

Findon Village Hall Extension – Past, Present and Future

Introduction:

As is very widely known in the village, the project to extend the Village Hall has run into serious problems. This has resulted in a great deal of discussion and concern around the village exacerbated by a dearth of hard information.

The purpose of this statement is to provide everyone with a summary explaining where we are, how we got here and what we hope will be the way forward.

The village hall is administered by an independent charity called the Findon Village Hall Trust (FVHT). There is a second, separate, trust whose function is simply to hold the legal title to the land and buildings. FVHT manages the day-to-day activities at the hall through a committee consisting of members elected at the AGM and representatives of local associations.

History:

FVHT conceived the idea of upgrading the facilities and options ranging from full demolition and rebuild to simply carrying on the status quo were considered. The purposes were to improve appeal to hirers, flexibility and accessibility amongst other things. A selection of options were put to a public vote in 2013 and the favoured proposal was for an extension onto the rear of the existing building. The cost at that time was estimated at £200,000.

Over the next few years various activities took place including fundraising and a decision to include renovations to the existing hall as part of the project – these have been implemented over the period since that time. Eventually, architects were appointed, plans for the extension were prepared and a planning application submitted in May 2017.

Unfortunately, it was at around this stage that things started to go awry or perhaps rather over-optimistic assumptions made. The budget was always going to be tight so the entire planned budget was allocated to the building itself. In order to stretch the funds as far as possible other assumptions were also made with respect to tasks which could be omitted from the scope of work at this stage and undertaken later. These included, for example, fitting the final floor covering over the concrete screed and the exterior landscaping work. It was assumed that further money could be raised and income from normal activities plus, where possible, the use of volunteer labour, would cover these items. Volunteer labour has, for example successfully been used to decorate the “new” end of the main hall.

In 2018 a contractor was appointed after only two responses were received to a number of requests for tender and building work started. No contractor was prepared to enter a fixed price arrangement. The plan was that the work would be completed before May

2019. As is all too commonly the case – once work started things which could not have been known before the start were discovered and had to be resolved. Examples of this sort of thing include the discovery that the joists supporting the floor under the stage area had been sitting on bare earth, since the 1930's and were rotten. To add insult to injury, the spaces between the joists had been filled with concrete. This all had to be removed, the area prepared and a concrete floor laid - none of which had been expected. The amount of waste material that needed to be removed from this area greatly exceeded forecast requiring significant additional costs.

As work progressed it also became clear that some tasks that were essential before the extension could be used, such as upgrading utility supplies to cope with the needs of a bigger hall, had been overlooked both by the architects and FVHT. It also became clear that some parts of the estimate were incomplete and the cost of bricks, for example, represented a significant overspend.

Finally, issues emerged with the adequacy of the structural design work on the steel roof beams. This required the engagement of a replacement structural engineer and modifications to the work completed. Conceivably, monies might have been recovered from the architects and/or structural engineer but it is too late for a realistic claim now.

The contingency allowance in the budget was not generous and, given the above, it can surprise no-one that the budget was exhausted before the work planned was complete. The total spend on the extension to date is just under £210,000. Work stopped abruptly in early 2019.

Discussions between FVHT and Findon Parish Council with respect to the Parish Council potentially funding the completion of the project by means of a Public Works Loan opened in March 2019 and have been progressing since then. The figure prepared by FVHT as a preliminary budget at that time and excluding both costs that FPC would be statutorily obliged to take on and also some other costs now found to be necessary, was £99,000.

Current Status:

The extension is weatherproof but unfinished and unusable. Work that was planned but has not been completed (including tasks intended to be completed by volunteer labour) include:

- Finishing guttering and drainpipes plus connection to soakaway
- Supply and fit sanitary ware
- Complete external drainage connection to sewer
- External paving and access levelling
- Complete unfinished internal plumbing, gas fitting and electrical work. This includes boiler commissioning and (minimal) kitchen.
- Finish plasterboard installation and plaster skim throughout
- Complete fire alarm installation and certify

Internal joinery
Internal decoration
Clear site and remove debris etc.

It should also be noted that the local authority Building Control Officer has expressed concerns relating both to the finished roof structure and the load transmission into the walls and to the foul drainage arrangement. These are both unknown quantities at present but will require resolution. The roof question may be a formality or it may require remedial work. The foul water drain will require rectification work.

Planning consent was granted on condition that a covered, secure cycle rack was provided and the car park modified to take 18 cars (double parked, end to end). The plan was not modified to include these works.

If this list included everything necessary to complete and open the extension **and** the FVHT had those funds, then a budget around the lower figure that has been mentioned in the past – around £40,000 - might have been appropriate. Note that this would still leave, for example, only a concrete screed floor, all the landscaping work and the new utility connections all the way to the road on the “to do” list – not to mention the cycle rack and car park works.

The Future:

Findon Parish Council (FPC) have agreed to pursue a possible Public Works Loan on behalf of the village and repayable by the village. It is important to understand that this is not a foregone conclusion. There are three stages:

- FPC must evaluate the project in accordance with the guidelines for these specific loans, they have no discretion in this matter. They must satisfy themselves also that the project would represent good value for money to the community as a whole. This task includes preparing a fully costed scope of work and competitive tenders for the work based upon a fixed price-fixed deliverables contract covering the entire job. This is a task requiring professional advice and significant cost in itself and FVHT is grateful to FPC for offering this assistance. This stage is not yet complete, covid has not helped and changes at FVHT have also complicated matters.

If and when FPC have completed their assessment, consulted with residents on the concept and gained a sufficient level of support, the tendering process will commence to enable a fixed price proposal to be formally put to all residents by way of referendum. Should residents approve the proposal FPC will then be in a position to apply for a Public Works Loan.

If FPC are successful in securing a loan and the village as a whole approve the scheme

then FVHT understand the work will be supervised by qualified professionals responsible to FPC and ensuring both conformity to the specification and value for money. The list of cost headings is as follows:

- Site Prep/re-opening
e.g. Insurance, site supervision, temporary electrical power and site protection (H&S etc)
- Professional fees – architects plus others
- Completion costs
Completing work which was in the original scope but which was unfinished when work stopped e.g. plaster-boarding walls, plastering, decoration, meeting structural requirements.
- Flooring throughout the extension
- Plumbing (water/heating and gas)
- Kitchen equipment supply and fitting
- Provision of new gas and water supply from the mains in the road
The existing supply does not have capacity to meet the increased requirement
- Additional costs associated with drainage requirements
It has been discovered that the provision of sewer/drainage arrangements for the extension are not as straightforward as had been envisaged.
- Landscaping to make good and make safe after the other work is complete
Note that this will include measures to ensure people cannot fall down the sheer drop from the garden into the access area to the rear and southern side of the building
- Provision of a covered and secure cycle rack (condition of planning consent)
- “TOPO” Survey – 3D topological survey the Parish Council is required to undertake.
- Modify/mark out the car park for 18 parking spaces (condition of planning consent)
- Miscellaneous small items and sundries
- Contingency allowance
No project like this can start without a contingency allowance; things will go wrong and this always leads to higher costs, therefore a reasonable provision for such events must be included in any budget.

FVHT are in no position to provide a breakdown of these costs because the work to evaluate them is being undertaken by FPC and is not yet finalised. FVHT understand that the £170,000 in the public domain is merely a provisional and indicative figure.

Conclusion:

The FVHT committee hope that this statement clarifies the situation relating to the village hall extension past, present and, as far as we can for the moment, future. We are painfully aware of the discussion and distress within the village that has been caused by this saga and the dearth of actual information which has led to understandable confusion and speculation. We hope that this will enable us all to accept that what is done is done – and was done in good faith and with the best of intentions by unpaid volunteers. We hope that everyone will support FPC in their effort to support us. We also guarantee that FVHT will offer FPC any and every assistance that they want including the offer of voluntary labour - should they be able to accept it within the Public Works Loan rules.

Then we can all pull together and look forward to a rejuvenated, upgraded and altogether better village hall that we can all enjoy and pass on to future generations.

By the way – we really need volunteers to be the new committee secretary and a new bookings secretary (the latter will be given their head to implement a new, on-line bookings system as part of a new website) – please contact chair@findonvillagehall.net if you are interested