



16<sup>th</sup> February 2022

As with many voluntary organisations, the last couple of years have been challenging ones. But I am pleased to report that from the Ile Youth and Community Centre's perspective, they have appeared to weather it reasonably well, through good management and prudent measures.

The centre benefited immensely from the Government Grants schemes that were administered through SSDC and helped the centre keep afloat, especially through the 'lockdown' phases. General activity and use of the centre has reduced due to various reasons and sadly one group, the 'Ilminster Majorettes' folded during the period. However, things are picking up, with some groups beginning to return to their pre-pandemic timings and other groups looking to restart after a pause.

Sadly, as with many facilities across our District, the material state of the building has suffered, both from age and vandalism. The building itself dates from the mid-1960s and consequently constructed at a time when materials such as asbestos and concrete were commonplace in the building industry. As such, over the period since the last report, various works have been undertaken both externally and internally:

- As a result of vandalism, a flat roof to the rear of the building had to be replaced. Work was completed last year. New lighting was installed and the kitchen ceiling replaced. Most of this work was paid for through an insurance claim, which has meant an inevitable increase in premiums.
- Asbestos guttering and down pipes were removed and replaced. New guttering was installed at the rear of the building and fascia boards redecorated.
- A new water heater was installed, as well as all radiator valves changed and the heating system completely cleaned.
- Dampness had damaged some of the main hall's flooring. This was treated and replaced. Some of the floorboards had to be custom made, as they are no longer mass manufactured.
- Tree works were carried out on the very large willow tree that stood at the entrance to the centre, which had been damaged and become dangerous.

As some councillors may be aware, although the centre is owned and operated by a trust, the land on which it sits is owned by SSDC. A 99-year lease was agreed when the centre was built, of which approximately 34 years is left to run. This land provides the centre with its major income generation, as it allows for the rental of parking spaces to local residents and business in the centre of Ilminster. This is effectively how the centre has managed to financially stay afloat. Prudently, the Trustees and Committee ringfenced much of this income for the ongoing maintenance of the building. But that is now being sorely tested.

Looking forward.



The centre's use is beginning to increase and Ilminster Town Council has agreed funding with Young Somerset, to provide youth facilities which are looking to utilize the centre. Other clubs and organisations using the centre, mean that its event diary has something in there nearly every weekday/evening.

However, there are major financial challenges ahead for the centre, with regards to the age of the building and its material state. Some of the issues identified will require major works and large costs. In no particular order, they include:

- Replacing the main boiler and heating system.
- Removing all remaining asbestos from the building.
- Removing and replacing the main hall roof.
- Replacing and/or repairing the flat roof over the toilets and front office.
- Updating and/or replacing the website.

Following a meeting with the Chair, the Deputy Mayor and myself, I agreed to investigate the possibility of grant funding for some of the works. It was also considered whether the building, considering its age, should be replaced in its entirety. A new building would be more environmentally efficient and help reduce overheads in the long run and provide a more modern and appealing facility for organisations and the wider community. But this latter suggestion would be a major undertaking and involve the centre taking a huge financial risk and hit on its income, both from the hall and the car park.

This is an incredible facility built by and for the people of Ilminster and stands as a testament to what a community can achieve when it comes together. The Ile Youth and Community Centre has great potential going forward. With enthusiasm and support behind it, it can once again become a focal point for the young people and community of Ilminster.

Cllr Brian Hamilton