

**CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT ON THE ERNULF COMMUNITY SCHOOL AND
ST NEOTS LEISURE CENTRE SITE, EYNESBURY, ST NEOTS
(Report by Head of Community Services)**

1 SUMMARY

This report appraises Cabinet of proposals from Ernulf Community School (the School) for capital development associated with its bid for Performing Arts College status. It further explores how this development might be integrated with the Council's aspirations for developments within St Neots Leisure Centre.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The School applied to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for Performing Arts College (PAC) status in March this year. Its initial application was unsuccessful, partly due to failing to raise the necessary £50,000 of non statutory sponsorship, but it received positive feedback from the DfES and encouragement to reapply. In addition, the School has received local support for its proposals including the other Secondary Schools in the District; the St Neots Town Council; the Regional College; the MP; and the Arts Council for England.
- 2.2 The School has now raised the £50,000 sponsorship and is to reapply for PAC status this month. If successful (the outcome will be known by February 2004), the School will benefit from additional funding of £600,000 from the DfES, £100,000 of which is committed to the development of a "Youth and Community Performing Arts Centre". This £100,000 is in addition to around £400,000 already allocated to the project by the School and the County Council. The Performing Arts Centre would be the main facility within which the School would develop its ethos of excellence in the field, but would also be available for use by the local community similar to the existing Leisure Centre on the site, and thus a significant infrastructure improvement to the existing and growing community within St Neots.
- 2.3 The School has recognised that its expertise is in the field of education and that the Council has expertise in operating and managing community facilities in the form of its Leisure Centres, including the Burgess Hall. Consequently, the School would like to explore with the Council the feasibility of the Council managing on behalf of the School the Performing Arts Centre for the wider community.

3 IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 At first sight, there is a clear rationale for any community cultural services on the Ernulf site being managed by the Council through its Leisure Centres service. The basic rationale focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of co-ordinating and rationalising similar and complementary services within a single management framework. There are also practical benefits in recognising that many of the features of the Leisure Centre will be required from a Performing Arts Centre. These include for example, reception, bars and catering, crèche facilities, and changing accommodation. Consequently, it is possible that capital development of the Leisure Centre and that of the Performing Arts Centre could be facilitated by recognising the incremental need for these facilities rather than each Centre's individual need, thus realising additional efficiencies.
- 3.2 Before any agreement is reached between the School and the Council, there are many areas which require further exploration. These include:
- the possibility of developing a single reception point for all cultural services (currently, there are two Leisure Centre receptions);
 - an evaluation of the degree to which similar services can be developed and shared between the Leisure Centre and a Performing Arts Centre;
 - the impact upon the Priory Centre; and
 - the conflict between re-evaluating the Leisure Centre's capital programme (worth around £650,000 over the next five years) and the need to make immediate improvements to the Leisure Centre as driven by existing customer demand.
- 3.3 At this stage, approval is sought from Cabinet to open further discussions with the School so that a more detailed report might be brought to a future meeting.

4 CONCLUSION

There is a strong possibility that Ernulf School will benefit from further major investment in Performing Arts facilities over the next two years. There is an opportunity for the local community to share in that benefit. There is considerable local support for the proposal. The benefit might be further enhanced by a shared approach between the School and the Council in managing the new facilities.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 That Cabinet supports formally the bid of Ernulf Community School for Performing Arts College status.
- 5.2 That Cabinet authorises Officers to explore further the opportunities that may arise from a shared approach to managing and developing community cultural services on the site.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

*Ernulf Community School – Our Rationale for Performing Arts College Status.
Ernulf - A Specialist Arts College For St Neots.
Held in the Community Services Office.*

Contact Officer: Peter Jones
Head of Community Services
 01480 388202