Community Stewardship Solutions

CLARE CHESTER CONSULTING

Community Asset Review

Bourne Hall, Epsom Playhouse & Community & Wellbeing Centre

JUNE 2026

DRAFT

EPSOM & EWELL BOROUGH COUNCIL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is at a significant point of transition. Increasing financial pressures, changes associated with Local Government Reorganisation, and growing demand for community, cultural and wellbeing services require the Council to take a strategic and long-term approach to its community assets.

This report provides a high-level strategic overview of the future direction for three of the Council's significant community and cultural assets: **Bourne Hall**, **Epsom Playhouse** and the **Community & Wellbeing Centre**. It builds on previous operational, financial and asset reviews and sets out a strategic direction focused on improving long-term financial sustainability while protecting and enhancing community value. It seeks to increase utilisation and income generation across the assets, strengthen partnership opportunities and align the portfolio with future service delivery priorities, supporting the development of a more modern, resilient and strategically coordinated borough-wide offer.

The **Community Asset Review** identifies a significant opportunity to reposition these assets as integrated, multi-functional community destinations that support culture, wellbeing, civic identity and local economic activity. The overall strategic direction promotes a more coordinated cross-asset approach, underpinned by increased partnership-led delivery, targeted capital investment and improved operational efficiency. Collectively, these measures are intended to strengthen commercial resilience, enhance accessibility and maximise the wider community impact of the Council's key cultural and community assets.

Collectively, these proposals represent an opportunity to safeguard important community infrastructure while creating a more financially sustainable and strategically aligned portfolio of assets for the future. The review concludes that maintaining the status quo is unlikely to be financially sustainable over the medium to long term. Instead, a phased programme of investment, rationalisation and operating model reform is required.

- For **Bourne Hall,** the recommended strategic direction is the development of an integrated civic and cultural hub held by a local authority, improving connectivity between the library, museum, café, events and community functions.

- For **Epsom Playhouse**, the recommended direction is a transition towards an independent charitable trust operating model, supported by targeted investment to improve flexibility, programming and commercial performance.

- For the **Community & Wellbeing Centre**, the recommended approach is a partnership-led delivery model, with rationalisation of the site and consideration of future co-location opportunities where appropriate.

INTRODUCTION

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council owns and operates several significant cultural, civic and community assets which contribute to the social, economic and cultural life of the borough. These assets provide important community infrastructure, support local wellbeing, contribute to placemaking and identity, and create opportunities for engagement, participation and local economic activity.

However, these assets are operating within an increasingly challenging environment characterised by ongoing financial pressure on local government, rising operational and maintenance costs, increasing expectations around accessibility and sustainability, changing audience and service-user behaviour, growing pressure to demonstrate social value and measurable impact, and wider uncertainty associated with Local Government Reorganisation.

The Council has therefore commissioned a strategic review to consider the future role, sustainability and operating models for three key assets: **Bourne Hall**, **Epsom Playhouse, Community & Wellbeing Centre.**

This Community Asset Review forms a second phase of work already undertaken, as shown in the strategic roadmap below;

Strategic roadmap

INTRODUCTION

The Community Asset Review sits within a broader strategic context of organisational change and increasing pressure on local authority resources. The following themes are particularly relevant to this review.

Financial Sustainability

Local authorities continue to face significant budget pressures alongside rising energy, staffing and maintenance costs with the assets being subsidised at a rate of £1.8m per annum (based on the 25/26 approved budget and analysis of relevant cost centres) Traditional operating models for community and cultural assets are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain without reform, investment and/or partnership working. The Council needs to consider how these assets can generate higher levels of income, improve operational efficiency and reduce reliance on subsidy over time, while also positioning themselves to access a wider range of external funding opportunities to support future investment and long-term sustainability.

Local Government Reorganisation

The transition towards a future East Surrey Authority creates additional uncertainty around asset ownership, governance and long-term operational arrangements. There is therefore a need to establish clearer financial baselines, strengthen business planning and improve overall asset performance to position these assets more strategically and sustainably for the future, particularly within the context of ongoing organisational change and Local Government Reorganisation.

Community Demand and Wellbeing

Demand for community, cultural and wellbeing services continue to grow. There is increasing national recognition that community assets play a significant role in supporting prevention and early intervention, improving mental health and wellbeing, strengthening social inclusion, encouraging cultural participation and building wider community resilience. As a result, these assets are increasingly viewed not simply as buildings, but as important components of local social infrastructure and place-based service delivery.

Asset Optimisation

A key finding from the review is that these three assets contain underused or constrained spaces. There is an opportunity to improve use across the asset portfolio by rationalising low-value or underused space, increasing flexibility in how buildings are configured and used, improving visitor flow and accessibility, and creating additional income-generating opportunities that strengthen both operational performance and long-term sustainability.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

Options considered and rationale

The development of the recommended stewardship and delivery model was informed through a structured **options appraisal process** undertaken across Bourne Hall, Epsom Playhouse and the Community Health & Wellbeing Centre. This process considered operational sustainability, community impact, financial resilience, governance flexibility, investment requirements, and long-term strategic fit.

While each asset has distinct operational characteristics and opportunities, a consistent theme emerged throughout the appraisal process: a single uniform operating model would not optimise the performance or long-term sustainability of all three assets. Instead, the evidence supported a more flexible and tailored approach that balances strategic Council oversight with specialist partnership-led delivery.

The following sets out the options considered and a brief outline commentary.

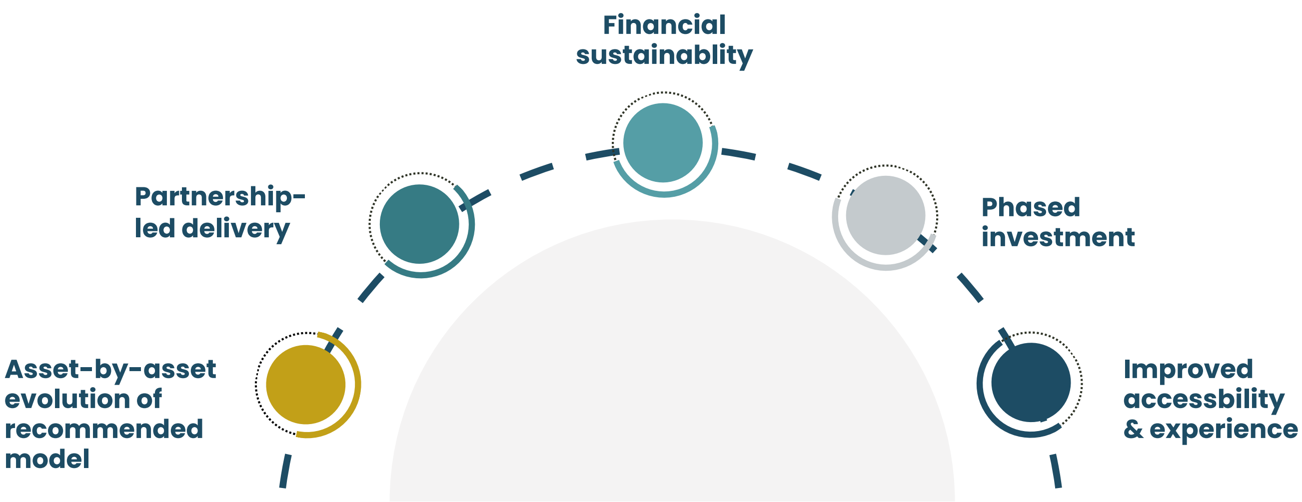
1. **Retain existing in-house Council model**
   Considered financially unsustainable as a long-term solution across the portfolio
2. **Full externalisation/commercial outsourcing**
   Not recommended due to risk to community outcomes and place-based objectives
3. **Community Asset Transfer (CAT)**
   Considered viable for selected assets but not appropriate uniformly across all sites
4. **Single Integrated Trust across all assets**
   Rejected in favour of more tailored stewardship arrangements
5. **Distributed Stewardship & Partnership Model**
   Recommended strategy direction as provides tailored solution

STRATEGIC APPROACH

The recommended distributed stewardship model emerged through comparative assessment of the operational realities, market opportunities and long-term sustainability requirements associated with each asset. The appraisal process identified several consistent findings:

Key Finding	Implication
The assets perform fundamentally different functions	A single governance or operating model would not effectively support all venues
Specialist expertise is required in arts, culture, wellbeing and community service delivery	Sector-led organisations are better positioned to operate certain assets
External funding opportunities are increasingly tied to charitable or partnership-led models	Greater independence increases access to grant and philanthropic funding
Current operating models rely heavily on Council subsidy and cross-subsidy arrangements	Greater diversification of income and operational responsibility is required
Community expectations increasingly favour collaborative and participatory approaches	Partnership-led stewardship aligns more closely with modern civic asset management
The Council still requires strategic influence over place-based outcomes	Full disposal or complete withdrawal from oversight was not considered appropriate

The review recommends a strategic direction based on a coordinated cross-asset approach. Rather than considering each venue in isolation, the assets should be viewed within the context of both wider Council assets, as well as facilities in the wider geography. The proposed strategic approach is based on the following principles.



Asset-by-Asset Evolution of the Recommended Model

Bourne Hall – Evolution Towards Retained Civic Stewardship

Options Considered	Rationale
Maintain current operating arrangements with incremental improvements	Would not sufficiently address spatial inefficiencies or unlock wider strategic potential
Full external management or transfer	Considered inconsistent with Bourne Hall's role as a core civic and heritage asset
Integrated civic hub model with retained Council oversight	Identified as best balancing civic identity, strategic control and partnership-led activation

The recommended direction for Bourne Hall therefore is a Council-retained civic stewardship model, supported by increased collaboration with cultural, commercial and community partners. This reflects Bourne Hall's strategic importance as a flagship civic, cultural and community destination.

The review proposes that assets including Bourne Hall increasingly operate as flexible, multi-functional community destinations rather than single-purpose buildings. This means creating spaces that support community activity, wellbeing services, cultural participation, learning opportunities and commercial uses within a more integrated operating model. By broadening the role of each venue, the Council can strengthen community impact while also improving long-term sustainability and resilience.

Epsom Playhouse – Evolution Towards Independent Cultural Stewardship

Options Considered	Rationale
Continue direct Council management	Increasingly financially challenging and out of alignment with wider theatre sector trends
Commercial operator model	Risk prioritising commercial return over cultural and community outcomes
Independent charitable trust or specialist arts organisation	Offered strongest balance of financial resilience, funding access and cultural development

Benchmarking and sector analysis demonstrated that charitable trust and independent arts models are increasingly standard across the UK theatre sector and provide greater access to Arts Council funding, philanthropy and operational flexibility. This led to the recommended direction of transferring operational stewardship to a purpose-led cultural organisation through lease, licence or trust arrangements, while maintaining strategic alignment with Council priorities.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

Community & Wellbeing Centre – Evolution Towards Hybrid Regeneration and Stewardship

Options Considered	Rationale
Retain existing standalone building and management structure	Limited long-term financial sustainability and constrained income generation
Full disposal and relocation of services	Risks loss of community identity and accessibility concerns
Partial redevelopment with retained community provision	Creates opportunity to balance capital receipt, retained services and long-term sustainability
Third-sector stewardship model	Better aligned with preventative health, community wellbeing and funding opportunities

The resulting recommended approach combines: partial redevelopment and housing-led regeneration; retention of core community and wellbeing functions; and stewardship by a specialist third-sector organisation. This model was identified as offering the best balance between financial sustainability, social value and long-term community benefit.

Partnership-Led Delivery

A consistent theme throughout the review is the importance of stronger partnership-led delivery. There is a significant opportunity to work more closely with cultural organisations, health partners, community organisations, specialist providers and commercial operators across all of the assets.

A partnership-based approach for ownership and delivery for the Community and Wellbeing Centre would enable access to additional expertise, greater operational flexibility and wider external funding opportunities. It would also support a more collaborative delivery model in which risk, innovation and service delivery can be shared more effectively across organisations.

Financial Sustainability

The review identifies a need to move towards a more sustainable financial model through;

- Diversified income streams
- Improved commercial activity
- Better use of space
- Reduced operational inefficiencies
- Reduced utility costs after infrastructure investment
- Long-term capital planning

STRATEGIC APPROACH

Phased Investment

A phased investment approach is recommended, balancing:

- Immediate quick wins
- Medium-term transformation
- Long-term infrastructure investment

This would allow improvements to be delivered progressively while minimising disruption.

Improved Accessibility and Experience

Across all assets there is scope o improve:

- Unique Selling Point (USP) and branding
- Accessibility
- Visitor flow
- Wayfinding
- Inclusivity
- Overall user experience

BOURNE HALL

Bourne Hall is one of the borough's most important civic and community assets. Elements of the building are listed including an internal wall and staircase. The building occupies a prominent position within the borough and plays an important role in community identity and engagement. It combines;

- library services
- community spaces
- museum provision
- café facilities
- events and conferencing
- public and civic functions

The review identifies Bourne Hall as the asset with the greatest opportunity for transformation across the Council's portfolio and that it should be retained within a local authority portfolio working with stakeholders, hirers and partners.

The **proposed strategic direction** is to reposition the building as a fully integrated civic and cultural hub with stronger connections between community services, cultural activity and commercial uses.

Central to this approach is improving the relationship between currently fragmented spaces and creating a more cohesive visitor experience throughout the building. This includes;

- enhancing accessibility and flow
- rationalising under used areas
- strengthening commercial activity
- expanding community and wellbeing uses in a way that supports both social value and long-term sustainability

The current layout creates fragmentation between users. There is an opportunity to create stronger integration between: the library, Museum provision, Café spaces, Community and event areas, Outdoor spaces and parkland.

This would create a more cohesive and engaging visitor experience. Several areas within the building are currently under used or used inefficiently, presenting an opportunity for rationalisation and reconfiguration to improve both functionality and financial sustainability.

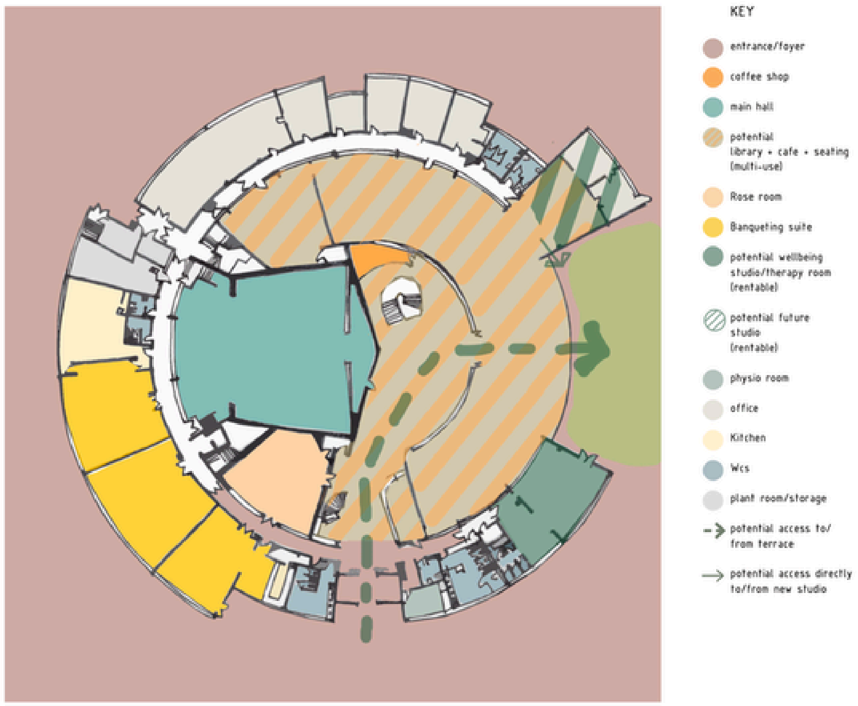
BOURNE HALL

The existing layout presents significant opportunities to reconfigure open-plan and public-facing spaces, improving circulation, visibility and operational integration across the building, while creating a more connected and efficient Civic and Cultural Hub, as shown in the spatial diagrams.

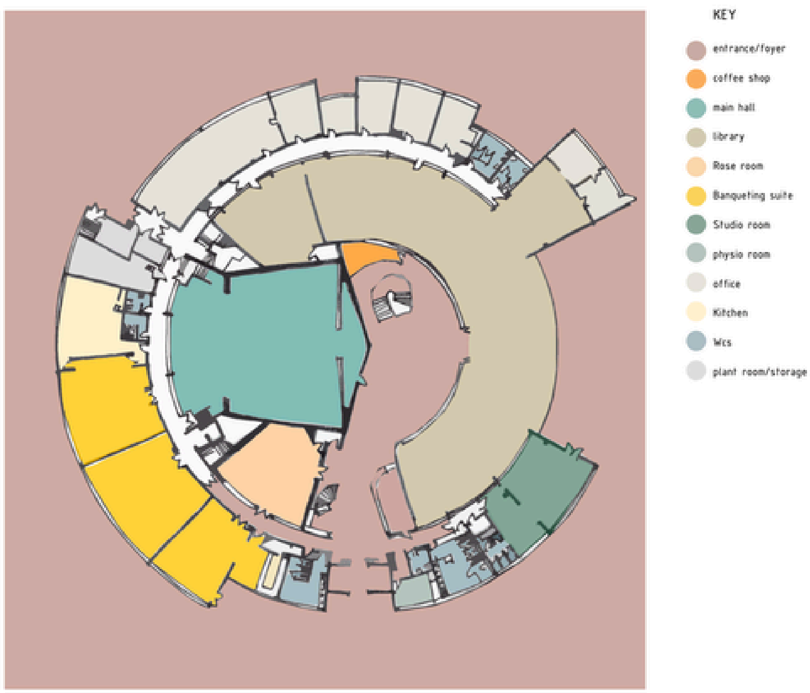
Opportunities include reducing the footprint required for storage, reconfiguring existing studio and meeting spaces to provide greater flexibility, creating dedicated therapy and consultation rooms to support wellbeing and community services, and developing more adaptable conferencing and civic meeting facilities capable of supporting a broader range of uses and generating increased income.

The **building** faces important challenges which need to be addressed as part of any long-term strategy for the asset. These include ageing infrastructure, accessibility limitations, ongoing maintenance liabilities, constraints associated with the building's listed status, and issues relating to heating and ventilation systems.

CONCEPT GROUND FLOOR PLAN: ACCOMMODATION DIAGRAM



EXISTING GROUND FLOOR PLAN: ACCOMMODATION DIAGRAM



Collectively, these factors reinforce the need for a phased and carefully planned investment approach that balances immediate operational requirements with longer-term transformation and environmentally sustainability objectives.

BOURNE HALL

There is potential for selected **wellbeing and support services** to be integrated into Bourne Hall, supporting;

- increased daytime activity
- stronger community engagement
- greater integration of services
- improved use of the building

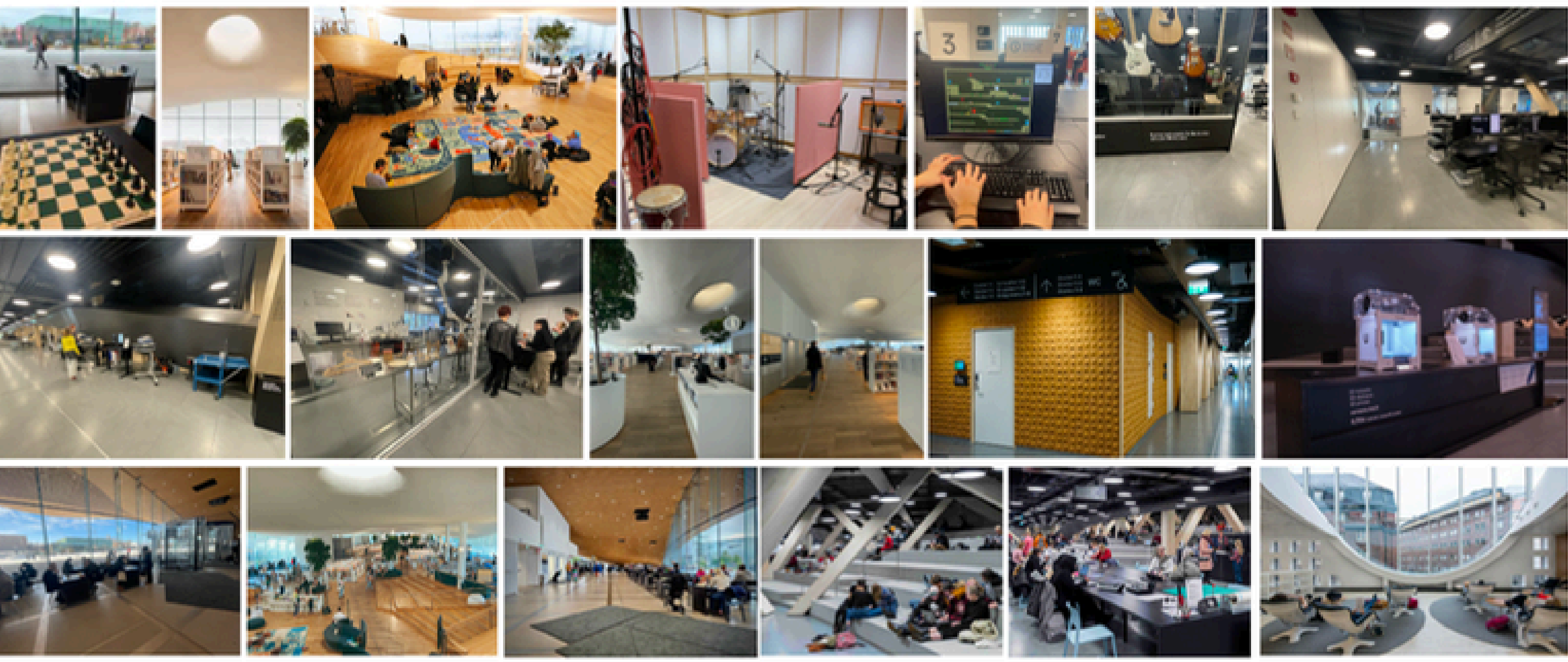
There is scope to increase commercial and community activity across the asset through the expansion of events and conferencing provision, enhanced café and food sales, increased community hire and a broader programme of training, learning and workshop activity.

In addition, there is an opportunity to introduce more **flexible workspace provision,** supporting a wider range of users while creating additional income streams and increasing daytime use of the building. The recommended strategic direction is the spatial reconfiguration of Bourne Hall to create an integrated civic and cultural hub.

This approach provides the strongest **long-term strategic value** by improving the overall use and connectivity of the building, strengthening community impact and creating a more flexible and financially sustainable operating model.

The proposed direction would support better use of space, enhance the visitor experience, and create increased opportunities for partnership working, community engagement and income generation, while positioning Bourne Hall as a **modern, multi-functional destination at the heart of the borough.**

Precedents



EPSOM PLAYHOUSE

Epsom Playhouse is a **major cultural asset** for the borough and makes a significant contribution to the area's wider cultural offer, town centre activity and evening economy. The venue plays an important role in supporting community participation, strengthening local identity and contributing to the borough's wider placemaking ambitions through arts, entertainment and community engagement.

The venue has an **established reputation and audience base** but faces increasing financial and operational pressures. The review identifies a clear opportunity to reposition Epsom Playhouse as a more flexible, financially sustainable and community-focused cultural venue.

While the Playhouse remains an important and valued asset, the current **operating model and building configuration** limit its ability to maximise use, income and wider community impact. The proposed direction focuses on;

- improving commercial resilience
- expanding daytime activity
- increasing secondary spend
- enhancing flexibility across the building

This reflects wider national trends across the theatre sector, where venues are increasingly operating as civic and cultural hubs with a broader range of uses and stronger partnership-based delivery models.

The Playhouse, currently owned and managed by the council faces significant challenges which impact its long-term **sustainability and operational resilience**. These include high operating costs, an ongoing dependence on subsidy and increasing competition from other cultural and entertainment venues. In addition, the current operating model limits access to certain external grant funding opportunities, while the building itself continues to face infrastructure and maintenance pressures that will require ongoing investment and strategic planning.

A key opportunity for Epsom Playhouse is to reposition the venue as a more active **all-day cultural and community destination** rather than primarily an evening performance venue. This would create opportunities for increased daytime cultural activity, broader community use, flexible workspace and rehearsal provision, workshops, learning activity and enhanced café and bar trade, helping to improve utilisation and strengthen financial sustainability throughout the day. There is also significant potential to improve the **front-of-house experience** through the reconfiguration of foyer and bar areas.

Enhancements in these spaces could improve visitor experience, increase dwell time, support greater daytime activation and strengthen secondary spend through improved food and beverage income. In parallel, improvements to dressing rooms and backstage facilities would strengthen the venue's attractiveness to touring productions, improve operational flexibility and enhance the overall market position of the Playhouse within the regional cultural and entertainment sector.

The review also identified considerable opportunities to strengthen **community and cultural partnerships**, particularly with schools and colleges, youth arts organisations, community groups and wider regional cultural partners. A more collaborative approach would help expand participation, diversify programming and reinforce the Playhouse's role as a key cultural anchor within the borough.

The recommended strategic direction for Epsom Playhouse is a transition towards an **independent charitable trust operating model.** This approach would provide greater operational flexibility, improve access to external funding opportunities and reduce overhead costs, while also creating stronger opportunities for partnership working and enabling any operational surpluses to be reinvested directly into the venue and its programme. The model reflects wider national trends across the theatre and cultural sector, where charitable trust arrangements are increasingly being adopted to support long-term sustainability, resilience and community impact.

Precedents

COMMUNITY & WELLBEING CENTRE

The Community & Wellbeing Centre plays an important role in supporting older residents, vulnerable adults and individuals with health and mobility needs through a range of wellbeing and support services. The asset delivers significant **social value** within the borough and contributes directly to wider prevention, health and wellbeing priorities by providing accessible community-based support and opportunities for social connection, independence and early intervention.

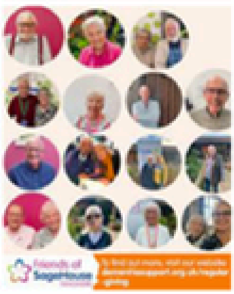
The review identifies an opportunity to **modernise and strengthen** the long-term sustainability of the Community & Wellbeing Centre service offer. This includes opportunities to expand wellbeing provision, improve use of the existing space, strengthen partnership-led delivery models and better integrate services with the Council's wider community asset portfolio.

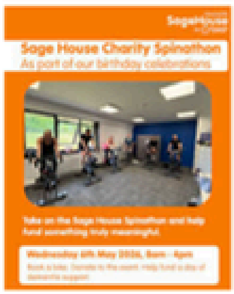
The asset faces challenges which impact on its **long-term sustainability** and future operating model. These include relatively limited commercial income potential, ongoing subsidy requirements and wider financial sustainability pressures, alongside uncertainty associated with future local government reform and organisational change. Collectively, these factors reinforce the need for a strategic review of how the asset is operated, funded and integrated within the wider community infrastructure portfolio.

There is potential to explore **partial redevelopment opportunities** as part of a broader long-term asset strategy.

There is significant potential to expand the range of services delivered from the centre, including increased therapy and wellbeing provision, social prescribing activity, wider community support services and greater use of group activity and hall spaces. A stronger **partnership-led approach** could also support a more diverse and resilient service offer while improving access to external funding and specialist expertise.

Precedents




The Centre presents opportunities to strengthen **collaboration** with NHS and Integrated Care partners, specialist wellbeing providers, community organisations and wider rehabilitation and support services.

A more **integrated delivery model** could improve outcomes for residents while creating stronger alignment with wider health and prevention priorities across the borough. As part of the broader cross-asset strategy, there may also be opportunities for selected functions to be integrated into Bourne Hall. Any future rationalisation or co-location approach would require careful consideration of accessibility, the needs of service users, continuity of provision and the overall suitability of alternative accommodation to ensure that services remain inclusive, accessible and effective.

The recommended strategic direction is a partial redevelopment of the current site and **conversion to residential and partnership-led model** which retains core wellbeing services while supporting rationalisation, modernisation and greater operational sustainability. The model would be to explore charitable and community partners to take on lease/licence of the asset. This approach would increase opportunities for partnership-led delivery and allow the Council to explore future co-location opportunities where appropriate as part of a wider cross-asset strategy. The recommended direction seeks to balance financial sustainability with the continued delivery of strong community and wellbeing outcomes.

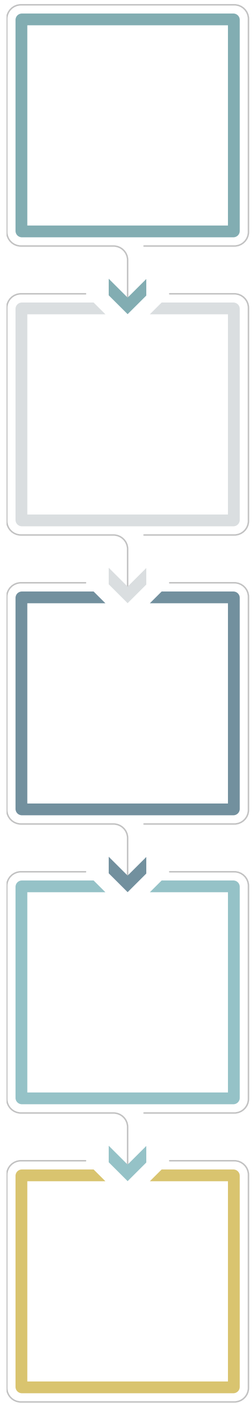
STEWARDSHIP & OPERATING MODELS

A key theme emerging from the review is the importance of future operating models and the need to consider more **sustainable and flexible** approaches to stewardship and delivery.

Traditional direct local authority operating models are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain within the current financial environment, particularly given rising operational costs, growing service expectations and increasing pressure on public sector resources. As a result, the review considered a range of **potential governance and operating approaches** for the Council's key community and cultural assets.

Continuing with full Council operation would maintain direct control over the assets and services; however, this approach would continue to limit operational flexibility, restrict access to certain external funding opportunities and reduce commercial agility, while also limiting the Council's ability to reduce long-term operating costs and financial exposure.

The review also considered the potential creation of a single development trust responsible for multiple assets across the portfolio. Whilst this model could create some efficiencies and opportunities for integrated management, it would also introduce additional organisational complexity, governance challenges and operational risk associated with managing a diverse range of assets and service types within a single entity.



The preferred strategic direction is a **distributed stewardship and partnership model,** designed to reflect the distinct purpose, operational needs and long-term opportunities associated with each of the three assets. Rather than applying a single ownership and management arrangement across all sites, this model recognises that different community assets are best stewarded through governance structures that are aligned to their specific function, user groups, funding opportunities and service outcomes.

Under this approach, the Council would retain an **overarching strategic role**, setting long-term objectives, safeguarding community benefit and maintaining influence over place-based outcomes, while enabling a range of purpose-led organisations and delivery partners to take responsibility for the day-to-day stewardship and operation of individual assets.

This creates a more **flexible and resilient ecosystem of ownership,** management and delivery arrangements, allowing each venue to operate in a way that best supports its social, cultural and commercial potential.

STEWARDSHIP & OPERATING MODELS

Bourne Hall

Bourne Hall would remain in **direct Council ownership and management**, reflecting its continued civic role and strategic importance within the borough. However, the operating model would evolve towards a more **collaborative stewardship approach**, with increased involvement from purpose-led hirers, cultural organisations, community stakeholders and service partners. This would allow the venue to function as a more dynamic civic and community platform, where programming, events, wellbeing services, learning activity and community uses are co-developed with local partners rather than delivered solely through traditional Council structures. The Council would continue to oversee the building, core operations and strategic direction while encouraging greater partnership-led activation of spaces and services.

This model would support:

- stronger community participation and co-production
- increased utilisation and commercial flexibility of spaces
- broader cultural and wellbeing programming
- improved responsiveness to local needs
- opportunities for external partnerships and funding aligned to social outcomes

The Playhouse

The Playhouse would move towards an **independent stewardship arrangement** through either a long lease, licence agreement or potential community asset transfer to a purpose-led arts and cultural organisation. This reflects the specialist nature of arts venue management and the advantages of sector-led programming, fundraising and creative development. Under this arrangement, the Council would retain a **strategic interest in the asset** and its contribution to the borough's cultural offer, while operational responsibility would sit with an independent organisation whose primary mission is arts, culture and community engagement.

The Council would retain ownership and management of the associated car parking assets to ensure continued public access, town centre functionality and income generation.

A specialist stewardship model for The Playhouse would enable;

- greater artistic and programming autonomy
- access to cultural and arts funding streams not available directly to local authorities
- stronger creative sector partnerships
- improved volunteer and community engagement opportunities
- increased entrepreneurial and commercial flexibility
- a governance structure better aligned to the operational realities of running a cultural venue

This arrangement also reduces operational risk and financial pressure on the Council while helping secure the long-term sustainability of the venue as a cultural asset.

STEWARDSHIP & OPERATING MODELS

Community & Wellbeing Centre

For the Community and Wellbeing Centre, the stewardship model would combine **development-led regeneration with long-term community asset management.**

Approximately one-third of the asset would be released for residential development, generating capital receipts and helping to improve the overall viability and sustainability of the wider site. The remaining two-thirds would be retained for community, wellbeing and service delivery purposes and operated through a lease or licence arrangement with a third sector or social purpose organisation.

That organisation would assume responsibility not only for managing the building but also for coordinating and delivering services from the centre, potentially bringing together health, wellbeing, social support, community development and voluntary sector activity within a more integrated delivery framework. This model would:

- create a financially sustainable mixed-use approach to the site
- embed community-led service delivery within the asset
- support integrated health and wellbeing outcomes
- unlock external grant and social investment opportunities
- encourage innovation in service provision
- strengthen long-term community ownership and participation

Cross-Cutting Strategic Principles

Principle	Application Across All Assets
Distributed Stewardship	Different ownership and operating models tailored to the specific function and needs of each asset
Strategic Council Oversight	Council retains long-term strategic influence, governance oversight and place leadership
Specialist Delivery Partners	Day-to-day management undertaken by specialist cultural, community or third-sector organisations where appropriate
Financial Sustainability	Combination of capital investment, asset rationalisation, commercial income and external funding
Partnership-Led Delivery	Strong collaboration with NHS/ICS, cultural organisations, voluntary sector and commercial partners
Flexibility & Adaptability	Assets designed to evolve over time in response to changing service demands and community needs
Community Impact	Focus on wellbeing, accessibility, cultural participation and long term public value.

STEWARDSHIP & OPERATING MODELS

Overall Strategic Benefits of the Distributed Stewardship Model

Collectively, the distributed stewardship model creates a balanced framework that combines:

- retained strategic Council oversight
- diversified operational responsibility
- specialist sector expertise
- increased community participation
- greater financial resilience
- improved adaptability over time

Importantly, the model avoids a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Instead, it acknowledges that civic venues, arts facilities and community wellbeing assets each require different governance cultures, delivery mechanisms and partnership arrangements to thrive.

By distributing stewardship across a network of aligned but distinct partnerships, the Council can focus on its role as strategic place leader and custodian of public value, while enabling specialist organisations to maximise the social, cultural and operational potential of individual assets. Over time, this approach also creates greater flexibility to respond to changing community needs, funding environments and organisational priorities, ensuring that each asset can evolve appropriately while continuing to deliver long-term public benefit.

Potential Stewardship Structure by Asset

Asset	Ownership	Management Model	Strategic Role
Bourne Hall	Council retained ownership and management	Partnership-led activation with purpose-led hirers and stakeholders	Integrated civic and cultural hub
Epsom Playhouse	Council ownership retained initially, with potential lease/licence/asset transfer	Independent arts and cultural organisation or charitable trust	Specialist cultural venue with expanded programming
Community Health & Wellbeing Centre	Mixed model: partial redevelopment plus retained community asset	Third-sector or social purpose organisation stewardship	Integrated wellbeing and community services hub

FINANCIAL & FUNDING STRATEGY

The review confirms that the current operating position across several assets is increasingly challenging. Rising operational and maintenance costs, continued reliance on subsidy and historic cross-subsidy arrangements between services have created a situation in which assets are not operating on a sustainable basis.

Existing Council subsidy

(based on the 25/26 approved budget and analysis of relevant cost centres)

Venue	2026 Budget
Epsom Playhouse - Invest and optimise	£400k (Deficit)
Health & Wellbeing Hub : Expand in situ	£450k (Deficit)
Bourne Hall - Integrated Civic Hub	£920k (Deficit)
Total	**£1,770k (Deficit)**

In response, the review recommends moving towards a more **transparent, resilient and strategically aligned financial model.** This includes establishing clearer financial baselines, improving understanding of the true operational costs associated with each venue and developing a broader and more diversified mix of income streams to reduce long-term dependency on subsidy.

A central objective is to strengthen income diversification across the portfolio. This includes;

- increasing hire and events activity
- improving food and beverage offers
- expanding community and daytime use of the assets
- developing partnerships and commissioned service opportunities
- increasing access to external funding and grant programmes.

Collectively, these measures are intended to create more resilient operating models while improving utilisation and overall commercial performance. The review recognises that **targeted capital investment** will be required to unlock the long-term sustainability and transformation of the assets. Key investment priorities include accessibility improvements, heating and wider infrastructure upgrades, spatial reconfiguration, front-of-house enhancements and wider compliance and maintenance and environmental improvement works.

These interventions are not simply maintenance requirements, but are strategic investments designed to improve visitor experience, operational efficiency and future income-generating potential.

To support delivery, a **blended funding approach** will be essential. Potential funding opportunities include Council capital investment, capital receipts and a range of external funding sources, including Arts Council England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, NHS and wellbeing funding streams, DCMS programmes and wider community and cultural grant opportunities. A coordinated funding strategy will therefore be critical to enabling phased delivery and long-term sustainability across the asset portfolio.

FINANCIAL & FUNDING STRATEGY

High level financial modelling

Using the Council's published 2025/26 baseline figures, high level financial modelling has been carried out to scope opportunities, impacts, and viability. Moving forward, more detailed deep-dive analysis would need to be carried out as part of future business plans and business cases.

The purpose of this modelling is to test how different operational, commercial and investment options could affect the future financial sustainability and performance of each asset, helping to identify where the greatest opportunities and risks may lie.

The assumptions underpinning the models have been informed by significant experience of working with community assets, alongside extensive financial forecasting, income and expenditure business planning, and qualified financial analysis. It also draws on benchmarking, comparable building projects, and similar operational schemes.

The modelling uses between two and five potential change scenarios to each building;

- For Bourne Hall, five different streams of change, including library and café changes, heating investments, and the repositioning of the banqueting suite and Rose Room.
- For the Playhouse, three potential changes have been modelled.
- For the Community & Wellbeing Centre, a simpler model has been used focused primarily on changes in lease income and staffing assumptions.

All scenarios are layered with prudent and conservative assumptions, while also considering the wider ripple effects across operations and financial performance. Some figures, particularly revenue, may change significantly under certain scenarios; however, associated expenditure will also increase accordingly, recognising that not all costs will rise at the same rate.

Venue	2026 Budget	Change	Future
Epsom Playhouse - Invest and optimise	£400k (Deficit)	+£240k	£160k (Deficit)
Health & Wellbeing Centre - rationalise	£450k (Deficit)	+£470k	£20k (Surplus)
Bourne Hall - Integrated Civic Hub	£920k (Deficit)	+£150k	£770k (Deficit)
Total	**£1,770k (Deficit)**	**+£860k**	**£910k (Deficit)**

These figures reflect high level assumptions regarding :

- changes in revenue (equate to a saving) inlcude direct costs, overheads and Corporate recharges
- Playhouse to be moved to a Trust model, with staff will Tupe'd to the new organisation
- capital receipts to be identified fund capital costs such as remodelling venues, a new Bourne Hall heating system and any administrative costs
- Central costs reduce in line with a reduced Council function - responsibilities passed to third parties in accordance with proposed operating models

RISKS & MITIGATION

The review identifies strategic risks which will require careful management throughout the development and delivery of the programme.

Financial risk remains a significant consideration, particularly in relation to rising capital costs and ongoing operational pressures across the assets. To mitigate this, the review recommends a phased investment approach supported by strong business planning, income diversification and a coordinated external funding strategy designed to improve long-term resilience and reduce dependency on subsidy.

There is also a risk that transformation and investment programmes could **disrupt existing services** and impact current users during implementation. This will require careful programme phasing, strong communications planning and, where necessary, temporary decant arrangements to minimise disruption and maintain continuity of service delivery.

Changes to community and cultural assets can also create **uncertainty** and concern among stakeholders, service users and the wider community. It will be important to ensure early engagement, clear communication and transparent decision-making throughout the programme, alongside a strong emphasis on demonstrating the long-term community benefits and strategic rationale for change.

The complexity of the programme itself presents a **delivery risk**, given the involvement of multiple assets, stakeholders, funding streams and operating models. This reinforces the need for strong governance arrangements, clear programme management structures and well-defined decision-making processes to ensure effective oversight and coordinated delivery.

Finally, wider uncertainty associated with Local Government Reorganisation and **future governance arrangements** remains an important strategic consideration. To mitigate this, the review recommends maintaining flexible operating models, establishing strong financial baselines and ensuring that assets are positioned strategically and sustainably for the future regardless of future organisational structures.

PROGRAMME DELIVERY & NEXT STEPS

The review recommends a phased programme approach over the next 12 to 24 months to support structured delivery, minimise operational disruption and allow investment and transformation activity to be aligned with emerging priorities and funding opportunities.

The **first phase** should focus on establishing strategic agreement around the recommended direction of travel for the assets, alongside the development of appropriate governance arrangements and more detailed financial modelling.

This stage would also include early stakeholder engagement and the delivery of initial quick-win improvements designed to demonstrate progress, improve operational performance and build momentum for the wider programme.

The **second phase** would focus on the development of more detailed business cases and investment plans for each asset, including capital planning, funding applications, design development and the refinement of future operating models.

This stage will be critical in establishing affordability, deliverability and long-term sustainability, while also ensuring alignment between the various workstreams across the programme.

The **final phase** would move into delivery and transformation, including capital works, service integration, operating model transitions and the mobilisation of delivery and partnership arrangements.

This phase would ultimately support implementation of the longer-term strategic vision for the Council's community and cultural asset portfolio. Strong governance arrangements will be essential throughout the programme to ensure effective oversight, accountability and decision-making.

This should include clear officer oversight, ongoing Member engagement, robust programme management arrangements, stakeholder involvement and regular financial monitoring to support successful delivery and strategic alignment across the programme.

QUICK WINS

The most immediate quick wins focus on improving utilisation, visibility and income generation across the asset portfolio without requiring significant capital investment.

These include increasing community hire and events activity, expanding daytime use of facilities, strengthening café and food and beverage offers, improving marketing, branding and wayfinding, and introducing more flexible use of underutilised spaces.

Bourne Hall

Early actions could include reconfiguring existing rooms for greater flexibility, creating spaces for wellbeing and community services, and improving links between the library, museum, café and events programme.

Epsom Playhouse

Quick wins could focus on activating the venue during the daytime through workshops, community use and cultural activities, alongside enhancements to the foyer and bar offer to increase secondary spend.

Community & Wellbeing Centre

For the Community & Wellbeing Centre, opportunities exist to strengthen partnerships, expand wellbeing activities and maximise the use of existing spaces.

Across all three assets, early engagement with potential partners, improved programming, clearer branding and promotion, and the development of a coordinated cross-asset approach would help demonstrate progress, increase income and build momentum for longer-term transformation.

QUICK WINS

Asset	Quick Win Opportunity	Potential Benefit
Bourne Hall	Improve connectivity between the library, museum, café and community spaces through enhanced programming and coordinated visitor journeys.	Increased footfall, longer dwell times and improved visitor experience.
	Reconfigure underused meeting and studio spaces for flexible community, training, therapy and wellbeing uses.	Higher utilisation rates and additional hire income.
	Expand community events, workshops and learning activities.	Increased engagement, income generation and community impact.
	Improve wayfinding, signage and marketing across the building.	Better visitor experience and increased use of facilities.
Epsom Playhouse	Increase daytime activity through workshops, rehearsals, community groups, business events and learning programmes.	Improved utilisation and additional revenue streams.
	Enhance the foyer, café and bar offer through improved programming and promotion.	Increased secondary spend and visitor satisfaction.
	Develop stronger partnerships with schools, colleges and local arts organisations.	Increased participation, audience development and community engagement.
Community & Wellbeing Centre	Expand wellbeing activities and social prescribing programmes through existing partnerships.	Increased participation and improved health and wellbeing outcomes.
	Maximise use of existing rooms and community spaces through targeted hire and programming.	Improved utilisation and operational efficiency.
	Develop partnerships with health, voluntary and community sector organisations.	Greater service reach and access to external funding opportunities.
All Assets	Implement a coordinated marketing and branding strategy across the portfolio.	Increased awareness, attendance and commercial performance.
	Review pricing, hire packages and commercial opportunities.	Increased earned income and improved financial sustainability.
	Establish a programme of early stakeholder engagement and partnership development.	Builds support for future transformation and identifies new delivery opportunities.
	Undertake space utilisation reviews and introduce more flexible operating arrangements.	Better use of assets, reduced inefficiencies and increased income generation.

DELIVERY ROADMAP

STAGE 1

Strategic Decision & Mobilisation

0-3 months

- Confirm strategic direction and establish programme governance
- Programme governance & mobilsation
- Feasbility & early engagement

STAGE 2

Business Planning & Funding

3-6 months

- Develop detailed business plans, funding strategies & partnership agreements
- Funding & investment strategy

STAGE 3

Design, Development & Procurement

6-12 months

- Translate strategic vision into deliverable designs and procurement packages
- Technical design & delivery planning

STAGE 4

Construction & Reconfiguration

12-24 months

- Deliver capital works and spatial transformation
- Operational readiness

STAGE 5

Transition, Commissioning & Go-Live

12-24 months

- Activate new operating models and launch transformed assets
- Marketing & Place activation

STAGE 6

Post-implementation Review & Optimisation

24-36 months

- Evaluate performance and optimise long-term delivery
- Continuous improvement

CONCLUSION

This review identifies a **significant opportunity** for Epsom & Ewell Borough Council to reposition its key community and cultural assets for the future.

The direction outlined is not simply about buildings or operational savings; it is about ensuring that important civic and community infrastructure remains relevant, accessible and financially sustainable within a rapidly changing local government environment. Collectively, Bourne Hall, Epsom Playhouse and the Community & Wellbeing Centre play an important role in supporting **local identity, culture, wellbeing and community resilience across the borough.**

The review demonstrates that, through **targeted investment, stronger partnership working and more flexible operating models**, these assets can continue to deliver significant public value, while becoming more sustainable and resilient over the long term.

The proposals provide a **strategic framework** for improving financial sustainability, protecting community value, strengthening cultural and wellbeing outcomes, supporting placemaking and local identity and creating more resilient and adaptable operating models across the Council's community asset portfolio.

The review highlights strong potential to transform Bourne Hall into a more integrated civic and cultural hub, reposition Epsom Playhouse as a more sustainable and flexible cultural venue, and modernise and strengthen the borough's wellbeing offer through increased partnership-led delivery and service integration.

Importantly, the report recognises that these assets are not simply buildings. They are community anchors, cultural destinations, civic assets and places of wellbeing and social connection which contribute significantly to the wider social and economic life of the borough.

The recommended strategic direction seeks to safeguard these assets while ensuring that they remain financially sustainable, operationally resilient and capable of meeting future community needs. A **phased and partnership-led approach,** supported by targeted investment and strong governance arrangements, provides the strongest opportunity to deliver long-term success. The next stage will be to refine the recommended strategic options into more detailed business cases, financial models and implementation plans for future consideration by Officers and Members.

Community Asset Plans

Summary Documents

Community Asset Plan (CAP)

Bourne Hall, Ewell

Bourne Hall is the borough's principal civic and community asset, providing library services, museum provision, community spaces, events, conferencing facilities, café services and civic functions.

Strategic vision

To create an integrated Civic and Cultural Hub that brings together community, culture, wellbeing and civic activity within a more connected, accessible and financially sustainable operating model.

Ownership & operating model

Retain Council ownership while adopting a more commercially focused and integrated operating model, with greater coordination across cultural, community, civic and hospitality functions.

Key challenges

- Fragmented visitor experience and disconnected uses, Underutilised spaces
- Ageing infrastructure and maintenance liabilities, Accessibility constraints
- Heating and environmental performance issues
- Ongoing subsidy requirements

Key opportunities

- A more joined-up visitor experience linking the library, museum, café, events and community spaces.
- Increased utilisation of underused spaces through flexible programming, workspace, community hire and commercial events.
- Improve café performance and strengthen its role as a destination within the building.
- Invest in energy efficiency and heating systems.

Implementation Roadmap

QUICK WINS

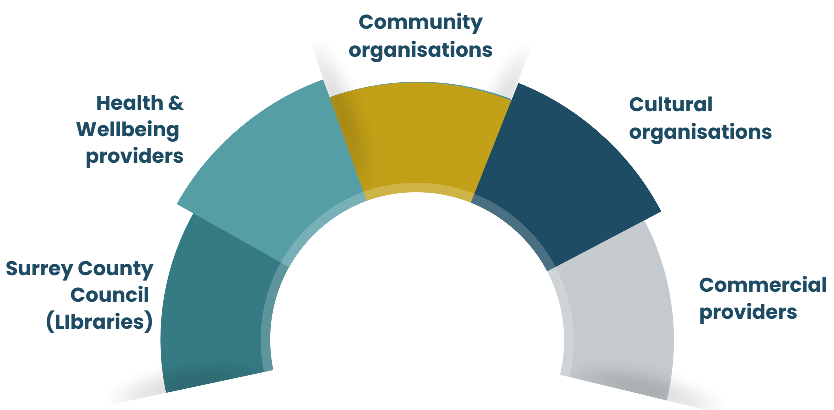
- Improve signage, wayfinding and visitor flow
- Increase community events, workshops and learning programmes
- Expand café and food offer
- Review and activate underused rooms for flexible hire
- Introduce wellbeing and community service partnerships
- Increase use of outdoor spaces and parkland
- Strengthen marketing and cross-promotion between library, museum and events

MEDIUM TERM PRIORITIES

- Reconfigure underused spaces
- Create flexible community, therapy and consultation rooms
- Improve accessibility and customer experience
- Expand conferencing and civic hire opportunities
- Develop environmental improvement programme

LONG TERM AMBITION

- Fully integrated civic and cultural destination
- Modern, sustainable and accessible facility
- Increased income generation and reduced subsidy
- Borough-wide hub for culture, wellbeing and community engagement



Outcomes

- Increased utilisation and footfall
- Improved financial sustainability
- Enhanced community impact
- Stronger cultural and wellbeing offer, Improved visitor experience

Community Asset Plan (CAP)

The Playhouse, Epsom

The borough's primary theatre and performing arts venue, supporting cultural participation, entertainment, community activity and the evening economy. .

Strategic vision

To establish Epsom Playhouse as a vibrant, all-day cultural venue operating through an independent charitable trust model, increasing flexibility, resilience and community impact.

Ownership & operating model

Retain Council ownership of the asset while transitioning to a purpose-led (e.g. Trust) operating model. Retain Council ownership of the asset with long-term lease or licence arrangement in place for operators and users.

Key challenges

- High operating costs with reliance on subsidy
- Infrastructure and maintenance pressures
- Limited access to some grant funding streams
- Underutilisation during daytime hours

Key opportunities

- access to charitable, arts and external grant funding not readily available to the Council
- strengthened community participation, volunteer involvement and local partnerships
- increase utilisation of the venue
- clearer artistic and cultural identity
- improved commercial performance

Implementation Roadmap

QUICK WINS

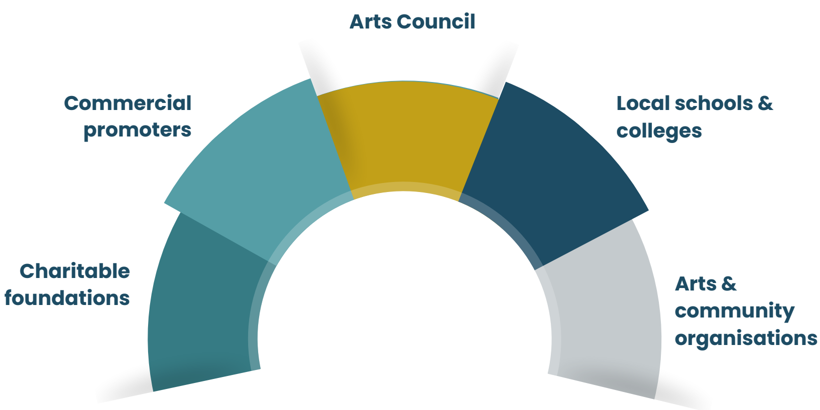
- Increase daytime activity and venue utilisation
- Expand workshops, community programmes and educational activity
- Strengthen relationships with schools and colleges
- Improve café, bar and hospitality offer
- Review commercial hire opportunities
- Develop partnership programming with local arts organisations
- Enhance marketing and audience development activity

MEDIUM TERM PRIORITIES

- Improve front-of-house facilities
- Upgrade dressing rooms and backstage facilities
- Develop charitable trust operating model
- Strengthen regional cultural partnerships
- Increase secondary spend opportunities

LONG TERM AMBITION

- Independent charitable trust operation
- Sustainable cultural venue with reduced reliance on subsidy
- Regional centre for arts, culture and community participation
- Increased external funding and investment



Outcomes

- Increased attendance and participation
- Greater financial resilience
- Expanded cultural programme
- Improved access to external funding
- Enhanced contribution to town centre vitality

Community Asset Plan (CAP)

Community & Wellbeing Centre, Ewell

A key community asset providing wellbeing, support and social opportunities for older residents, vulnerable adults and those with health and mobility needs. activity and the evening economy.

Strategic vision

To create a modern, partnership-led wellbeing hub that supports prevention, health improvement, social connection and independent living, while operating more sustainably and efficiently.

Key challenges

- Limited commercial income opportunities
- Ongoing subsidy requirements
- Ageing accommodation
- Future uncertainty associated with Local Government Reorganisation
- Need for modernisation and service integration

Ownership & operating model

Retain Council ownership of the core asset while transitioning management and operation to a purpose-led organisation through an appropriate lease or licence arrangement. Rationalise surplus or non-core elements of the assets.

Key opportunities

- Dedicated purpose-led organisation focused on health, wellbeing and community outcomes.
- Increased access to external funding, grants and partnership investment
- Rationalised asset footprint - reduce costs and generate capital receipts.
- Improve utilisation of retained space
- Strengthened partnerships
- Future-proofed asset

Implementation Roadmap

QUICK WINS

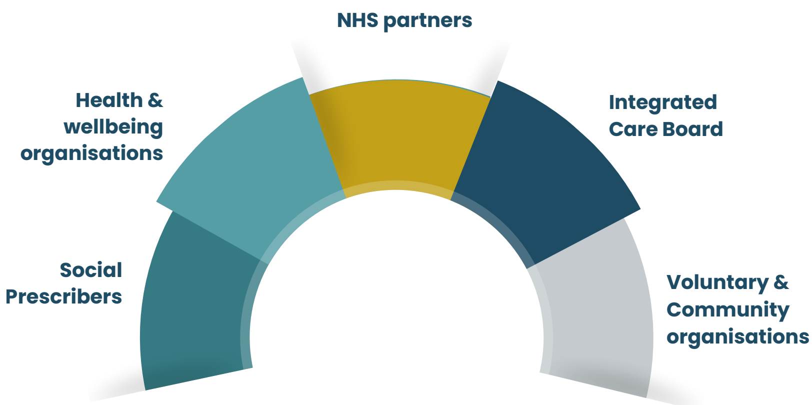
- Expand wellbeing and social prescribing programmes
- Increase use of existing rooms and activity spaces
- Develop new partnerships with NHS and voluntary sector organisations
- Improve community outreach and engagement
- Review programme offer to maximise utilisation
- Identify opportunities for commissioned services

MEDIUM TERM PRIORITIES

- Develop partnership-led delivery model
- Explore partial redevelopment opportunities
- Expand therapy and wellbeing provision
- Improve flexibility of internal spaces
- Assess co-location opportunities with complementary services

LONG TERM AMBITION

- Modern, sustainable wellbeing hub
- Integrated health, wellbeing and community services
- Reduced operating costs and increased partnership investment
- Enhanced preventative health and wellbeing outcomes



Outcomes

- Improved resident health and wellbeing
- Reduced social isolation
- Increased participation and service reach
- Greater partnership investment
- Stronger alignment with preventative health priorities

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EPSOM & EWELL BOROUGH COUNCIL

CSS Community Stewardship Solutions

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