Community Centres – general principles and preferred minimum requirements

1. Introduction

1.1 This document provides an overview of Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council's minimum preferred requirements for new community centres. It acts as a starting point to aid discussion with developers. It is recognised that this is not an exhaustive list and will be subject to further updates, refinement and negotiation.

1.2 The document sets out general principles and factors to consider, many of which are inter-related. It is anticipated that discussions will inform more detailed specifications for individual buildings in relation to their design, layout and fit out. This will ensure buildings are fit-for-purpose, meet the needs of the local community and are sustainable over the longer-term, as well as align with the council's approach to climate change and its net-zero aspirations.

1.3 The approach to the provision of community buildings, including new council-owned community centres, is set out in the draft Community Buildings Policy. This Policy includes the standards which will apply to the provision of community buildings and the design principles for developing new or upgrading existing buildings.

1.4 To help ensure operational viability, the minimum area of internal floor space for a standalone community building is recommended to be 500sqm unless this serves an isolated community or can act as a satellite to a larger building. The ideal size for a standalone building is in the region of 750sqm.

1.5 It is anticipated that all future new community centres will be owned by the council. Further discussion will be required with developers regarding individual management and operational arrangements.

2. Building location

2.1 Community centres are integral to local communities and their appearance and positioning should celebrate their role as a focal point in the local community.

2.2 Buildings should be in an appropriate and convenient location, which is suitably close to where people live, and in accordance with the principle that, ideally, everyone in the borough should be able to access a community building within 15 minutes, either by walking (urban areas) or driving (rural areas)[1].

[1] As defined by the Leisure and Recreation Needs Assessment Update 2022: Part 2 Community Buildings Report

2.3 New community buildings should be sited on sufficient land with adequate ancillary space (such as outdoor space and parking) and should be designed so that reconfiguration and/or expansion could be achieved with relative ease to meet changing future demands.

2.4 Where there might be co-location with a pre-school, additional space will be needed (both internally and externally) to accommodate the users of the facility. The size of the additional space will be informed by relevant standards[2].

2.5 Community centres should be located so that:

- Where appropriate and relevant to the development, ideally, they are grouped in the vicinity of other public facilities to create a community 'hub' as may be found in a Local Centre. This may include shops, doctors' surgeries and dentists, nursery or pre-school provision and/or sports facilities as appropriate.
- They are within or immediately adjacent to public open spaces, such as an urban square or public green spaces such as amenity green space, parks and/or other local play and sports facilities such as multi-use games or kickabout areas.
- They incorporate private and communal external spaces where people can sit, meet and congregate.

3. Transport, parking and access to the building

3.1 Consideration should be given to how people get to the building. It is important to encourage 'walkability', active travel including cycling and sustainable forms of transport. There should be a network of direct and accessible pedestrian and cycle routes to the building and, where feasible, buildings should be close to bus routes.

3.2 Planning applications for a community building should be accompanied by a Transport Statement. This sets out transport issues relating to the development, identifies measures required to support alternatives to the car such as walking, cycling and public transport, and promotes accessibility together with measures needed to deal with the anticipated transport impacts of the development.

3.3 The development of the community centre should provide suitable, adequate and well-designed vehicle and cycle parking in line with the Council's Parking Supplementary Planning Document (July 2018), or any successor document.

[2] As informed by Hampshire County Council and the Department of Education's Early years foundation stage statutory framework

4. Accessibility within the building

4.1 Community centres should be welcoming and inclusive spaces. The building and its site should be easily accessed by all users, including people with additional needs.

4.2 They should:

- Include a range of appropriate measures to help ensure equality of access to, and within, the building and address any barriers, in line with relevant Building Regulations including Approved Document M: Access to and use of buildings, Volume 2 – Buildings other than dwellings.
- Include and/or consider:
  - clear and appropriate signage
  - a visible and well-located entrance
  - automatic or self-closing doors
  - width of corridors and entrances
  - suitable lighting and contrasting decoration
  - appropriate surface treatments and changes of level
  - ramps or handrails and stair or passenger lifts
  - provision of accessible toilets and adult changing facilities
  - induction loop/s
  - WIFI and broadband
  - accessible parking spaces.

5. Building Design

5.1 Community centres should offer flexible and adaptable spaces, which can deliver a range of services that meet the needs of local people across all ages, abilities, and interests. Their layout and purpose should be considered up-front to ensure buildings can be used effectively for a wide range of community activities. Their design should be determined through engagement with stakeholders, including potential operators, local groups and residents who may use the building. Input from other community associations would also be beneficial to ensure best practice informs design.

5.2 Buildings should respond sympathetically to their location and the local distinctiveness and character of the surrounding area. Community buildings need to be a focus in their neighbourhood. This may, in some cases, allow the building to adopt an architectural approach which varies from that of the rest of a surrounding development whilst still maintaining some visual connections to the locally distinctive character of the area. They should be well designed, incorporate sustainable materials/technology and be of high architectural quality. Consideration should also be given to on-going maintenance of the building to ensure this is not unduly onerous.

5.3 The design of new buildings must incorporate a ‘fabric first’ approach and must exceed the minimum Building Regulation standards. This should ideally be to Passivhaus standard, where this can be reasonably achieved.

5.4 Buildings should be designed to comply, as relevant, with the following regulations, policy and guidance or their successor documents:

- Building Regulations.
- National Design Guide 2019.
- Policy EM10 (Delivering High Quality Development) and Policy EM11 (The Historic Environment) of the adopted Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan 2011-2029.
- Guidance in the Design and Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (2018).
- Guidance in the Heritage Supplementary Planning Document (March 2019).

5.5 They should be designed to:

- Ensure that emergency vehicles can easily access the site.
- Minimise the impact of any disturbance associated with the use of the premises on surrounding residents.
- Include good sightlines and natural surveillance of the building and its surrounding spaces to reduce opportunities for anti-social behaviour.
- Minimise the visibility of refuse stores and servicing bays in public views and consider how these will be accessed and serviced.
- Incorporate energy-efficient features (e.g., good insulation, low-energy lighting, solar panels) and maximise efficiency and minimise energy use through their layout, orientation, and design (please also refer to the Sustainability section).
- Include sufficient natural light and ventilation to enhance user comfort and well-being.
- Implement efficient heating and cooling systems to maintain a comfortable year-round temperature.
- Consider the acoustics needs of different activities, with inclusion of soundproofing as appropriate.
- Maximise space for community use (please also refer to the Internal Layout section).

6. Internal Layout

6.1 Community centres should be informed by an up-to-date assessment of need, and should consider the potential for complementary, and concurrent, uses and any opportunities for co-location.

6.2 They should:

- Be one-storey. A two-storey building would require a lift to access the upper floor, which could limit use, accessibility, and would require on-going maintenance costs.
- Provide the appropriate quantity and size of hall/s to reflect the requirements of the community. To facilitate multi-use, and support viability, more than one hall is likely to be required, particularly where a pre-school will be included.
- Provide access to adequate outside space. This should include designated space for community centre users and additional space for any pre-school. Outdoor space for a pre-school would need to be secure and appropriately fenced off and include external solar shading (such as a canopy).
- Consider pre-school requirements, e.g., small toilets, storage, space to store confidential information, keypad entry, safeguarding requirements etc.
- Provide appropriate ancillary spaces, e.g., reception, office, cleaner's cupboard, plant room, etc.
- Provide an appropriate quantity of bathrooms including accessible WC and baby changing facilities.
- Provide appropriate kitchen facilities. These should be suitable to facilitate a community café to support income-generation.
- Incorporate lighting that can be adapted to suit different activities.
- Ensure windows give an even distribution of light.
- Provide appropriate, slip resistant, hard-wearing flooring.
- Consider impact energy-absorbing flooring suitable for both sports use and safe children's play.
- Ensure walls are smooth and impact resistant, potentially with a sound absorbent ceiling and wall linings.
- Consider ceiling height. This should be an appropriate height to enable easy access to light fittings and efficient heating of the space.
- Be equipped with modern technology (e.g., Wi-Fi, projectors, sound systems, and video conferencing facilities).

6.3 Community halls would not typically be required to accommodate sports such as badminton, volleyball, or football as these are best suited to purpose-built sports halls; however, halls suitable for martial arts, short mat bowls, table tennis, dance, fitness sessions and similar activities should be considered as part of any feasibility studies.

7. Storage

7.1 Community centres should consider and incorporate adequate storage to meet all users' needs.

- Sufficient storage should be included within the building and its curtilage to allow for groups using the space to store a range of equipment. Space should also be provided to store tables, chairs, events equipment etc. Buildings should ideally provide a minimum of 10% internal floorspace for storage.
- Pre-schools will need additional storage space to pack equipment away each day.

8. Landscaping

8.1 Community centres should include high quality hard and soft landscape schemes and boundary treatments that relate positively to the design of the building. These should be sympathetic to the wider site and the setting to the building.

8.2 They should:

- Use soft landscaping to create buffering between the centre and adjacent housing.
- Include nature-friendly design features which enhance biodiversity, for example swift bricks, bat boxes and hedgehog highways, and safeguard any existing habitats and protected species.
- Consider opportunities for inclusion of green roofs on ancillary buildings.
- Include native species where possible and include plant and tree species which flower and fruit in order to provide for pollinators, birds and other wildlife.
- Consider Biodiversity Net Gain requirements and incorporate them through well considered design in accordance with the above points.
- Follow the provisions within the council's Landscape Specification when undertaking landscaping works on site.

9. Sustainability

9.1 Community centres should be exemplars of sustainable development. Their design and operation should address key requirements, including those set out in the council's Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy, Design and Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document and Landscape, Biodiversity and Trees Supplementary Planning Document (or successor documents).

9.2 It is expected that new buildings will also meet the requirements set out in the emerging/proposed updates to the Local Plan, which are currently still subject to consultation.

9.3 Community centres should:

- Minimise energy use through the layout, orientation and design of the building.
- Maximise the fabric energy efficiency of buildings.
- Be net zero ready with fossil fuel-free heating.
- Consider low-carbon forms of construction and sustainable building techniques and materials (e.g., recycled materials, sustainable timber, low-VOC paints).
- Maximise on-site renewable electricity and energy storage.

- Install water-saving features (e.g., rainwater harvesting systems, use of grey water, low-flow fixtures).
- Include fixtures and fittings and/or incorporate use of modular elements which easily enable sustainable measures to be integrated/introduced in future.
- Include high efficiency rating appliances and equipment throughout the building.
- Provide on-site waste and recycling facilities.
- Include adequate electric vehicle charging points.
- Incorporate appropriate:
  - insulation
  - shading
  - heating, ventilation and cooling systems
  - glazing (e.g., low-emissivity (Low-E) glazing, solar control glazing)
  - lighting (e.g., LED lighting, motion sensors)
  - smart building technologies for energy management, lighting control, and building monitoring systems.
- Include site and building-level adaptation measures that ensure resilience to future climate change impacts. These should provide for the comfort, health, and wellbeing of occupiers and the surrounding environment over the lifetime of the development. Measures should be integral to the building's layout and design and should take into account the vulnerability of the building's occupants.

10. Fit out

10.1 Community centres should be fitted out to a level which enables the building to deliver a broad programme of activities and services and be fully operational from the handover stage.

10.2 It is expected that fit out will include provision of all relevant infrastructure and, where possible, more portable capital items such as tables, chairs etc. Where necessary, additional funding should be secured/set aside to purchase essential equipment which is not being provided.

10.3 Fixtures and fittings should be hardwearing and cost effective to clean, access and maintain. The use of non-standard fixtures and fittings should be limited to aid replacement and reduce on-going maintenance costs.

10.4 It is assumed that a commercial grade kitchen will be provided, with suitable appliances/white goods, to ensure that the building can support a range of user groups and any potential trading initiatives, such as a community café.

10.5 Bathroom fittings must be durable and appropriate for the setting.

10.6 Flooring should be of commercial quality, robust, slip resistant and appropriate for its use, with a sprung floor included in the hall as appropriate.

Appendix 1

Handover of new buildings

It is recognised that early consideration of what information is necessary for the building's effective use and management will enable a smoother handover. This will ensure that the owner and occupier/managing organisation are familiar with the building and its operation from the outset.

A clear list of requirements will be shared with developers/contractors at an early stage to facilitate data capture and support transition. It is anticipated that the below will act as a starting point and can be refined as required. It will also be necessary to agree the approach to snagging and defects, and how these will be remedied and how access will be facilitated.

As a minimum (and as relevant) this should include:

1. Legal and Contractual Documentation

- **Certificate of Practical Completion**: Issued by the contractor to confirm that the work is complete and complies with the terms of the contract, subject to any agreed defects being addressed.
- **Building Regulations Compliance Certificate**: Proof that the building complies with all relevant regulations, such as the Planning Permission and Building Control approvals.
- **Health and Safety File**: Contains information related to the safety of the building, including fire safety procedures, emergency exits, and any hazardous materials used.
- **Warranty Information**: Details on warranties provided by the contractor for materials, systems, and workmanship. This includes manufacturers' warranties for things like boilers, elevators, roofing, and windows.

2. Construction and Design Documentation

- **As-Built Drawings**: Final, accurate architectural drawings showing the building as it was constructed, including changes from the original design. These are essential for future repairs or renovations.
- **Operating and Maintenance Manuals**: Manuals for all major systems (e.g., heating, ventilation, electrical, and plumbing) outlining how they operate, how to maintain them, and who to contact for repairs.
- **Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) Schedules**: Detailed information about the mechanical and electrical systems installed in the building, including service schedules, maintenance procedures, and instructions for system operation.
- **Building Performance Data**: Information on the building's energy efficiency, including any energy-saving features (solar panels, insulation, heat recovery systems, etc.), to help manage running costs and sustainability.

- **Maintenance Instructions**: Detailed instructions on how to maintain all fixtures, fittings, and systems, including recommended service intervals, cleaning requirements, and troubleshooting guidance.

3. Health and Safety Information

- **Fire Safety Plan**: Includes fire escape routes, emergency exit signage, fire extinguishers, and evacuation procedures. The fire safety plan must be detailed and align with legal requirements.
- **Hazardous Materials Register**: Any materials used in the construction that may pose health or safety risks (e.g., asbestos, chemicals) should be documented and clearly identified.
- **Emergency Contact Information**: List of key contacts for emergencies, including the building manager, local emergency services, contractors for urgent repairs, and specialists in specific systems.

4. User Training and Demonstration

- **Walkthrough and Training**: The contractor should conduct a formal handover walkthrough for the client and end users to demonstrate how key systems operate (e.g., HVAC, lighting, security systems). This ensures users are familiar with the building's functioning.
- **Training Sessions for Key Staff**: If applicable, training should be provided for staff members responsible for maintenance, security, and health and safety, to ensure they know how to operate, maintain, and troubleshoot building systems.
- **Technical Support and Contact Information**: Information on who to contact for ongoing technical support and advice for troubleshooting issues related to the building's systems.

5. Operational Guidelines

- **Occupancy and Usage Guidelines**: Guidance on how the building can be used, including hours of operation, any restrictions (e.g., noise levels, security access), and specific rules for different areas of the centre (e.g., community rooms, kitchen, storage areas).
- **Cleaning and Waste Management Procedures**: Details on cleaning protocols, waste disposal, recycling, and maintenance schedules for common areas and toilets. This will help ensure the building remains in good condition for long-term use.

6. Performance and Monitoring Tools

- **Building Performance Monitoring**: Instructions on how to monitor the building's performance, including energy consumption, air quality, and internal temperature, especially if the building has automated systems in place.

- **Smart Building System Access**: If the community centre uses a building management system (BMS) for controlling environmental factors (lighting, heating, cooling, security), the contractor should provide access credentials and training on how to use the system.

7. Defects Liability Period and Post-Handover Support

- **Defects Liability Period**: Information on the period during which the contractor is responsible for fixing any issues or defects identified after handover (usually 12 months).
- **Post-Handover Support Agreement**: Details of on-going support for maintenance or repairs, especially if the contractor is still involved for a set period or if there is a separate service provider.

8. Financial and Operational Information

- **Final Account and Payment Certificates**: Documentation confirming the final financial settlement between the contractor and the client. This would include a summary of costs, any agreed changes, and final payment certificates.
- **Building Operation Costs**: Estimated operational costs of the building, including utility usage, maintenance, and staffing. This helps the client plan the on-going budget.
- **Insurance Certificates**: Information on building insurance coverage, including public liability and employer's liability, to ensure the centre is fully covered against potential risks.

9. Post-Handover Evaluation

- **Feedback Mechanism**: Establish a process for gathering feedback from end users and the client after the building has been in operation for a set period. This can help identify any areas for improvement, on-going maintenance issues, or additional training needs.