



Celebration of Priya's 25 Years service in Highfields Page 4...

Community Governance Now!



More than 1,000 people sign petition in support of Community Governance

Petition was presented to the full City Council meeting held on 28th September 2006. Ask local councillors how they will support local people



Asset transfer is one simple way of achieving Community Governance.

As early as 2004 Pulse recommended and even the Government accepted that

"Asset transfer refers to local communities' ability to acquire land and buildings, either at market value or at a discount, in order to deliver services that meet local needs. It is seen as one way in which local authorities (in particular) can support the development of social economy organisations and thereby meet their wider strategies for renewal and improved delivery of local services."

Join our photo gallery of Supporters for Community Governance at Highfields Centre through HCA

'Jaat baat zindabaad' Our destiny is in our own hands. We the people of Highfields have always had to do for ourselves. Self-Help has always made it possible for us to maintain who we are and what we are. We as citizens of Leicester and UK are entitled to a fair share of resources, funding, services and staffing to meet our needs. For more than 25 years, Highfields Community Association (HCA) has had to battle hard to secure these entitlements.

Community Governance will enable us to be Self-Driven and be able to work with all major funders and resource holders as an equal partner, sign contracts and deliver accordingly. We have the professional expertise to work to national inspectable standards. Learning & Skills Council, Sport England, East Midlands Development Agency & Government Office East Midlands have demonstrated their professional judgement by partnering up with HCA and providing £4.3m to meet the needs of our communities. Why can't Leicester City Council follow their example?

All over England, local community associations are supported by their local councils in partnership arrangements to meet the needs of local people. Community Governance makes it possible to bring more funds and resources to support, train, educate and qualify local people for work and further education. To build healthier and more fulfilling lives.

Everybody accepts **Leicester City Council does not have the money, staff or the expertise to do any of this.** So, the solution is to partner up with HCA and deliver high quality, tailor-made services for our communities.

HCA has worked hard to get funding and support from the Learning and Skills Council, Sports England, East Midlands Development Agency and the Government Office East Midlands. Now Leicester City Council should play its part in making community governance a reality for the people of Highfields.

Read what the local MP and Councillors had to say at the Public Meeting held on 22 September **Page 2**



Ten Facts about our journey so far...

1. Highfields Community Association (HCA) was formed in 1972
2. Highfields Youth & Community Centre (HYCC) was built in 1974 by Leicester City Council in partnership with HCA. Responsibility for HYCC's operation rested with HCA.
3. Local Government re-organisation in 1974 resulted in responsibility for the centre moving to County Council
4. In 1977 the County Council unilaterally took control for the running of the centre, away from HCA
5. 1997 local government reorganisation results in responsibility for HYCC returning to City Council
6. October 1997 Sport England award to HCA for new Highfields Centre
7. May 2001 City Council decision to proceed with building of new centre
8. April 2004 City Council agree with HCA to Community Governance of new centre
9. May—September 2004 City Council impose Lifelong Learning Review on new Centre
10. Since 1972 HCA has worked in partnership with City and County Councils

1996 to 2006 - the ten year journey to redevelop HYCC and gain Community Governance of the new Highfields Centre will return HCA to its original position as the body responsible for this centre.

This information has always been available, especially from Senior Council Officers.

As a registered charity, HCA's details have always been part of public knowledge.

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Add your name.

We look forward to meeting you



Public meeting held on 22nd September 2006 at Highfields Centre



A very well attended public meeting included Sir Peter Soulsby MP & Councillors Panchbhaya, Saleh, Kitterick and Sood

The public meeting was called because of the threat of direct control of Highfields Centre and an attack upon long standing local Community Associations' ability to secure affordable use of facilities, resources and services.

Sir Peter Soulsby, Councillors Panchbhaya and Kitterick and Pravin Patel (Highfields Users Campaign & HCA) spoke to the meeting. The meeting was chaired by Abdul Osman. Below we publish extracts from the main speeches.

Pravin highlighted the Council's failure to implement Community Governance, the continued mischief and delay tactics of senior officers and the absolute impotence of local councillors to influence matters.

Cllr Panchbhaya said "The Highfields Community Association as we know it, is an organisation that we don't know about and we haven't come face to face with them at all. We don't know when they were formed and under what constitution they have"... "We don't know who the members are, we don't know how it operates, we don't know how often it holds an annual general meeting"... "So, when I talk about Highfields Community Association, we don't know how it came in to being, whether it was recognised by the County Council or even if it was recognised by the City Council."... "So, we have this conflict here of the recognition of HCA and we don't know who it's accountable to. Because they are not elected by the Highfields people".

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Councillor Panchbhaya read out LCC's Head of Community Services' letter about their 'plans' to make radical changes to the current and well established system for funding local community associations across the city.

Cllr Kitterick, said he was surprised by Cllr Panchbhaya defending senior LCC officers and taking their word as the undisputed truth, particularly after the costly debacle of the 2004 lifelong learning review which had resulted from the current Administration's over reliance on the reliability and truthfulness of senior officers.

Sir Peter Soulsby (MP) said "This centre was funded by Sports Council, by the Government Office, by East Midlands Development Agency, by the Learning and Skills Council and it was funded to the tune of £4.3 million pounds – a lot of money by anybody's standards to provide facilities. It was funded because the need was here and it was funded also because the bid was being put forward by the community itself. It was the Highfields Community Association, well established, well respected and with respect to Councillor Panchbhaya, well known. It is very surprising that an elected representative doesn't know how long it's been here, doesn't know how well respected and how well known it is. Clearly, the Sports Council and the Government Office, they were all well convinced by it, well convinced by its credibility and by the need of the area"... "It's a scandal that such desperately needed facilities remain largely unused for so long while there is so much need"...

"It is very clear that the Council needs Highfields Community Association. It needs the Community Association, because the Community Association speaks on behalf of the local community and because it was the Community Association that got the funding in the first place. It is only the Community Association working with the Council and the Council working with the Community Association can ensure that these facilities are bought in to use in the way they ought to be. It lies at the Council's door, not at the Community Association's door".

"I would say to the Council that the community and the Community Association needs to be supported, its work needs to be recognised and it needs to be helped. And I'd say to them, the sort of thing I experienced when I met the councillor, the sort of thing we've seen in the Mercury, is not the way to build for the future of this centre. The threatening, the blaming (*Bullying*) – you used that word, but it may be well appropriate, the threatening and blaming certainly is not the way to build the future of this centre. They need to work constructively with those who speak on behalf of the local community and they are the Highfields Community Association".



The 10th

Annual Celebration of Diversity & Unity in the Community Event was enjoyed by over 250 people on 23 August 2006. The event's organisers and especially Jay Patel were congratulated for yet another very successful and effective contribution to community cohesion, supported by Leicester Museums and Leicestershire Police.



12th Annual Certificate Presentation Evening was held on 17 August 2006, with over 100 learners receiving local and national certificates. Furzana Khalifa was presented with the Student of the Year Award for her outstanding achievement on the Certificate in Advice Work course and her contribution to the overall development of Highfields Centre.

HIGHFIELDS CENTRE ADVICE SERVICE

In 2004 we suffered a devastating blow to our service when one full-time post was cut by the City Council which resulted in our advice sessions being reduced from eleven to four sessions per week. Despite this loss and the cuts/closures affected on three other advice work projects in this area, we continued the struggle and tried our level best to provide a quality service to you, our service users. We have a long tradition of providing quality services to the local communities.

Our advice service **was established in 1984** and over the years, it gained credibility across the city as a leading organisation dealing with issues relating to advice. We have been responsible in **setting up the Highfields Advice Workers Forum** and producing a comprehensive guide to advice services as well as piloting and developing the **hugely successful** Certificate in Advice Work course which is accredited by the University of Leicester. The fourth edition of **A Guide to Advice Services in Highfields** was launched on 2nd June 2006. Before we moved into the new premises, we were providing advice to **2306 clients** and dealing with **3180 enquiries**. In spite of all the obstacles put in our path, we still managed to achieve the **Matrix accreditation** in February 2005, in addition to the **CLS Quality Mark** and **OISC Exemption Certificate**.

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**HIGHFIELDS CENTRE
ADVICE SERVICE**

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Our commitment to our service users is paramount in our service delivery which reflects the sheer volume of clients who walk in through our doors daily. We operate an open door policy whereby we try our utmost not to turn away anybody in dire need of advice.

Our monitoring statistics prove that we put our users' needs first. In **2004-2005**, we provided information and advice to **1404 people** and dealt with **2055 queries with just one part-time worker**. Our client survey result shows a **100% success rate** which proves the need for our services among the local communities. All the above achievements would not have been possible without the **strong commitment and leadership** of our project manager, **Priya Thamotheram**.

It is a tragedy that our well thought out plans for developing and extending the range of quality advice services in the new expanded centre have been jeopardised by the City Council's continued failure to abide by its earlier agreements and decisions. The centre is undergoing major issues related to community governance, join us and secure the excellence, professionalism and dedication we need in Highfields .

**PRIYA THAMOTHERAM WINS APPEAL
AGAINST TRIBUNAL DECISION
EMPLOYMENT APPEAL TRIBUNAL ORDERS
RE-HEARING OF DISCRIMINATION CASE**

HCA is delighted at the news that the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) has upheld the central plank of Priya Thamotheram's appeal against the decision of a Leicester Employment Tribunal. In a 25 page judgement, the EAT ruled that the Leicester Tribunal erred in law when it dismissed Priya's complaints that Leicester City Council discriminated against him by rejecting his applications for two managerial posts. The EAT has ordered that those complaints must be re-heard by a 'freshly constituted Tribunal'

Priya Thamotheram has now completed 25 years service at the Highfields Centre. During this period, he has successfully developed numerous and innovative lifelong learning courses, activities and services, including being the main architect for drawing down £4.5 million in grant aid to completely redevelop the old Highfields Youth and Community Centre. Instead of celebrating and actively supporting this flagship project, the City Council issued Priya with a redundancy notice in August 2004, following its rejection of his applications for the Area Manager posts. The consequent pressure exerted on the Council by the Highfields Users Campaign (HUC) and others resulted in Priya being appointed to a temporary Project Manager post at Highfields Centre.

Matt Follett (HUC) said '*We call on Leicester City Council to set aside its petty, hostile and vindictive attitudes and practices towards Priya Thamotheram and the HCA. Instead, it should take immediate steps to settle Priya's case, secure his employment and conclude the transition of Highfields Centre to community governance in line with the 24th April 2006 Cabinet decision*'.



A Celebration of Priya Thamotheram's 25 years service to Highfields

A wonderful and full day of debate, performance and party was held at Highfields Centre on 2nd September 2006 to celebrate Priya Thamotheram achieving 25 years service to the Highfields community. Well over 200 people attended on the day, with an initial Inaugural Highfields debate on **Community Development and Race Equality**, followed by a specially commissioned performance, **Strength through Struggle** which was led by Saqib Deshmukh and Lennox Carty, both performance artists from High Wycombe. Young people from both Highfields and High Wycombe were also featured, with their specially prepared poems, songs and short plays. The final part of the evening was a celebratory musical party, featuring Roy Richards and Itel Roots and the cutting of a magnificent cake to mark Priya's 25 years service.

