

## **WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **Report by the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development**

**Planning Committee: 6 March 2012**

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**DC12/027: Change of use of ground floor vacant rooms into sports development storage area and first floor games/activities area into offices at Alexandria Community Education Centre, Main Street, Alexandria by West Dunbartonshire Council**

#### **1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1** This application relates to a property owned by the Council. Under the approved scheme of delegation it therefore requires to be determined by the Planning Committee.

#### **2. DEVELOPMENT DETAILS**

- 2.1** The application relates to part of Alexandria Community Education Centre (CEC), which is located on the southern edge of Alexandria town centre. The CEC is a two storey flat roofed building of brick construction, which contains a large games hall and numerous smaller activity/meeting rooms used for community purposes. It is bounded to the east by a children's' play centre in a former church, to the south and west by houses/flats and to the north by the centre's car park and with the town centre beyond.
- 2.2** Permission is sought to convert part of the first floor of the building into offices for use by the new West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust. The proposal to locate the Leisure Trust offices in the Education Centre was agreed at the HEED Committee on 19 December 2011. Presently the first floor accommodation comprises a games/social room, an activities space and a small youth club office which would be converted into a large open plan office and several smaller rooms for managers' offices, a staff room and a boardroom. The activities displaced from the first floor, which include a youth club, gaelic class and table tennis, would be relocated to the ground floor area. On the ground floor the existing CEC reception area, which would be relocated to an existing office on the other side of the entrance, would also become offices for the Trust, while a group of vacant rooms adjacent to the reception would be used as a storage area for sports development equipment. The proposal would not involve any external changes to the building. A total of 27 staff would be employed within the new office space on both the ground and first floor. Of these, 3 new posts would be created and the other 24 posts would be relocated from Braehead Primary, Balloch Castle, the Play Drome and the Meadow Centre.

### **3. CONSULTATIONS**

- 3.1 West Dunbartonshire Council Roads and Estates Services each have no objection to the proposal

### **4. REPRESENTATIONS**

- 4.1 None

### **5. ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

#### West Dunbartonshire Local Plan 2010

- 5.1 The site is within the defined Alexandria Town Centre and Policy RET 1 indicates that town centres are the preferred location for retail, commercial leisure, cultural and public service developments. Whilst not specifically identified as such in the local plan, the CEC is a community facility and Policy PS1 is also relevant. This policy seeks to protect existing social/community facilities and requires that any change of use should not have a significant adverse impact on the community. The proposal involves the relocation of some community/leisure floorspace from the first floor to the ground floor within the CEC in order to create offices for the trust which will manage the building, therefore there would be no loss of community space. It is therefore considered that the proposal would comply with the above policies.

### **6. ASSESSMENT AGAINST MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

#### Acceptability of the use

- 6.1 The West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust is a separate, not-for-profit organisation set up by the Council to manage leisure facilities within West Dunbartonshire, including the Alexandria CEC. The proposed changes are required in order to provide a headquarters for the Trust, and it is appropriate that such a facility should be within a town centre location. The conversion of the community use floorspace to form offices for this purpose is considered to be acceptable as the community space would be relocated to the ground floor rather than lost. The proposal would result in an increase in staff working at the CEC, but the site is located within the town centre with good access to public transport link and ample parking is provided in the immediate area. There would be no adverse impact on local residents. The Council's Estate's section is supportive of the application and the Council's Roads service has confirmed that they have no objection to the development.

### **7. CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The proposed change of use would provide a location for the Leisure Trust in an under-utilised part of the community education centre, and is considered to be acceptable in policy terms. It will provide much needed accommodation in a town centre location and will add to the vitality and viability of Alexandria town centre due to the staff employed at the offices, which in turn would support the local shops.

## **8. RECOMMENDATION**

- 8.1 Grant** planning permission in principle subject to conditions set out in Section 9 below.

## **9. CONDITIONS**

- 01. The development hereby approved shall commence within a period of 3 years from the date of this decision notice.**
- 02. The developer shall submit to the Planning Authority in writing upon the forms specified for the purpose and attached to this decision notice:**
- a) A Notice of Commencement of Development as soon as practicable once it is decided to commence the development hereby approved (which shall be prior to the development commencing);**
  - b) A Notice of Completion of Development as soon as practicable once the development has been completed**

**Elaine Melrose**  
**Executive Director of Housing, Environmental**  
**and Economic Development**  
**Date: 22 February 2012**

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**Appendix:** None

**Background Papers:**

- 1. Application forms and plans;
- 2. Consultation responses; and
- 3. West Dunbartonshire Local Plan 2010.

**Wards affected:** Ward 2 (Leven)