

Five Acres vision

To create a leisure and cultural destination at the Five Acres site which, as well as preserving and enhancing its existing facilities, will become a tourist and community hub to develop employment, regional tourism, health and education.

WEST DEAN PARISH COUNCIL FIVE ACRES LEISURE AND CULTURE SITE

1. THE VISION

To create a leisure and cultural destination at the Five Acres site which, as well as preserving and enhancing its existing facilities, will become a tourist and community hub to develop employment, regional tourism, health and education.

West Dean Parish Council is undertaking an ambitious economic regeneration project which will bring employment and regional tourism to the area, protect and enhance a cultural and recreational centre in the Forest of Dean, and create a vibrant community hub.

The project aims to encourage the **economic regeneration** of Gloucestershire and in particular the villages around Five Acres in the Forest of Dean.

2. OBJECTIVES

Set up a constituted group to progress the project

Apply for funding for a feasibility report and develop a business plan to:

- Develop the theatre into a **multi-occupancy arts and social centre** for concerts, plays, gigs, business conventions, broadcasting studio, social events, and exhibitions.
- Develop the **sports buildings and open areas** to create leisure opportunities; all weather multi use sports fields for local sports clubs and schools; skate park; tennis courts; indoor sports facilities (adventure activities, squash, pools, gym)
- Develop a **health centre** in an area where community facilities are in short supply: HNS or NHS referrals, therapy
- Develop a **training facility**: catering, creative skills apprenticeships: training and higher education catering, and other subjects through accreditation with higher education institutions and other training providers
- Employing **students and graduates from the catering training programme** and **using local produce** to create a restaurant facility to provide an essential amenity for users of the site
- Create accommodation suited for **Enterprise and Regional tourism Growth**

3. OUTCOMES

A Regional Destination for Tourism

Increase tourist spend and tourist numbers by providing:

Potential indoor / wet weather activities including rock climbing; leisure pool with slides, spa; soft play for young children; bowling; farmers' market; shops; family-oriented indoor facility with a variety of interesting activities. (*FODDC 2013 visitor survey*)

Pre-feasibility consultations have highlighted the option of **developing a hotel** on the site. This will be targeted at a specific audience wanting good quality but low budget accommodation, e.g. tourists and visitors attending major events in the area (Forest of Dean Half Marathon, Wyedean Rally, Cheltenham races, national mountain cycling events).

Employment

Short term building employment

Retail: shops including local foods

Café & restaurant: Catering, waiting on tables, training-apprenticeships

Sports and leisure: coaching, training, operations

Theatre: operations; performers

Enterprise: start up business accommodation, rural skills; employment in the service industry; creative skills training apprenticeships, opportunities for volunteer training to provide the necessary human resources to run the facilities after implementation.

4. WAY FORWARD

Practical support, and finance commitment are now needed from partners and politicians to ensure the success of this project through feasibility and development of the site.

5. WHAT IS NEEDED

Partners and politicians to:

- **Work with the project team and community**
- **Support and identify funding for the project (local, national and European)**
- **Raise the profile of the project**
- **Acknowledge and publicise the project as an integral part of the economic and leisure strategy of the district, county and region**

6. OUR ASSETS

Extensive evidence from community consultation through the Neighbourhood Development Plan, the WDPC parish plan and the local campaigning group Five Acres New Story (FANS) demonstrating extensive evidence of community involvement

Active and well-motivated community: a variety of skilled and committed volunteers.

Active support from Parish Council

Creative and active partnerships with Social enterprise suppliers, GRCC, Forestry Commission, Locality, Social Investment Business, local schools and local sports clubs

A Pre-feasibility report recommending a full feasibility report and business plan

BACKGROUND

THE FIVE ACRES PROJECT

FROM CONCEPT TO FEASIBILITY

The Gloucestershire College Five Acres Site

The Five Acres area was owned by Gloucestershire College and is currently owned by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The future of the Gloucestershire College sited at Five Acres is scheduled to move to a new site sometime in 2015.

These plans are not dependent on Gloucestershire College moving from the Five Acres site. In the event that the College does not move off site or if there is any delay to the move, then the Parish Council with its social provision supplier intends to develop and manage the leisure, cultural and sporting facilities at the site.

West Dean Parish Council has successfully registered the area as an Asset of Community Value, and is working with HCA to transfer ownership of the land to a Parish Council or community organisation.

The site accommodates a gymnasium, a swimming pool, tennis courts, a restaurant, classrooms, playing fields and a large theatre (the second largest in the county) as well as the college buildings. It is set in an area of 4.7 hectares in a glorious Forest setting at the edge of the forest, sharing a larger site with the local secondary school and primary school.

The site is on the A4136 to Gloucester and the Wye Valley and is well served by public transport. There are plans for cycle tracks to connect to the centre of Coleford, Five Acres and the wider forest cycle network. The River Wye Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty adjoins the site. The Forestry Commission's leisure arm, Forest Holidays, has camping and an expanding luxury cabin accommodation for tourists in this area.

The facilities on the site, although highly valued by the local community, are not all in a state to be regarded as 'fit for purpose'. The project may therefore involve some level of demolition and rebuilding.

The theatre facilities have been used for community and professional events for many years but have not been a priority for the present management.

The sports fields are widely used, and the indoor leisure facilities are in urgent need of upgrade.

The site adjoins primary and secondary schools and a popular community rugby club which would benefit access to the sports fields, suitably upgraded.

The catering facilities and cafe and restaurant are excellent.

Berry Hill Christchurch Edge End Neighbourhood Development Plan

Using powers available through the Localism Act (2011), the Parish Council has embarked on a Neighbourhood Development Plan for the area (the area being Berry Hill, Christchurch and Edge End, Forest settlements that surround the Five Acres College site), which will enable the community to influence future development. This plan will build on all the previous community consultation exercises that have been conducted including parish plans and housing needs surveys. It is intended that following further consultation events, the Plan will be presented for referendum later in 2014.

Asset of Community Value

A Community and Business group has been set up to look specifically at the development of the Five Acres College site. It is clear from existing community consultation that the facilities offered at this site are highly valued. Working with our community, voluntary and statutory partners we wish to develop the site into a community and tourist hub. Our aspirations are reinforced by the HCA's detailed 'Enquiry by Design' investigation in October 2013. The favoured option is being explored. The green areas of the site offer an opportunity for the development of modern sporting facilities. The adjoining rugby club and schools will benefit from all weather sports fields which will provide the additional outdoor capacity they require. This area of the site, which adjoins Forestry Commission land has the capacity to be transformed into a community orchard and a small additional holiday site to create a pleasant entry from the western aspect.

The development, management, funding and governance of the project through all its stages from feasibility through to staged implementation will require backing from advisors, partnerships, politicians and our colleagues in the local public sector. The benefits to the local and regional economy have the potential to be enormous. Regional tourism is the key

to employment and prosperity in the area, and a properly designed and managed leisure centre in this area would support the growth of tourism.

The area will also provide leisure and cultural facilities to local residents, including the adjoining rugby club and schools, which have never had the resources that they require. This project, successfully implemented, will transform the economy of the area and the quality of life of its residents.

The Parish Council is working with the local community, the Forest of Dean District Council, the Forestry Commission, the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, Place Studios, the Community Development Foundation and the Social Investment Business Group to secure this project for the community.

In partnership with the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, West Dean Parish Council made a successful bid for £10,000 to the Social Investment Fund for a pre-feasibility study in the form of a Constructive Review to determine the viability of this aspiration as a serious project.

The Constructive Review report from Locality consultants clearly confirms the viability of the project, recommending a full feasibility and a business plan. WDPC is now preparing to move forward to this stage.

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