

Council approves charity run community centre in Newhaven

Council gives go-ahead for brand new, charity-run community centre in Newhaven

Victorian primary school saved from development

The oldest working primary school in the area, Victoria Primary School in Newhaven is to be bought by a brand new, locally-based charity which plans to turn it into a thriving community hub.

When the pupils move out to their new building the site will be taken over by the Heart of Newhaven Community, an OSCR-registered SCIO charity.

The charity has won the right to buy the building from The City of Edinburgh Council under the Community Asset Transfer scheme, and transform it into what they call “a beating heart” for the community.

The ambitious project includes much-needed pre-school childcare facilities centred on the modern Anchor Building in the playground and a heritage suite on the first floor of the old Victorian building. Circulating around those two basics, will be community areas for hire by local groups and individual spaces created for local artists, workers and service providers.

The project has been several years in the making. A steering

group was set up after several public meetings. Members of the local community wanted to save the site from re-development as flats, as has happened to so many old school buildings in the city. Consultation within the area proved a widespread wish for a heritage centre, as well as facilities local groups could use.

When the charity's application went to the city council, it was assessed by the Operational Estates Team using the Community Asset Transfer policy scoring matrix and the result was "a strong submission". This combined with a robust business plan and various inter-generational projects all meet council-recognised social needs.

At the meeting of the Policy and Sustainability Committee today, councillors agreed the recommendation to allow the asset transfer, noting that all local councillors unanimously supported the application. As one councillor put it however, "this is the start of the hard work".

He was referring to the fact that the Heart of Newhaven must now consolidate their plans by applying to the Scottish Land Fund to cover the purchase cost, and a successful outcome there will then be followed by a search for the funds to cover the cost of repairs and upgrades to the building, to which the council has declined to contribute.

Adam McVey, Council Leader, said: "This project is great example of community asset transfers in the city as it will provide cultural, educational and wellbeing projects to those in the local area so I'm really pleased the Committee got behind it today. As lockdown is now easing I'm sure this will be a real boost for local people.

"I'm really looking forward to visiting and tracking the progress of Heart of Newhaven and hearing about how people are benefitting from it in the future. This opportunity has come about as the Council delivers a brilliant new school for

Victoria Primary and the old school building being left as a community legacy is fitting tribute to the strength of the local community in Newhaven that has been centred around the school for so long. It's so important that local people have a say on and find their own solutions to what they need most in local communities and as the name suggests this project sounds like it will be at the heart of local activity in the area in the future.

"We're very supportive of community asset transfers in the city and this is one of three approved by Committee today."

"As we celebrate City of Edinburgh Council's approval of our Application to purchase Victoria Primary School, we are working really hard to ensure all interested parties are helping us set out the strongest possible case to attract suitable charitable funding," said Rodney Matthews, chair of the HoNC. "At every stage we will publicise partnerships and progress towards our goal of an exciting community hub for the benefit of everyone."

The current pupils are expected to move to their new building in Western Harbour, whose completion has been delayed due to the Covid 19 crisis, in the autumn of 2021. HoN would purchase the building before that and lease it back to the council until the pupils move. After that, it would be all systems go.

One of the trustees of the new charity, Judy Crabb, who has a background in community development, says the project is a step towards a better future for the area.

"Moving back to Edinburgh four years ago I fell in love with this area because of its wonderful position by and connection to the sea, its fascinating, developing history, and its strong sense of community," she says. "When I learned that VPS was to be relocated and the existing school vacated it seemed an exciting opportunity to get involved."

"Covid has touched everybody in some way and

heightened awareness of the need for community, the need for interaction, the need to work together for everyone's benefit. The vision for the centre, shaped by what people have said they want, is a significant step forward towards a better local future."

More information can be found on the HoN website – heartofnewhaven.co.uk

