

- *There is a negative perception of people using Central. This is based on what took place there 30 years ago. It is still viewed as the same such as smoking and fighting.*
- *The centre has a poor reputation.*
- *The view people have of the place is that if you want to get on in life you would stay away from there.*
- *There is nothing positive about the building.*
- *Need to change people's perceptions that they can do other things the other than dominoes and food.*
- *It has a bad reputation.*
- *Older women do not use the centre much for the main activities are dominoes (and smoking).*
- *There is also a lack of following simple rules (i.e. no smoking).*
- *Words like mugging and shoplifter from the town centre.*
- *The stigma of the centre goes back many years. It has been seen to be a place that accommodated bad boys that is what the community did not want to be associated with.*

Negative perception

- *The smoking of cannabis that goes on in the centre keeps the community away.*
- *If appropriate systems are in place it might prevent or eradicate the drugs issue.*
- *There are rumours of drug dealing and the association do not want to be linked to that.*
- *There is smoking of hash.*
- *People feel comfortable smoking weed.*
- *A lot of the community are not going there to avoid the drugs (cannabis).*
- *Youth smoking weed.*
- *There is a lot of talk about drugs in association with the centre.*
- *Drug selling.*
- *Some people do not want to go to Central because of the smoking especially the elderly. There is a no smoking policy in all RBC buildings and this [Central] should be no exception.*

Smoking and Drugs

The community expressed strong views about the current reputation of Central and its negative impact on the community. More than half (52%) the respondents referred to the reputation of the centre as a weakness. These views are presented here

12.2 Reputation

Negative Role Models

- The old men there are not positive role models.
- These older people have the attitude that anything they want to do they can do at Central. They are angry, they are violent.

Intimidating Environment

- The use of space at Central is intimidating and unwelcoming.
- Can be intimidating.
- Metal detectors not needed.
- Metal detectors put community off.
- Suspicious and negative environment because of searching procedures.
- Security all day at Central is an embarrassment. The stereotype should not be lived out at Central. Is it OK to have security all day for dinner and computing?

12.3 Summary

The reputation of Central is one that is known throughout the community. Some of it may be historical but many respondents referred to it as a current problem. Although their perceptions may be difficult to consider or discuss nevertheless, they are important because the community have commented on it as a key factor. The future of Central will depend upon this reputation being changed not only in practice but more importantly in the minds of the wider community.

12.4 Strengths

81% of respondents who were interviewed were able to share what they felt were the strengths of the centre. Three respondents said that there were no strengths. Perry's has already been established as a successful part of the centre and will not be included here.

Meeting Point for the Community

- Focal point for the Black community.
- Only Black community base in south England.
- Provides a place for the Black community.
- Good for Black people to have their own centre.
- A place to relax and let off steam.
- Central is the centre for the community where information can be exchanged and shared.

Positive Activities

- Positive street youth with positive things to do.

Despite the difficulties and negative perceptions of Central, the community recognise that there are positive aspects to Central. They have been acknowledged here. Regardless of the negative views it continues to be a meeting point for members of the community who do have needs and feel that Central is meeting those needs. The challenge for the future of Central is to continue meeting those needs while moving forward to a point where the wider community can access the building, help to extend it and gain benefit from the positive activities there.

12.4 Summary

- *It's a break from stress*
- *Provides support (e.g. from unemployment)*
- *Holiday centre for community belonging*
- *Provides belonging*
- *When children excluded from school parents see Central as a place of help*

Source of Support

- *Black people live*
- *Excellent location. Easily accessible for West and East Reading where many*
- *Potential to be a landmark in the community*
- *Central is the best location*
- *Location for those who do not drive and can easily direct people there*
- *Easily accessible*

Location

- *It posses as a place to be hired (e.g. Fitness instructor could hire space in hall)*
- *A lot of space*
- *Large hall.*
- *For functions can operate a bar and make money.*

Functions

- *It has a computer room.*
- *The computer programme.*

ICT

- *Provision for Black people and youth.*
- *Dominoes, Brazilian dancing and other activities.*
- *A lot of good will.*
- *More young people using the building.*
- *Youth provision and seems to be a good place for youth.*

"I am concerned that Reading Borough Council has not and seems unable to state what the police objections to the license were. There is a strong feeling in the community that they are being messed about by the council. All the community is asking for is equality of opportunity in providing a centre for its Black community members." Member of an Island Association

"Central has more security than anywhere else and there is still no PFL. Local pubs in town have no problems getting a license. Why? Island groups have a big stake in it as they need a venue which is licensed until 4am." Chair of a community organisation

"If the centre had a license then the community could use it more. The centre used to be a place where Black people could socialise and have parties (i.e. calypso). A license is the key; with one they could open doors to the community." Leader of a user group

"The violence that took place stopped the PFL, gunshots in the ceiling but after the Matrix shooting where someone lost their life they did not lose their PFL. Why is there a difference in the treatment?" Chair of an Island Association

There are many groups and organisations that have historically used the centre for functions. Currently, however many of these groups are unable to use the centre because it does not have a Public Entertainment License (PFL). There are a range of views about the reasons why. Some of these views are described below:

13.2 Former Users and the Loss of the PFL

The users of Central fall broadly into three categories: former users, current users and potential users.

To identify the current and potential user groups of Central Club.

The following five chapters will present specific responses to the terms of reference for the consultation. Each chapter will address each term of reference by using the actual responses from the groups and individuals consulted. All references in italics are quotes from the interview respondents.

13.1 Introduction

13. Users of Central

It will be noted that the community has a particular perception of why the license was lost. The authorities have a different view. The community feel that they were not fully informed of the reasons for the license not being reappplied for hence the misperceptions. Indeed a closer look at the responses indicates that Thames Valley Police suggest that the

Community Worker
 "The security at Central is necessary to increase the numbers of young people entering the building. To also increase the number of women coming which has happened. This is necessary. There are initial requirements to getting the FEL renewed and there are medium and long term requirements. Training people was essential to getting the license but there needs to be some clarity as many changes have been implemented but they keep saying that everything needs to be completed. An Action Plan has been developed in conjunction with the Principal Youth and Community officer." Central Youth and

Community Officer, Reading Borough Council
 "The Action plan needs to be completed. The constitution needs to be resolved. This will provide formality for the holders of the FEL. We are now awaiting the police inspector to visit the site. The FEL was not reappplied for due to issues around health and safety at the centre. There are concerns from the local community in terms of noise. The primary function of the Action plan is to get the centre running smoothly." Principal Youth and

Thames Valley Police
 "With the doors at the back being left open there is no security control...If Central can demonstrate that the issues raised are being tackled and tightened then they will have the license back."

Thames Valley Police
 "Prior to losing the FEL cars would be abandoned down the centre of London Street and fire arms were fired into the ceiling of the building. The centre lost its license not only due to the firearms incident. It may have been that the shooting was the straw that broke the camel's back. The security measures particularly the metal detector which is airport standard were introduced by Reading Borough Council. However, there are too many incidents of the fire doors being left open at the back of the building which have been logged by passing police officers. The Matrix was closed as a result of shots being fired where two people were injured but also because there was a reduction in the clientele attending the centre because of the perceived increase in violence." Thames

The view of the council, Central and Thames Valley Police are presented below:

13.3 The View of the Authorities

There was a strong sense within the community of unfair treatment in relation to losing the PEL. The comparisons made with other venues where firearms had been used were cited by a number of individuals.

Without the renewal of the license many groups cannot hold functions at Central. This means that a large proportion of former users are unable to continue using the centre for functions and have to look for other affordable venues which are difficult to find in the Reading area. Although for many the town hall would be an ideal venue the costs for

Association
"We have used the centre for association functions; dances, Christmas parties for children, family and friends 'get togethers'. We have had to use RISC because there is no license but RISC is small and we have to pay £50 to operate the bar." Chair of Island

Association
"We used the centre for activities such as end of year functions, christenings, funerals etc. The centre has not been used for a while due to no PEL." Chair of an African

Association
"The needs of the association have not been met by Central especially since the centre had been without a PEL. The association needs to look at whether they can afford to have a function as this facility is not available to them anymore." Chair of Island

Association
"Since losing the license we have not been able to fund raise. Central is important for Black people as it is the only council building where we can get the funds from the bar and the kitchen. At other buildings you cannot access the funds from the bar and kitchen. The centre is used for birthdays, funerals, Christmas dinner for the elderly. Since losing the license we have met there only once." Chair of voluntary organisation

have been unable to fund raise and are financially suffering as a result.
 The lack of the PEL has had a major impact on organisations that use the Centre. Many

13.4 Impact on the Community

compliance with the requirements for the PEL was maintained.
 been a useful opportunity to engage the community in working towards ensuring that more clarity, less speculation and frustration about the issue. Furthermore, it would have statement to all stakeholders in Central's PEL about the situation would have created confusion and ultimately mistrust and frustration within the community. A clear ensuring the terms of the license are adhered to. These differing messages have caused there is a constitution in place with named license holders who will take responsibility for was not reapplied for. It has also been suggested that the PEL cannot be renewed until centre lost its license due to a catalogue of incidents. The council suggest that the license

Current users of the centre have referred to the need for the centre to be utilised and There are also regular users of the centre who drop in to socialise and meet with friends.

*of.”
“There is good space upstairs but it would be better to have a dedicated space with somewhere for storage. Our equipment sometimes gets damaged and is not taken care*

*more storage space, as some of our equipment has been damaged.”
“The space provided in the main hall is not always adequate. It depends on the numbers attending the class. The pole in the centre of the hall is in the way. There is a need for*

*improvements being made.”
“There is an adequate amount of space but we do need more lockers. It is good to see*

those who use it only because there is nowhere else to go.

The views of these groups range from those who find the space and facilities adequate to

surgery and sexual health drop in once per month where take up varies.
10-25 people attending regularly of different age groups. There is also an employment upstairs. Groups meet between one and three times per week and have anywhere between OSCAR and RASPO. These groups meet regularly in the main hall or the lounge Firm, Capoieta Dance class, Showstop'z Dance group, Invaders Dominoes group, A number of groups use the centre such as WUMA Martial Arts, Reading Shadows, The

the ICT centre draw in large numbers from the community.
have a number of clubs which operate out of the centre. The Caribbean take away and the centre for functions although this happens less often due to the lack of a PEL. Central regular basis as a venue for their clubs. In addition there are organisations that still use use the computer centre or purchase food from Perry's to those who use the centre on a Current users of the centre vary from individuals who drop into the centre for socialising;

13.5 Current Users:

existence of the voluntary organisations will be threatened.
most community groups would be prohibitive. Unless the license is renewed the

promoted more. Many of these views have been expressed via the questionnaire data and

will not be reported again here.

13.6 Potential Users

The potential users of the centre are those groups who formerly used it when there was a PEL and those who do not use it at all. As part of the consultation Reading College was targeted as a source of young people who could comment on their use or non use of the centre. There were some individuals who stated that they had never heard of the centre and felt that they could not be involved in the consultation. Others knew of the building due to the mural but were not aware of what took place there. Others took questionnaires and completed them although only 7 out of 30 questionnaires distributed at the college were returned.

Other potential users are church groups, other ethnic minority groups, community/voluntary groups, women and mothers with children. These groups could be a source for increasing the use of Central. But this would only be successful if certain conditions were in place. In the words of one association leader who has used the centre in the past:

“The crowd that go there are quite intimidating. There are rumours of drug dealing; the association does not want to be associated with that. The kinds of things that go on there are not appropriate for our youth.... Its [Central's] most serious problem is image.”

Before potential users can be attracted to the centre there are changes that would need to take place. In order for the Centre to grow, thrive and develop the voice of the community would have to be heard and considered, and the council would need to have the will to ensure that the necessary systems are in place for the centre to fulfil the wishes of the community.

14. User Needs

To detail the user needs and how they wish to use the club and subsequently in consultation with users what service Central Club is to provide.

The question on the interview schedule which addressed the needs of the community asked what their future vision for the centre was. There was a range of responses which will be dealt with here but issues relating to the accommodation and facilities will be addressed in Section 16.

One of the most pressing needs of the community is the renewal of the PBL to enable organisations to return to Central and use it for functions, particularly for fund-raising. This has been addressed in detail in Section 13. The second most pressing need is a major improvement in the condition of the buildings and reorganisation of the space to meet the varying needs of the community. This has been addressed in detail above.

The community need

A Centre

- A centre that we can be proud of.
- A space we can call our own.

A Function/ Events Venue

- An affordable venue where we can host functions and have access to the takings from the bar and kitchen.
- A centre that can be open until the early hours of the morning which for the Black community enables them to celebrate in the way that is a culturally normal.
- A venue with sufficient parking.

Flexible Spacing

- A place that can accommodate the elderly, young people, and children.
- A venue which has meeting rooms, office space and dedicated space for a young people's counselling facility, and a space for the elderly to practice their crafts and play dominoes.

- **An Inclusive Centre**
- A centre that has strong links with other successful Black organisations in Reading.
- A centre that can provide for the growing African community as well as the Caribbean community.

- **Strong Management and Trained Staff**
- Experienced and professional staff that are trained to the highest levels in customer services and relations.
- Robust management committee comprising representatives from the community, users and council.
- A professionally run venue that is well marketed and managed.

- **An Educational / Cultural / Arts Resource Centre**
- A centre which provides educational support to children and young people, opportunities for employment, adult education and advice on unemployment and legal issues.
- A place for youngsters that is positive and achievement oriented.
- A cultural heritage and resource centre which has an exhibition of the history of the Black community in Reading and their contributions to the town and Black books, and resources.
- A centre that hosts Black arts plays conferences and workshops and encourages exchange visits.
- It becomes a central source of information and advice for the community.
- A beacon for the creativity and dynamism of the community to be harnessed and developed for future generations that will enable the community to prosper in the future.

- **The Council**
- A council that recognises the major contribution that the Black community have made to the economy of Reading and be prepared to take into account the community needs.

- **A Safe Place**
- A place where mothers and toddlers feel safe and not intimidated.
- A place where rules are enforced and smoking and other illegal activities are not tolerated.
- A place that is a hive of activity where the male dominated environment is changed to one that is positive and all embracing.

A Positive Image

- *Has a positive high profile not only in the Black community but in Reading as a whole.*

The needs described are those expressed by the individuals interviewed for the consultation. These needs must be seen in conjunction with those expressed in Section 10.3. These needs were expressed with vigour and passion which emphasizes the community's strong desire to see their people progress and their needs met through an African and Caribbean community centre.

15. Mission Statement

A draft mission statement to be established including aims and objectives, which would be in line with Reading Borough Council's corporate values.

Some interview respondents expressed what they felt was part of the mission of Central. These statements are outlined below.

- *To meet the needs of the youth and community*
- *To build community*
- *To provide a place for ethnic minorities to socialise and have their own activities.*
- *It should engage the following concepts:*
- *Education The future of our community is dependent on its young people being educated to participate in society as decision makers, intellectuals, and captains of industry*
- *Enterprise development: Using the facility as an incubator to encourage the development of initiatives, which in future would result in gainful activities reducing dependency on the need for state handouts.*
- *Cultural awareness: The success of any community is dependent on its roots that are laid, this provides strength and longevity. Activities undertaken should reflect this and be a catalyst for development and serve as a beacon for further evolution*
- *Self-help: Without self-help, the State will continue to be short changers at a time when public resources are scarce. In utilising public resources more time is spent monitoring the nuances of each penny rather than being visionaries as to - enterprise development, cultural awareness, and self help.*

- To set up a provision to give young people an opportunity to excel in things that they're good at.
 - To feed children with the right information to help them move forward and to pass this onto the generations
 - To be about helping people in all aspects.
 - To involve the Black churches
- 15.1 Draft Mission Statement**
- A draft mission statement and objectives which incorporate the stated elements is presented here:
- Our mission is to build community through empowerment, engagement, and positive relationships which will encourage excellence and respect for diversity whilst meeting the needs of the African, Caribbean and mixed heritage people of Reading.
- We will seek to achieve this by
- providing a service which enables the community to develop and grow in the areas of
 - education, health and life long learning for all
 - entrepreneurial enterprise which supports and encourages the development of innovative and creative initiatives for collective benefit
 - cultural and historical awareness and appreciation
 - self help through the provision of expertise, advice and information
 - providing a programme for social and recreational activities
 - seeking to work in partnership with the borough council and other agencies
 - fostering community cohesion, harmony and the celebration of differences
 - becoming a force for harnessing the creativity and dynamism of the Black community for future generations

15.2 Development

This draft mission statement and objective is informed by the community's contribution to the consultation. Once a management committee is in place it will be their responsibility to develop, shape and modify the mission statement and objectives in line with the role Central takes on.

16. Accommodation

To identify present and future accommodation needs in the light of the changing needs of the community and detail the opportunities for enhanced facilities.

The consultation elicited in very strong terms the view that the present accommodation and facilities are not sufficient or acceptable for meeting the needs of the community. That if the centre is to become a community centre it would need to be reorganised, extended, refurbished, and re-launched.

The accommodation needs are for:

- Flexible office space.
- A large main performance hall with flexible staging and seating that could be partitioned to provide smaller or larger spaces as and when necessary.
- Sufficient sound proofing to enable functions to take place without disturbing new residents in the area.
- A variety of meeting rooms with flexibility of partitions to allow for extensions or reductions should it be necessary.
- Additional space through extending the building either towards the rear which would entail getting permission from the highways agency or extension upwards by adding an additional two storeys that would have the same floor area as the existing ground floor.
- Area for a gym.
- Space for a studio.
- Existing space for the ICT centre.
- Exploration into additional parking for evening functions.
- Separate bar area and restaurant area that is comfortable and furnished appropriately in the style of a bar/restaurant.

That the facilities should provide for

- An information/resource/advice area.
- An Exhibition area.
- A crèche facility.
- A bar and restaurant/café area.
- Rooms for confidential advice.
- Office space that can be rented by organisations.
- Sufficient storage space within each of these areas.
- Conference rooms.
- Gym space with separate entrance.

The meeting rooms, office space and large hall could be available for booking for a range of events, such as church services, workshops, dinner and dance and conferences. The facilities should be flexible enough to allow for a full range of events and functions. If after exploration and investigation the current premises cannot be renovated to accommodate the needs of the community then alternative accommodation should be sought.

17. Collaborative Working

To detail how Reading Borough Council and the user groups can work together to meet these needs.

A primary concern expressed by the community was the feeling that Reading Borough Council have largely ignored the needs of the Black community. There was a great deal of frustration expressed about the way issues have been addressed. It was felt that the centre has been crisis managed without proper and consistent supervision from the council which has resulted in the centre being used by some for illegal activities without fear of being reprimanded. This has contributed to the negative reputation of Central. A range of the views of those who were interviewed is presented below:

17.1 Role and Responsibility of RBC

When asked about the role and responsibility of Reading Borough Council (RBC) the responses were as follows:

Relationship

- *There is a bad relationship between RBC and Central and the council are not fulfilling their role.*
- *There seems to be a conflict between council and management. But it is good that they [council] developed the IT provision.*
- *They need to identify an RBC officer to work side by side with Central so they can help each other without feeling threatened by each other. They should listen to the perceived needs and suggested ideas of provision. Their role is to facilitate the realisation of those ideas.*
- *Because the site is a multi-million pound site there is a fear in the community that RBC are wanting to sell the site.*

- Their role is to make sure the centre is managed properly. There should be laid down in principle guidance of how it would work. They should not be afraid to
- The council owns Central which is part of the youth and community they have a big responsibility they have a vital role. If they don't show their enthusiasm openly you will be in the dark again. As landlord they need to come and sort out the problems. Ultimately I want to see it become a joint partnership.
- More involvement from the council is needed to understand the community's needs. They need to be providers for young people. They are not fulfilling their role.
- RBC has a great responsibility as many of the tax payers are Black. And they need to take into account the needs of the Black community.
- They are not fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.
- They understand that we are taxpayers they should give us a centre that we can feel proud of so we can put something back into it.
- The council has a responsibility for meeting the needs of the community.

Legal Obligations and Responsibilities

- They only see their responsibilities under the Race Relations Act 2000 and the Race Equality scheme. They are failing in that alone. The council are failing their duty to the Black community under race equality schemes.
- The council only fulfil their responsibilities to a certain degree. They need to change their attitude.
- They need to encourage and support more.
- The Council needs to visit the building and check things out. They should meet stop stereotyping the building as currently they are treated like outcasts.
- The council need to show more support towards the centre. They also need to
- RBC need to trust and support the manager and their strategies.
- RBC do not support the centre financially. It is OK to give the odd table here and there but we need consistency.

Support

The community's concerns need to be addressed openly and consultation with them must be on-going. The council will need to be open about their intentions and action plans for implementing change, furthermore, these plans will need to be publicly declared and made accessible. The community need to be aware of who their RBC contact person is with a contact number and e-mail address so that these concerns can be raised, considered and responded to within pre determined timescales.

The legitimacy of the above statements is not as important as the recognition that these are the real perceptions of members of the community. In order for the community and Reading Borough Council to work together there will need to be a serious determination on the part of the council to engage more actively with the community and genuinely seek to repair the damage that has been done over the decades. Part of the healing process will involve the council having greater transparency and openness by ensuring that the community is kept informed of progress and developments by regularly communicating with the user groups, community and voluntary groups as well as members of the management committee but had no idea whether it was still operational as they had not received copies of minutes or any information about whether or not the committee had been disbanded. Communication through and from the Council is vital if Central is going to become what the community envisions. There is a gap in the provision offered by the Youth and Community service which focuses on Youth but neglects community. This situation needs to be addressed.

17.2 Conclusion

- *Other comments made were:*
- *They provide funding and maintenance and are fulfilling their roles.*
- *Council are in a difficult position since they cannot control Central according to its normal operations it will probably close.*

make tough and difficult decisions. This is what they have been elected for. They need to be strong and have discussion with the management.

18. Management Arrangements

To determine the management arrangements for the club, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the users, the management and the staff team including looking at the options of independent status and charitable trust.

18.1 Views on Current Management Arrangements

Respondents were asked to comment on current management arrangements:

Representation on Committee

- It is best to empower a management committee to look after the building. We need proportional representation of Africans and Caribbeans on the management committee.
- We need an advisory to liaise with the manager so they can work closely together on issues that need to be addressed not just having socials. Steering groups need to be well balanced, and focused they need to be articulate and know how to get what they want... We need young people and fresh blood. We need youth to represent young people. There is a need for a strong management committee who have Central as their interest not themselves.

Management Arrangements

- The centre needs its own management committee.
- Any management arrangements should put the committee at the centre. The council must trust and make full use of the judgements of the committee. A council officer should be there to offer professional advice and ensure the legal framework in which the committee operates is followed.

Clarity of the Role of Management

- The management is not clear of the role of the centre. They need to bring young people and the community together as a family. This has not been seen as important by many managers. They have lost the support of the community. They need an office manager who has a clear brief that the facility is going to meet the needs of the African Caribbean community and wider community in general.
- Each manager did what they thought was best. But that is the problem. They have taken away what is already there. There was football for the men and netball for the women, woodcarving and the kiln they were all here. They should have kept the good activities. This should be included as part of the remit of the job.

A management committee that has members from the key user groups and representatives from some of the community groups as well as individuals who have been successful in the past in other African Caribbean ventures should be members of the committee. The centre manager would be a member. A representative from RBC should sit on the committee and act in an advisory role. The committee can determine whether the RBC representative has voting rights. If Central is to become a community centre with an active programme for youth there needs to be a representative for youth and someone with the experience of attracting funding from external sources to fund initiatives at the centre on the committee. The committee should be comprised of individuals within the

18.3 Composition of Management Committee

The consensus was that rather than an advisory committee which was described as 'merely rubber stamping council decisions without consultation' by one former advisory member that there should be a management committee which has power and responsibility and is able to make decisions about Central and its use.

18.2 Management Committee

The manager is enthusiastic and experienced but there seems to be a conflict between the management and the council.

Relationship

- *There is no communication from management committee to members.*
- *They need to develop a good management structure that is accountable and transparent.*

Communication and Accountability

- *RBC talk about robust management at Central. No one is taking a stand. People do not see management there and what they are trying to get across.*
- *The previous management committee was strong and the county council listened to them. They would review what was happening and hold conferences. We would regularly meet with the council.*
- *The management needs improving although the centre is being managed reasonably well. They have the ability to motivate and provide ideas to those who are willing to accept.*

Strong Management

Initiatives that have been organised and implemented by individual managers or youth workers should be organised in such a way as to ensure continuation of these initiatives should there be a change in personnel. It should be the responsibility of the management committee to ensure that there is continuity of provision.

18.5 Continuity of Provision

Consideration will need to be given to whether the centre should be closed for re-building and refurbishment and then re-opened. There have been concerns expressed about this where some members of the community feel that if the centre is closed for refurbishment that RBC will not allow it to be re-opened. In order to allay these fears a written undertaking by RBC would need to be secured before if the centre is temporarily closed. The Thames Valley police should have the right to enter the building with representatives from management when there is evidence or suspicion of illegal activities taking place or when suspects use the centre as a refuge.

day drop-in centre with open access or whether there would need to be controlled access. It may be that certain areas of the centre are available for dropping in but there would need to be supervised positive and purposeful engagement of these individuals to enable the mission of the centre to be achieved and to assist in eradicating the negative stigma associated with the centre. This would need to be done firmly, but sensitively.

18.4 Responsibility of Management Committee

community who have a proven range of skills, experience and expertise to successfully take Central forward.

18.6 Centre Management

Management of the centre should be the responsibility of an experienced venue/events manager with supervision from the management committee. If there are individuals within the community who have the standing, respect and proven ability to run the centre in the way that the committee desires they should be considered even if they may lack the specific qualifications. There should be a youth worker attached to the centre to provide activities for young people. There may also be a need for a community development worker to assist the management committee in moving Central more fully towards a community provision. Staff at the centre should receive regular training to ensure that the quality and level of customer services is professionally delivered and of a high standard. Regular forums should be convened to ensure that the community have the opportunity to regularly contribute to the development process. This should include opportunities to make suggestions, to feedback on developments and to discuss and share concerns with the management committee.

18.7 Options of independent status and charitable trust.

There is the possibility of Central applying for charitable or independent status but this will need to be determined once the management committee and Reading Borough council have agreed a way forward and established the nature of the centre that will be operated. There are a number of rigorous requirements and criteria that need to be met in order to be awarded charitable status. The management committee should seek the advice of community members who have been through the process of acquiring charitable status or independent status to determine which if any would be suitable for Central.

19. Conclusion

To undertake a consultation with a community of people with diverse experiences and backgrounds, similar yet opposing views and perceptions, and conflicting opinions, desires and needs is difficult to say the least. This coupled with the frustrations and strong emotions that often accompany any community that feels that they have not been acknowledged, appreciated, affirmed or recognised, is challenging. To add to that combination an environment of mistrust and politics would seem to be an impossible undertaking. A pathway has had to be carved through the complexities of human experience and expression which makes sense and presents a way forward. It is hoped that this report has achieved this.

The consultation has established that there is a desperate need for a centre in Reading that the African Caribbean community can call their own. They desire a centre that they can be proud of and one which symbolises their hopes and dreams for the community and future generations.

This consultation has sought to document and establish the views of the African and Caribbean community in Reading. It has not been able to access every individual within the community but is confident that it has presented the full range of views that there are on the future of Central. These differing views have been drawn together to form the report presented here.

It is the responsibility of the community and Reading Borough Council to recognise that the only positive and constructive way forward is to accept that there will need to be a degree of compromise in order to come to a consensus and move the community forward. The report and recommendations presented are to be used as a tool to guide the new management committee and the Council. They may need to be modified and shaped to suit the direction that the committee believes Central should go. The community need to

be kept informed of all decisions that are made and a continuous process of consultation must be established if their support and trust is to be gained and sustained.

If the physical changes to Central that are recommended here are not practically or financially feasible or possible it is strongly recommended that the Council provides another site for the community that can be used in the way that they have expressed in this report.

The consultant wishes to express her appreciation and thanks to those who were willing to participate in this consultation and took time out of their own programmes to be interviewed or to complete questionnaires. It is my desire to see the Reading African Caribbean community unite and thrive as they seek to attain excellence and success in all their endeavours.

That the management committee of Central is comprised of representatives of the user groups but also representatives of island/country organisations as well as key individuals who have been successful in setting up and running Black organisations within Reading. It may be that some of these individuals have other commitments which would preclude them from participating fully on the management committee. I would urge that attention

20.2 Management

community aspect of this service to be reviewed. The Youth and Community Service is heavily focussed there is a need for the Borough Council's Equality Strategy Action Plan 2002-2005. The documentation from stated key aims and objectives in relation to this community as outlined in Reading. Additionally, it is important for the community to experience the benefits of RBC's own outlined in the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000. community need to have confidence that the Council is fulfilling its legal obligations specific focus of meeting the needs of the large African and Caribbean community. There is a need for its role and function to be clarified and documented if it is to have the Community centre is utilised primarily by the African Caribbean community. However, 3.8% (2001 Census) making it the largest minority group in Reading. Central Youth and That the council recognise that the combined African and Caribbean community totals

20.1 Council

The recommendations of this report have been informed by the consultation with the African Caribbean community in Reading. Respondents were asked what recommendations they would make for the way forward. Their recommendations can be organised into eight main areas: Management, Refurbishment and Development, Transparency, PFL, Marketing and Promotion, Engagement, Council.

20. Recommendations

The renewal of the Public Entertainment License is crucial to the success of a new community centre. Every effort needs to be made to determine the criteria required to be met for the license application to be successful. If this includes ensuring a management

20.6 PEL

The programme that is offered must seek to meet the diversity of needs within the community. It should be a programme which meets the specific needs of the senior citizens both female and male; young people, the unemployed, school children and parents. It should also seek to provide support, advice and guidance to those within the community. The details of the programme should be determined by a representative management committee in consultation with the manager of the centre and promoted within the community for the opportunity to comment on it.

20.5 Programme

There needs to be a concerted effort to engage the community in the future of Central. Part of this process will mean that each African and Caribbean organisation, group or church within Reading would need to be visited by members of the management committee and centre manager to promote the centre as a community centre, to encourage ownership and involvement of the community. The benefits of becoming involved with Central would need to be outlined and dialogue with the community maintained so that they can inform and shape the development of Central.

20.4 Engagement

The process of selecting members for a management committee and/or steering group must be transparent and open to the community which they aim to be representing and serving. It is imperative that this process is seen to be open, fair and balanced. Any committee that is formed to manage the Centre must make every effort to regularly inform its users of business and progress. A newsletter which is sent to all Black associations and organisations within Reading may assist with this.

20.3 Transparency

be given to ensuring that their expertise remains available to the committee in an advisory capacity. The management committee must be empowered to manage the building in its entirety and make it profitable.

The successful future of Central as a community centre relies heavily on re-branding the Centre and a change in the perception and stigma associated with it. This will necessitate ensuring that the whole community are kept informed of developments and changes at Central. That the change in function from youth provision to community centre may necessitate a change in name but should accompany a refurbishment and development programme. The centre would need to be re-launched with a grand opening with representatives and dignitaries from the Council, user groups and all community, voluntary and church organisations within Reading. The media would need to be involved to ensure positive and wide coverage of the event.

20.8 Marketing and Promotion

Before any serious development of the centre can take place there needs to be an urgent investigation into the feasibility of extending the current site by adding upper floors as well as extending the floor space upstairs to equal the ground floor space. In order to better fulfil its function as a community centre there would need to be a re-designing of the space within the building. This would necessitate exploring the feasibility of extending the site. If this proves to be costly and therefore prohibitive or indeed not feasible from a structural perspective efforts need to be made to consider whether outside funding can be procured to fund the extension or in the latter case for the council to provide another building for the community, leaving Central to function as a dedicated youth and possibly arts facility.

20.7 Refurbishment and Development

committee is in place with named individuals who will be the license holders this should be set up at the earliest opportunity. This information should be made available to the community, particularly those who frequent the centre so that they can be encouraged to become engaged and involved in working towards ensuring that requirements are met and rules adhered to in order to have the license renewed.

- Office for National Statistics (2001) *Census National Report* London: The Stationery Office
- Office
- Home Office (1976) *Race Relations Act*. London: The Stationery Office
- Home Office Race (2000) *Relations Amendment Act* London: The Stationery Office
- Reading Borough Council (2002) *Equality Strategy Action Plan, 2002-2005*
- Reading Borough Council (2002) *Race Equality Scheme Part 1*
- Thomas, C. (2004) *Central Reading Youth Provision Programming Policy*

References

Appendix 1

LIST OF ASSOCIATIONS AND GROUPS CONSULTED

Ghana Reading Association
 Vincentian Association
 Sierra Leone Association
 Barbados and Friends Association
 Reading Carnival
 Invader Dominoes
 Apollo
 New Testament Church of God
 Reading Refocus
 Church of God
 Mary Seacole Day Nursery
 Urban News
 RCRC
 The Globe: Youth Club
 Reading University
 Reading Equities Staff
 Youth Workers
 Grenada Association
 Unity
 West Indian Women's Circle
 Director of Education and Community, RBC
 Principal Youth and Community Officer, RBC
 Jamaican Association
 OSCAR
 Thames Valley Police
 Perry's Caribbean Cuisine
 WUMA
 Capotera Classes
 RASPO
 Showstop'rz
 ICT project
 Sexual Health Drop-In
 The Firm
 Fusion
 Grenada Association
 Reading College of Art and Technology
 Former Manager of Central
 Central Staff and Management

In addition a number of individuals who are associated with Central and use it regularly were interviewed. A number of other groups, individuals and organisations were contacted and invited to be involved. Despite a willingness to be involved in the consultation for some it was not possible for a range of reasons such as pressure of work and lack of time.

Management

- 8. What changes if any would you like to see at Central?
- 7. What is your vision for the club? (How do you see it developing?)

Future Vision of the Club

- 6. Do you think the wider Black community should be drawn into using the club more? If so how? If not why not?
- 5. Does the club currently meet the needs of the Black community in Reading? If so, how? If not, why not?

The Community

- 4. What are the key areas of concern?
- 3. What, if any, do perceive the difficulties/problems to be?
- 2. What are the strengths/positive aspects of the club?

Current Function of the Club

- 1. What has been your involvement/relationship with Central?

Personal

Are the same users attending each session or different users?

What is the age group of those attending the sessions?

About how many people attend each session?

How long is each session?

How many times per week do you use the centre?

Name of group:

Initial Interviews for User group Leaders

Interview Schedule

Appendix 2



9. Do you have any views on the strengths or weaknesses of the current management system?

Role of the Council

10. What do you see as the role and responsibility of the council in relation to Central?

11. Are these roles and responsibilities being fulfilled?

Accommodation and Facilities

12. Which part of the centre is used by your group?

13. Is the space provided adequate?

14. What additional space or resources could Central provide that would aid the development of the group?

15. How do you feel generally about the current accommodation and facilities?

16. What changes would you like to see in the accommodation and facilities at Central?

Consultation

17. How do you think this consultation should be conducted in order to be effective?

18. Who in the community should be included/involved in the consultation?

19. What are the key issues that need to be considered?

20. Is there anything else that you think is important that you would like to share?

**Appendix 3
Questionnaire
Survey on Reading Central Youth Provision**

Gender: (please tick)		<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Female		
Age Group: (please tick)		<input type="checkbox"/> under 15	<input type="checkbox"/> 16-19 yrs	<input type="checkbox"/> 20-24 yrs	<input type="checkbox"/> 25-30 yrs
		<input type="checkbox"/> 31-40 yrs	<input type="checkbox"/> 41-50 yrs	<input type="checkbox"/> over 51 yrs	
Have you ever used the facilities at Central? (please tick)		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes		<input type="checkbox"/> No	
What have you used Central for? (please tick)		How often? (please tick the appropriate box)			
		Daily	1-2 times per week	3-4 times per week	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Perry's Caribbean Cuisine				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Computer Project				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hall for socialising				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other				
Please specify: _____					

Which clubs have you used? (please tick)		<input type="checkbox"/>	RASPO		
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Dance Group		
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Martial Arts Group		
		Please Specify: _____			

If you have not used Central or rarely use it say why. (please tick)		<input type="checkbox"/>	Poor reputation		
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Condition of buildings		

Thank you for your help

Use this space for additional comments:

Central?
What changes would you like to see taking place at

Please say why

Do you think Central should become a centre for the African Caribbean community in Reading?
Yes No

Please give reasons:

Do you think that Reading needs an African Caribbean Centre? (please tick)
Yes No

	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Does Central cater for your needs? (please tick)		
Please give reasons		

	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No entertainment license	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No interesting activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I am too busy	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Hours of opening are not convenient	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other please specify	<input type="checkbox"/>	