

Community Consultation – Future of HOOE VILLAGE HALL

5.14 Residents Correspondence and Responses during consultation period

The following correspondence and responses, in full, made to resident's correspondence during the consultation period are published here. To avoid publishing other resident's opinion, criticism or any incorrect or misleading statements during the consultation period only parts of the response that was deemed relevant and useful for all to see and not prejudicial to the consultation were published in document 5.13. The council has decided to fully publish (in anonymity) all correspondence and replies now the consultation period has ended.

12 residents emailed and received the following responses during and after the consultation period.

Resident 1 correspondence 4Apr24, verified

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Hello; I'm a resident of Hooe and have just received the options newsletter. I do not want the hall to close but I also do not want to pay an extra £900 a year on my council tax which is already over £300 per 10-month period. If there was a Hooe Village Hall Facebook/web site where anyone wanting to use the hall would easily access booking then maybe more people would use it. I will be retiring in mid-July so can spend time on such events as a vinyl record evening, Mod/punk/ska/disco/pop DJ evenings, open mic nights, band practice, Burns night, to think of a few. I do not think £10 an hour is extortionate for the hire of the hall. Maybe some events could be run alongside our local pub too. I hope I'm not left to just vote close due to my financial status upon retirement. Regards

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Resident 1 full response 4Apr24

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Thank you for your email.

I believe you have misunderstood the information you have read.

The £854 per band-D council taxpayer quoted is the cost over the example 25-year timescale - if the council did raise £100,000 over 25 years this alone could increase the Hooe council tax bill element by £34 per year for each of the 25 years (£854 divided by 25 years) unless the council found other funds to pay for the loan repayments.

*Please note, this **does not imply** the council will borrow £100,000 or choose a 25-year repayment timescale, the amounts, timescale, interest rates and precept effect could be more or less at the time - but we have to give an example to show the long-term liability that could fall to taxpayers of Hooe.*

I hope this answers your question.

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Resident 1 further correspondence 4Apr24, verified

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Just had a word with my wife, we both thought the accompanying letter was confusing and may put others off voting for the hall to stay. Would it be possible to make it clear to everyone how much would be added each year to the council tax for how many years? Cheers

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Resident 1 further full response 4Apr24

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The Parish Council are required to illustrate the potential effect on council taxpayers, but we are only in a position to give an example as no firm decisions have been made on the exact nature of any renovations or improvements and the council have stated what they might consider doing.

The main purpose of this consultation is to gauge resident's preferences on which of the two options they would like council to explore at this time.

We have strived to make it clear that a significant part of renovation costs are likely to end up on our council taxpayers' bills although we will explore grants and other funding as a priority but they are never guaranteed. Without the example statement, it could equally mislead readers in believing that the Keep and Renovate option is without significant cost implication, this might sway voters, in the opposite way you suggest that the inclusion of the statement might put off voters from that option.

The council believe the summary statements are fair and balanced.

I hope this clarifies the position.

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Resident 1 further correspondence 4Apr24, verified

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Hello Jane; Many thanks for the prompt response and clarification. That has swayed me to the keep the hall vote. If the Hall does stay, I'd be happy to run a Facebook site for information and chat. Cheers

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Resident 2 correspondence 4Apr24, verified

Clerk!

Make sure the letter includes details of the viable option for relocating a new village hall at the Hooe rec site is declared as a realistic alternative.

Resident 2 full response 17Apr24

Thank you for your email.

May I refer you to the minutes of the Village Hall Project Committee at www.Hooe-PC.gov.uk/village-hall-project/ Document "5.02 Village Hall Project Committee minutes 12.02.24" where you will find the discussion and motion passed unanimously by the council to reject the building of a new village hall on the recreation ground. You will also find all the supporting documentation at that location that the council used to inform that decision. Hence, this is why that option does not appear on the consultation paper.

I hope this clarifies the position.

Resident 2 correspondence 18Apr24, verified

The Village Hall issue needs to be raised with the local population is made fully aware of all reasons that such a ridiculous decision was dubiously 'railroaded'.

That way the most sensible conclusion for the fairest long-term benefit to us all can be achieved.

Thanks!

Resident 2 no further response 18Apr24

Correspondence 8Apr24 – source not verifiable/No response

Subject: *How dare you try to close the village hall*

Isn't the village hall a memorial to first world war soldiers? You are not in a position to close it

Yours

Residents 3&4 joint correspondence 9Apr24, verified

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Open letter to the Hooe Parish Council

We have received the Parish Council 'Consultation Papers'.

We are both of the opinion a village hall is central to the life of the community, any thought of closing and selling for development would be a travesty.

This action would be counter mount to letting the residents down and letting the village die. Whilst the hall is not used very much at present it has been well used in the past and will be again in the future when residents are again encouraged and made welcomed. That is not the case at present.

It would appear from reading your paper and looking at the return form, that the Parish Council has already made its decision. It seems very clear that is to close the Hall permanently and sell the land.

1. It is stated that the results are not binding. So why go to the expense of preparing documents, having them delivered by post, producing banners etc. if this is an empty exercise? What is your reasoning? Are you ticking boxes in the hope that you will be able to strengthen any grant application by stating you have consulted with the residents?
2. The PC has only offered 2 alternative options and there is no opportunity on the form to make comments. The questions are too black and white to be able to answer thoroughly and therefore will not give a complete and true picture of the views of residents. There is no way the Council can be informed fully by simple tick or cross answers to these questions. Why are you wasting everyone's time and money?
3. The hall is not used at present because the Parish Council has made it difficult for local groups to enjoy it. The rules and regulations which have been imposed, and the high rental costs make it unaffordable and unwelcoming.
4. In addition, the sudden closure of the hall for months was an action that all other parishes and hall organisers always avoid at all costs. History has proved that clubs, societies and organisations need to find an alternative venue when their usual venue is suddenly unavailable. Often, having been let down once, these clubs and organisations are reluctant to return to a newly opened venue as all trust is lost. This is the reason the hall is underused at present; local clubs and societies have lost confidence, and some have decided to make their temporary venues permanent.
5. Apart from St Oswald's Church which has proved to be the saving of Community activity in the village, a Village Hall is the only building where residents may meet together and socialise. Without a hall community spirit dies. I hope you will recall and have taken into consideration the fact Children's parties, charity dinners, beetle drives, anniversary parties, dance and exercise classes are just a few of the activities which have happened in the hall in addition to committee meetings of groups and organisation.
6. Sadly, the financial record of the Council is not great. It would now appear your wish is to rush forward without even producing a robust business plan. Whilst this would normally be disturbing for any organisation, it is more so for a Parish Council that is spending money raised from local council tax. These funds are Parish funds, not Parish Council funds, and this fact should be remembered at all times.
7. We find it shocking that you closed the hall, spent many thousands of £s on it, apparently all without a long-term business plan. Then, once you reopened it, nothing appears to have been done

to promote it to the people of the village and beyond. And now you want to close it! Such a waste of Hooe residents' money.

We are both of the opinion a village hall is central to the life of the community, any thought of closing and selling for development would be a travesty.

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Resident 3&4 full response 11Apr24

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Thank you for your email which has been noted by councillors. We have responded to your questions and any statements or inferences you have made that are false.

It is our intention during the consultation to publish the answers to questions from residents that may be of key significance to the community consultation on the website during the consultation period, such as any clarification sought or potential misinterpretation of the documents.

The Parish Council will not publish the contents or the response if it contains your personal opinion or the potential to misinform, mislead or misdirect the outcome of the consultation such as criticism of legitimate council decision or policy.

Each response to you below is categorised and only those deemed seeking key clarification will be published. No responses to you have been deemed for wider publication.

Please see document 5.13 Consultation - Responses to Questions answered at www.hooe-pc.gov.uk/village-hall-project.

Response to Preamble (Personal opinion, False inference, no question)

Your inferences that the council has already decided, and the consultation is an empty exercise are false. As you know, a decision has not been made until the council make it - I can confirm no motion has been passed to close and sell the Hall or otherwise. I can confirm, all meetings are held in public and on the record, no private meetings or groups of individual councillors get together to make decisions, as that would be illegal. It is up to each individual councillor to vote on this, it is for each of them to decide given the breadth of information they have now amassed on this project, and ultimately with the result of this consultation. All information is available on the website to everyone, nothing is kept back from voters.

At the February meeting of the Village Hall Project Committee, councillors voted unanimously to consult the community, pay for promotion of it to ensure a wide participation and gave their reasoning - which you can establish from the minutes available on the website. I'm sure you are aware no former council ever asked the community in this way and provided the necessary depth of financial implications and usage analysis.

Response to 1 (False inference of an empty exercise, 3 questions)

The statement about not binding on the council is a formality - as you know only the members of the council makes an actual decision based on many factors only one of which is the community response or desire to do something. It would have been inappropriate to imply whatever the community says will definitely happen; the parish council could never have guaranteed that.

Your inference that the consultation is an empty exercise is false. The council has most of the financial, technical and legal points answered about how they could proceed, what they don't have is a fuller picture of the communities wish regarding the future of the hall. Although meetings seem well attended, there is never more than 10% of the electorate at meetings and many do not offer their

views. A previous attempt at a consultation, which you are aware of, received only 39 subjective comments. The parish council has a duty to establish the actual views of the wider community, particularly those who up to now may be unaware of the situation and uninformed on key matters such as financial implications for them.

Community support is a key element to any application for a grant or public works loan - without the result of this consultation the council would be unable to comply with these conditions and therefore may not be able to decide to Keep and Renovate without substantial community input. I'm sure you appreciate any council which decides to spend a significant amount of taxpayer's money should at least know they have a mandate to do it.

Response to 2 (Criticism of council decision/policy, Personal Opinion, 1 question)

At this stage the parish council is seeking a simple direction from the community. If we were to try to present in advance a complex variety of possibilities of what we might do and obtain the detailed costs of all these options, it was felt this would over complicate what in essence is a simple decision - does the community want the council to keep the hall (with a few sensible suggestions for improvements) at not an insignificant cost or does the community feel that money is better in their pockets over the long-term.

As for allowing further comments on the consultation form, any member of the community, at any time can forward their comments to the council, as indeed you have just done. We have received many already and each one will help inform councillors in their decisions. Councillors have seen the detailed results of a previous "comment" based consultation carried out and were concerned that the parish council had to infer and make a subjective decision on many comments - some weren't classifiable as for or against – the parish council wanted to avoid this and just receive a single clear preference.

The costs of the consultation are approx. £5 per household. Considering that should the renovation option be enacted, each of these households could face a total long-term financial liability 100-200 times or more that amount, it was felt that this was value for money. I'm sure you know that any council spending that kind of money has a fiduciary duty to ensure everyone is informed of that possibility.

Response to 3 (Criticism of past council decisions/policy, no question).

You do not quantify how the council has made it difficult for local groups to enjoy it. It is currently available for hire 7 days a week at £10 per hour (possibly free to charities or for local activities by council discretion) - this is in line with local halls with similar facilities. The hall has all the legal certificates and insurance; rules governing hiring are typically the same you would face going anywhere else to hire a space.

The council is fully aware that the lack of parking is a serious barrier to hiring, that is why this is likely to be priority number one for improvements to support increased use. You also know the fiduciary duty on the council, and the financial pressure on many councils nationwide mean we cannot leave an empty building that is costing money without questioning its long-term viability.

You do not define how a building gives the vibes of being unwelcoming - I can agree the 4ft of black mould appearing on the inside walls in winter months due to lack of use and necessary long-term maintenance justifies your comment. I'm sure you agree this may constitute a health and safety hazard and is a significant reason why the current slow decline of the building condition cannot be maintained for much longer.

The parish council provides the facility - it is up to the community to use it - at present use is very low.

Response to 4 (Personal Opinion, no question)

The closure of the hall was down to legal requirements not previously being met. You cannot legally have public use of any building without valid fire, electrical and insurance. The condition of the building was partly down to previous council's cutting back on spending so it could be preserved for a new build. Now that option has been formally rejected by the parish council, suddenly, you suggest it is the fault of the council why the existing building was unavailable.

Community groups have been contacted for comment on what it would take to return to the village hall - the arguments are those you'd expect - parking and kitchen facilities are the main two, hence the planned improvements. If community groups and other users find alternative facilities locally, that is to be welcomed too. All local venues have desperate funding issues for their premises and facilities - but Hooe Village hall is the only one within a 6-mile radius that is paid for by local taxpayers. They have to be considered too.

Response to 5 (Personal Opinion, no question).

The activities you refer to can all come back if the community wishes to organise them and approach the council for support. The council does not have the resources to promote, run and organise all community events. There has been an overwhelming request by the residents attending the Village Hall Project Committee meetings for the voluntary groups to return to using the village hall, particularly the coffee mornings, and that has not happened, and the residents should be given an explanation why. You suggest without a village hall the community spirit dies, maybe the community groups should consider the views of the local community that are crying out for them to return to the village hall. The village hall cannot be the hub of the village if no one is using it.

Response to 6 (Criticism of council decisions, no question).

The Clerk to the parish council and Responsible Finance officer has spent the last 2 years getting to grips with the financial affairs of the council, which according to auditors were in serious breach of many legal and regulatory requirements. Accounts are now fully audited, published and all our statutory obligations are correctly satisfied. The poor financial record that you imply is correct but is not isolated or limited to any one manifestation of the many past councils but collectively and over time many former councils and councillors failed in their fiduciary duties. It has been costly and taken a lot of time to get to the position where we are now and a three-year financial plan will shortly be underway for the first time, so it will now be possible for councillors to make informed financial decisions for the future of the village hall and other projects.

Response to 7 (Personal Opinion, Criticism of council decisions/policy, no question)

*Once again, answers to Response 4,5,6 apply.
I hope this clarifies the Parish Council's position.
Kind Regards*

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Resident 5 correspondence 4Apr24, verified

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To Hooe Parish Clerk and Councillors,

Re: HP Village Hall – Prejudicial Public Consultation Paper

I am in receipt today, Thursday 4 April 2024, of the Community Consultation on the future of the Hooe Village Hall (HVH) voting paper.

As anticipated, the voting paper has ignored the views of residents expressed before, and at, the last meeting of the Village Hall Project Committee (VHPC), held on 11/03/24, which was to keep the HVH as is. The Hooe Parish Council (HPC) have also ignored residents' requests to view and discuss the content of the consultation. The Consultation Paper (CP) has only two extreme options on which to vote. As such the CP is prejudicial against residents wishes with one option proposing "Keep and Renovate" or the other option to "Close and Sell" the HVH.

The term 'renovate' and or 'renovation' has been used by the HPC in VHPC meetings as the de facto option, but the term is not defined on the CP. However, the CP notes refer to the need to obtain government grants or loans for such works - an expensive exercise in itself. The term renovate (to restore to a good state of repair) is incorrectly applied in the current context as it is understood the proposal includes items such as new building works, improvements, enhancements, extension(s), new kitchen and a new car park.

The example given in the CP of a loan of £100,000 over 25 years refers to a cost to a council taxpayer (band D) of £854, but the CP does not state if this cost is annual or is it the total cost for the 25 years loan period?

The CP notes that "the usage of HVH has been very low for some time and the HPC does not foresee any significant increase in the use" – so why is there a need by the HPC for expensive and extensive 'renovation' without any strategy to initiate more usage?

The 'renovate' option has not been properly discussed with residents as it includes a variety of extensive and costly proposals. Contrary to Local Government guidelines the HPC have not sufficiently engaged or discussed with residents the purpose and content of the CP issued.

The CP should include at the very least an affordable middle third option of 'Keep and Maintain' which has been raised by residents, and which appears to have been supported by some councillors. This option would not require any additional monies to be obtained by government loans or grants as the costs of annual maintenance could be contained in a reasonably costed Precept. Any improvements, enhancements or additions to the HVH should be kept separate from the basic 'Keep and Maintain' - which would include the necessary maintenance to keep it operational.

By only having the two extreme options on which to vote, the HPC are forcing those residents who wish to keep the HVH, to also vote for extensive 'renovation'; thereby giving the HPC carte blanche to undertake whatever modifications and improvements that they want without further recourse to residents input. The same can be said if the number of returned CP's do not meet the required "weight of support" which again will allow the HPC to carry out whatever they want.

The CP states that it is an informal consultation and that the outcome is not binding. Thus, the only purpose the CP would seem to have is to allow the HPC to apply for government loans or grants for 'renovation' works which have not been discussed with residents. Therefore, is not this CP a waste of time and money?

It seems to me that the HPC have not moved any further forward on the issue of the HVH from Cllr Crawhurst's report 'Appraisal of Options for Hooe Village Hall' dated April 2023.

Regards

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Resident 5 full response 12Apr24

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Thank you for your email which has been noted by all councillors. We have responded to your questions and any statements or inferences you have made that are false.

It is our intention during the consultation to publish the answers to questions from residents that may be of key significance to the community consultation on the website during the consultation period, such as any clarification sought or potential misinterpretation of the documents.

The Parish Council will not publish the contents or the response if it contains your personal opinion or the potential to misinform, mislead or misdirect the outcome of the consultation such as criticism of legitimate council decision or policy.

Each response to you below is categorised and only those deemed seeking key clarification will be published. Two responses to you have been deemed for wider publication, one already has been asked by other residents.

Please see document 5.13 Consultation - Responses to Questions answered at www.hooe-pc.gov.uk/village-hall-project.

Response to paragraph 2 (Criticism of consultation scope, no question)

The building is well over 110 years old and has no significant TLC for many years, the council has a legal obligation to manage council assets appropriately. The council does not wish to get into a position where the building must close and further significant maintenance carried out if the community do not want to pay for it or use it anymore.

The parish council has most of the financial, technical and legal points answered about how they could proceed, what they don't have is a fuller picture of the communities wish regarding the future of the hall. You suggest we have ignored views expressed before, is this false. Although meetings seem well attended and views are expressed, they are not the only views. There is never more than 10% of the electorate at meetings and many do not offer their views. To limit our decision making to only the views we hear at meetings, or those who shout loudest via email, would be democratically unacceptable to most people. A previous attempt at a consultation received only 39 subjective comments. The parish council has a duty to establish the actual views of the wider community, particularly those who up to now may be unaware of the situation and uninformed on key matters such as financial implications for them.

Your comment regarding restricting the residents' prior access to the consultation document is answered in the set of minutes from 11th March, to which you refer.

At this stage the parish council is seeking a simple direction from the community. If we were to try to present in advance a complex variety of possibilities of what we might do and obtain the detailed costs of all these options, it was felt this would over complicate what in essence is a simple decision - does the community want the council to keep the hall (with a few sensible suggestions for improvements) at not an insignificant cost or does the community feel that money is better in their pockets over the long-term.

Ultimately, it is now up to those in the community who challenge and lobby the parish council to keep the facility to start to demonstrate how they will help achieve and maintain increased use in the long-term, not just turn up and say so at meetings. The parish council have sought opinion from community

groups and others that use other facilities, such as the Church, what it would take to return and use the hall and the council is disappointed by the response and lack of engagement.

Ultimately, the council has a fiduciary duty to ensure money is spent wisely, appropriately and offers value for the taxpayers' money and have voiced this concern several times in previous public meetings about the implications of the lack of community use. The consultation paperwork clearly spells out the situation cannot continue as is.

Response to paragraph 3 (Criticism of language, no question)

Irrespective of the textbook definition of the word "renovate", the summary document clearly lays out the proposed intentions under the Keep and Renovate option. It spells out clearly the likely improvements that will be considered and the council have stated in the preamble it cannot allow the continued decline of the current building any longer, closure could be forced any day due to a failure of or in the building. The 4ft of black mould that appeared on inside walls this winter almost was almost a reason to temporarily close it again.

Response to paragraph 4 (Example costs clarification question - this response has been published already)

The £854 per band-D council taxpayer quoted is the cost over the example 25-year timescale - if the council did raise £100,000 over 25 years this alone could increase the Hooe council tax bill element by £34 per year for each of the 25 years (£854 divided by 25 years) unless the parish council found other funds to pay for the loan repayments.

Please note, this does not imply the parish council will borrow £100,000 or choose a 25-year repayment timescale, the amounts, timescale, interest rates and precept effect could be more or less at the time - but we have to give an example to show the long-term liability that could fall to taxpayers of Hooe.

Response to paragraph 5 (Increasing use question - this response will be published)

The parish council have clearly outlined what improvements (parking, kitchen upgrade) will likely promote increased use. Whether this will increase community use or just attract outsiders is unknown and could never be quantified. Whether it will be sufficient to justify the expense and determine the appropriate levels of that expense have not been decided and will be a factor for councillors to consider alongside the results of the community vote.

All the activities that have happened in the past can all come back if the community wishes to organise them and approach the parish council for support. The parish council does not have the resources to promote, run and organise all community events. As you say, there has been an overwhelming request by the residents attending the Village Hall Project Committee meetings for the voluntary groups to return to using the village hall, particularly the coffee mornings, and that has not happened, and the residents should be given an explanation why. Some suggest without a village hall the community spirit dies, maybe the community groups should consider the views of the local community that are crying out for them to return to the village hall. The village hall cannot be the hub of the village if no one is using it.

Response to paragraph 6 (criticism lack of detailed renovation proposals)

See Response to paragraph 2

Response to paragraph 7 & 8 (suggestion of a less costly middle option, no question)

The nature of the buildings current condition and decline and likely maintenance costs (even if improvements were not carried out) could be significant enough in the short-medium term to warrant this community consultation on cost alone. Keeping it as it is with no prospect of parking to promote increased use is not seen as an option the council wish to explore at this time. The parish council is

fully aware that this Village Hall decision for many people promotes nostalgia and other such feelings, however, the financial and other implications that taxpayers cannot ignore must be spelt out to them so they are able to make an informed choice. There is no viable middle option for the short to medium term or the parish council will just have to keep revisiting this topic, and we are well aware residents are already fed up with the time it's taken already.

I direct you to the website where you will see the most recent survey report (over 4 ½ years ago) suggesting works totalling £155K this does not include improvements. Even if only some of the most urgent repairs were spread out over a long period and paid for annually by taxpayers as we go would be sizeable annual increases, as every cost has to be divided by 210 taxpayers each year. The current running costs with no maintenance and no emergency costs are approx. £10 per taxpayer per year. If £20,000 needed spending in one year on emergency or essential repairs, this would be a sudden increase of approx. £100 to that year's tax bill, a significant increase.

To prevent further deterioration in the building, such as the black mould example, this might require a low level of heating in winter months, this alone could cost a further £10 per taxpayer, a doubling of present running costs. As you can see, the loan option, which can spread these kinds of costs over a period up to 50 years does help spread the taxpayer liabilities but if taken out are long-term obligations that once taken cannot be undone, hence the requirements for community support.

The parish council will not sugar coat the situation with the village hall as some want us to do. We have a duty to ensure any decisions we take are in the interest of our community and taxpayers and our legal obligations. This parish council is doing what no other parish council has done before regarding the Village Hall proposals, being realistic and transparent about the situation. You will find many parish councils might take this decision purely on cost grounds, particularly at this difficult time for parish council finances - we have chosen to give the community a say in defining the next period of the Village Halls existence and whether they wish it. It is not a listed building, it is not used sufficiently to justify the long-term repairs it needs, all local village halls are NOT paid for by taxpayers - YET - we have asked the community for their choice and parish council await that with interest.

Response to paragraph 8 (weight of support - no question)

The consultation paperwork clearly outlines why the community must engage with parish council on this matter if the Keep and Renovation option is to remain viable, irrespective of which definition of renovate is used.

A Parish council always takes financial decisions for its taxpayers and residents, we always could take a carte blanche approach if the parish council wished to but we have a fiduciary duty always.

Response to paragraph 9 (Criticism of waste of money spent and inference on binding statement)

Your inference that the purpose of this consultation is not genuine, simple to allow the parish council to tick a box is false. The statement about not binding on the council is a formality - as you know only the members of the parish council makes an actual decision based on many factors only one of which is the community response or desire to do something. It would have been inappropriate to imply whatever the community says will definitely happen; the parish council could never have guaranteed that.

The council will not be applying for any grant or loan in respect of the Village Hall without the community support which this consultation will either give or not.

The costs of the consultation are approx. £5 per household. Considering that should the renovation option be enacted, each of these households could face a total long-term financial liability 100-200 times or more that amount, it was felt that this was value for money. I'm sure you know that any

council spending that kind of money has a fiduciary duty to ensure everyone is informed of that possibility.

Response to paragraph 10 (Criticism on lack of action)

I again further you to look at all the documents on the website under the Village Hall Project section. The parish council has worked tirelessly since the appraisal report was published a year ago. Further studies, including full costing and usage of local facilities and carrying out other necessary financial and regulatory work has been done in preparation for a final decision on the Village hall.

Please remember, no decisions have yet been made and all your comments and concerns, together with all other received have been noted by councillors.

Kind regards

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Residents 6&7 joint correspondence 16Apr24, verified

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To Hooe Parish Council

Both {...} and {...} are of the opinion that the village hall should be **SAVED for the use of the **HOOE** community for the present and the **GENERATIONS** that will follow us **ALL**.**

After moving to Hooe in 2014 it was very apparent that the village was a vibrant place to be part of with many activities and a community spirit. Very soon we wanted to partake within the community and felt very comfortable to offer support and become part of the village.

The Village hall was very much a hub of the community, along with the Church, the Red Lion and Hope Cottage.

We would like to bring to the attention to the PC the activities that were incumbent to the village hall during our tenure thus far: -

1. PC meetings
2. Elections
3. History Society
4. Youth Club
5. Open Group
6. Line Dancing
7. Martial Arts
8. Home Education Group
9. Table Tennis
10. Harvest Supper
11. Pancake Lunch
12. Bonfire Lunch
13. Coffee Mornings
14. Open Gardens toilet stop
15. Beetle Drives
16. Suppers/Charity Fundraising events
17. Village morning organised by the Parish Council, Various organisations attended: - Fire, police commissioner, Hastings conservation, footpaths, first aiders, music group, Hooe silver band, Neighbourhood watch among others
18. Handcraft/Art sessions
19. Bazaar/2017 Christmas fayre
20. Children's Parties/adults parties
21. Funeral Wakes
22. Hooe Motor Club
23. Hooe Band
24. Ukelele Group
25. Conquest Dr's meetings
26. Cycle stop for charity event.

There were a number of enquiries for the hire of the hall before the covid19 closure: -

1. Art Club
2. Toddlers
3. Pilates
4. Cinema

The ultimate issue if the village hall and grounds are sold is where are the community going to congregate for civil matters, elections, PC meetings, Church and village social occasions and community meetings of all kinds?

Hopefully this consultation will highlight the value and importance of the village hall and encourage councillors and community alike to increase the use through NEW societies and community events.

Regards,

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Residents 6&7 full response 17Apr24

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Thank you for your email. The council has received several during the consultation and is pleased it has promoted discussion amongst the community, of course councillors will take on board your comments.

It is our intention during the consultation to publish the answers to questions from residents that may be of key significance to the community consultation on the website during the consultation period, such as any clarification sought or potential misinterpretation of the documents.

The Parish Council will not publish the contents or the response if it contains your personal opinion or the potential to misinform, mislead or misdirect the outcome of the consultation such as criticism of legitimate council decision or policy.

*Each response to you below is categorised and only those deemed seeking key clarification will be published. **Your list of 26+4 activities/enquiries has been deemed for wider publication, equally so, the response to your question as it provides valuable context and therefore is in the public interest and will be published during the consultation.***

Please see document 5.13 Consultation - Responses to Questions answered at www.hooe-pc.gov.uk/village-hall-project

Response to paragraph 1 (list of activities - no question)

Your list of 26 past users of the Village Hall and possible 4 future users is uplifting to read. The council is aware how popular the village hall has been in the past but is also acutely aware of how little the building was used both prior to and since it re-opened in 2022. Nostalgia cannot alone be a reason for spending taxpayers money keeping a building going if times have changed and the long-term need no longer exists. Lack of use is why communities up and down the country have lost their pubs, local shops, post offices and banks – the mantra being “use it or lose it”.

Ninfield and Catsfield village halls are very busy and well used by the communities they serve. The council has already identified that none of our local village halls (also including Boreham Street, Crowhurst, Ashburnham and Herstmonceux) are paid for by taxpayers, all being independent financed charitable trusts- all their funding is donations or hiring fees. Hooe is the last remaining local parish funded facility.

The community must urgently take on board the wishes of those residents, such as yourselves, who have spoken out wondering why existing community groups do not get behind the council and be more pro-active in lobbying or indeed take a more hands-on role in identifying and running more community events in the Hall and approach the council with their ideas. The council is about to make a critical decision on the future and it might be a wasted opportunity if these groups or proposed users do not now make their intentions clear or their reasons why the hall is unsuitable. The council have full decision making over the hiring costs and in many cases when they have been approached by fund raising or charity events, they have waived any fees, rather having the hall used than empty.

The council urgently wishes to hear from any groups who may have specific requirements that would enable them to utilise the Village hall better. Indeed, the council has approached many of them and

asked what it would take to return. After the consultation ends and the results are known, residents have a further opportunity to address the council at the Annual Parish Meeting on 29th May before the Village Hall Committee meets in June.

Ultimately, it is now up to those in the community who challenge and lobby the parish council to keep the facility to start to demonstrate how they will help achieve and maintain increased use in the long-term, not just turn up and say so at meetings. The parish council notes all the talk but is disappointed by the action.

Response to paragraph 2 (Where to go? question)

The answer regarding where the community will meet if the village hall and grounds are sold is two-fold. The official meetings of the council or polling station may not justify a building alone. Whilst the hall was closed for 6 months, these meetings were held at the Church or in a hireable room in Ninfield, just 1-2 miles away for residents. As for the social calendar of the village, it is clear the Church is a central place for the community and well utilised and even has parking, The council has already stated a desire to support it more financially, but unfortunately there are some legal barriers at present. The other local facilities at Ninfield are available less than 2 miles away and, as you point out, we have a thriving community pub, The Red Lion and nearby tea-shop/café Hope Cottage very close to the village. All these and the other local businesses, not just the village hall, goes to make a thriving community.

Please remember, no decisions have yet been made and all your comments and concerns, together with all other received have been noted by councillors.

Kind regards

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Residents 8&9 joint correspondence 16Apr24, verified

Dear Parish Councillors,

I wish to draw your attention to a number of omissions or inconsistencies on the consultation documents that have recently been delivered to this household. The sheet on which to record householders' votes did not include a section for comments to be written so I feel it necessary to pass on my observations to you all.

There were only two options available on the voting paper – to close and sell or to keep and maintain at high cost. In my opinion there should have been a third option – to maintain the hall in reasonable condition for use, without excessive expenditure. I question whether this has even been considered by those who appear to want to close the building.

In my opinion the letter that accompanies the voting paper sets out a prejudiced explanation of the potential cost of maintaining the village hall. The sums mentioned were arbitrary, with no independent verification as to their accuracy or indeed whether or not they were compulsory requirements. In setting out the random costs of the village hall there was no explanation as to why significant sums of money (at least £12,000) have been allocated to high-cost professionals, as detailed in my previous e-mail, which has been of little or no value to the village and created a financial shortfall in the accounts. Also, there was no consideration of the potential benefits the hall brings to the community – for meetings, functions, exhibitions, games, exercise, a book exchange, heritage centre as well as its regular use as an electoral polling station and parish council base for meetings. To my mind this was a shoddy portrayal of the situation with regard to the village hall, written with the primary intention to promote the vote to close the building. I question whether a consultation vote based on inaccurate or vague information may be considered a valid debate and also whether councillors approved the content of the accompanying document before it was released.

My understanding is that this “consultation” was to be conducted by a (neutral) third party but I note that the return envelope was addressed to the Clerk to the Parish Council at her home address. I question, therefore, what safeguards are in place to ensure this process is completed fairly and impartially. This is not made clear on the accompanying document.

Quite honestly, I see the proposal to close the village hall as an act of vandalism, by people who do not have the common sense to envisage the long-term damage to the village that would surely result from this misguided, hasty proposal which has clearly not been adequately discussed with the community at large. Please remember that as Parish Councillors you are here to serve this community, not to dictate. This can only be achieved by engaging with the community through dialogue, which I feel has so far been suppressed.

It gives me no pleasure to write to you in this way but I feel it is necessary given the passive conduct that I have seen from some Parish Councillors. As one who has lived here most of my life I have strong feelings for this village, its amenities and those who reside here and I feel it is not too harsh to suggest that the very fabric of life in this village may be damaged beyond repair if the village hall is closed.

This is not a criticism of all parish councillors as I believe there are those sitting around the council table who may share my concerns. It is said that all it takes for evil to prevail is that good men (and women) do nothing. All I can do is cast my vote and bring my concerns to your attention; it is for those among you with the will to do so, to stop this destruction of our village and its amenities whilst that decision remains in your hands. I urge you to reject the siren voices who would destroy your village hall because, long after those voices have walked away, those who follow in your footsteps will have to live with the consequences of the actions you take at this period in time.

Sent on behalf of,

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Residents 8&9 full response 22Apr24

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Thank you for your email which has been noted by all councillors. We have responded to your questions and any statements or inferences you have made that are false, in particular, direct your attention to our response to paragraph 5 with some urgency.

It is our intention during the consultation to publish the answers to questions from residents that may be of key significance to the community consultation on the website during the consultation period, such as any clarification sought or potential misinterpretation of the documents.

The Parish Council will not publish the contents or the response if it contains your personal opinion or the potential to misinform, mislead or misdirect the outcome of the consultation such as criticism of legitimate council decision or policy.

*Each response to you below is categorised and only those deemed seeking key clarification will be published. **No responses to you have been deemed for wider publication.***

Please see document 5.13 Consultation - Responses to Questions answered at www.hooe-pc.gov.uk/village-hall-project.

Response to paragraph 1 (Criticism of council decision/policy, no question)

The council decided against general comments on the consultation form since any member of the community, at any time, can forward their comments to the council, as indeed you have just done. We have received many already and each one will help inform councillors in their decisions. Councillors have seen the detailed results of a previous "comment" based consultation carried out and were concerned that the parish council had to infer and make a subjective decision on many comments - some weren't classifiable as for or against – the parish council wanted to avoid this and just receive a single clear preference.

Response to paragraphs 2&3 (suggestion of a less costly middle option, arbitrary costs, no question)

The nature of the buildings current condition and decline and likely maintenance costs (even if improvements were not carried out) could be significant enough in the short-medium term to warrant this community consultation on cost alone. Keeping it as it is with no prospect of parking to promote increased use is not seen as an option the council wish to explore at this time. The parish council is fully aware that this Village Hall decision for many people promotes nostalgia and other such feelings, however, the financial and other implications that taxpayers cannot ignore must be spelt out to them so they are able to make an informed choice. There is no viable middle option for the short to medium term or the parish council will just have to keep revisiting this topic, and we are well aware residents are already fed up with the time it's taken already.

I direct you to the website where you will see the most recent survey report (over 4 ½ years ago) "4.02 Sheppard Survey Report" suggesting works totalling £155K this does not include improvements. Even if only some of the most urgent repairs were spread out over a long period and paid for annually by taxpayers as we go would be sizeable annual increases, as every cost has to be divided by 210 taxpayers each year. The current running costs with no maintenance and no emergency costs are approx. £10 per taxpayer per year. If £20,000 needed spending in one year on

emergency or essential repairs, this would be a sudden increase of approx. £100 to that year's tax bill, a significant increase.

To prevent further deterioration in the building, such as the black mould example, this might require a low level of heating in winter months, this alone could cost a further £10 per taxpayer, a doubling of present running costs. As you can see, the loan option, which can spread these kinds of costs over a period up to 50 years does help spread the taxpayer liabilities but if taken out are long-term obligations that once taken cannot be undone, hence the requirements for community support. The verification of the example £100,000 loan stated in the documents is available on the website as document" 4.08a PWLB Fixed Rate Loan 100000 25yrs Est Costs WL 13Mar2024"

Response to paragraph 4 (Criticism of unexplained costs and bias in consultation, no question)

At the last meeting, which marked the end of the recent financial year, council issued a statement to explain the costs you refer to. Please see that at www.hooe-pc.gov.uk/council-notices/ document "7 Statement Financial Spend on Professional Services 08.04.2024"

I refer you also to the document 06 on www.hooe-pc.gov.uk/village-hall-projects-committee/ which are the minutes of the 11th March Village Hall Project Committee where you will find confirmation that all councillors debated at length and approved unanimously the content of the consultation documents in detail, all councillors having the opportunity to add or change content.

The parish council will not sugar coat the situation with the village hall as some want us to do. We have a duty to ensure any decisions we take are in the interest of our community and taxpayers and our legal obligations. This parish council is doing what no other parish council has done before regarding the Village Hall proposals, being realistic and transparent about the situation. You will find many parish councils might take this decision purely on cost grounds, particularly at this difficult time for parish council finances - we have chosen to give the community a say in defining the next period of the Village Halls existence and whether they wish it. It is not a listed building, it is not used sufficiently to justify the long-term repairs it needs, all local village halls are NOT paid for by taxpayers - YET - we have asked the community for their choice and parish council await that with interest.

Response to paragraph 5 (Potential libellous at an individual/Criticism of consultation procedure, no question)

Whilst a response to this paragraph was being finalised and before you'd had received that response, on Friday 19th April the full content of your email was posted on social media via Facebook group "Hooe (nr Battle, East Sussex) Community Group" under the name "xxx". Although this is a private group, it is freely available to join and had 256 members at that time and the post had been liked by 8 members.

Councillors asked the Chairman of the council to urgently contact the administrators of the group raising their concerns of the potentially libellous comments made regarding the trustworthiness of the Clerk to the Parish Council (in the context of using their home address to receive the responses to the consultation) were now also in the public domain. The Facebook administrators agreed with the council's argument and that it did not comply with the site's content standards and the post was taken down sometime on Sunday 21st by the admin.

Councillors were clear that these comments were totally unacceptable even before you made this public, but as you now have, councillors have asked me to convene a meeting for them to assess your comments and action to make public against the council's Vexatious Policy (August 2023) which you will find attached.

Councillors wish to make it very clear that all unsubstantiated claims or statements directed at individual councillors or their staff will be robustly challenged. The council is a corporate body and all decisions are ratified by that body – no one person makes decisions so should not be challenged, intimidated or abused at a personal level. Councillors suggest if you have any evidence or further clarification to support your comments, you urgently provide the Chairman with such information. Alternatively, if you feel your comments were badly composed, open to the wrong interpretation, written in haste or anger and wish to retract and apologise, councillors request you do this urgently, to avoid unnecessary council time and further expense.

The security aspects to protect the integrity of the consultation both from voter abuse or administrative issues were a confidential part of the Clerk's report and not discussed in public by councillors at the 11th March meeting to ensure no-one could use that information to gain any advantage. You may ask the council for more specific answers to any remaining concerns after the voting has been concluded and announced at 8th May meeting.

The outbound mailing was overseen by a third party and they have confirmed 206 letters were issued to all addresses in the 29 postcodes in the parish. As for the address on the return label, this is the official business address of the council and all envelopes returned remain sealed until opening at the next meeting to collate and announce the results. The Royal Mail response license ensures mail is returned to the official address only.

Response to paragraph 6,7,8 (Personal opinion, criticism of councillors, no question)

The building is well over 110 years old and has no significant TLC for many years, the council has a legal obligation to manage council assets appropriately. The council does not wish to get into a position where the building must close and further significant maintenance carried out if the community do not want to pay for it or use it anymore.

The parish council has most of the financial, technical and legal points answered about how they could proceed, what they don't have is a fuller picture of the communities wish regarding the future of the hall. Although meetings seem well attended and views are expressed, they are not the only views. There is never more than 10% of the electorate at meetings and many do not offer their views. To limit our decision making to only the views we hear at meetings, or those who shout loudest via email, would be democratically unacceptable to most people. A previous attempt at a consultation received only 39 subjective comments. The parish council has a duty to establish the actual views of the wider community, particularly those who up to now may be unaware of the situation and uninformed on key matters such as financial implications for them.

Your inference that the council has already decided to close and sell the hall is false. As you know, a decision has not been made until the council make it - I can confirm no motion has been passed to close and sell the Hall or otherwise. I can confirm, all meetings are held in public and on the record, no private meetings or groups of individual councillors get together to make decisions, as that would be illegal. It is up to each individual councillor to vote on this, it is for each of them to decide given the breadth of information they have now amassed on this project, and ultimately with the result of this consultation. All information is available on the website to everyone, nothing is kept back from voters.

Ninfield and Catsfield village halls are very busy and well used by the communities they serve. The council has already identified that none of our local village halls (also including Boreham Street, Crowhurst, Ashburnham and Herstmonceux) are paid for by taxpayers, all being independent financed charitable trusts- all their funding is donations or hiring fees. Hooe is the last remaining local parish funded facility.

The community must urgently take on board the wishes of those residents, such as yourselves, who have spoken out wondering why existing community groups do not get behind the council and be more pro-active in lobbying or indeed take a more hands-on role in identifying and running more community events in the Hall and approach the council with their ideas. The council is about to make a critical decision on the future and it might be a wasted opportunity if these groups or proposed users do not now make their intentions clear or their reasons why the hall is unsuitable. The council have full decision making over the hiring costs and in many cases when they have been approached by fund raising or charity events, they have waived any fees, rather having the hall used than empty.

The council urgently wishes to hear from any groups who may have specific requirements that would enable them to utilise the Village hall better. Indeed, the council has approached many of them and asked what it would take to return. After the consultation ends and the results are known, residents have a further opportunity to address the council at the Annual Parish Meeting on 29th May before the Village Hall Committee meets in June.

Ultimately, it is now up to those in the community, like yourselves, who challenge and lobby the parish council to keep the facility to start to demonstrate how they will help achieve and maintain increased use in the long-term, not just turn up and say so at meetings. The parish council notes all the talk but is disappointed by the action. The future of the village hall has blighted this village for many years and this council wish to bring it to a conclusion. The council cannot be accused of rushing this matter.

Please remember, no decisions have yet been made and all your comments and concerns, together with all other received have been noted by councillors.

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Residents 10&11 joint correspondence 26Apr24, verified

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To the members of Hooe Parish Council

As long-term residents of Hooe we are appalled at the decline of this village. We have lived here over 50% of our adult lives and have witnessed a village with a heart and social network to totally diminish.

In the last few years there has been much wrangling over a proposed village hall, with seemingly some support for a new hall sited on the recreation ground, a hall that would seat in excess of 100 and provide facilities for large gatherings, possibly weddings.

This new consultation is TELLING us that not only does the village not require a new hall, that it does not require the existing one!

It is not so far back that in the present hall we attended coffee mornings, jumble sales, afternoon teas, Harvest Suppers, Pilates and Yoga classes, heard the silver band practice, and attended a memorable Beetle Drive! All of these events could be re-generated with time and a genuine concern for the village and its inhabitants.

It would appear that some members of the present council have no desire to facilitate the success of Hooe Village:

Assuming the need for a Community Consultation, we do not understand that why in a village with so few houses it was necessary to spend money on posting out questionnaires, which could easily have been hand delivered by council members, and funding posters which could have been made up on A3 sheets and put on the council notice boards.

The Consultation gives only YES or NO options with respect to the Hall.

The Hall, which after a period of closure to carry out essential health and safety works, following a very successful Ukrainian afternoon tea, was re-opened and since that time has been boycotted by some members of the village and indeed former parish councillors.

It would appear that neither then or now that a business plan has been undertaken to understand the cost of maintaining and running the hall and the income required to do this.

We are convinced that if the decision is made to keep the existing hall that there are many villagers who could be prevailed upon to use their professional skills to carry out necessary maintenance works probably at reduced rates., including sponsorship.

Our last comment does however require the parishioners to be happy with our representatives on the council. It should be noted that as councillors that you are there to represent our views and should be directing these views to the Clerk. If f you do not feel that you can be objective - you should resign your position allowing others who have an interest in the life and soul of the village to stand in your place.

Has the present council investigated the origins of the hall. Are there any clauses that may prevent the selling and development of the land?

Given the amount of time and parishioner's money spent on investigating the building of a new hall, we are totally disgusted at the lack of time and interest spent on deciding future of the hall that formed the heart of this village for so many years.

We feel obliged to return the voting forms, confirming that I wish to keep the existing hall, but until such time as we are informed the genuine cost of itemised repair works required and its annual upkeep, it seems entirely irresponsible to expect parishioners to make an informed decision.

Yours sincerely,

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Residents 10&11 full response 7 May24

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Thank you for your email. The council has received several during the consultation and is pleased it has promoted discussion amongst the community, of course councillors will take on board your comments.

It was our intention during the consultation to publish the answers to questions from residents that may be of key significance to the community consultation on the website during the consultation period, such as any clarification sought or potential misinterpretation of the documents.

The Parish Council will not publish the contents or the response if it contains your personal opinion or the potential to misinform, mislead or misdirect the outcome of the consultation such as criticism of legitimate council decision or policy.

Although your correspondence came in before the closing date of the consultation, the reply is able to be issued and published fully now the consultation is closed. Please see document 5.14 Consultation - All Correspondence and Full responses at www.hooe-pc.gov.uk/village-hall-project

Response to 1,4,5,8,10 (Decline of community, past events, boycotts, volunteering).

The activities you refer to can all come back if the community wishes to organise them and approach the council for support. The council does not have the resources to promote, run and organise all community events. There has been an overwhelming request by the residents attending the Village Hall Project Committee meetings for the voluntary groups to return to using the village hall, particularly the coffee mornings, and that has not happened, and the residents should be given an explanation why. You suggest without a village hall the heart and social network dies, maybe the community groups should consider the views of the local community that are crying out for them to return to the village hall. The village hall cannot be the hub of the village if no one is using it.

Community groups have been contacted for comment on what it would take to return to the village hall - the arguments are those you'd expect - parking and kitchen facilities are the main two, hence the planned improvements. If community groups and other users find alternative facilities locally, that is to be welcomed too. All local venues have desperate funding issues for their premises and facilities - but Hooe Village hall is the only one within a 6-mile radius that is paid for by local taxpayers. They have to be considered too.

Response to paragraph 2 (Support for new village hall)

May I refer you to the minutes of the Village Hall Project Committee at www.Hooe-PC.gov.uk/village-hall-project/ Document "5.02 Village Hall Project Committee minutes 12.02.24" where you will find the discussion and motion passed unanimously by the council to reject the building of a new village hall on the recreation ground. I refer you to the document 4.0 pages 4-7 and associated sections in Appendix 1 and 2 regarding new build usage and detailing the requirements council would have to comply with

in order to satisfy planning authorities and financial providers that there was a demonstrated local need in the community and not for the provision of facilities for mostly outside users run like a business, such as for wedding receptions as you state. The only identified requirements by the community communicated to the council to that date in support of a larger building was a once-a-year Harvest Festival for 100+ and a local business wishing to have room for circa 70 Pilates/Yoga mats – not necessarily focused on localised community activities.

Response to paragraph 3 (Suggested leading consultation)

The consultation does not tell the community that it does not require any hall – it states the community need to decide for themselves given the facts if they wish to retain and pay more towards it.

The nature of the buildings current condition and decline and likely maintenance costs (even if improvements were not carried out) could be significant enough in the short-medium term to warrant this community consultation on cost alone. Keeping it as it is with no prospect of parking to promote increased use is not seen as an option the council wish to explore at this time. The parish council is fully aware that this Village Hall decision for many people promotes nostalgia and other such feelings, however, the financial and other implications that taxpayers cannot ignore must be spelt out to them so they are able to make an informed choice. There is no viable middle option for the short to medium term or the parish council will just have to keep revisiting this topic, and we are well aware residents are already fed up with the time it's taken already.

I direct you to the website where you will see the most recent survey report (over 4 ½ years ago) suggesting works totalling £155K this does not include improvements. Even if only some of the most urgent repairs were spread out over a long period and paid for annually by taxpayers as we go would be sizeable annual increases, as every cost has to be divided by 210 taxpayers each year. The current running costs with no maintenance and no emergency costs are approx. £10 per taxpayer per year. If £20,000 needed spending in one year on emergency or essential repairs, this would be a sudden increase of approx. £100 to that year's tax bill, a significant increase.

To prevent further deterioration in the building, such as the black mould example, this might require a low level of heating in winter months, this alone could cost a further £10 per taxpayer, a doubling of present running costs. As you can see, the loan option, which can spread these kinds of costs over a period up to 50 years does help spread the taxpayer liabilities but if taken out are long-term obligations that once taken cannot be undone, hence the requirements for community support.

The parish council will not sugar coat the situation with the village hall as some want us to do. We have a duty to ensure any decisions we take are in the interest of our community and taxpayers and our legal obligations. This parish council is doing what no other parish council has done before regarding the Village Hall proposals, being realistic and transparent about the situation. You will find many parish councils might take this decision purely on cost grounds, particularly at this difficult time for parish council finances - we have chosen to give the community a say in defining the next period of the Village Halls existence and whether they wish it. It is not a listed building, it is not used sufficiently to justify the long-term repairs it needs, all local village halls are NOT paid for by taxpayers - YET - we have asked the community for their choice and parish council await that with interest.

Response to paragraph 6,7,9,13,14 (Criticism of cost of consultation, lack of options, business plan, itemised repairs, lack of interest)

At the February meeting of the Village Hall Project Committee, councillors voted unanimously to consult the community, pay for promotion of it to ensure a wide participation and gave their reasoning - which you can establish from the minutes available on the website. I'm sure you are aware no former council ever asked the community in this way and provided the necessary depth of financial implications and usage analysis available in report 4.0 and Appendix 1 and 2 – this is where you will see the business plan investigations for all three options on the table prior to that decision. This single

document took over 60 hours to compile, the council has worked long and hard over the last year to finally bring reality, focus, transparency and integrity to this project.

Community support is a key element to any application for a grant or public works loan - without the result of this consultation the council would be unable to comply with these conditions and therefore may not be able to decide to Keep and Renovate without substantial community input. I'm sure you appreciate any council which decides to spend a significant amount of taxpayers' money should at least know they have a mandate to do it. The decision and procedure of mailing documents and widespread advertising was approved by councillors to ensure security, integrity and wide participation, ensuring every household in the village did not miss the opportunity.

At this stage the parish council is seeking a simple direction from the community. If we were to try to present in advance a complex variety of possibilities of what we might do and obtain the detailed costs of all these options, it was felt this would over complicate what in essence is a simple decision - does the community want the council to keep the hall (with a few sensible suggestions for improvements) at not an insignificant cost or does the community feel that money is better in their pockets over the long-term.

The council decided against general comments on the consultation form since any member of the community, at any time, can forward their comments to the council, as indeed you have just done. We have received many already and each one will help inform councillors in their decisions. Councillors have seen the detailed results of a previous "comment" based consultation carried out and were concerned that the parish council had to infer and make a subjective decision on many comments - some weren't classifiable as for or against - the parish council wanted to avoid this and just receive a single clear preference.

The costs of the consultation are approx. £5 per household. Considering that should the renovation option be enacted, each of these households could face a total long-term financial liability 100-200 times or more that amount, it was felt that this was value for money. I'm sure you know that any council spending that kind of money has a fiduciary duty to ensure everyone is informed of that possibility.

The building is well over 110 years old and has no significant TLC for many years, the council has a legal obligation to manage council assets appropriately. The council does not wish to get into a position where the building must close and further significant maintenance carried out if the community do not want to pay for it or use it anymore.

The parish council has most of the financial, technical and legal points answered about how they could proceed, what they don't have is a fuller picture of the communities wish regarding the future of the hall. Although meetings seem well attended and views are expressed, they are not the only views. There is never more than 10% of the electorate at meetings and many do not offer their views. To limit our decision making to only the views we hear at meetings, or those who shout loudest via email, would be democratically unacceptable to most people. A previous attempt at a consultation received only 39 subjective comments. The parish council has a duty to establish the actual views of the wider community, particularly those who up to now may be unaware of the situation and uninformed on key matters such as financial implications for them.

Response to paragraph 12 (Prevent selling and development)

Until council know what the community wants, it would have been an unnecessary use of time and money to investigate all the implications of selling and development, in the same way, council did not offer varying choices of different renovation and improvement options. If the community do not want the hall saved and the council agrees, those investigations will begin and council will see where they lead and keep everyone informed.

Response to paragraph 11 (Council members)

The representatives on the council are a matter for the voters to decide at election time, however, there have been 2 vacancies on the council advertised in the last 3 months that have each attracted only one applicant, so there have been opportunities for people to get involved should they wish.

Please remember, no decisions have yet been made and all your comments and concerns, together with all others received have been noted by councillors.

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Residents 12 correspondence 9May24, verified

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Thank you for sending through the results of the survey.

This now raises some issues obviously as the majority have voted in favour of keeping the Village Hall. So, I have put down some thoughts that hopefully might help the Council, just my thoughts I am not claiming to be an expert, but sometimes the benefit of not directly involved enables a different and unemotional view. If the Hall is to survive moving forward and the Council do decide to follow the results of the consultation, then they have some big challenges ahead.

1. The Village Hall needs be able to “stand on its own two feet” it has to generate enough income to pay for itself. It has to move forward on a more business-like basis and needs someone on the Council or reporting to the Council with specific responsibility for driving that.
2. There needs to be a budget for the Village Hall – in order to establish what level on income is needed to sustain it each year without just reverting to maximising the precept every year.
3. The community has to come together, we can’t have splinter groups – those that have been most vocal about keeping the Hall haven’t been using the Village Hall – that can’t continue and so the Council need to find a way to resolve that – I am not suggesting it was or is the Council’s fault – but the reality is that the responsibility lies with them – although those parishioners who have been very vocal need to step up and all differences need to be put aside.
4. There needs to be some thought on how to attract bookings to the Hall – I often hear “Where are the youngsters” – the reality is that they are at home in their bedrooms on their devices, kids are not excited by a “Coffee morning” at the Village Hall, it isn’t cool and even if they were to be dragged along, they would most likely spend the whole time glued to their phones. The Village Hall needs to almost be “re-branded” to have any chance of appealing to a younger audience.
5. There does need to be some investment in the Hall over and above the statutory requirements – decent seating, kitchen facelift, less plain and dull décor, modern toilets – it needs to be a welcoming modern space. At the moment it is a tired, dull building with uncomfortable chairs, dated crockery and kitchen appliances. It absolutely fits the traditional “Village Hall” from the last century – that is not appealing to today’s younger generation and potential users from the local area.
6. A large % of the Community voted to keep it – they also need to now stand up and be counted – they wanted it, they need to use it, we can’t have an expensive white elephant just because it makes us feel all warm and cosy about having a community, a building rarely makes a community, people make a community, the Council have to try and find a way to get more people engaged in using the Village Hall and part of doing that is to now invest a bit to make it more appealing, especially as they are competing with newer, more modern facilities in the surrounding villages.
7. The small garden area also could do with a facelift – maybe a patio area, some decent outside seating, a bit of planting – low maintenance but make it a usable welcoming area ?

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Residents 12 full response 5Jun24

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Thank you for your email dated 9th May regarding your views on the Village Hall consultation result; resident's views are always considered and appreciated. Apologies for the delay in replying to you.

It would not be inappropriate at this stage to give a full reply to each of your points since the council themselves have not met to discuss the implications of the result and decide any further actions. The Chairman (of the VHPC) has asked me to assure you that he has noted your 7 points and will ensure each of them is included in discussion points raised at the meeting on 19th June. If you are unable to

attend the meeting please let me know and I will ensure you receive a further detailed responses after councillors have discussed it further.

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End of document – last updated 5th June 2024