

Staplecross Village Hall Business Plan

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1. Executive Summary

This document, together with the associated spreadsheet, sets out options for the development of the Staplecross village hall. The current village hall, although much loved and used, clearly requires refurbishment or replacement.

The trustees of the charity responsible for the hall have been working on this for some years, looking at several options. There are clearly significant challenges, notably around fundraising.

Although there has always been consultation with the community, the trustees will enhance this to involve the community more in key areas such as the design of the hall. The pattern of use of village halls has also been changing. Some types of bookings are inherently local and could only take place in Staplecross. Others are running events which attract participants from the wider area. Such bookings are effectively in competition with other village halls.

Most village halls run at about break-even and this is intended, as they are mostly charities run for the benefit of the local community. Viability also depends upon the time of volunteers, in particular trustees, but village halls now require some paid support for cleaning and perhaps caretaker services.

The rest of this document and the associated spreadsheet sets out in more detail:

- Options for the development, including a new hall and refurbishment
- A business plan for each, covering both running costs and raising capital

These plans will evolve and be regularly updated as consultations and discussions proceed.

2. Introduction

Ewhurst and Staplecross Village Hall (to give it the full name) is a charity responsible for the village hall used in Staplecross. The village hall is a highly successful and integral part of the local community but is dated and showing its age in several ways:

- The roof regularly leaks requiring local external repairs and decoration
- The internal configuration would benefit from changes such as removing the stage, updating the kitchen and as a result widen the scope of the customer use of the hall
- It is not that attractive from the outside, making it less likely to get bookings, particularly from hirers from outside the village who have the choice of other village halls. This also limits the hire charges.

The Trustees have therefore been considering a range of strategic options, outlined in the rest of this document.

3. Summary of Options

There are four options being considered:

- New build in place - demolishing the existing hall and building a new one on the same site
- Refurbishment - replacing the roof, removing stage, replacing floor and refurbishing wet areas
- New build on new site
- Do nothing

3. History

The village hall charity was established in a conveyance dated 20th February 1967. This conveyed the site from a number of sites . It is believed that the village hall was built at about this time.

4. Options Detail

4.1 New build

The existing hall was built in about 1968 and is constructed to the standards of the day. The pitched roof is asbestos cement sheet on steel purlins which in turn are mounted on a precast concrete 'barn type' frame, internally it is finished with low density fiberboard on a recessed profile metal support frame. The roof often shows signs of local leaking, typically around the pins which fix the roof to the frame. It is uninsulated.

The concrete frame is infilled vertically with uninsulated masonry cavity wall comprising a plastered block internal skin and facing brick external skin; whilst the original single glazed windows have been replaced with double glazed upvc units, these are of dated design and specification.

Floors are again uninsulated and are of solid construction under the lobby, kitchen and toilet areas as well as the backstage area. The floor to the main hall is suspended timber construction and is particularly distressed and has a number of repairs in need of further attention. The gas fired warm air heating system would fail modern efficiency standards. Generally the current structure is both timeworn and careworn.

A new hall on the same site would occupy roughly the same footprint as the current one, with the roof of the main hall following approximately the same ridgeline. To the western elevation there would be an integral two storey hexagonal structure offering office space on the upper floor.

Some years ago architects were commissioned to draw up plans for a new hall. This was a useful exercise but it is clear that these need revisiting to take account of feedback from the community and changes in requirements. A revised brief will be drawn up in consultation which will be passed to potential architects.

Advantages

- A new build structure would provide a slightly larger, reconfigured space that would provide the community with a greater opportunity for a wider scope of activities which will enable greater engagement within the village population
- New build structures in the UK are built with a minimum design life of 150 years
- Built to current Building Regulations.
- Much higher energy efficiency.
- Lower maintenance
- No harmful materials
- Contemporary Design

Disadvantages

- The hall would be out of use for the duration of building works (approximately 12 months)
- Higher capital cost than other options

4.2 Refurbishment

This option would be to refurbish the current hall, probably starting with the roof and then progressively upgrading other parts such as the toilets, floor, kitchen etc. This would need to be as a minimum:

- New Roof with better insulation, perhaps also solar panels etc
- New floor to the main hall and committee rooms
- New heating installation
- Updated Kitchen and toilet facilities
- Complete internal redecoration

Ideally the following would also be undertaken

- Removal of the stage

- Replacement of inefficient upvc windows
- Internal or external wall insulation

Advantages

- The hall will be unusable for a shorter period of time
- Lower cost
- Loss of amenity reduced to approximately 6 months
- Could be done in stages according to fund raising

Disadvantages

- Floors to entrance area, toilets remain uninsulated
- Walls may remain uninsulated
- Energy efficiency only slightly improved
- New work will only carry contractor warranty (max 20 years, usually less)
- 1960's design and look remain
- Refurbishment incurs VAT
- The core configuration would be unchanged which might not meet current needs as well as a new build

4.3 New Build on Alternative Site

This is the same as that given in section 4.1 but instead building on a new site. This does depend on the availability of such a site. So far such a site has not been identified.

Advantages:

- The new hall should be able to be built before the old hall is demolished, ensuring continual availability for the school and other hall hirers
- The current site could be sold for house building, perhaps affordable and social housing, contributing significantly to the building cost

Disadvantages:

- Finding a new site
- Legal challenges in changing use of current site which was donated to the village

4.4 Do Nothing

This is the maintenance of the status quo and in any case is likely to be needed for several years until funds are raised.

Advantages:

- No cost other than increased ongoing maintenance

Disadvantages:

- The structure will continue to degrade, eventually to a point where it becomes dangerous to use
- Less marketable

5. Finance

There are two components to a viable business plan:

- Ensuring viable ongoing running costs
- Raising the capital for the new/refurbished village hall

Raising capital is certain to require contributions from grant-making bodies such as the Lottery, charitable trusts, individuals and the parish council. Most such bodies will require a viable business plan for the eventual running costs as well as the initial capital costs, which are presented here.

5.1 Running Costs

The attached sheets show running costs over a 3 or 4 year period for both a new hall and a refurbished one. The period of 3 to 4 years is intended to include the transitional revenue/costs profile during the rebuilding/refurbishment period, the last year showing the steady state once the disruption of building and the effect on hall usage is complete.

A third tab also shows the running costs under a 'do nothing' scenario.

The current hall roughly runs at break even which is a reasonable aim.

The key differences are:

- It is assumed that for a new hall, higher fees can be charged than for a refurbished hall, but in each case these would be significantly higher than fees charged for the current hall. The current plans show a 30% increase in fees for a refurbished hall and a 70% increase in fees for a new hall, which we still think are competitive.
- The new build option has a year when there is no revenue. The refurbishment one assumes that revenue is 50% in the year of refurbishment.
- Revenue loss is greater for a rebuild project and might take longer to return

The plans also include provision for both a caretaker and cleaner which dominate the costs.. Currently some of this is done by volunteers and this would be desirable, but it is safer to assume that paid staff are needed. It might be possible to have one person take both roles which would save money, but the skill sets needed are slightly different.

We know that current hall fees are competitive compared to other halls which is perhaps one reason why utilisation of our hall is reasonably good.

The plans each show a return to surplus in the last year (the steady state one).

5.2 Capital Costs

Whichever option is selected (other than do nothing) there will be a need to raise capital. The exact amount depends on tenders, building costs, contingency etc. For planning purposes the following median values are assumed. Note these are indicative only.

Rebuild: £1.5M
Refurbishment: £330K

The option for building a new hall on a new site would potentially reduce the value of £1.5M shown above but does not change the fundamentals.

The following potential sources of funding have been identified:

- National Lottery
- Grant making trusts
- Individuals, probably local or with local connections, who are willing and able to make significant donations
- Public Works Loan Board, funded by Ewhurst parish council precept
- General donations from the local community. These would be very welcome but are likely to be relatively small to the amount of money raised.

The spreadsheets show a range of scenarios for fundraising for both new build and refurbishment, in each case showing a range of capital amounts to be raised, a range of amount raised from lottery or grants and then the residual amount to be raised by a Public Works Loan Board, for the latter calculating the equivalent precept on a band D house. The key decision for all of these is whether such amounts would be acceptable to the residents of the parish.

7. Marketing a New or Refurbished Hall

Marketing the new hall will be crucial to address two main challenges:

- The hall will have been out of action for some months or a year, so some regular users may have found other venues
- It is proposed to increase the hire charges, justified by it being a better venue. The running costs plans assume this, with a 70% increase for a new hall and a 30% increase for a refurbished hall

The following is proposed to address this:

- Building a mailing list of users and using it to keep all previous users regularly updated on the progress
- Updating the web site to show initially artists impressions then photos of the new hall
- Making the web site more likely to be found in search engines. This should be relatively straightforward using WordPress plugins such as Yoast as we are not trying to compete nationally or globally.
- Possibly initial discounts for previous users, though these are not included in the finance figures

The finance figures assume that getting usage back up will take several years.

Raising hire charges may pose some challenges for some types of user where the current competitive pricing of the hall compared to other local ones is the key factor in their choice. This obviously applies particularly to hirers who come from outside the village and for those whose activities are not just for local people. It is believed that the vast majority of hirers

come from within the village or are running events specific to the village. This is reassuring as it means that most will not be drawn to other halls. However the relatively few hirers who are not linked to the village can make the difference between surplus and loss.