

Report from the Steering Group for the VHMC AGM

21st February 2019

Introduction

There has been a lot of progress on a variety of issues since the last report. In particular we have focussed on the opportunity to obtain grants from various sources and looked in more detail at a number of options for the new hall. **We are excited by the progress made recently and hope others will volunteer their time and energy to help move the project forward.**

Upgraded website and social media

Our ability to run an open and transparent process would be enhanced if we were to have a better way of communicating and engaging with the village. We are delighted therefore that Will Barber has agreed to provide expert IT advice and support over the **redesigned website for the new village hall**. We will be working with Will to change our current website to allow for more information to be displayed and for more interaction with the community. As we are moving to the next phases of seeking community support for funding and, in due course, feedback on the various options we will put forward, this better interface will be invaluable to the project.

We are also working on creating a Facebook page for the NVH and also possibly a Twitter account, both with the view to get more feedback from and engagement with the community.

Big Lottery

We remain in discussion with the Big Lottery about a substantial grant and we are definitely making progress with them. An email update from our point of contact, received today, commented: "I have discussed your project with our local team last Friday who feel that you have done a great deal of good work". They go on to say "As you can imagine, the panel will be keen to take into account the level of ask as part of the assessment process, and be confident if were to award funding, you would have sufficient funds to complete the project. All the best and great work on the additional local fundraising, [which] further strengthens the wish locally for this to happen."

Our initial ask was £300,000 but we have heard since then that there is little appetite these days to grant more than £100,000 to any single project. The Steering Group and Graham Parker will discuss how best to respond, but **this is clearly a high priority for us to achieve a grant of £100,000, if possible.**

Other Grants

We have spent a lot of time and effort in looking carefully at how we might gain funding from a wide variety of sources. We have met and are now working formally with Community Action Suffolk (CAS) who have been most helpful – see Appendix. They have a funding portal for members (Funding4Suffolk) which has allowed us to search for grants that might be made available to a project such as this. At the moment we are sifting through a long list of possible grant giving bodies (approaching 50). In addition we have been in touch with Westleton who have completed their fundraising for their village hall and they have been kind enough to share with us their experiences on fund raising. Graham Parker has kindly provided us with a template to use when seeking grants and also populated this with ideas he has had about where to apply. In total, Graham Parker's ideas and Westleton's list plus the CAS search gives us around 75 entities to pursue for grant funding. We are working hard to make contact with all these possibilities, but volunteers to make these applications is always welcome.

Westleton achieved third party grant funding (excluding the Big Lottery) of around £80,000 and therefore **we have set ourselves the target of achieving £100,000 from these sources.**

Match Funding

We have been approached by an individual who has offered a sum of money to start a match funding programme for a new village hall (and specifically not a refurbishment). The aim of the individual was to encourage a small number of other individuals to then pledge significant sums of money to raise an initial total amount of £50,000. I am pleased to say we are virtually there with commitments from people to reach this initial target. With Gift Aid, this sum might be increased to up to £62,500.

The initial £50,000 this will be used to encourage and match fund other donations made by other people. This would include a wide variety of donations from events such as the Grundisburgh Symphony Orchestra's concert in the church on 10th February. The Horticultural Society confirmed at its meeting on 20th Feb that it would adopt the new village hall as its charity of the year and is likely to be able to make a donation of around £2,000. If anybody makes their own personal donation (of whatever amount) that person's donation would be matched by the fund. If people are able to obtain grants from bodies other than those being pursued by the Steering Group, those grants would also be match funded.

Early indications already suggest that we may already be able to identify from other sources a total of around £10,000 which would be doubled up by the match funding to produce cash donations of £20,000. This is without having made any public announcement about the match funding scheme. The Big Lottery have already mentioned (see above) that this initiative is hugely helpful with our application to them for a major grant.

It is hoped that this major local initiative, started by a few individuals, will help galvanise and encourage the community into action to make extra efforts to raise funds for the new village hall with a view to raising £100,000 from this match funded system.

Refurbishment option

It has been suggested that we ought to consider as an option, the refurbishment of the existing village hall rather than building a new village hall. One reason stated for promoting this option is that we already have sufficient funds from the Foulgers donation to pay for a large part of the refurbishment.

To remind people, the Foulgers donation came as a result of the s106 Deed entered into between the Foulgers and SCDC and SCC. The village hall was not a party to this deed, nor was Hopkins Homes. The Foulgers paid the monies to SCDC and SCC and they then passed the funds on to us – we did not receive the monies direct from the Foulgers.

We have been in contact with SCDC to enquire whether the monies are capable of being used for a refurbishment notwithstanding the wording in the s106 which clearly states the monies are to be used for the purposes of constructing a new village hall on the new village hall site. **SCDC have considered carefully this request and formally confirmed in writing that “we could not endorse an approach other than the money being used for the new village hall.”** They go on to say “In conclusion; the premise of varying the deed to allow it to be spent as below [ie for a refurbishment] would not be supported at this stage and it likely would not be [legally] possible either at this stage of the development.”

However, notwithstanding this response, we had already asked Castons to cost a refurbishment of the existing hall to bring it up (as far as possible) to modern standards with a small extension to allow for disabled toilets etc. The cost of any sensible refurbishment is well in excess of £500,000. This is partly because any work to refurbish an existing hall attracts VAT at 20%, whereas a new build community project is VAT exempt. This makes a huge difference to the costs.

Following the advice from SCDC we have liaised with Ensors (who are advising on the recent accounts) and it is their opinion that the monies from the Foulgers donation are treated as “Restricted Funds” as they cannot be used for any purpose other than that for which the monies were given.

Having done considerable research into it, it is our intention therefore to no longer actively consider the option of refurbishing the existing hall.

Options being considered

We feel it is important to give the community a series of options to comment on in order to reach the most popular final design. It is appreciated, however, that the design/size cannot be considered in isolation and the cost of the project is an important and sensitive part of the equation.

We have asked the Architects to draw a number of options and the Quantity Surveyors are currently costing these options.

The costings by the QS and the drawings by the Architects have looked at the following options:

1. Refurb - A refurbishment of the existing hall.
2. Nil extra cost - A new hall which costs circa £500,000 and is capable of being built from the funds/assets currently held by the VHMC.
3. Option 1 - A new “minimum user” design which just about provides the various users with their most basic requirements.
4. Option 1a – A less restrictive design which gives a little more space to the minimum user requirements (mainly a slightly larger hall)
5. Option 1b – A similar design to Option 1 which includes a meeting room to allow other clubs to use the hall.

We have concluded that we will stop any further drawings or costings until we have a better idea of what grants are available as this will be a critical part of understanding what options are realistically open to us.

Community Consultation

We are keen to engage with the village on various options, however, we are acutely aware that cost is a big issue and we want to present these options only when (a) they are fully costed, (b) a better idea can be obtained as to the levels of third party grants we are likely to raise and therefore (c) we can estimate the size of any funding gap relevant to each option ie how much would need to be borrowed, if anything.

The intention is to undertake consultations with open and transparent explanations on all aspects of the project and to seek full and frank feedback from as many people as possible. This will undoubtedly involve the more usual open days in the village with physical displays of various options and feedback forms to be offered to anyone who wishes to make a comment. In addition we are looking at ways to use social media and a revamped website to allow people to review the options and make comments via pc, tablet and phone.

The timing of any consultation will depend on how quickly we can get a better idea of the likelihood and size of grants being awarded to us, together with funds being raised by villagers and various events. At the moment we believe it is unwise to give a timeframe because the grant approvals and timings are outside our control, but it is a priority for us and we will be putting maximum effort in to this aspect.

Demolition condition

As recommended previously, we have made an application to SCDC to have the condition removed in the existing hall consent that requires the existing hall not to be demolished until the new hall is ready for occupation. This issue was covered in both the previous reports.

Bryan Laxton

Steering Group Chair

Bryan.laxton@hotmail.com

Appendix

Bryan & Peter

Thank you for coming to meet with me at Brightspace on Tuesday the 1st February to discuss the proposed rebuild of the village hall in Grundisburgh.

Firstly I must say that its no mean feat to embark on an exercise such as this so its an absolute asset to have a highly committed team of volunteers who are prepared to step up to the fore!

It was fascinating to hear of the work which you have undertaken with regards to the research of the hall and its current offer. The comprehensive reports from Bryan Laxton and the webpage welcome the desired transparency which community which you represent and funding agencies alike.

The proposed engagement activities will ensure that the views for future use will be representative of the community's needs and interests and will highlight the opportunity to identify any new potential uses going forward.

Myself as Financial Sustainability Officer and my colleague Jon Eaton the Governance & Community Buildings Officer at Community Action Suffolk would be happy to continue to support you on your journey.

We look forward to hearing about your future endeavours.

Kind regards

Louise Fairbrother

Financial Sustainability Officer (Tuesdays, Thursday Mornings & Fridays)

t: 01473 345400

m: 07990 576892

e: louise.fairbrother@communityactionsuffolk.org.uk

