

Deputation to Council by Chapeltown Community Centre Action Group

Introduction

- We are a delegation from the Chapeltown Community Centre Action Group. Our group was formed immediately after the closure of Chapeltown Community Centre in January 2001.
- Over the last 5 years our group has represented the users of the former centre and worked with many other local groups and individuals. We have broad support from residents, schools and the police as well as from community, voluntary, ethnic and religious groups in the area. We are made up entirely of people that live or work in Chapeltown.
- Our aim is to develop a new community centre in Chapeltown that will be designed, built, managed and owned **by** the people of Chapeltown for the people of Chapeltown.
- We are making this deputation to the council to make public our deep dissatisfaction with the way that our community has been treated by council officials, and to ask that the matter is fully and transparently investigated, particularly with regard to decisions on the allocation of land for the LIFT project and community centre.

Closure

- The centre was closed in January 2001 in an atmosphere of confusion and mixed messages. The council set up the Community Centre Feasibility Study Steering Group in 2000, apparently with £17,500 allocated for the study. However, it then delayed the decision on the group's funding application and closed the centre before the group had a chance to carry out the work.

Replacement of the centre

- Public meetings were held and people were led to believe by council officials that a replacement centre would be created. We were told that the council has never promised to rebuild the centre, and yet this directly contravenes statements at public meetings and in letters. |

Consultation and involvement

- Feasibility studies and public consultations were promised. We asked for involvement, inclusion and participation. “Absolutely, absolutely, absolutely” said Andy Taylor, then Director of Community Planning and Regeneration. He told us that there would be a Planning for Real event as part of the consultation on the project. That meeting was the last we heard of it.
- We were told specifically by a council officer that our group would be involved at an early stage and throughout the planning process for the Joint service Centre or ‘LIFT project’, and that we would be contacted about that involvement. When we were finally invited to a users meeting, the matter of community space was irrelevant. We were told specifically that the community as a whole would be consulted on the plans. It now appears that this will not be happening either. So where is the opportunity for the people of Chapeltown, surely the LIFT project’s most important stakeholder, to influence the development and make the case for community facilities?
- Chapeltown has the third poorest neighbourhood in the country. The people of Chapeltown want to be involved in its improvement, but involving people here takes more work, care and energy. This extra effort has not been made in this case, indeed very little effort has been made at all.

Misleading statements and poor treatment

- Our group has been misled, given partial answers and ignored repeatedly by council officials since the closure of the old community centre.
- Instead of a source of information and expertise on how to improve Chapeltown, our group has been treated like the opposition. We feel that we have been perceived as an inconvenience that is getting in the way of the experts and their plans.
- It now seems highly likely that the removal of the Community Centre was part of the overall plan to introduce a new Joint Services Centre, via the LIFT company. If this was the case, then it would have been more honest for that to have been stated in the beginning.

Allocation of land

- Andy Taylor, who is now on the board of the LIFT Company, last month told one of our members that he couldn't imagine there being room for another centre on the site – despite the fact that we

were told by a lead partner in the LIFT company that the users' needs have only been collated in the last month and that plans have not yet been drawn up.

- The LIFT project is now nearing the stage where planning permission will be sought, and where any opportunity to claim land for a new community centre may be lost forever.

Our request

We request that an appropriate committee make a full investigation into this matter and in particular answer the following questions:

1. Which department has responsibility for the sites of the former community centre, the Hayfield pub and the green-space between them?
2. Has a decision been made about how the land will be allocated? In particular, has the land for the LIFT project been allocated, and does that allocation in effect mean that land is no longer available for a new community centre?
3. If decisions have been made, who made them and when?
4. Will Leeds City Council review those decisions and allocate land for a new community centre? This question should be seen as separate and different from who would fund, design, build, manage and run the community centre.

Conclusion

Chapelton needs a community centre. Chapelton wants a community centre. We have a strong team supported by local architects and consultants, a robust business plan and multiple funding streams identified, but without land for the new centre we cannot move forward.

We ask that a member will now move a motion that this matter be referred to the appropriate committee.

Thank you.