

# Village Hall Redevelopment Information Evening: Responses to Comments

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## Introductory Matters

The Parish Council (PC) and the Village Hall Development Committee (VHDC) thank all those residents and user groups who attended the information evening held on 6 August and for submitting comments at the event or afterwards. This document presents the responses of the VHDC to these comments.

The architects appointed by the PC to progress this project – Welham Architects – attended the meeting and engaged fully with residents. Arising from this, they have incorporated some suggestions made by residents (e.g., secure bicycle storage).

One general point, before we come to the specific comments. The Village Hall and its site is held in trust to the community and so is not owned by the Parish Council; the PC is a Custodian Trustee and the Hall is managed on a day-to-day basis by the Managing Trustees, Langar cum Barnstone Village Hall Committee (LcBVHC). This means that the PC cannot dispose of the site of the Village Hall, hence the need to concentrate on this site; to plan works on another part of the parish would still leave us in need of spending cash on the hall site. It is pertinent to note that the LcBVHC has been kept fully apprised of the work of the VHDC, that the chairman of the LcBVHC is a member of the VHDC, and that the LcBVHC supports the recommendation of the VHDC to build a new hall on the existing site as the best way forward to secure its long-term future.

## Positive Comments Received

We are encouraged by the many positive comments that we have received. It is clear that the community appreciates the need for a new Village Hall that is fit for contemporary purpose, is in keeping with the 'look' of the villages and which displays good 'green credentials'.

## Negative Comments Received

We have identified seven principal concerns or objections expressed by residents and user groups, and we will provide separate responses to each.

### 1. No prior engagement with residents

As many residents will know, the PC first considered re-development of the Village Hall over ten years ago, the intention then being to build a new hall on the site of the sports field on Works Lane. There was extensive collaboration with residents at the time which led to a very ambitious plan to incorporate sports facilities with a community meeting place. This eventually came to nought, in large part due to its ambitious nature and the difficulty of securing the significant funding against the backdrop of the many competing influences. In that sense then, there was considerable prior input by residents into the ambition to re-develop the Village Hall.

Five years ago, the PC undertook a scheme of work to update the most pressing problems with the existing Village Hall, including facilities for the disabled and baby changing, new front and rear doors, improving the substandard kitchen, creating a rear fire escape route, replacing in full the dangerous wiring, lighting, heating and decoration. These were only intended as an interim measure, to extend the life of the current hall by five years or more, until the re-development could be considered again. Which is where we are now.

After much initial discussion, the PC decided that the best way to proceed would be to use the information from the previous process (including the views of residents) to guide a more focussed plan to re-develop the Village Hall on its present site, creating the VHDC to undertake this task. This was reported as the “Forward Plan 2017 – 2020”<sup>1</sup>.

Since starting this current process, we have kept residents informed through a series of articles in Signpost, our regular newsletter to the villages<sup>2</sup>; these are also made available on the PC website<sup>3</sup>. The Village Hall is a constant item on the agenda of PC meetings, at which all residents are entitled to attend and air their views on any matter of concern that relates to our community. To date, we have had no comments at these open sessions at PC Meetings. Similarly, meetings of the VHDC are open to residents.

All in all, we feel we have engaged with the community throughout the planning process to date.

## 2. No proper review of refurbishment/modernisation of the existing hall

The upgrade mentioned in comment 1 above was not intended to rectify the underlying structural and other problems with the current building. These include subsidence in one corner associated with drainage problems, ongoing plumbing and drainage problems in the toilets, changes of level within the toilets which limit accessibility by some members of the community, and cracking along cast lines of concrete wall panels. Furthermore, the floor, roof and walls are all un-insulated and it still has some single-glazed windows.

We have considered carefully the options to retain the hall and further re-model the building to provide the additional accommodation we need. However, given the magnitude of remedial work that would be required to bring the existing hall up to current standards, the acknowledgement that many of the existing structural elements would have to be retained and may present ongoing maintenance issues, the uneconomical methods of delivering such a scheme, the compromises that this would have on the ‘solution’ design, and realisation that the hall would be out of action for a considerable time whilst this work was undertaken, we concluded that a full re-build was the only logical way forward to provide a more long-term investment.

## 3. New Hall is too small

The archery club uses the Hall for practice and coaching sessions and are concerned that the new hall would not provide the same shooting distance as they can use currently.

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<sup>1</sup> PC Minutes, 16 February 2017 - <http://langarbarnstone.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Minutes-16-February-2017.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Signpost – November 2018, March 2019, May 2019

<sup>3</sup> <http://langarbarnstone.co.uk/village-information/signpost-archive/>

We are confident that lining the back wall with the material used for their bosses would allow the bosses to be placed close to the end wall and so provide an equivalent shooting distance. We also note that there is no *a priori* requirement for the distance they currently use, it is merely what they can use in the space available.

#### 4. New Hall is too large

A couple of comments have queried whether the Hall needs to be 30% bigger than the current one, in particular the need for a meeting room and an office area.

##### Need for a meeting room

The Hall is used extensively in the evenings and so any PC meetings which need to be timetabled outside of the normal diet need to be held in the kitchen should the hall be in use. This occurred for our meeting on 29 August, for example. Meetings of the VHDC and of the LcBVHC have similarly had to be held in the kitchen.

Given this, we believe a need for a separate meeting room is irrefutable.

##### Need for an office area

The PC requires a dedicated space within the proposed village hall to store essential documents and other material in a safe manner, to provide a secure workspace for the outreach post office (which currently uses the kitchen area), and to allow occasional use by the Parish Clerk.

These considerations establish the need for the office area identified in the plans.

#### 5. Aesthetics of the design for the proposed new Hall

The comments relating to this topic fall into three main categories – the choice of building material, the need for a two-storey frontage, and the prominence of the proposed building in relation to Main Road.

##### The choice of building material

The plan for the new Hall envisages a brick and timber construction. The houses in the immediate vicinity of the Hall are of brick construction, apart from a mock-Tudor house diagonally opposite the Hall. We note that the owners of Walnut House immediately opposite the Hall have recently erected a solid wooden fence at the front boundary of their property.

All in all, we feel that the choice of building material is in keeping with the other adjacent properties.

##### The need for a two-storey frontage

This aspect was predicated on the wish to maximise the roof area available for solar panels as part of our desire to give the Village Hall the strongest green credentials as possible. In addition, a key request from groups associated with art and design was the maximising of natural light into the hall; the full height glazing assists with this.

##### The prominence of the proposed building

Some residents have queried the need for a larger footprint for the proposed new Hall, as they feel this would impact negatively on their adjacent dwellings. We have indicated in comment 4 why we feel we need a larger Hall, noting that the additional space required will be of a single-storey construction to minimise the sense of 'encroachment' to the neighbouring property.

Associated with this have been concerns that the new building would be too dominant and overbearing to the character of Main Road. The new hall is dominant in its façade, but no taller than the current building, and thereby stands out proudly as a statement building within the village, marking its presence clearly as a central community space.

## 6. No consideration of building the new Village Hall on the site of the now-redundant St Mary's Church

Previously, the PC considered the use of the former church as a site for a new community facility, but dismissed the former church due to its inadequate size, its location on the edge of Barnstone village and further from Langar and the rest of the parish, the same issue with car parking existing, the significant structural issues that required attention to make the existing structure serviceable, and the significant costs associated with that work.

We understand that the Parochial Church Council will shortly be submitting an outline planning application to Rushcliffe Borough Council to permit development of St Mary's as a residence, with due regard to the prior stipulation of RBC that the integrity of the building be retained.

Given this, we consider that attempting to develop the St Mary's site for a new village hall remains a non-starter, and still leaves the present building in need of redevelopment, increasing the pressure on finances.

## 7. No detailed costings to date or proposed

Welham Architects have provided 'indicative' budgets for all incarnations of the potential schemes produced along the way in this process.

As in all cases, these 'early stage' studies can only provide indicative budgets, based on previous known average costs or 'rule of thumb' superficial area rates.

To this end, the last indicated 'range' cost for the proposed solution to provide our villages with a new hall facility for the future, was £440k - £595k, excluding professional fees, VAT, Statutory Fees and the like.

At this stage, we can only base our decision-making around the likely upper extent of these indicatives, and therefore, we are basing our decision around this expected outcome.

As there is no guarantee of planning permission being granted, we can only await the outcome of the application, before reviewing any changes that might be required.

At this time, we will then have fully detailed tender packages generated, in order to go out to the market, at which time the true competitive costs of this project will be fully realised. The VHDC are not obliged to recommend any of the tenders received, but hope that under competitive market conditions, the true costs will be below those currently budgeted for.

The VHDC will forward their recommendations to the PC as soon as possible after all tenders are received, and in any event, not until the outcome of the planning application is known.