

BACKGROUND PAPER

TOWN CENTRE PROVISION FOR KINGSTON'S VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

The National context

A number of Government programmes have been launched, including ChangeUp and Futurebuilders with the aim of building the capacity of the voluntary and community sector to increase the scale and scope of their public service delivery. Futurebuilders (www.futurebuilders-england.org.uk) provides a mixture of grants, loans and support to voluntary organisations to enable them to get involved in service delivery. ChangeUp aims to improve the governance of voluntary organisations at national, regional and local levels through the establishment of a Governance Hub (www.governancehub.org.uk) which involves key infrastructure organisations led by NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations). One of the strands of this investment is to bring together local providers to share resources and back office functions and to provide seamless user focussed services.

These developments are underpinned by the Voluntary Sector Compact principles, which encourage:

- a strategic approach to funding infrastructure organisations
- building in consideration of the needs of the sector at the planning stage of major programmes, and
- recognising the need to contribute towards the costs of building organisational capacity as part of meeting the full costs of the service delivery.

Local context

Kingston has a vibrant and developing voluntary sector with over 30 organisations recognised as key strategic organisations, which work in partnership with the Council and other local statutory agencies. It has long been recognised that there is a need for accessible, affordable premises for the local voluntary sector and that there are real advantages to co-location of organisations, in terms of sharing resources, networking and referral opportunities and support for small developing organisations.

The development of Kingston's Local Infrastructure Development Plan, as part of the ChangeUp programme, recognises the importance of developing town centre premises to house voluntary and community organisations. The development of this Plan has been led by Kingston Voluntary Action and endorsed by the Community Leadership Forum. The ChangeUp steering group is a sub group of the Community Leadership Forum steering group.

Also, one of the strategic objectives of the Kingston Town Centre Action Plan is 'Enhanced Community Facilities including better meeting and operating facilities for the Voluntary Sector'.

Currently, the Council leases part of a building close to the Town Centre (Siddeley House in Canbury Park Road) from a private landlord for the use of local voluntary organisations, including Kingston Voluntary Action and the Volunteer Centre. Ten organisations occupy offices in the building under licence arrangements. The costs of the premises are passed to the organisations and, where they are grant aided by the Council (as the majority are), the rent and related costs are deducted from their grants. Some £135,000 is paid in rent to the private landlord each year. (see Appendix A.)

In addition, a further nine organisations occupying other premises leased from private landlords, churches and schools, pay £79,000 in rent, making a total of over £214,000. It is predicted that these costs will increase by 10% a year for the next five years as the development of the local voluntary sector continues. Often these premises are not fully accessible and offer little flexibility for organisations to develop their services. Meeting space is also at a premium although the recently installed lift at the Richard Mayo Centre in Eden Street has increased the availability of accessible meeting rooms in the town centre.

The number of employees working in these premises is in excess of 85. In addition over 200 volunteers are involved either delivering services or serving on trustee boards. This includes the following organisations:

Home Start Kingston*
Kingston Advocacy Group*
Kingston Bereavement Service
Kingston Carers Network*
Kingston Centre for Independent Living
Kingston Childminding Association
Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness (KCAH)
Kingston Citizens Advice Bureau Service (KCABS)
Kingston and District WelCare Association
Kingston Racial Equality Council (KREC)
Kingston Victim Support*
Kingston Volunteer Centre*
Kingston Voluntary Action*
Law Centre Kingston*
Learn English at Home*
MIND in Kingston*
Refugee Action Kingston*
Relate – Richmond, Kingston and Hounslow
Richmond and Kingston Accessible Transport

*Organisations currently occupying offices in Siddeley House (Lease up for renewal in 2007)

The premises needs of these organisations will vary according to the services they provide. Advice agencies including KCABS, KCAH, KREC and the Carers Network need premises easily accessible by the public with reception and back office facilities. Some discussion has been taking place about using

more space in the current Citizens Advice office in Neville House in Eden Street for advice giving agencies. This would be a short-term solution because Neville House is proposed for redevelopment within the Hammersons project.

Local arts organisations like Global Arts Kingston and Kingston Arts Council would benefit from a flexible community building model, enabling developing organisations with small numbers of staff and volunteers to access office space as and when needed. The building could then be used as an organisational postal address and contact point for small organisations as well as providing shared facilities and meeting rooms. Fusion Arts already occupies premises in Eden Street for use as an arts facility particularly for local artists although this building is also part of the redevelopment proposals. There is also a need for exhibition space which is accessible to the public. A Kingston Creative Industries Centre could ideally provide both office and exhibition space.

Environmental organisations like Save the World Club would like to see an 'Environment Centre' which provided a base for its work as well as facilities for other local environment groups, many of which currently operate out of people's homes. Information and advice could also be provided for the public on issues like recycling and good environmental practice.

It is difficult to be precise about the amount of floor space which would be needed to meet all these requirements. The organisations currently occupying premises under licence agreements with the Council occupy some 12,000 square feet. This figure does not include premises occupied at WelCare House and the United Reform Church (Richard Mayo Centre). The need in say five years' time will be likely to be in the region of 20,000-25,000 square feet. This would not all have to be based in the town centre although there are advantages to public access advice giving agencies like the CAB and the law centre being in or near the centre, easily reached by public transport. There is also an argument for having a 'showcase' building/premises which give a higher profile to such organisations as Kingston Voluntary Action and the volunteer centre. The disadvantage for some organisations of being based in a central town centre location would be the cost of car parking, particularly if their workers or volunteers had to travel during the day to visit clients or deliver services in other locations.

Proposals

There is not one solution to the premises needs of the voluntary and community sector with its range of different types of organisations and services. A number of proposals have been discussed:

- **Thames Community Foundation proposals** – Thames Community Foundation operates in Kingston and across five other London boroughs to raise money from the business community to meet charitable and community needs (**see Appendix B for more information about the Foundation**). TCF has put forward the following proposal:

- the creation of an Endowment Fund to be held by Thames Community Foundation to support community activity. The capital sum would be invested and the income used to fund grant making in perpetuity. This would have the benefit of investing in Kingston's vibrant and growing voluntary sector and of supporting the developer's long term interest in the town

or

- the transfer of office accommodation, to be identified in a non-premium site, to TCF, who would hold this asset on behalf of the community. TCF would then seek to provide flexible accommodation at below market rents to local voluntary and community organisations. TCF would move its own offices into the community building which would be configured to provide shared facilities such as kitchens, reprographics, and meeting space. The net rental income received would be placed into a specific Kingston Fund and would be disbursed as grants to voluntary and community organisations in the Royal Borough. In the short term, while the redevelopment was in progress, premises could be made available to displaced small businesses and allow them time to re-locate within the borough.

From the experience of other Community Foundations, TCF believes that a substantial contribution towards any refurbishment costs of a suitable building could be found by TCF by way of funding from ODPM, Big Lottery or a strategic pan London charitable trust. This could reduce the net cost of the initiative and lever in funding to the Royal borough that would otherwise not be available.

- **New library proposals** – to adapt the plans for the new library to incorporate an information/advice facility to be used by a number of voluntary organisations to publicise their services, recruit volunteers and signpost members of the public to services which meet their needs. Libraries have long been used by the public as points of information on a range of local activities and services and other local authorities have seen their potential for engaging the public. The current plans do not allow enough space for such a facility for the voluntary and community sector.
- **Under-used office space in or near the Town Centre** – to explore the possibility of adapting existing office space, not planned to be included in the re-development, for use by the voluntary and community sector.

The voluntary sector already brings added value to the grants and other support it receives from the Council through external funding and volunteer input. Any projects agreed as part of the major development in the town centre has the potential to attract other funds from the Big Lottery and Futurebuilders, as well as other charitable trusts and Government funding streams.

Investment in the Voluntary and Community Sector as part of the major redevelopment of the Town Centre would demonstrate a commitment on the part of the developers and the Council to the community through improved

access to services, enhanced cultural facilities and support for the development of local social enterprise. Such investment would take forward some of the objectives of the Council's Community Plan as well as meeting the Corporate Responsibility aspirations of the major developers. It would also go some way to redressing the balance between people engaging in civic duties for the benefit of Kingston and the growing emphasis on retail opportunities.

12th January 2006