

# Coalville CAN proposal for Hermitage Leisure Centre

## Summary

The community take-over of the current Hermitage Leisure Centre, Whitwick on the successful opening of the new Leisure Centre, is a part of a wider community led regeneration project. The aim is to create a sustainable project which will be well used by local community and attract visitors to the area, complementing the existing and planned provision and generating a surplus to be reinvested back into the area.

## Context

The aim is to create a wellbeing centre including urban activity and learning spaces which would offer a series of mixed-use facilities. To make sustainable use of existing buildings, firstly assessing if reuse and fitting to low carbon standards is a better option than demolish and rebuild. This includes a creative approach to the use of space however is proportionate to the costs and future use of each project. Each element suggested has been tested and is in use elsewhere. This is a work in progress. It is assumed that existing users of the site would remain and be part of future use of the area.

## Core Use

- Well-being, urban leisure and learning centre,
- including converting the existing swimming pool to a skate/scooter park;
- a parkour centre
- using the existing hall for martial arts and boxing
- spaces for hire, creative learning, music and “repair and maker” spaces for use by local education providers and the community
- creche/ softplay area
- community café with dog friendly facilities.
- Mini train / fishing lake / football 3g and grass pitches and mini golf – as existing

The location and planned use allows interconnectivity with the new Leisure Centre for complimentary activity.

## Outdoor Space

The fishing lake and recreational area; part of the 6 mile ‘Coalville’ Mega walk local foot and national cycle network (route 52); mini golf; model railway; football pitches – and grass area for community festivals such as Woodstock and the 3 G pitches - the site has much to offer and is a loved local space from dog walking to gathering teenagers. Whilst there is a lot of potential for growing eg forest garden and sports, there needs to be recognition of current use and value of the spaces.

**Carbon Neutral** the refurbishment will explore sustainable and low carbon options including green roofs & walls; ground and air source heating and solar panels, generating energy beyond the needs of the site. There is potential to connect as one of a series of low carbon transport hubs including a core hub alongside the future Ivanhoe Line station in Coalville, with public transport, ULEV vehicles, E bikes and cargo bike hire all on National Cycle Way Route 52 which runs alongside the centre.

**Accommodation** is not planned as a core part of the scheme however there may be a discrete associated 'eco-accommodation' to those working on site.

### **Community Engagement**

There has been intense consultation via surveys, social media, the Parish Council, local organisations and young people. The ideas contained within this document have come from those discussions and have been formulated over many months – and adapted by the changing circumstances and in the spirit of cooperation (*eg the removal of bouldering when Everyone Active announced that they were offering this in the new Leisure Centre*)

In order to gain feedback on the most recent ideas, a current survey was sent out on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> June – 417 individuals completed this representing over 830 people, 83% of whom has not been involved in any previous consultations and the vast majority from the LE67 area. The full results of this are attached in a separate document.

### **Accountability**

The site would be democratically owned by the community through a Community Benefit Society (see separate document on what is a CBS) acting as an ethical landlord, providing insurance, support and oversight.

The operation of the new centre would be through dynamic and flexible teams of expertise working together through an executive board, with representatives from all users with expert advice. Individual enterprises operating as standalone ventures in their relevant 'expertise' areas. This enables private, social or charitable operations to work together with their 'rents' or contributions jointly meeting the costs of the operation.

Adaptability and responsiveness is built in with a structure designed to be efficient, transparent, and non-hierarchical, allowing a nimble response to the changing market and demand.

The ownership & running of the site by the community will lead to more opportunities for people to directly contribute to the running the site, being involved in the development and care of the site; a reduction in the level of antisocial behaviour seen on the site and more people involved in the activities offered.

A key result from the survey was that 90% of people considered affordability and inclusivity as 'very important' something that a community owned, and focused organisation can offer.

**Funding and financial sustainability** Through financial viability models (including the "Wicked Spreadsheet") the costs and potential income from the partners involved, paying flexible rents / profit shares would need to be further assessed in order to create a detailed long term sustainable finance solution.

As a CBS, in addition to a community share offer which can raise substantial sums, it would be eligible for social finance from places like Key Fund as well as significant grant and match funding from bodies such as Sport England, Community Ownership Fund and community business funding. 92% of community business that have had a share offer are still trading successfully after 5 years.

With local community involvement and support of the Parish (or District) Council, funds can be raised directly from the government in form of Public Works Loans which offer unlimited sums at cheap interest rates over many years. *(recent example from a small Parish in Leeds borrowed £810,000 from PWL at 2.8% interest over 50 years, to purchase a shop and a pub which are now generating excess to share in the community)*

With this flexible mix of finance, surpluses would be generated and reinvested back into the community, decided on by the community and not be needed to pay off investors, absent landowners, or shareholders. This means the more the community the use the site, the more they generate unrestricted funds for local use. A win win!

The Leisure Centre would be an ideal candidate for an asset transfer, and Whitwick Parish Council have an asset of community value lodged with NWLDC. A partnership approach could also be explored or profit share for spending in the local community.

### **Timescales**

Coalville CAN is already bringing some of the site into use eg the mini golf in partnership with Meadow Barn View CIC. Early agreement and access to enable a full feasibility study to start prior to the current facility closing with a phased approach to enable continuity of opening.

### **Destination**

The facilities offered responds to current local demand and offers new employment opportunities building on existing work with young people through the Kickstart scheme. Whilst our choice of initial uses is based on local demand we are keen to create a destination site with the National Forest and activity based tourism encouraging visitors to stay in the area. The site is on the national cycle route and can be a destination/stop.

## **Collaboration**

As a cooperative Coalville CAN is keen to collaborate with others and has already engaged a number of partners that would take on parts of the operation. This includes a private local successful martial arts and boxing operation, a successful social enterprise that has built an indoor skate park and community café operators. A collaboration of local parkour deliverers would offer expertise to set up a parkour centre.

Coalville CAN believes the strengths and skills lie in the people – and if given the opportunity there would be many more people with relevant expertise that would come forward to help. A key issue is belief and trust that this is a possibility, many believe the site has already been sold for housing and there is no point trying.

## **Support Crew**

Coalville CAN has the support of a number of people and organisations whose expertise would be used to further the plans / ideas in addition to the local partners that have already expressed an interest in being part of the day to day operation of the various activities.

### **These include :**

Dave Stock Leicestershire and Rutland Sport, (funded by Sport England)  
[LeicesterShire & Rutland Sport | County Sports Partnership for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland | Leicester-Shire & Rutland Sport \(active-together.org\)](#)

Mick McGrath, Locality (asset transfers) [Locality](#)

Vidhya Alakeson, Power to Change (funder) [Power to Change](#)

There are many organisations undertaking projects like this all over the country and Coalville CAN is part of a number of wider networks whose members have done this successfully in collaboration with their council.

More information and examples can be found here – [www.mycommunity.org.uk](http://www.mycommunity.org.uk)

## **Next steps**

Coalville CAN is happy to work with partners to provide information on any of the above or get involved in further work on sustainability planning and business planning.

Deana Wildgoose and Ian Wilson, July 6<sup>th</sup> 2021