

WIVENHOE
COMMUNITY
FACILITIES

**A PLAN FOR
THE FUTURE**

July 1994

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1. Introduction

This document has been drawn up by the Wivenhoe Facilities Group, a group of people who are actively involved in the following organisations:

Wivenhoe Pantomime Group
Wivenhoe Players
Wivenhoe Gilbert and Sullivan Society
Wivenhoe Community Association
Wivenhoe Town Football club
Wivenhoe Crime Prevention Panel
Wivenhoe Society

The Group has also included several members of the Wivenhoe Town Council and all three Wivenhoe Ward Councillors.

The purpose of this document is to provide a plan for the future development of community facilities in Wivenhoe, designed to meet the needs of a growing population as well as recognising the opportunities which currently exist to 'fill the gaps' in existing facilities.

Apart from drawing on the knowledge and experience of members of the group, a survey of residents' preferences for sporting and social requirements was undertaken by the Facilities Group, covering the whole of Wivenhoe. The survey questionnaire and analysis was provided by 3RS Services, a firm experienced in this type of survey. The survey was sponsored by the Wivenhoe Town Council.

2. Youth Facilities

A number of organisations at present provide activities for young people of school age in Wivenhoe. These include the Scouts and Guides in their hall behind the Town Council's office, the Congregational and Methodist Churches in their respective halls, the cadet section of the Sailing Club and the junior section of our Cricket Club and the recently-established activities at Wivenhoe Town Football Club, which supplement the thriving Football Club on its site adjacent to the Wivenhoe Town Football Club ground.

The group's view is that two meeting places for young people in Wivenhoe are required, one in the north and a second in the south. Wivenhoe Town Football Club's ground, together with the Youth Football Club, should be the focal point for youth activities in the north (subject to the retention of its buildings beyond the end of the forthcoming season). Similarly, the Phillip Road Centre should act as the focus for youth activities in the south. Both should have the capacity to offer a meeting place and a coffee bar, recognising that youngsters do not always want activities to be organised for them.

3. Facilities for the Over-60s

Wivenhoe possesses a number of very active groups for citizens over the age of 60. Keep-fit activities are centred mainly on the William Loveless Hall. Carpet bowls takes place in the Phillip Road Centre. The Wivenhoe Allotments and Gardens Association (WAGA) and the Wivenhoe Show cater for their gardening interests. The vigour of our Workers' Educational Association (WEA) group and of the University of the Third Age (U3A) testify to a strong interest in educational opportunities. The Over-60s and Monday Clubs offer important social contacts for older people.

The Wivenhoe Facilities Group's view is that, despite the range of activities for the Over-60s currently provided in Wivenhoe, further provision is needed. The levels of demand on the William Loveless Hall and the Phillip Road Centre preclude full satisfaction of the social, educational and exercise requirements over people over this age being given. Greater use could and should be made of the facilities available in the Phillip Road Centre and at the Wivenhoe Town Football Club (subject to them remaining available) in the medium term.

If new community facilities become available in Wivenhoe, then the Group is of the view that refreshment facilities for the elderly (i.e. for alcohol, coffee and tea) must be a priority.

4. Arts and Drama

Wivenhoe has three active drama groups, i.e. the Players, The Gilbert and Sullivan Society and the Pantomime group. They currently use the William Loveless Hall for approximately ten weeks a year. There is also clear evidence from the Community Arts Project and the survey by 3RS Services of a demand for arts/crafts facilities, for exhibition space, etc.

The Phillip Road Centre's Grasby Wing has under-utilised space for arts and crafts activities. The chance to exploit these more actively, given the renewed interest of the County Council in the centre, should be promoted. (Pam Dan's skills should be passed on.)

The Facilities Group believes that the Development Brief prepared by British Rail, the County and Borough Councils for the goods shed and stable block on the Railway Station yard offers an important opportunity to meet these requirements. The possibility of establishing a small theatre in the goods shed was canvassed in the Development Brief. (This might entail moving the stage from the William Loveless Hall to the goods shed: it might also involve the establishment of a bar within the building operating under an occasional licence.) External inspection suggests that it may also be possible to arrange exhibition space within the building. These options need to be taken up directly with the two Councils and with BR. If they were to become practicable, a new umbrella organisation to assume responsibility for the management of the building would be necessary. The Players, The Gilbert and Sullivan Society, the Pantomime group and, perhaps, the Wivenhoe Community Arts Project would be appropriate members of such an umbrella group.

The Facilities Group recommends that this option be vigorously pursued by these organisations in the immediate future.

5. Sports Facilities

Wivenhoe has some relatively good sporting facilities in terms of the provision for cricket, bowls and sailing, for which there are established clubs, with their own club houses and, in the case of cricket and bowls, their own grounds.

Wivenhoe people are able to play tennis and squash at the University of Essex, and sometimes badminton, although the two Wivenhoe Badminton clubs compete with users to use the one court in the William Loveless Hall.

Aerobics and similar types of keep-fit classes are adequately run at the William Loveless Hall and other venues in Wivenhoe, including the Wivenhoe Town Football Club club-house.

There is a thriving Youth Football Club at Elmstead Road for boys from the ages of 8 to 16. And, apart from the main football club side, there are 16+ teams based at the adjacent Wivenhoe Town Football Club site.

This football club is currently under threat of closure unless the ground can be acquired from the present owner, who wishes to sell. Sale of this important site would mean the loss of the Wivenhoe Town Football team, who has added to the prestige of the local area through its success in the last few seasons by gaining promotion in several leagues.

The Wivenhoe Facilities Group is aware of demand for a swimming pool, particularly for the elderly, who find the Colchester pool too far to travel to. Also, the Wivenhoe Tennis Club has for years harboured thoughts of its own courts rather than use those at the university. Having courts in Wivenhoe, it is felt, would attract more people to this game.

A larger hall in Wivenhoe, accommodating two badminton courts, as well as such sports as netball and basketball, would be welcomed. Such a building would have additional benefits to Wivenhoe beyond sports use, for such events as dances. With a local population approaching 10,000 people, the William Loveless Hall at its maximum capacity of 150 people (100 if seated at tables) is just too small.

6. Longer-term Requirements

There is a possibility that Beauchamp Homes Ltd., who are acquiring the important Wivenhoe Port site for the construction of over 300 homes, will offer the use of a re-constructed building on Bath Street to the Centre Project Group.

This group, comprising a number of local people, has identified a wide range of activities which could be run from this building. These activities, like a crèche and after-school care facilities, art/craft workshops, etc., to meet a more social type of need than currently catered for in Wivenhoe, are exciting and this group, in consequence, has gained the backing of the Wivenhoe Facilities Group and the Wivenhoe Town Council, as well as many organisations in Wivenhoe.

The possibility of acquiring the old engine shed in the BR car park has already been mentioned as a place which could be purpose-designed for the performing arts, and become a permanent home for the three existing Wivenhoe groups, the amateur dramatics group, the Gilbert and

Sullivan Society, and the Pantomime Group. The Wivenhoe Facilities Group feels excited about this idea.

Brief mention was made in the previous section of the Wivenhoe Town Football Club which has been under threat since December, 1993, of losing its site at the top of Wivenhoe, on the junction of Broad Lane and Wivenhoe.

The town is seriously in danger of losing an excellent site of 10.5 acres at Elmstead Road which could be the centre of sporting and recreation in Wivenhoe. Currently, the senior Football Club, Wivenhoe Town, occupies this site, which the owner of the land has threatened to close down if the Club fails to purchase it. About 4.5 acres of the site is covered by the main football pitch and surrounding stands and clubhouse, leaving about 6 acres of open space. The Football Club has produced plans to develop the site over the next 10 years for general sporting and recreational activities for the local community, subject to its successful acquisition of the site. The plans are in five stages:-

- Stage 1 - development of up to four tennis courts
- Stage 2 - a small stand for the staging of tennis tournaments
- Stage 3 - the laying of an artificial floodlit surface for multi-sports activities (eg hockey, netball, 5-a-side football. This stage could be implemented at the same time as Stage 1 (subject to finance) or in place of it
- Stage 4 - possible provision of squash courts
- Stage 5 - the provision of a basic swimming pool

These are, of course, subject to planning and finance being available. There is also the issue of covenants held by the adjoining landowner, which will need to be addressed.

Wivenhoe Facilities Group fully supports the Football Club in its efforts to purchase the land and to develop it as described. If the Club is unsuccessful in its efforts to buy the site, not only would Wivenhoe lose its Football Club, the leading Football Club in the area (including Tendring) which adds prestige and national recognition to the locality, but it would also lose the chance, perhaps the only chance in the foreseeable future, to provide a centre for much-needed sports and recreational facilities.

The Football Club has demonstrated its commitment to provide a wider community resource. The Club has:-

- provided the Clubhouse free of charge for a Youth Club for 12 - 17-year-olds and been instrumental in setting it up
- forged links with at least one local school who provided ball girls and boys for home matches. A Schools match was held before one of the home matches and a number of penalty competitions were held also
- organised a soccer skills training school in the summer school holidays for 7 - 14-year-old boys and girls

The land between the Football Club/Youth Football Club and the Broadfields Estate on Elmstead Road has for a long time been designated as public open space by Colchester Borough Council in the local Structure Plan. The land is owned by a property company and is currently farmed.

The Borough Council's planning officers have indicated that a community building might prove acceptable on this site with sufficient land for adequate car parking. This site would be the preferred option for the construction of a new large building, sufficient to accommodate two badminton courts, as well as having a wide range of other uses. This building to be run in conjunction with other activities being organised at the Football Club site.

Viewed as a whole, these three sites, comprising some 30 acres of land, could become a focal point for sporting and general recreational activities not just for Wivenhoe but the eastern side of Colchester, which is very poorly served in this respect.

7. Recommendations

Action is needed now

- a) to utilise the Phillip Road Centre, and the facilities at Wivenhoe Town Football Club, as focal points to provide new and additional Youth Club activities
- b) to exploit the Phillip Road Centre and the Wivenhoe Town Football Club's facilities to provide extra activities for the Over-60s
- c) to acquire the engine shed and stable block on the railway station as a local theatre
- d) to see the Bath Street building offered to the Centre Project Group as a new facility to meet social and other recreational needs
- e) to help the Wivenhoe Town Football Club acquire the Broad Lane site from its current owner, and to develop a broader range of activities there
- f) to acquire the Elmstead Road site currently designated 'public open space'
- g) to construct a building of approximately 10-12,000 square feet on the Elmstead Road site as an indoor sports hall/general purpose building to be run in conjunction with existing facilities on the adjacent Football Club sites