



UTILISATION OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS IN THE BOROUGH

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL
LOCAL COMMITTEE (GUILDFORD)
21ST July 2005**

KEY ISSUE: Guildford Borough Council's (GBC) Community Development Scrutiny Committee have undertaken an in-depth scrutiny investigation into the effectiveness of the utilisation of public buildings in the borough in meeting the aspirations of the community.

SUMMARY: This report summarises the recommendations of the GBC report and responds to those specific recommendations that are addressed to Surrey County Council.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee is asked to

- (i) commend the work of the GBC Community Development Scrutiny Committee Study Group.
- (ii) comment on the response of SCC to those specific recommendations directed to SCC services.
- (iii) comment on any further ways of addressing the issue of utilising public buildings in the borough.

1. INTRODUCTION and BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In March 2004, Guildford Borough Council's (GBC) Community Development Scrutiny Committee agreed that an in-depth scrutiny investigation should be undertaken into the effectiveness of the utilisation of public buildings in the borough in meeting the aspirations of the community. That Committee agreed that a Study Group be appointed to undertake this work and prepare a report on the outcome.
- 1.2 The Study Group agreed the following detailed objectives for the investigation:-
- “To assess the effectiveness of public buildings in the borough in meeting the aspirations of the community, including:-
- (a) the optimisation of the use of relevant current property assets, including any identified instances of under-utilisation;
 - (b) potential opportunities to increase community use of GBC land and buildings, including the use of property beyond its core purpose;
 - (c) possible barriers to the extension of the use of existing GBC assets;
 - (d) the extent and availability of non-Council owned land and buildings for community use (e.g. village, church and school halls); and
 - (e) the aspirations and requirements of the community in relation to public buildings to enable unfulfilled demand to be assessed and any divergence between needs and provision to be investigated.”
- 1.3 In addition, Members proposed that the Study Group should aim to:-
- develop a data-base on the requirements of the community to inform decisions relating to the proposed use of new community facilities; and
 - prepare a directory of halls and premises available for hire in the Borough.
- 1.4 As part of its work, the Study Group has met on nine occasions, including three public meetings on the following themes:-
- Sport, Youth and Play
 - Arts and Heritage
 - Social Welfare
- 1.5 A wide range of agencies were invited to participate in the 3 public meetings mentioned in the previous paragraph. There was both a full exchange of views in these meetings and at the same time, different agencies & groups made contact with each other outside of the meetings

to develop ideas on sharing facilities. This networking was an important spin-off from the work of the GBC Study Group.

- 1.6 A number of Surrey County Council (SCC) services contributed to these public meetings, such as Early Years Service; Lockwood Day Services; Sports Development Service, Cultural Services and the Local Director. These officers were very grateful for the opportunities to contribute to the work of the Study Group and for being kept in touch with the deliberations of the final report.

2. ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

- 2.1 The final report of the Study Group was reported to the GBC Executive who have, following amendment, confirmed the following recommendations as needing to be addressed:
- a) that SCC be requested to clarify the position in relation to its plans for the possible relocation of Guildford Library.
 - b) that the GBC be requested to give careful consideration to the charging structure in respect of the replacement Guildford Civic to enable and encourage its extensive use by local community groups.
 - c) that SCC be requested to promote the availability of the Lockwood Centre for community uses and, in particular, for live music rehearsals and events and dance.
 - d) that GBC Officers be requested to submit a report to the Community Development Scrutiny Committee on:
 - potential opportunities to develop and enhance the performance of live music in the town centre; and
 - options to regulate the noise levels and quality of buskers and other musical events in the town centre.
 - e) that the Community Development Scrutiny Committee be invited to review options for the improvement of signage and information in respect of GBC facilities and events, subject to the caveat that no additional funding would be made available in that regard.
 - f) that the GBC Head of Communication Services be requested to review existing arrangements for the management of GBC's information boards to ensure that they consistently display relevant, up-to-date material.
 - g) that SCC be requested to:
 - develop proposals for the use of Guildford Community Centre as a meeting place for young people in the evenings and investigate other options for the establishment of similar facilities to the Plantation Cafe within Council-owned buildings; and

- continue investigations into possible venues for live music gigs and other major events for young people.
- h) that the GBC Executive be urged to ensure that the programme for the installation of youth shelters, as set out in the approved Youth Facilities Strategy, is progressed at the earliest opportunity.
- i) that SCC be invited to consider options to extend further the availability of school premises for community uses, together with the current charges for their use.
- j) that, whilst recognising that existing space is well-used and spare capacity is scarce, the Guildford Business Forum be requested to circulate a questionnaire to relevant voluntary organisations to ascertain their requirements in relation to office accommodation and to identify opportunities for the sharing of premises.
- k) that Guildford Business Forum be asked to consult Guildford Association for Voluntary Services about the possible development of an ongoing “brokerage” system to match the requirements of voluntary organisations for office accommodation with spare capacity in existing buildings.
- l) that the production of the proposed “Directory of Halls for Hire” be welcomed and widely publicised through appropriate channels and that its inclusion in the “Maps Online” facility on GBC’s website be investigated.
- m) that Parish Councils and local community groups be encouraged to assist in the identification of demand for community facilities in their localities, for example by participating in the production of Parish and Ward Plans, and that appropriate advice and support be given by Officers on request.
- n) that, in the light of the issues raised during this study, the Head of Legal & Property Services be requested to submit a report to the Community Development Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis on potential opportunities to enhance community uses of GBC-owned property.

3 SCC’S RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 This report responds to just those of the above GBC recommendations that are addressed to SCC, via the Local Committee. However, as a general point, SCC commends GBC and the Study Group for taking the lead in addressing this useful area of work.

3.2 GBC Recommendation a)

“That SCC be requested to clarify the position in relation to its plans for the possible relocation of Guildford Library.”

SCC response: The Library Service acknowledges the view that the current location and layout of Guildford Library are not ideal, and could be improved by re-location. Officers are always willing to examine options for re-location and to enter into dialogue with GBC. The current approach of new library development is to seek to contain the revenue cost within the existing library service budget, and to fund capital costs from an in-and-out scheme or from a developer.

3.3 GBC Recommendation c)

“That SCC be requested to promote the availability of the Lockwood Centre for community uses and, in particular, for live music rehearsals and events and dance”

SCC response: Lockwood Day Services are very pleased to promote and further develop the Centre for a range of artistic events. A partnership has already been developed with GBC to promote space in the Centre for a more artistic studios, rehearsal space and with possible upgrading of the building, further public events.

3.4 GBC Recommendation g)

“That SCC be requested to:

- develop proposals for the use of Guildford Community Centre as a meeting place for young people in the evenings and investigate other options for the establishment of similar facilities to the Plantation Cafe within Council-owned buildings; and*
- continue investigations into possible venues for live music gigs and other major events for young people.”*

SCC Response: The Youth Development Service used to be the main users of the Guildford Community Centre, in Haydon Place. After a period of shared use of that building, the Service vacated the building in 2002 and have very recently opened a newly refurbished building in Ward Street. Given the very close proximity of their new centre to Haydon Place there would be no point in the Youth Development Service taking a second building in the same locality.

On the second point of live music venues, SCC feel that this recommendation is more appropriately addressed by GBC’s Cultural Service, who have this remit.

3.5 GBC Recommendation i)

“that SCC be invited to consider options to extend further the availability of school premises for community uses, together with the current charges for their use.”

SCC response: As explained at the public meetings, under the devolved management of schools to Boards of Governors, schools are not required to let their facilities and they alone determine whether they choose to do so or not. National and local guidance on the schools funding formula means that schools cannot subsidise the use of their premises from the delegated school budget. At the very least they must meet the explicit costs from the letting fee and then there should be something extra for wear and tear as schools have to undertake redecorating from their own budget. While the role of SCC as the Local Education Authority, is thus constrained, schools are encouraged to extend the community use of their facilities.

However, two very positive developments are the recent announcement, via central government initiatives, for the development of Extended Schools and the roll out of more Children’s Centres. At this stage the Early Years Service are working with others to identify eligible areas for children’s centre development, which will include areas in the Guildford borough. In a number of instances these new centres will be located in schools that have the physical capacity.

We will be holding public meetings in each borough in the autumn, which will include parents & communities. Following on from this expressions of interest will be sought leading to a formal bidding process for interested parties who wish to set up these centres. This means that SCC, with partners from other agencies and the private and voluntary sector will be looking to use schools and community facilities and buildings within the borough.

CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Report by: Dave Johnson, Area Director

LEAD/CONTACT OFFICER:	Dave Johnson, Area Director, South West Surrey
TELEPHONE NUMBER:	01483 517301
BACKGROUND PAPERS:	GBC’s Utilisation of Public Buildings in the borough -report of the Community Development Scrutiny Committee Study Group – March 2005.