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1.0 Introduction

Barrowden Village Hall Committee has been successful at securing Awards for All funding to help establish a plan for future provision of community facilities in Barrowden. In 2017, the Village Hall Committee appointed Focus Consultants to assist in delivering the project. Following a process of consultation with the local community via a paper questionnaire, online survey and face-to-face interviews with residents and user groups, a number of key criteria for the Village Hall were established.

The village has a high proportion of older people and this is set to rise. It also has a relatively high proportion of young people in the 10-14 and 16-17-year age group. Barrowden is in the 10% most deprived areas in England for Barriers to Housing and Services and in the 10% most deprived LSOA's in England for Geographical Barriers. There is a strong sense of community and a good range of community activities but consultation identified that there is potential for people to feel lonely and isolated. Much of the community activity in the village is focused on the village hall.

In a number of ways, the village hall is fit for purpose – it is a reasonably sized site, central to the village and accessible to most residents. However, it has undergone a series of essential refurbishments and alterations, and it is thought to be nearing the end of its usable life. Previous inspections of the property have identified a number of problems with the building which if not addressed will eventually impact on operation and service.

The consultation process identified that over 54% of people felt that the village hall does not meet their needs; frequent concerns about the needs of both young people and an ageing population were emphasised throughout. 62.4% stated that they would not be able to continue with their activities at an alternative location due to Barrowden's rurality and lack of public transport. 67.4% of people said that there were facilities and activities needed in Barrowden that aren't currently available.

In terms of facilities, the most important new community provision is identified as a large, flexible hall space as well as operational kitchen/catering facilities and parking. The types of activities that people stated they would like to participate in if facilities were improved are indoor sports and exercise, meetings and social functions. The potential for a modern larger facility that could host sports activities is acknowledged as an exciting opportunity and at the forefront of many people's desires for a new facility. However, it must be appreciated that a sports hall-type facility would be difficult to fund, and potentially underused.

This paper sets out the options considered for addressing this challenge.

It should be noted that in terms of the needs in the village, these can be addressed by looking at the activities delivered rather than specifically a building and will need the local community to develop, deliver and sustain these activities. However, a community space is required in order to deliver these activities and as identified above, it is considered that some form of community space will continue to be required.

2.0 Options

The five options considered were:

- A: Do nothing
- B: Refurbish the existing village hall
- C: Refurbish the existing village hall and build a new sports facility on the Recreation Ground
- D: Demolish the existing village hall and build a new village hall on the site of the existing village hall
- E: Demolish the existing village hall and build a new village hall on the Recreation Ground

The key criteria against which the options were assessed were identified through analysis of the consultation findings and were identified as follows:

- Provides access for all
- Provides improved kitchen, catering and heating facilities
- Provides a more aesthetically pleasing building to hire
- Ability to accommodate more sports activities and provide a wider range of services
- Provides activities for children/teenagers and mitigates intergenerational tensions
- Ability to improve the health and wellbeing of the village
- Provides additional car parking

Each option was scored against the six criteria with a score of 0-2 with 0 meaning the option did not address the criteria at all and 2 meaning the option could fully address the criteria. The scoring is shown in the table below:

Options Scoring					
Criteria	Do Nothing	Refurbish	Refurb + New Build	New Build	New Build on Rec
Provides access for all	1	1	1	2	0
Provides improved kitchen, catering and heating facilities	0	1	1	2	2
Provides a more aesthetically pleasing building to hire	0	1	1	2	2
Ability to accommodate more sports activities and provide a wider range of services	0	1	2	2	2
Provides activities for children/teenagers and mitigates intergenerational tensions	0	1	1	1	1
Ability to improve the health and wellbeing of the village	0	1	2	2	1
Provides additional car parking	0	0	2	1	2
	1	6	10	12	10

3.0 Analysis

A: Do nothing

This is considered the least appropriate option moving forward as it does not address the criteria identified. It is acknowledged that the village hall, built in 1927, is now approaching the end of its life and it is recognised that not all community needs necessarily have to be met in one place.

If nothing is done, the village hall will eventually reach the end of its life and cease to serve as an adequate venue.

The needs analysis and consultation undertaken with the local community has highlighted a lack of alternative facilities within easy reach for local residents, particularly in view of the inadequate public transport and distinct rurality of the village. The process further revealed the need for improvements to the village hall in order to provide a more diverse range of activities and services for a range of generations, and in order to help address social isolation.

A continuation of the current offer would only serve to aggravate any existing isolation and would fail to address any of the essential criterion aforementioned. This option would not improve the health and wellbeing of the village, provide improved facilities, make the hall more aesthetically pleasing or provide more parking due to the limitations of the current site. Consultation revealed the widespread desire for the village hall to expand its bookings-only function to serve as a community drop-in facility; only adaptation to the present organisation and management of the hall can meet this need.

The only tangible benefit of maintaining the current provision is that the central location is preserved. The consultation process revealed that the vast majority of users walk to the village hall. As one of the strategic priorities is providing access for all, any movement towards the fringes of the village would have a detrimental effect to this fundamental criterion.

Risks: The key risk with this option is that the hall will eventually become unfit for purpose, making it increasingly unattractive to current user groups and new users. It will be difficult to attract more people to hire the venue for functions (which is their primary source of income). Eventually the hall would cease to be sustainable operationally and would close, leaving Barrowden without an important community asset.

B: Refurbish the existing Village Hall

The second option considered was to refurbish the existing hall. In the last few years the hall has been refurbished and purposed exclusively as a hire venue for community group and private parties. A new kitchen was kitted and an extensive refurbishment programme has been undertaken, although the consensus is that it will need refurbishing again. This included a thorough redecoration, refurbishment of the toilet facilities, new flooring and supplementary heating was installed in the main hall. In addition, there is a ramp which enables easy access for those with disabilities or children in prams.

This was the second lowest scoring option in the analysis above. Refurbishment of a similar nature to previous attempts would serve only to prolong the eventual decline of the hall and wouldn't provide a facility fit for future generations. Although the overall hall size is sufficient for most activities hosted in the village, this option alone would fail to create any additional smaller meeting spaces or storage areas, thereby failing to accommodate new activities and services that require more space. In particular there is a desire for some indoor sports provision. This does not need to be a sports hall but the hall should provide flexibility for activities such as table tennis, indoor bowls, new age curling etc.

This option could make the hall more welcoming and attractive to those looking to hire for functions, and would address the need for improved kitchen, catering and heating facilities. Improvements to the building alone would provide the capacity for some sports and new activities, but not guarantee the provision of a wider range of services for children/teenagers or to enhance health and wellbeing. In this case, the activity is more important than the facility in addressing these factors.

A refurbishment would meet the requirements with regards to providing access for all; the central location of the village hall is a necessity.

Refurbishment schemes tend to be a compromise and higher contingencies are required due to unforeseen elements when uncovering/opening up. The existing building fabric would have been improved but not to new build standards.

Risks: The key risk with this option is that despite the significant expense involved in refurbishment, the hall is unlikely to be fully fit for purpose and would not fully meet the needs identified in the consultation. As indicated above, refurbishment schemes tend to be a compromise with higher risks due to unforeseen elements when uncovering/opening up. The Hall has also experienced recent refurbishments; such alterations improved the usability of the hall and generated more user activity but are limited in their ability to affect long term change.

C: Refurbish the existing Village Hall and build a new sports facility on the Recreation Ground

This option would suffer from the same limitations as Option B but would address more of the listed criteria. Although refurbishment of a similar nature to previous attempts would serve only to prolong the eventual decline of the hall, an additional sports facility would be able to accommodate more sports activities and provide a wider range of services. Such provision would have the capacity to host intergeneration activities and would cater for all ages.

A stand-alone sports venue would play a significant role in improving the health and wellbeing of the village, and there are fewer spatial limitations to the Recreation Ground, allowing for more parking. This option would create a larger, fit for purpose venue that could accommodate many of the needs established throughout consultation with the community. The need for sports and exercise activities, both indoor and outdoor, were prevalent in discussions with most residents, and are thought to be a way of providing for all generations. A facility on the Recreation Ground also has scope for incorporating new playground equipment – a zip wire or exercise equipment – into the development as complementary to the existing offer.

A new facility would enable the village to develop a range of alternative services and activities to better meet the needs of the community and secure a diversified stream of income.

The exact location of any proposal would need to be confirmed; the Recreation Ground is uneven and already hosts the Barrowden and Wakerley Cricket Club pavilion and children's playground. Developments would have to be wary of disruption to existing activity, the spatial requirements, and acknowledge the difficulties adopted in deciding to locate the facility at the fringes of the village. The colocation of village assets is important to complementing the wider management of village facilities.

The main limitation of this option is associated with the cost of a new build sports facility in tandem with refurbishment or running repairs of the village hall. Refurbishment schemes tend to be a compromise with higher risks due to unforeseen elements when uncovering/opening up. However, the village hall alone would not need to meet all requirements established by the consultation process, and a refurbishment would make it more attractive to hire and provide improvements to the kitchen and catering facilities. Equally, the location of new build on the Recreation Ground would not be accessible for all, as the consultation exposed the necessity of a central location.

Any proposed addition to village facilities must consider the wider implications on wider village asset management; Barrowden's primary facilities must be considered in tandem – a sports facility distanced from the village hall might diminish the number of activities held in the centre of the village and would have no cooperation with the community shop adjacent to the current site. The prospect of village assets such as the shop, the hall and the surgery co-locating as a means of providing a better, broader offer for Barrowden's residents should be taken into account.

Option C also scores the highest for its capacity to enhance activity for all generations. Sport is considered to be intergenerational, and a new build on the Recreation Ground would cater for younger generations less likely to be impacted by having to drive.

Risks: The key risk with this option is that refurbishment of the village hall would not provide a social facility for future generations, only prolonging the eventual closure. The cost of refurbishment and a new build is also a preventative factor. Although a new build would be preferred as a means of meeting all of the needs recognised by the consultation with the community, locating the facility on the Recreation Ground would distance most village hall users who would ideally walk to the venue. Equally, a solely sports-orientated facility would be challenging to fund.

D: Demolish the existing Village Hall and build a new Village Hall on the site of the existing Village Hall

This option would create a larger, fit for purpose hall that would be able to provide the facilities and accommodate the activities needed by the local community. A new facility will better meet the needs of residents and be more energy efficient and cost effective to run. This option reflects the opinions of the majority of local people consulted, directly supports key local strategies including Rutland County Council's Core Strategy and Strategic Plan for Culture and Leisure.

This was the highest scoring option and will result in an energy efficient, low maintenance and accessible building which has been designed in a way to support user groups both current and proposed. The existing site means the option would continue to be easily accessible for most residents and would protect the services on which residents are reliant. This option would deliver the project outcomes of providing improved kitchen and catering facilities, and a better designed hall to accommodate functions, sports activities and a wider range of services. Most importantly, a new hall would enable activities to be better tailored to reducing social isolation through an increase in local groups and open events and would remain central to the village.

This option would enable the village to deliver improved activities that would encourage people to be active and healthy and reduce social isolation. The main limitation of this option is the existing parameters of the village hall site allowing little leeway for an increased hall size and would not guarantee an adequate supply of parking to match future activity. However, using the existing site would remove any barriers associated with land ownership as the Village Hall Committee Trust already own and operate the site. There is scope to negotiate land use surrounding the hall as a means of securing more space for parking.

A new build also has the potential to either co-opt the adjacent shop, or to draw more visitors to it, successfully benefitting another village asset and creating a synergy across village facilities. Co-location of facilities was identified as important in the consultation.

It is important to recognise that the provision of a new facility does not guarantee improvements to the activities and services offered to residents of Barrowden. Progress against, and amelioration of, intergenerational tensions social isolation can only be addressed through an improvement to the types of activity offered at a new facility. Local community engagement is an important factor in addressing the needs of the project; such engagement will be better enabled by a new facility but would still be heavily reliant on committed volunteers.

It is assumed that under this option, additional sports facilities could be developed at the recreation ground as a second phase of the community facilities plan. This could either a new build facility of even some form of temporary structure such as a sports dome.

Risks: The main risk of a new build option is the discontinuity of services that the village hall currently provides. The consultation revealed that the majority of users could not carry on their activities at an alternative venue. There is scope for St Peters Church, upon completion of the Reordering project, to host some activities. However, the church is restricted by a lack of parking and would therefore suffer from similar limitations as the current hall. In addition, the assumption of a future phase of sports provision on the recreation ground will provide funding challenges.

E: Demolish the existing Village Hall and build a new Village Hall on the Recreation Ground

This option would create a larger, fit for purpose hall that would be able to provide the facilities and accommodate the activities needed by the local community. A new facility will better meet the needs of residents and be more energy efficient and cost effective to run. This option reflects the opinions of the majority of local people consulted, directly supports key local strategies including Rutland County Council's Core Strategy and Strategic Plan for Culture and Leisure.

This was the third highest scoring option. This option would facilitate improvements to the kitchen and catering facilities, be a more aesthetically pleasing building to hire, and would be more accessible for events as there is a greater capacity for parking spaces on the Recreation Ground. New build options also have the capacity to be tailored for particular uses, and the hall could therefore incorporate storage space, smaller meeting rooms, and an appropriately sized hall to cater for a wider range of services and activities. A broader, community hub type function could build partnerships with other service providers so that appropriate services can be sought out to meet village needs. Services could be delivered in-house, or the hall could signpost residents to other services in the local area.

The strategic location of the Recreation Ground would also grant the opportunity to host both indoor and outdoor activities and events. However, the location is the most detrimental factor; the consultation revealed the importance of a central location for the village's main service asset, and the ageing population would be less inclined to use a facility that they could not walk to. The colocation of village assets is an important factor; the village hall is frequently used by residents in part because of the centrality of the hall to the village.

A new build option on another site could allow for a continuity of services as the former hall could stay open during the construction phase. However, it is likely that the current hall and land would need to be sold in order to fund any new development.

Risks: The main risks of a new build option on the Recreation Ground are that it might worsen social isolation as many of Barrowden's residents, especially the older generations, would be less inclined to walk to the fringes of the village.

As aforementioned, any proposed addition to village facilities must consider the wider implications on wider village asset management; Barrowden's primary facilities must be considered in tandem. Village assets could be complementary but must not be in competition. In view of the forthcoming St Peter's Church Reordering development, complete with a meeting room and events space, the village needs to designate functions...