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<p>Corporate Plan Output: Community Facilities</p>	

The purpose of this report is to present the recommendations for the future use of Avebury House to the Board.

BACKGROUND

Board members will recall that a consultant was contracted to:

- Identify the range of possible user groups and services with associated development costs/impacts, in relation to the use of Avebury House as a community facility.
- Make recommendations to Council on the most effective and efficient use of Avebury House as a community facility.

CURRENT SITUATION

Avebury House is a substantial house with some heritage features, built in 1885 and added to over the years.

The layout of the house includes five upstairs rooms and downstairs a flat (currently tenanted), male and female shower block/toilets a large kitchen and a large front room.

The house needs upgrading and has been untenanted for two years.

HERITAGE

The building is not listed by the City Council as a heritage item in the City Plan nor is it registered as an Historic Place by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. However this does not mean that it is not of some heritage significance and could not be considered within a future listing of the City Plan or recommended for registration by the Trust.

‘Avebury’ was built by William James Flesher on rural section 197 in 1885 and remained in the Flesher family until 1945 when part of the land was sold to the Government for a housing estate. In 1948 the remaining land, which included the dwelling, was purchased by the City Council and established as Avebury Park. The Youth Hostels Association of New Zealand leased the premises (known as the Cora Wilding Youth Hostel), from 1965 until 1997.

Designed by architect James Glanville, the original dwelling of 1885 comprised a large two storey Victorian gentleman’s residence with a service area to the rear. It is thought this area may have been built over, or incorporated into, an earlier dwelling. Alterations were made to the principal façade at the time of the 1906-7 International Exhibition. These comprised the addition of two storey corner turret, an open verandah and gable on the upper storey and bay window, verandah and gabled entrance at ground level.

Despite a number of alterations and modifications over time the dwelling remains in remarkably original condition and features lead-light and coloured glass windows, panelled doors, plaster ceiling roses, double hung windows and an elegant internal staircase. The centre piece of its parkland setting, this timber dwelling is an interesting example of Christchurch's Victorian domestic architectural and social heritage.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

- The research project, over a two-month period, set out to establish the features of the property, features of other Community Centres and what needs in the locality Avebury House could meet. A networking approach was followed, with an emphasis on contacting groups and agencies with good networks in the area. These groups were potential stakeholders in developing and using the property as a general community resource. In addition contact was made with a wide range of Council workers, residents, young people, artists and performers.
- The research area included Richmond and part of Shirley and Avonside. Richmond has a strong identity whereas Shirley and Avonside have no focal points and few locally based services. Richmond and Avonside have cheaper rental properties. There is evidence of “gentrification” in the area.
- Information from the 1996 census shows Richmond has an ethnically diverse community with a high proportion of people on low incomes. It also has fewer young people and a large proportion of one-person households. Avonside has a younger population and is slightly better off than Richmond. Shirley is a modestly affluent suburb with a higher proportion of retired people.
- The issues identified, particularly for Richmond, include the problems arising out of poverty and hardship including poor parenting, crime, vandalism etc. Isolation was mentioned as an important concern that the churches attempt to address along with material needs. Richmond has a number of artists and performers resident in the area.
- Avebury House was not seen as a community cottage due to its size and quiet location. Nor is it suitable for sport. A range of other similar facilities in the city have a variety of uses and goals. A key difference between them is whether they have on-site workers, and whether their goal has a focus on individual or community needs. Some centres have an overarching community development goal and they use a variety of means to involve people and develop networks (information and resource centre, drop-in, arts, gardening etc).
- It is recommended that Avebury House be developed as a community arts/culture centre with an on-site worker. A stakeholder group representing a wide cross section of interests is willing to work with the Council to develop the property. Indicative costings provided for four scenarios.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AVEBURY HOUSE

The size and out-of-the-way location of the Avebury House make it less suitable as a “community cottage”. The local residents’ group feels that they meet that need with Richmond Cottage. They are supportive of Avebury House developing a special role.

The diversity of the Richmond and nearby communities, the isolation of many individuals, and the higher proportion of people on low incomes with limited access to recreation and leisure activities, suggests that there is a place for a community resource in the area that creates cheap or free opportunities for people to get together. There is a need for a public space in which groups can meet, express their identity and get to know each other to develop trust. The efforts of the local residents’ association to provide this on a voluntary basis through local events indicate the community itself has recognised the need.

The question that remains is, what is the potential of this property? It is not suitable for sport but is seen as suitable for cultural pursuits. Culture is central to identity. A sense of identity is essential to health. Maori use their culture as a means to re-connect members of their community. Migrant groups express a desire to get to know New Zealanders. Arts and culture are a good medium through which to approach groups that are culturally different. They are also a good means through which to achieve developmental goals.

A community arts or cultural centre with a co-ordinator, run on developmental principles, can be continuously responsive to community needs. A worker of this kind is proactive as well as reactive and co-ordinates with existing community activities, often acting as a catalyst. Local groups and services have their own specific goals. Such a centre needs its own goals with a management group made up of key stakeholders to represent a broad interest base. It is important for such a venture that the management group understands that community development is the over arching goal and art and culture are a means to achieve it.

It is widely agreed there is little in the east of the city to foster art and culture. The presence of the Linwood Arts Centre nearby is a considerable advantage as it is unable to meet the needs and the worker could support and co-ordinate with Avebury House.

The many features of the property would provide opportunities for the arts in the wider sense. The grounds could be an outdoor concert or performance venue. Gardening is an art form. The facilities in the house suggest the possibility for overnight accommodation for visiting artists or performers. The kitchen facilities could be developed creatively. The property including house and garden gains greater significance as a potential community arts centre by virtue of its location in Richmond. The people of Richmond are a resource in themselves. There is a significant group of creative people – photographers, architects, artists, writers and performers. In addition it is culturally diverse, and has a local Primary School that has been nationally recognised for its innovative work. Richmond Primary School undertakes a great deal of networking as it attempts to include the wide community (such as the elderly) in its activities.

Richmond has a strong sense of community. There is potentially a strong driving force and creative resource base for the development of Avebury House in its host community, to become an arts centre for a wider area. This is a great opportunity for three Community Boards to work together on an exciting project.

COSTED OPTIONS FOR AVEBURY HOUSE

Four comparative options are identified for Avebury House in the Research Report. This report will outline only in detail the preferred option. (Option 4).

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| 1. | Sale of building, clear site for Park
While this may have been an option when the report was commissioned, this is no longer so as Council have approved the retention of the building and will provide in excess of \$100,000 in each of the next three years for its restoration. | \$26,500 |
| 2. | A commercial tenant | \$405,000 |
| 3. | One organisation as a tenant
Note: Possible income of \$50,000 has not been taken into account as this may very well be paid by the Service Centre. | \$535,000 |
| 4. | A general community resource with developmental goals, a management group (representing broad community interests) and an on-site worker. | |

Initial cost to Council

Renovation of building over three years exterior and minimal interior upgrading	\$365,000
Council likely to have to refurbish interior (Recommend a conservative approach initially so that refinements can be made as the centre develops).	\$80,000 to \$160,000

Ongoing cost

Expenditure: Internal building operational annually	\$10,000
Estimated rent to Property Unit	\$50,000
Worker salary	\$35,000
Seeding grant first year	\$10,000

Advantages

Purpose meets agreed criterion
House has general community use
Diverse membership of management group ensures range of perspectives contribute to development
Involvement from neighbourhood interest groups/organisation generates ownership
Relevant to neighbourhood
Meets Social Policy objectives

Disadvantages

More expensive than option 1 and 2 initially and ongoing
Will involve time of community services staff to assist management

Preferred Option

The preferred option is option four, based on the needs of the community for a place where diverse groups can express their own identity and pride. The research process identified an interim steering group to work with the Council to develop the property if so desired. An important concern of existing community initiatives is that new initiatives draw on stretched funding resources and that if Avebury House is developed it will need to aim to be self funding. This is always a struggle in areas of low income.

It is reiterated that the above costings are indicative only, to provide an idea of likely costs for the various options. Once the decision has been made on which option to pursue, more detailed costing will be required.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

If the Hagley/Ferrymead Community Board supports the researcher's preferred recommendation the Avebury House Project will be developed over a three year period.

The Council's investment will be significant, approximately \$525,105 which the Council has committed over three years.

It is imperative therefore to gain the best possible community value for this investment.

Developing Avebury House for the use of any single community group could be questioned on the grounds of the level of investment required of the Council.

Developing the project with a broad based Arts/Culture focus using a developmental philosophy will ensure that the facility is used by all sectors of the community ranging from pre-school to elderly. The facility would also be used by a cross-section of cultural groups.

When art/culture is used as a community development tool it achieves non-patronising and inclusive results. We have an exceptionally successful facility already operating in the Hagley/Ferrymead area (Linwood Community Arts Centre) that uses art/culture as a tool to develop/strengthen the surrounding community.

The Avebury House Project would be developed along similar lines.

A healthy and strong community is one in which there is opportunity for a wide variety of social interactions and experiences. The Avebury House proposal will provide for these opportunities for all residents, including those on limited incomes.

The proposal meets the defined objectives of the following Council policies:

1. Community Development and Social Wellbeing
2. Arts and Culture
3. Recreation and Sport

- Recommendations:**
1. That the Burwood/Pegasus Community Board support the preferred option (Option 4) recommended by the Avebury House Research Project.
 2. That the Burwood/Pegasus Community Board pass on this recommendation to the Projects and Property Committee.

Chairperson's Recommendation: For discussion.