

LLANWDDYN COMMUNITY CENTRE FEASIBILITY STUDY

COVER TO BE INSERTED

Contents

Introduction	3
Summary of Recommendations.....	4
Background and context	6
The Condition of the Building	8
The Community Centre and its Activities.....	10
The Charity	11
Consultation	14
Access.....	16
Using additional services at the Centre	18
The Visitor and Business Survey	19
Information from businesses	22
Findings and Recommendations.....	24
Volunteers and ongoing support	24
Governance of the Community Centre.....	24
Work on the Building	25
Developing the services on offer	26
Findings and Recommendations	
Action Plan	

Introduction

The Community Centre, a listed building located in the small community of Llanwddyn, which has only 35 houses in the village, has been managed by a charitable trust under a lease agreement with Powys County Council since XXXX. A new long term lease is currently being negotiated between the charity and Powys CC. The Centre is attached to the former local primary school, which was closed in 2009 and had some shared services, including a biomass boiler which served both the school and the Community Centre, and the other utilities, water, electrics etc. A temporary boiler serving the Centre only was installed after the closure of the school, and Powys CC has agreed to replace this boiler with a permanent, more efficient one, serving the Centre only, as part of the negotiations for the renewed lease.

The Centre is in some disrepair, there are significant issues with the roof, which leaks and is unsafe, the metal windows are inefficient and allow some water ingress, and there is asbestos within the building which needs to be safely removed before any building or remedial work can commence. As a Grade II listed building there are restrictions on development which would require listed building consent as well as any planning consent, should these be required.

Despite the small number of residents, (there are only 35 houses in the vicinity of the Centre) the Centre committee is supported by an active events committee, some of whom are also committee members of the Charity. This events committee promotes a number of successful events which are aimed at both local people and visitors, and range from one off social events, such as balls, quizzes and talks, through to larger events which attract people from a wider area such as the annual Folk and Acoustic Festival and the Lake Vyrnwy half-marathon. These events provide both social benefits, and substantial funds towards the both the Centre's running costs, and other community activity.

Resources for Change (R4C) was commissioned by the Charity in February 2017 to undertake a feasibility study into the long term viability of the Community Centre, funded by the Arwain (Leader) scheme. R4C met with the Community Centre committee, worked with members of the community to undertake a range of community surveys, of residents, visitors to the Centre itself, caravan sites and day visitors, and local businesses. They also liaised with Powys County Council staff involved in the lease and local building consultants, and advised on securing accurate costings for any development work. In addition, they developed an Asset Transfer Tool Kit, based on the experiences at Llanwddyn, but aimed at other community groups in Powys, they also made recommendations about visits to other centres so the committee could learn from others' experiences.

The recommendations in this report are based on these activities, and on experiences elsewhere; a suggested Action Plan is also included.

Summary of Recommendations

Running the Centre

This community is exceptional in its drive, enthusiasm and commitment to retaining the Community Centre and making it a viable hub for community members and visitors. Many people who do not currently volunteer have indicated a willingness to do so, but some of them are likely to respond better to a direct request for assistance.

Recommendation

That the Centre committee and events committee continue to work together, bringing additional and willing people “on board” as and when necessary from a pool of willing and available volunteers.

Governance

The Charity, which has the legal responsibility has a significant number of committee members, but only four of these act as trustees. This means that although a number of active residents support the Centre, four of them carry all the legal and financial risk. Most funders would expect to see a larger number of trustees as this lessens the burden, and the risk.

Recommendation

That the committee of the Centre which has a number of members, but only 4 trustees increases the number of trustees to at least eight.

The relationship between the charity and the events committee is currently good and works well. However, it could look confusing to a funder, and should be formalised.

Recommendation

The two committees consider options for making their joint working clearer by agreeing a revised or new structure.

The Building

The building is currently in some disrepair, and this limits the activities the committee/s are able to undertake, although they have found a way to work around some of these, e.g. the kitchen is not able to be used, so catering is undertaken at local people’s houses, and they have obtained necessary permissions from Environmental Health in order to do this. They have already discussed the necessary repairs to the roof and other building work with local firms, and have some funding available from their fundraising efforts and some substantial local donations.

Recommendations

The committee should apply for grant funding to repair and refurbish the entire Centre to a good standard, including removal of asbestos, bringing the kitchen up to standard to meet Environmental Health requirements, making the building watertight with repairs to the roof and windows, and ensuring all areas are accessible to people with disabilities. They should also focus on introducing significant levels of insulation to ensure the building is comfortable to use and their running costs into the future are minimised.

Ongoing development

The surveys undertaken showed a number of ways in which activities could be developed from the Centre in order to make the community more sustainable in terms of offering additional income for local residents to deliver these services.

Recommendation

In refurbishing the building, the committee should also seek to provide the facilities that corporate and other bodies require such as wi-fi, hearing loops, access to audio visual aids such as a screen and projector, microphones and speakers. It should work with local people to offer additional services within the Centre, such as catering, a bar etc, and maximise the opportunities for local people to use the facilities at the Centre either regularly or on an ad hoc basis to increase their income, and provide locally based products and services.

Additional offers from the Centre

Regular visitors responding to the survey identified additional services which could be offered from the Centre. These included services such as specialist guided walks, one-off day long sessions, and regular weekly sessions, such as bingo. These could generate income for local people and interest for businesses and local third sector bodies who could offer these services, paying the Centre a fee for its use.

Recommendations

That the Centre committee works with individuals, businesses and local groups (such as RSPB) to develop a suite of offers for both local people and visitors. Details of the sorts of offers people found attractive are to be found in the body of the report.



Background and context

The current village of Llanwddyn was built following the flooding of the original village in the 1880's to create a water supply for Liverpool and the reservoir, Lake Vyrnwy.

The Lake Vyrnwy Nature Reserve and Estate that surrounds the lake is now jointly managed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Severn Trent Water and is a popular destination for ornithologists, cyclists and hikers. The reserve is designated as a National Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Special Protection Area, and a Special Area of Conservation (NNR, SSSI, SPA and SAC).

The village and surrounding area, which constitutes the community of Llanwddyn, has a total population of just 257¹ with almost 40% of them Welsh speakers and is located approximately one mile from the lake and outside the designated areas mentioned above, although with easy access to the lake and its amenities. It has a shop and petrol station that sells a range of general provisions, and also provides some services for visitors who are self-catering, such as a breakfast pack. There is no public house, the nearest licensed premises being at the Lake Vyrnwy Hotel approximately 2 miles away, and the services of a Post office are provided part-time at the Community Centre by a post-mistress who is over the statutory retirement age.

The nearest centre of population is the small town of Llanfyllin, with a population of 1,542², and with facilities such as a high school, (which includes a sports centre) a medical centre, post office and a number of shops, together with a former workhouse which has been restored as a cultural and heritage centre. It is 9.7 miles from the Centre, whilst the nearest large town is Oswestry, 24 miles distant, which is in Shropshire and has significantly more facilities including banks, large supermarkets, dentists etc. Public transport to and from the community is poor with a weekly bus to Oswestry on Wednesdays (market days) only.

The Community Centre, was opened in 1950 by the Local Authority, at that time Montgomeryshire District Council, with the support of Liverpool Corporation, which, at that time, still retained ownership of the dam. It was the first of a series of schools combined with community centres that were established across the former county of Montgomeryshire. The Centre and the school are linked, with outside parking spaces, but the proposed lease for the Community Centre does not include the portion of the building which was the former school and there is agreement as to division of the car park, and other outside areas, formerly linked to the school.

The group of buildings was Listed Grade II on the 21st October 2008 as *“an exceptional example of a Mid twentieth century school - part of an ambitious programme of school building by Montgomeryshire District Council, and conceived to include a community centre as well as educational provision from the outset / a progressive and pioneering concept. The building gives clear architectural expression to this combined purpose in its bold massing, generous planning and subtle detailing”* ³

A biomass boiler was installed at the site with the aim of heating the school, the Centre and a number of local houses. The school operated until 2009 and since then no use has been made of the

¹ ONS Census 2011

² ONS Census 2011

³ <https://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/wales/llanwddyn-powys#.WTfI3YWcHIU>

school side of the premises, and the biomass boiler has been decommissioned, and replaced by Powys County Council, with a temporary boiler which supplies the Centre only.

The Centre itself consists of the following facilities

- a) A large community hall with a traditional stage and proscenium arch, which potentially seats up to 300 people and is suitable for dinners, concerts, plays, eisteddfodau and a range of other performance based events. This hall has a sprung floor and is therefore also suitable for dances and others exercise based activity, such as keep fit, or badminton etc
- b) A meeting room, with the Post Office at one end, which can be divided to create two smaller rooms, and also has a space for a commercial bar.
- c) A further meeting room.
- d) A snooker room.
- e) A good sized kitchen (the former school kitchen), with equipment.
- f) An adjoining dining room.
- g) A further room, the former school library
- h) Men's and Women's W.C.s, together with disabled W.C. located at the rear of the stage
- i) Store rooms and built-in store cupboards

We understand there is a basement store under kitchen and dining area, but it is not clear if this is available for use by the Centre.

Currently all the facilities within the Centre are used regularly, (at least weekly) with the exception of the kitchen, which needs to be upgraded to meet current Environmental Health Standards.

The Condition of the Building

A comprehensive report was produced on the condition of both the school and Community Centre by DarntonB3 Architecture, Newtown, Powys in 2015. This report has been made available to the committee and to R4C. In addition, as part of this feasibility study, R4C recommended that costings should be provided for all the remedial work recommended within this report, and a Quantity Surveyor, Mr Steve Bowen, of Bowen Consultants Newtown has been identified.

The significant work to the building includes

- Refurbishment and replacement of the roof tiles, with possible repairs to battens etc
- Improving the internal roof space with venting and higher levels of insulation
- Removing any asbestos using specialist contractors
- Monitoring and reviewing the electricity supply which passes through the roof space (ensuring it is not compromised by any additional insulation)
- Replacing, or providing secondary glazing to the metal framed windows
- Refurbishing the kitchen in line with current Environmental Health standards
- Providing disabled access to the building from outside, and to different areas within the building, including the stage
- Reviewing and addressing any fire safety issues
- Redecorating and renovating throughout, including refurbishing the wooden floors, and improving the WC facilities
- Removing and replacing cracked paving around the outside of the building



The picture on the left shows the current entrance showing the poor condition of the door, and the HERAS fencing; and on the right the windows (and HERAS fencing)

The deteriorating condition of the building is a source of constant anxiety to the committee. Much of the successful fundraising activity has focused on “fire-fighting” – carrying out emergency repairs, redecorating and making good after interim repairs to the roof etc. The roof tiles are so fragile that the County Council has installed a temporary HERAS fencing around the building to prevent injury to users from falling roof tiles, which makes the building look unattractive and unused. The committee has secured quotes from local tradesmen for some of the works identified above but there has been no overall quote obtained for the works, because some of the works have been under discussion with Powys County Council as part of the lease negotiation.

Our recommendation is that a full Quantity Surveyor report is secured so that the committee can consider the overall potential repair and refurbishment costs to the building. This will enable them to:

Llanwddyn Community Centre – Feasibility Study

- a) Consider grant applications for the whole work
- b) Consider staging the work, prioritising those areas of greatest concern
- c) Establish bench marks for the costs for the work to enable them to be set against any quotes received from tradesmen

The Community Centre and its Activities

The Centre is the hub of this community. Every person in the survey of local people had heard of, and/ or used the Centre, and many were active supporters. Community provision includes:

- Post office, open on Mondays and Thursdays between 9.00am and 1.30
- A monthly social drop-in, with a licensed bar
- A snooker room used regularly on a drop-in basis

The Centre also hosts the following regular sessions:

- Weekly exercise (line dancing) classes



- Weekly indoor Bowls



- Monthly meetings of community groups, e.g. W.I meetings

It also provides a base for a wide range of annual events, which attract significant numbers of both local people and visitors from considerable distances. Some of these events are the sole

responsibility of the events committee, and others are supported by the Centre committee, or the events committee in partnership with others. Some of these events raise funds for the Centre, whilst others make a contribution to the Centre, but all offer the opportunity for the Centre to establish itself as a venue, and potentially offer potential for local people to set up small local supply businesses. Many of these events attract repeat visitors.



These events include

- Talks by recognised specialists in their fields, e.g. Iolo Williams on wildlife
- Social events such as balls, quizzes and tea dances
- The Lake Vyrnwy half-marathon, established in 1988; starting and finishing at the Centre, set up originally to raise funds for Llanwddyn Church it now makes an annual contribution to the Centre
- The annual Folk and Acoustic Festival. Now in its fifth year this festival attracts hundreds of visitors for two days in September, and includes a craft fair, a ceilidh, bands and a Sunday morning sing in the church.

The Charity

The Charity is the governing body of the Centre. It has up to 15 committee members, but only four trustees. It meets regularly in the Centre, and different members take on specific responsibility, so for example, there is a committee member who leads on the physical work needed in the building.

In addition, there is an events committee, which runs a number of events each year, all based in and around the Centre, and they make donations from events towards the upkeep and repairs of the Centre, but also support other community activity out of the proceeds of these events. It is fair to state that the events committee has provided the spur for the Charity to become re-invigorated, and to feel up to the challenge of managing the Centre into the long term.

Llanwddyn Community Centre – Feasibility Study

Some people sit on both committees, but others prefer to concentrate on either the Charity, or the events committee. This works well at present, but could look confusing to a funder.

The Centre's income and Expenditure are as follows, for 2015- 2016

Income

Affiliation	£320.00
Autumn Fayre	£1,457.90
Bowls	£402.00
Caretaking	£0.00
Donations	25,848.76
Hall hire	£710.00
Line Dancing	£691.00
Maintenance	£0.00
Newsletter	£438.50
Oil	£0.00
Post Office	£224.00
POWYS	£3,350.00
Snooker	£116.50
Total Income	£33,568.66

Expenditure

Affiliation	£0.00
Autumn Fayre	£111.20
Bowls	£0.00
Caretaking	£5,026.47
Donations	£32.00
Hall hire	£0.00
Line Dancing	£0.00
Maintenance	£2,252.10
Newsletter	£507.60
Oil	£2,995.93
Post Office	£0.00
POWYS	£0.00
Snooker	£0.00
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£10,925.30

In 2016. £20,000 was transferred to a savings account, which at the end that financial year, contained **£32,959.51**

The actual running costs of the Centre for that year are fairly low, at £8673 (expenditure minus the costs of the maintenance). However, the oil bill is high because the current boiler is unable to be regulated so that it can be used efficiently. A new fuel efficient system, which allowed only the areas of the Centre being used to be heated would reduce these costs.

The actual income, excluding donations, is £7,719 which is slightly less than the expenditure, and includes a donation of £3,350 from Powys CC. The basis for this payment is unclear but assuming this will be withdrawn once the new lease is signed, this leaves a running costs deficit of @ 50% against expenditure.

However, the large sum shown as donations includes all the fund-raising undertaken on behalf of the Centre, and includes annual donations, made by regular users (such as the Lake Vyrnwy half-marathon) which are likely to continue.

For this reason, once the Centre is transferred, and especially when the refurbishment is undertaken there appear to be no concerns about the community's ability to continue to both run the Centre. They should also be able to set aside sufficient funds each year for ongoing maintenance, using income from lettings and donations, *even without attracting additional users (and income)* ; and even though it is likely the donations will fall significantly once any refurbishment work is done,

Consultation

R4C worked with the committee on consulting a wide range of local people, and visitors.

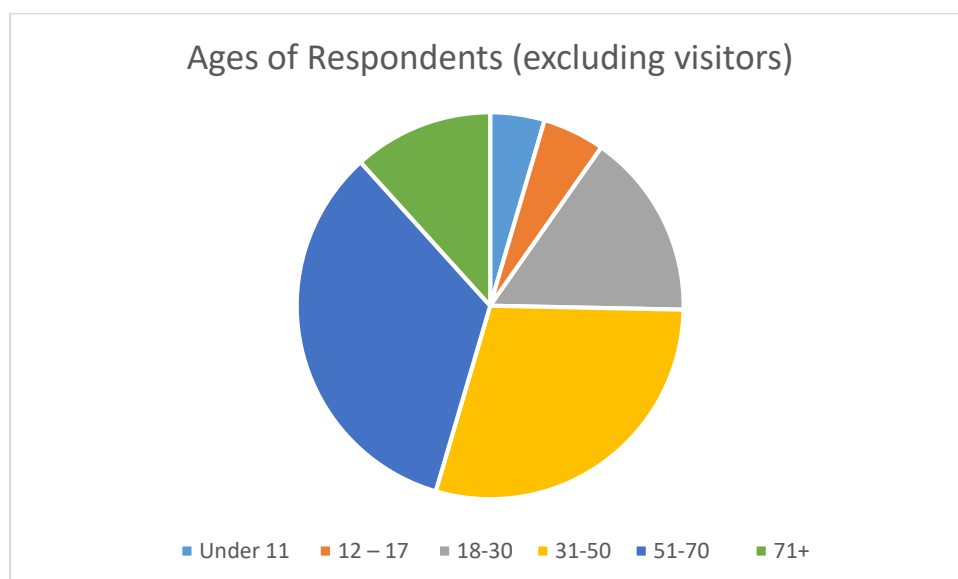
This included:

- A bilingual e-survey promoted to all residents through the community newsletter
- A bilingual paper survey included in the community newsletter
- Consultation at events, using pinboards, beginning with the Curry and Quiz Night
- Interviews with day visitors, using the Artisan lakeside café as a base
- Interviews with the semi-permanent residents at two local caravan sites
- Targeted interviews with staff at the Lake Vyrnwy Hotel,
- Targeted interviews with local businesses

In all, over 241 responses were received, including 202 from local people (defined as living within 5 miles of the Centre) and which included local businesses. This is an excellent response in such a remote and sparsely populated area and is a tribute to the efforts of committee members.

Background of respondents

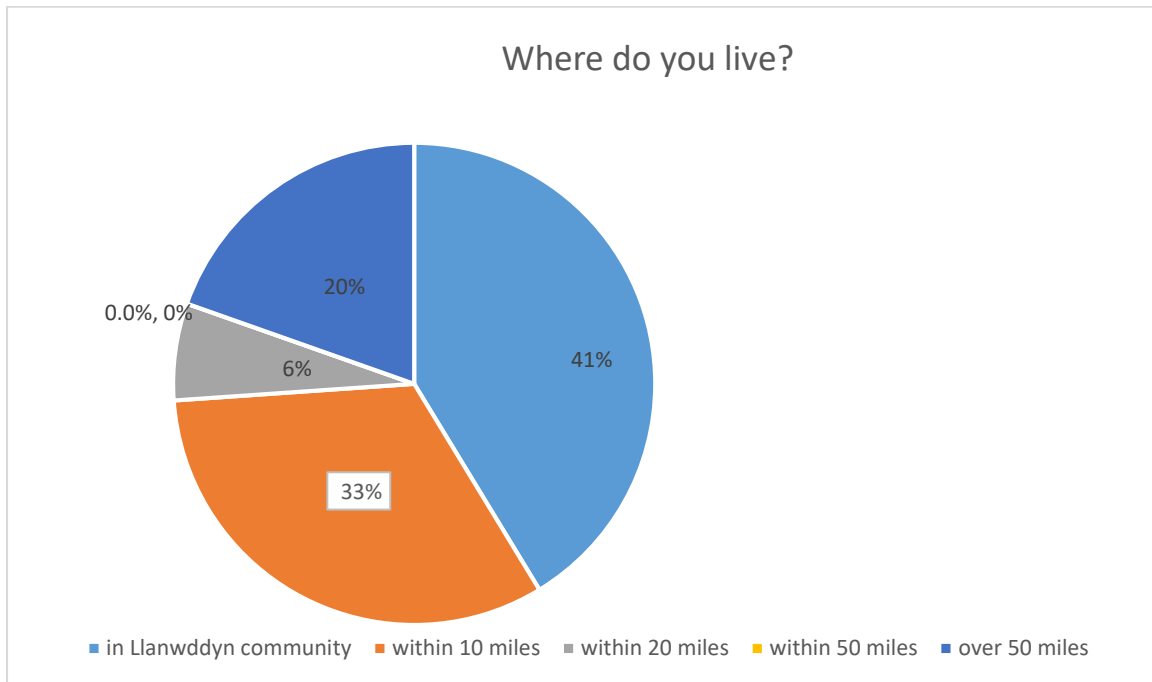
A good mix of local residents' views were heard in terms of gender and ages. More women than men responded (56.5% women 43.5% men), and the table below shows the spread of ages of those who contributed.



Distance from the Centre

Almost 20% of the people who contributed to the e-survey and to the pinboards were people who stated that they lived some distance (over 50 miles) away, this was probably because the newsletter is distributed to local caravan sites and other forms of holiday accommodation, and the pin boards were used at the Artisan café with the express intent of securing the views of day visitors. However, the caravan sites are all owner occupied, as opposed to short, weekly let caravans; so those responding are regular visitors, some of whom spend as much time in their mobile home as they do at their home address. Many of the day visitors told us they visited regularly, up to three or four times a year, and the majority of day visitors were travelling from a within the 30 – 60 miles radius.

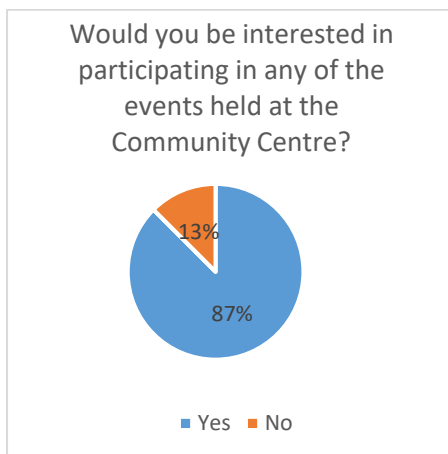
The graph shows the distance from Llanwddyn of those responding.



Awareness and Use

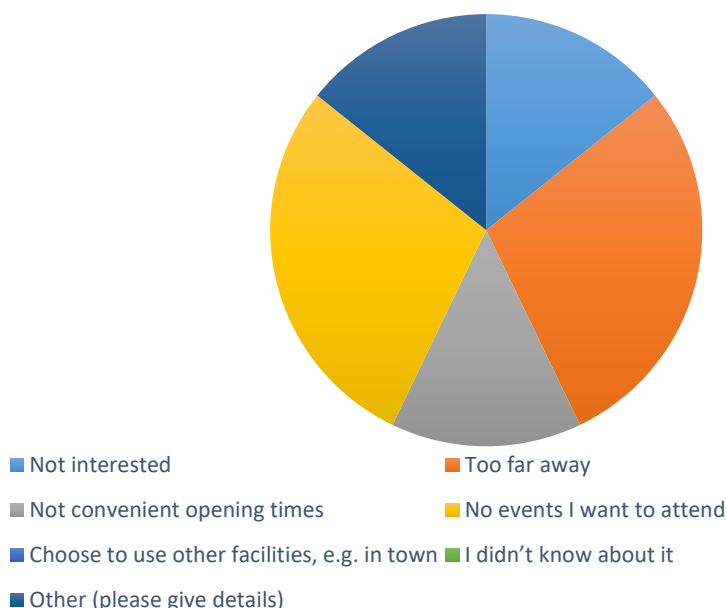
There is a high level of awareness of the Centre, with 91% of respondents stating they were aware, and in addition, for those who had used the Centre there was a 100% positive response to the question.....Are you likely to return to the Centre?

In terms of how often people use the Centre, there was a direct correlation between the numbers of people who identified themselves as living some distance from the Centre, and those who stated they would be less likely to use the Centre regularly. The graph below shows the results.



Reasons given for not attending events or using the Centre were as follows; however, the sample who chose to answer this question was very low, only 8 people chose to respond.

If you don't use the Centre, could you tell us why?



In the “Other” section, only one comment was received, that..”it feels too uncomfortable”..

It isn't clear if this relates to physical comfort, (anecdotally people told us the hall could be warmer) or whether the individual was not comfortable to enter a venue they had never used.

A percentage stated that there were ..”no events I wanted to attend..” again, given the wide variety of events and activity on offer it may be that they were unaware of the range available, or had narrow interests. It was not possible to test this out but given the low level of numbers responding to this question it should not be given too much weight. In addition, one such comment was received from a person who was, at the time of responding, attending an event at the Centre!

Access

The Committee is aware that the Centre does not meet current access standards. There are steps between the current main entrance and the hall, access to the stage is via steps and there are further steps in the section of the building to the rear of the kitchen. The current W.C. used by disabled people is not directly accessible through the main entrance, and it is unclear if all areas are wheelchair accessible, due to the width of doorways etc. In addition, there is no hearing loop for people with hearing loss, and the area outside the building is uneven, and not very well lit across the whole site, which makes it even less appealing on winter evenings.

Having said that, only 2 people completed the section which asked if there were issues which prevented them using the hall, and their comments were:

It's too cold sometimes and puts me off coming to an event..

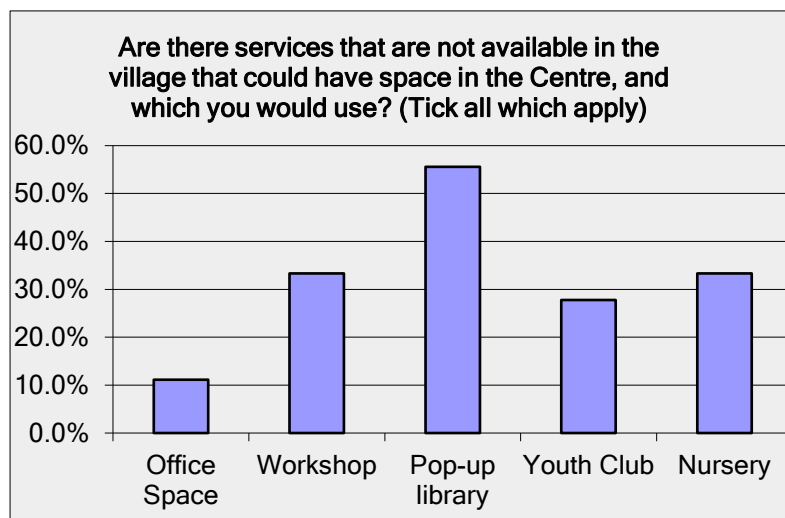
and

Uneven ground around the building with poor lighting for evening events.

The recommendations include suggestions for addressing these issues as part of any refurbishment programme.

Services and facilities at the Centre

We offered a range of options for additional services, and also asked for suggestions, and the graph shows the responses



The most popular was a pop-up library. The mobile library van funded by the County Council does visit the community, but this may not be at a time which is convenient for all residents, and it was suggested that the committee visited a Centre where the Post Office service is combined with a tea/coffee drop-in, and an informal library service, where people donate books and borrow from an available selection. The committee have visited a Community Centre which offers books for loan, which have been given by members of the community, in return for a donation in an honesty box, and which generates both income and interest at that Centre

The interest in office space is low, and some people commented that the real need is for effective, reliable broadband speed in the community. It is likely that if this is on offer in the community then the need for office space would diminish further, but the committee, might consider a “hot desk” with a computer and internet access, especially if support could be offered to those who do not have access in their own home as increasingly government communications relating to tax, benefits etc are moving online. However, 85% of respondents did not see the need for this so it would need further investigation before significant investment in such a facility could be recommended.

The requirement for a workshop is expressed as one where simple DIY/ hobby or craft activity could be undertaken, and might include the use of hand tools in return for a hire fee. Again, the opportunity for volunteering could be developed with skilled and experienced people sharing their skills with novices.

We asked whether there were additional services that could be offered from the Centre. We did not include pre-school provision, such as a Cylch Meithrin, which had previously been run from the Centre as this had closed due to the very low numbers of young children in the community at present. In addition, we heard that working parents found it more convenient to use pre-school facilities nearer to their place of work.

Although a nursery and youth club were suggested, because of the low numbers these are unlikely to be viable, however, the committee might consider how it supports parents with children, by offering a crèche facility at daytime events, where appropriate, possibly giving work experience to a young person undertaking a qualification in child care at the same time. Many of the events on offer are already “family friendly” and suitable for children at Key Stage 2 and over.

Using additional services at the Centre

In order to tease out the difference between respondents “good ideas” and to test what might be feasible, the following questions were asked.

Which additional services ***you would like to see and use*** at the Centre?

and

Which additional services ***do you feel would be of benefit / used by other people?***

There was some overlap between the two sets of answers, with some activities mentioned in both, such as badminton and yoga (the main hall is marked out for badminton)

Other suggestions for the activities that respondents would like to see/use and which had multiple responses included craft sessions, a running club, and a range of exercise / dance activities. We understand that an exercise class based on dance had run at the Centre but it had not been viable for the provider, and had ceased, so the committee might need to try some of these on a pilot basis to test their viability.

Individual suggestions included a bridge club, children’s activities (unspecified), a roller disco, football, a beer festival, photography, a film club and children’s activities including an after-school club. These are the suggestions least likely to be viable, although, given the success of the Folk and Acoustic Festival, a beer festival might be viable; however, it would incur significant effort on (probably) the same local people and is not, at present, recommended.

Suggestions for activities and events for other people included luncheon club/s for older people, a welfare advisor in attendance, a hairdresser and a horticultural show. These are suggestions the committee might consider, once refurbishment is complete.

Building the Volunteer base

As already stated, a significant number of people are already involved with the Community Centre, and the events committee in a range of ways, but some committee members have concern about burn-out, and also the lack of willingness of other people to offer their help

..”it’s the same few who do all the work..” being a typical comment

However, when asked whether people would assist, and in what way, it was clear there is an additional untapped pool of volunteer resource available within the community. They may not be assisting for a variety of reasons:

..”everything seems to be running OK, I’m not sure they need extra help “..

and

..” they only have to ask, we’ll pitch in with anything, as long as we’re not lambing!”...

were two comments received at community events, and a significant (over 75%) number of people indicated a willingness to volunteer. This demonstrates a willingness, but some people may need to be approached in a different way, i.e. by a direct request than a more general.. “we need more volunteers..” request.

The graph below shows how people could see themselves supporting the Centre, and unsurprisingly more people felt they could be more available for a one-off, or time limited commitment (helping at events etc) rather than an ongoing (being a committee member) commitment. Potential volunteers also saw themselves supporting the activity in the background – helping behind the scenes / helping

to organise events. N.B. people could fill in more than one section, so they could identify themselves as both volunteers organising events, and also doing other tasks, such as carrying out basic building maintenance, which was identified as painting and decorating, general clear-ups, and some basic repair work.

Overall three quarters of respondents offered their services, and whilst a number were already volunteering, this indicates there is additional potential for support within the community.



The Newsletter

The committee wanted to include some questions about the newsletter in the survey. The community newsletter goes out to all residents, and is available electronically.

The newsletter appears to have a wide reach, 72% of respondents stating they received it (N.B. respondents did not all live in the community). All the respondents stated it was useful, and that they read it, with a few (only 3 people) making suggestions for improvements, which were

- Compress the layout to save resources
- More local articles
- Better quality images as some are too poor to reproduce

The Visitor and Business Survey

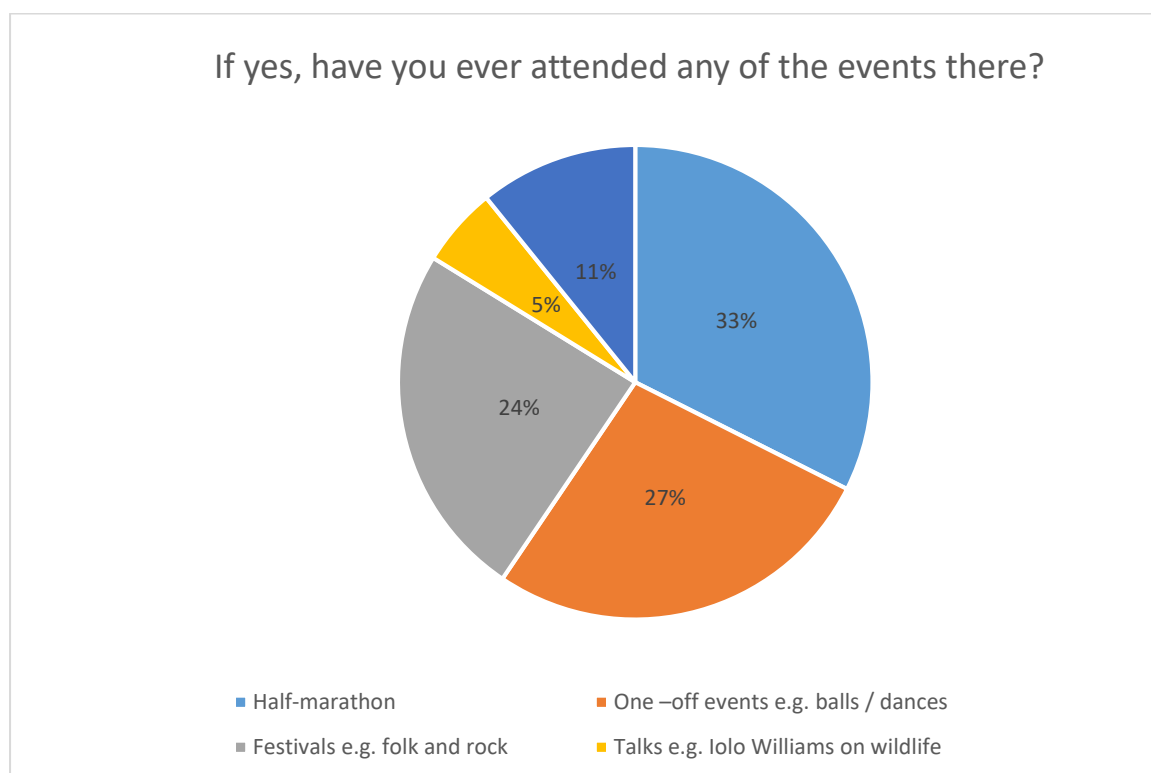
Because of the low number of residents in the community, visitors could be key to adding to the sustainability of the Centre, and this is assisted by the number of “residents” in the nearby caravan parks, both of which only offer caravans for sale, so occupants spend significant amounts of time in the area, even though their principal home is elsewhere. Although they may offer the use of their caravans to friends and family, in reality, no caravan has more than 10 separate users, and most have between 2 and 4 regular, repeat visitors. Caravan residents tend to be either retired, and so spend significant amounts of time in the area, or still working in which case they stay regularly, “most weekends and when we’re on holiday” Visitors were all ages and both genders but the majority were aged over 50.

Visitors were asked how they spent their time when in the area and the graph below shows how people spend their time. N.B. this was a multiple choice question so respondents could answer more than one section, but the most popular activity (89%) was walking. Some respondents were ‘serious walkers’, mentioning the mountains of Snowdonia as popular, but the majority walked in and around the area, and enjoyed the wildlife, the peace and quiet and the panoramic views. The second most popular activity at 78% was to “go for drives” with visiting the lake a close third at 75%.

The people who ticked the “other” box indicated that they visited Snowdonia, local steam railways, and National Trust properties, such as Powis Castle.

Awareness of the Centre

There was a high level of awareness of the Centre with 67% of respondents having attended one or more events at the Centre. Of those who were aware of the Centre, they identified the following as reasons for attendance:



11% of respondents stated they had not attended the Centre, and when asked why, 4 gave the following reasons –

It's too far away/ distance is an issue (3 respondents)

Timing isn't right

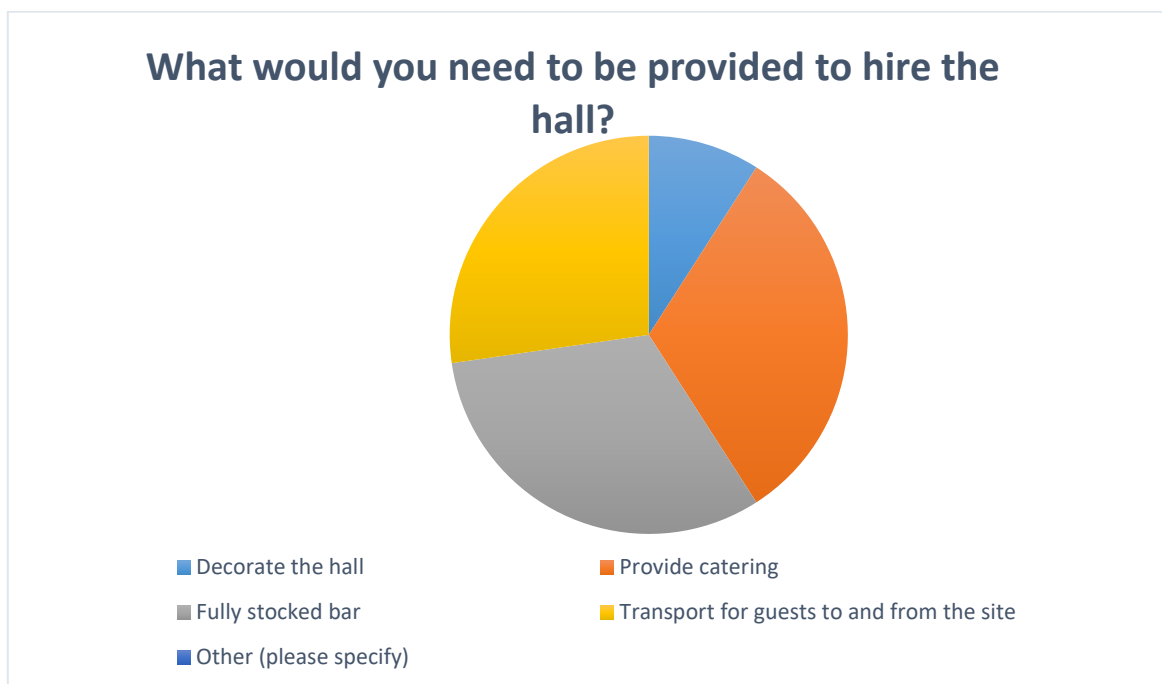
90% of visitors stated they would attend the Centre again.

Hiring the Centre

The committee has already identified the Centre as a potential facility for celebration events, such as weddings, birthdays etc; and was keen to explore this with regular visitors to see if they might

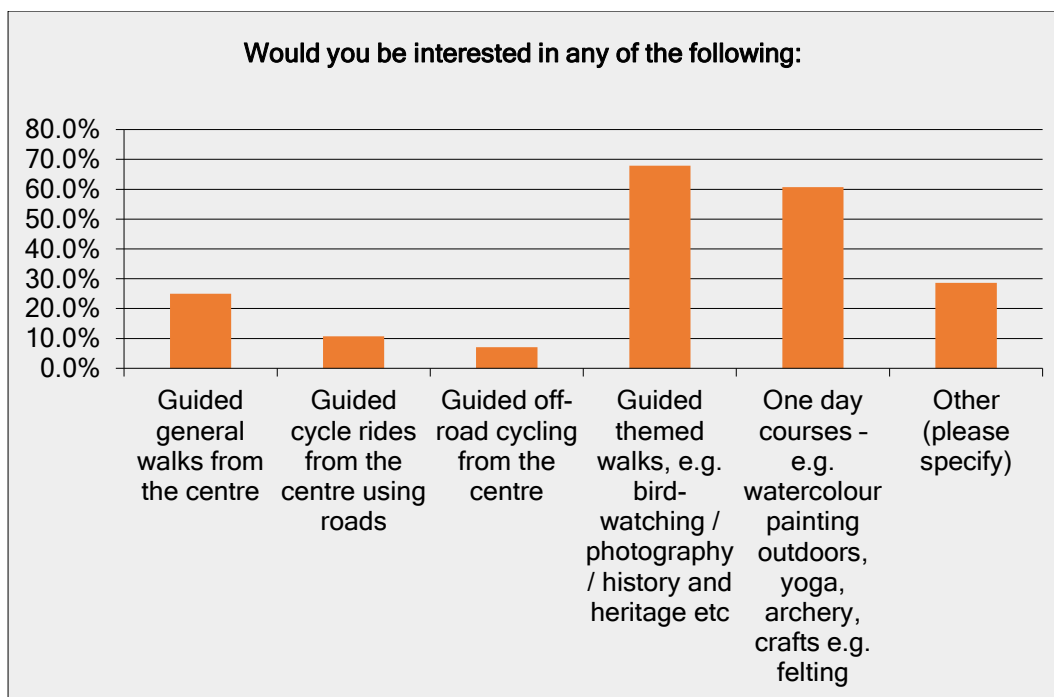
consider using the hall for such an event. This would have a benefit not only for the hall in terms of rental income, but also for local businesses in the supply chain, including accommodation providers.

When asked, 70% of respondents were not aware that they could hire the hall, and nearly 50% of them stated they would consider this, but they would need certain services to be available to make this happen. The graph below shows what they would need, and shows the opportunities for local people in terms of catering, bar work, and transport.



Additional activities based from the Centre

There was a significant appetite from visitors for activities delivered from the Centre, with 75% of them responding positively to the suggested options, and also suggesting some themselves. Some respondents ticked more than one option, with guided walks, and day long courses being the most popular options. The graph below shows the responses



These sorts of activities could also attract visitors staying with a range of accommodation providers, including the hotel, and self-catering and catered accommodation locally. Businesses that were consulted were in the main aware of the Centre or its activities (a number were already active supporters) and if they were not providing information for visitors, either via the newsletter, or from other sources such as the website, would be willing to do so.

In addition, developing skills such as guiding walks with a particular theme; heritage / photography etc would build skills for local people who might also receive a small supplement to their income for this work. The committee could also talk to the RSPB who deliver activities from their centre at the lake, about either extending their reach to operate from the Centre on occasion, or by training local people to do so. There is also an opportunity to provide catering, especially for the one day events, which could be advertised with a lunch included. These may well not only attract visitors, but people from the community, and the wider area, e.g. Llanfyllin and Oswestry, especially for specialist courses or with known experts in a particular field.

A significant number of visitors ticked the “other” box, and the most popular suggestion was for bingo sessions, which the committee might consider, subject to Gaming Commission rules, which limit the cash prize to £600 for those without a licence.

Information from businesses

Most of the businesses spoken to were members of the Lake Vyrnwy Tourism Association, whose members offer accommodation, activities, and retail. They are based both directly adjacent to the Lake, and in a radius of up to 10 miles. In addition, we spoke to other providers of services, such as the RSPB, who, whilst not being businesses in the legal sense, offer a range of services, some of them commercially.

Most businesses were aware of the Centre, and had visitors who had used their services whilst attending events based at the Centre (the half-marathon and the Folk and Acoustic Festival were named frequently) About a third of businesses were already actively supporting the Centre, either through practical assistance, financial contributions, or by being active committee members. A majority of the businesses were not attracting visitors as their principal income, a typical example

being a farm, that also offered B&B or a holiday cottage. This means that promoting the Centre may be marginal to them as their principal business interests lie elsewhere.

The further away from the Centre, the less likely the businesses were to see the relevance of the Centre to them, so a farmhouse B&B 10 miles away, for example, had only ever had one person staying who was attending an event at the Centre (the half-marathon) They also did not receive the newsletter and were less likely to know about, or promote activity at the Centre.

However, for those businesses who were engaged with the Centre, there was either existing, or potential mutual benefit, so for example, the Artisan café, will assist the Centre by supplying catering at appropriate events. An outdoor activity centre would like to use the Community Centre for its corporate clients, for example, for de-briefing or indoor team building exercises, but is unable to do so at the moment because of the condition of the building. RSPB have indicated they would use the Centre for meetings / conferences, but wi-fi would be essential. If there was increased use and hire by businesses for corporate events, there would also be the opportunity for local business development, for example by providing the catering at the Centre. One of the community centres visited by the Llanwddyn committee members runs a successful café, which is run as a franchise which employs local people and generates income for the community centre. It is not likely that a permanent café at Llanwddyn Community Centre would be viable because of the location and alternatives available nearby at the lake, but catering to complement other activity is very possible.

Individuals also mentioned business use of the Centre on an ad-hoc basis. For example, once refurbished, the kitchen is unlikely to be in daily use, and could be hired out to local producers – wedding and celebration cakes, jams and preserves and other types of catering were suggested by people who could use this type of facility, and establish a small business.

The prestigious Lake Vyrnwy Hotel offers conference, meeting and wedding / celebration facilities, however, the potential offer from the refurbished Centre would not be in direct competition with the hotel, rather it would be offering facilities targeted at those who

- Use community venues on principle (including Welsh Government)
- Are seeking a smaller, more affordable option for their event or celebration
- Are seeking a traditional theatre style hall, with stage and proscenium
- Prefer a more informal atmosphere

The Hotel currently supports the Centre by promoting its events, and is on the list of accommodation providers circulated by the events committee. In addition, the large number of staff residing at the hotel could add to the viability of some of the potential activities on offer e.g. exercise classes.

Findings and Recommendations

Volunteers and ongoing support

This community is exceptional in its drive, enthusiasm and commitment to retaining the Community Centre and making it a viable hub for both community members and visitors. It is estimated that over a third of the community is already actively engaged in supporting the Centre, and this includes serving on committees, practical and significant support for one-off and other events, e.g. preparing food, selling tickets, staffing events, serving food and drink; planning other activities, fundraising and other activity, e.g. internal painting. These volunteers include residents, and visitors to the caravan parks, where most park residents own the mobile homes and visit regularly. Many people told us they would be happy to assist with a range of practical activity, with offers from DIY skills, to catering, if asked. This is a good springboard from which to build into the future. However, because the numbers are small overall, the two committees need to continue to build on their successes, and take up offers of volunteering wherever possible, and be ready to ask people directly for assistance, where necessary.

Recommendation

There is already a large pool of volunteers who commit their time to supporting the Centre, the committee should seek to build on this wherever possible, including asking people directly for practical assistance at events, and with planning and organising activities and events

Governance of the Community Centre

The governance of the Centre should be clearer; there is the charitable group, with some 14 committee members, only four of whom are trustees. The events committee runs in parallel, and some people on both committees. To date, the events committee has been a real spur to encouraging the Centre committee to have confidence in the ability of local people to generate sufficient income to maintain and sustain the Centre, and a core of members are very active, as demonstrated by their commitment to supporting this feasibility study and their successful community fundraising events, which raise funds for both the Centre and for other community activities. In the longer term, and in order to satisfy the requirements of funders, the relationship between the two bodies needs clarifying, and the Charity's Board of Trustees needs to be strengthened by the addition of more trustees; who could come from the existing committee/s or by encouraging new members with particular skills. There has been a history of late reporting to the Charity Commission and therefore the Charity might benefit from some targeted recruitment to the trustees, for example by recruiting someone with financial experience as Treasurer. This will be important if the Charity is to satisfy a funder that it has the skills to manage a large building / refurbishment project.

Recommendation

That the Charity, and the Centre Events Committee consider their relationship for improved clarity. A number of models should be considered, and two are outlined below. Action should be taken on this before applying for a grant from an external funder.

- a) *The Charity establish an official fundraising sub-committee (effectively the existing events committee) from which two trustees would also sit on the Board of Trustees. This would*

mean that the sub-committee, could, through the Charity apply for grants from bodies like the Arts Council and Heritage Lottery Fund for some of their community activities.

- b) The Charity and the Events Committee continue as separate bodies, working to a Memorandum of Understanding so the relationship between the two is formalised, and there is clarification about what each can expect from the other.*
- c) The Charity and the Events Committee merge, with members of each becoming members of the Charity's committee. This would make the committee potentially too large and unwieldy, with some members, who are more interested in practical support losing interest.*

Work on the Building

The building is in what may appear to considerable disrepair in that it needs significant investment to make it fit for the future. The Charity has begun talking to local tradespeople and getting quotes and costings for the areas which appear to be of greatest concern, and is working hard to raise funds for these works. To repair the building in this way will take a very long time, up to 10 years to bring it into good condition overall. It would be preferable (better for the Charity, Community and the building) for the Charity to seek to supplement their own fund-raising by applying for grants for the work. This would enable all the work to be carried out in one period, and once completed, the building will be more attractive to hirers, and more economical to run and maintain. The Charity has a good chance of success in applying for grants because it can demonstrate:

- Regular existing community use
- Significant local support
- Regular social and community events
- The potential for further use and sustainability as demonstrated in the consultation
- The lack of other facilities available for local people due to remoteness

There are a number of grant programmes to which the Charity could apply, all of which have slightly different criteria, and different grant amounts. A starting point would be Powys County Council Community Facilities grant (for matched funding), Big Lottery Fund People and Places, and Heritage Lottery Fund's Our Heritage scheme (given the listed nature of the building and the subsequent increased costs, for example, of replacing the existing single glazed metal windows with double glazed ones). There is currently support available to help communities with applications such as this from staff based at Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations (PAVO) and in addition, many buildings advisors such as architects or quantity surveyors will assist with this as part of project managing any refurbishment. Indeed, Steve Bowen Consultants has indicated the development of the second stage application as something they would be prepared to take on.

The disadvantage of this type of refurbishment is that the Centre may be completely out of action for some months whilst the work is done, and activities normally planned would need to be suspended, with a consequent impact on income. However, if the work is done piecemeal, there will also be disruption, loss of income; and in addition, the length of time taken may mean that the momentum is lost. The refurbishment should be able to be planned with the Quantity Surveyor and Clerk of Works during the planning stage, so that major disruption may be avoided.

Recommendation

That the charity applies for funding for the whole refurbishment of the building, taking advice from the quantity surveyor who is assessing the costs, and from PAVO, in order to complete the refurbishment of the Centre in the short, rather than long-term, and with only one significant period of disruption.

Developing the services on offer

Lake Vyrnwy and the surrounding area attracts significant numbers of visitors both to stay overnight, or longer, and as day visitors. Accommodation on offer nearby (within 10 miles) includes the prestigious Lake Vyrnwy Hotel, caravan sites, holiday lets and Bed and Breakfast accommodation. In addition, there are businesses offering corporate training, and other organisations that could use the Community Centre as a meeting venue for their activities.

As part of the future development, the Centre needs to offer (and advertise) the facilities that the corporate, public and third sector expect when looking for venues for meetings, conferences and other events. Although Llanwddyn may appear remotely located, this remoteness is also attractive to corporate and other users seeking venues for away-days etc. Welsh Government encourages its departments to use community venues for meetings, especially those with an all Wales focus, so, once refurbished, the Centre could promote its facilities within the public, as well as the corporate and third sector. Although the Lake Vyrnwy Hotel offers conference and other facilities, in reality the Centre would be appealing to a different market, one where cost is the major driver, or where policy dictates that the location of meetings will support community venues. In order to do this successfully it will need to consider its marketing materials, which should be bi-lingual, wherever appropriate.

Recommendation

Whilst the refurbishment of the building is under way, the Charity should work with local suppliers to develop the complementary services necessary to ensure the additional facilities of the Centre fully meet the needs of users. As well as fully equipped rooms for meetings, hirers will also need catering provided and on occasion, the services of a bar, local accommodation and transport support, in addition, some conferences and events may require the use of simultaneous translation, linen hire and entertainment. All these offer additional opportunities for local people to increase their income through providing these services. Once it has tested the “conferences and meetings” market, the committee could consider marketing the Centre for celebrations, such as weddings, civil partnerships, birthdays etc. To do this effectively it will need to consider the appropriate licences, both for the actual ceremonies and for alcohol.

Llanwddyn Community Centre – Feasibility Study

Thanks go to the following who gave time and effort in contributing to this feasibility study **I know I will have left people, organisations and businesses out, please let me know who they are,**

Llanwddyn Community Centre committee, especially Ruth, Janet, Irwin, Gwyndaf

Llanwddyn events committee, especially Di, Jennifer

Phil and the team at Artisan Café

Dafarn Newydd Stores

Lake Vyrnwy Hotel

The Lake Vyrnwy Tourism Association

Fronheulog Holiday Homes

Lake Vyrnwy Holiday Homes

DarntonB3 Architects, Newtown

Abergynolwyn Community Centre

Bryncrug Community Centre