

Newtown Community Association

A 'VISION'

A purpose built, exemplar ecological
Community Building for Newtown

Belmont Park

Newtown

Exeter

Introduction

This report gives an outline of the work carried out so far by Newtown Community Association (registered charity) regarding a 'Vision' for new community facilities at the existing site of Newtown Community Centre, Belmont Park, Exeter. It includes an overview of the existing community building, proposed remedial works and an outline design brief for a new structure.

Background

The decision by a major supermarket chain to apply for planning permission to build a new 'in-town' supermarket in the Newtown area of Exeter prompted the local community association to ask how the local community might benefit if this application were to be successful. The supermarket have not been approached in a formal capacity but it is hoped that some funding might be forthcoming as their literature strongly promotes support for local charities through their Community Matters scheme.

In February 2010, the idea of a new community centre was suggested as the current facilities are highly used yet, as is outlined below, they are lacking in many regards.

As a forward thinking community, Newtown expects any new proposals to be at the forefront of ecological design and community involvement. This is reflected in the early work carried out by the 'founders' of the 'Vision'.

Early soundings were sought from all community association members, local councillors (including the Lord Major), the local MP (Ben Bradshaw), council planning and parks departments, and other interested parties.

Initial feedback was very positive, particularly after locally renowned 'ecological' Architects Gale & Snowden lent their support in terms of initial advice and an offer of reduced fees for further design work. Their connections with the local council and experience in community design has also proved invaluable.

Also situated in Belmont Park are the charities Scrapstore, Magic Roundabout and Merry-Go-Round. Discussion led to the exploration of a sharing of the 'Vision' which is still in progress. It is hoped that a shared facility would have stronger backing and would also involve replacement of the last two war-time sub-standard buildings in Belmont Park.

Discussions with the neighbouring community of St Leonards have also taken place. They currently have no community facilities and their association is currently canvassing local resident's opinion on whether to join forces with Newtown and its 'Vision'.

Next steps

Assistance has been received from the built environment charity RESET and further assistance by Glasshouse has been sought. A steering group composing of a core of committed community members and representatives from the charities is proposed.

The founders of the 'Vision' believe it should now be taken to a wider audience and that community involvement should now be sought. Assistance in the best way to go about this will hopefully be available through charitable organisations such as Glasshouse and ECI with further input from Architects, Gale & Snowden.

Funding is also a high priority and all avenues are being explored. All action taken so far has been on a voluntary basis and this is likely to remain the case until funding can be sourced. Newtown Community Association is a registered charity which should widen the

potential for funding sources. The current effort put into getting the 'Vision' up and running has taken place with the knowledge of wider economic realities and expectations are realistic.

What follows is an audit of the current facilities, proposed remedial work and initial design brief.

Existing Newtown Community Building



Site Plan



Existing building

Scrap Store et al

1.0 The current situation

The building is situated in the centre of Belmont Park which is one of the oldest parks in Exeter (<http://www.exeter.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=7839>). The ward of Newtown has a population of approximately 4000 residents. The ward boundary follows Sidwell St. to the East, Iddesleigh Road to the North, Posloe Road to the West and Magdalen Road to the South. There are numerous schools from primary upwards to a University of Exeter campus, various shopping and recreational facilities including swimming pool, cinema, golf driving range and dry ski slope. There are two health centres and a maternity hospital. The population is mixed in terms of ages and cultures and the community centre is currently heavily used by numerous groups and associations.

The NCA Building is a single storey building of 102m² with 2 main function rooms, a kitchen and only 2 WC's. It has a duo-pitch roof with a vaulted ceiling internally. The construction is a simple timber frame dating from post WWII and was not designed for its current purpose. Usage consists of various local groups of all ages and activities and occupancy is intermittent throughout the week.

It can be seen from below the building is very energy inefficient which impacts on the comfort of the users. As it was not designed with community facilities in mind is not very well laid out or welcoming to the public. There is no designated outside space and the facilities are limited. There are insufficient storage areas which impacts on the internal space and makes activities more difficult.

Currently there is no provision for disabled access or adaptations for disabled users inside. Various, significant repairs are required in the foreseeable future to maintain the existing usage.

1.1 Technical details

The timber frame construction consists of;

- 25mm weatherboard
- bituminous felt onto
- 100mm timber studs
- 25mm EPS between studs
- 12mm plasterboard

The exact roof construction could not be determined but is likely to consist of;

- bituminous felt cover
- roof underlay/sarking
- 150mm timber joists
- Plasterboard

The floors are linoleum or laminate surfaced throughout and there is no insulation under the raised joists which are cross ventilated. There are two exposed internal trusses supporting the roof joist and all windows are single glazed.

Thermal U' values of the roof and wall were calculated (using IES VE software) and the

results compared against existing building regulations are shown below.

| | Existing | Building Regulations (Part L) |
|-------|----------|-------------------------------|
| Walls | 0.85 | 0.35 |
| Roof | 0.54 | 0.25 |

As increased thermal performance is associated with lower U' values, it is apparent that the existing structure is not energy efficient.

1.2 Heating system

There are 4 standard electric storage heaters in each of the main function rooms making 8 in total. Heating is said to be sufficient in the morning and early afternoon with temperatures dropping to uncomfortable levels in the late afternoon and evening in the winter. Poor insulation of the structure is likely to be a major factor in the decrease of thermal comfort levels. There are two small hot water boilers for hot water in the kitchen.

1.3 Lights

There are 4 no. 70W florescent lights in each of the function rooms and 2 no. in the kitchen. The hall and WC's have 16W energy saving florescent bulbs.

1.5 Water fittings

The taps in the building appear to use water at a rate of 6-7 litres/min when fully on. There are no other water fittings other than the two WCs..

1.4 Appliances

All appliances, including an electric cooker, fridge freezer, toaster and kettle do not appear to be 'A' rated.

2. Proposed improvement works

2.1 Roof

The existing roof will need to be replaced within the next 3-5 years as the current roof is in a poor state.

2.2 External cladding

The external timber weatherboard will need to be replaced/repaired as a matter of urgency as the existing is shown to be damaged in several areas which may cause potential risks regarding fire, structural, vandalism or security concerns. External decoration is becoming very poor and needs considerable attention within 18 months.

2.3 Disabled facilities

The existing facilities do not comply with current DDA requirements which have a negative effect on disabled users. It is proposed that immediate remedial works be carried out to rectify this situation in the short term. A long term solution has not been put forward for the existing building.

2.4 Water and sewerage

3. Outline Design Brief for new structure

Belmont Park is part of the local Conservation Area and is flanked along Belmont Rd by Grade II houses. The hut itself has a history having been erected in the last War for the military and is now one of two remaining out of some 40 originally in the Park.

It is anticipated that a new community building, to pass planning and to appeal to the City Council, who own the Hut and manage the Park, must be required to fulfil several requirements. Of overriding importance would be to provide an exemplar 'green' building with a versatile specification to act as a focal point in Newtown and to encourage the local population to participate more fully in the community.

The Community Association feel that a "Green" building amongst other attributes will greatly improve the energy efficiency, a more sustained use during the year and give Newtown a real sense of having a purposeful community hall of its own. These aspirations would hopefully gain the support and involvement of other community groups, Exeter City Council and other local stakeholders.

A radical improvement of facilities and additional flexibility would, without doubt, encourage existing local residents and community groups to make more use of the building. The proposals would also attract "new business" and give added momentum to a stronger management structure for the Association.

Joining forces with the charities currently residing the other remaining hut in Belmont Park should be explored as an option.

Provision of facilities for teenagers and disabled people would benefit entire groups currently not able to be catered for.

3.1 Footprint

It is proposed that any new structure would fall on a similar sized footprint to the existing to ease issues surrounding planning and service provision. If moves to incorporate the Scrapstore and other charities is successful then this will need to be looked at again. A full park survey has been carried out and possibilities for location should be discussed with planners and design professionals at the same time as discussions with the local community.

3.2 Layout

Requirements include;

- 2/3 activity rooms (design to include flexible room configuration)
- Kitchen/utility area
- Male/Female/Disabled toilets
- Storage space
- Outside space linked to inside/entrance
- Office space for permanent use

4.0 Conclusion

It is clear that the existing facilities are not sufficient in many ways for a community the size of Newtown and it is hoped that all concerned parties recognise that short term improvements will not lead to a long term solution.

Involving the other charitable organisations based in Belmont Park would make a strong case for increasing funding options and making the building more accessible to a wider number of people.

There is an opportunity to involve the local community in an exemplar project that will benefit not only local residents but also Exeter as a whole.