

Case study

The project

The Furzehill Centre, Borehamwood

The organisation

Hertfordshire County Council

Key practice areas

Delivering community needs

Working with key partners

Service enhancement through co-location

The challenge

- A middle school in Borehamwood became surplus to the needs of the education system following education review objectives to raise standards and remove surplus capacity
- Being close to the town centre, the site would be an attractive location for public services which serve the entire settlement of Borehamwood
- When decisions were taken to re-organise the education system, it was anticipated that disposal of the previously developed part of the site, for residential purposes, would produce significant capital receipts to invest in sites retained for education purposes, resulting in a building stock of sufficient quality to help improve standards
- The town planning system allowed redevelopment of the previously developed part of the site and protected the undeveloped part of the site unless a special case could be made to release the land
- The regulations governing the disposal of school playing fields require exacting criteria to be met for residential development to take place on the playing fields
- The County Council operates a single storey family centre elsewhere in the town, from physically and functionally obsolete premises, which underutilises the site's capacity
- The local Primary Care Trust (PCT) operates a health clinic from a site adjoining the family centre, a building which shares the deficiencies of the family centre
- Adjoining the health clinic but on the other side from the family centre, the County Council has a library which is not fit for purpose and makes poor use of the site
- The family centre, health centre and library form part of an area where there are a number of public sector buildings, including the local council's civic offices. There is potential for partnership working to regenerate the area and unlock latent capital, enhancing the appearance of the main gateway into Borehamwood and improving the delivery of public services by incorporating a new library in a comprehensive redevelopment
- The Borehamwood Community Partnership (BCP), an umbrella organisation for local community groups originally established by government grant as part of a Single Regeneration project, has identified a demand for space for local community groups which cannot be met from existing buildings
- The challenge is to deliver a successful capital project, by positive asset management in partnership with a PCT and the voluntary sector.

The key steps

- Gaining the trust of the local planning authority
- Setting up a partnership with the PCT and BCP
- Achieving ownership by the local community of the concepts required to provide and operate a mixed use building providing services delivered by both the statutory and voluntary sectors
- Setting up a management structure to plan, deliver and operate the project
- Obtaining the town planning permissions
- Securing legal agreements with the local planning authority to ring fence capital receipts to provide capital for the project
- Procuring the Secretary of State for Education's consent for disposal of school playing fields
- Securing a mechanism via a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to provide the PCT funding and HCC gap funding for the scheme
- Setting up arrangements for the provision of infrastructure to serve the project
- A successful disposal of surplus land for residential purposes

The outcome

- Work is due to start on construction of the Furzehill Centre in June 2006 which will provide a new flexible facility to improve the quality and range of services provided to the local community by the PCT and HCC
- The new facility will allow the very early delivery of a children's centre complying with government initiatives introduced at the end of 2005
- The co-location of PCT and HCC children's services in the same building facilitates the integration of services delivered from different statutory bodies to the same client group
- Voluntary sector occupation of the building, providing complimentary services to the local community, extends the benefits of co-location and adds an extra dimension to the scheme which makes this project stand out from others
- Active asset management by HCC has procured the site and created capital for the project, which would not otherwise have been available, from both exceptional land disposal and the private sector, via the PFI scheme
- Revenue costs will be reduced due to economies brought about by joint use of a single building, for example, a single shared front reception
- Running costs of the building will be lower than those of the existing buildings due to more efficient energy systems and reduced repair and maintenance liability in the new building
- There will be environmental benefits from reduced carbon dioxide emissions due to the mechanical and electrical installations of the new building meeting modern environmental standards
- Both the PCT and HCC will vacate obsolete and poorly performing buildings
- Relocation of public services from Elstree Way will enable regeneration of another part of the town and release further capital receipts
- The potential to establish a new library in a comprehensive redevelopment of the sites at Elstree Way
- HCC will receive a capital receipt of some £7.5m from the sale of the Lyndhurst surplus land

The learning points

- The need for a thorough risk analysis at the inception of the project, updating the risk register as the project develops
- To be realistic in setting dates for key milestones
- The "emerging" status of PCTs needs to be recognised in the project plan to take account of the possible changes in approach, appropriate skills of PCT staff, and service/property procurement
- An umbrella organisation, representing the collective view of community organisations, is essential
- Collaborative engagement with the local community is worth the investment in time and resources
- Being patient can be rewarded as new initiatives from central government are introduced
- Complex arrangements can be achieved if property practitioners have the appropriate skills and the commitment/goodwill of the strategic service commissioners
- Reliable data as part of the asset management process supports the business case for release of resources
- Recognition that local planning authorities need to be seen to act strictly in accordance with local and national policies in order to avoid challenge - this means that the lead authority on the development scheme has to establish a robust business case which will be subject to rigorous and public scrutiny in both the town planning and financial aspects of the project

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