

THURSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

COMMUNITY USE PROJECT UPDATE & FUNDING REQUEST

1. Synopsis

The following report provides an update of the development of the Community Use Programme at Thurston Community College (the School) since the initiation of a designated project in late 2022 & formally requests a contribution of £10,000 match funding to support the project over the coming year.

2. Background

Since starting the project, the main focus has been on exploring resident & local sports & community clubs' interest in accessing the indoor & outdoor facilities at the School's Thurston & Beyton sites. A community awareness campaign was started early in 2023 with a formal community survey promoted in May & an "Open Event" held in July.

The survey generated over 250 responses with the main headlines including requests for a range of new junior & adult sport, physical & fitness sessions plus hire space for local clubs & organisations (both sport & cultural) to either start, restart post covid or grow. However, most significantly, approx. 80% of respondents requested the fitness gym to re-open.

There has been follow up on most of these requests & since this September the Combat Kickboxing Club has re-established itself back at the Thurston site, netball & football activity has increased & a new Pickleball session started. On the cultural side, demand for & use of the auditorium space has significantly increased & is now nearing capacity over the summer & main seasonal periods. The Thurston Community Players (Theatre Group) have also started to use the dance studio on a long-term basis.

The next step is to re-open the fitness gym. This has to date been complex to achieve but it is intended to do a "soft opening" from early in November until mid-December. This will allow adults to use the gym on Tuesdays, Wednesdays & Thursday between 5.30 & 9pm & give valuable feedback as to how to ensure the gym provides for their needs in the future. Currently over 50 local residents have already responded to the recent promotion of the re-opening & subject to sufficient interest, these hours will be extended & a membership scheme introduced in the new year, subject to new specialist staff cover becoming available.

The School has historically had a degree of community use, however with the impact of the Covid pandemic & loss of Abbeycroft Leisure as a commercial partner, it now seeks to expand its community programme itself, as part of a longer aspiration to become a more influential "Community Hub" within the expanding village.

Catering for an expanding community programme has impacts on the Schools' infrastructure, management & finances, hence this request to the Parish Council to lessen the financial burden & risk to the School in this first phase of the Community use project. Assuming the

expressed local demand turns into real customers, then the aim is to develop the programme as far as possible & ultimately achieve a sustainable operation.

NB. The project also includes the Beyton 6th form site & liaison is ongoing with Beyton Parish Council & the Beyton Village Association, who are keen to use their site more. The site has both indoor & outdoor facilities (conference centre & grass pitches in particular), but physical access & ground preparation work would need to be undertaken before any significant use is achievable & will be subject to a separate funding bid with those parties.

3. The Current Position & Moving Forward

Up until September this year the School's current regular weekly programme of indoor & outdoor activity (based on weekday evenings after 5 pm & at weekends) has been limited to approx. 13 hrs per term time week, of booked use across both indoor & outdoor facilities (excluding the auditorium as it is mainly seasonal). Governmental aspirations for community use of Schools is generally accepted as 40 hrs weekly, so there is significant potential to work towards this.

Attached is a graphical summary of various facilities available for community use & hire outside the School's weekday term-time use (**BLANK** hours between 9am – 5pm weekdays). **YELLOW** outlines the maximum potential for community use. Historic community use is shown in **GREEN**. Recently started activities/bookings are shown in **BLUE**, taking it up to 20hrs per week. **AMBER** represents the next targeted hours to be increased including moving to daily opening of the fitness gym plus more club & individual use of both indoor & outdoor areas. Clearly community use is now increasing but is reliant on having suitable staff to lead its growth & in particular to provide "Duty Cover" to enable the fitness gym & other indoor facilities to be open & operationally usable.

To date, managing the existing Community use programme & covering current community use time has been reliant on the good will of certain core staff & overtime contributions by the current site caretaking team. This only provides a basic service & is not cost efficient. From this October the School has now established a new part time Community Use Project Officer post (CUPO) to support the recently re-titled Community Use & Marketing Officer (CUMO) who is currently leading this project. The CUPO role includes the specific responsibility for developing & expanding the community use programme as well as providing "Duty Cover" for the fitness studio & other facility areas. This is a significant step & investment by the School. The CUPO roles is currently based on 12 hrs per week over Tuesdays to Thursday evenings, but will need to be expanded (with another part time CUPO post) in line with the increasing "opening hours" as referred to above.

Assuming demand for fitness gym is realised over the next 2 months, work can then begin to expand its opening hours & associated health & fitness activities ie. group exercise classes, which are generally an alternative popular activity to fitness gym use. The fitness gym programme will ultimately extend to 5 weekday evenings per week & Saturday & Sunday mornings, over the next year, when staffing provision allows. People committing health & fitness activities generally normally participate on a weekly basis, sometimes up to 2-3 times a week or even more. It is therefore essential that both fitness & other community use activities are made available throughout the year, including during school holidays & not just

term time as currently. Alongside these opening hours, it will therefore also be possible to start to develop more holiday activities, particularly for children & young people, which is something that has been extremely limited to date.

It is worth noting at this stage that the Schools' facilities & pitches will require increased investment to ensure they can cater for this proposed increase of out of hours community use activities. With the potential of the School being significantly improved/rebuilt in the next few years, work is already underway to ensure the sports & cultural facilities & pitches are included in future plans to cater for both the School's growth. Developing a more extensive community use programme at this time & demonstrating local demand for it, will be important in justifying the need for retention & potential expansion of the School's community accessible facilities in the future.

In the short to medium term (1-2 years) the priority is to be proactive in encouraging new use, managing it properly & developing a quality approach to what is on offer. If this is achieved in these early stages, growth will occur & community confidence & support will increase. This in turn will assist in seeking more significant funding to ensure that the facilities remain "fit for purpose" & have the capacity to cater for an expanding local resident population.

4. Financial

Over recent months the School has been assessing the financial implications of committing to this proposed expansion of its community use programme. Its provision to date has been amalgamated within its overall budgets & funding arrangements. However, a new designated budget area has now been established to be able to highlight its specific financial costs & income streams as well as implications on internal resources & management.

It is clear that historic activity to date has been an ongoing cost to the School, approximately £10,000 annually. It is therefore essential future activity levels generate sufficient income to offset costs & ultimately provide an annual surplus that can be reinvested in the facilities & the wider activity programme.

Committing to the new CUPO "Duty Cover" staff as outlined above is a new direct cost, whilst there are also "one off" set up costs associated with making the fitness gym safe & accessible for public use. The annual cost of a part time CUPO post is £10,000 approx. therefore starting in October 2023 & bringing in a further post in April 2024 to meet the expanded opening hours programme, will cost a total of approx. £25,000. Set up costs (for fitness gym/reception CCTV, online bookings system, TV & monitoring screen, safety & customer signage) is £7,300 have already been committed to enable the fitness gym to open in early November.

The new budget comprises these revisions within the current financial year & projects into next financial year from April 2024 to Mar 2025. Over that period, the target is for the fitness gym to attract up to 75 regular customers (recognising that the opening hours are currently limited), who are likely to become members & therefore be provide a key new annual income stream. Together with growth in the wider club & community activities programme it is projected that the overall annual income generated by community use activities, will

increase from the current £31,000 approx. towards £50,000, assuming the new staff posts & local demand are forthcoming.

This period of approx. 18 months has been chosen as financial projections indicate that this new activity should enable breakeven/a small surplus to be achieved mainly through the establishment of the sustainable fitness gym & classes programme. It is important to recognise that fitness-based activities are commercially viable, whereas sport, cultural & more community-based use activity income does not normally cover all costs. However, this project, although needing to be financially viable, fundamentally aims to extend opportunities for the local community to participate in physical & socially based activities for the wider benefit of individuals & the community's health & wellbeing.

A monitoring system to record & highlight the numbers of actual usage & participant profiles is currently being developed. This information will be able to provide insight as to which parts of the local community are using the facilities & more importantly will highlight areas that require targeted promotion and/or education to encourage non participants to take part in physical & social activity for their part of their everyday lives.

5. Funding Request

The Phase 1 funding request originally submitted was based on a designated person being taken on for 1 year to undertake the community consultation, develop an Action Plan for future improvements & funding plans & starting a range of new community activities. In practice, as outlined above, these aspects have generally been achieved over the period, through the work of the School's Community Use & Marketing Officer, assisted by internal PE & administrative staff & with advisory support provided by Tony Bass (External Project Advisor), with costs being covered within current School budgets.

The funding request therefore is now revised to provide a contribution towards the set-up costs of £7,300 & the CUPO costs of £25,000 as these are the key requirements to enabling this project to move into its implementation stage up to end March 2025. The request therefore remains at £10,000 as previously stated but remains at the Council's discretion to determine.

TB 25 – 10 - 23