

Saintfield Community Centre

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An update by Martyn Todd

In the Autumn 2016 edition of Saintfield News we reported good progress with the tender process to find a private sector partner to help fund and manage the day to day operation of the new community centre on the Belfast Road. It was therefore a huge surprise and disappointment when the Council assessment of the tenders resulted in none being accepted. This meant that the available budget for the community centre project was limited to the

£1.5million committed by Newry Mourne and Down District Council, with the possibility of attracting up to £200k from the Rural Development Programme and/or up to £100k from Peace 4.

During January and February this year, the Saintfield Community Centre Trust working group met with the various sports clubs in the area to discuss the best way forward. Included in these discussions were the Saintfield Development Association, Saintfield Sports Club (comprising Saintfield Men's and Women's Hockey Clubs, Saintfield Cricket Club and Saintfield Striders, the new running and walking group), Saintfield United Football Club and St Mochai's GAA Club in Darragh Cross. The discussions were open and very productive and resulted in a letter, signed by the five chairs of these groups,

being sent to Liam Hannaway, the Chief Executive of NMD Council summarising the agreed priority needs for the wider Saintfield community.

The letter emphasised that it had the full support of all five of the above community representative groups and stated that the unanimous



consensus was that the three priorities identified by the major public consultation in 2015 still stood and were 1) an all-weather artificial grass surface suitable for training for large-ball sports, 2) a large indoor multi-use hall and 3) an artificial sand-dressed surface for the hockey pitch (suitable for men's and women's hockey and other sporting and training needs).

The letter asked for these options to be costed for both capital and running costs and estimates of revenue generation carried out so that the financial sustainability could be assessed. A meeting with the NMD Chief Executive to agree the next steps was also requested. This meeting took place on Monday 27 March, attended by NMD senior officials including Liam Hannaway and Michael Lipsett

(Director of Active and Healthy Communities), all five Rowallane Councillors, the leaders of the five community groups listed above and representatives of the Community Centre Trust working group.

The action agreed at the meeting was:

- NMD will immediately fund the preparation of separate business cases for four options, namely (1) upgrading the shale sports surface to sand-dressed artificial grass, (2) laying a 3G artificial grass surface and basic changing facilities in the 60m by 30m, largest, building on the Belfast Road site, (3) providing a community hall and meeting rooms in the newest building on the site and (4) assessing the demand and financial viability of business units on the site in the space not used by options 2 and 3.

As most of the necessary information for these business cases already exists, the completion of them is expected to be a matter of weeks rather than months.

- NMD will progress the necessary planning approvals for the first three options urgently

- NMD will prepare the necessary tender documentation for a contract for whichever of these options are proved viable by their respective business cases.

There is still a way to go until the community centre becomes a reality, but we will get there!

Chair's Viewpoint



Brian Gamble
Chair of Saintfield
Development
Association

Much of this issue is devoted to the background to, and the present position, towards the procurement of a fit for purpose Community Centre for Saintfield.

The project has been beset by numerous setbacks since it was initiated about 12 years ago, which have provided the few naysayers and sceptics in our community with much ammunition for their sniping. The SDA initiated the project and is determined to see it through to completion. Many lesser mortals would have thrown up their hands in despair and walked away from

the project after all the obstacles which arose.

However, the SDA (and Saintfield) is fortunate to have a small project team who are committed to the challenge and have bounced back after each bloody nose suffered.

The Rowallane councillors have given their full backing to the project and have been instrumental in helping to ensure progress, especially when the whole project seemed destined to collapse.

There is now also unanimity between the SDA, the recently formed Saintfield Community Centre Trust and the sports

clubs over the composition of the Community Centre and associated playing surfaces, so we are able to present a united front to the authorities, which has brought much needed muscle into play.

The marathon is not yet over but it is hoped that the finish line will be in sight before too long. Then Saintfield can enjoy the facilities a community centre will provide, which have been denied them for so long.

If you have any issues you would like raised I can be contacted by email at editor@discoversaintfield.co.uk

Saintfield Community Centre Trust

The SCCT has been created to oversee the delivery and eventual running of the Community Centre in Saintfield.

The trust is open for business and we are looking for new trustees who are enthusiastic about Saintfield and would like to be involved with the delivery of new facilities in the village. If you feel that you have skills or experience that will be

of benefit or just wish to gain some new experience, then please make contact.

Damian Scarlett is the Chair of the steering group of the Trust and plans are well advanced in setting up the Trust as a limited company with charitable status.

The Trust is to comprise two NMD Councillors, two representatives of users of the facility, two members of the

Saintfield Development Association and four members of the community.

The group already has a vision of how much the centre will be used and in the coming weeks and months the Trust will be looking to engage with the local community to add to the list of uses and events for the community centre. Please get in touch.

The Scourge Of Dog Mess

Saintfield is in danger of being overwhelmed by the scourge of dog mess. It is almost impossible to walk around the village without having to constantly watch your step.

Many dog owners are careful to clean up after their pets but it seems that a growing number just don't care and are happy to leave piles of poo in their wake. Owning a

dog brings certain responsibilities, of which one is ensuring your dog does not despoil the environment. Not only is dog mess unsightly, it poses a health hazard.

There is a statutory £80 fine for offending pet owners and defaulters can be reported by phoning the Council on 0300 0132233, giving the location, time and description. Much of the offending is done under cover

of darkness, although there are a number of owners who have no qualms about when or where they let their pooches defecate.

We need to reclaim our streets from this blight on modern life and everyone can do their bit by challenging any inconsiderate dog owners they come across.

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Saintfield Community Centre - A Summary Of Events To Date

Background

After ten years trying, the Saintfield community had high hopes that 2017 would see construction start for a community centre in Saintfield.

During this time there have been feasibility studies, economic appraisals, business cases, widespread public consultations, engagement of design consultants, planning applications and council commitments. All have been positive steps on the journey from no community centre to some sort of shared space. The final positive step was to be the result of a tender process to provide a private sector partner for the design, refurbishment and operation of the site on the Belfast Road.

It was, therefore a great surprise and disappointment that NMD Council decided not to accept any tender for the project. There will be many hours spent analysing what went wrong and debating a number of theories about what caused the process to fail. The bottom line is that the tender process is over and no private sector partnership came about.

The choice for NMD Council, the SDA and the people of Saintfield boils down to this - whether to try a Plan B or to abandon the project.

Discussion

There are strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats surrounding the ambition for a community centre in Saintfield.

Strengths

- There are a multitude of studies, by a range of independent consultants, which all conclude that there is a definite need for a community centre in Saintfield
- Saintfield has a strong community group in the Saintfield Development Association, that has consistently and, to date, successfully, pressured Down District Council and then Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, for the progress to date
- A group of Saintfield residents from various sectors are exploring how a Community Trust could oversee the operation of a viable, fit for purpose, community centre
- NMD Council has repeatedly assured the Saintfield community that it has committed £1.5 million for the refurbishment of the designated site on Belfast Road, a site that the Council has already invested £1m to purchase.
- NMD Council has committed to go out to tender for design consultants to see what is possible on the existing site with the £1.5 million available.

Weaknesses

- On two occasions the community has been led to expect the refurbishment work to start and twice these hopes have been dashed. There is an air of despondency around the project and the negative people in Saintfield are saying that they were right to believe that neither DDC nor NMDDC would ever actually deliver a community centre for Saintfield.
- Although there are many people in and around Saintfield who contribute many hours of voluntary work to over 50 community, church, school and sporting groups, they have little experience of working as a cohesive community. We lag behind many other communities in the NMD Council area in this aspect.
- NMD Council has been reluctant to publicly commit to the Saintfield project, to the extent that it has refused, to date, to erect a sign on the site to explain its intentions and financial allocation to the project.
- The social and sporting activities of Saintfield take place mostly in association with the five churches and five sports clubs and are therefore aligned in silos.

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(Continued From Previous Page)

In addition, around half of the Saintfield population do not attend any church, creating an additional silo.

- The new Council is still settling down after the merger of the two legacy councils and this has reduced the capacity of council officers to manage all the work for which they are responsible.
- The current site comprises three large warehouse buildings that will need considerable expenditure to convert them to community use or income generation.

Opportunities

- All the political parties in NMD, including those that have no councillors in the Rowallane DEA, are unanimously supportive of the commitment of £1.5 million for a community centre for Saintfield.
- The Belfast Road site has been purchased for a community centre and, after some initial considerations for other uses for the site, NMD

Council have stated publicly that they are not considering any other use for the site

- There are other grant giving bodies that may consider providing funding for the refurbishment of the site (Rural Development Programme, Heritage Lottery Fund, the Landfill Tax, etc.)
- Many new grant opportunities are focused on “shared spaces”. Saintfield currently has no shared space and therefore could qualify for such funding.
- The model now proposed as Plan B is one with which the Council is familiar and so they have the necessary experience in managing.

Threats

- NMD is currently overspending its budget and may decide to re-allocate money from Saintfield to address this shortfall.
- Saintfield community activists may become disheartened and lose the

will to continue with the project.

- The change of responsibility for the Saintfield project from Eddy Curtis to Michael Lipsett may cause a delay in progress.
- A full working partnership between NMD councillors, council officials and the Saintfield community is essential to bring this project to fruition. To date it has proved difficult to persuade all necessary council officials to operate in a genuine partnership
- Without a private sector partner to operate the site on a day to day basis, the whole project may not be practically viable or financially sustainable

All involved need to rekindle their enthusiasm and commitment to the project, so that the years of effort and planning do not go to waste. Then the Saintfield community can at last enjoy the benefits of a shared communal space for which they have waited so long.

Scarlett Triumphs At Crufts

Scarlett Burnside, a 16 year old Saintfield schoolgirl won the International Junior Handling competition at the world renowned Crufts dog show held at the NEC arena in Birmingham in March.

The talented youngster represented Ireland at the competition, which saw her beat representatives from 43 other countries in her 10 – 19 age group.

Competitors only meet the dog with which they will compete just 45 minutes beforehand. The teenager has only been showing dogs for a short



time and she not only managed to win that competition but her Alaskan Malamute Ethan also picked up first place in the own breed junior male class category, and she also picked up fourth place in the Young Kennel Working Stakes competition.

Scarlett will also represent Ireland at the World Dog Show to be held in Germany in November.

Scarlett is pictured with Babs, a 10 month old English Pointer, and their trophy.



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Can You Help?



Volunteers removed weeds on this Belfast Road footpath

The Green committee of the SDA are looking for some fresh hands to help with their efforts at keeping Saintfield neat, tidy and beautiful.

You can put in as much or as little time as you can spare and you can help with watering plants, dead heading flowers, helping to maintain and tidy public areas such as the memorial garden, doing a bit of weeding, litter picking with the team or helping to raise funds for various green projects.

Any help you can give would be welcome and you will obtain a great deal of personal satisfaction from your contribution to the communal effort to keep Saintfield an attractive village.

If you would like to help, meet new people and make new friends, or want more



information, please contact the convenor of the Green committee, Lawrence Murphy

on mobile 07792 921 966 or landline 028 9751 9232 or e-mail murphy199@btinternet.com

Saintfield Crime Report

The latest statistics available for crime in the Saintfield area are for the month of January.

They reflect a decrease over previous months with just 15 incidents recorded.

These are broken down into various offences and anti – social behaviour still tops the list with six reports.

Next is violence/sexual offences with four incidents, followed by one each of criminal damage, drugs, burglary, vehicle crime and theft.

Saintfield is a relatively crime free village but this should not lead to complacency. Make sure all your property is secured and keep an eye out for any suspicious behaviour.



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The Events committee of the SDA has arranged another of its popular cycle rides around the scenic countryside of County Down for Sunday 14th May.

The route is over 33 miles, starting and ending in Saintfield. It is a social outing, not a race, and is suitable for all categories of rider, from the novice to the club enthusiast. The entry fee is just £10 which includes refreshments half way and at the finish at the Rowallane Inn.

Registration is at the Downpatrick Street car park, behind Danske Bank in Saintfield, from 8.45am on the day for a 9.30am start, or can be done online on our website discoversaintfield.com/latest

The route will be fully signposted with Marshals at strategic points and a sweeper car will follow the field to attend to any riders experiencing difficulties.

Join The Litter Pick

The Green committee of the Saintfield Development Association has organised a Litter Pick event for Saturday 13th May from 10.00am until noon.

The event is being held in association with Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council as part of the Big Spring Clean campaign.

Everyone is welcome to take part and litter picking tools, bags and gloves will be provided at registration, which will be at the Second Saintfield Presbyterian church hall from 9.30am.

Children must have parental permission to take part and refreshments will be provided in the church hall after the event.

You can make a difference and help to keep Saintfield litter free.



Details of these and all of our other events can be found at discoversaintfield.com



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