

A Networking Centre for East Belfast

Report on East Belfast Community Development Agency's Proposal for Templemore Avenue School

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Community Technical Aid
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I. Introduction

Community Technical Aid (CTA) was commissioned by East Belfast Partnership to provide development and feasibility assistance to East Belfast Community Development Agency's proposal for a Networking Centre. This report presents:

- the findings of the consultation with community stakeholders in the project;
- an analysis of the needs of the stakeholders;
- the identified benefits of a Networking Centre; and
- plans and costings for the renovation and modernisation of Templemore Avenue School to provide a Networking Centre.

The report also identifies key design and planning issues and sources of funding for taking the project forward towards implementation.

2. Networking Centres - The Policy Context

The Department for Social Development commissioned research in 2003-2004 to inform the work of the Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector. This included research into the benefits of Networking Centres for local communities. The research report¹ identified the following benefits of a Networking Centre:

- preserving the independence of the sector while providing an environment, context and support for greater co-ordination;
- promoting efficiency and effectiveness through facilitating joint working and the sharing of skills, knowledge and resources;
- enabling improved needs identification across the sector at a sub-regional level and enhanced links between regional and sub-regional organisations in addressing those needs; and
- underpinning the financial sustainability of the sector by drawing income from other sectors, improving efficiencies and reducing dependence on grant aid.

The optimum elements of a Networking Centre were identified by the researchers and are presented in Appendix I.

Task Force and Positive Steps

The research recommended that the Task Force promote Networking Centres "as a key mechanism for improving co-ordination and developing sustainability within the community and voluntary sector". In its final report (Investing Together, October 2004) the Task Force recommended that resources be made available to support the development of proposal for centres. The government's response to the Task Force (Positive Steps, March 2005) adopted this recommendation and the Priorities and Budget Statement 2005-2006 allocated funding for a Modernisation Fund for the sector.

The Modernisation Fund is administered by the Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU) and includes revenue and capital elements. The guidelines for the revenue grants include provision for grant aid for the development of Networking Centres.

¹ Networking Buildings for Sustainability: Community Technical Aid and PMG Consulting (March 2004).

Policy Impacts

Areas of wider policy which Networking Centres can have an impact on include:

- **regeneration and renewal:** by enabling groups to work together, facilitating partnerships with statutory agencies, regenerating disused buildings and sites;
- **shared future:** by supporting inter-community activity, networking groups within and across communities, providing shared facilities and services;
- **targeting social need:** by promoting the needs of disadvantaged areas, enabling statutory agencies to better understand, access and engage with local communities;
- **efficiency and effectiveness:** by sharing resources and services, enabling more co-ordination and joint working between community and voluntary groups and with partners.

3. Profile of the Stakeholders and Their Needs

The Networking Centre project is being promoted by East Belfast Community Development Agency. The community stakeholders who have identified their needs and articulated their interest in co-locating in the Networking Centre are:

- East Belfast Community Development Agency (EBCDA);
- East Belfast Independent Advice Centre (EBIAC);
- Inner East Belfast Sure Start;
- Beat Initiative;
- East Belfast Community Health Initiative (EBCHIP);
- East Belfast Alternatives;
- Home-Start East Belfast; and
- Community Drugs Awareness.

Each of the community stakeholders provides services for communities throughout East Belfast. They thus share a common catchment area. Furthermore each is committed to the development of East Belfast and its local communities and each is committed to working with others towards this goal. The aims and objectives of each of the stakeholders and the support services they provide are presented below.

3.1 East Belfast Community Development Agency

East Belfast Community Development Agency is the umbrella organisation supporting community development in East Belfast. Its membership is made up of community groups from across the area of almost 110,000 people. It is representative of a broad range of interests and needs within local communities including local residents' associations, faith based organisations, sports clubs, older people's projects and women's groups.

The Agency's mission is "to provide resources, support and capacity building programmes for community groups that are based on partnership, equal opportunities and sustainable outcomes".

EBCDA's strategic aims for 2006 to 2010 are:

- to assess the needs of the community sector and work with other key organisations to draw up programmes, projects, plans and strategies that build capacity;
- to promote good financial management practice in the community sector by offering financial management advice, training services and a community accountancy service;
- to provide accessible meeting rooms and assistance with photocopying, production of newsheets, leaflets and other administrative support;
- to encourage, support and facilitate the provision of quality community development, education and training opportunities;

- to seek to influence the policies of community, voluntary, government and public agencies so that they recognise the value of adopting a community development approach and that the community sector in East Belfast might benefit from this.

The Agency has been assessing the long-term support needs of the local community and voluntary sector within the context of a changing policy environment for the sector. This analysis has concluded that the financial sustainability of support services for local communities would be better safeguarded if these services shared premises and other resources and facilities. EBCDA has thus, over the past two years, investigated models of co-location and shared premises. It has reached the conclusion that a Networking Centre would: meet its own accommodation needs; provide facilities, services and resources for community groups in the area; provide accommodation to meet the needs of other support services; and further develop networking by groups and communities. The proposal for a Networking Centre thus takes forward many aspects of EBCDA's mission and strategic objectives.

EBCDA's own accommodation needs are presented in Table 1 on pages 12 and 13. They include office accommodation for its core and project staff and for projects which it facilitates. EBCDA will be responsible for managing the Networking Centre and the provision of conference, training and meeting rooms for the use of stakeholders, other community and voluntary organisations and organisations in the public sector.

3.2 East Belfast Independent Advice Centre

East Belfast Independent Advice Centre (EBIAC) provides free, independent and confidential advice to people in greater East Belfast who are affected by poverty and disadvantage. EBIAC's service promote community participation, is community based and community led and it seeks to ensure that the people of East Belfast do not suffer from a lack of information on their rights and responsibilities.

The Centre's specific services include:

- confidential, independent and free advice on a range of issues including benefits, disability, housing, employment and consumer services;
- specialist projects including dealing with debt, the needs of minority ethnic groups, tribunal representation, financial capability and volunteering opportunities;
- an outreach service which operates in a number of communities and also provides home visits to those who cannot access advice services due to physical or mental incapacity or caring responsibilities.

The accommodation needs of the centre include self-contained offices, interview rooms and a reception and waiting area (see Table 1).

3.3 Inner East Belfast Sure Start

The overall aims of Inner East Belfast Sure Start (IEBSS) are: to co-ordinate and enhance services for families with children under the age of three; to enhance parenting skills and child health; and to improve the development and learning of children ensuring they flourish at home and school.

It provides health, education and family support services in the Lower Newtownards Road, Woodstock and Willowfield areas. Its programmes include:

- health and social development scheme;
- outreach crèche services and toy and book library;
- parent and children's centre and play away crèche;
- special needs support scheme; and
- community play groups.

Sure Start also provides a community based speech and language service (Language for Life) and will soon be providing a fathers/male carers project.

The Networking Centre project will enable Sure Start to:

- establish a new daycare facility and crèche;
- support parents in returning to education, training or employment;
- provide a new fathers development support project;
- provide suitable office facilities for its speech and language therapist and two health development workers.

3.4 Beat Initiative

The Beat Initiative exists to involve as many people as possible in carnival arts and, in doing so, contribute to good relations and community wellbeing. Its role is to promote excellence in carnival arts; devise and organise performances; train and develop artists and encourage community participation, cultural collaboration and civic celebration.

During the past 12 years, the Beat Initiative has:

- facilitated workshops on innovative music, visual, dance, theatre, carnival and circus arts;
- enabled production of the award-winning Belfast Carnival;
- been the nerve centre for creating multi-arts performances at the Millennium Dome;
- provided the rehearsal space for award-winning theatre companies;

- been a production factory for a wide variety of Belfast arts and community development projects; and
- been the base for arts, education and outreach programmes in the local area of East Belfast, across the city and around Northern Ireland.

The Beat Initiative's accommodation needs encompass:

- administration and project offices;
- workshop and training spaces;
- rehearsal facilities; and
- performance and exhibition spaces.

3.5 East Belfast Community Health Initiative (EBCHIP)

EBCHIP promotes health and wellbeing amongst vulnerable groups for whom preventative measures can provide the greatest impact. Its aims are:

- to provide 100 local people with access to information and training of their choice on five themes – men's health, drugs and alcohol awareness, family support, women's health and mental health;
- to develop mechanisms for exchanging health-related information through the Health Issues Working Group and other agencies in East Belfast;
- to inform policy makers of key health issues and information needs in local communities.

And its objectives are:

- to provide quality training opportunities for 100 local beneficiaries on the five health priorities;
- to develop and sustain links with key organisations in the community, and with policy makers and funding agencies;
- to develop an information base and share information on perceived health information needs and approaches to the provision of that information;
- to publicise the project in local neighbourhoods;
- to review progress and amend activity as required during the life of the project to offer the most effective approaches;
- to work with existing health projects in East Belfast;
- to enhance the skills, knowledge and awareness of the local beneficiaries;

- be innovative in approach by the use of a variety of venues for information and training session.

The project has trained 84 lay health information workers who are now engaged with the project in ten communities (Albertbridge Road, Ballybeen, Clarawood, Cregagh, Knocknagoney, Newtownards Road, Short Strand, Tullycarnet, Walkway, Willowfield) where they exchange information in their local communities with family, friends and neighbours and have collectively devoted over 10,000 hours to training and community events.

EBCHIP's accommodation needs include an office base and the use of group rooms, meeting and conference facilities and complementary therapy training rooms. Ideally it would also like to be able to link in with art therapy and other forms of complementary activities. EBCHIP views the Networking Centre as providing an ideal location for its 84 lay health information workers to meet, share information and experience and develop ways of working together and improving health service impacts in local communities.

3.6 East Belfast Alternatives

Alternatives developed out of a two year action research project, which explored the issue of punishment attacks and the operation of the paramilitary informal justice system. This research identified failings in the formal criminal justice system in addressing anti-social behaviour in the area and highlighted the need for a non-violent alternative to punishment attacks, that would be community-owned and based on the principles of restorative justice.

The project's accommodation needs include an office base in the Networking Centre and the shared use of meeting and conference facilities.

3.7 Home-Start East Belfast

Home-Start is a voluntary organisation which is committed to promoting the welfare of families with at least one child under five years of age. Volunteers offer regular support, friendship and practical help to families under stress in their own homes, helping to prevent crisis and break down.

Home-Start East Belfast has been operating since 1984 and has referrals throughout the area. In addition to family support and visiting it runs a mother and toddler group one morning a week where it promotes parent/child communication and interaction. It also runs monthly volunteer support and training sessions on all the issues affecting their volunteers and supports where applicable their personal development.

Its premises have a drop in facility and volunteers and families can call in for advice, information or just a cup of tea and a chat at any time.

Home-Start's accommodation needs include an office base and access to shared meeting and conference facilities.

3.8 CODA Project (Community Drugs Awareness)

CODA is a community-led partnership which aims to empower communities to take more responsibility for tackling drug issues and abuses and the associated difficulties. It skills up local people to enable them to deliver drug education and awareness to both their peers and young people. It achieves this by providing informal education with progression with further routes through to further training including accredited courses. These courses include counselling and parenting skills. CODA's accommodation needs in a Networking Centre include an office base and therapy rooms with access to training and meeting facilities.

3.9 Summary of Accommodation Needs

Table I overleaf presents the accommodation needs of all the community stakeholders. It also makes provision for a restaurant and lettable retail or office units. The restaurant would be leased to a private company or community business and would provide facilities for the community stakeholders, the daycare centre and crèche, meetings and conferences and be open for public use by the local community. The lettable units would be available for renting by public bodies, regional voluntary organisations or community businesses which need a base in the area. Like the restaurant these units would provide an income towards sustaining the Networking Centre.

Table I - Accommodation Needs

Group	Services and Functions	Needs
EBCDA	Community Development Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 150 -180 m² to include all existing staff and projects including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Talking Newspapers. - Community Care - 2 rooms. • Reception Area. • Interview Rooms. • 1 communal office (4 staff). • 3 separate offices.
EBIAC	Advice Centre Services and Base for Outreach Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 200 m² to include a self contained office (open plan). • 4 interview rooms. • Separate waiting/reception. • 1 management office. • Archive store.
Inner East Belfast Sure Start	Daycare Facility, Crèche and Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full daycare facility for 24 children but with meals contracted to Restaurant. • Separate entrance and play area. • Crèche facility for min 16 children. • Office accommodation for 6-8 programme staff. • Archive storage. • Use of training and meeting rooms.
Beat Initiative	Offices and Workshop /Performance areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 93 m² office accommodation. • Use of workshop/performance space.
EBCHIP	Office Base and Therapy Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 51 m² office and complimentary therapy suite. • Use of shared facilities.
Alternatives	Office Base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 two person offices. • Use of shared facilities.
Home-Start	Office Base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 35 m² office accommodation. • Use of shared facilities.
CODA	Office Base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 35 m². • Use of shared facilities.

(continued overleaf)

Table I - Accommodation Needs (continued)

Group	Services and Functions	Needs
Shared Facilities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-purpose community hall with changing facilities and storage. • Large meeting/board room approximately 30. • Smaller meeting rooms. • Kitchen. • Toilets.
Restaurant	Restaurant Facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully fitted lettable restaurant.
Lettable Units	Retail/Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self contained ground floor retail units. • First floor lettable offices.

4. **Benefits of a Networking Centre for East Belfast Communities**

In consultation workshops with community groups the benefits of a Networking Centre were articulated and explored. The benefits identified are summarised below.

- **Improved Networking and Partnership Working** - a Networking Centre will improve networking between communities in East Belfast and partnership working between community groups, voluntary organisations and public sector bodies.
- **Shared Future** - by providing both formal and informal opportunities and settings for networking between all community groups across East Belfast a Centre will contribute to realising the aims of the Shared Future policy. A Centre will also provide a focus for groups from outside East Belfast and from differing backgrounds and ethnic origins to meet with community groups from within the area and to learn about its issues, culture and perspectives;
- **Efficiency and Effectiveness** - a Centre will provide for more efficient use of resources, avoid duplication, improve communication between groups (including referrals) and facilitate shared services and facilities.
- **Improved Co-ordination** - a Networking Centre will facilitate greater co-ordination in planning, project development and service provision by community and voluntary groups in the area.
- **Better Promotion of Community Services** - a Networking Centre will raise the profile of the community and voluntary sector within East Belfast and in a wider context and raise awareness of the work of community and voluntary groups.
- **Improvements in Targeting and Provision of Services** - by improving communication between groups within East Belfast and with other sectors a centre will enhance understanding of community needs and how best to meet them.
- **Meeting Needs** - a Networking Centre will meet the accommodation needs of the stakeholders and provide improved facilities for the use of the wider community of East Belfast.

Section five of this report explains that EBCDA has identified Templemore Avenue School as a suitable location for a Networking Centre. This location will generate additional and significant benefits including:

- **Interface Development** - the building is located on the interface between the predominately Protestant Newtownards Road area and the predominately Catholic Short Strand community. Its development and shared use by people and groups from all areas will demonstrate communities' commitment to positive change and provide evidence of the regeneration potential of interface sites which have been contested spaces in the past.

- **Local Environment** - the Templemore Avenue area is in need of investment to renew its built and streetscape environment. The Centre will create a growing sense of community and public sector confidence in the area and provide a better context for attracting private investment in local residential and commercial properties.

5. The Proposal

East Belfast Community Development Agency (EBDCA) proposes to renovate the former Templemore Avenue School building. The building is owned by the Department for Social Development and is BI listed by the Environment and Heritage Service.

EBCDA's renovation proposals for the building have been developed in consultation with the community stakeholders and designed to:

- (1) meet the accommodation needs identified by the community stakeholders (see Table 1, pages 12 and 13);
- (2) provide conference, meeting, training, exhibition and performance facilities for use by all community and voluntary groups in East Belfast;
- (3) enable the shared use of services, facilities and resources by both the community stakeholders and the wider community and voluntary sector;
- (4) provide a focus for promoting the work of community and voluntary groups, improving communication and co-ordination and furthering partnership working; and
- (5) provide lettable units for commercial use and to generate income towards the financial sustainability of the Networking Centre.

The School was built in 1924 to the design of WG Davis, Architect. It was one of the first two schools built by the Belfast Education Committee and was constructed according to the most up-to-date ideas in regard to planning and architectural facilities. It is of sufficient architectural significance that it has been listed BI category by the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS). However the building has been derelict for some years and subsequently has fallen into a state of disrepair. Slates and lead flashings have been stripped from the roofs and fire damage has destroyed several areas including the structural steelwork to one of the roofs. The existing reinforced concrete structure itself has decayed significantly in some areas exacerbated by exposure to the elements. Photographs of the existing building are at Appendix 3.

The Department for Social Development has carried out some holding maintenance on the building and has secured all access points into the building including blocking up all the windows. It has further agreed to seal the exposed roofs of the building with metal sheeting to prevent further deterioration. The Department asked the Professional Services Division of the Department of Finance and Personnel to inspect and report on the building. The Division's Holding Repairs Statement (March 2005) is presented at Appendix 6.

Templemore Avenue is located within an Area of Townscape Character (ATC) as designated by the Planning Service in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (BMAP). The Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland advises on the need to "protect designated Areas of Townscape Character where the inherited mix and layout of buildings of different ages, styles and function adds to the quality of life

for the local community." Any demolition of buildings within an ATC requires planning permission and any application for development, including a change of use and alterations, must respect the appearance and qualities of the ATC.

Consultation with the Environment and Heritage Service has indicated that it would require that as much of the existing building fabric be retained as possible. The existing external appearance and courtyards should be retained with natural slate roofs reinstated and the existing hardwood and metal windows renewed or replicated. However sensitive alterations to the building to facilitate new uses will be acceptable including the replacement of the glazed screens to the courtyards and the formation of accessible entrance ramps and 'shop fronts' within the perimeter of the listed boundary railings.

Renovation Plans

The proposal currently includes for the provision of car parking in one of the courtyards with a vehicular access provided to the rear of the building at Westbourne Street. While EHS would prefer to see the courtyards retained as they are these changes are proposed following careful consideration of the car parking requirements, initial advice from Roads Service indicates that for the size and level of use of the building it would not accept on-street car parking only.

To ensure accessibility it has been necessary to provide access ramps to all of the entrances to the building. A single lift provides access to the first floor. The stakeholders' accommodation has been, where possible, fitted into the former classrooms to minimise the extent of structural alteration to the building. Acoustically isolating timber stud walls are used to form the smaller rooms. The existing corridors on the first floor and half on the ground floor provide general and escape circulation between the existing entrances and staircases and to the all of the stakeholders' accommodation. These staircases and entrances have been retained and minor modifications to handrails and stairs will improve accessibility. All doorways are to be widened and fire-rated doors replaced to meet Disability Discrimination Act standards. The Surestart Project and the restaurant have both absorbed the ground floor corridor into their accommodation to allow them use of the remaining courtyard. It is proposed that this courtyard will provide both a dedicated children's open and covered play area and external space for use by all the building occupants and by customers of the restaurant.

The outline cost estimate for the repair and upgrading of the building is included in this report (at Appendix 5) and is based on the proposed new use of the building as illustrated in the plans (Appendix 4). A schedule of works has been prepared and costed by Donaldson Associates, Quantity Surveyors. The costings allow for provisional sums for works where the exact specifications and standards require more detailed consideration and agreement with EHS and subject to specialist reports. This includes the reinstatement of the decorative plaster vaulted ceiling and mouldings to the former assemble hall, necessary concrete repairs, timber and damp reports. The cost estimate is £3.15 million and excludes VAT, all associated professional fees and statutory application fees.

The Schedule of Works is presented at Appendix 5. In summary it includes:

- structural repairs and alterations to roofs, wall and floor structures;
- partial replacement of timber floors;
- new natural slate roof coverings;
- new flat roof sheeting;
- new aluminium gutters and downpipes;
- new external doors to match existing;
- new or refurbished windows to match existing;
- new internal walls and ceilings;
- new glazed courtyard screens;
- new internal doors and joinery;
- new zoned heating installation and plant;
- new fire detection and intruder alarm installations;
- new power, lighting and data installations;
- new passenger lift;
- new sanitary and kitchen fittings, including drainage;
- new finishes throughout;
- new external access ramps;
- new carparking area to courtyard;
- landscaping to courtyard area.

6. Funding Opportunities

This section of the report identifies potential sources of funding for developing and implementing the renovation proposals for the creation of a Networking Centre. The potential sources are:

- the Architectural Heritage Fund;
- Environmental and Heritage Service (Historic Buildings Grant);
- Heritage Lottery Fund;
- Neighbourhood Renewal;
- International Fund for Ireland;
- Renewing Communities;
- Peace III Funding; and
- the Prince's Regeneration Trust.

6.1 Architectural Heritage Fund

The Fund provides Project Development Grants to charitable organisations for professional work needed to prepare a project proposal for funding from other sources. This includes technical work and specialist studies required to develop a proposal in more detail. Grants are available up to £15,000. The Fund also provides grant aid of up to 75% (maximum £75,000) towards the cost of professional fees and other costs involved in viability assessments and options appraisal work.

6.2 Environmental and Heritage Service Historic Buildings Grant

This grant is available towards the cost of specific eligible items of work for the repair and restoration of listed buildings. BI listed buildings (such as Templemore Avenue School) are eligible for grants of up to 20% of the cost of specified items of work. The recently published Sustainable Development Strategy includes a key target of to rescue "at least 200 structures on the Built Heritage at Risk Register by 2016".

6.3 Heritage Lottery Fund

The Fund provides two types of grants: (a) Project Planning Grants; and (b) Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) grants.

The Project Planning Grants range from £5,000 to £50,000 and are for specialist conservation studies, research and planning work and for employing someone for up to one year to assist with project planning and funding applications. THI grants range from £250,000 to £2 million and are normally for no more than 50% of total project costs (or, exceptionally 75%). Priority is given to projects in areas of deprivation which can demonstrate significant public benefits. Preference is given to projects in defined areas (eg townscape and conservation areas) where a range of work to a number of structures, buildings or spaces is involved.

The application process for the THI grants is in two stages. Development grants of up to 75% up to a total of £25,000 can be made available following stage one approval.

6.4 Neighbourhood Renewal

Neighbourhood Renewal has been designed by the Department for Social Development to become the lead process for delivering its regeneration commitments in disadvantaged areas. The Templemore Avenue School building is within a Neighbourhood Renewal area and thus eligible for consideration for capital grant aid which is administered by the Department through Belfast Regeneration Office.

6.5 International Fund for Ireland

In January 2006 the Fund launched its Strategic Framework for Action 2006 - 2010. The document presents the Fund's strategic objectives and funding programmes. These include a regeneration programme for community based economic regeneration projects in the most deprived urban and rural areas. The Strategic Framework also commits the Fund to helping to realise the vision of a shared future. In recent years the Fund has provide capital investment grants up to and beyond £500,000 and significantly more for flagship projects.

6.6 Renewing Communities

The Renewing Communities Action Plan includes two action points which could provide funding for the project. The "Targeted Regeneration of Worst Urban Dereliction" has a budget allocation of £500,000. This is initially for physical redevelopment masterplans in five areas including Inner East Belfast. "Improving Arterial Routes" has a budget allocation of £4 million capital funding for improvements to secondary arterial routes. Both funds are administered by the Department for Social Development.

6.7 Peace III Funding

The European Union has agreed budget allocation for a Peace III Programme. Final decisions on the type of activities the Programme will support are awaited but it is likely that it will focus primarily on peace and reconciliation work. The location of the project on Templemore Avenue may provide the opportunity to seek support from the Programme.

6.8 The Prince's Regeneration Trust

The purpose of The Prince's Regeneration Trust is to repair and find new community and public benefit uses for major historic buildings which are in danger of falling into decay or facing demolition. It seeks to support projects which will be a significant catalyst to local regeneration, offer job opportunities and act as a focus to attract business and residential development.

The Trust (which now incorporates the Phoenix Trust) has built partnerships with organisations and agencies such as the Environment and Heritage Service (Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland), and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Projects supported by the Trust have been large, unusual buildings where a practical solution is urgently needed. The Trust is unique in that it will not only propose detailed and viable solutions, it will also implement them.

7. Recommendations

In taking forward the project proposal it is recommended that EBCDA:

- (1) Continues to engage the community stakeholders in the development process.
- (2) Shares experiences and learning on a project "twinning" basis with the Falls Community Council which is developing a similar project in the lower Falls area of West Belfast.
- (3) Seeks funding for project planning, co-ordination, development and fundraising from the funding opportunities identified in section six. This funding should be used to prepare applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Environment and Heritage Service.
- (4) Seeks funding for the research, technical work and specialist studies required to take forward a listed building project.
- (5) Ensures that the project is considered by the consultants preparing a physical redevelopment masterplan for inner East Belfast as part of the Renewing Communities Initiative.
- (6) Initiates early discussions with Belfast Regeneration Office (custodians of the building) on the findings of this report to:
 - agree the next steps in the project development process;
 - identify the steps needed for the project to be considered for Neighbourhood Renewal funding; and
 - discuss the measures BRO will now take to protect the fabric and structure of the building.
- (7) Seeks information on the capital element of the Modernisation Fund which it is anticipated will be launched by the Voluntary and Community Unit this year and may support networking centres.

Appendix I - Optimum Elements of a Networking Centre

The optimum elements of a Sustainable Networking Centre are:

Social Capital Elements **Description**

- Stakeholder Engagement - Organisations within the Centre share responsibility for delivering its core purpose in the form of an agreed 'compact'. This compact should be developed in stages with early 'in principle' agreement on issues of lead responsibility for developing the proposal, management, risk taking and ownership.
- Co-ordination and Joint Working (Bonding) - Resources and skills within the Centre to identify opportunities for and provide a lead in creating co-ordination and joint working. The compact should describe how this will take place and be facilitated.
- Co-operation between Regional and Sub-Regional Organisations (Bridging) - The Centre co-ordinates the work of regional and sub-regional organisations and conjoins local needs and regional provision. The compact should describe how this will be facilitated.
- Policy Forum (Linking) - Centre services a forum for sector to understand, discuss and respond to public policy issues. The compact should describe how this will be facilitated.
- Generic and Sub-Sectoral Mix - The Centre stakeholders are generic (community development) and sub-sectoral (thematic) organisations with a district-wide remit and include advice services to the public.

Human Capital Elements

Description

- Co-ordination of Training - Centre occupants co-ordinate needs analysis and training provision for both themselves and others. This should be initiated prior to a centre being proposed to establish and test the basis of co-ordination.
- Skills and Information Sharing - Systems (including an IT network) in place for sharing information and skills within Centre and between Centre and others (with due regard to issues of confidentiality and data protection). Information 'library' provided. Reception provides signposting service.
- Needs Identification and Response - Centre facilitates identification of emerging needs and development of co-ordinated responses. The compact should describe how this will take place and be facilitated. It should be initiated prior to a centre being proposed in order to establish and test the basis of co-ordination.

Physical Elements

- Accessibility and Acceptability
 - Location seen as 'neutral' and supporting a shared facility (particularly where a centre will serve divided communities and can thus contribute to better relations). Location should also be served by public transport and accessible from nearest car park. Design and layout conform with modern accessibility standards. Symbols associated with one community only not in use. Management Committee and tenants between them serve and reflect all communities.
- Conference and Training Facilities
 - Large conference room for 50, workshop room for 20 and meeting room for 15. All served by a kitchen and buffet dining area. Facilities to be located near main entrance if possible.
- Variety of Office Spaces
 - To include a mix of open plan and small units which can accommodate a range of community and voluntary sector organisations. Presumption in favour of open plan where feasible (to facilitate communication across organisational boundaries).
- Common Kitchen and Dining Area
 - Located at the core of the building and able to accommodate up to half of the people based in the Centre.
- Reception
 - Welcome environment with information and seating area.
- Core Resources Area
 - To include reprographics and information library services.
- Commercial Units
 - Units to let for public uses (retail, café, post office etc) and no more than 20% of total floor area. This element is desirable but may not always be possible (eg because of location, conditions attached to the building or site, VAT registration status)

Description

Financial Elements

- 100% Public Sector Capital Investment or Maximum 15% Loan in Commercial Location
 - 100% public sector investment allows all income to be devoted to the Centre's core purpose. A loan is only viable where commercial rental income can be secured to repay the loan. Issues such as VAT status, marketability, location, conditions attached to site or building need to be carefully considered.
- Minimise or Pass on VAT Commitments
 - Zero VAT rating should be sought on new build projects (but note this restricts income from commercial activities) and VAT registration considered for renovation projects (but note VAT must then be charged to users).
- Diverse Income Sources
 - Centre should aim to not be dependent on either a small number of income generators or one sectoral source.

Description

- Affordable Charges and Flexibility - Centre provides good quality accommodation for groups at a reasonable charge which is generally seen within the sector as affordable. Centre is flexible when groups have short-term funding difficulties.
- Generate a Surplus - Centre income should meet management, financing (if any) and operating costs while providing a surplus to support services for the local community.
- Cost Effective Management - Business plan in place. Systems for minimising energy and maintenance costs. Shared responsibility built into management to minimise cost of overheads.

Networking Buildings for Sustainability: Community Technical Aid and PMG Consulting (March 2004).

Appendix 2 - Plans of Existing Building

Appendix 3 - Photographs of Existing Building

Appendix 4 - Networking Centre Layout Plans

Appendix 5 - Schedule of Works and Estimated Renovation Costs

Appendix 6 - Holding Repairs Statement (Department of Finance and Personnel)

Appendix 7 - Historic Buildings Listing

Community Technical Aid is the only region-wide voluntary organisation which provides professional planning and architectural services for community and voluntary groups. We facilitate community participation in planning and support community development by assisting groups to develop the skills, knowledge and infrastructure needed to regenerate disadvantaged urban and rural areas.

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