

# **Locks Heath Memorial Hall, 122 Locksheath Park Road, SO31 6LZ – Proposal to retain facility as an asset for Locks Heath community use**

## **Background**

Locks Heath Memorial Hall (the “Hall”) was built on a parcel of land gifted by Mr Louis Lynn, the first churchwarden of the church of St John the Baptist, Locks Heath (SJLH). It was financed through a number of public fund raising activities, loans and church collections. The Hall was originally going to be known as Parish Room but was changed to ‘Memorial Hall’ in memory of those from the parish who had lost their lives in the Great War. It was originally a condition of the gift of the site that it should be used for “the benefit of the members of the Church of England in the parish of Locks Heath”. However, the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of SJLH (as Administrative Trustees) did not seek to run the Hall on a denominational basis and the Hall account was always kept separate from church funds.

The early 1960s saw a change of ownership to Fareham Borough Council (FBC), principally because the income was insufficient to maintain the facility, which was being subsidised by the congregation of SJLH; the PCC of that time could not allow this to continue. However, the facility was considered to be an important and central part of village life. So, following fears that the Hall might have to be closed and demolished, the PCC decided to sell the site to FBC and form an independent ‘Community Association’ to manage the Hall.

In 2016, the Community Association failed to find the new members needed to maintain a viable constitution. Given the poor state of the building, existing users were encouraged to find alternative facilities, with a view to the site being sold. In September 2017, FBC made a decision to put the site up for sale. In August 2018, FBC concluded that the Hall “has very limited value as a community asset, and after taking all matters into account should not be registered as such”.

## **Vision**

It is the view of the leadership team of SJLH that, in today’s environment, this facility has a viable and long term future as a community hub, delivering vital services, as it has for 95 years. If the facility is lost, it would be a needless and irreversible waste of a valuable community asset. It is also felt that this is an important local heritage site and the memory of those lost in WW1 should be retained, as intended in the original founders’ vision, particularly as we commemorate the centenary of the end of the Great War this year. We are certain that these views are shared by the majority of our parishioners and indeed, may well be shared by the majority

of those who live in Locks Heath and the surrounding area. We have not yet been able to demonstrate this strength of feeling, as we did not think it would have been helpful to stir up a campaign to save the Hall until we (jointly with FBC) had first formed a credible, attractive and long-term alternative to closure.

A new, modern and appealing Hall could provide a means for alternative approaches to community service delivery. This would be underpinned by the principles of unified community involvement, led by SJLH and FBC working in close partnership. We could facilitate this by providing a place where different local (and potentially national) community providers can come together and effectively address the issues that matter most to our community. It will be a facility that addresses today's local pressures, but will be future-proofed, to ensure another 95 years of local service delivery can be achieved, as priorities change.

### **Why is this facility still required?**

We recognise that FBC has decided not to register the Hall as an 'Asset of Community Value', based largely on the facts that:

- Its usage was low before its closure in 2017
- The building was in a poor material condition, with a need for 'significant investment' (estimated at circa £60K at that time)

These facts seem stark, but we submit that a new, purpose built facility would indeed attract many groups of users from our community. Some may have been previous users of the current Hall and others would be new. A new Hall could be constructed on the existing site, to be:

- Versatile and flexible, in its use of space and ability to accommodate groups of all sizes, from one-on-one counselling, to birthday parties and communal meals.
- Accessible to all, particularly those with disabilities and the elderly.
- Toddler friendly.
- Compliant with all food hygiene and preparation regulations, to enable efficient and effective cooking and serving of food to groups of all sizes. (an activity which we practise regularly in SJLH).
- Available for contingency emergency accommodation, in the event of a local crisis, i.e. it would have space for temporary sleeping accommodation and good sized toilet and washroom facilities.

- Attractive, comfortable and with internal spaces that are aesthetically pleasing, i.e. much more than a traditional 'village hall'.

The other key feature of this facility is proximity. One mile can be a lengthy and arduous journey (particularly in bad weather) for a young mother with a pushchair, an elderly person with a walking aid, or a person in a wheelchair.

The most recent data on parish demographics can be found in the 2011 Census, which provides some insight into where our areas of need may lie. Some key extracts from this Census data are provided below:

The Age Profile of the parish in 2011 was:

0 to 4	550	5%
5 to 15	1,550	13%
16 to 64	7,450	64%
65+	2,100	18%

(Totals to nearest 50)

- 25% of households have dependent children. 16% of these households are lone parents.
- 13% of households have a single person 65 and over.

The parish age profile changes between 2001 and 2011 show an ageing population, as indicated by:

- 4% drop in those aged 0 to 14
- 6% drop in those aged 30 to 44
- 2% increase in those aged 45 to 59
- 4% increase in those aged 60 to 74
- 2% increase in those aged 75 to 89

From these data, we can see that:

- The parish has an (increasing) ageing population, many of whom live alone.
- A quarter of all households have dependent children and over half of these households are single parent families.

From this we can deduce that there is a need to work alongside various agencies, including publicly provided, private and charitable, in the care and support for our ageing population and young families, particularly those with only one parent at home. This assertion is supported by our own direct experience of working with these groups in our church. We also believe that many families struggle to afford a balanced and nutritious diet. This is based on the collections we have for Fareham foodbank and the number of parents we know in the local schools whose children are eligible for free school meals when they reach year 3. So, we would envisage the provision of a range of associated services to help alleviate these needs, potentially including:

- Pre-school/nursery group; we are aware of a shortage of pre-school places to feed the local schools in our area, especially with the relocation of Jigsaws from the Memorial Hall to Titchfield and the closure of the group in Warsash Victory Hall.
- Offering a safe and welcoming environment for our youth to meet, recognising that nowhere in our borough is safe from the reality of illegal drug usage. Over recent years, we have frequently experienced gatherings of teenagers in our church grounds and porch, normally during late evening. These have often involved smoking, consumption of alcohol and sometimes use of cannabis. We understand that this is commonplace in many public spaces locally.
- Food bank, possibly working with a nationally recognised partner, such as The Trussell Trust.
- Provision of cookery classes for families on low incomes, to teach how to prepare and cook nutritious meals with low cost ingredients.
- Debt counselling.
- Support for single fathers with young children.
- Advice on preparation of CVs and job applications.
- Drop-in café, offering company for the lonely.
- Social, communal events for our community, particularly those who struggle to leave their homes, for whatever reason.

These (and other) activities would be generally offered on a minimum or free-of-charge basis and the Hall would be financed through donations, working with other charitable agencies and importantly, subsidised through rental income from commercial (e.g. slimming clubs) or recreational (e.g.

judo, dance, musical etc.) groups. This is a business model which SJLH understands very well and has practised for over 20 years, in the usage of its church centre spaces. The objective would be to balance the finances, such that only enough profit is retained to ensure that future investment in the facility can be assured.

Therefore, whilst we recognise that all users who had occupied the Hall prior to its closure in 2017 have been relocated, this by no means proves that they would not have preferred to remain in that location, had they had access to a modern and more pleasant building. Indeed, we know that the Hall had regular users, every weekday (including most evenings) before FBC began the process of closure. Through our experience of attracting paying tenants to use our church complex, we also understand the market forces underpinning the needs of different user groups. We offer different rental tariffs to those groups who are commercial enterprises and those who are engaged in charitable, not-for-profit work.

So, we do not subscribe to the view that the capacity for such community usage has been fully satisfied in this locality and certainly not that the demise of the Hall somehow proves this to be true. Indeed, discussions with the trustees of the Lockwood Community Centre in Locks Heath indicate that they are regularly having to turn away groups who wish to use that facility, due to lack of capacity. We are also having to turn away prospective paying clients from our own premises and are now seeking to expand our work with youth and young families, having recently appointed a full time, paid Children & Families Team Leader.

Therefore, our experience and feedback from many local sources reflects that there is a significant, underlying and unsatisfied need for many community needs, currently not provided, which could be effectively addressed by adopting one of our preferred options.

### **Options Considered**

The following options have been reviewed by SJLH leadership team;

1. The existing building is retained by FBC who remain as freeholder, but SJLH manages its use and refurbishes and maintains the premises. High financial and health & safety risk - building is 100 years old and no longer fit for purpose or accessible to all.
2. SJLH purchases the site (and its freehold) and retains and refurbishes the existing building. Not economic - would be more effective to demolish and build new.
3. SJLH purchases the site (and its freehold), demolishes the existing structure and replaces it with a modern, purpose built facility. We would finance all these initial capital costs through grants and fund raising, using all available channels. This could be a low risk and

viable option, provided that FBC is prepared to sell the site at less than market value, under the 'Community Asset Transfer' scheme. We would agree a covenant that restricts future use of the new Hall, for the benefit of the local community. SJLH would still seek to work in partnership with FBC, to identify and help satisfy local community needs.

4. FBC retains the freehold and SJLH raises funds to demolish the existing structure and build a modern facility, which would be 'gifted' to FBC. SJLH would manage and maintain the facility. SJLH would seek a peppercorn rent from FBC, for an extended period of time, commensurate with the significant capital investment made and the on-going management and maintenance of the site. Low risk – SJLH confident that fundraising to demolish and replace the building is achievable. Existing expertise and experience of managing a community space already in place at SJLH, which successfully lets its own hall and church centre rooms

### **Outline Proposal**

It should be noted that, because of time and resource constraints since being first invited to submit this paper on 10 July 2018, this submission does not form a full business case. However, SJLH has a clear and achievable vision for the future of this site. We have used 'all-in', rough order of costs based on circa £1.7K per square metre (more detail in the Annex to this submission) and SJLH understands the steps needed to form and run the new community hub. We also have individuals within the Church with significant experience in project managing new builds, fitting out and ongoing facility maintenance. So, we are not deterred by the prospect of taking on such a facility management task.

The SJLH Leadership Team wishes to work closely with FBC to redevelop the site and submits that Option 3 above would be the preferred solution, provided that the site was offered at a very attractive price. Otherwise, we believe that Option 4 is a viable and attractive solution. In either case, we would establish a new Memorial Hall Trust, backed by the experience and expertise of the Church, to take on the operation, management and maintenance of this site, on a not-for-profit basis. Also, to be clear, we would not seek to recover the demolition, rebuild or freehold purchase costs (in the case of Option 3) from rentals. Our plan would be to finance all these initial capital costs through grants and fund raising.

Clearly, both of these options have significant dependencies with respect to any unknown liabilities that may exist, in terms of:

- Any existing debts that the previous trustees may have accrued
- Liabilities due to the disposal of hazardous materials in the current Hall building, e.g. asbestos

- Liabilities due to need for remediation of the ground, due to contamination by hazardous materials
- Latent hazards, or restrictions on building a new facility on the site, due to the large tree

So, the viability of any business case to be developed would be dependent on early disclosure of any known liabilities and may be subject to an independent survey and report.

Notwithstanding the considerations mentioned above, we have considered the outline specification of the proposed new facility and details are provided at the Annex. A main hall, one or two break out/consulting rooms, accessible WCs/washrooms and a commercial size kitchen would be the minimum requirements. It is estimated, based on a building similar in size, that the costs for demolition and new build (prefabricated steel frame) would be in the order of £320K. However, there does need to be contingency for risk, as well as funding for equipment, furniture, floor coverings, window blinds and all the other fittings and interior decoration needed to make this a very attractive, versatile and functional space. This brings the total budget estimate to £380K - £400K, with the upper limit likely to be the amount we would target for fund raising. Should the risks not materialise, then we would clearly be in a better position, but we think it is important to view this project's finances very realistically.

Based on our experience of two previous major building projects in the last 30 years, we believe this to be a realistic figure for SJLH to fund raise through grants and donations. Indeed, one should recognise that this facility would be for the benefit of the whole of the local community. (Whilst the 2011 Census showed that Locks heath had a population of just 11,650, the wider residential area is over 40,000) So, with appropriate campaigning and publicity, we would be confident of engaging positively with this community and potentially raising significant funding via channels such as Crowdfunding.

Through compliance with all current building regulations and visionary design objectives, we would ensure the safety, accessibility and green credentials that are so essential to make this an economic, attractive and inclusive facility for the whole community.

The expertise and experience in SJLH makes our church a reliable partner for a scheme such as this. We have proven experience of letting our own hall and rooms. We also have a proven track record of successful fundraising for projects with a clear vision. Earlier this year, we raised nearly £150K in less than a month, to employ a Children & Families Team Leader; this was just from our own congregation. Finally and very importantly, we have an existing governance body (the PCC), registered with the Charities Commission with the skills and experience in overseeing

projects and activities, including managing annual budgets of hundreds of thousands of pounds.

## Next Steps

If FBC agrees, in principle, with either of Options 3 or 4 (or proposes an alternative that fulfils our objectives), then SJLH will take the following steps;

- Establish an appropriate governance structure – legal entity (SJLH). This would mirror the existing governance body for the church, the PCC.
- Establish legal requirements including, if required, heads of terms of a lease (FBC/SJLH)
- Understand local needs and demands more fully, through an organised canvassing campaign. This would be achieved through digital channels, mail drops and utilising local media. Our hope and intention would be to do this in close liaison with FBC and all other existing local service providers, both charitable and commercial.
- Develop partnerships with entities within our local community, to develop plans on how best to fill gaps in service delivery and optimise all available funding, including public, corporate and individual.
- Investigate and secure grants/funding. This would tap into our prior knowledge and experience of these matters, reaching out to a number of entities who may wish to either offer start up grants or partner with us in terms of ongoing service delivery.
- Develop and keep under review the business model and strategic objectives to include contracts and service delivery, trading and asset based income (SJLH)

This is a significant project and we require a further 6 months to conduct all the work needed to engage with our proposed partners, define community needs in detail and develop a costed business plan.

## Conclusions

1. Locks Heath Memorial Hall has been a key community asset for 95 years and although established and initially managed by St John's Church, was always intended to be an asset for use by all in the parish, irrespective of denomination or faith.
2. Whilst all previous users have been accommodated in alternative premises, we are certain that there is still a significant underlying demand for various community needs, both commercial and charitable. We would seek to substantiate this, given more time.

3. These needs could be met by providing a modern, pleasant and accessible building, offered at affordable rates, or free of charge, subject to the means and needs of the respective user groups.
4. The preferred option would be for SJLH to buy the site, at less than market value, under the Community Asset Transfer mechanism. SJLH would then demolish the existing structure and build a new facility, to be run for the benefit of the whole local community. SJLH would still wish to remain closely engaged with FBC, in the provision of community services.
5. If the solution described above is not possible, then the next preferred option would be for FBC to retain the freehold and value of the Memorial Hall site, whilst SJLH provide a new building and the management of that building, to provide a valuable and affordable community facility. We would need FBC to grant SJLH a long lease, on a peppercorn rent.
6. SJLH needs 6 months, to engage with our prospective partners, define local community needs, develop a costed business plan, set up the legal requirements and identify the necessary funding channels, to meet this realistic and exciting vision.
7. Should FBC have other preferred options, which are believed to be more feasible and which would satisfy the needs outlined, then we would be very happy to enter into a substantive dialogue with FBC, to explore and develop these thoughts.

### **Recommendations**

It is requested that:

1. FBC considers the Options provided and agrees, in principle, to continue working with SJLH, to assure the continuation of the site as a community asset.
2. After due consideration, we agree which of these Options is the most viable for both parties and also best fitted to meet the community needs outlined.
3. Once the second step above has been completed, that FBC provides the additional 6-month period needed for SJLH to prepare and submit a full business case.

Attached: Annex providing outline specification for proposed new hall building

## Annex

### Outline specification for proposed new hall building

We believe that the optimum construction for a new hall would utilise prefabricated steel, offering the benefits listed below. We have assumed a single storey replacement, with a floor area of some 250 square metres (m<sup>2</sup>), which is equivalent to the existing Hall footprint. This would provide adequate space for the main hall area, with 2 or 3 small 'breakout' rooms, kitchen, WCs/ washrooms and storage areas situated around the perimeter. Efficient and 'green' insulation, heating and lighting would be provided, along with all necessary Health & Safety and accessibility features. The best value option is a steel frame with cladding and guide price circa £1,100 per m<sup>2</sup>, i.e. £275,000, plus 10% for professional fees etc. Compliant, simple demolition/site clearance guide circa £10,000 but this subject to disclosure on any known liabilities, as described above. This total of circa £320K would represent the bare minimum and for the reasons outlined on page 7, above, we would fund raise to a target of £400K.

The proposed building does have the potential for a first floor, with dormer windows looking over the side car park, which would add about 140m<sup>2</sup>. If initial funding was constrained, this could be constructed as a single space, which could be sub divided and fitted out in a second phase, when additional funding had been secured.

The key benefits of this type of construction would be:

#### Cost

Given the proposed funding mechanism, this is a key aspect of our proposal – we must demonstrate best value for money to all who donate funds, both individuals and organisations.

Prefabricated steel buildings are widely considered to be amongst the most cost-effective options available. This form of building is pre-engineered, so the amount of time spent doing on-site construction is far less than with other materials. This means fewer opportunities for disruption caused by building work preventing tasks being completed.

A faster build also means we could start using the facility and therefore generating rental income, more quickly.

#### Quality

Prefabricated steel buildings are known for their quality and are constructed in-factory under controlled conditions. Traditional buildings, on the other hand, are often exposed to adverse weather conditions throughout the building process and can suffer accordingly; pre-engineered steel eliminates this risk.

Frequent quality control checks would occur, both in-factory and on-site, to ensure that the construction is as safe and stable as possible at every point in the process.

It is also possible to guarantee quality in regards to resistance and durability. Coatings and claddings are available which would protect this building from the weather and daily wear-and-tear, ensuring resilience and low, through-life maintenance costs.

### Speed

This construction method would significantly reduce construction time frames from months down to weeks, giving significant savings for time and associated labour costs.

### Environmental Impact

This is now more of a consideration than it ever has been. WRAP is an independent organisation that promotes sustainability and seeks to optimise use of resources. They have reported that off-site prefabrication can lead to a 90% reduction in material waste, equating to a 38% overall decrease in a project's carbon footprint. In addition, most of the off-cuts and waste is recycled. The environmental cost of vehicle deliveries is also reduced by 90% compared to traditional, on-site building methods.

Also, we would seek to minimise the environmental impact of this building, through utilisation of specialised insulation, coating and cladding.

