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Feasibility Study Summary Report
December 2018

Potential of Corranny Primary School as a new Community Hub in Aghadrumsee

Insight Solutions was appointed by Aghadrumsee Community Group to undertake a Feasibility Study to explore potential of the Corranny School site as a new Community Hub.

This Hub would seek to provide a space in which new and innovative services could be delivered to improve quality of life for local people.

Initial engagement was undertaken to understand the need, appetite and demand for such services. This engagement included survey work (online and offline) with a total of 126 respondents. A public meeting was then held in St Mccartan's Primary School on Thursday 28th June 2018, followed by a further meeting in Corranny Bar on 17th October 2018.

A full copy of the Feasibility Study is available at:

http://www.insight-solutions.org/blog/view/33/corranny-primary-school

For further information on Insight Solutions please see our website **www.insight-solutions.org**

The Status Quo

People rated quality of current facilities in Aghadrumsee as only 2.3 out of 10.

Top three issues negatively impacting on the quality of life were;

- Community facilities (79%),
- Facilities for young people (78%) and
- Facilities for older people (71%).

The impact of this lack of key services is;

- Increased isolation (81%),
- Having to do without (77%) and
- Having to travel elsewhere to access these services (51%).

"A cross community facility at Corranny School would be a great bonus for all in this isolated rural community...existing facilities are very limited and need to be extended for essential interaction in our community".

"We need a central hub where people can socialise and be part of a strong community".

"We currently have no meeting space. Our school cannot be accessed and the only other place Corranny is inappropriate for some meetings".

"All of the facilities are urgently needed in this rural setting for essential community interaction as they do not exist at present. Both youth and senior citizens activities are needed".

Potential Impact

The vast majority (95%) believe that a new community hub would deliver many positive differences for the community.

The top five benefits that a community hub would bring were;

- Reduce Isolation (97%),
- Create a more connected community (95%),
- Prevent people from having to travel elsewhere to access services (93%),
- Enable the community to engage in new and improved services (95%) and
- Enable people to access local facilities on a more regular basis (95%).

"The hub in the area is essential. I believe so many people would avail of the services that it would provide and would give the community a better quality of life, it would reduce isolation and bring the community together".

"A facility like the one proposed at Corranny old school has the potential to activate and empower a community. The local services that are proposed would be a welcome addition to community life. This is needed in our area".

"A central meeting spot for older people/ senior citizens and indeed all ages of people. A community hub would help sustain the friendships / relationships and a sense of community among the local people".

"This is an opportunity to rekindle this building which is falling into decay, into something new and beneficial for our local community".

People rated the following as 'very important' for the local community:

- Kitchen facilities for functions, events and private hire were very important (67.29%)
- Increased range of exercise classes, health and wellbeing classes (68.22%)
- Broader range of activities for young people (71.96%)
- Enhanced opportunities for older people (73.83%)
- Adult education classes (55.88%)
- Meeting space for groups and private hire (75.47%)
- Opportunities for new local groups to be developed (74.07%)
- Parenting and pre-school facilities (66.04%)

Conclusions

Need and Demand

1. There is a serious deficit in community facilities within the local community, which is compounded further by its distinct isolation and high levels of deprivation (top 1% of most deprived areas in Northern Ireland in terms of access to services, top 1% of most deprived in terms of income generation affecting older people);

2. The current level of community provision has a negative impact on quality of life for local people living in Aghadrumsee (e.g. increased isolation, anxiety) as a result of poor or non-existent level of services including provision for older people, young people and health and wellbeing opportunities;

3. The potential impacts of the proposed project are significant including reducing isolation (97%); creating a more connected community (95%); enabling the community to engage in new and improved services (95%); allowing people to access local facilities on a more regular basis; and preventing people from having to travel elsewhere to access services;

Support for Project

1. Widespread support exists for the development of Corranny School – 80% indicated that they would be prepared to support the project financially in the longer term through local fundraising efforts; 67% reported that they would be willing to volunteer their time to help develop the project further; and 60% have indicated that they would help with maintenance and upkeep of new community space on a voluntary basis;

2. A site offering indoor and outdoor space such as that offered by Corranny Primary School is rare, particularly within a rural community such as Aghadrumsee;

3. The Parish is agreeable to leasing the land on favorable terms;

82% believe that the development of facilities would add substantial value and make a long-term difference.

67% would volunteer their time to help develop this project.

89% stated the preferred approach was developing the new community hub at Corranny Primary School.

80% would support the project financially through fundraising efforts

"These facilities are needed for young and old, families and people who are on their own, it is such a hindrance to travel to other communities for anything, we should be putting into our own community to get back from it, not someone else's".

"It would be excellent as it would enable me to be more involved with our community".

"I think there are many projects required in the area. I understand that many people have made efforts to make this possible. I appreciate their work and I look forward to further developments and an improved quality of life in this area".

Things to Consider

"Very good proposal but would require a large amount of support (financial and personal) from the local community to keep it going".

"We need to speak to people who run other centres to get a better understanding of costs and potential problems".

"There are some excellent examples of other rural community hubs and we need to learn from them".

"Long term viability is a question that needs addressed and we need to be mindful of duplicating services".

Investment Potential

1. The proposed project is felt to be an attractive proposition for attracting grant aid in the short to medium term. Utilising existing assets within communities is currently the preferred approach by many funders this project fully meets that criteria.

2. The project is considered to be an excellent strategic fit to all local (Council level) and regional (NI level) policies and strategies;

3. The proposed project has the potential to leverage borrowings from a lender such as Ulster Community Investment Trust which provides loans exclusively to other third sector organisations such as community groups, charities, sports clubs and social enterprises in Northern Ireland.

4. There are many other examples of projects where vacated schools have provided an important hub for local rural communities. Corranny Primary School has the potential to achieve similar outcomes for Aghadrumsee.

Risks

1. The 'clawback' from Department of Education needs to be resolved before the project can be advanced. If this amount has to be factored into costs for the project promoter, it could add additional financial pressures which may jeopardise the viability of the project;

2. There are clearly risks associated with this project, but all capital projects carry a degree of risk. However, steps identified already including strengthening management and governance arrangements and undertaking more investigative work to understand the extent of works required would be advantageous .