

REPORT OF THE ELMTON WITH CRESWELL PARISH COUNCIL REVIEW TEAM

Executive Summary:

- The Heritage and Wellbeing Centre took a lot of time and effort to deliver, as part of the process the local community were consulted, and those who responded supported the project. At the Council meeting on the 20th October, 2020 a £2m loan application for the scheme was approved by the majority of Councillors.
- From the material the Board has seen there is no evidence of any public funds having been misappropriated.
- To secure the legally required loan sanction (from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government), and the PWLB loan to fund the building, staff at Bolsover DC worked with Elmtown with Creswell Parish Council to construct a business plan for the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre. The income projections in the plan have not been met and this lack of income is central to the parish council's current financial situation. This is a structural financial issue, there is no simplistic answer to this situation, and it needs to be worked through.
- The turnover of the parish clerks in 2024, and lack of sufficient staffing added to the problems now being faced. Leadership was absent when the income levels dipped and therefore no discernible effort was made to market the centre or encourage more income to be generated. (Ongoing community negativity continues this trend.)
- This disruption in administration also meant that both the response to corporate (the Parish) and service (the Centre) financial monitoring was inadequate. The Locum Clerk has uncovered a number of outstanding issues since he arrived in December, 2024 and has sought to resolve all of them within the 2025/26 Budget Report, which was approved on the 20th February, 2025. The precept has increased from £280,816 in 2023/24 to £555,820 in 2024/25, and then to £919,471 in 2025/26. This has caused a real financial impact for residents as Band D taxation levels have increased from £172.05 in 2023/24 to £557.09 in 2025/56, a £385 increase in two years. From the figures in the 2025/26 Revenue Budget report, and excluding the borrowing commitments, the loss on the running costs of the Centre is now estimated to cost the Council c£7,060 per week. Including the PWLB and BDC loans this is equivalent to £10,400 per week.
- The Review Team have been concerned about the governance of the Council's operations which has contributed to this problem. Reports, such as they are, have not been published, or well minuted; the Council's accounting and financial management has also been inadequate as highlighted by the Locum Clerk's initial report to Members on the 12th December, 2025. In addition, general staff management issues have not been overseen.
- A key issue going forward will be ensuring the appointment of a permanent Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer.
- Whilst it was helpful in terms of progressing the opening of the Centre, as key parish members were also district council members sometimes accountability was blurred and governance issues not dealt with formally in reports and decisions at the Parish Council. This has added to the uncertainty faced now, the most significant example being the service level agreement for the staff at the Centre and the role of the Charitable Trust.
- The parish council was well established and operated adequately as a medium size parish council before the Heritage and Wellbeing Centre opened. It had adequate reserves and precept trends were not out of the ordinary. The Centre transformed this situation and increased the level of expenditure by some 236%. The Council was not corporately or financially robust enough to respond to the new pressures it faced, and this why the local precept has increased. Had the business plan's trends played out as forecast this would not have been an issue. This did not happen.

- The parish needs to come to a view about what it wants to do with the Centre and its other assets, which cost to run. The Locum Clerk has made recommendations to reduce expenditure but a strategic review is required of all the Council's assets – what are they there for?, should they be kept? how much do they cost?, would anyone wish to buy them? and if so for how much?
- The key issue now is whether to keep the Centre open within an increased precept level, or not. The Council have in effect bought themselves 12 months until the next budget in 2026 to come to a considered view about what they want to do with the Centre and their other assets.
- All options need to be looked at thoroughly and objectively, but this needs to happen in time for the 2026/27 budget round.
- Whatever is decided the Council will be liable for any severance costs on the project. Even then it will still be liable for the £2m loan taken out from the Public Works Loans Board, plus the £533,000 loan from Bolsover District Council, unless it can dispose of the building for more than these commitments. This may not be realistic given the building's location and current configuration.

Elmton with Creswell Parish Council

27th March, 2025

REPORT OF THE ELMTON WITH CRESWELL PARISH COUNCIL REVIEW TEAM

1. Public Interest Test

The Review Team has determined that the contents of this report are not of a confidential nature.

2. Purpose of the Report

- 2.1. In response to the Parish Council's decision on the 23rd January, 2025 Councillors agreed to establish an independent review of the organisation. This report sets out its findings.

3. Background

- 3.1. The Review Team ("the Team") is a body set up to independently examine Elmton with Creswell Parish Council's ("the Council") finances, operations and governance arrangements. This followed a significant increase in the Council's 2024/25 precept, and concerns about the Creswell Heritage and Wellbeing Centre's future viability.

- 3.2. The Council's financial problems are receiving significant local attention. The PWLB have raised concerns about the repayments that were missed, and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government are also aware of the Council's situation. There are concerns from the Information Commissioner's Office and about the Council's VAT accounting. The Derbyshire Constabulary have also been in contact with the Council.

- 3.3. The National Association of Local Councils which represents England's 10,000 local councils are concerned about the impact of this situation on the reputation of the sector generally and especially with government and principal councils. It believes the issues highlighted need to be urgently addressed.

- 3.4. The Review Team comprises:

Wendy Amis: Chief Officer, Derbyshire Association of Local Councils

Jonathan Owen: Chief Executive, National Association of Local Councils

Neil Taylor: LGA/Solace Associate, District Council Chief Executive (retired)

- 3.5. The Review Team members have written this report based on the findings from a limited review period. Our thanks are extended to the Locum Clerk, Councillors, staff and those local people who contributed their views and perspectives during the interviews we undertook and the information they provided.

- 3.6. Open invitations were made to all local councillors, residents and local stakeholders to ensure as many people as possible who wanted to discuss matters with the Team could do so. In completing its work, the Review Team received a full spectrum of views, read

numerous reports and documents, and attended Elmtown with Creswell's Parish Council meetings, including an informal meeting with all Members before the formal publication of this report. During our time on the review the Team were presented with a plethora of issues, some of them extraneous and some historical which only blurred some of the key issues that the Council now faces. There were also a few misconceptions which have some local currency and other matters people need to consider:

- Surcharging councillors - this was withdrawn under the Local Government Act 2000 and no longer applies.
- Capping parish council precept levels - the Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local Government have confirmed that there is no mechanism for this at the moment.
- Councillors can legitimately be members of two or more local authorities, and many public spirited people give up their time to do this, within Bolsover, within Derbyshire and the rest of the country.
- There are no simple solutions to the situation the Council and the community now faces, it will need a lot of thought and effort to work through.
- When we asked some of the people who were complaining about the situation if they would like to serve on the parish council, they said they did not wish to do so. Whoever serves on the Council will have a challenging and time consuming task ahead of them.
- Loan Sanction from Ministry Housing, Communities and Local Government is required prior to an out of year loan being taken out by a Parish or Town Council.

4. Terms of Reference

- 4.1 At the Extraordinary Meeting of the Full Council held on 23rd January, 2025 Councillors agreed to commission an independent review of the Council's finances and the impact of the Creswell Heritage and Wellbeing Centre.

The National Association of Local Councils have conducted this exercise, to:

- (i) Determine the causes of the Council's financial insolvency.
- (ii) Forensically examine the Council's accounts from an agreed point in time through to the present day.
- (iii) Assess the Council's governance arrangements over the period, making recommendations for improvement.
- (iv) Provide advice to the Council on any forms of recourse that might be available to it to address any significant concerns raised during the Review Team's investigation.
- (v) Support the development and implementation of short-term and medium-term improvement programmes, focused on improving the Council's operations, finances and governance arrangements.
- (vi) Monitor the Council's delivery against the improvement programmes and make further recommendations to the Council as appropriate.

- 4.2 This is a non-statutory improvement review; and the Team's report and recommendations will be made public. The Team's work is intended to be supportive and positive, but ultimately it will be for Elmtown with Creswell Parish Council to reflect on the Team's work

and adopt the Team's recommendations in full or in part. By its nature this review is a time limited exercise, set within this Council's work. It is not part of the remit to review the District Council, this was not their project; or conduct a full audit of everything the Parish Council has done.

5.0 Elmton with Creswell Parish Council

5.1 Elmton with Creswell Parish Council is an established parish council covering 6.7 square miles and serves a population of c6,615 (2021). It elects 11 councillors and the last elections took place in May 2023.

5.2 Parish councillors are unpaid members of the community who stand for election, and a distinction needs to be made between their role and the day to day management of the Council which is the job of the Clerk and the staff.

5.3 The Council levied a precept of £555,280 for 2024/25. In 2024/25 the Council's level of Band D council tax increased from £172.30 in 2023/24 to £332.95. An increase of some 93% which reflected the financial pressure the organisation was facing, principally because the running costs of the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre were outstripping the income its operations were generating. This is an ongoing and structural issue that underpins the Council and its operations. At the Council meeting on the 20th February, 2025 the precept was increased again by 65% to £919,471, a level of £557.09 at Band D following the work undertaken by the Locum Clerk who has tried to establish the true level of all the Council's commitments. (It should not need to increase substantially again as the correct base position for the Council's budget has now been established, which includes some outstanding bills which affect the cashflow.)

5.4 The Council provides the following services/amenities to the local community. The majority of these are discretionary services i.e. they do not have to be provided:

- i) Allotments
- ii) Cemetery
- iii) Cricket Club
- iv) Creswell Events Centre
- v) Heritage & Wellbeing Centre
- vi) Markland Campus
- vii) Youth Club

5.5 Appendix 1 sets out a summary of the Council's Annual Governance and Accountability Returns (AGARs) which are produced each year as part of the sector's good governance arrangements. They include financial information together with an internal audit assessment of the Council's operations. In terms of the external auditors they approved all the Council's AGARs until 2023/24 when they highlighted:

"There was loan repayment of £200,000 during the year and a new loan of £637,629.

These transactions are not reflected in the figures reported in Section 2, Boxes 3 and 5. The figures should be restated in next year's AGAR comparatives to reflect these transactions."

5.6 The AGAR trends show since 2018/19 show Elmton with Creswell Parish Council had a sound and established financial base until 2021/22. The impact of the Heritage and Wellbeing Centre transformed the organisation with expenditure increasing from £226,825 in 2020/21 to £954,694 by March 2022 and then a peak of £3,236,536 when the Centre was being built during 2022/23. Until March 2023 the Council operated with a fairly consistent

level of reserves with an average £230,000. In addition, all the pertinent internal governance issues assessed in the AGARs until that time were all deemed adequate. Had the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre not been commissioned the Council could have continued operating probably with very little interest or controversy, conducting a range of straightforward services as they had done for many years. This may provide an explanation why so few people say they were invited, or can remember the consultation exercises for the business plans that were carried out six to eight years ago for the proposed Centre.

- 5.7 Until recently the Council also had a stable councillor and officer team, with a Clerk in place for c10 years and a team of experienced Councillors who had made significant personal commitments to serve the local community on the Council. All three local Bolsover District Councillors are also members of the Parish Council. However very significantly since the summer of 2024 there has been an unstable situation with the position of the Clerk. In May 2024 the longstanding Clerk, Clerk A resigned, then the Deputy Clerk, Clerk B stepped up for two and a half months and was doing both their substantive job and the Clerk's job without support and therefore it was perhaps not surprising that they also left the Council in November 2024. Clerk C subsequently joined the Council, but again left after a month or so. Since December 2024 an experienced Locum Clerk has been in place and the extent of the problems the Council has been experienced have become apparent, both in terms of finance and governance.
- 5.8 These issues have been hindered by poor record keeping, procedural issues and the deletion of Council emails and documents. This has also hampered the Review Team's work and the amount of material that could be referred to with any certainty. Clerk A handed in their notice in May, 2024 and left their full time post in June, 2024, but agreed to pay bills and the payroll etc as the Council had not got a permanent replacement by then. Given the time in their career, and the level of salary being paid, it was not worth the additional pressure of managing a multi-million pound project in an organisation that was being significantly changed from what they were accustomed to. For example, whilst Bolsover recruited the staff for the Centre, the Clerk had to commission all the electricity, gas and other utilities in a short space of time before the opening in April 2023.
- 5.9 Finding a permanent experienced Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer is a priority for the Council.

6.0 The Council's Current Financial Position

- 6.1 The financial implications of the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre were made clear when the Council considered the matter at the meeting on the 26th November 2020. The Clerk (Clerk A) reported on the proposed Heritage and Wellbeing Centre and outlined:

"A comprehensive risk register has been compiled by the District Council with details of how those risks are being addressed. With regards to the Parish Council the major risk is that the project fails operationally and the Council is left with the borrowing costs if the facility does not generate a sufficient surplus, although it is worth noting that the income projections in the business plan are deliberately cautious.

However given that potential outcome, the Parish Council would have to increase its precept to fund the borrowing costs. This would require the band D tax figure to increase from £151.00 to £200.72 per annum or a weekly increase of £0.96."

- 6.2 At the Council meeting on 25th January, 2024 the Clerk (Clerk A) notified Members:

“That the latest estimate was a shortfall of approximately £147,000. This will require the Parish Council to borrow this figure from the District Council at the end of the financial year. The Clerk then reported on the deficit generated for 2023/24. This is currently estimated to be between £170,000 and £240,000. Once this figure is known at the end of the financial year, another loan will be required from the District Council”.

- 6.3 In their report to Council Meeting on the 23rd January, 2025 the Locum Clerk outlined the scale of the financial problems now being faced by the Council. At the end of January 2025 the Council had c£191,500 in its main bank account. However, the Council owed £230,862 to Bolsover DC and a further £124,573 in other bills and commitments. Subsequently the Locum Clerk has deftly managed the Council's cashflow to ensure it has not become insolvent. The 2025/26 budget now places the organisation on a firm financial platform.
- 6.4 As outlined in the introductory paragraphs this is a time limited review, which means that the Review Team have concentrated on the strategic issues that face the Council. Thankfully the Locum Clerk has addressed several outstanding matters in their work in the lead up to the 2025/26 budget and is putting in hand a comprehensive work programme to improve the Council's governance across the board.

7.0 What Has Happened?

- 7.1 With the decision by Bolsover DC to close the Creswell Baths in 2015 there was a perceived local need to replace it and given the community's history of high levels of deprivation since the closure of the colliery that was perhaps understandable. This was particularly so, as so many facilities were previously provided to the community free via the colliery. Members on the Parish Council therefore set out to do something positive for local people. The National Lottery funded the “Big Local” initiative which provided some local funds to sponsor local community initiatives throughout the country, and Bolsover District Council supported Elmtown with Creswell Parish Council in furthering these aims and a business plan for a new facility was developed by BDC on behalf of the Parish Council.
- 7.2 Given the financial pressures the District Council was experiencing BDC streamlined its buildings and service offer, and the original swimming baths were not replaced in Elmtown with Creswell. Bolsover developed a separate strategy around The Arc in Clowne as public sector commitments were reduced nationally after 2010, following the global economic crisis of 2008. Whilst Bolsover DC staff supported Elmtown with Creswell's scheme, it was not a Bolsover project. Bolsover also supported the capital costs with a £100,000 grant and the £66,000 proceeds from the sale of the Creswell Baths site.
- 7.3 The Heritage & Wellbeing Centre has a two-court badminton sports hall, a group exercise studio and a 27 station gym. It also offers a caving experience which aimed to tie the Centre in with the nearby Creswell Crags, as well as a three-tiered soft play kingdom and a café. Prices are comparable with other local leisure centres. Bolsover District Council voluntarily supports the Parish Council by allowing the Centre to use its leisure income system. BDC employs the staff at the Centre and recharges Elmtown with Creswell Parish Council with the net cost. There is an open-ended financial commitment by the Parish Council to meet any net deficit, as the risk is borne by the parish.
- 7.4 These arrangements are provided at cost and there is no additional management fee. As the levels of income do not cover the costs they incur, the Parish Council has to take responsibility for the deficit (If there is more income, the deficit the Council obviously has to pay is less). Bolsover have also supported Elmtown with Creswell Parish Council with temporary loans to offset the Council's cashflow issues whilst the centre was being built, viz:

	£000	
Temporary loan from 27 th March – 1 st May 2023	200	Repaid in full
Temporary loan from 1 st May – 3 rd May 2023	200	Repaid in full
Temporary loan from 1 st July – 29 th Nov 2024	104	Repaid in full

- 7.5 A medium term loan was then taken out on the 5th July, 2024 with quarterly repayments for ten years for £533,000 (until 4th July, 2034). This was approved by the Parish Council at the June 2024 Council meeting and was one of Clerk A's last actions. We have seen no evidence that separate external approval was sought or granted for the Bolsover loan in June 2024. This is a legal requirement which would likely have brought the financial problems to light much sooner, and had the Council been part of Derbyshire Association of Local Councils (DALC) at that time it would have received timely and appropriate advice. This lack of loan sanction remains an outstanding issue.

- 7.6 This is important as at this date the full capital costs of the building were known and represented the excess over the existing grants and loans the Council had received to build the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre (which again Bolsover have supported):

	£000	£000
Bolsover District Council	100.0	
Bolsover District Council – Creswell Baths	66.0	
Bolsover Partnership	5.0	
Community Shares Grant	4.7	
Derbyshire County Council	50.0	
Elmton with Creswell Parish Council	25.0	
Big Local (National Lottery Fund)	320.0	
Total		£570.7
PWLB Loan		£2,000.0
Total Scheme Cost		£3,060.0
Overspend		£489.3

- 7.7 The point also needs to be made that the same issues facing the Council about the Centre then are the same ones that are faced now. Once the commitment was made to build the Centre and take out the loan finance the point of no return was passed. The application for the £2m loan sanction was made to MHCLG in 2021, but the revenue problems which are being experienced did not become apparent until the Centre opened in April 2023 and the income/usage levels were much lower than the forecasts. The net revenue cost of the Centre in 2025/26 Budget is now £367,200, compared to a Business Plan surplus in Year 2 of £113,027, an adverse variance of £480,227 or 425%.

8.0 The Business Case

- 8.1 During 2018-2020 an overview of financial projections and a business case for the Centre was drawn up, this included an identified borrowing need from the Public Works Loan Board of £2m over a 49.5 year period. It envisaged there was a potential catchment area of 14,250 people, teamwork with schools, link up work with Creswell Crags, and a variety of other income earning activities. Due to competition from other sites, a lack of marketing or management this income has not materialised. In the first year the estimate was for a modest £11,500 surplus, based on a £225,000 turnover, a margin of 0.5%.
- 8.2 Projections over the following years were projected to increase the surplus to £113,000 by year five, on a turnover of £345,200, a margin of 32%. This proposal was considered and

approved by the Council before applying to the Ministry for Housing Communities & Local Government Parish Borrowing Team for approval. This approval was required before the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) would agree to fund the bulk of the capital costs.

- 8.3 Plans were drawn up, the community were consulted, and the Secretary of State, MHCLG approved the loan finance application in May 2021. A Capital Project Steering Group was set up and led by Councillor McGregor, who was also Deputy Leader of Bolsover DC to get the centre built, and Councillor McGregor and Councillor Wells were the main link between Bolsover DC who were overseeing the capital project and the Parish Council. The Clerk was not involved with this but was sent updates from Bolsover officers.
- 8.4 There were problems with the original capital programme, the contractor, and then the effects of Covid all impacted on the cost of the project. However, the Review Team cannot see if any effort was made to scale back any other scheme costs to try and compensate for these increases. Indeed, on the visit to the Centre we were extremely impressed with the quantity and the quality of the gym equipment available, but there was no one using it. Could savings have been made here and on other facilities to keep the capital cost down? Were Local stakeholders asked for their views about any possible savings as the costs escalated?

The impact of these increased capital costs was twofold:

- i) It drained the Council's reserves as Elmtown with Creswell had to pay Bolsover for the excess scheme costs once they were incurred. This meant £100,000 (June 2024 Council meeting) was taken out of reserves, and contributed to the capacity to respond to the cashflow issues that were encountered in 2024/25; and
- ii) It also forced the Council to take out a further, and unforeseen ten-year loan from Bolsover DC to make up for the balance of shortfall.

Given these two factors it is not surprising that the precept has had to increase.

- 8.5 It needs to be stressed at this point whilst any increased capital costs of the project have had an impact, they are not at the heart of the issue the Council currently faces i.e. it is revenue costs associated with the Centre and the lack of income to cover them that is fundamental to the Council's acute financial situation now. For reasons that remain unclear the manager's post was not filled/deleted at an early stage of 2023. Therefore it was unclear who had ownership of the Business Plan once the Centre opened (was it Bolsover District Council, the Parish Council, the Charitable Trust) and this remains unclear now.
- 8.6 There have been many criticisms of the business plan, not least that less than five miles away is The Arc in Clowne which offers a wider range of activities, including a competition size swimming pool. Clowne also has the draw of local shopping which could be combined with any leisure trip to the Town. To compound this Elmtown with Creswell Parish Council also has a number of competing facilities itself: the Events Centre, the Markland Campus and the Council has also recently acquired the Youth Club, which will be returned to later in this report. These facilities mean that income is not concentrated in one facility, and all these buildings compete for the same potential income of the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre from a limited catchment area.

9.0 The Charitable Trust

- 9.1 At this stage attention needs to be turned to the Charitable Trust concept to run the Centre once it was built. We have been informed that there has been one meeting of the putative Trust Board, but there seems to be no transparency about what it is doing, or intends to do

and interaction with the Council, Bolsover DC and the community has been minimal. This is a key factor as from the outset the Charitable Trust were to run the Centre, and this was an underpinning feature of the PWLB loan application:

“The loan application is supported by a financially robust business plan which is attached to the application. The Creswell Health & Wellbeing Trust which will operate the facility is forecast to generate a healthy annual surplus in excess of £100,000. The lease arrangement between Elmtton with Creswell Parish Council and the Creswell Heritage & Wellbeing Trust will oblige the Trust to reimburse the Council for the annual borrowing costs. There is therefore no requirement to increase the Parish Council precept to fund the loan.

It is only in the unlikely event that the Trust does not generate sufficient surplus or indeed that the project totally fails that the Parish Council would take back the building and increase the precept to cover the borrowing costs.”

- 9.2 There was a report from the Trust to the Parish Council on the 22nd February, 2024. It consisted of two sides of A4 with some bullet points and a structure chart. This does not inspire confidence that the Trust has/had the capacity to run the Centre despite the application to the Charity Commission for charitable status. Parish Council Members need to formally meet the Trustees and challenge and explore their approach and satisfy themselves the Trust can run the Centre effectively for them: What have they done in the last 12 months since their report in February 2024? What are they doing now? What are their plans for marketing the Centre? How can they generate more grants or income? What savings could be made? None of this known and this needs to be concluded as soon as practicable so the situation does not drift on further.
- 9.3 The disconnect between the Council and the operations at the Centre is a significant factor. What mechanisms were in place to let the Council know that the income levels were below target? Bolsover DC provided the financial information on the Centre’s revenue performance to Cllr McGregor on a monthly/quarterly basis but as can be seen from the Council Minute extracts in Appendix 4 the information provided to the Council was scant.
- 9.4 If the thrust of the Trust idea was to save the National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) then the arrangements should have been completed and operating in tandem with the Centre from its inception. This has not happened with the result that NNDR of:

	£
2023/24	50,822
2024/25	57,330
2025/26	<u>58,275</u>
TOTAL	£166,427

was/is payable to Bolsover DC as the billing authority.

- 9.5 If the Trust were supposed to be running the Centre operationally it should have complemented what the Capital Steering Group were doing in the run-up to the Centre being built and should have had a separate Risk Register. This could have flagged up problems earlier and also considered how to mitigate them.
- 9.6 If the Trust were responsible for the management and marketing of the Centre, the Review Team have seen no evidence of anything of this nature. We understand that Councillor McGregor has visited the Centre very frequently and gets involved in numerous operational matters, but this is not the same as strategically getting to grips with the deliverables the Business Plan was dependent on – the link up and generation of income with schools, for example, or promoting leisure passes. Whatever drawbacks there are with the business

plan, at least it was a plan that provided some guidance on what are the best income streams to target. The Team have also been informed that the Charitable Trust is also a vehicle for obtaining external funding that councils could not otherwise access. Apart from this point of view we have seen no evidence that any such funding has been sought or secured by the Trust in the last 18 months/two years.

- 9.7 Allied to this was all the turbulence in 2024 with the Council's administration. Following the resignation of Clerk A there was no officer working to keep things on track. In addition, as the Centre was not a Bolsover District Council scheme there was a disconnect of responsibility for who was going to get things back on track. Given these above factors it is unsurprising the scheme has not delivered. It is the failure to generate sufficient income which is the heart of the problems encountered.
- 9.8 If the deficit is to be reduced then there needs to be some coherent leadership, management and marketing of the Centre. This will require time and effort, and perhaps some cost as well as the expertise to do it and the capacity to do so by Elmtown with Creswell Parish Council may be limited.
- 9.9 Significantly, the community can also do their part by being persuaded to use the Centre more. During this review has been easy to detect the level of local animosity there is towards the Centre. A consequence of this is that fewer people use it, that in turn lowers the levels of income, and increases the deficit, this in turn increases the level of animosity and so on.

10.0 Financial Pressures

- 10.1 If the Council wants to reduce the precept it either needs to reduce expenditure or increase its income, and if that does not happen the local precept will remain at its 2025/26 level (subject to inflationary changes). The 2024/25 and 2025/26 precept increases now establish a true cost platform of running everything, as they have been identified, and included by the Locum Clerk in their work in the last three months.
- 10.2 With regard to the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre the running cost now represents a commitment of £367,202, or nearly 40% of the net budget. The PWLB loan costs a further £87,114 and the Bolsover District Council loan costs £86,613 within the overall £919,471 of Council net budget. But the issue that needs to be considered are the revenue costs that the Council can influence.
- 10.3 The commitments to repaying the £2m PWLB loan and the ongoing revenue commitment for the service level agreement to Bolsover District Council means that far more of the Council's expenditure is fixed or semi fixed. The fundamental problem is the income from the Centre is simply not covering its running costs which means there is a continual requirement to make up the shortfall from precept funding.
- 10.4 Figures provided by Bolsover District Council show that on average the estimated level of income for 2024/25 is £8,300 per month and expenditure is £27,600 per month. Given the scale of this imbalance Elmtown with Creswell does not have the financial capacity to make up the difference apart from increasing the precept.

11.0 Governance and Transparency

11.1 This is another key area for the Council: how decisions are made and the transparency of them as they are vital to avoid problems and provide community confidence. Proper decision making must be made within a formal decision-making framework – via reports that are drawn up by the Clerk, considered formally, and if appropriate approved by all Members.

11.2 It is significant that Members touched on this at the Audit Committee meeting on the 18th September, 2024, when the minutes recorded:

Standing Orders & The Role of the Councillors

“Discussions were held on issues within the Parish and the lack of faith from the Public towards the Parish Council. It was mentioned that decisions were being made on behalf of the Parish Council and all members were collectively being blamed. Cllr Colbert asked that we abide with the Standing Orders and the Nolan Principles and that it is disappointing that the public had to make freedom of information requests as the information should have been public.”

11.3 In addition at the Audit Committee 24th April, 2024 it was stated that:

Cllrs asked if the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre can be audited by the committee.

The Clerk explained that financial aspects can be audited by the Parish Council Audit Committee but the overall responsibility will be the Trustees & Secretary/Treasurer of the Management Committee.

11.4 At the heart of all this has been the approach to decision making at Elmtun with Creswell Parish Council. Starting from the basic point that no one entered into the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre venture with anything other than good intentions, a significant contribution to the current undesirable situation is the lack of clarity or transparency of the decisions that have been taken. Members will understand the community's concern about their rising council tax, and things could have been improved if there had been an acknowledgment of the problem with the Centre early on and some clear communication was provided about the situation. This goes back to the start very start of the project and has been a recurring theme throughout the Review Team's work.

The situation has been hampered by:

- (i) the Clerk's departure in June 2024
- (ii) the temporary arrangements put in place as a result, when the Council should have immediately tried to recruit a full-time replacement. This is especially so when Clerk A was working from home and there was limited access to the bank account, which in turn obscured the problems the Council was facing.
- (iii) The cashflow problems experienced during the building of the project, particularly in March and May 2023 which should have flagged up to Members that the Council's financial situation was becoming acute and serious consideration of potential options or help sought at an early stage.
- (iv) The apparent lack of a Council detailed budget for 2024/25 which for the scale of the operations the Council was undertaking was vital. This should have set out the financial framework for the year and allowed everyone to see at any early stage what variances there were from it when formal reports about the revenue situation were provided. Had this happened it should have triggered a clear understanding that things were not going well and corrective action was needed. Bolsover did provide

monitoring reports to Cllr McGregor, and these should have been put onto the Parish Council agenda for everyone to see and consider. Instead, only verbal reports were provided to other councillors.

- (v) No record of the management of the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre once it opened. A Steering Group was put in place for the capital project and something akin to it should have been put in place to ensure once the Centre opened everything was proceeding according to the revenue business plan. It was not and things just drifted. Councillor McGregor, as a senior councillor with decades of experience should have understood this as he also had direct and immediate experience of it on the capital project and how complex the scheme was.
 - (vi) The decision taken to extend the Council's commitments with the Youth Centre, and the capital improvements to that building are also a case in point. It was provided as a fait accompli for the majority of Members. It was another commitment which exacerbated the Council's financial commitments despite the Clerk's advice, recorded in the minutes in January and March 2023, that the Council should save money. A further example was noted when we visited the Youth Centre. A new boxing ring had been installed there, and this acquisitive approach to assets, whether they are required or not, is perhaps symptomatic of some of the Council's problems. What plans are there to use the boxing facilities? If there are none, it emphasises the lack of organisational capacity there is to take on further issues effectively.
 - (vii) Until recently the Clerk's reports were not published on the website with the Agenda, and as the Minutes told the public very little there was little explanation about why Members had taken the decisions they had. This would not be acceptable in any upper tier council.
 - (viii) Some Members defensiveness to legitimate questions from local people who had a right to know what was going on and why. The attitude and behaviour of Councillor McGregor, in particular, has been raised with us continually throughout this review. Whilst strong leadership may have been useful to get things done in delivering the Centre in the first place, leading councillors were not always open to challenge or advice. The dismissal of practical and positive suggestions from fellow Members once it was built; the questions from the public; and a lack of empathy has contributed significantly to the sense of frustration and antagonism by the community to its own Council. There are some real community grievances about the financial impact of the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre which have not been answered until now.
 - (ix) The absence of the reports, emails and documents that have been deleted have hampered this Review, and they do not point to a sense of openness and transparency that is required in a modern local authority.
- 11.5 So much has followed from this breakdown of the basics in good governance. A key feature of this is overall responsibility for the Centre and this needs to be clear moving forward.
- 11.6 Therefore before signing off the Centre to any Charitable Trust, Councillors need to fully understand what the implications of the initiative are – the management of the centre and its operations will be run by the Trust, without the Council being able to intervene, and the Council will still need to meet the shortfall in revenue. Whilst there may be some benefits such as saving some fixed costs (the NNDR) or accessing different funding streams, the Council needs to have confidence in the ability of the Trust to effectively manage the Centre to reduce the revenue deficits. It is clear the Centre is not going to make a surplus, unlike when the Charitable Trust concept was originally envisaged.

Therefore, the Parish Council needs to ensure that it understands the mechanics of what's happening and is confident about what the Trust is doing with its biggest asset/budget commitment on its behalf. If that stage is reached the Council needs to hold the Charitable Trust accountable for its stewardship of the Centre. The Trust also needs to operate in an open and transparent manner by recording its decisions and making them public. At the moment:

- i) Bolsover DC are incurring the costs, collecting the Centre's income and charging the shortfall back to the Parish Council
- ii) The Trust could take over the client function and additionally provide the management role that would be critical for increasing revenue.

The Review Team have been told that local people with financial acumen have been recruited onto the Trust's Board following parish-wide advertising. If this is so, and there is recreation centre management expertise as well, this may work and such volunteers should be encouraged to contribute. However, at present, the Review Team are only aware of Cllrs McGregor and Wells as Trustees, in their capacity as local residents. The Review Team therefore, have not been able to see any evidence of what skill sets are potentially available.

- iii) The Parish Council will be picking up the financial responsibility for something Cllrs McGregor and Wells will be part of, in their capacity as local residents. So other Parish Council members need to be confident about the arrangements. The Review Team have not been provided with anything to provide such confidence.

12.0 Options For the Future

12.1 In the Budget Report to the Council on 20th February, 2025 the Locum Clerk outlined a number of budget options for Members to consider. Members approved the budget to keep the Centre open for now and have in effect bought 12 more months to get things in place before they have to consider the budget/precept again.

12.2 Time is therefore of the essence.

12.3 There are three main options, none of which are straightforward:

- i) Continue to make the best of the offer at the Centre. This was the least expensive option in short term, and was approved at the 20205/26 Budget meeting. As part of our work the Review Team has spoken to Bolsover Leisure staff who have considered a number of positive options, set out in Appendix 2 which can be acted on immediately, including reduced costs for residents to attract more people to use the Centre. Members need to consider and approve them accordingly if things are to progress. There is also a recognition that just supporting operational staff is not sufficient and some management support will be required, this may be a cost that Bolsover DC could build into the recharge figure, but that discussion needs to be formally had with Bolsover so all Members know what is going on.

Improving the management of the centre could be via making the Charitable Trust operational and accountable. This would save £58,275 in National Non Domestic Rates in 2025/26. However, the Trust would need to take over the management of the Centre and the marketing of its facilities to increase income. The Parish Council would need to be confident and assured that the Trust has the capability to do this effectively. The current ad hoc arrangements do not seem to provide that.

Whatever happens there has to be a recognition that the Centre will still need financial support. A private sector leisure provider may be able to market the Centre's services more effectively, and Members may want to explore this option to see what any marginal cost differences there would be from the arrangements with Bolsover DC and making use of a Charitable Trust for management. If any private sector operator were to take over the operation, they may market the Centre more proactively but would require a higher management fee for their effort, as they would want to make a profit, something that Bolsover DC do not currently do.

However attractive this may seem it should be stressed that any tendering exercise to be conducted properly will take time, effort and expertise which the Council does not have. Continued support from Bolsover DC may therefore be very important.

- ii) Partial closure of the Centre. If there are certain days when the Centre is not as popular as others. Could the Centre be shut for some of the time to reduce staffing and utility costs? This needs exploring in more depth than the time restraints in this review will allow, and time needs to be applied to this to analyse the usage figures.
- iii) Closure and Disposal. Whilst attractive to some this is not be a straightforward proposition. Negotiations would be required with Bolsover DC about the staffing commitments etc. which would reduce the revenue costs. Also given the arson of the Bowls Club insuring an empty building will be extremely expensive, the Council will also have to invest in a security contract, and decommission the facilities.

As the Council does not own the land and is a sub-tenant of Bolsover DC, who in turn lease it from the landowner, the building could only be offered on a leasehold basis. In addition, as the current Centre's configuration is so specific there will be adaptation costs which may dissuade potential interest in any alternative use. The NHS may not be interested in the tenure of the building given its leasehold nature but that option could be explored more fully.

Importantly the PWLB and the BDC loan commitments will remain and there will be a residual cost for the remainder of both loan periods.

- iv) Members need to undertake a similar exercise for the Council's other assets, can some be improved, changed or disposed of? Members need to look at the purpose and cost of the following buildings and try and save or generate more money where they can:
 - the Youth Centre/Hub
 - the Events & Social Centre
 - the Creswell Multigame Centre
 - the Former Bowls Pavillion
 - the Markland Campus

13.0 **Conclusions**

- 13.1 In reaching the conclusions in this report the Review Team has seen sufficient evidence to make the recommendations outlined to the Council. Everyone who wanted to discuss matters with the Team was afforded the opportunity to do so, and we are grateful for their time and thoughts. In summary:
- 13.2 The Council embarked on an ambitious community scheme and it is clear now it does not stack up financially as was forecast in the Business Plan. There was an acknowledged risk at the outset that the Parish Council would meet any deficit but no one at that time really knew what the scale of the commitment would be.

- 13.3 The Heritage & Wellbeing Centre was a complicated and ambitious capital project beyond the financial and managerial capacity of a modest parish council like Elmtun with Creswell to undertake. For example, capital cost overruns resulted in immediate cash flow issues as the scheme was nearly eleven times the level of the 2023/24 parish precept. In addition, the linkages with Bolsover DC were ad hoc as far as the Parish Council were concerned with no formal detailed and regular reports formally coming back to Members from the Capital Steering Group, as these were passed to individual Members who did not formally present them to the Council meetings. There should have been an equivalent Revenue Steering Group, running its own risk register once the Centre was opened. This should also have reported back regularly to Councillors in the same formal manner.
- 13.4 The Clerk did advise Members about the overall financial pressures there were on the Council. Taking on the commitment of the Youth Club was symptomatic of the disconnect between the Council's financial position and the Council's actions.
- 13.5 The lack of formal reporting and poor governance issues contributed to the uncertainty about what was going on. Once Clerk A resigned the administration of the Council was significantly disrupted, staffing was inadequate, and no financial information was provided for a period of 3 or 4 months until the Locum Clerk arrived in December 2024. Once they did so the scale and extent of the financial problems were made known. The precept set in good faith by Members in January 2024 was inadequate to cover the Council's commitments and in effect the Council's financial position has not been sound for a period of perhaps 18 months or so.
- 13.6 The Centre has structural financial problems with income significantly below the running costs and this will continue to be the case for the foreseeable future. The Review Team have outlined three main options for the future:
- Making the best of the current situation, with some operational changes.
 - Partial closure on the most underused days
 - Potential full closure or disposal
- 13.7 None of these things are straightforward and all have pros and cons to them, not least the outstanding loan debts which will remain. What is clear is that a decision needs to be made so that by the time the next precept is considered for 2026/27, in less than 12 months' time, the Council and the community know what the optimum way forward is. This will require time, commitment and expertise from the people involved.
- 13.8 Parish councillors who stand for office do not receive any remuneration for their time, unlike other either district or county councils. Members need some training support. This is particularly so for the current Chair as they have just stepped up, and taken on a significant responsibility, with no real assistance apart from drawing on their work and life experience. There is little evidence of a robust training programme for councillors being in place. Assistance can be provided by the Derbyshire Association of Local Councils (DALC) who can support this through a range of training courses including bespoke training specifically for the Council. Clerk training and support is vital too especially as budgets and responsibilities grow.
- 13.9 The current situation with the Charitable Trust needs to be considered formally, with all the issues of how it will link up with Bolsover DC who are supporting the scheme and what direction they will take on things like pricing and promotion, staffing issues etc considered. If there are talented people that have been attracted to assist the Trust, and the NNDR costs can be saved this is a positive move. But the ultimate financial responsibility will remain with the Parish Council and Councillors need to be confident about what the Trust will be doing on the Council's behalf. Are they?

14.0 RECOMMENDATIONS:

Going forward the Council needs to:

14.1 Formally review this report and recommendations; and prepare an action plan to implement its improvements, with review dates Consider the suggestions provided by Bolsover DC in Appendix 2 to get things moving (a meeting with the Bolsover staff is recommended to hear their views).

14.2 A scheduled Action Plan with dates, actions and responsibilities is set out on Appendix 5 for Members' attention.

14.3 Appoint a full time qualified and experienced Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer and review other staffing requirements.

14.4 Arrange a formal meeting within the next month with all the Charitable Trust members to understand what their practical plans are and come to a decision about their value.

- What skill sets have the Trust members got?,
- What are their ideas to improve the situation, what plans are they proposing?,
- What do the monitoring of the plans show?
- What interventions are being proposed to market the Centre and get the deficit down?
- When will the deficit go down?

(Does the Trust provide another vehicle and opportunity to involve people with different skill sets to support the project as well as saving the NNDR costs?)

14.5 Arrange a similar formal meeting within the next month with Bolsover DC to get their views on what could be improved, and what expertise they could provide to support the Council and the Centre:

- If this was a BDC scheme what would they do?
- What could additional management capacity provide?
- What "invest to save" options are there?
- Can they provide any more support as the District Council?

14.6 Following those meetings, come to a view on the general preferred options for the future of the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre and publish a way forward with milestones. (Para 12 refers)

14.7 Undertake a review of all the buildings the Council operates and ensure that those that are not worthy of future subsidy are disposed of, relinquished or the subsidy for them reduced. This is not a straightforward matter where the objective is to encourage people to participate in local sports activities for example, or where it is in the community interest to keep public buildings in use.

14.8 The Council should also include in its action plan a proposal to sign up to the national Civility and Respect Pledge committing the Council to treat councillors, the Clerk, other employees, members of the public, and representatives of partner organisations and volunteers with civility and respect in their roles and that it:

- Has put in place a training programme for councillors and staff

- Has signed up to the Code of Conduct for councillors
- Has good governance arrangements in place including staff contracts and a dignity at work policy
- Will seek professional help at the early stages should civility and respect issues arise
- Will commit to calling out bullying and harassment if and when it happens
- Will continue to learn from best practices in the sector and aspire to be a role model/champion Council.

14.9 A commitment to peer reviewed accreditation under the Local Council Award Scheme to demonstrate that good governance, policies and procedures are in place will also provide some good advice for success.

14.10 Ensure that its future agendas are published with supporting reports and minutes to provide a full picture of what Members are being asked to decide and why. In addition, as much as possible, matters should not be exempt unless commercially sensitive or staffing matters are being considered. Even then a broad outline of what was decided should be published so that local people know what is being done by their representatives.

- (i) Members need a formal financial statement against the budget at each of its meetings.
- (ii) Members should not embark on any new expenditure unless it is balanced by additional income.

Elmton with Cresswell Parish Council - Annual Governance & Reassurance Returns: 2014/15 - 2023/24

Appendix 1

	31st March 2015	31st March 2016	31st March 2017	31st March 2018	31st March 2019	31st March 2020	31st March 2021	31st March 2022	31st March 2023	31st March 2024	
Sign Off Date					30/05/2019	25/06/2020	27/05/2021	26/05/2022	18/05/2023	27/06/2024	
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£		
Balances Brought Forward				£189,213	£240,276	£221,670	£215,790	£279,903	£258,569	£218,723	£232,021
Annual Precept				£169,640	£185,916	£196,602	£202,802	£229,854	£252,818	£280,816	
Total Other Receipts				£180,053	£145,543	£170,815	£88,136	£703,506	£2,943,592	£1,177,132	
Income:	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ 349,693	£ 331,459	£ 367,417	£ 290,938	£ 933,360	£ 3,196,410	£ 1,457,948	
Staff Costs				111,999	124,896	132,404	119,180	126,980	139,115	170,811	
Loan Repayments				0	0	0	0	4,880	33,870	85,601	
All Other Payments				186,631	225,169	240,893	107,645	822,834	3,063,271	1,358,714	
Expenditure:	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ 298,630	£ 350,065	£ 373,297	£ 226,825	£ 954,694	£ 3,236,256	£ 1,615,126	
Balances Carried Forward				£ 240,276	£ 221,670	£ 215,790	£ 279,903	£ 258,569	£ 218,723	£ 61,545	
Cash & Short Term Investments				£ 241,999	£ 227,169	£ 235,916	£ 276,150	£ 218,994	£ 261,234	£ 181,007	
Fixed Assests + Long Term Investments & Assets				£ 1,110,970	£ 1,141,161	£ 1,125,661	£ 1,139,208	£ 1,322,988	£ 1,338,422	£ 4,438,442	
Total Borrowings				£0	£0	£0	£0	£ 328,685	£ 2,188,592	£ 2,607,388	
Positive Audit Areas					8	8	8	8	8	8	
Negative Audit Areas					0	0	0	0	0	0	
TOTAL	0	0	0	0	8	8	8	8	8	8	

Creswell Heritage & Wellbeing Centre
Income Opportunities

- Leisure pass scheme for residents/non-residents. Keep current pricing structure the same for residents but increase between £1-£2 for non-residents on bookable activities. This could also include memberships.
- Area identified within the facility to operate a sunbed on a profit share scheme.
- The caving system be removed and placed at the back of the facility and still be available for booking /use. This would free up a significant space to offer a range of activities/meetings/clubs.
- Link with both infant and junior schools in Creswell. Each school currently receives £20,000 per year to deliver physical activity. Approaches should be made to them to use the facility during curriculum time to achieve targets set out from the educational board.
- S80 clubs for children during the evenings and weekends delivering multiple activities/games.
- Allow the sports hall to be rented out for indoor football for local infant teams.
- Current food and drink is set at 60%. could be raised to 65% whilst keeping an eye on local competitors' prices.
- Indoor car boot sales monthly. This has worked well before and if the events are booked in advance over 12 months it allows sellers to book early and for the Centre to advertise.
- Promotional offers. We have been restricted in this area but could have competitions offers throughout the year.
- Car charging points. 15-20% income after all initial costs are covered.

Ideas which need investment:

- Multiple Games Use Area/play zone at the back of the facility
- Trim trail
- Lazer Tag

Heritage & Wellbeing Centre Fees & Charges

Price list

We offer a range of activities and a single inclusive membership, all of which are competitively priced.

365 Membership - £365

Up to 2 adults and four children living in the same household can take advantage of our exclusive 365 membership. You will have access to the gym and junior gym, caving system (limited to one hour per day), group exercise classes, badminton (limited to one session per week), social activity hub, table tennis, soft play (limited to one hour per day) and school holiday activities. You can either pay the £365 in a one-off payment or split as a £65 deposit followed by four x £75 direct debit payments. In addition to this, you can [swim](#) (opens in a new window) at Go! Active for the reduced price of £3 per session

Single Inclusive Membership - £25 per month

This is our individual all inclusive membership package for the single person. Activities include unlimited access to the gym, all group exercise classes and concessionary pricing for all bookable dry activities. If you wish to pay by cash, then we can offer you 12 months for the price of 10 at £250. Concessions receive this membership for £22 per month or £220 if you pay cash (12 months for the price of 10). In addition to this, you can [swim](#) (opens in a new window) at Go! Active for the reduced price of £3 per session and you can use the [thermal suite](#) (opens in a new window) at Go! Active for the reduced price of £4 per session.

Junior Gym Membership - £20 per month

This is for young people aged between 11 and 14 who want to use our Junior Gym sessions. It costs £20 per month via Direct Debit and allows you to book onto unlimited Junior Gym sessions.

General Price List

Group exercise classes

- Non-member - £5
- Concession - £4

Fitness Suite

- Non-member - £6.50
- Concession - £4.50

Play Kingdom (Free up to 1 year old. Upper age limit is 12)

- Flat rate - £3 per person

Caving Experience (age and height limit apply)

- Flat rate - £2 per person

Badminton (per court for 1 hour)

- Non-member - £8
- Concession - £6

Short Mat Bowls (Available in 1 hour slots)

- Non-member - £7.70
- Concession - £6

**Approved Minutes - Financial Extracts by Elmdon with Creswell Parish Council
2023 -2024**

26th January, 2023

96.1 The Clerk presented the December statement and reported that there were no significant adverse issues or trends to report to date, but expenditure would increase in the final 3 months of the financial year as previously approved items impacted.

96.3 2023/24 Precept & Draft Budget The Clerk outlined the recurrent funding requirements for 2023/24 and that in order to fund them a precept increase of 7.6% would be required, which for a band D property was an increase of £12.23 per annum. The Clerk also reported that with regards to the Council's cash reserves and given what has already been committed this financial year together with uncertainty around the financial performance of the new Leisure Centre it would be unwise to make any further financial commitments until the new building is fully operational and its actual financial performance becomes clearer. He recommended that the Council should keep in reserve sufficient funding to pay for the borrowing costs plus an allowance for any other costs which materialise relating to the new building.

23rd February 2023

110.1 Financial Statement for January 2023 The Clerk presented the January statement and reported that there were no significant adverse issues or trends to report to date, but reiterated his view that the Council should be cautious in committing significant future expenditure until the full impact of the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre on Council finances was known.

Heritage and Wellbeing Centre update Cllr McGregor reported that the building was nearing completion and that a provisional opening date of 31st March had been pencilled in and invites to be sent out. An outstanding issue remains the final mains electrical connection but agreement has now been given for this to be done.

23rd March, 2023

123.1 Financial Statement for February 2023 The Clerk presented the February statement and reported that there were no significant adverse issues or trends to report to date, but reiterated his view that the Council should be cautious in committing significant future expenditure until the full impact of the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre on Council finances was known.

27th April, 2023

136.1 Financial Statement The Clerk reported that there was no finance report this month as priority was being given to preparation of the year end accounts. 136.2 The Clerk asked for approval to extend the short term loan with the District as the Council's VAT return was being examined by HMRC and this presented a cash flow difficulty. Moved by Cllr McGregor

18th May, 2023

10.2 To approve the Accounting Statements for 2022/23 The Clerk gave an overview of the figures and highlighted the impact of the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre. Cllr Colbert asked for clarification on how the new building would be operated. Cllr McGregor confirmed that the Heritage & Wellbeing Trust Board were seeking Charitable Status and there would also be the opportunity for members of the public to become board members.

22nd June, 2023 Minutes

- 23.1 The Clerk reported that there was no monthly finance report but a June report would be available at the July meeting.
27. Heritage & wellbeing Centre Update Cllr McGregor updated members on the Wellbeing Centre and the land behind the centre and future use. Members were updated about the future of the Heritage & Wellbeing Trust status which will include 2 representatives from the Parish Council. Cllr Colbert requested a quarterly performance report to the Parish Council. It was noted that this was already in hand.

28th September, 2023

Heritage & Wellbeing Centre Update

- 56.1 Finance Update The Clerk updated members on information received from the District Council on the total cost of the building and its initial performance against target. This information shows that there is an anticipated funding shortfall of around £130,000 in terms of completion of the building. In addition the building is currently falling well short of its financial targets and could be showing a deficit of circa £250,000 by the end of this financial year. This would result in the Parish having to request an advance of the 2024/25 precept from the District in this financial year. Position to be monitored closely in advance of setting the precept in January.
- 56.2 Management Committee Update The current H&W board was in place to complete the build which has now been completed, The previous meeting approved the creation of a Management Committee which would apply for Charitable Status and then be eligible to apply for NNDR relief. Discussions have taken place with a solicitor who is now taking the proposal forward at a cost of approx. £2,500. Overall discussions were held on the future in Creswell regarding housing development and associated facilities. Cllr Smith commented on the proposal to extend and add liabilities within the Parish with a Muga and running tracks with the need to maintain and improve existing facilities.

26th October, 2023

Heritage & Wellbeing Centre Update

- 63.1 Finance Update Cllr Wells updated members on the current finance situation that the income generated to date was £36,661.42. Current subscriptions were 188 members An update was requested on membership at the next meeting. The Clerk informed members that membership was direct debit on a monthly basis and ongoing. Discussion took place on the potential annual financial shortfall in the region of £250,000 and the need to increase the precept to cover the shortfall. Cllr Colbert suggested the Building should be offered to the District Council. Cllr Colbert proposed, seconded by Cllr Smith that a special meeting prior to the next Parish Council be held to discuss the finances of the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre

2 It was decided that a Special Meeting be held on Thursday 16th November 2023 at 6pm

23rd November 2023

- 84.1 Financial Statement for October 2023 The Clerk reported on financial activities for October with no cause for concern. Cllr Colbert requested an additional line be placed on the report to show reserve fund position

25th January, 2024

95. Precept 2024/25 The Clerk presented a report showing the anticipated recurrent budget changes for 2024/25. The most significant item being the forecast deficit for the Heritage

and Wellbeing Centre. The Clerk confirmed that the figures did not include repayment of the loans referred to under minute 94, only the estimated interest. Having regard to all the known factors an increase from £172.50 to £332.95 was proposed.

22nd February, 2024

110. Heritage & Wellbeing Centre Update The Clerk updated members that approval had been received from the Charity Commission on the application for charitable status. The new organisation would be known as “CRESWELL COMMUNITY & WELLBEING CENTRE”. Members were supplied with a diagram of responsibilities and a list of requirement needing immediate attention. Advertising is currently being prepared for the public to apply for the role of Trustees, highlighting the range of skills desirable for membership. Discussion took place around the financial reporting of the charity to the Parish Council. Clarification was made of the overall control of the Parish Council regarding finance. Confirmation also that the current staff at the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre will be transferred to the new charity and that this process is underway.

28th March, 2024 Minutes

124. Heritage & Wellbeing Centre Update The Clerk reported that Charitable status has been granted by the Charity Commission and an advert for volunteer Trustees for the management committee had been advertised in the Bolsover Gazette and delivered to every house in Elmtun & Creswell by Parish Council Staff. Cllr Colbert requested clarification under agenda item 5 (February meeting) for the figures regarding the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre from District Council. The Clerk confirmed that the figures provided by BDC show a deficit of £153,109 to end of March 2024 excluding the PWLB loan. Cllr McGregor moved seconded by Cllr Wells.

23rd May, 2024 Minutes

With the apologies of the Clerk & RFO it was agreed to take financial matters to the June 2024 meeting
Mr Nunn absent

27th June, 2024

Cllr McGregor reported and accepted the report from the Clerk and recommended the loan facilities be accepted and it was agreed that

25th July, 2024

No minutes

26th September, 2024

Cllr McGregor, Chair of the Management Committee updated members on the special meeting held on the 12th September 2024 which has endorsed the Management Committee and the relevant paperwork has been sent to the Council's solicitors for conclusion. Cllr Colbert questioned the availability of up-to-date financial report. 2 Members were advised the Council are in between stages and financial reports will be made available as soon as contracts are signed off by the solicitor, following this the committee can meet and a Management Committee reports can be produced. It was suggested that for the October Parish Council meeting the following be included on the agenda: • What is the financial plan for 24/25? • How is it currently performing against the plan? • What are predicted costs? • What income is required to cover/break even? • Do we have any income generation plans? Questions were raised regarding the new GP building, and members were advised no update is available.

24th October, 2024

Due to the absence of a Clerk there was no financial documentation and members were informed that the Ex Clerk had kindly helped the Admin Assistant in paying October wages and some urgent bills

28th November, 2024

Minutes in 24/10/24 Parish Meeting where questions were asked around the wages/payment of wages for the Health and Wellbeing centre. The method of payment and re-invoicing the costs to ECPC – what are the costs and can they be justified

- o Cllr J Wells explained the process which has been undertaken for the forming of the board and that currently BDC are paying the wages
- Are member of the new trustee board currently registered on the Charities Trust Website

- o Cllr J Wells advised that he would look into this matter
- An agreement has been signed between the new trustee board and the Wellbeing Centre – What is this and why hasn't this been in the public domain

- o Cllr J Wells confirmed that this was just an agreement that the Wellbeing Centre and the New Trustee Board would sub-let the premises
- Are the new trustees aware that they are financially responsible for any debts incurred, this is as per the Charity Commission website

- o Cllr J Wells advised he wasn't aware of this and would look into it
- Who are the Trustees and why haven't we been made aware of their details published.

- o Cllr J Wells advised that as the final sign off for the members only happened this week we haven't announced the members and this will be done once they have met.
- New Housing Estate – Path was redirected temporarily but has never been reinstated to original position

- o Cllr J Wells asked the Clerk to organise a letter to the house builders (Gleeson) with regards to reinstating the path to its correct position and removal of the gates
- Health & Wellbeing Centre – DO we have a plan in respect to reducing the debt and increasing revenue

- o Cllr J Wells advised that the new board comes with a lot of business experience and they will be writing a business plan and also a growth plan with a view to increase revenue and reduce debt

Mr Nicholls gave an update on the bookings for the rest of November and December and advised that we were planned to be really busy. He advised that there hadn't been as many in attendance at the light switch on event due to the weather and the proposed/impending storm which was forecast.

The Clerk gave an update that the current expected income budget was £90K and we were projected to bring in £116,465.21 which would mean we would be above budget by £26,465.21. The events centre had a historic deficit of £31,000. With the projected income we can expect to move into 2025/26 with a deficit of £4,534,79.

- Cllr P Colbert asked if we knew what expenditure was for the events centre.?

- o The Clerk advised that she wasn't currently in a position to provide a full expenditure

- The Council requested confirmation of the length of the lease on the building

- o Mr Nicholls and the Clerk to find out this information and report back.

Action	Start Date	By Who	Completion Date	Progress/Comments
Formally review this report and recommendations; and prepare an action plan to implement its improvements, with review dates. Consider the suggestions provided by Bolsover DC in Appendix 2 to get things moving (a meeting with the Bolsover staff is recommended to hear their views).	March 2025	Council	April 2025	
Appoint a full time qualified and experienced Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer and review other staffing requirements.	March 2025	Chair/Clerk	June 2025	This includes advertising, interviews and notice periods
Arrange a formal meeting within the next month with all the Charitable Trust members to understand what their practical plans are and come to a decision about their value. • What skill sets have the Trust members got?, • What are their ideas to improve the situation, what plans are they proposing?, • What do the monitoring of the plans show? • What interventions are being proposed to market the Centre and get the deficit down? • When will the deficit go down?	April 2025	Council	June 2025	

Arrange a similar formal meeting within the next month with Bolsover DC to get their views on what could be improved, and what expertise they could provide to support the Council and the Centre: • If this was a BDC scheme what would they do? • What could additional management capacity provide? • What “invest to save” options are there? • Can they provide any more support as the District Council?	April 2025	Council	June 2025	
Following those meetings, come to a view on the general preferred options for the future of the Heritage & Wellbeing Centre and publish a way forward with milestones	June 2025	Council	August 2025	
Undertake a review of all the buildings the Council operates and ensure that those that are not worthy of future subsidy are disposed of, relinquished or the subsidy for them reduced. This is not a straightforward matter where the objective is to encourage people to participate in local sports activities for example, or where it is in the community interest to keep public buildings in use.	June 2025	Council	August 2025	This should not take long. Members already have the budget figures, they also need to look at the usage figures, talk to users and then come to a view.
The Council should also include in its action plan a proposal to sign up to the national Civility and Respect Pledge committing the Council to treat councillors, the	March 2025	Council		

Clerk, other employees, members of the public, and representatives of partner organisations and volunteers with civility and respect in their roles and that it: • Has put in place a training programme for councillors and staff • Has signed up to the Code of Conduct for councillors • Has good governance arrangements in place including staff contracts and a dignity at work policy • Will seek professional help at the early stages should civility and respect issues arise • Will commit to calling out bullying and harassment if and when it happens • Will continue to learn from best practices in the sector and aspire to be a role model/champion Council.				
A commitment to peer reviewed accreditation under the Local Council Award Scheme to demonstrate that good governance, policies and procedures are in place will also provide some good advice for success.	March 2025	Council	NALC timetable	
Ensure that its future agendas are published with supporting reports and minutes to provide a full picture of what Members are being asked to decide and why. In addition, as much as possible, matters should not be exempt unless commercially sensitive or staffing matters are being considered. Even then a broad outline of what was decided should be published so	April 2025	Council/Clerk	April 2025	This is good practice and should be put in place without objection

that local people know what is being done by their representatives.				
(i) Members need a formal financial statement against the budget at each of its meetings.				
(ii) Members should not embark on any new expenditure unless it is balanced by additional income.				