WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL	**EXECUTIVE** **6th April 2016**	**Agenda Item No.** **4**

Title	Whitnash Community Hub Update and Next Steps
For further information about this report please contact	Andrew Jones (01926) 456830 Andrew.jones@warwickdc.gov.uk
Wards of the District directly affected	Whitnash
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	
Background Papers	Not applicable

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	No
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	Yes Ref 741
Equality & Sustainability Impact Assessment Undertaken	No
Not applicable.	

Officer/Councillor Approval	**Date**	**Name**
Chief Executive	29th February 2016	Chris Elliott
CMT	14th March 2016	Chris Elliott, Bill Hunt, Andrew Jones
Section 151 Officer	29th February 2016	Mike Snow
Head of Service	29th February 2016	Marianne Rolfe
Monitoring Officer	29th February 2016	Author
Portfolio Holder(s)	21st March 2016	Cllrs Mobbs, Coker & Mrs Grainger

Consultation & Community Engagement	
Consultation with residents through the Neighbourhood Plan process. Engagement with key stakeholders - Whitnash Sports & Social Club; Whitnash Primary School.	
Final Decision?	No
If the recommendations are agreed a further report will be submitted to Executive at the appropriate time.	

1 SUMMARY

1.1 This report updates Executive on the outcome of a feasibility study of a Community Hub based at Acre Close, Whitnash. It proposes the next steps as continuing to play a community leadership role to enable a viable scheme to be brought forward and that an in-principle agreement to invest significant funds is made.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Executive notes the outcome of the feasibility study (Appendix 1 - referred to as *Draft* but actually *Final*) in respect of Whitnash Community Hub undertaken by Tuffin Ferraby Taylor (TFT), commissioned by Warwick District Council (WDC) and Whitnash Town Council (WTC).

2.2 That Executive notes that subsequent to the completion of the aforementioned feasibility study, Whitnash Sports & Social Club (WSSC) has expressed an interest in re-working the TFT's Community Hub options to create a more comprehensive site development scheme.

2.3 That Executive notes that Warwickshire County Council (WCC) has agreed to consider the business case for the Library being located at the Community Hub.

2.4 That Executive notes that based on current S106 agreements and the land allocations in the Submitted Draft Local Plan (including Modifications) funding in the region of £1.03m could be received towards the cost of a Community Hub over the next ten years.

2.5 That Executive notes that further financing for a Community Hub will be sought from various funding bodies and charities to deliver the scheme with work having already started (Appendix 3) to identify precisely where that finance could come from.

2.6 That Executive agrees that Deputy Chief Executive (AJ) continues to work with members of WTC and officers at WCC on the production of a viable scheme and thereby gives its support to the development of a Community Hub for Whitnash.

2.7 That Executive notes that based on the last central government Financial Settlement and the recent New Homes Bonus (NHB) Consultation Proposals, WDC can expect a minimum of £1.2m in NHB monies for 2017/18 and therefore makes an in-principle grant offer of £0.5m to help deliver a viable scheme this being subject to a comprehensive business plan being received, appropriate legal undertakings being in place, a further report to Executive and WDC being in the financial position to award the grant as part of the 2017/18 Budget.

3 REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 <u>Recommendation 2.1</u>

3.11 Whitnash Town Council is at the heart of Whitnash community. From Town Council offices based at Franklin Road it manages allotments, a Millennium Garden, war memorial, Washbourne Fields & Play Area and a Community Hall, and playing fields at Acre Close. Whilst many community activities and Town Council meetings take place at the Community Hall, the building requires significant investment to bring it up to modern standards and for a population of 8,606 (Census 2011), which will grow to well over 10,000 during the next ten years, a new facility is required. There is no alternative community facility in Whitnash (other than church halls) and the nearest community centre is at

Warwick Gates. Although the town of Whitnash covers part of Warwick Gates, it makes up only a small part and so the community centre does not serve the vast majority of Whitnash residents.

3.12 It is within this context that in July 2014, Executive agreed to part-fund a feasibility study of a Community Hub for Whitnash. WDC committed c£13,000 to the study and WTC £5,000. Following a WDC compliant procurement process, TFT was awarded the contract to undertake the study. The study was completed in July 2015 and the report can be found at Appendix 1.

3.13 The scope of the study's works can be found at Section 2 of the report and in summary, with WTC having identified the Community Hub site as Acre Close Fields (the site of the current Community Hall), it was to "advise on what changes could be made to the current land uses to enable investment and provide more of a "town centre" focus for the parish". The outputs from the study were to be:

a. A masterplan of the Acre Close site covering the provision of a community hub, open and amenity space, access, egress and parking arrangements;
b. A masterplan of the Acre Close site covering a. above but also opportunities for the development of a town shopping area/focal point;
c. A financial appraisal of the cost of a. and b. and opportunities for financing the necessary investment.

3.14 Specifically, the study was to consider whether the Community Hub could provide the following facilities:

- Meeting space for the Town Council;
- Library/Information/One Stop Shop centre;
- Community Hall;
- Sports Hall e.g. badminton, indoor bowls, Pilates etc.
- Drop in space for Police Safer Neighbourhood team;
- Meeting rooms including those for hire;
- Café-type area
- Sufficient parking due to problems with parking at main shopping area at Acre Close / Heathcote Lane

3.15 The outcome of the feasibility study was that it identified seven options for the development of the Acre Close site with the preferred option (6) providing the following benefits:

1. The new building would be closer to the community.
2. Building proximity reduces the amount of wasted space.
3. Building proximity provides improved building security.
4. Car park location provides improved safety; limiting pedestrian and vehicular interface.
5. Best use of green space would be achieved.
6. Maximise number of football pitches provided.
7. Primary school land could be incorporated easily.
8. Inclusion of primary school would enable mile route to be achieved.
9. Defined playground space separated from car parking.

3.16 The feasibility study was well received by WTC but the downside was that the project costs ranged from £3,577,500 to £3,822,753 depending on the option, with the preferred option costing £3,632,533 (2nd quarter 2015). TFT was asked

to explore the funding options available for a scheme but regrettably this is a weak aspect of the study with a limited amount of investigation having taken place. (A ten per-cent reduction in contract price was secured due to this and delivery date issues). Notwithstanding the paucity of the information around funding, it was clear that identifying funding of c£3.5m would be a challenge and a forensic review of the specification would be required to determine whether cost could be removed without fundamentally impacting on the aspirations of WTC.

3.17 Members should note that since the conclusion of the feasibility study, a referendum has been held in respect of Whitnash's Neighbourhood Plan and 92.6% of those taking part voted in favour of the Plan. Objective 1 of the Plan specifically addresses the Community Hub issue as follows (extract taken from adopted Neighbourhood Plan):

Objective 1 - Providing a New Community Hub

Whitnash has a strong local identity and the town has expanded considerably over recent years with extensive areas of new housing development. With the proposed new development in the Local Plan, Whitnash is likely to increase its population further over the Plan period. However Whitnash lacks a main focus or hub for local facilities such as shopping, office space and a community centre. The Town Council has aspirations for improved office and meeting space, and recognises that the existing community centre in Acre Close playing fields is dated and requires replacing or significant updating and investment. The location of the building is also isolated and located away from other facilities such as the library and shops. There is a need to bring the various facilities together to provide a focus for the town which meets the needs and aspirations of all.

Consequently, Policy W1 of the Neighbourhood Plan is as follows:

Policy W1: A New Community Hub for Whitnash

Proposals for a new Community Hub for Whitnash will be supported in principle. The Community Hub is encouraged to include the following development:
- *A new community centre to meet the needs of local residents and groups.*
- *A civic centre which provides office space for the activities of the Town Council.*
- *A new library with internet facilities.*
- *A police station.*
- *Healthcare facilities*
- *Other suitable community and retail uses (A1 – A5).*

The Community Hub will complement and enhance any existing local retail facilities through careful siting and location and the provision of improved parking and high quality landscaping.
Detailed proposals will be informed by the results of a feasibility study which (have been) commissioned to consider the cost implications, proposed uses, access and siting of the proposed Community Hub.

3.18 WTC believes that "*the need for a new Community Hub is the overriding key issue to be addressed in the Whitnash Neighbourhood Plan*." (para 5.1.7 refers). Consequently with the feasibility study now completed and the Neighbourhood Plan having been overwhelming endorsed, the next steps now need to be mapped-out.

3.2 Recommendation 2.2

3.21 A drawback to the options contained within the feasibility study was that WSSC, also based at the Acre Close site, and which runs a variety of sports and social sections (Football (Junior & Senior), Bowls, Tennis, Petanque, Table Tennis, Fishing, Line & Ballroom Dancing and Bingo, Darts, Dominoes, Crib & Pool) was lukewarm to the Hub proposal as it felt there was a danger it could lose its own identity. This view inevitably leads to missed opportunities to bid for funding to cover Community Hub sports provision. However, following a change of Board membership at WSSC this view may be changing thereby providing the opportunity for a reworking of the feasibility study proposals to drive out project cost, make the possibility of sports funding more likely and attract value into a scheme by making available land on the site for alternative uses.

3.22 Initial work has already commenced with ATI Projects Ltd (commissioned through a WDC Executive approved initiative to identify and secure funding for key projects) developing an *option 8* (Appendix 2) to be further examined should WSSC formally agree to sign-up to the development of a scheme.

3.23 Whether WSSC is part of a scheme or not, WTC has expressed a desire to keep ATI Projects Ltd involved and will be seeking funding from its reserves to do this. WDC still has some agreed budget under the ATI Projects Ltd contract it could commit but this will be very much second to a WTC contribution.

3.3 Recommendation 2.3

3.31 Whitnash town benefits from a library situated on Franklin Road. In 2010 as part of the WDC/WCC One Stop Shop programme, the library was refurbished and upgraded to enable a range of new services to be delivered from the building. These included the Town Council's administrative base, the Police's Safer Neighbourhoods Team (since departed), and a team of WDC and WCC advisors providing advice on issues such as benefits, council tax, disabled badges and street lighting to name but a few. Whitnash residents can access a range of services in a welcoming and convenient location. However, its base at Franklin Road does mean that it is separate to the Community Hall based at Acre Close, an issue that the Community Hub is trying to address. It is also the case that due to the need for the public authorities to allocate staff resource across a number of sites, the library/One Stop Shop's opening hours are not as comprehensive as say Kenilworth, Leamington or Warwick's.

3.32 Whitnash library/One Stop Shop opening hours

Day	Details
Monday	10.30 – 17.00
Tuesday	10.30 – 17.00
Wednesday	13.30 – 17.00

Thursday	Closed
Friday	10.30 – 16.00
Saturday	10.30 – 13.30
Sunday	Closed

3.33 Executive members will be aware that at its Committee meeting of 2nd December 2015, it noted a recommendation within the *Digital Transformation of Council Services* report as follows:

"That Executive notes the scope of the One Stop Shop (OSS) service review as agreed with Warwickshire County Council (WCC) at Appendix 2 and agrees to receive a future report detailing the outcome of that review and any consequent recommendations."

3.34 The scope of that review covers Whitnash library/ One Stop Shop and whilst WCC did not initiate the review it has agreed to work constructively with WDC and in respect of Whitnash, it recognises the ambition of the Town Council, as articulated in its Neighbourhood Plan, to have public services at a single location; a Community Hub. WCC has been very clear that there is no political or officer drive to reduce its service offer to Whitnash residents and so it would only support a new location and service delivery model if it does not adversely impact on service provision and the overall running costs.

3.35 The review has now commenced and it is likely that the information contained in this report will play an important part in forming the recommendations coming out of the review.

3.4 <u>Recommendation 2.4</u>

3.41 As described under paragraph 3.1, the feasibility study produced options with significant costs attached to them. Ordinarily this may bring into serious question the viability of a Community Hub even at this early stage but the nascent scheme does have the advantage of large S106 contributions for community facilities either being in place or other large contributions likely to come forward.

3.42 WDC's Major Sites Monitoring Officer has reviewed the current S106 obligations and those likely to come forward when new planning applications are decided (subject to WDC's Submitted Draft Local Plan, including Modifications, being approved) and so calculated the level of funding that could be available to a Community Hub scheme. It is emphasised that the contributions will need to be fair and reasonable but the funding could be as follows:

- Existing s106 that could be used (if agreed) from Chesterton Gardens, Golf Lane and Woodside Farm = £386,148
- New s106 = £550,000 - a combined figure that would include contributions for indoor sports, outdoor sports, footpaths and libraries for

both the AC Lloyd site (500 homes) and the proposal south of Golf Lane (70 homes)
- Potential play area/allotments =£95,000
- Total = **£1,031,148**.

3.43 There would need to be detailed work to determine precisely what the contributions could fund but the aggregation of the contributions does give Members a feel of what could be available for the scheme. It is recognised, however, that although the totality of contributions is encouraging, the funding would not be available in a lump sum meaning that there could be forward funding issues to navigate. Whilst it is too early to go into detail, WTC has indicated that it will look at prudential borrowing should that be necessary to ensure a scheme is deliverable.

3.5 Recommendation 2.5

3.51 Whilst the examination of funding options by TFT was disappointing the subsequent work undertaken by ATI Projects Ltd is much more encouraging. The company has a track record of success in this area and in just the last six months funding bids have been made in respect of St Nicholas Park Tennis Courts (SITA) £19,930 (outcome awaited) and Racing Club Warwick (Football Foundation) £100,000 (successful).

3.52 At Appendix 3 a comprehensive list of the potential funding bodies has been drawn-up. The funding strategy will need to be carefully thought through and access to certain funds will be dependent on whether WSSC wishes to be part of the scheme but should the project move forward, bids can start to be worked-up.

3.53 In addition to funding from charitable and non-government bodies, there may also be funding from WTC and WCC and subject to Executive agreeing recommendation 2.6 of this report, Deputy Chief Executive (AJ) will work with his WCC counterpart to develop a business case to enable WCC to decide whether or not to make investment in a scheme.

3.6 Recommendation 2.6

3.61 The preceding paragraphs have described the status of an aspiration to bring forward a Community Hub for Whitnash. Already in place are a will to succeed; town council political endorsement; community affirmation of the Neighbourhood Plan; land in control of the protagonist; realistic significant funding sources; and project management experience with a track-record of delivery (ATI Projects Ltd). It is therefore recommended that Deputy Chief Executive (AJ) continues his work with WTC and WCC to bring forward a viable scheme.

3.62 It could be argued that the main beneficiary from this initiative will be WTC and that the District Council should not be committing further officer resource. This is not the way this Council has used its community leadership role to support local communities. It has in the recent past overseen (amongst other things) the development of Chase Meadow Community Centre; made funding available for Bishop's Tachbrook Community Centre; supported Racing Club Warwick with its successful funding bid for the development of community services; and brought a number of public services together with the creation of Jubilee House. Whitnash has a strong community identity and it is right that it should have a Community Centre that befits its place as a growing town.

3.63 In giving its agreement to further officer investment to bring forward a scheme, the Executive will be formally acknowledging its support for the concept. Whilst this will be welcomed by WTC and local residents it is also important in making the Council's position clear when it comes to the negotiation of S106 contributions enabling the Planning Authority to give further weight (over and above Policy W1 in the Neighbourhood Plan) to the request for fair and reasonable contributions for a Community Hub scheme.

3.7 Recommendation 2.7

3.71 Over recent years WDC has provided investment in community buildings. Examples include:

- Chase Meadow Community Centre
- Bishop's Tachbrook Community Centre
- Jubilee House
- Various RUCIS grants to by-and-large rural projects
- Lillington library/ One Stop Shop
- Kenilworth library/ One Stop Shop

3.72 It is probably correct to say that these schemes would not happen/ have happened without WDC investment and the public benefits that have accrued from that investment would not have been realised. Whitnash is one of the four towns in the District and through the stewardship of WTC has created a functioning and effective civil society. Yet to provide is residents with a community resource that its growing population requires, funding will be necessary from larger organisations. It is therefore proposed that WDC makes an-principle commitment of £0.5m to be financed from the anticipated 2017/18 NHB allocation.

3.73 For 2016/17 the Council is to receive £2.256m in NHB. The use of this funding was agreed by the Council as part of agreeing the 2016/17 Budget.

3.74 In his Autumn Statement 2015, the Chancellor launched a review of the NHB scheme and it is clear that whatever the outcome of the review, WDC will receive less funding from 2017/18 than it is due to receive for 2016/17. Under the options under consideration within the consultation, the Council should be able to expect a minimum of £1.2m NHB for 2017/18 and optimistically circa £2m, depending on the outcome of the consultation.

3.75 Currently the Council has a commitment from future NHB allocations for Waterloo Housing Group (WHG). For 2017/18 this is likely to be a minimum of £150k, and potentially to up to £250k. The precise sum due will be dependent upon the future of the NHB scheme from 2017/18 following the current consultation and the number of new affordable properties developed by WHG under the joint venture agreement with the District Council. There are undoubtedly other financial claims that could be made on this funding from other areas (see Section 5) but Members do have the ability to choose to make an in-principle allocation to a Community Hub scheme.

3.76 Should Members agree to this in-principle award then a number of safeguards will need to be put in place which will be part of a future report to the Executive viz:

- A business plan covering both revenue and capital implications;

- A grant agreement between WDC and WTC;
- Appropriate legal undertakings;
- Confirmation from this Council's Section 151 officer that the award is affordable and does not prejudice the Council's financial position going forward.

4 POLICY FRAMEWORK

4.1 The Council's Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) has five thematic priorities and three cross-cutting priorities areas. The recommendations in this report are consistent with the strategy in the following ways:

4.11 Health & Wellbeing Priority theme - Increasing opportunities for everyone to engage in sport, the arts and cultural activities.

4.12 Community Engagement & Cohesion - Ensuring our communities have access to high quality services and advice.

4.2 Underpinning the SCS is the Council's Fit For the Future (FFF) change programme which consists of three strands:

Service - Delivering customer focused services by: using customer measures, helping to build trust, continuously improving, understanding our customers, and using systems thinking.

People – Valuing our staff, empowering our staff, supporting our staff through change, ensuring our communication is clear and regular.

Money – Managing the resources appropriately to balance our budget, ensuring our assets work for us, ensuring our town centres are vibrant and create solutions to increase our revenue.

4.21 The recommendations within this report are consistent with all three strands but particularly in relation to building trust with our communities and partners and ensuring vibrant town centres.

4.3 The S106 contributions that will be necessary to help fund a Community Centre are/ would be as a consequence of land allocations that have either been agreed by Planning Committee or are proposed in the Submitted Draft Local Plan.

5 BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

5.1 There is no impact on the Council's current budget or budgetary framework as a consequence of the recommendations in this report, however, there is an opportunity cost of Executive agreeing an in-principle grant as the anticipated funding could be deployed elsewhere. The allocation of Deputy Chief Executive resource brings no additional cost and can be managed within his work programme agreed with the Chief Executive. Should further support be needed from ATI Projects Ltd then there is sufficient budget for this although as described in the report, it is anticipated that WTC will be providing funding to procure the company's services.

5.2 As discussed in section 3.7, based on current information, WDC will receive NHB funding of at least £1.2m for 207/18. Of that at least £150k is committed to Waterloo Housing Group leaving an unallocated amount of potentially over £1m. WDC has managed its finances prudently through the period of austerity and has not used NHB to support core service provision. However, there are still many demands on the Council such as its built assets, open space, car parks and office equipment which are not budgeted for, or funded. Officers have factored some funding of these demands into the on-going revenue budget but a case can always be made for investment elsewhere. Ultimately it is a choice for Members having received the appropriate officer advice but on what is known at present, it would not be an unreasonable use of the Council's anticipated funding to make an in-principle decision to allocate £0.5m for a Community Hub scheme. Confirmation of this decision could not be made until the Council has considered a viable business case as discussed in Section 3.5 and agrees the use of its NHB and Budget for 2017/18.

5.3 As a result of planning consents at Chesterton Gardens, Golf Lane and Woodside Farm, £386,148 could be available for a scheme with potentially a further c£650,000 coming from anticipated planning applications. A lot more work will need to be undertaken to validate these figures for a final business case but it is helpful to understand at this point the extent of funding that may well be available.

6 RISKS

6.1 This report does not recommend that the Council finances a Community Hub at this point in time as the in-principle decision is subject to receipt of a comprehensive business case. Therefore the risks are:

- That a senior officer's time is committed to an aspiration that has little chance of delivery;
- That finance is ring-fenced (both NHB and S106 monies) for a scheme that is not deliverable.

6.2 These risks will be managed by the regular reporting of progress by the Deputy Chief Executive to the Chief Executive through their monthly 1-1 meetings. Should it be considered that a scheme is not deliverable, discussions will be had with WTC and WCC.

7 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

7.1 At this time no alternative options were considered as it is officers' view that there is a realistic possibility that a Community Hub scheme can be delivered and that it merits the investment of resource to try and achieve this.