

# **Whimble Victory Hall**

## **Planning our future**

### **Introduction**

Whimble is a village of about 1650 inhabitants situated halfway between Exeter and Honiton in Devon. Whimble Victory Hall is a registered charity at the centre of this rural community, and is run by a group of volunteer trustees the majority of whom are drawn from the organisations that use the hall.

The hall was established in 1920 to commemorate victory in First World War and is based on an old First World War building. It comprises an entrance hallway with ladies and gents toilets and a disabled toilet, a main hall with stage, a second room with children's toilets, a committee room and a kitchen.

The main hall has capacity for 200 people and is often full for village events. During the week it is used by the adjacent village school for assemblies, P.E., drama and lunches. Evenings and at weekends it is used for recreational activities such as yoga, short-mat bowls, dances and receptions. The stage is used by the school, Young Farmers and the village drama group.

The second room is known as the billiard room. Its main use is shared between the under 5's (pre-school and mother and toddler group) and the over 60's. There is also occasional use for band practice and for meetings. The use of this room is significantly restricted by the presence of a full size billiard table.

The committee room is situated between the main hall and the kitchen with no direct access from the main entrance. This means that this room has only minimal use during the day when the school is using the main hall. At other times it is used for parish council, mothers union and other meetings.

The main entrance and toilet area is in poor condition and is in urgent need of refurbishment.

The car park receives heavy use, particularly when parents deliver and collect children from school. Funding has been obtained to resurface the car park and this will be done shortly. The garden is used and maintained by the under 5's groups. Other grounds around the building are maintained by the hall.

The building is now quite old and in a poor state of repair. There are significant cracks in the walls. The main roof and the flat roof over the kitchen are poorly insulated so that mould patches appear on the ceiling. Consequently heating costs are very high. The layout of the building makes it difficult to take full advantage of the rooms that are available. There is insufficient storage space.

## **Issues affecting the future use and development of the hall**

### **Demand from users**

At present the demand for the hall's facilities is such that, within the constraints mentioned above, rooms are in constant use throughout the day and evening most weekdays. This has resulted in complaints from prospective hirers that there are no rooms available during weekdays. At weekends the main hall has about 50% utilization mainly in the evenings. A recent survey carried out as part of the village plan emphasized the need for the Victory Hall and calls for improvements in the facilities and in the range of activities we offer. A recent weekend trial confirmed there is a demand for local adult education classes that we would be happy to provide but are unable to accommodate.

### **Cranbrook**

A new town called Cranbrook, initially of around 3900 properties, will be built a few miles to the west of Whimple starting in 2009. In due course the town will have its own community building, leisure facilities and schools. The impact on Whimple and the Victory Hall is not yet clear but it seems likely that a rapidly increasing local population will place new and greater demands on the hall's facilities in the short term, and possibly for much longer.

### **Primary School**

The close relationship between the Victory Hall and the school will continue. We have reached agreement with the education authority on a contract that sets out details of the arrangements for the next six years, albeit with a notice period of a year on either side. The plans for Cranbrook include two new primary schools. Although this poses no immediate threat to our village school we cannot afford to ignore the possibility that, at some time in the future, it might close or no longer have need for the hall. At present one third of our hire income comes from the school. Our plans must allow for the possible loss of this income.

### **Pre-school**

The Department for Children, Schools and Families is actively encouraging primary schools to include pre-school provision within each school. The number of children attending Whimple Primary School is likely to fall over the next few years following the general demographic trend and this may release space for the pre-school children. Again, there is no immediate proposal that either the Pre-school or the Mother and Toddler group should move from the hall to the school, but we cannot afford to ignore the possibility.

### **Local Government changes**

Consultations on the future of local government are happening at present and the indications are that the outcome will be a reduction in the number of tiers of local government from three to two. This will inevitably expand the role and activities of the parish council. It seems likely that the council will need to establish an office where parishioners can make direct contact with their local council. Whimple Parish Council currently has no property of its own. It uses the Victory Hall for its meetings and the

secretary works from home. Our development plans will take account of the possible need for a parish council office.

#### Use as a community building

Traditionally, village halls have been used predominantly as a centre for leisure activities. However, the rural community is finding local facilities such as shops, post offices, schools etc., under threat and the role of the village hall is being seen as a community buildings where a range of services can be delivered to serve the local community. We should therefore take account of future use of the Victory Hall as a community building for example by considering the need for office space, telephones and IT facilities.

#### Licensing

The new licensing laws that came into force in 2005 have placed new and more onerous demands upon the trustees and users of the hall. Work is nearing completion to bring the hall up to standard with the new legal requirements. New terms and conditions of hire incorporating the new licensing requirements have been agreed by the trustees and will be implemented after a period of consultation with users. Policy documents have been prepared covering health and safety. Risk assessments have been made on hall activities and remedial works carried out. A water services inspection (for legionella risk) has been completed and remedial works are in hand. A DDA audit has been carried out.. A fire safety review has been carried out and implemented.

#### Child protection

The new licensing act places, for the first time, a specific responsibility for child protection on the trustees of the hall and its users. This is a matter that we have discussed in some detail with the school as the current building layout raises concerns about security of the main doors and toilets when the school children are present. So, for the time being, we are restricting the use of the committee room during school hours and are relying on the vigilance of school staff when children leave the main hall. This falls short of the standard of security we should have, and needs urgent attention.

#### Disability access

Although we have made some improvements to enable wheelchair access to the billiard room from the main hall our provision for disabled people is not up to standard as neither the committee room nor the kitchen are wheelchair accessible and the disabled toilet is smaller than it should be. We have had a DDA audit carried out and a number of changes suggested to improve accessibility and convenience for disabled users

#### Storage

At present there are only two storage areas available to the hall. One is in the boiler house shed adjacent to the main hall the other is at the end of the building outside the billiard room external door. The former is used to store tables and stage scenery and the latter is used by the under 5's groups. The lack of storage has resulted in ad-hoc storage of materials under the billiard table and under the stage where they present a fire hazard. It also means that tables and chairs in the main hall have to remain stacked there when not required for a particular event. This is unsatisfactory so planning permission has been

sought and granted for additional storage containers to be sited outside the hall. This permission is limited to five years to cover the period until satisfactory internal storage can be provided.

#### Collaboration

We work very closely with the school and have good relations with the adjacent Doctors' Surgery, the Heritage Centre, and the Church. There is scope however to improve collaboration by sharing our plans with their management committees.

#### Constitution

As trustees we operate within our governing document (constitution) which dates back to the 1920's when the hall was given to the village. Although this causes no immediate difficulty it may at some time in the future if, for example, we were offered additional or alternative premises. It may be appropriate for us to seek to update our constitution by adopting the model constitution for village halls prepared by ACRE.

## Finance

#### Current Financial Position

At present we operate the hall by balancing the income we receive from users against the day to day running cost with a surplus that is accumulated to meet larger expenditure on capital expenditure and maintenance as the need arises. This is supplemented by occasional grants towards capital works and our own fundraising activities.

A typical annual account would be:

Hire charges	£16000	Running costs	£10000
Fundraising	<u>£ 2000</u>	Maintenance/capital reserve	<u>£ 8000</u>
Total income	£18000		£18000

Currently our reserves are £22000 with £5000 of that held as an operating reserve and £4000 allocated to car park resurfacing. This leaves £13000 available for capital works.

#### Refurbish or rebuild?

It is estimated that to demolish the existing building and rebuild would cost in the region of £500,000 (based on similar projects elsewhere) with the cost of a new site and building likely to exceed £1,000,000. Although we would not discount the possibility of a new building if sufficient finance became available, it is difficult to justify that approach. Our plans are based on improving and extending the existing hall and addressing any maintenance issues as they arise.

#### Generating further income

With the high level of utilization of the existing rooms there is only limited scope to increase hire income from extra hirings. The most common source of extra income for village halls is to have a licensed bar. We have discounted this possibility as impractical

with the space currently available, and undesirable given there are already three other licensed premises in the village.

#### Hire Rates

Our hire rates are quite modest by comparison with other places largely because there is no element of depreciation in our accounts. We treat the hall as 'paid for' and therefore of nil value. In some ways this is unwise as we are making virtually no provision to replace the hall in the fullness of time. A new hall such as ours would cost more than £1,000,000 to build from scratch and even if it lasted for 100 years would (simplistically) add £10,000 a year to our costs just to pay for it.

#### Cost of cleaning

The onus is placed on hirers to clean and tidy the room they have used at the end of each session. This has from time to time proved unsatisfactory as rooms have been left in a less than satisfactory condition. The hall employs a part time caretaker/cleaner to unlock and inspect the rooms after use and to carry out some limited additional cleaning. As the use of the hall increases, particularly if we are able to extend the number of rooms available, we may need to consider these arrangements and the implications of the increased cost.

### **Priorities**

Taking account of these issues we have set a series of priorities in preparing our development plan. These have been categorized as high, medium and low and are as follows:

- High priority - to resolve the child protection concerns with the school
- High priority - to ensure that all other legal obligations are fully met
- High priority - to improve the condition of the toilets
- High priority - to improve facilities for disabled users
- High priority - to provide temporary storage for hall equipment
  
- Medium priority - to increase the availability of rooms by making the committee room available to hirers
- Medium - to improve the long term financial stability of the hall
- Medium - to provide adequate storage for hall equipment within the building
  
- Low – to extend the building with additional rooms for hire
- Low – to carry out remedial work on both the main roof and the kitchen roof to improve the standard of thermal insulation
- Low - to achieve hallmark certification in hall management

## Proposals

To meet the high priority issues it will be necessary to make a series of internal alterations to the building. This will be the first stage of a building development plan (see appendix). The plan sets out three broad stages; the internal alterations in the first stage will address child protection, disabled access, access to the committee room and the toilets. The estimated cost of this stage is £30,000. With grant aid this can be achieved within a year, so we are now applying to the Community Council of Devon for assistance.

In any event we intend to make a start on the first stage this year. If our grant application proves unsuccessful, it will leave a shortfall of at least £15,000. Based on our current financial projections we would be able to complete stage 1 by the end of 2009 unaided.

The second stage involves creating a new main entrance on the north side of the building to include an office and store, and the creation of another store from the current entrance lobby. As yet this has not been precisely costed but for planning purposes is estimated in the region of £50,000-£60,000. With grant aid this could be completed within five years. Temporary external storage has been agreed by the local authority but must be removed within the five year period. Without grant aid it would take ten years, rather than five, to achieve this,

The third stage of building development is the construction of two additional rooms accessible from the new entrance. No timescale has yet been set for this as it will depend on the demand for additional space and the availability of funds.

Although there is a need to improve the thermal insulation of both the main hall and the kitchen, no firm proposal is made at this time in the light of higher priorities above.

Considerable work has been done to bring our policies and procedures up to date in the light of recent changes in the legislation affecting village halls. That work needs to be completed as a matter of urgency. We need to demonstrate to our users, the licensing authority, the Charity Commission, and any prospective funders or benefactors, that the hall remains well and prudently managed in the light of all these changes. In order to do so we propose achieving level one and two of the Hallmark Quality Assurance standard for Village Halls this year.<sup>3</sup>

In order to ensure the long term financial viability of the Victory hall it will be necessary to raise hire charges for the hall by more than the rate of inflation for at least the next five years. This will minimise the impact of any possible loss of income from the school and it will contribute towards the funds needed for the development of the hall.