

Children and Families Residential Outdoor Centres – Property Progress Report

Education, Children and Families Committee

21 June 2011

Purpose of report

- 1.0 To provide an update on the progress on property maintenance and development, as requested in the previous report on The Outdoor Centres to this committee on 14 May 2009. The report agreed to the investment in the Council's two residential Outdoor Centres in support of the development of outdoor learning for Edinburgh's children and young people.
- 1.1 This report provides an update into the progress on meeting health and safety requirements, accommodation standards and improving the quality and range of facilities at both Benmore and Lagganlia.

Main report

- 2.0 The key strengths of the outdoor provision are the contrasts in location, experience and accommodation offered by the two facilities, both set in Scotland's only two national parks.
- 2.1 A former Scots baronial style hunting lodge, Benmore is located close to the coastal setting of Dunoon and can be reached by road or ferry. It is situated within the Botanic Gardens site, on the edge of the Trossachs National Park, and close to Loch Eck. The facilities also include an indoor climbing facility; boat houses; and Bernice cottage on the west shore of Lock Eck, 4miles from the main building.
- 2.2 By contrast Lagganlia is situated in a forest setting within the mountainous Cairngorm National Park and comprises a main residential building with dining facilities and a further six individual residential forest chalets. It also has separate outdoor equipment stores, a dry ski-slope and camping facilities.

2.3 The focus of both Centres is outdoor learning and teaching during school term times. However, other groups hire the accommodation particularly during weekends and school holiday periods. One of the key aims over the period of the next five years is to improve the scope and flexibility of accommodation at both Centres. Both Centres face the continual challenge of ensuring that income exceeds expenditure. The 2010 -11 figures have still to be completely finalised but Benmore appear to achieved a small surplus of approximately 20k with a total turnover of 877k. Lagganlia's turnover for the same period was 656k. Last year both centres were unfortunately subject to unexpected VAT legislation. In Lagganlia's case this amounted to a bill of 23k which was far higher than Benmore's (7k) because of the differing nature of the facilities and the capacity for self catering and so for 2010-11 Lagganlia showed a deficit of 17k.

Progress to date:

2.4 A range of immediate issues have been addressed at both properties. The focus for improvements since the previous report have been a review of property Health and Safety issues (for example new doors, automated fire detection and alarm enhancement) and urgent building condition issues such as window and roof replacements. Energy performance certificates have been completed.

2.5 There are a number of key areas for future development (see following examples). These areas have been identified and shall now be subject to detailed costs and prioritisation over a five year period.

- Ensure the required number of showers and toilets are located adjacent to bedroom areas and create efficient location of service areas separate from bedroom and showering areas.
- Provision of mixed catering arrangements on both to allow further development, flexibility, and income generation of self-catering lets simultaneous to serviced meals for large school numbers.
- Multiple use of space such as additional dining facilities to relieve pressure on peak dining but to also provide teaching and learning space out with dining periods.

2.6 The issue of accommodation flexibility is also being addressed in an innovative way through the introduction of twelve 'timber eco camping huts' at Lagganlia (powered by solar lighting). This shall ensure a variety of experience and a lower cost accommodation option. This idea is to be piloted for one year on a shared rental income basis with the manufacturer with a view to future purchase.

2.7 There is also the additional possibility of Boyd Anderson Trust funding to support activity and facility development at Lagganlia. To comply with the Trust deeds and wishes of Boyd Anderson this particular set of improvements need to support the development of snowsports. The possible options include a new/improved ski slope and a teaching resource centre.

- 2.8 Bernice Farmhouse, Benmore, Dunoon: The cottage lies four miles from Benmore and in fine weather is in an idyllic setting. However, the access road is in very poor condition and has deteriorated considerably over recent years. As a result the cottage often lies empty and severe weather results in a range of access, maintenance and housekeeping issues. As part of the future investment strategy it is the intention to sell the cottage (please note there is requirement to reinvest all of the receipt back into the Benmore estate because of 20-year lottery commitment as a result of previous investment in 2004/5). The view of the staff at Benmore is that the Centre would greatly benefit from a new 'chalet' type facility close to the main building that could provide more flexible accommodation for small groups. The current dormitory type accommodation remains viable for Primary School children but is much less attractive and appropriate for other groups.

Financial Implications

- 3.0 The immediate improvement works completed to date are as follows:
Lagganlia 45k and Benmore 124k.

Equalities Impact

- 4.0 There are no negative impacts on equality. One of the aims of the development of these centres outlined in this report is to improve equalities for all service users.

Environmental Impact

- 5.0 There are no negative impacts on the environment as a result of this report. A key strategy in the centre development is a fundamental alignment of environmental delivery of the building services on both of the sites.

Recommendations

- 6.0 Committee are asked to :
- a) Note the progress to date.
 - b) Note the key areas for development scoped to date. These shall form the basis of 2011-14 Investment Strategy plans for both Centres
 - c) Note the intention to sell Bernice Farmhouse with the view to re-investment in a similar self catering facility either next to or close by the main building.

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Appendices

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Wards affected All

Single Outcome Agreement Supports National Outcome 6 – ‘we live longer, healthier lives’ and National Outcome 4 – ‘our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

Background Papers