

ANGUS COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 28 JANUARY 2025

ARBROATH COMMUNITY CENTRE FUTURE

REPORT BY ALISON SMITH, DIRECTOR OF VIBRANT COMMUNITIES AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

1. ABSTRACT

- 1.1 This report provides an update in relation to Arbroath Community Centre following a decision by Policy and Resources Committee on 29 August 2023 for officers to develop a Feasibility Study for the Community Centre to be led by a community group. This followed on from a decision of Council on 3 November 2022 agreeing a general approach for the Council to engage with local communities to explore opportunities for ongoing delivery of services. This report provides an update on the development of the Feasibility Study, and the outcome of the process which has identified a potential community-led operator. It seeks approval for officers to continue negotiations with this community-led operator, with a view to negotiating a lease agreement in principle, that would require the potential operator to undertake further community consultation and finalise a financial and business plan prior to a report being brought back to Committee for a final decision on whether to agree a lease.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES

- 2.1 Outcomes delivered by the proposed operator for the Arbroath Community Centre will contribute to the following priorities in the Angus Council Plan 2023-2028 (2024 update).

Caring for our People

- Reduce inequalities in all our communities.
- Create more opportunities for people to live well and achieve their personal goals.
- Improve physical, mental health and wellbeing.

Caring for our Place

- Enable inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe communities across Angus.
- Make our local services accessible.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to: -

- (i) note the decision of Council on 3 November 2022 agreeing to adopt an approach of engaging communities to explore opportunities for involvement in service delivery including at libraries, museums, and town halls;
- (ii) note the decision of this Committee on 29 August 2023 for officers to develop a Feasibility Study for Arbroath Community Centre to be led by a community group, and to note the update on the process carried out in engaging a suitable alternative operator for the Community Centre following the instruction from Committee;
- (iii) note that an interested community-led operator “Shape Wellbeing Community Interest Company” (“Shape Wellbeing CIC”) has been involved in the development of the Feasibility Study and has presented a proposal to lease Arbroath Community Centre;
- (iv) agree that officers continue discussions with Shape Wellbeing CIC, and negotiate lease

terms in principle for Arbroath Community Centre;

- (v) note that consultation to inform the final proposal is one of the conditions required prior to entering into a lease, and that information from that consultation will be brought back to Committee, along with a final financial and business plan, to allow members to make a final decision on whether or not to enter into a lease with Shape Wellbeing CIC; and
- (vi) note that if recommendation (iv) above is not approved, officers would cease discussions with Shape Wellbeing CIC and the building would be declared surplus and put on the open market for lease or sale.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Arbroath Community Centre (former Drill Hall headquarters of the Arbroath Rifle Volunteers from 1883) is a Category C listed building but is not a common good property. It was one of three sports centres operated by ANGUSALive on behalf of the Council in the town of Arbroath. It closed as a community/leisure centre in 2020 and was then leased to NHS Tayside as the main vaccination centre for the area. It has been closed since vaccinations ceased there. Given the financial constraints faced by ANGUSALive, they intimated their desire to cease operating the facility within their business plan as part of the March 2023 budget setting ([Report 53/23](#)). As part of the required Change Process for Angus Council to accept a building back, the Council was required to consider the feasibility of continuing to operate the service before considering disposing of the building.
- 4.2 Reference is made to Report 364/22 agreed by the Council at its meeting on 3 November 2022, which considered the latest update to ANGUSALive's transformation programme and agreed to adopt an approach of engaging communities to explore opportunities for involvement in service delivery be they libraries, museums, or town halls to see these valued services continue to thrive.
- 4.3 Following ANGUSALive intimating their desire to cease operating four facilities within their business plan as part of the March 2023 budget setting process, engagement sessions were held in each area where the four properties are located and community organisations were invited to attend. In relation to Arbroath Community Centre, the Community Council and forty-two community groups that had frequently used the Centre were invited to attend sessions in Arbroath. Seven groups, along with a few other new interested parties, Voluntary Action Angus and the Community Council, were in attendance.
- 4.4 At its meeting on 29 August 2023, the Policy and Resources Committee ([Report 231/24](#)) was provided with an update on the engagement sessions and asked to agree a proposal to develop Feasibility Studies for the four properties, including Arbroath Community Centre. The Policy and Resources Committee on 3 September 2024 ([Report 249/24](#)) noted that £15,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), was allocated for a group to commission a feasibility study to understand if the service could be operated and the building managed by a community group.
- 4.5 In the case of Arbroath Community Centre, a further meeting was held with the interested parties, former community group users of the Centre and the Community Council. There was no interest in taking on the building and service from just one individual community group due to the size of the property and the financial sustainability. However, 'Showcase the Street' agreed to lead the feasibility study.
- 4.6 A robust feasibility study was conducted by the contracted consultant and during the community engagement carried out by the consultant, two further community groups intimated that they were interested in the property. Officers held a meeting with all three interested parties, resulting in two of the community groups collaborating to progress a business plan that could see them become the operator of the building and service and the ambitious redevelopment of the property.
- 4.7 As per the previously agreed recommendation noted in 4.4 above, an [information paper](#) was provided to all members of the Communities Committee on 20 August 2024. This paper summarised the outcomes of the four feasibility studies for each former ANGUSALive property and informed members that further work was still required with the interested party in each property.
- 4.8 Since the former service run by ANGUSALive in Arbroath Community Centre was not sustainable, and since the building requires significant redevelopment, the emphasis has been placed on finding an operator that can deliver a robust, sustainable business plan and, at the same time, secure external funding to redevelop and maintain the property.

- 4.9 At its meeting on 3 September 2024, (referred to at 4.4 above) the Policy and Resources Committee agreed to the allocation of £180,000 from the Communities and Place priority of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund towards works to Arbroath Community Centre roof to allow the building to be wind and watertight for any potential group interested in operating out of the property.

5. CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 Angus Council is not in a position to keep the Arbroath Community Centre building open and provide a similar leisure offering to the services previously offered. ANGUSALive has relocated services and provides venues for community use in their other facilities in the town. Research and discussion with the former users of the Arbroath Community Centre has identified that the majority are now using alternative venues within the community. An exercise has been carried out to identify all available space for hire in Arbroath and shows that there is adequate large space available for any community group to hire which could accommodate a range of activities including sports or theatre/performance space. Appendix 1 refers.
- 5.2 Following approval by the Policy and Resources Committee as stated in para 4.4, officers have been exploring the potential of a new operator to deliver a similar but sustainable service. Angus Council officers and the interested operator, Shape Wellbeing Community Interest Company, have supported the abovementioned process. A community interest company (or CIC) is a special form of a non-charitable limited company. It exists primarily to benefit a community or to pursue a social purpose rather than to make a profit for shareholders.
- 5.3 The aim of this CIC is to offer a community facility run by the community for the community. Plans are underway to engage and appoint additional local members to the group board. The interested operators have met with all previous users of the building who attended the engagement events to discuss community needs regarding the required space, as well as with stakeholders such as the Angus Health and Social Care Partnership. They have also presented to the Community Council and have reached out to the Arbroath Town Board.
- 5.4 Shape Wellbeing's proposal focuses on health and wellbeing as well as having space for former leisure centre users and/or new users to book the Centre for activities and/or sports. This will include a dance studio for dance groups, Pilates or yoga etc. Room on the ground floor will be bookable by groups for community group use; for example, discussions have taken place with the boxing club and a wheelchair basketball club as well as other former users. The plans include a cafe and a VR room for both young people, rehabilitation, and other uses, which can also be hired for parties. The proposals also include a new Padel court which would be a new and unique addition in the town and encourages leisure and competitive participation with the potential to attract people from across Angus and the wider North East of Scotland to take part and visit the area. The proposal includes plans to incorporate a model for preventative health that will complement the [Angus Community Wellbeing Centre – The Beacon](#) that will be delivered from the former Access Office in Arbroath, opening in Spring 2025, with office and small rooms available for hire for health, wellbeing, and holistic health purposes.
- 5.5 The group has developed a financial and business plan based on projected income from hiring out the various spaces, cafe income, and external funding. It is intended that, following consultation, they would work with Business Gateway to finalise this before submitting it as part of negotiation on any lease conditions. The group is having ongoing discussions with potential funders but cannot submit funding applications without an agreement in principle regarding the lease of the building. There are risks to any group taking on a building of this size, redeveloping and maintaining it, hence the reason for ensuring that multiple sources of income from different activities and initiatives are in place and that a robust, sustainable business plan will be essential. It should be noted that the current group members do have the business experience to support this type of ambitious project, and they intend to supplement their Board membership with a range of relevant specialisms from members of the community.
- 5.6 A summary of the draft proposal to date is attached in Appendix 2.

6. PROPOSALS

- 6.1 As previously instructed by Committee, officers have engaged community groups with a view to finding a suitable operator for the Arbroath Community Centre. A Feasibility Study has been developed and a proposal brought forward by a community group, for a multi-use facility, with a range of community spaces. Following consultation, it is intended that their business plan will be finalised and fully costed. Elected Members have access to a summary of the draft proposal to date in Appendix 2. It should be noted that the service ANGUSAlive was delivering was not financially sustainable, hence their desire to cease running the service and building. In addition, no services have been run from the Arbroath Community Centre since 2020. Therefore, the focus has been on finding an operator that can operate a financially viable offering as well as redevelop and maintain the property. The alternative would be for the Council to put the building on the open market for lease or sale, meaning there would be a risk of it not being available for community use in the future.
- 6.2 The proposal is community-focused, offering opportunities for community groups to hire space, and the proposed operator will provide a range of activities and space that will ensure the future and sustainability of the building.
- 6.3 Officers are therefore seeking approval from Committee to negotiate lease terms in principle with the new proposed operator. Consultation to shape the final proposal, as well as the finalisation of the financial and business plan, would be required prior to entering into the lease. A further report would be presented to a future committee with information from the consultation, along with the financial and business plan, seeking Committee approval to proceed with the lease.
- 6.4 If Committee agrees that the operator is offering a sustainable proposal, officers will negotiate the heads of terms for a lease in principle with the interested community operator, allowing them to apply for funding for the proposed investment. Any lease would be subject to the confirmation of conditions including community consultation and funding.
- 6.5 Should Committee not agree that the proposal to operate the building is sustainable and similar enough to the previous service offer, as per previous Committee decisions, officers would cease discussions with the interested operator and the building would be declared surplus and put on the open market for lease or sale.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The lease terms, including rental amounts, running costs and maintenance will all be negotiated with the interested community-led operator. The group has ambitious plans to draw in investment to the building and improve the condition internally. There are risks involved in any significant project like this however officers will ensure risks are mitigated as they arise.
- 7.2 Should Committee not approve the recommendations, the building would be declared surplus, and put on the open market for lease or sale. Angus Council would continue to be responsible for the upkeep, maintenance and all other costs of the building until such time it is leased or sold.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 Should Committee support the recommendations, a lease with the interested community-led group would mean the building was continuing to be used for the community, which is important in feedback having been received to-date. There would also be minimal future risk and cost to Angus Council.
- 8.2 Should Committee support the recommendations, and at some point in the future the operator were to cease functioning, it is anticipated that Angus Council would be able to find another operator or could place the building on the open market. At that stage, it is anticipated that the building would be easier to dispose of due to the intended investment and redevelopment of the property. The lease conditions will need to be managed by the council, and this will require staff resources to continue monitoring and assessing the property's maintenance.
- 8.3 Should Committee decide not to approve the recommendations; the building will be declared surplus and put on the open market. In this scenario, the building would be likely to lie empty, for

a period of time incurring more maintenance and/or repair costs. The building may not sell quickly, leaving an empty building in the centre of Arbroath. The building may also be sold for non-community use or not redeveloped, resulting in the loss of community space.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The proposal to redevelop the building for community use will have a positive impact on carbon emissions and will support net-zero targets. It will also mean an unused building in the centre of Arbroath is brought back into use.

10. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND FAIRER SCOTLAND DUTY

- 10.1 A screening assessment has been undertaken, and a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required for the following reason(s):
- This is a technical report with options; once a decision has been made on the next steps, should the proposal from the group be supported, a full Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out.

11. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND WELLBEING IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 This is a technical report with options; once a decision has been made on the next steps; should the proposal from the group be supported, a full Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out to include a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment.

12. CONSULTATION

- 12.1 The Director of Finance, the Director of Infrastructure and Environment and the Director of Legal, Governance and Change have been consulted on the contents of this report.

Engagement was initially carried out with the Community Council and users of the Arbroath Community Centre. Engagement was also carried out with the community of Arbroath by the consultants, and this information was fed into the proposal for the future use of the building. The interested community group has continued with these consultations and has also consulted with Angus Health and Social Care Partnership and will continue to engage to shape the final business plan.

NOTE: The background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) which were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report are: (list them below)

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List of Appendices:

Appendix 1: Information on community halls for let in Arbroath
Appendix 2: Details on the proposal from the Shape Wellbeing Community Interest Company

Appendix 1

Arbroath bookable hall space

Venue	Amenities	Capacity	Bookable
Arbroath Library	Exhibitions	60	Yes
	Gallery / meeting space	60	
	Activity area	20	
	Learning area	10	
Arbroath Signal Tower	Activity room	15	Yes
	Courtyard and Garden	160	
Arbroath Sports Centre	Main hall	300	Yes
	Gymnasium	30	
	1 st floor studio	20	
	Meeting room		
Saltire Sports centre	Main hall	300	Yes
	Hall 2	200	
	Meeting room	30	
	Classrooms	20	
Webster Memorial Theatre	Auditorium	500	Yes
	Assembly hall	72	
	Studio	50	
Arbroath Harp Community Club	Small hall	80	Yes
St Andrews Centre - Church	Flexible church space and hall/ smaller hall	Est 200 Est 80 Est 50	Yes
Old and Abbey Hall	Hall/ kitchen	Est 150	Yes
Arbroath Academy	Assembly hall Gym small Gym large Classrooms		Yes
Arbroath High School	Assembly hall Dining hall		Yes
Primary schools x 8	Hall		Yes
Scout hall	Hall x 2 Kitchen	Est 100 /80	Yes
Abbot Street Lounge	Small meeting space	Est 50	Yes
Arbroath Courthouse	Courtroom 1 Courtroom 2 Office space	Est 100 Est 80	Yes
Totum Kirkie (St John Methodist Church)	Hall Kitchen	Est 50	Yes
Bowling clubs x 3	Hall Kitchen	Est 80	Yes
Gayfield AFC	Portacabin	Est 40 Est 50	Yes

	Lounge – not DDA compliant		
Angus Carers centre	Large room	Est 25	Yes
Café Project	Hall – not DDA compliant	Est 100	Yes
Morrisons Supermarket	Meeting room	Est 20	Yes
Dundee and Angus College	Lecture theatre. Classrooms	Est 100	Yes
Hospitalfield	Variety of space to hire including the Garden Cafe		yes
Guide Hall	Large Hall (36 x 30 feet) Small Hall (30 x 17 feet)		Yes

Appendix 2 – Brief summary of the proposal to date from Shape Wellbeing Community Interest Company

The proposal is to utilise and repurpose the currently unused Arbroath Community Centre to complement the existing services and provisions in Arbroath and bring something unique to the town. On completion, it will become the first fully operational community hub in Angus, focusing on preventative health and wellbeing for all the community in terms of preventative physical and mental wellbeing. The Centre's primary focus will be preventative, but it will also accommodate some aspects of support for those experiencing difficulties and those in crisis, although this crisis element of support is better handled by other providers within the town. A brief summary of the proposal is set out below. However, it should be noted that a fully costed business plan offering a self-sustaining offer will be finalised before any lease agreement is signed.

The proposed plan, based on identified demand so far, for the main community centre space is a range of facilities, open spaces and rooms of different sizes that can be used for a range of community-inspired projects, existing groups, new groups, meetings and other purposes. This will include a community café that primarily services the needs of centre users and may also include a training element thereby investing in the future of the community at large, a dance studio and will include the redevelopment of the toilet areas and changing rooms.

The first floor, accessed through a separate doorway, will provide a range of rooms for third-party hire, including treatment rooms and holistic therapies, rooms for counselling, and a wellbeing training centre.

In addition to having adequate space for community groups to lease, the space on the ground floor will also focus on Padel. Padel is the fastest growing sport, not currently available in the town or surrounding area and attracts participants from all age ranges and abilities. This fosters a sense of connection and engagement across the community as the barrier to participation is quite low. It's fun, healthy and interactive, in that it fosters a sense of shared experience, adventure, connection and enthusiasm. The sport is played as individual, teams and in leagues. It can be across teams within the town or between other Padel centres which promotes visitors, players and supporters to come to the town and in turn can generate income. Having a recognised and regulation sized court allows entry and inclusion into a wide network of related players across the country and Scotland and possibly internationally.

It is an easy-to-do activity, which means that it is not exclusive to those who have attained a fitness level, but it is great fun and leads to repeat activity. Padel, is a racquet sport that combines elements of tennis and squash, has gained popularity worldwide due to its accessibility and unique features.

For more info see [Fancy a game of Padel? The world's fastest growing sport | ITV News](#)

Also being considered is an area for table tennis, a recovery Gym, and a VR studio, which people of all ages can use to get them into game playing but can also be used for rehabilitation as VR can create environments tailored to the needs of individuals with disabilities. It is increasingly used in physical and cognitive rehabilitation and can provide a controlled and immersive environment for therapy, helping individuals improve motor skills, balance, and coordination. VR can be used as a tool for distraction and relaxation, helping to manage pain or anxiety for individuals with chronic pain or mental health conditions. It can also be used to create customised educational experiences that cater to different learning needs. People with cognitive or learning disabilities can provide interactive and engaging ways to learn new skills, practice tasks, or explore new concepts at their own pace.

Research is also being carried out on how viable it would be to include an area for a ski machine and discussion is ongoing with the local ski club, but this may be a longer-term goal.

As an indication the lower level hall would be split into 3 zones:

- A zone for Padel, volleyball and a universal 20m X 10m space. Fixed.
- A zone for community groups. 20m X 10m. This space can be used for various uses including Wheelchair basketball, Roller Skating, Boxing etc.
- A Viewing Area/Sitting area for the cafe to create a space to connect.
- Kitchen, toilets, changing facilities, dance studio, VR and treatment space

The aim is to listen to what the community needs and be flexible so that all citizens of Arbroath can find a reason to turn up and take part. The business plan will be finalised following further community engagement with community groups on the space available for groups to hire and further consultation with partners, such as the Community Council, Elected Members and other stakeholders, to ensure there are no cross-overs with other services or facilities operating in Arbroath.

Listed below are just some of the possible uses for the multipurpose spaces created within the centre, but the group are open to other community suggestions:

- **Corporate Events:** Seminars, conferences, workshops, and meetings.
- **Fitness and Wellness Classes:** Yoga, Pilates, Zumba, martial arts, and dance classes.
- **Educational Workshops:** Art and craft classes, language courses, coding boot camps, or professional development seminars.
- **Local Club Meetings:** Space for book clubs, hobby groups, or special interest groups.
- **Community Forums:** Town hall meetings, neighbourhood association meetings, or public discussions.
- **Support Groups:** Rooms for AA meetings, mental health support groups, or other counselling sessions.
- **Co-working Spaces:** Flexible desks or rooms for freelancers, entrepreneurs, or small businesses.
- **Networking Events:** Meetups for professionals, start-ups, or industry-specific groups.
- **Health Clinics:** Pop-up health services, vaccination drives, or wellness checks.
- **Charity Events:** Fundraisers, charity drives, or community service projects.
- **Food Drives:** Collection points for food banks or distribution centres for community aid.
- **After-School Programmes:** Tutoring, homework clubs, or enrichment activities for children.
- **Youth Groups:** Spaces for scouting groups, teen clubs, or youth development programmes.
- **Playgroups:** Indoor play areas or structured activities for toddlers and young children.
- **Photography Sessions:** Space for photo shoots, either for private clients or creative projects.
- **Storage Space:** Renting out rooms for short-term storage or archiving needs.
- **Craft Fairs:** Space for artisans and crafters to sell their products.
- **Resilience Centre:** Temporary housing during natural disasters or extreme weather events.
- **Language Meetups:** Informal gatherings for language exchange or practice.
- **Heritage Celebrations:** Events that highlight and celebrate the cultural heritage of different communities.
- **Food Festivals:** Small-scale food festivals or tasting events.
- **Supper Clubs:** A space for private dining experiences or themed dinner nights.
- **Cooking Competitions:** Hosting cook-offs or culinary challenges.
- **Hackathons:** A venue for coding events, tech challenges, or innovation workshops.
- **Tech Demos:** Space for product launches, tech demonstrations, or VR/AR showcases.
- **Makerspace:** A community workshop with tools for building and crafting.
- **Ski Machine Simulator:** Installing a ski machine simulator in a small community town delivers strategic advantages. It provides a year-round fitness solution, promoting physical wellbeing and encouraging active lifestyles. The simulator creates an inclusive environment for residents to learn or enhance skiing skills, attracting diverse age groups and skill levels. It fosters community engagement by serving as a social and recreational hub. This will require extensive public consultation at this stage is only a suggestion

Brief summary of the proposed financial model

A draft plan and consultation have been taken as far as possible until the group are given the comfort that they can negotiate a long-term lease for the building. As soon as this decision is made, the following steps are in place for execution:

- Community consultation will determine the final business plan – this will allow the costings and financial cashflows to be finalised.
- Recruitment of Board members will take place comprised of a wide range of stakeholders with a remit to providing the most inclusive solution for the town overall
- External funds will be sought for a one-year project development officer (support is already in place from Vibrant Communities Development Officers)
- Designs and final costings will be completed, and business plan updated

Short-Term Financial Goals

The short-term financial goal is to redevelop the upper floor, which will allow rooms to be rented out for complementary therapies. This area is secured with a separate door and stairwell. This will allow income to be generated.

Once all plans are in place and investment is secured, the main building will be redeveloped and opened. The centre aims to be fully self-sufficient, generating enough income to cover all operational costs, including staffing, maintenance, and programme delivery. It is important that the financial business plan does not depend on external funding for the operations of the property. Expertise will be brought in with experience from elsewhere on sustainable projects to check that costings for the café and hire income are accurate. Council officers will work with the group to pair them to best practice from other projects in Angus and other ideas for peer mentoring.

Profit Distribution and Reinvestment

Operating as a not-for-profit entity, the Centre will reinvest any surplus income back into its facilities and programmes. This will be a building for the long term future of Arbroath. This reinvestment will allow for continuous improvement of services, expansion of offerings, and the ability to provide discounted or free services to those in need.

Investing in the preventative well-being centre is not just a contribution to a community resource; it is a strategic decision that offers financial returns, enhances social capital, and promotes long-term sustainability. By blending diverse revenue streams, fostering strong local partnerships, and focusing on cost-efficient operations, the centre is designed to be financially self-sufficient while delivering lasting benefits to the community and businesses alike.