

COMMENTS FROM DR MARK CHAMBERLAIN, CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE REC, ADDRESSING THE POINTS MADE BY ANTHEA SAMAIN ON THE CASTLE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION FACEBOOK PAGE

1. The accusation has been made that there is a lack of transparency regarding the plans for refurbishment of the Centre and the proposed extension. This accusation is unfounded. The plans have been available for consultation via the Borough website since July. Furthermore all students and local residents were invited to an open consultation meeting held at the Centre at 4pm on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> September, well ahead of the planning meeting to be held in November, on the plans submitted to Bedford Borough. At that consultation meeting the architect made a comprehensive presentation on the plans and several questions raised by local residents were addressed. When requested, local residents have been met to listen to and address their specific concerns. There is also a link to the plans in the 'Stop Press' section of our website. The plans are also displayed on the centre notice board with hard copies available in the Centre.
2. It is said that there will be a large expansion of student numbers attending the Centre. Again, such an assertion is unfounded. The assertion seems to be driven by two features: namely two additional classrooms in the proposed extension and the myth that suddenly the Centre will be open to all and sundry aged 18 and over. The aim of the Centre remains as previously: to advance the education mainly of persons over 50 and provide facilities for recreation and leisure with the object of improving the quality of their lives. For several years courses which have been run on Saturdays and during the summer months have been open to persons over 18 but there have been remarkably few takers (less than 0.5%) so this will not be a source of increased numbers. The two additional classrooms are required to partially offset loss of classroom space in the main building as the result of the refurbishment. It is anticipated that around 10 to 15 additional students could be accommodated per session. This compares with an average of up to 100 students per session currently.
3. Concern has been expressed that the new extension could see a significant rise in hire of the Centre at weekends and in the evenings for social events. At present the Centre is hired out for four evenings a week for educational purposes. The main uses are for a language group and for art classes both of which are run by existing tutors at the Centre. There is also occasional use by a local Rotary Club. The Centre is only hired to people or organizations who are already known at the Centre and they have to abide by strict terms and conditions.

The Centre is not available for hire by the general public. This policy will not change in the future.

4. Concern has been expressed that an application may be made for a licence to serve alcohol on the premises. This concern is totally unfounded since there is no intention whatsoever of applying for a licence to sell alcohol.
5. The question has been raised over increased parking in the area caused by the extension. Parking at the Centre is reserved for staff and tutors only. Just under half of the students use a car to attend the Centre and use public car parking available nearby, (figures based on our 2015 Student Survey). Whenever possible car sharing is encouraged. Some of our students live in the villages surrounding Bedford and a few travel much further, and public transport is not always a viable option for them. Similar numbers of students either walk or use public transport. Since there is not going to be a large increase in student numbers attending the Centre then it is highly unlikely that there will be a noticeable increase in car traffic to the Centre.