

Village Hall Working Group Report.

March 2019.

This group was mandated by Ermington Parish Council in 2015. Its initial remit was to establish whether the residents of Ermington Parish wanted a village hall and if they did what they would use it for. A household survey and a survey with all of the existing groups and clubs were undertaken. 89% of respondents wanted a village hall and 23 of the 24 groups confirmed this desire. This information gave the parish council a firm mandate to develop the village hall project.

Since that time the group has dedicated a great deal of time and efforts to making this project a reality for all in the Parish.

In 2019, the requirement for a village hall remains and as the village experiences the loss and dilapidation of those remaining community venues, the need is becoming more acute.

This Parish is geographically large, containing small hamlets and outlying houses and farms, some of which are two or three miles away. To bring the community together and develop cohesion, there needs to be a place and reasons for people to meet.

In the last ten years the village has experienced the loss of the only remaining shop and the loss of half of the pub. The school has become part of a Beacon federation and as such is now a private business. At the same time the population of the village has increased with the construction of the Spires and other individual properties that are being built around the village. There is no reliable public transport and there are no safe cycle paths to enable residents to cycle around the parish. All parishioners are entirely dependent on cars.

The remaining community venues all have significant issues that make the running of groups and clubs difficult for the organisers and impossible for a large number of our residents who have mobility problems. None of them lend themselves to the development of community.

The church is on the top of a steep hill and has large steps to mount before it is possible to enter the building. Although large, the fixed pews make it extremely difficult to run and club or group there. The heating is not sufficient for such a large space so people attending, are invariably cold. There are no toilets. There is no kitchen and no storage space. The PCC are not able to move the pews so they remain a physical barrier to a great many activities.

The school hall is now part of the Beacon Federation and is very expensive to hire, too expensive for most small groups and clubs. The hall is small and insufficient to host plays, concerts and other productions, including the schools. As it is a school hall, clubs and organisations are not permitted to use the kitchen so, although it exists, it is not available to the community. There are no chairs in the hall so the group organisers are required to bring their own. There are no storage facilities, so groups and clubs have to take and remove all of their equipment on every occasion. When the bottom playground is used as a car park, people attending the event, including the organisers have to climb long steep steps with all of their equipment. The restricted parking around the rest of the village make it impossible for anyone with any mobility problems to access the hall safely and easily. There are steps into the hall in both entrances and no ramps.

The Pre School has adjacent car parking, is on the level and is accessible. It does have toilets and a kitchen but its small size prohibits its use as a community facility.

The Reading Rooms are in the centre of the village but on the main thoroughfare making entering and exiting extremely hazardous for all. For those with mobility issues, it is practically impossible to access this building safely or easily. There is nowhere nearby to park so it is not possible to drop people off, although the First and Last are extremely generous with their car park. Both rooms in this building are too small for many of the clubs and activities that people have said they would be interested in. They are far too small for productions, family celebrations, physical activity groups etc and therefore in their current form, are of little use in developing a community hub for the village. There is no storage space, no kitchen and only one toilet. The building itself, is in a state of morbid dilapidation with very serious structural problems. It would cost a considerable amount of money to repair and upgrade this building, which, in its current form, would still be unfit for the needs of the parish.

Despite its size and growing population, Ermington remains one of the few parishes without a community hall. The lack of a community place is having a serious effect on community cohesion at a time when all Government plans are focused on the development of community resource and community cohesion. This is the direction of travel for future health provision.

We in the Working group believe that the parishioners of Ermington deserve to have a community facility that is: big enough to cater for a diverse set of groups and clubs, that is accessible to all, that is warm and dry, that has a kitchen and toilets and that is pleasurable to

attend. We are extremely aware of the current debate about the suitability of the chosen location but the need for a hall remains and is pressing.

The Working group remains committed to this explicit need and looks forward to further debates with the Parish Council following the elections.

Nicky Scutt.

Chair of the Village Hall working group.