

**South Norfolk House**  
**Swan Lane, Long Stratton, NR15 2XE**



The rationale and ambitions for the site of South Norfolk House and reflects the South Norfolk Council Statement of June 14<sup>th</sup> 2022

*“That return is not just a financial consideration, the Council also has to take into account community value and how it can improve the quality of life of residents”*

**This proposal outlines the repurposing of the existing site to deliver a Community & Creative Arts Centre.**

South Norfolk House is considered by Long Stratton Town Council to be a “Building of Local Importance” and is an “Asset of Community Value” and as such offers a unique opportunity to be repurposed to support both existing and emerging community and commercial needs. By sympathetically breathing new life into the existing space the site can be redefined to support a number of activities.

By combining the artistic experience within an enhanced community setting this facility will maximise social impact and community engagement through the breadth of the activities available. It will contribute to regeneration and growth through localised economic impact and the provision of generic cultural place-making.

It will help invigorate and refresh the town ready for its next phase of growth making Long Stratton the place of choice to live in South Norfolk whilst ensuring that it aligns with the Government’s Carbon Reduction profile achieving long term sustainability.

## A bit of History

The land was acquired by South Norfolk Council in 1974

The design for the building was completed in 1975 by Michael Innes a local Norwich architect. The original two hexagon design are 3530 sq. m (38,000 sq. f) and were quite controversial at the time but went on to win several awards. The design was exceptional for its day with the architect applying several elements of environmental thinking from more current times with consideration for energy use and overheating with tracking of the suns solar path for winter heat gain alongside natural cross ventilation coupled with some mechanical ventilation for the summer months. It was one of the most energy efficient buildings of its time.

The space was designed as “open plan” to accommodate 180 staff with space available for an additional 10%; however some 300 staff worked there during its busiest times.

The construction of the building started in early summer 1976 and was completed in winter 1978.

The building was “officially opened on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 1979.

The main contractor was Simons of Kings Lynn

The construction cost was £1.1m



## Why a community centre

### Uniting a community

Community centres are important hubs that give people an opportunity to socialise, learn, make new friends and access some key services.

This community centre will be about providing a place for people to connect, offering different things for different people and linking people from all walks of life, people will be valued for their own individuality coming together under the umbrella of the community.

The centre will help invigorate and refresh the town ready for its next phase of growth making Long Stratton the place of choice to live in South Norfolk.

### Support for broader community projects

The centre will bring people together to work on wider community projects, such as organising clean-ups or working on improving community spaces or delivering the new pocket parks, community allotment or orchard.

It's not all about what goes on within its 8 walls, the centre will outreach to the wider community and work to improve the town and overall local environment for everyone.



### Combating loneliness

This centre will provide a vital place to visit for older members of the community, or people who feel isolated from those around them. Studies show almost a fifth of the population feel lonely, always or often. Having a place to visit regularly is vital for many people. It provides a routine, something to look forward to and new opportunities.



## **Positive impacts on the lives of younger people**

The youth of today need a safe space to visit and take part in activities. This centre will provide that space with classes and events both creative and social. A programme will be developed with the likes of MTM Educational Outreach Team that offers numerous opportunities for young people to make friends and learn new skills. Giving the younger generation a healthy outlet for their energy will help prevent anti-social behaviour and nurture the individual's most positive attributes instead.



## **Promoting healthy living and Wellbeing**

The centre will look to develop a culture of wellbeing and mindfulness across social, mental and physical health with supported learning sessions in conjunction with local county teams. This will improve the overall health of the community, taking pressure off social services and other facilities.

Working closely with the leisure centre, the community centre can co-promote physical activities. Walking clubs and fitness classes could be tailored to the communities various age groups.

Prioritising physical fitness is important, but not everyone wants to join a gym or go to a demanding sports class. The centre will put socialising at the heart of everything it does – making fitness fun. “Eating fit” will be promoted with nutritional health by offering specialist cooking classes, with the occasional low calorie cake making thrown in!

## **Creativity and culture**

Arts and crafts classes alongside other cultural activities are key to encouraging new members of the community to get involved. The more opportunities, the more people will come along. With use of the in house “arts” facilities and people the centre will offer a varied selection of “have a go” classes alongside longer courses, including traditional and media opportunities.



## **Information source**

The centre will provide valuable information on events, programmes and other activities going on in the community. From local am-dram productions to local fairs. It will develop a well promoted and managed social media presence where all you need to know can be found on your local community centre media page.

Guides, brochures, flyers and newsletters will be on the social media bulletin board where both the community centre and other local operators can advertise their events.

The community centre could also provide wider resources with volunteers and staff being able to signpost individuals to helpful websites or facilities, such as mental health organisations.

## **Educational opportunities**

The community centre will offer a learning hub to support adult education opportunities, as well as developmental opportunities; such as longer term artistic crafts supported by the in house arts team. A safe space to learn a new skill and further an individual’s education will make for a fantastic local resource.

## Social space

Individuals often find hiring facilities prohibitively costly. People are able to organise social and family events by hiring out community spaces. Other voluntary groups and organisations would also be able to hire out space on a more regular, consistent basis. This service is invaluable for people who want to organise social activities and need a base in which to do this.



## Nomad opportunity

With the move to home working post-COVID, some nomad workers are looking within their local community for out-of-office workspaces. Community centres are a positive setting to work, as long as there is solid internet connection and coffee on tap. By linking into this demographic the centre will look to adapt part of their space into a temporary workspace for individuals who wish to take advantage of this.



## **Volunteer opportunities**

There are many reasons why people volunteer. Some want the opportunity to give back and do great things. Others require a break from day-to-day life and find solace in volunteering. There are always new people to meet, new skills to learn and activities to take part in, so the centre will build a family of volunteer's gives people a chance to build their confidence and feel part of a team.

## **Employment**

The repurposing of South Norfolk House into a new complex accommodates the employment of some 25 persons alongside 40 resident and visiting artists. This aligns with the currently designated classification

## **Location**

Within close proximity of South Norfolk House is the Leisure Centre, the Medical Centre, Saffron Housing Trust offices, Mayfield's Care Home, Break Respite Care and the High, Junior and Infant Schools each of which will likely need to be enhanced to accommodate the towns' growth over the coming years. It would therefore seem to make this an ideal location to provide further community facilities.



## **The proposal**

### **Long Stratton Town Council and beyond**

The recent engagement with Long Stratton Town Council has allowed the delivery team to incorporate a number of community elements outlined within the Councils Action Plan. The proposed relocation of its operational office to South Norfolk House will also allow for greater local engagement and the development of further community services.

The team will also explore the possible relocation of the existing Long Stratton Library within this space by co-locating it with other enhanced services such as the learning hub which could see a realignment of expanded services providing for its long term core sustainability.

### **Community and Arts synergy**

The proposal reflects the principles outlined previously in this paper and delivers an integrated community and arts hub. It accommodates such community facilities as a wellbeing centre, older resident quiet space, bank hub, credit union, and “men’s shed / repair shop” multi-purpose older youth space with internet café and seating areas within the proposed pocket park. The arts complex allows for production, learning and display, with both community and arts being supported by an enhanced café, work and management offices alongside an incubator hub. These combined facilities will make an excellent use of this locally important building.

### **Why Creative Arts**

Norfolk has been home to a great number of artists over the years and the importance of stable and secure studio space to be creative is indispensable to allow this legacy to continue.

The current opportunity for sustainable studio space is diminishing as potential studios close such as the Outpost Centre based in Gildengate House at Anglia Square and the proposed closure of the DM21 building in Diss Having. These studios have housed hundreds of artists over the past 10 years and their closure will have a severe impact for the Norfolk arts community.



## Creative Industry

With the creative industries contributing in excess of £109bn\* (1) annually to the UK economy it is important to nurture and encourage its development at all stages. It is therefore the intention of the delivery team to establish a comprehensive programme through the provision of a wide range of individual and group studios, workshops and exhibition space bringing together fellow creatives whilst providing opportunities for growth and development.



The new facility will cater for both for traditional artists and those engaged or wishing to enter into the Digital, Interactive, and Media, Photographic and Musical arenas, catering to the creative needs of all generations both present and future.



The delivery team will provide outstanding artistic experiences, providing ‘safe houses’ for the development of artists and companies, encouraging and supporting artistic experimentation and development, drive innovation within the industry, with business models that enable artistic risk-taking and provide safe and stimulating environments for creative development.

We will create exhibitions, events, skills workshops and further opportunities within the wider community, drawing on local interest and talent to provide a wide range of projects led by individuals or teams of professional artists and other creative practitioners





By offering outstanding artistic experiences for all in the community, and by operating as a robust social enterprise, the repurposing of South Norfolk House into a Community and Creative Arts Centre presents a fantastic opportunity to become the local cultural venue of tomorrow providing a unique artistic and social contribution to the cultural and civic life of the town and surrounding areas.

The delivery team proposes to adopt a collaborative outreach program working with local schools and community groups, to enhance existing practices or help develop new creative projects and activities.

In schools, we will look to bring together a creative and inspirational learning opportunity. Working in partnership, it will allow schools to create a more robust arts educational offering; either locally at each school or collectively through the use of the centres' artists, or in house using the centres' facilities.





Through the development of a large-scale studio it will bring together a creative network of artists in one place, becoming part of a community who can offer each other advice and support. Being part of an artistic, social hub that will fuel creativity whilst bringing to the wider community the opportunity to learn and experience the other amenities that the creative family will bring. This will contribute to an overall town change via social, physical, and economic value.



It is the intention of the team to co-create with local enterprises to drive the hub's growth by acting as an industry incubator supporting artistic businesses in their early stages, supporting them with advice and training to establish their own enterprises and financially contributing to the local economy.

### **Supplimentary benefits**

With the growth of housing in Long Stratton and the surrounding parishes there will be a direct need for greater local facilities. With the town being the geographic centre of South Norfolk, the location for this new centre makes it a practical choice for the same reasons South Norfolk District Council chose the location back in 1974.

The centre would support the newly created sports complex opposite and link well with the anticipated growth of the towns schools and the medical centre, grouping a number of key social facilities together in one area this would seem to be an ideal location to co-locate a community centre, creative arts hub, library, café, exhibition facility and youth club.

The delivery of a pocket park and other external space could be delivered through a collaboration with one of the Chelsea Flower Show garden designers as that designed for Oulton Hall by Humphry Repton



## Working with Skilled Partners



The team will consult with ACAVA (Association for Cultural Advancement through Visual Art) who were a pioneer in delivering arts in health and wellbeing settings, bringing professional artists together with local communities in programmes to explore their creativity with transformational outcomes.

With their engagement the team will deliver high-quality creative opportunities with demonstrable transformational impacts on people's wellbeing. Advocating the social value of creativity to communities and society whilst delivering culture-led regeneration and place-making strategies alongside long-term projects that are socially inclusive.

Hosting the more practical likes of "Men's Shed" would be part of the offering. These sheds are designed to create a welcoming and engaging workspace, aiding participants to work on practical projects, follow hobbies and share skills all whilst enjoying the benefits of socialising and meeting others.





The team will deliver an “Art for Wellbeing: Everyday” programme. (AWE) is a project that provides the opportunity for local people to work with professional artists, and to learn a range of visual arts skills. Art for Wellbeing projects has, in some areas, been funded by the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (WLCCG). Through user feedback we can help create models for the skills learnt, so local people can try out the same activity at home with their family or friends.

Coupled with the engagement with ACAVA the team will engage with the Arts Council England, Future Arts Centre and the Arts Marketing Association through which it will be able to provide additional resources including;

Access to further online peer support networks, enabling users to reach out to other arts centres across the UK for information, advice and support

Inclusion in generated PR and advocacy activity

Opportunities to be involved in funded projects

Members of the team have a history of developing sustainable projects and will become part of the Gallery Climate Coalition, with a shared goal of reducing the industry’s carbon emissions by at least 50% by 2030



## Long Stratton Local Plans



The current Local Plan comprises a group of documents including the Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk to 2026 (adopted in March 2011, amendments adopted in January 2014) and the Long Stratton Area Action Plan (adopted 2016). It also includes the Site Specific Allocations and Policies Document to 2026, the Development Management Policies Document (adopted 2015) and the Long Stratton Master planning Report undertaken in January 2018.

The element relating specifically to Long Stratton Town Centre and surrounding areas identifies *“an excellent opportunity to enhance the setting of the Long Stratton”* and identifies community facilities, Swan Lane and pedestrian movement. The Long Stratton Master plan determines the opportunity to *“remodel the village centre in a more people-friendly way”*. The conversion of South Norfolk House as outlined within this proposal facilitates all of these needs. It may also be possible, on the open land to the front of South Norfolk House, to accommodate a “Pocket Park” to align with the proposed Pocket Parks identified in the same plan.

The latest report relating to “Norfolk Clusters” would make this an ideal location with the entrance to South Norfolk House being just 500 metres from the junction of Swan Lane and the High Street. This would therefore allow the hub to be walkable within 15 minutes of some 4000 residents (this will increase considerably once the A140 bypass housing development is completed).

Extracts from local plans:

A wide range of retail and community facilities acts as a service centre for surrounding villages. As noted in the AAP, the number of shops and services is

already high for a settlement of this size, making it close in function to a market town.

2.56 There are some sites in the town centre that are located in the Long Stratton town centre boundary (as defined in the adopted AAP) that are vacant and presenting opportunities for comprehensive development where this would enhance the commercial centre of Long Stratton. This includes the fire station/telephone exchange area on Swan Lane and properties interspersed within the town centre boundary.

2.57 Currently the volume and type of traffic along the A140 impacts adversely (through noise, vibrations, fumes, dust) on the quality of the public realm in the town centre. The A140 is also a barrier to pedestrian movement in and around the town centre.

2.58 The Long Stratton by-pass would provide an opportunity to increase the quality of the public realm in the town centre and is an excellent opportunity to enhance the setting of the Long Stratton Conservation Area and all the heritage assets in it.

2.59 The removal of high volumes of traffic along the A140 in itself will help but if opportunities are to be fully realised physical improvements in layout, furniture and street scene also needs to take place. The Long Stratton Master planning Report undertaken in January 2018 looks specifically at such measures.

#### Acknowledgements:

LSTC

ACAVA

FAC

Aecom

Bow Arts

NCA

Pintrest

Other generic internet sources

Notes