest in using the Centre.

Financially the picture is not clear. The impression is given that the Centre is losing money, but the accounts, at an adequate level of detail to assess this, have not been available. There is a view that the Centre has covered its recent running costs and, taking out the grant-supported expenditure, possibly made a surplus.

Proposal

It is suggested that a strong option is to capitalise on the investment made by many in the fabric and facilities of the Centre and to realise the full potential of the Centre. This is both as a facility for the Church, but also as an outreach to and support for the wider Buxton community.

This would involve actively supporting and encouraging existing users, whilst also promoting the Centre more widely. This latter could be through outreach activities run by the Church or use by external organisations.

It would require a clear decision to back the Church community's commitment and ability to succeed in this proactive stance. The sale of the Centre would have to be taken off the table to create the conditions for this option to be viable.

Risks and benefits

The risks of this approach are that:

- The Centre may not attract enough use to be viable (more financial information is needed to make an informed judgement on this).
- The proactive development of activities within the Centre and their administration are too much work for the Church.

The benefits of this approach are that:

- Outreach and links to the local community will be enhanced.
- The Centre would not lose current users simply owing to the current uncertainty.

- Good faith would be demonstrated to the promises made or implied in Grants received, in terms of benefits to the community.
- The negative reputational impacts of Buxton losing a substantial community amenity by selling it for property development would be avoided.
- Several years of physical disruption and distraction to the Church's main mission would be avoided.
- If ultimately this option did not work out, it would not have prevented any other approaches being considered.

Summary and next steps

If the Centre is, or could be seen with some confidence to be, financially viable, then the positive benefits of this proposal are very compelling.

The remaining key issue is the appetite of the Church community to actively develop and manage the uses of the Centre to support the Church's mission and, more broadly, the local community. These are issues that both Clare and Bruce (and others) have started to address. It should perhaps be seen as a marvellous opportunity to engage and invigorate the congregation, whilst putting the Church, through the Centre, at centre stage in the community.