

CHAPELTOWN COMMUNITY CENTRE

ACTION GROUP

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Concerns about the data and conclusions of the community centres review

- There were one or two inaccuracies and surprising gaps, which cast some doubt as to how accurate the rest of the data is – eg. I was told that the contact for the Islamia Centre has been dead for 18 months, St Martin's Institute and the Lodge on Nassau Place weren't included while 180 Chapeltown Road was included, although it is earmarked for sale as offices on the Chapeltown Road Development Plan.
- The report makes no mention of cultural restrictions or expectations, nor of the geographical limitations of some of the centres. For example, the West Indian Centre was established as a centre for the West Indian communities in Leeds as a whole, and is located at the very bottom of Chapeltown Road, up to a 20-minute walk from the other end of Chapeltown – more if you have mobility problems. It seems odd to recommend that it should be recreated into both a major performance venue AND a community centre for Chapeltown – two functions which are not necessarily compatible.
- The report recommends making local primary schools 'the hub of community life' – yet the one thing which most people mention they are missing since the loss of the community centre and the Hayfield (the only local pub), is a place to socialise in the evenings or to hold parties. Primary schools are not appropriate for this purpose.
- The report concludes: "the facilities review demonstrates there is no case for the Council to consider the release of land as requested by CCCAG for the purposes of a new build community centre. This does not preclude CCCAG pursuing options for a new development site in the area at market value."

We are troubled by this conclusion. Firstly, gifting land should not be considered the only option and we are disappointed that other options weren't explored. Secondly, it seems pretty obvious that trying to put together an enormous finance package, while competing against other developers and without council support is a nigh-on impossible task.

Gaps in provision

We have identified things we think are missing, of which the report makes no mention:

- Places which are explicitly inclusive and welcoming to everyone, regardless of race, culture, ability, age, sexuality, etc. Places which are free of cultural baggage and preconceptions.
- Places which set out specifically to bridge those cultural and generational gaps – if there is an issue with social cohesion in Chapeltown, then that bridging work is absolutely essential.
- Any place or project (or even mention) of environmental sustainability, of energy efficiency advice or eco-friendly products or of global environmental awareness.
- Places which promote community empowerment, community decision-making, community planning or strategic or creative thinking.

- Places which promote mutual aid and self-help solutions and support for starting social enterprises.

IMPACT's research into community engagement

The IMPACT partnership has commissioned research into how service-providers can better engage with the local community. There is one over-riding factor that will lead to a higher level of engagement and trust – if people repeatedly tell the council what they want (cf. responses to the Chapeltown Road Development Plan consultation), but their views are not taken seriously, then it is unreasonable to expect them to bother with future efforts at engagement. Local people have been very vocal over a very long period about their desire for a community centre – since the last one was closed, in fact. Yet it seems clear that the council is not listening to them.

Community decision-making over the next fortnight

Over the next fortnight we are planning two meetings which will be very important for us.

- On Wednesday we are facilitating a round table discussion of people who provide facilities and voluntary projects in Chapeltown. We need to find out what they honestly think about the prospect of a new community centre. If they are concerned, we need to discuss their concerns. If they are opposed, we need to find out why. If we all decide together that a community centre is not the way to tackle gaps in provision, we will come up with another solution.
- On Thursday 14th we are having a public meeting, which will serve 3 purposes.
 - i. to update people on the progress of the Joint Service Centre as promised at our last public meeting
 - ii. to present the options for our group as we see them, together with the outcomes and suggestions from Wednesday's round table discussion
 - iii. to decide the way forward together, as a community.

Council support needed

We would like the committee to consider this proposal for supporting our group:

Should the outcome of the next fortnight's discussions and community decision-making be that both local residents and service-providers feel a new community centre is the best way forward, we would ask the council to make a clear statement of support and work with CCCAG to earmark land for the group to buy at market value.

We would like this land to be as near as possible to the site of the Joint Service Centre, as we feel the two projects complement each other well and we wish to be located in the heart of the community, ideally no more than a 10-minute walk from anywhere in the IMPACT area.