

Concerns raised over the state of a popular West Lothian community centre

Concerns have been raised over the state of a popular West Lothian community centre, after images showed damage caused by winter weather.

The Lanthorn in Livingston was scheduled to reopen at the start of this year, but the building was left roofless over the winter.

It was the first council building to have crumbling RAAC roof planks discovered, in the spring of 2021. Others, including community halls and schools, followed soon after.

Many of the buildings, in Livingston, Bathgate and elsewhere, have since been successfully repaired. The Lanthorn remains a building site.





The re-opening has been dogged by delays and one local councillor said this week that user groups doubt whether the new November deadline will be met.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service has seen photographs of the extensive damage caused over the winter months. One shows the floor looking like a swimming pool. Another shows mould growing on walls and another of the interior gutted because of water damage.

Despite the damage, councillors have been assured that the community centre will re-open before Christmas.

The LDRS revealed in June that a firm awarded a £2m contract in October 2022 was scheduled to have finished the work by January. The firm was given an additional £450,000 to accelerate the works earlier this year before being removed from the project.

The LDRS understands that one of the first jobs in the spring was to set up ten dehumidifiers as well as large space heaters to dry out the building after emergency roof repairs were made. This had to be done before full refurbishment could start.

Councillors have called for the final bill on how much it will have cost to bring the Lanthorn back into the heart of the community it has served since 1978.

After a meeting of the Livingston South Local Area Committee yesterday (Wednesday) Councillor Moira McKee Shemilt said people feared there is no guarantee that groups would be back in the building for Christmas.

She asked the council's Property Manager David Baird: "How much has been lost in the building of the Lanthorn. How much overspend has there been?"

Mr Baird said: "I don't have the particular figures to hand but I'm quite happy to come back with the different bits and pieces on that. I'll come back to members with the figures and financial situation for Lanthorn."

Councillor McKee Shemilt said: “Nobody anticipated that they would find RAAC in the roof and nobody anticipated what would happen with the contractors, and how they would leave things in the way that they did.

“I understand the particular issues around it but it would be good to know what the figures are about the overspend.”

Mr Baird replied: “We’ll certainly get that clarified but, certainly, for the meeting I’m happy to confirm that we are now currently on programme as per the updates which were given to the steering group which I know you sit on, so there’s been no change.”

Councillor McKee Shemilt told the LDRS: “It’s now expected to be completed by the end of November, and I know that user groups (or what used to be user groups) are sceptical about this because the date has been pushed back so often.

“Doubt exists as to when user groups might be able to re-access the building.”

Roof planks were removed by a contractor hired to refurbish the building after crumbling concrete RAAC roof planks were discovered in 2021. The roofing was removed in the autumn, but the building was not made wind and watertight.

So far, the council has spent £53 million on RAAC related remedial works on different buildings in the county.

User groups in the Lanthorn were given temporary accommodation in council venues around Livingston when the building was first closed.

A spokesperson for the council confirmed that repairs are planned to be complete in November.

They added: “Works to replace the roof at the Lanthorn Community Education Centre have been ongoing for some time after significant structural issues were identified. The

council has fully funded the project to remove and replace the existing roof deck at The Lanthorn Centre and Chapel Annexe.

“The new contractor has provided a programme of works and estimated timescales for the project and based on this, the estimated completion date is late November 2024, which will then allow groups to remobilise and undertake the process to move back into the building.

“The council has confirmed that it is anticipated that the cost of the remaining works will be accommodated within the overall budget available. Updates on progress will continue to be provided throughout the year.”

Patrick Welsh, the council’s Head of Finance and Property Services said: “I’m sure everyone will agree the focus now needs to be on completing the project works and working together over the coming months to get the facility back open. This will allow user groups to move back in as smoothly as possible and allow the wider community to once again use this important community facility.”

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter