

FEARS GROW FOR FUTURE OF YOUTH CENTRE AS PROBLEM DRAGS ON

Starlight still in the dark

YOUNGSTERS still have an anxious wait to discover the fate of a popular youth centre.

The future of Starlight Youth Club, Inkerman Street, continues to hang in the balance after months of heel-dragging at Luton Town Hall.

Running of the site was supposed to be handed over to the African Caribbean Community Development Forum (ACCDF) in March. But instead its place in the grand scheme of Luton life is again being discussed in the corridors of power.

The forum's Patrick Markland claimed Luton Borough Council was being strangely slow in helping to secure money for the centre's long-term position.

"If we're still waiting for documents that we should have got, then what does that say?", he said. "We need that information for an application form and we still haven't got it from them."

The question of any possible Starlight closure came to a head last October when its young users campaigned to keep it

open. Protestors said they were not being given straight answers over its future and demanded to be told.

At the time the Lib Dem-led council said it would work with the forum to secure funding and then hand over the reins for it to continue providing youth facilities.

Those same councillors, who are now in opposition after losing May's election, have claimed the youth centre is now back on council meeting agendas and its future looks less certain.

Councillor Lawrence Patterson said an October 1 meeting had a worrying item - 'to review the current operation and future use of Starlight Youth Centre' - creating doubt where it seemed to have been removed.

"Labour councillors ran a closure scare story when Liberal Democrats controlled the council even though they knew we had no intention of closing the premises and were discussing ways to secure its future," he

said. Now they have put it back on the agenda without giving any clear idea of what they are planning.

"This just perpetuates the uncertainty and makes a long term solution harder to find. "If they are seriously thinking about closing the building then they should be honest and say so. If they are not, then why are they not pushing forward with the discussions started under the Liberal Democrats?"

Executive member for children's services Councillor Tahir Khan said he did not know why it had taken this time to progress.

But, he said, the service itself would go on even if he was not in a position to confirm it would remain at its present Inkerman Street site.

"We are committed to continuing the youth activities that are there. We are always interested in sustaining the activities that are of benefit to young people," he said.

"The future of Starlight is as certain as it was when they (the Lib Dems) were in power. In two months we can't make a miracle happen."

Mr Khan added he would be holding talks with the ACCDF in the coming weeks to work out a way to go forward.

"We are not considering the closure - we are still fully onboard with that," he said.



Pooling resources to keep kids active

YOUNGSTERS are being given plenty to do at a summer school project.

A host of activities are on offer free of charge or at subsidised rate during the Mitalee Youth Association's programme for young people aged between nine and 19.

Mitalee's Ashuk Ahmed said: "The programmes are designed to ensure that young people are provided with opportunities that are challenging and that provide personal, social and educational development over the long summer holiday."

The summer school project started last week at Maidenhall Junior School, Newark Road, Luton, and will run for four days a week, Monday to Thursday, between 11am and 4pm.

Activities on offer include accredited and non-accredited training programmes such as first



aid, food and hygiene, bicycle safety and radio broadcast training, as well as educational workshops covering community safety and health and drugs awareness.

There will also be a chance to enjoy subsidised trips to Alton Towers, the cinema, swimming, ice skating and many other indoor and outdoor sports and recreational activities. The project is open to all young people living in the area. A one-off registration fee of £2 is required.

For further details contact Mehboob Koyes on 07903121187 or email: mitalee@totalise.co.uk

