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Name: Eddy Alcock

E-Mail: eddy@thealcockdomain.co.uk

Country: United Kingdom

Comments: -

There are some conflicting ideas about Debenham Leisure Centre. It certainly isn't a Private Company! It is a Registered Charity and its Management Board is open to anybody in or around Debenham to join at each year's AGM. It is owned by the Community of the Village and the surrounding area. Let nobody forget that it was the foresight of four local philanthropists, who bought the land and enabled the building of the Community Centre, before donating it to the residents of Debenham, who gave us the foundation of the fabulous facility we now enjoy. In operational terms though, it is comparable to Leisure Centres and other facilities operated by Mid Suffolk District Council, owned also by the residents of Mid Suffolk. No, you don't use such facilities free, as nothing is free in this life. Somebody somewhere has to pay. You, through the District Council element of your Council Tax, subsidise the Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre in Stowmarket to a very substantial degree each year, as well as paying user fees for the various facilities; the same applies to the District's two swimming pools. This is exactly the same as at the DLC. The DLC has to fix its user fees at levels equal to other public subsidised venues and has difficulty remaining viable because it has nowhere near the level of subsidy enjoyed by Council owned facilities.

The proposal for the use of the Irvine Martin site is in my view a non starter as experience tells me that any grant aiding body looks closely at what is available in the locality already and to what extent their support for the proposal might damage the prospects of those existing.

When I made the bid to refurbish the Community Centre in 2000, I was encouraged by the Arts & Cultural National Lottery to replicate something fitting Gerry Baxter's suggestion for the redundant I.M site. This meant a proposal with a cost of around £750,000. It made it to the feasibility stage, but it didn't receive support when close scrutiny found Wingfield Arts & Music to be so close nearby and in danger of becoming non-viable if my proposal was funded by the Lottery. Wingfield was at that time a privately run concern, unlike the DLC. So I had to scale back my refurbishment bid to a mere £275,500 and was successful with my Lottery bid for £160,000 from the Lottery Charities fund. I still of course had to find the balance and that came from five other sources, one of which was Debenham Parish Council, who contributed £18,600, the only substantial sum they have ever given for the benefit of their "Village Hall" and then only because Mid Suffolk District Council would only contribute £16,400 if a substantial sum was to come from the local Parish Council. That way the project succeeded, otherwise it would have failed.

There is no doubt in my mind that any bids for £750,000 from Lottery or other similar funders would attract the same scrutiny as before. It would be noted that Wingfield Arts is a stone's throw away and that Art Exhibitions are held annually in the Church. It would note that the DLC provides for the performing arts (otherwise where would you see the Pantomime and other productions), is also used as a Conference Centre and Meeting place for all manner of bodies, including Local Authorities, Diocesan

Church Authority etc., etc and has the potential to develop further into Arts & Culture if funding was available or demand existed. It does of course cater for all ages through the sporting and wider socially motivated offers within its curriculum.

The proposal being put forward could never be self sustaining financially as very substantial funds would need to be found to maintain, organise, clean, staff and generally manage such a massive site, not to even mention the costs of heating, lighting etc. You only need survey the DLC's Balance Sheet to discover just what sums are required for a much more modest site.

Capital funding is sometimes found for such projects, though I doubt it would be in this case for the reasons I have already given, but revenue funding is quite another matter and is available from almost nowhere.

I don't knock Gerry's idea though, as it is important that fertile imaginations employ themselves in communities such as ours to suggest, explore and if possible activate projects for the good of the community. In this instance though I do think it is a non-starter.

The DLC is already an exemplar for a community of this small size and is the envy of communities everywhere, even outside this Region.

Families move to Debenham often for two reasons alone:- the quality of its Schools and its Leisure Centre. If anybody has a magic route to funds for Art & Culture, then let them employ those talents to revive my failed bid for such facilities on the DLC site. The comment made by another that you will have to wait until after the 2012 Olympics to see any Lottery funds being loosened is very valid though and even then, I wouldn't hold my breath!