

Appraisal of Options for Hooe Village Hall – April 2023

1. Introduction

A Village Hall Project Committee was established by the Parish Council on 26th October 2022, with the task of undertaking a review and evaluation of village hall options, including reference to previous studies, designs and consultations carried out over recent years. This appraisal report is the result of that work carried out of a period from Autumn 2022 to April 2023 and includes the consultation undertaken with Wealden District Planning Department on 22nd March 2023.

This report is arranged as follows:

Section 2. Brief background on the history of Hooe Village Hall

Section 3. Future options to be considered

Section 4. Evaluation Criteria

Section 5. Evaluation of the Options, including summary appraisal

Section 6. Conclusions

Appendix – Precept Data for Wealden 2021/2022

2. Background

The existing Village Hall on Denbigh Road was built as a reading room about 100 years ago. In recent years Hooe Parish Council observed that the existing hall needed a number of repairs and in 2012 a suggestion was put forward that perhaps the construction of a new and larger hall would offer better value for money than the repair of the existing hall.

In 2014 the parcel of land adjoining the Village Hall, currently used as an allotment garden, was gifted to Hooe Parish Council. It has been suggested that the purpose of gift was so that the Village Hall might have a car park but we have no firm evidence of this.

In 2018 a number of schemes for a new hall, to be located on the Recreation Ground were considered. One included a traditional, timber building of about 300m² from a local manufacturer and the Parish Council also commissioned architects Baker Associates to draw up a scheme for a larger hall with an external gross area of about 390 m² sqm. The Baker scheme included two function halls, an office, kitchen and support facilities and veranda. Comments on this scheme were invited from the public. The results of this were inconclusive, with roughly as many residents in favour of remaining on Denbigh Road as preferred a new hall on the Recreation Ground.

Subsequently, two years later, in 2021, a design was prepared on behalf of the Parish Council which provided a major expansion of the existing hall on Denbigh Road, providing total floorspace similar to that achieved by the Baker scheme on the Recreation Ground. This scheme was exhibited at the Village Hall and comments invited. Again, there was a mixed response from residents. Many liked the large new hall and the fact that the facility would remain in its current location. However the scheme provided no on-site parking, so that overall, it was not favourably received by residents.

The Parish Council therefore decided to revisit the matter again and returned to the proposal for a new facility on the Recreation Ground. Two working groups/committees were established, one to prepare designs for the new hall, to be known as the Community Hall and the other to look at funding opportunities. An outline scheme was prepared for the new hall based upon an extensive brief, established following visits to a number of other village halls in Wealden District. The scheme included two activity halls and generous support facilities in an efficient layout, slightly larger than the Baker Associates scheme.

The proposals for the new hall appears not to have been adopted by the Parish Council at that time, whether on design, cost grounds or a combination of the two, it is not clear. This outline scheme was not presented to the public. It is nevertheless understood that the funding sub group reported that the cost of the new hall would far outstrip the likely funding opportunities, which have been much reduced in recent years.

3. Future options to be considered by Hooe Parish

In 2022 the Parish Council was faced with the problem that the existing hall required urgent repairs and, in particular, failed to meet fire safety regulations for public buildings. However the decision as to refurbish the existing building or to construct a new hall on the Recreation Ground had yet to determined.

It was noted by the Council that although many options has been looked at over the years, no comprehensive appraisal had been presented to residents that directly compared and costed the construction of a new facility on the Recreation Ground with refurbishment of the existing building and provision of an on-site car park.

At the Village Hall Committee Meeting on 26th October 2022, it was agreed that a shortlist of options should be considered for evaluation. Two options were subsequently developed for siting on the Recreation Ground. The first would be based broadly on the size of the 2018 Baker scheme, as this was the most advanced on the proposals for the Recreation Ground. A second, theoretical “budget” scheme, also be sited on the Recreation Ground was also developed primarily for cost comparison purposes, since no smaller schemes have hitherto been fully developed. It is assumed that the smaller scheme would be sited in the same general area of the Recreation Ground as the larger hall.

The third option for consideration would be the repair and refurbishment of the existing hall with the addition of an on-site car park and, in the longer term, a small extension.

The key features of each options are summarised below, including an indicative costing. The costing is based upon data derived from a website, Cost Modelling.com. This website provides data on construction costs for nearly 300 different building types across the UK. The data used here is for 1st January 2023 and is based upon the build costs for a community centre, which gives a range for such facilities of between £ 2360-£2510 per square metre(m²), based upon the internal floorspace. We have used the mid- point in our estimates. The calculations also use the recommended indicative settings for the calculation of external works, risk and fees but does not include financing costs or on-going inflation.

Indicative siting , access arrangements and car parking for Option 1(a) and (b) on the Recreation Ground are shown on Figure 1 and for existing Village Hall and Figure 2.

Option 1(a) Recreation Ground

The Scheme: Modelled on that prepared by Baker Associates in 2018, it provides a large and a second smaller hall, an office, kitchen, store room, lobby and capacious toilet facilities. The external built area was 390m², internal area about 304m². The main hall was 113 m², the second hall 26 m². The two halls together could accommodate about 139 people seated (at 1.0 m² per person) and 93 seated at tables (at 1.5 m² per person). On site car parking for a minimum of 28 cars would be required.

Budget Cost: Internal area x £2490 per m² = £ 757,000 rounded.

External Works: Including ground works, electrical connections, sewerage connection, stormwater drainage, landscaping and car parking = 15% of building costs = £113,550

Fees: 10% = £ 75,700

Risk(Contingency): 12% = £90,840

Total budget estimate = £ 1,037, 190

Option 1(b) Recreation Ground

The Scheme: This is a “budget” scheme to provide a new hall but with less accommodation than Option 1(a). It provides an external built area of say 250 m², internal area 220m², main hall 90m², office 20 m². On site car parking for a minimum of 18 cars would be required to meet parking standards The hall could accommodate about 90 people seated (at 1.0 m² per person) and 60 seated at tables (at 1.5 m² per person).

Budget Cost: Internal area x £2490 per m² = £ 547,800, reference as in footnote.

External Works: Including ground works, electrical connections, sewerage connection, stormwater drainage, landscaping and car parking = 20% of building costs = £109,560

Fees: 10% = £ 54,780

Risk(Contingency): 12% = £65,736

Total budget estimate = £ 777,876

Option 2 Existing Village Hall, Denbigh Road

The Scheme: Refurbishment of the existing hall, which has an external area of about 120 m² and a main hall of 64m². A car park capable of accommodating about 12 cars would be provided on the adjoining allotment garden as a priority, followed by repair of the existing windows.

In the repair or rebuilding of the existing rear extension, the opportunity would be taken to enlarge the extension to provide a small office .

Budget Cost: Repair of windows = £23,000 (estimate provided by contractor). Access, car parking and landscaping = £ 20,000, new extension and repair of existing extension = £ 35,000 budget estimate

Fees : 7.5% = £5,250

Risk(Contingency) 12% = £9,630

Total budget estimate = £ 89,880

Option 1 – Indicative site plan for a new Village Hall on Hooe Recreation Ground



Figure 1

Option 2 – Indicative site plan for car park and minor extension, Hooe Village Hall

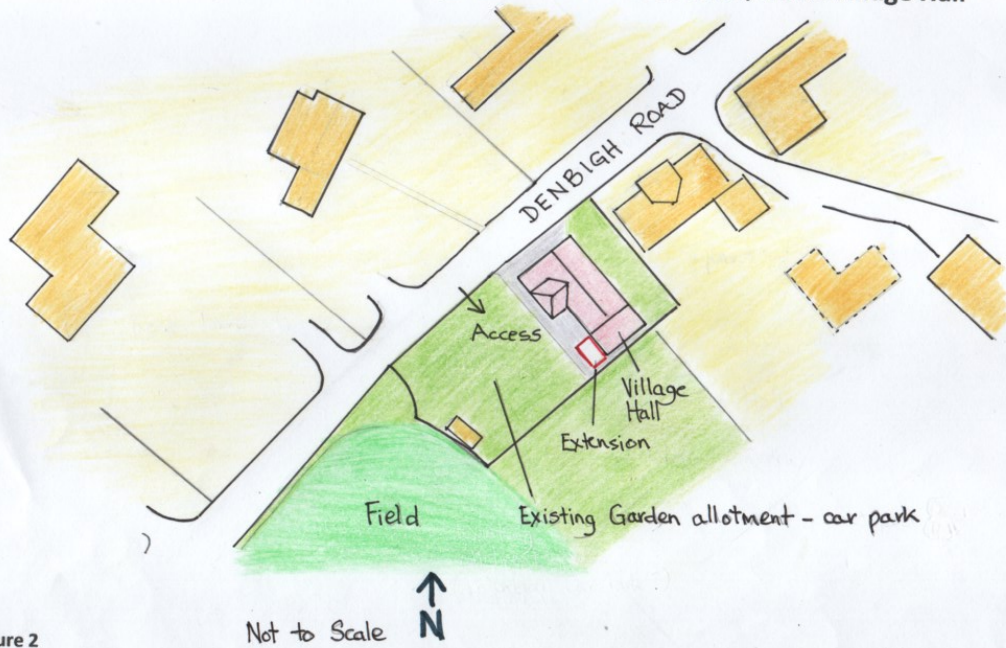


Figure 2

4. Evaluation Criteria

In order to compare the three options on a like for like basis, an evaluation exercise has been undertaken. We have adopted well established evaluation practice by devising an evaluation matrix, which comprises six broad evaluation categories. Within each of the categories there are one or more individual criterion against which the options are judged. The evaluation categories and criteria have been selected to allow a comprehensive and balanced appraisal that is open to scrutiny and to help guide the Parish Council and residents of Hooe in reaching a conclusion on the Village Hall project. See Table 1 below.

Table 1. Evaluation Criteria

| Broad Evaluation Category | Individual Criterion |
|---|--|
| Need or Demand | 1. Does the option meet the needs or demands of the village? |
| Size and quality of facilities | 2. Does the option provide facilities, including car parking, capable of accommodating larger gatherings and a variety of users? |
| | 3. Are the facilities provided user friendly and of high quality? |
| Planning | 4. Does the option meet District Planning Objectives and Requirements ? |
| Finance | 5. Are the capital cost of the hall realistic and affordable for the Parish and could there be a requirement for long term or bridging loans and financial risk to the Parish? |
| | 6. Will building running costs, notably heating, lighting and cleaning be affordable? |
| Operational Issues | 7. Will it be easy to implement the project, including raising finances, procurement and construction? |
| | 8. Will running the hall, inc. staffing, booking, administration be easily manageable? |
| Environment & Sustainability | 9. Will the scheme minimize adverse impacts on natural resources? |
| | 10. Does the option provide easy access for parishioners, particularly for walking? |

5. Evaluation of the three options

Each of the broad evaluation categories is examined in detail through the consideration of individual criteria, which we have formulated into a series of questions. The evaluation is made up of a commentary on each of these questions and then collated into a single summary matrix with a scoring system, so that the relative merits or disadvantages of each option can be clearly seen and compared.

Need or Demand.

Criterion 1 seeks to determine whether the option meet the needs or demands of the village.

It appears from the limited Parish records that we have been able to access, that no systematic demand studies with regard to seating and space requirements of a village hall for Hooe have been undertaken. At a public meeting in 2021 it was suggested that a new hall ought to be able to accommodate events such as the annual harvest supper, when over 100 people might need to be seated. It is reported that the recent 2022 fund raising “Afternoon Tea” for Ukraine could have sold more tickets if more space had been available in the existing Village Hall.

The regular users of the Village Hall in recent years have been the Parish Council, Hooe History Group, Hooe Open Group(HOG), Line Dancing and the Hooe Silver Band. The hall is also occasionally booked for children’s parties. All of these events tend to be for small groups of people, for which the existing facilities are more than adequate. Unfortunately some of these groups are no longer functioning.

Furthermore , the Hooe History Group and Hooe Village Community Group moved to Hooe Church when the Village Hall was being made fire safety compliant and redecorated. These groups have not returned to the Village Hall following refurbishment.

The decline in use of the Village Hall is reflected in its income records. For the financial year 2018-2019, income was £1134, for 2019-2020 £1890. In 2020-2021 the Hall was closed due to Covid restrictions and in 2021-2022 income fell to £753. In the last financial year, 2022-2023, income was £750.

Future Growth in Hooe

In the existing Wealden Local Plan, Hooe is not named as a village for development. It is lumped under the broad category of “Other unclassified Settlements” . The village has no school, local shop or doctors surgery and the roads leading to it or narrow and winding. Further development has always been considered unsustainable and very few new developments allowed. This suggests that no expansion of the village is envisaged and further development would not be permitted. Thus the need for a larger village hall will not be driven by village expansion and an increased population.

The currently emerging Local Plan is thought to be very unlikely to change this basic strategy.

Conclusions on Need or Demand

The need for a larger village hall has yet to be established. Indeed, the existing hall is underused, even after its recent refurbishment and is not covering its running costs.

It is noteworthy that in other villages in Wealden that have built new, larger village halls, a major revenue earner is the hosting of wedding parties. It should be noted that in most cases the wedding is not directly related to the residents of the village. Furthermore village

halls offering weddings tend to have better road access than Hooe, or are closer to larger, settlements.

If a larger, better facility were to be built, no doubt additional uses and hirers would be found, on the argument that “build it and they will come”. A new, larger hall might generate new activities catering for residents and a larger hall would undoubtedly be easier to hire out. However there can be no guarantee that additional demand would be sufficient to keep the hall fully occupied and meeting its running costs.

Given the small village population and no likelihood of further growth, it would not seem to be a prudent use of village funds to build a larger hall, especially if most of the users of the new facility would of necessity be from outside Hooe.

When measured against the need/demand criterion, it would seem that Option 1(a) and 1(b) could give rise to the risk that a new, larger hall might become a “white elephant” project.

Size and quality of facilities

The criteria used to assess this evaluation category are closely linked and examine whether the option provide facilities capable of accommodating larger gatherings and a variety of users and whether the facilities are likely to be user friendly and of high quality.

The Baker Associates village hall scheme of 2018 has been used as the basis of Option 1(a) . It provides significantly more spacious facilities than the existing Village Hall and includes two halls, separate office, a good size kitchen and storage facilities . Option 1(b) would still be larger than the existing hall but would only have a single main hall and smaller support facilities.

Comparative Village Hall sizes and capacities

In assessing whether the existing village hall facilities in Hooe are adequate, it is necessary to look at the wider picture.

Hooe Village Hall is one of the smallest halls in Wealden, particularly in terms of the size of the main hall and its seating capacity. Many new village halls have been built in recent years within the district. Others, such as that at Ninfield, have been expanded and improved. In the larger settlements, new halls have been co-sited with doctors surgeries. These major improvements have taken advantage of the generous funding opportunities that were available in recent years.

The Parish Council in 2021 visited a number of these halls for and were duly impressed by the new facilities provided. Many are now used as wedding party venues. However it should be noted that it would appear that the villages visited were generally significantly larger than Hooe.

An interesting piece of research undertaken on behalf of Action with Communities in Rural England is also perhaps relevant here. The English Village and Community Hall Survey 2020 was a review of over 2,000 halls in England . The population served by village halls surveyed varies widely in the country, as is the case in Wealden. Amongst the key findings were:

- over 70% of communities had carried out improvement works on their halls in the preceding 5 years;
- 16% had no dedicated car park;
- Over 50% of the halls are 80 years or older;

Common problems reported were lack of storage facilities, lack of car parking, poor internet and lack of volunteers;

As many as 16% of the halls served populations of less than 300 and a further 21% served populations between 300 and 600. The population of Hooe is just over 400.

With regard to the size of the village halls within the survey:

- About 28% had a main hall size of up to 100 sqm. (The Hooe main hall is about 64sqm);
- With regard to seating capacity, 7% of halls surveyed could accommodate up to 50 people and a further 46% fell into the 51-100 seat bracket;

It was also noteworthy that only 6.5% of village and community halls were run by the parish councils.

Within the wider context of English villages, it would appear that Hooe is unusual in not having undertaken improvement works on the existing village hall. This is surprising, as the Hooe village hall is of similar age to many other halls and appears to have been in need of refurbishment for many years.

It is interesting to note that the seating capacity of Hooe Village Hall does not appear to be significantly out of step with other village halls, since over half of all village halls in England have a seating capacity of less than 100. Many of these communities will be larger than Hooe, which is amongst the smaller communities in the country.

Furthermore, proximity to other facilities may also be relevant. More isolated villages may not be blessed with easy access to alternative venues, so may need to be more self-contained in terms of facilities. The residents of Hooe have the advantage of proximity of other larger facilities, such as those in Ninfield, less than 1.5 miles from Hooe Village Hall. This might be an alternative venue for the very occasional events, such as the Harvest Supper, when a larger hall might be needed.

Conclusions on Facilities

There is little doubt that a new hall would provide larger and better facilities and accommodation. In this respect Option 1(a) would provide the more comprehensive facilities. The second of the two options for the Recreation Ground, Option 1(b), would have much smaller facilities and might not attract as much patronage as the larger facility. Use as a wedding venue might be compromised and might not justify the investment in terms of management and cost.

Options 1(a) and (b) would be able to provide off street parking commensurate with their floorspace. Parking for the existing Village Hall would be slightly less than that required for a new build but as an existing facility, would unlikely to be rejected by the Planning Authority.

Planning

Formal planning advice has been sought from Wealden Planning Department as to the various planning issues related to the Village Hall project and whether the options meet their objectives for the village and general planning requirements.

With regard to the development of a new hall on the Recreation Ground, the Planning Department had a number of reservations. Since the scheme would encroach upon existing open space, the hall and associated car parking would introduce an urban element into what is currently open land on the edge of the village. The development would be outside the main body of the village. The Farm Shop, Aviva Stone and Athelas Plants are located in Ninfield Parish and the open Recreation Ground makes a green gap between the parishes. Any new development would close this gap and present a more urban appearance to this end of the village.

If this option were to be pursued, the Parish Council would need to show why such a large increase in the size of the hall is required. Need and demand would be required to be demonstrated.

Various detailed requirements would also have to be satisfied in any submission, including good visibility splays for the access point, ecological and biodiversity reports, as well as a landscape scheme. These are costly studies.

It was pointed out to the District planners that the funding of a new hall on the Recreation Ground has always been based upon the assumption that the existing Village Hall and allotment garden would be sold for redeveloped for up to 3 houses. The Planning Department suggested that Wealden District would be unlikely to approve more than a single dwelling on the site. They noted that only the Village Hall building plot would count as a brownfield site for redevelopment purposes, as the allotment garden is open space/agricultural land .

Furthermore, it was stated by the Planning Department that Hooe village is not a sustainable location for new housing and is not earmarked for growth. Moreover, the site is within the setting of two listed buildings and is thus a sensitive location. Development of more than one dwelling would therefore be entirely inappropriate and out of character in this location.

In addition, should Options 1(a) or (b) be pursued, Wealden District would expect the Village Hall to be kept open and functioning as a community facility whilst any new village hall is constructed on the Recreation Ground. This would appear to significantly complicate, if not totally impede, the financing of a new hall on the Recreation Ground, since any funds raised by sale of the existing site would probably not be available until after the construction and opening of the new hall.

With regard to the possible redevelopment of the allotment garden adjoining the existing Village Hall as a car park for Option 2, this proposal was received more favourably, as the

District Council understood the need for car parking for a community facility and its role in improving the viability of the existing Village Hall.

However, as the car park would remove an existing allotment garden, the Parish would need to provide the same area of land elsewhere in the village as a replacement allotment. This is not just allocating an existing allotment for the existing tenant but ensuring the same area of land not currently designated as an allotment is earmarked as a new allotment garden. In short, there should be no net loss of land available as allotments in the village.

It was considered unlikely that the District would object to a small extension to the existing hall.

Finance

Two criteria are used to evaluate the financial aspects of the options. Criterion 5 is probably the more important and looks at the capital cost of the project, including financing and whether it might be a potential financial risk for the Parish. Criterion 6 looks at whether the running costs of the facility would be affordable.

Turning first to Criterion 5, the cost of constructing a new, larger hall on the Recreation Ground would be very high. This is because of the range of facilities sought requires a large structure and also because the site is a green field, so the cost of providing new infrastructure are also a high cost element.

The cost of Option 1(a) has been estimated in 2023 as over £1 million, Option 1(b) over £770,000. By way of comparison, in 2018 the cost of the scheme on the Recreation Ground is understood to have been about £800,000.

Previous Parish Councils have sought to fund the construction of a new hall through a combination of fund raising, setting aside part of the Parish precept, sale of the existing village hall and allotment garden and through grants and loans.

Additional fund raising for the Village Hall has been successfully undertaken over recent years and this has provided useful additional sums for the Parish.

With regard to the precept, this is the portion of the council tax that is raised to cover the costs and expenditure of the parish. Examination of the precept for Hooe suggest that it is one of the highest in the district on a household by household basis. Analysis of the precept data for Wealden for 2021/22 shows that Hooe had the highest precept burden of all small villages and only larger councils, such as the towns of Uckfield and Hailsham have higher precepts for Band D households. (Precept data for Wealden District for this period, see Appendix A).

In the last financial year, the Parish Council managed to reduce the precept by careful budgeting. However this may not be possible in future years, especially if inflation remains high. Furthermore, much of the expenditure of any parish or town council, such as insurance and Clerks wages are relatively inflexible, regardless of population size. As Hooe has a small tax base, then the burden of these costs is not spread very widely. This is then reflected in a high precept. Other councils may have additional income sources or provide fewer services, so require a much lower precept to function effectively.

Nevertheless what is clear from this analysis is that the precept cannot be relied upon as a major source of funding for a new village hall. It is clearly not a prudent use of village residents to set a high precept just in order to fund construction of a larger village hall. Especially in the absence of proven demand .

In addition to a portion of the precept , the sale and redevelopment of the existing Village Hall and allotment garden for housing has been a key element of the potential funding package. However as mentioned previously, this may be more problematic than previously thought. The value of the site might be lower because only one dwelling would be considered appropriate for the site. We have no valuation of the site for a single dwelling but it has been noted that a site behind the Village Hall sold for £275,000 a few years ago. A minimum target value of circa £300,000 for the site without planning permission could be assumed for budgeting purposes.

Existing Parish Council funds earmarked for the Village Hall, plus sale of the existing site would still leave a substantial shortfall in funding. This suggests that the Options 1(a) and (b) will require a grant, loan or mortgage. Without this, these options are not viable

Turning first to the questions of grants. In the past these have been relatively generous but have declined in recent years as the state of the UK public finances have been subject to austerity. The Government has increasingly introduced competition between local authorities, including parish and town councils, for these scarce funds. This creates significant administrative burdens for councils.

By way of example, bidding for grants to support the modernisation and improvement of village halls was announced at the end of 2022. Funds are limited, so not all bidders would be successful. Furthermore the grant would cover only 20% of the total costs, so that even successful councils would still need to find 80% of the cost.

Even were a grant application were to be successful, a loan would still be required to fund the gap between existing village hall funds and the total cost of construction. This is likely to be very substantial.

The bridging loan would be required to fund the construction programme before sale of the existing village hall site, which cannot be completed until the new facility is opened.

Short and long term loans are available to parish councils through the Public Works Lending Board(PWLB). To qualify for a loan, Councils need to demonstrate high public support for the scheme for which the loan is sought and present a sound business case, showing how the repayment of the loan would be managed and funded. Approval for any loan would be required from ESALC and the Government, Department for Levelling-Up, Housing, and Communities.

The long term and bridging loans would be expensive. The UK economy has deteriorated over recent years, with the negative impacts of Brexit, the Covid epidemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine squeezing public finances, stoking inflation and reducing economic growth. There has therefore been a significant increase in interest rates, which are now between 4 and 5%, depending upon length of loan. Assuming a 4% rate, this would give rise to an interest burden of £4,000 per annum per £100,000 borrowed. Consequently it is clear that in the current financial climate a loan of the size required to build a new hall between

£770,000 - £1,000,000 plus would be unaffordable. And unlikely to be approved because the Parish would be at risk of being unable to repay the loan or afford interest payments.

Overall the financial risk to the Parish of funding the new build options on the Recreation Ground are considerable. Although Option 1(b) would be less costly than Option 1(a), the cost is still substantial and offers fewer and smaller facilities than Option 1(a). On balance Option 1(b), probably represents no better value than Option 1(a).

In comparison, Option 2 is the least expensive option. It is the only option that is likely to be affordable for the Parish without large loans or sale of any existing assets.

With regard to running cost, Criterion 6, it would be reasonable to expect that a newly constructed Village Hall would be more energy efficient than the existing hall. Even with significantly larger floor areas, the new halls would probably be only marginally more costly to run than the existing hall in terms of energy and water.

However other costs, notably cleaning, would be much greater because of the increased size and use.

Operational Issues

Criterion 7 looks at how easy it will be to implement the project, bearing in mind the phasing of development, procurement and construction.

Construction of a new hall on the Recreation Ground would take a number of years. Even the smaller scheme involved in Option 2 would be undertaken in stages and over a number of years as finances permitted.

The bridging finance cost of Options 1(a) and(b) have already been touched upon above and the cost of construction supervision of a new hall is included in project fees. Nevertheless the setting up and management of the whole project would create a major administrative burden for the Parish. Issues to contend with would include planning, not just for the new hall but also for the use of the existing site, tendering all works contracts and arranging finance. All of these tasks would fall to the Parish Clerk to arrange and this would increase their workload and cost to the Parish significantly.

Management of Parish Council assets, including the Village Hall, also fall to the Parish Clerk. Building a larger hall would increase this administrative task for the Clerk as bookings and use would be expected to increase. This would add further wage costs to the Parish.

Many village halls are not owned or run by the parish and have alternative ownership and funding models. Many establish a charity to own and manage the facility. Advice has been sought by the current Parish Council as to the viability of such a solution for Hooe from a solicitor. The solicitor strongly cautioned against adopting such a strategy, on the grounds that the Parish Council would receive only a peppercorn rent for the facility and would lose control of how the asset is operated. If the charity ran into financial difficulties, the Parish Council would be unable to bail-out the charity and the facility would close. Apparently many parishes have got into difficulties pursuing this course of action.

Environment and Sustainability

The recreation ground is a very much appreciated open space, used by sports clubs and dog walkers. The loss of a significant part of this to build a new hall and parking would result in a loss of green space and areas for informal games and children's football games. Potential extra revenue might also be lost. Open space would also be lost by the provision of the car park on the allotment garden next to the Village Hall. However the area lost would be significantly less than that lost to a hall on the Recreation Ground.

Building a new hall on the Recreation Ground would require significantly more resources than continuing the refurbishment of the existing Village Hall. Re-using an existing building is widely seen as greener than demolishing it and building a new one. Such an approach minimizes the use of building materials and energy and also waste.

Criterion 10 examines accessibility of the hall options, particularly for walking. Hooe is a very dispersed settlement, with no centre. The church lies in the southern half of the village and some distance from the other village facilities such as the pub, garage and Village Hall. These facilities are in Hooe Common, which is where the greatest concentration of houses are in the settlement. The Recreation Ground lies further north on the boundary of the village. Arguably, therefore the existing Village Hall is the more accessible of the alternative locations, especially those who wish to walk to the facility.

Summary of the Evaluation

The evaluation of the three options set out above have been gathered together in a summary matrix, shown in Table 2 below. The table is designed to give an overview of the evaluation and the relative advantages and disadvantages of each of the options considered and how they match the evaluation criteria. A simple colour coded scoring system has added to the summary to aid the comparison.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the appraisal:

- The need or demand for a larger hall have not been established and Option 1(a) and (b) have therefore been marked down when measured against this criterion;
- However Options 1(a) and (b) perform very well in terms of the size and quality of facilities provide, Option 2 markedly less so;
- Planning considerations tend to favour Option 2;
- On the key issue of financing, Options 1(a) and (b) appear unaffordable. Option 1(b) is less costly than Option 1(a). However this option is inferior to Option 1(a) in terms of the facilities provided, so overall is only marginally better performing than Option 1(a). Both these options represent a major financial risk to the Parish;
- With regard to the implementation and operations of the hall and on environmental issues, Options 1(a) and (b) perform less well than Option 2;
- Overall, the evaluation suggests that the continued refurbishment of the existing Village Hall and provision of a car park as proposed in Option 2, is, on balance, the best performing option.

It will be noted that no weighting has been applied to any of the criteria in the overall evaluation. All criterion have been considered of equal weight. This simple scoring used here gives a clear advantage to Option 2. If the size and quality of facilities is considered paramount and more important than all other criteria and weighed accordingly, then the gap between the options would narrow. However, conversely, if cost and reduced financial risk to the Parish were given additional weight, then the advantages of Option 2 over the other two options would be even greater.

Table 2: Summary Appraisal Framework

| Evaluation Criteria | | Recreation Ground | | Denbigh Road |
|---|--|-------------------|-------------|--------------|
| | | Option 1(a) | Option 1(b) | Option 2 |
| Need or Demand | 1. Does the option meet the needs or demands of the village? | | | |
| Size and quality of facilities | 2. Does the option provide facilities, including car parking, capable of accommodating larger gatherings and a variety of users? | | | |
| | 3. Are the facilities provided user friendly and of high quality? | | | |
| Planning | 4. Does the option meet District Planning Objectives and Requirements ? | | | |
| Finance | 5. Are the capital cost of the hall realistic and affordable and could there be a requirement for long term & bridging loans? | | | |
| | 6. Will building running costs, notably heating, lighting and cleaning be affordable? | | | |
| Operational Issues | 7. Will it be easy to implement the project, including raising finances, procurement and construction? | | | |
| | 8. Will running the hall, inc. staffing, booking, administration be easily manageable? | | | |
| Environment & Sustainability | 9. Will the scheme minimize adverse impacts on natural resources? | | | |
| | 10. Does the option provide easy access for parishioners, particularly for walking? | | | |
| | Total score out of 50 | 22 | 24 | 31 |

Key:- Indicative Scores

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| 1. Scores very poorly when set against this criterion | 2. Scores poorly when set against this criterion | 3. Scores broadly neutral when set against this criterion | 4. Scores well when set against this criterion | 5. Scores very well when set against this criterion |
|---|--|---|--|---|

Source: Parish Council April 2023

6. Conclusions

Comparison of Options

The development of a new hall on the Recreation Ground would provide a much larger and better appointed facility for the village than that currently provided by the existing hall. However the need for a larger village hall has yet to be proven and appears to be based upon aspiration rather than firm demand.

Given the small population of the village and little likelihood of further growth, it would appear that the case for a larger hall largely rest upon attracting many users of the hall from outside Hooe.

The development of a new hall on the Recreation Ground would come at a very high financial cost, be difficult to implement and manage and would have environmental disadvantages. This appraisal indicates that neither of the larger halls sited on the Recreation Ground would offer good value for the Parish, be a prudent use of scarce village funds, management resources or open space.

In comparison, the creation of a small car park and refurbishment of the existing hall would represent a less risky option for the village.

Other Options

At the internal audit of the Parish Council on 19th January 2023, the Auditor queried whether Hooe can even justify the running of the existing hall. He noted the sparse use of the facility, limited income and the rising costs of running and maintaining the hall. Other suitable facilities are available for hire in neighbouring Ninfield and some Hooe village events are now run from the Church. So is the hall even needed?

Sale of the existing hall would raise a substantial sum for the village. However, according to legislation and regulations governing parish councils , the proceeds of any sale of an asset can only be re-invested in a capital project. The funds cannot be used to reduce council running costs or the precept. So from a financial perspective, the village would gain little by selling the existing hall, as a venue would still be needed for essential meetings of the Parish, for elections and small local events. And the small income that the hall does generate would be lost and precept funds would need to be spent on hiring other venues for essential parish meetings.

Way Forward

Taking everything into consideration, it is concluded that future efforts of the Parish would be best directed towards continued refurbishment of the existing hall with the addition of a car park. This could be funded by a combination of the increased revenues attracted by the improved facilities and use of small grants. It is also worth noting that in the past the community was very successful in raising funds for a new hall and there is no reason why this experience and enthusiasm should not be directed to improving the existing hall for the benefit of all of the village residents.

Prepared by Councillor Steve Crawhurst, Hooe Parish Council, 27nd April 2023

Appendix A . Wealden Parish and Town Councils Precept data 2021/22

| | Parish or Town Council | Tax Base (£) | Total Precept (£) | Precept divided by tax base (£) |
|----------|------------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Alciston | 6 | 650 | 104 |
| 2 | Selmeston | 97 | 800 | 8 |
| 3 | Little Horsted | 116 | 0 | 0 |
| 4 | Cuckmere Valley | 125 | 8,580 | 69 |
| 5 | Berwick | 143 | 14,360 | 100 |
| 6 | Hooe | 207 | 32,000 | 155 |
| 7 | Wartling | 211 | 7,500 | 36 |
| 8 | Long Man | 254 | 9,450 | 37 |
| 9 | Laughton | 304 | 16,330 | 53 |
| 10 | Arlington | 327 | 21,410 | 65 |
| 11 | Isfield | 345 | 22,000 | 64 |
| 12 | Hadlow Down | 399 | 39,120 | 98 |
| 13 | Alfriston | 447 | 55,250 | 128 |
| 14 | Chalvington & Ripe | 450 | 19,700 | 44 |
| 15 | Chiddingly | 502 | 39,900 | 80 |
| 16 | Fletching | 567 | 32,000 | 57 |
| 17 | Ninfield | 621 | 60,950 | 98 |
| 18 | East Hoathly | 698 | 61,800 | 89 |
| 19 | Warbleton | 729 | 21,620 | 30 |
| 20 | Frant | 844 | 81,300 | 96 |
| 21 | Framfield | 957 | 68,700 | 72 |
| 22 | Danehill | 959 | 103,240 | 108 |
| 23 | East Dean | 995 | 71,500 | 72 |
| 24 | Hartfield | 1,117 | 96,710 | 87 |
| 25 | Horam | 1,304 | 52,000 | 40 |
| 26 | Herstmonceux | 1,133 | 88,760 | 78 |
| 27 | Withyham | 1,333 | 163,250 | 122 |
| 28 | Pevensey | 1,351 | 136,230 | 101 |
| 29 | Rotherfield | 1,619 | 124,340 | 77 |
| 30 | Hellingly | 1,626 | 161,290 | 99 |
| 31 | Maresfield | 1,834 | 95,080 | 52 |
| 32 | Buxted | 1,867 | 105,090 | 56 |
| 33 | Mayfield | 1,953 | 237,970 | 122 |
| 34 | Forest Row | 2,253 | 415,000 | 184 |
| 35 | Wadhurst | 2,483 | 159,000 | 64 |
| 36 | Westham | 2,962 | 160,170 | 54 |
| 37 | Willingdon | 3,129 | 190,720 | 61 |
| 38 | Polegate | 3,254 | 367,490 | 113 |
| 39 | Heathfield | 5,347 | 427,970 | 80 |
| 40 | Uckfield | 5,757 | 983,080 | 171 |
| 41 | Hailsham | 7,675 | 1,252,860 | 163 |
| 42 | Crowborough | 8,833 | 1,522,738 | 172 |
| | Totals | 67,133 | 6,275,048 | 3,559 |
| | Averages | 1,598 | 149,406 | 85 |

