

Lanthorn community centre faces lengthy closure as more work needed

It could be almost a year before the Lanthorn community centre reopens it was claimed this week after it was revealed work on the site had descended into a shambles.

Scheduled to reopen at the start of this year, work at the Livingston landmark is now six months behind and more than £1m over budget.

RAAC roof panels were removed in the Autumn and the building left open to the elements over winter, causing major structural damage.

What started as straight-forward removal and replacement of RAAC roofing has become a major refurbishment of the entire building – adding millions of pounds to the final bill.

A firm awarded a £2m contract in October 2022 were scheduled to have finished the work by January.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service has been told that the firm was given an additional £450,000 to accelerate the works, but finally had their contract terminated in April.

A new £1m contract had been awarded to another firm to complete the refurbishment- with an indicative end date of 1

November.

And an architectural services contract of more than £25,000 will run until April 2025.

It was claimed this week the Lanthorn has become a money pit for the council, with sub contractors being paid weekend rates to do work which will only need to be redone.

The LDRS has been told of aluminium framework for suspended ceilings being put in while the building remains without a roof and open to the elements. The work was branded as "crazy stuff".

Serious water damage has affected the building meaning a full electrical refit is needed, and specialists have been brought in to do structural surveys of the concrete floor and water damage to the gymnasium. It could be months before the fungal damage to the gym dries out.

A source told the LDRS: "It's been a total waste of council money. They've had people working there just trying to make things look good, but nothing's really been achieved.

"They've basically done stuff back to front. They stripped the roof off in September and left it open to the elements. They didn't make it watertight. The water was pouring in. It just beggars belief. There was crazy stuff being done.

"The Lanthorn now needs a total refurb they'll probably not get change out of £4m. The user groups will be lucky if they're in for next January – maybe March.

"The building's starting to dry out but the chapel is still soaking."

The source added: "The contractors were running miles behind and they were given an extra £450,000 to accelerate the programme."

User groups had expected to be back in the building in January this year. They were told in April of the delays.

Local Conservative councillor and depute Provost, Peter Heggie told the LDRS: "The user groups are frustrated by the delays and are currently located in various locations around the community.

"I must give real praise and credit to the user groups who have continued to support our community during the closure."

The council said that a new contractor was in place following "performance issues and missed deadlines".

It confirmed that there was water damage to the building but said that extra work needed would be accommodated "within the overall capital budget."

A spokesperson for the council told the LDRS: "The work is being undertaken by an external contractor. Following discussions with the original contractor on performance issues including missed construction deadlines and a lack of clarity on when the works would be completed, the council took steps to appoint another external contractor to complete the current contract with the objective that the project be completed as quickly as possible.

"This will enable the building to be reoccupied and back in operation for the user groups and wider community.

"The new contractor took over the project earlier this month and work has been progressing since then to assess the scope of the works remaining to be complete, including rectifying areas where water ingress occurred due to the previous contractor failing to adequately protect the works in line with their contractual obligations.

" On completion of this exercise, which is anticipated in the next couple of weeks, the new contractor will be providing the

council with a programme of works and estimated timescales for completion of the project.

“It is envisaged that after taking account of payment for works that have been completed to the required standard by the previous contractor, the cost of the remaining works required will be accommodated within the overall capital budget available.”

The Lanthorn Community centre was the first of the council’s public buildings to have problems identified with RAAC roof panels – in April 2021. User groups were moved out and the library was relocated.

RAAC refurbishment work has already been completed on some primary schools where problems were identified months after the issue was first discovered at the Lanthorn.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter