



Redevelopment of Stewart Village Hall

Summary of the Redevelopment Project

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Background:

The Village Hall is an important part of the village. It sits on the site of the original National School which dated back to 1726 but no longer met the needs of the village, nor the new standards set by the Government of the day.



A new school was built and opened in 1870, and the clock tower was an addition some four years later. The clock mechanism was made by Thwaites and Reed of London in 1873 and is located behind the clock faces. It is an unusual dual-action movement with a bell that chimes the hour via an external hammer and an internal clapper that was originally rung via a rope to summon children to school.



The school was in use for over 100 years until a new school was opened in the village and the old school finally closed its doors in 1975.

At this point, the Village Hall was housed in a wooden hut and the villagers decided to buy the old school building and redevelop it as the Village Hall. Renovations took place, and a water fountain cover that had previously sat on the forecourt became the porch of the Hall.

The doors of the Stewart Village Hall opened in 1976, named after Rev. Haldane Stewart who gifted the land the School/Hall was built on and fundraised the £1100 needed to build the school, and the £400 to add the clock tower. He was a great village philanthropist, providing food and clothing to those in need.

The Hall has continued to serve the community well since then. Extensions and renovations have been carried out, providing a second letting room for meetings and improving kitchen and toilet facilities. Understandably, the Hall is now showing its age; the facilities are limited and dated and suffer from major issues that must be addressed if we are to save the Hall for the future.

The Hall is not a listed building but is in a Conservation Area and is considered to have historical interest, being mentioned in Parish plans as far back as the 1970's. It has been included in the Parish Council's register of buildings as 'an asset of local heritage value'. This register forms part of the Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Neighbourhood Plan.

The Hall has always been at the heart of the village. We have families using the Hall today whose parents and grandparents attended the school here, or joined playgroups, Brownies or youth clubs. People taking part in WI meetings, bowls and badminton fondly remember their days at school or attending parties and functions celebrating milestones in their lives.

Seeking local support:

A condition report was commissioned in 2018 and results were shared with the community at the Village Hall AGM. Since then, we have continued to keep the village informed and involved. We have carried out two surveys asking for input and feedback and a Hall article is included in every edition of the village magazine (The Villager, issued bi-monthly). Regular updates are posted on the village Facebook page, and we attend all village events such as the Spring Fair, Brightfest and the Garden Fete to engage with the community and give updates on the project, with an interactive game for people to enjoy.

As the project moves forward, we will take every opportunity to inform and seek input. We will continue to hold fundraising events and will seek local donations when we have some proposed plans to show.

The Hall is used by many local groups and clubs. It is home to the Village Toddlers, the WI, indoor bowls, badminton, dance groups, keep fit and Pilates, the Lunch Club, local war-gaming clubs. It is used for Parish Council Meetings, band practices, parties, film shows and talks, theatre productions and annual community events such as the Village Quiz, the Wassail party and many more. It also hosts many fundraising events for other well-supported charities in the village, such as Save the Children, Save the Bone and Brightwell Supporting Refugees. The Hall has also been used by a home-schooling group, giving parents and students the opportunity to meet. The archives of the Village History Group are stored in the Hall.

As part of the village surveys, we approached regular hirers directly and asked them to reach out to their members for input. We also contacted the local school and pre-school and asked them to share the link to the survey with their parent groups. A new housing development of 31 houses was built in the village in 2020. We wrote specifically to the new owners offering them a tour of the Hall (as they may not have used it due to Covid restrictions) asking them to tell us what they would like to see in the Hall for the future.

The Parish Council has recently taken ownership of land adjacent to the Village Hall car park and is currently developing this into additional car parking spaces. This parking area is being designated the Village Hall car park and, while not solely for use by the Hall, will greatly improve our facilities and ability to attract a wider audience.

The Project

Our Vision

We will retain the building's Victorian feel and identity, while bringing facilities up to 21st century standards. This will create a multi-purpose venue, meeting the needs of current users and attracting a wider and more diverse audience.

We plan to provide enhanced facilities for special needs and more flexibility in renting space. It may be possible to offer facilities for remote-working or meeting room facilities for those who work from home.

We intend to approach local organisations that may need a venue on a regular or ad hoc basis with a view to widening our reach, such as organisations that have groups with educational or special needs requirements. We must be able to match and exceed expectations from hirers and compete with other venues within our catchment area.

Different-size rooms with the ability to link two or more together to create larger spaces are also planned.

Statement of Need

We have created a statement of need highlighting the limitations of the building and reflecting the fact we are losing business because of this. For example, although we have two renting spaces, the smaller space suitable for meetings has no direct access to the kitchen or toilets and can only be used if the Main Hall is not occupied.

Architects brief

To support our Statement of Need, our architect's brief was created to focus on 5 key areas:

Aesthetics

- Create an attractive venue capable of providing excellent facilities for weddings, parties, receptions and other special events

Spaces

- Current space configuration is poor, leading to a lack of flexibility; the new layout needs to address this issue
- Greater capacity required in the main Hall
- Increased storage capacity: all tables and chairs to be kept in dedicated storage areas when not in use

Facilities

- Access to all parts of the building to be for all, irrespective of ability

Environmental

- Heating, lighting, and ventilation systems need to be efficient, easy to use and create a good environment for the building's users

Building/Maintenance

- Move the main access to the building to the West side (currently the access to the shop and the rear access to the Stewart Room). This access to be shared with the Village Stores, directly from the car park

Methodology

Architect selection: we carried out a rigorous selection process to select an architect to work with, with experience in similar projects and understanding of the scale and limitations of the project. Complete buy-in to our aims and objectives was key to being selected in the short list.

Contractor selection: we will carry out a similar rigorous selection process to find the right partner(s) to work with, bringing their experience and skills to enhance the project and complete it on time and in budget.

Plan of Work: We will follow the standard Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Plan of Work

- The RIBA Plan of Work is a tool used to organise the process of briefing, designing, constructing, maintaining, operating and using building projects.

Funding

We are a small Village Hall with an annual income of approximately £23,000. Our average expenditure is £18,000, meaning our net income is often £5,000 or less. Our current bank balance is £52,000. We will be unable to increase our income significantly until the Hall's condition is improved, so therefore will rely heavily on grants and donations to fund the project.

We are Members of Community First Oxfordshire and OCVA (Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action) and will use their expertise and knowledge to assist with our funding strategy.

We recognise that Community Engagement is critical to the success of this project. To encourage our community to support fundraising activities and make donations to the project it is imperative to show that a redeveloped Hall will enhance village life and amenities.

Next Steps

Our next steps are to work with our appointed architect to develop initial drawings that incorporate the and feedback.

A launch event will be organised to present the drawings to the community, obtain feedback and begin the process of gathering donations and interest in the project.

A full fundraising strategy will be developed with two streams of income:

- Community fundraising and engagements
- Grants and major donor fundraising

On behalf of the Stewart Village Hall Development Group