

Correspondence

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Willington Parish Council

Re: Village Community Facilities

Dear Councillors,

I write as chairman of the Willington Village Hall to express my (personal) concerns re the future planning of community facilities within the village.

During 2023 I have been happy to contribute to a review of community facilities within the village, and in my report to the Village Hall Trustees AGM in November wrote -

“Our aim, in asking for a review, was to seek a clear statement from the Parish Council on the respective roles of the Old School, the Village Hall, and the proposed sports pavilion/community rooms planned for the TRPF, it being essential to show a clear development role for each, opening the way to further grant funding. This was, however, somewhat overshadowed by the renegotiation of the lease for the Old School which still remains to be resolved and hence leaves any meaningful statement on the respective roles of the three facilities in abeyance. Although the Village Hall can continue to provide facilities for a range of community uses while the status quo remains, we must be mindful that our long term future relies on keeping the building fit for purpose and fully hired; any changes in facility provision could well impact on this and hence the long term viability of the hall itself.”

That statement signals an issue for the village hall if the status quo changes, so I ask that whilst you are pondering on the future of the Old School and planning for the new community building on the TRPF that you consider the broader picture of how all three community buildings work together, as we continue to provide facilities for the community.

Currently there appear to be three future scenarios that need to be considered.

Firstly, that the three facilities remain/become operational then there is every expectation that in the most part they can work together providing education space, sports and scout facilities and community space, respectively.

Secondly, that the anticipated use of the new Pavilion at TRPF by the football club and scouts does not raise sufficient income to support the running of the building requiring additional community usage/income to be sought, thereby adding an element of competition into the community use mix.

And thirdly, the Old School eventually becomes too costly for the Trust to continue and the Pre School and Adventure Club and other users will need to find new homes.

Whilst one might be the preferred scenario, even that will have implications for long term sustainability of services as a degree of competition is inevitable, scenario two clearly would have an impact on the future viability of the Village Hall and Old School and scenario three would require a complete reset of current facility provision and plans for the new pavilion.

Whilst I might be wrong, at present as an interested outsider, I can see no consideration of the above by the Parish Council, focusing solely on providing a new building that fails to take account of the changing situation, and hence the need for flexibility.

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Whilst the review of community facilities was a useful exercise in highlighting the capacity, mix and usage pattern of facilities it did little to understand the needs of the users and any specific operational constraints that such uses might bring. Which, regrettably, provides little information on the potential for reallocation of activities/community space should there be any change in capacity.

The review also did little to highlight the needs of each facility in terms of income and running costs. As an organisation the village hall has an expenditure (on insurance, cleaning, management heating and lighting and general repairs) of some £25.000 per year. Any drop in income brought about by competition and/or usage would have a major impact on the viability of the premises. Also the Old School has similar costs, as would any new community building.

Whilst I applaud the efforts of the Parish Council in seeking to provide a new village base for the Football Club and Willington Scouts I must also ask them to be mindful of the potential impact on other community facilities and the current uncertainty regarding their long term sustainability.

If all goes to plan (plan A) then we shall have three community buildings each with their own specific client base. However if that plan does not include a degree of flexibility in anticipation of changing needs then the community could have a major problem in accessing both suitable and available facilities for their activities. It begs the question, "do we have a Plan B" ?

Yours sincerely

Chairman

Willington Village Hall.