

Community Assets

Issues & Opportunities



December 2025

DRAFT

INTRODUCTION

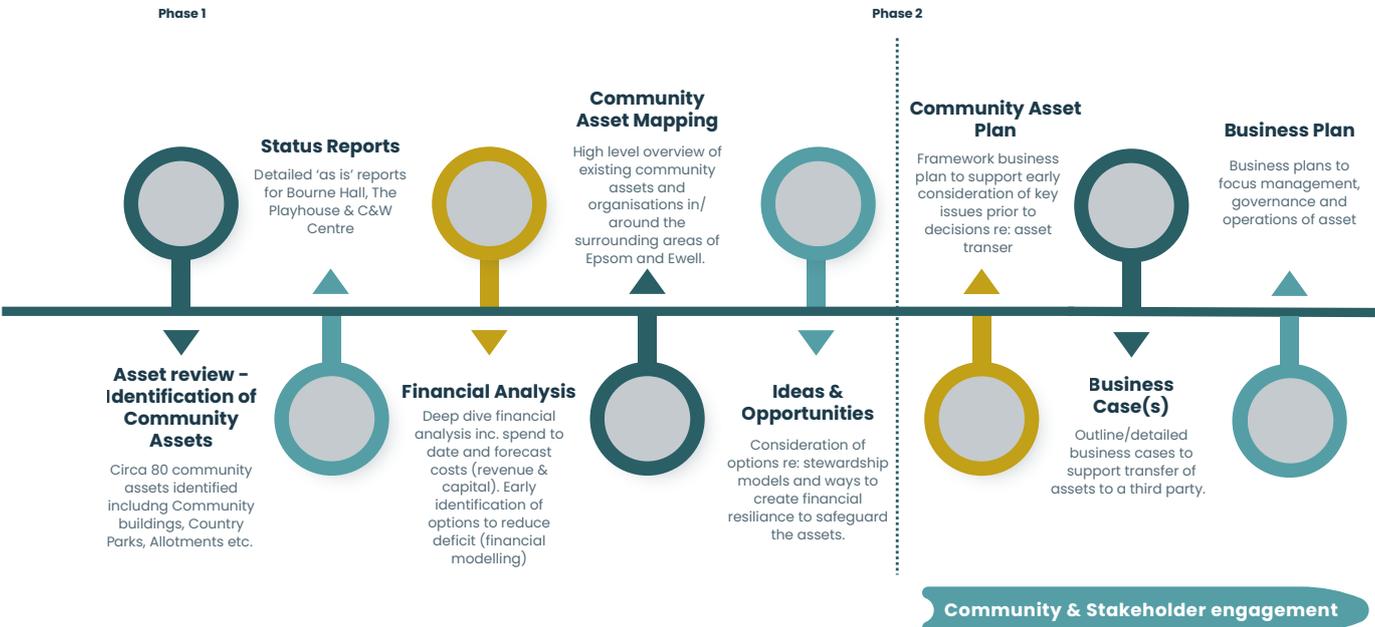
Epsom & Ewell Borough is a borough rich in community assets. The Council owns and is responsible for a number of those key assets and has long provided support through both its Place Leadership role, as well as through extensive officer and funding support. The Venues Community Commercial Service are proactive and creative in seeking to find ways to enhance and develop the facilities and their services, with the Property Team managing the assets both in terms of planned maintenance and capital investment.

In 2025 the Council undertook a Strategic Asset Review (Strategic Priority 4) and as part of that work, it identified over 80 assets held for community purposes;



The Council has also been consulting on proposals to create a Community Council under a Community Governance Review (CGR) process. One of the objectives of the Asset Review work was to identify those assets that could be considered for transfer to a new Community Council, as well as consider the financial (revenue and capital) implications of any such transfer. In parallel, the Government has recently confirmed the new shape of Local Authorities in Surrey as part of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process. As such and notwithstanding the outcome of the CGR, it is considered prudent to review these Community Assets, put them on a sustainable footing and prepare them for onward transfer..

The routemap below sets out the broad direction of travel for this workstream.



The **first phase** of this work has primarily been focussed on creating a stronger and shared understanding of the 'as is' arrangements for the assets. This has included reviewing previous work carried out and looking at the current operating model, approach to asset management and the financial implications (revenue and capital). The more detailed work has focussed on the key community buildings;

- Bourne Hall, Ewell
- The Playhouse, Epsom
- Community & Wellbeing Centre

In parallel, alongside some initial community mapping, early ideas and thoughts have been developed to consider how the assets and services delivered can be put on a more sustainable footing, including alternative stewardship models and opportunities for a more resilient financial plan.



Ultimately the Council's aim is to make best use of the facilities in the short term, while putting them in the strongest position possible, such that they can continue to support the local community into the future - preparing them for transfer to either a new Community Council, the Unitary Council or even an alternative stewardship model.

The purpose of this paper is to capture those early thoughts and ideas to enable them to be explored and developed as part of the second phase of this work. The next phase of this work will seek to prioritise and develop these ideas further, identifying a long term plan (Community Asset Plan) for the assets. Subject to the Council's requirements, this could take the form of a strategic roadmap setting out the long term plan, including a plan for future investment and ownership, but importantly supported by a clear short term action plan to identify the tangible and deliverable steps that can be taken within existing budget, resources and timelines.

IDEAS & OPPORTUNITIES

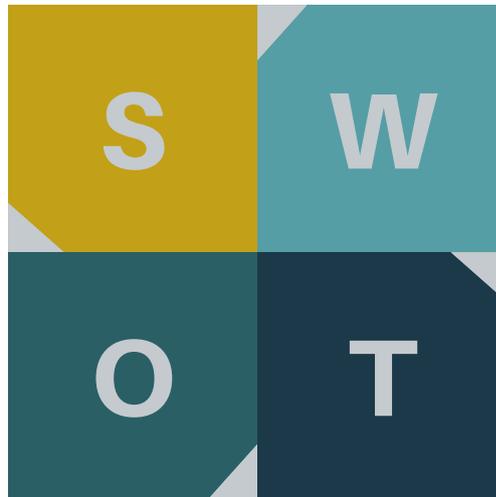
Below is a headline SWOT analysis to aid broad thinking about the Community Assets and to set a broad framework and context for future detailed work.

STRENGTHS

Fantastic & diverse range of well loved and well used community assets.
Strong & supportive leadership
Passionate and creative staff

OPPORTUNITIES

LGR may provide opportunities to consolidate assets and work at scale
Scope for further income generation and alternative funding streams to be secured.
Options around stewardship models
Scope for alternative operating regimes



WEAKNESSES

Level of subsidy currently required
LA accounting approach -LA accounting approach using internal recharges does not support commercial decision making
Significant capital investment required going forward

THREATS

LGR may pose a threat to the Community Facilities as efficiency drive/savings are likely to be identified



The following sections set out a range of ideas, which could be explored and considered further.

Mindful of budget and timelines, it is suggested that this document acts as a 'longlist' and that they be refined and prioritised in terms of areas for further work.

The ideas & opportunities are considered under the following themes for ease, although it should be noted that there will be cross-over between these themes. Other ideas and options will emerge and it will be critical to work with the service managers and wider operational team to help shape and refine the future areas of focus.



STRATEGIC

There are likely to be a number of both challenges and opportunities for the Borough's Community Assets in light of Local Government Reorganisation. Regardless of where the assets end up being transferred into (Unitary, Community Council or other) it will be important that there is a clear, robust and sustainable plan for each asset, acting as the foundation for a long term sustainable future and to support future decision making.

Set out below are some of the broader strategic issues that could be considered – some of these are explored in more detail in the sections below.

-  Work with new unitary partner authorities (& other LAs as helpful) to understand their community asset base, management, operational and financial model, along with their strategic plans for their community assets. Identify and explore synergies and opportunities for creative and joint working in advance of LGR.
-  Work with Surrey County Council to bring them into the Bourne Hall discussions and to explore opportunities to reconfigure space/amend lease arrangements sooner rather than later (in light of LGR).
-  Engage specialist experts in the arts/culture space to aid development of thinking around Epsom Playhouse (& Bourne Hall as appropriate) and to support the development of future business plans.
-  Capture the story to the venues (past, present and future) to build a narrative which helps to shape the future, strengthen the brand and support funding bids and business plan development.
-  Consider the strategic development options of Bourne Hall to include alternative uses for The Lodge, Bungalow, Park, car park AND the main building.
-  Consider other income generating assets that the council could endow to any stewardship organisation to generate income. To be explore further in the financial section.

FINANCIAL

There is currently a ~£4.2m annual Council subsidy (as per the published budget for 25/26) to operate the Council's Community Assets, which include Bourne Hall, Playhouse, the C&W Centre and other facilities such as Country Parks and allotments. More detailed financial analysis has taken place and it is recommended this work continues. Some key areas for further consideration are;

Local Authority Accounting Approach

A Local Authority accounting approach using internal recharges does not easily support commercial decision making. Analysis of the methodology of allocating costs to facilities should be reviewed. Each facility has a mixture of direct costs, plus allocations of centralised Council overheads of £477k in FY25-26. These re-charges cover items such as management, IT, HR and procurement. **The aim of cost allocation is two-fold;**

- 1 To ensure that costs are recovered through the organisation in order to understand the true cost of running each function. The allocation methodology is more suited to a Service Provider, rather than a commercial operator that generates income, like the facilities being considered.
- 2 To ensure that the costs allocated drive management and to understand the implications of expansion and growth of operations. For example, one extra member of staff costing £20k p.a. may be able to generate £30k more gross profit by supporting additional sales at the café at Bourne Hall. This would lead to incremental surplus income, but if the new role attracts an inflated allocation of central costs, rather than an incremental allocation of central costs, then management would **incorrectly conclude** that increasing sales has led to a deficit.

Opportunities to reduce cost

It is suggested there is a review of the services delivered from each of the facilities to explore potential for:

1. Reduction in any duplicate running costs e.g. for heating and lighting
2. Opportunities to consolidate activities
3. Review of overheads
4. Opportunities to generate revenue savings and/or deliver capital receipts.
5. Opportunities to look at expenses (& associated income) with items like car parking and property maintenance.

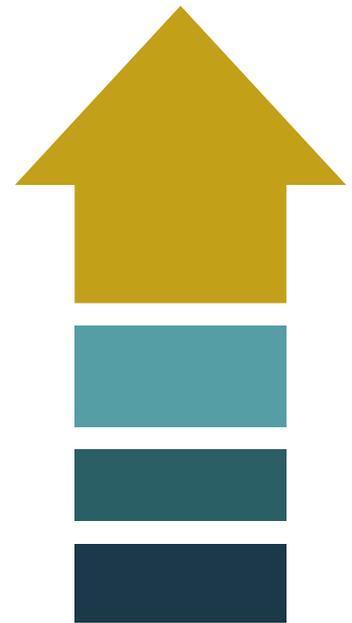


In order to save cost on heating and maintenance in any assets, it may be necessary to further invest in up-to-date heating systems, for example at Bourne Hall.

FINANCIAL

Opportunities to increase income

- Increased **utilisation of facilities** leading to spin-off F&B sales for eg. at BH – meeting rooms targeting 40% utilisation, rather than 12% to 20%.
- Enhancing the **technology** within existing meeting rooms to make them more appealing to a wider audience. E.g. video conferencing equipment.
- Increase the ratio of **anchor tenants**, for example small business start-ups or rent-a-desk. This helps to de-risk cashflow by generating a predictable revenue stream and generates more footfall leading to café sales. For example, there are many rooms in Bourne Hall that are currently used in a minimal way for administration, museum storage or by the NewSPAL.



Is there a better venue for NewSPAL. E.g, a dedicated storage facility where items can be shipped easily around the County?



The museum uses some prime space for storing artifacts. There may be better storage options, that would then open up prime space for other uses?



Could some users be consolidated into existing rooms, opening up space for other paying users or for rented storage e.g. church and other clubs?

- Swap the **library** in Bourne Hall to the centre of the building and the café to the library venue. This provides a better experience for the high footfall café and provides café users with a view of the park and closer to the external café seating area.
- Seek **cultural and community grants**. These applications have not been successful, so consider engaging consultants to generate a couple of bids on a no-win, no fee basis and learn from their successes. Then Council staff can leverage the successful approaches.
- Explore **alternative revenue streams** including income from CIL and S106, for capex and revenue funding. For example, County archiving; explore whether S106 sums could be passed onto the BH museum to offset costs. Review the Planning policy to require sums from developers, if it is not already a requirement.

Management Reporting

- Review the use of the **Sales booking tool** so that it can provide helpful information to support decision making about utilisation and income. Although the data appears at first glance to be very detailed, it generates some misleading information regarding room utilisation in certain circumstances. An upgrade to the software and some configuration changes should make it possible to deliver better information via standard reports.

SERVICES/OFFER

The service/programme offer should drive the requirements for the operations of the venues (see next page), with the service/programme offer being informed by local need and aspiration.

Community capacity building is key to delivering more, with other local service providers and volunteers bringing resource, funding, resilience and expertise to the table. The current Team has delivered extraordinary change to the venues since they have taken them over. The creation of further capacity should now include community development action working with other providers and volunteers to build local ownership and long term resilience, meaning less core reliance on Council staff. Building community capacity will be key to success and will move the venues closer to a model more akin to a community run approach.

The **community asset mapping** already completed helps to inform the local community offer and identify key local organisations, stakeholders and users who are acting or involved locally. No conversations with local operators have taken place as yet to deepen the current understanding and to build a knowledge of the local challenges and risks facing the community and voluntary sector. Building relationships with these operators and users of the venues will be a key part of the next stage.

There is always value in learning from others and identifying **best practice organisations** from which ideas and learning can be drawn and implemented locally. It would be incredibly valuable for Council project leads to visit community organisations who are operating services and programmes in historical buildings and conduct site visits to establish key learning points.

Chichester Community Development Trust was created about 15 years ago as a result of new housing development on a Homes England site. The Trust has since become a national award winner and has developed buildings of a historical nature to deliver community services and protect them in perpetuity. These include a listed water tower, stables and a church! They have secured grants which amount to many millions and are hugely successful locally.

In order to support the council's position, further improve the service offer and income generating opportunities of Bourne Hall and Epsom Playhouse, additional work could be undertaken to create an action plan which looks to take advantage of local gaps in service provision or spaces for hire, complementing the existing offer across the borough. This work could include consideration of the following;

- How the council could work with the **existing voluntary and community sector** to seek their input and support to protect BH and the PH. This could potentially be achieved through the creation of a working group, coordinated by the Council and positioned in a way which is seeking to support and underpin the Borough's offer, building on local community capacity and providing complementary services and support to a sector which is typically over stretched, under financed and under resourced. Potential connections with organisations/groups such as Connect and Support Surrey could support this agenda.

SERVICES/OFFER

- Work with peers in **neighbouring authorities** to start a conversation about the future of unitary wide community services and facilities. What are their ambitions and are there opportunities to work together now to refine and sustain Bourne Hall and Epsom Playhouse? Are they delivering similar services to those delivered from the Community and Wellbeing Centre which could be jointly delivered to reduce costs or are there community organisations in the wider area delivering similar services which could extend their services to Epsom and Ewell, protecting the services for the community long term? Link the outcomes of this work to the working group identified above.
- Conduct a **holistic review** of Bourne Hall in terms of its functions, spaces, uses and offer.
 - Consider and understand the limitations of the Listed Status and how this may affect programming/services.
 - Identify and agree the Unique Selling Point (USP) for each venue and how these fit with the local offer and community need
 - Give further consideration to the development of the museum – revisit the current location as part of the overall consideration of Bourne Hall. Is the current location the right space? How can further funding be secured to support the modernisation of the museum eg use of tech?
 - Consider how to reconfigure spaces to better fit a renewed vision/purpose eg move café into library space and generate further income
 - Extend the kitchen to better accommodate the Meals on Wheels service and hot food offer in café
 - Look at the long term provision of space for Surrey Pals. Is Bourne Hall the right location? Does the Council own another space suitable for Surrey Pals?
 - Are there services, hires or functions which could be stopped, reframed, increased or consolidated? Conduct a review and establish potential changes
 - What other service partners could be brought in to increase offer/provide rental income?
 - Are the NHS looking for rental spaces to deliver preventative services that could complement the Health and Wellbeing Centre services and GP Practice adjacent to Bourne Hall.
 - Can spaces to accommodate private health services such as physio, osteopath and beauty be easily and efficiently be accommodated in BH to create a quick win?
 - Identify which of the ideas above (and more) could be achieved at pace to drive income to BH.
- Conduct a similar **review for Epsom Playhouse**, noting its niche offer and therefore more limited potential market. Bring in specialist advisers to bring national experience and expertise to the table
- Consider further **environmental improvements** such as grey water[SAI] recycling and electric car charging to reduce utility bills, provide an additional service to residents and raise income.

OPERATIONAL

Changes have already been made to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the venues' operations.

To further support the creation of an optimal environment to aid growth in the business, there are a number of further changes which could be made and which include;

- Further evolving and embracing a management approach which supports a commercial approach to venue operations, moving away from LA methodologies
- Considering opportunities for apprenticeship/internship programme for BH, museum and PH
- Creating a hirers/tenants 'forum' to receive feedback (can be virtual and physical)

Bourne Hall

Bourne Hall has a wide variety of hireable/lettable spaces which serves a varied range of hirers. However, with some re-organisation/refurbishment of existing spaces, it could deliver even more. The ideas below focus on those which can be implemented now with no/limited changes to existing spaces;

- Opening hours - look to extend/amend opening hours to meet local demand e.g. Sunday café offer working alongside Church hirer (end exclusive use)
- How can the existing booking tool be adapted to reduce the number of manual overrides required e.g. acoustic issues between rooms A, B & C? Is there a better system out there which suits the team's needs?
- Revisit hire charges policy and procedures to ensure parity across all hirers (including long standing ones) and benchmark against other local venues
- Develop a volunteer programme for BH/museum- establish opportunities, roles, etc
- Consider an indoor farmers market (or outdoors in the car park/park), community foodbank/shop, warm space, co-working space or other ideas which would drive footfall to the venue
- Explore the potential to extend the museum outreach programme (secure funding to support)
- Could the roof space in BH be used for art installations or other uses?
- Interim measure until café offer is extended; could a local coffee cart provider be outside of BH/in the Park outside of BH café opening times?



OPERATIONAL

Epsom Playhouse

The Playhouse has more limited scope to flex its offer, particularly in the theatre, where it is more difficult to radically change the layout and neither would one want to, given the niche and unique market of a theatre. However, there are other spaces in the building which could (and do) flex could be used for alternative purposes to support income generation and raise the visibility of the venue;

- Consider extending the volunteer programme to other functions in the Playhouse, e.g. lighting engineer, caretaking
- Offer 'Behind the Scenes Tours' (already in motion)
- Offer corporate team building days
- Given the niche and specialist nature of a theatre, it is believed that with specialised input and advice, the council could be supported to implement new innovations by both taking best practice from elsewhere and through seeking advice and support from specialist advisor/s to take Epsom Playhouse to the next level.



MARKETING & PROMOTION

Understanding the **place and value** held by the venues and services delivered from them locally is key to success.

Understanding the **current and future target markets** will help to inform service planning and ensure maximum value (financial and community need) is derived from changes. With this intelligence, the current offer can flex to fill gaps to accommodate new audiences/users.

The **community asset mapping** has been helpful in identifying the local demographic across the borough. Further work now to identify the target market for the venues will enable the branding, marketing and promotion to be more focused on reaching out to existing and new audiences. This will inform the marketing and promotion plan.

The work described in previous sections to collaborate with the local community and voluntary sector will help to inform future marketing and promotion.

Further work with local residents/users to seek their feedback on the venues, their service offer and future requirements from the spaces would be helpful. This could be achieved through focus group sessions and a wider survey.

Furthermore, the following could be undertaken;

- Review the branding for each venue in light of any feedback from residents/users/stakeholders to support and underpin the narrative of the spaces
- Ensure that any promotion tools/avenues used are adequately articulating the 'offer' and hitting the right notes for the customer eg are the websites of the right calibre to attract key audiences?
- Promotion routes; consideration to using more visual promotion tools, such as film clips and posting them on TikTok, reaching out to a new audience
- Ensure the use of social media is regular, current and the content of interest to the customer
- Celebrate successes, new clients, users and the achievements of those groups
- Use promotion tools to create a networks of followers who actively engage with your promotional pieces and become advocates for you, helping to sell your services through 'word of mouth'
- What other channels are out there that the venue teams could utilize?
- In order to make best use of social media channels, the staff team at the venues should have authority to control the marketing and promotion so that it is timely, dynamic and 'of the moment.
- Develop a membership programme for Epsom Playhouse, providing benefits to local people. Maybe provide them with a 'members only' area of the website which shares particular narratives or offers 'early bird' ticket sales which only they have access to.

The refinement, refreshing and extension of current marketing and promotion approaches will have a significant impact on the profile and reputation of the venues. The preparation work and discussion with the community, will provide valuable insight into the views of existing users/hirers but extend the venues reach to new audiences. This work need not be of significant cost, but there may be value in securing some external support and expertise to help place the websites in the right dimensions

ASSET & FACILITY MANAGEMENT

The buildings, land and infrastructure provide a wealth of opportunity, but are also potential liabilities, given the level of both capital investment required and revenue resource needed to maintain and operate them.

The Council has invested significant capital over the last few years and maintained the buildings proactively and as best as possible within the resources available. However, additional significant investment is required both in the short and long term and it is unlikely that the Council will have access to the level of capital required. This needs to be factored into any future business planning and decision making.

A number of ideas and options relating to how the buildings' use could be optimised have been highlighted in this document, with some further areas that could be considered further set out below;

Capital investment

The Property Team, working alongside the Service Managers, has done a great deal of work to consider what further capital works are required and this is set out in the Council's Asset Management Strategy, as well as considered annually as part of the Capital Programme and Asset Management Process. However, it may be prudent to undertake further structural and or condition surveys to provide a more detailed view and costed plan, with proposed phasing of works. This should include items like asbestos and other abnormal costs (including matters relating to some of the building's Listed status). This will be particularly relevant if the assets are to be transferred to a Community Council or alternative community organisation.

Ownership Models

Currently the assets are all owned and managed directly by the Council, with the Council having full responsibility for the assets themselves. Moving forward, there are a number of different options in terms of both ownership and division of responsibility for the external (structure) and internal repair & maintenance of the assets themselves, as well as day to day management. These options should be considered in more detail, alongside the work to consider optimum stewardship models, to ensure responsibility sits with competent organisations who have the appropriate capabilities and are clear about their obligations.



ASSET & FACILITY MANAGEMENT

Alterations and conversions

To further optimise the use of the assets, there may be a requirement for further capital works in the form of alterations and or conversion of existing space. These works should be considered as part of the future plan and there will need to be business cases made for any further investment, taking into account any financial and social returns.

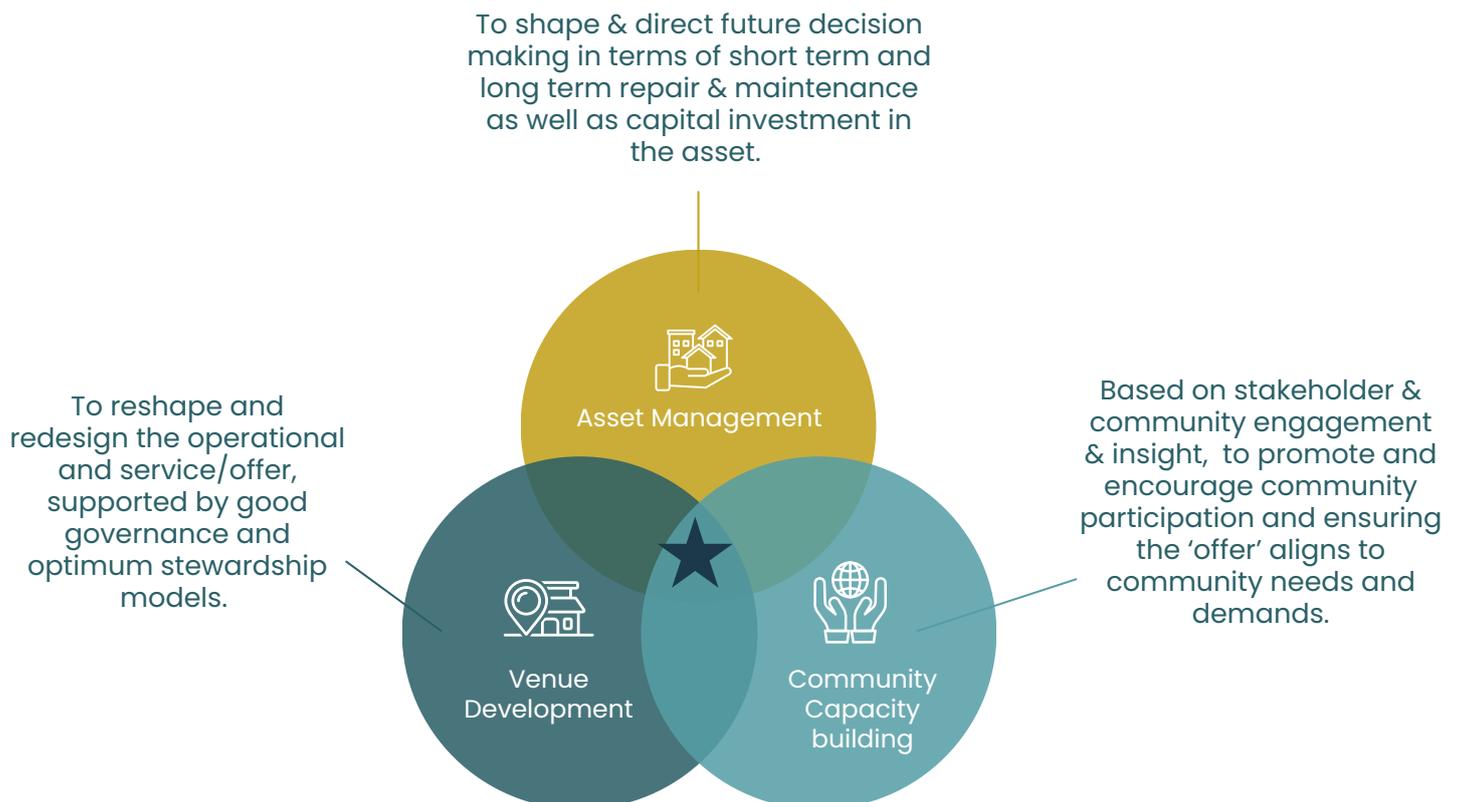
Environmental Enhancements

While the Council has already begun to invest in environmental enhancements in its assets, there are further investments that could be made which would both increase the efficiency of existing green investments and increase the use of green energy. This will in turn drive down longer term energy costs.



RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

It is recommended that the second phase of work consider these ideas further, with a view to developing a long term plan for the assets in the form of a **Community Asset Plan**. The Community Asset Plan would bring together the ambitions for the Community Asset, aligning future investment in the physical (building and sites) to the needs of the community, supported by an optimum operating model. It would support the development of business cases for asset transfer and set the framework for a future detailed business case for each asset.



The items listed above are some which collectively and individually could have an impact on the community offer and help to improve the bottom line of the community spaces. Once the holistic reviews are conducted and the outcomes assimilated, the Council will be in a better position to make decision about immediate changes which are low cost/low resource input and longer term changes which require additional finance and greater resource planning. The outcomes will help to inform the business case for any Community Asset Transfer.

In terms of practical next steps, it is suggested the ideas set out in this paper are considered (& expanded as helpful) and then developed as part of the second phase of this work. Stakeholder and Community engagement will be an important part of the next phase of the work to both build on the Community Asset Mapping work already undertaken and engage the local community.

It will be important that the long term plan for the assets is supported by a clear short term action plan, which identifies the tangible and deliverable steps that can be taken by the Council over the next 18 months, mindful of existing budgets, resources and LGR framework and timelines.