

26 Nov 1999

Mixed feeling over healing centre plans for derelict mill

PLANS to convert a derelict hill-top mill into an "energy interpretation" and healing centre have been given a lukewarm reception by local residents.

The scheme for the renovation of the former Oats Royd Mill, Luddenden, includes alternative healing classes, an aviary and a hydro electric power supply.

It would also play host to visiting student groups.

A swimming pool, bereavement counselling and the provision of respite care are other features of the proposal.

It is the brainchild of Mrs Bridget Benson, a clairvoyant and healer, and the former manager of Halifax Industrial Museum Mr George Drake.

But at a meeting of Luddenden Conservation Society, held at Luddenden Methodist Church, people living nearby expressed concern about the project.

Mr Michael Denton said he felt the plans did not stand up.

"I find it disturbing that

By JAMES ROBERTS

we have not heard anything that makes sense in terms of viability.

"Real money is needed to buy the mill and to convert it and I cannot see how that is going to happen," he said.

Mr Roger Hepworth said local people should be given assurances that at least 75 per cent of the necessary funding was in place.

"For the people of Luddenden it is vital that these aspects have been investigated," he said.

Mr Drake said: "No one can wave a magic wand and produce £2 million, the development has to be done in stages."

Talks had already been held with Calderdale Council chiefs and other public bodies, he said.

Resident Mr Brian Bateman said he believed that if the development was to be successful it would mean around 700 extra vehicle movements each day on the narrow roads around the mill.

But Mrs Benson said by using an appointments sys-

tem and public transport the 14 therapists using the centre would be able to cope with the demand for their services without causing disruption.

"I could work 24 hours a day but I always have to have my energies available so I can help people," she said.

"The aim is to create a professional and natural centre grounded in spiritual integrity and compassion."

If the scheme goes ahead Mrs Benson hopes the centre will open in 2003.

But the plans will not get off the ground if Calderdale Council Planning Committee give the go-ahead for a residential conversion in the New Year.

Plans drawn up by Renaissance Property, of Silsden, to convert the building into 40 two-bedroomed flats have already been given the green light by local people.

And subject to planning permission the Keighley firm have first option on purchasing the site.

Oats Royd Mill is a grade

two listed building which closed in 1982 after more than 130 years of production.