

The Offords Recreation Hut (Known as Offord Village Hall)

Registered Charity Number 302653

Business Plan 2023

Part 1 – Introduction

1.1 Offord Village Hall is a financially and structurally sound community building operating under the terms of a Trust Deed. In its present guise it has met the needs of its user community for over forty years although its history goes back as far as the early decades of the 20th Century. It is typical of many such village halls supporting and drawing much of its income from traditional groups such as WI, toddlers’ group, keep fit classes and clubs such as gardeners and bowls. Although the hall has been upgraded in various ways in the past ten years and has expanded the opportunities for recreation and leisure, it remains important to continue to reflect the ever-changing nature and needs of the local community. And it has increasingly to confront the stark financial reality that inflation and major increases in utility costs present.

1.2 This document is aimed at providing an evidence base for a further development programme, in the first instance for five years, and to support any necessary funding applications.

Part 2 – Context and Organisation

2.1 Offord Village Hall is located at High Street, Offord Cluny, Cambridgeshire, PE19 5RR. It is administered as a Registered Charity (302653) in conformity with the provisions of a Trust Deed dated 1 November 1966, under the title of ‘The Offords Recreation Hut’. This name reflects the hall’s earlier history and location in the two villages.

2.2 The purpose of the Village Hall is to provide a facility “for the use of the inhabitants of Offord Darcy and Offord Cluny and the neighbourhood without distinction of sex or political, religious or other opinions and in particular for the use of meetings, lectures and classes and for other forms of recreation and leisure time-time occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life for the said inhabitants”¹.

2.3 The hall currently provides a venue for a variety of village community groups/organisations. These are Offord Senior Citizens, Women’s’ Institute, Offord Gardener’s Association, Offord Bowls Club, Offord Tots, The Offord Players, Thursday Club, Brownies & Rainbows, All Saints PCC and the Offord Crafters. The Parish Council also use the premises for their meetings and the hall is used for local and national election purposes. In addition, there are several regular ‘private’ hirers (Line Dancing, Martial Arts, Yoga, and Tea Dancers) and the hall also hosts other private bookings (mainly

¹ 1966 Trust Deed, Schedule 1, Clause 1

children's birthday parties and similar events) throughout the year. The Trust's Management Committee uses the hall for its meetings and for fundraising events. ²

2.4 The Trust Deed sets down in broad terms how the Village Hall should be managed – essentially through a Management Committee comprising a maximum of 22 Trustees (7 elected, 10 nominated by user organisations and up to 5 co-optees. The Parish Council acts as 'Custodian Trustee' holding the legal title to the Trust's assets. The main duties (eg Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, and Bookings secretary) are undertaken by Trustees, on a voluntary basis.³ The good governance of the hall has now been recognised through achievement of all three levels of the Hallmark scheme.

2.5 The present Village Hall was built and opened in 1981 on land initially leased for a 30-year renewable term from the Ely Diocesan Board of Finance. A second 30-year lease commenced on 1st June 2010⁴.

2.6 The Village Hall is a single storey brick building with a pitched main roof and flat-roofed storage room. It comprises a large main hall (with stage and curtain), 2 Store Rooms, Committee Room (with 2 toilets attached), an updated and fully-equipped Kitchen (with serving hatch into hall), Bar, Entrance Hall (with appropriate toilets, a Cloakroom area. There is a small area of land to the front and one side of the property (mainly grass) and a narrow strip to the rear. ⁵

2.7 The hall adjoins a car park (shared with All Saints Church) the maintenance of which, under the terms of lease, is the PC's responsibility. The Management Committee is responsible for maintaining the boundaries of the leased area.

2.8 Since the hall was built it has been regularly decorated and maintained using income from hiring charges and fundraising activities. In addition, and guided by the 2012 Business Plan, the hall has undergone a number of significant upgrades. These include a new kitchen (and equipment), new Main Hall floor, a major upgrade of the audio-visual facilities (including lights, sound system, projection equipment and curtain tracks), LED replacement lights and further loft insulation. External upgrades have included a bicycle rack and a new compliant access /exit to the Main Hall. These projects were mainly grant funded.

2.9 In addition to physical upgrades, the hall has established its own website www.offordvillage.org.uk (and Facebook page). All information on the hall, its history, its policies and procedures, its booking arrangements and links with the local community, are now accessible via the website. Direct mail shots are now possible via the website. The hall has also adopted Ticketsource as a means of selling tickets and advertising events. The hall is currently looking to establish an online booking system (Hallmaster) for hirers that will also be linked to the website.

² Website (www.offordvillagehall.org.uk) Tab 'Calendar' for typical hall usage

³ Ibid Tab 'About'

⁴ Lease and Trust Deed dated 31st December 2012

⁵ Ibid Tab 'About'

2.10 Offord Cluny and Offord Darcy have some 620 dwellings. The Offords are categorised as a “small settlement” with what that entails for a limited growth in development.⁶ It has recently been revealed that as part of the District-wide planning process, up to 300 houses could be built in the Offords. It is not easy to get an accurate figure for the population – not least because the 2021 census data is not yet available at local level. But the ONS did estimate that the population of the 2 parishes would rise by mid 2020 to 1361⁷. There is nothing to suggest that as back in 2012, population growth will not remain fairly stable albeit with an inevitable ageing in the mix.⁸. Although the Offords were originally a farming community that is no longer the case and the majority of the residents work outside the village.

2.11 The villages have a number of other social facilities (although fewer than in 2012). Other than the Village Hall, there is one public house, a church (All Saints), a primary school, and a ‘redundant’ church (St Peter’s). The latter two provide venues for some social and ‘artistic’ activities (as does All Saints Church). There is a large playing field and the Offord Millennium Green. Both provide recreational space for villagers but are not linked in any way with the Village Hall.

Part 3 – Aims and Objectives

3.1 The overall aim of this work is to provide a sound basis for the management and development of Offord Village Hall in order to ensure that it continues to meet the evolving needs of the community. In particular the objective is to maintain and develop a viable, sustainable, compliant, adaptable and valued community asset to last well into the century which will contribute towards:

- A stronger, healthier and more active community at all levels
- Improving the environment
- Helping the community and its people face current and emerging challenges
- Giving people a better chance in life

3.2 The plan aims to provide the basis for development over a five-year period with some scope for anticipating issues beyond that.

Part 4 – Current Status

4.1 This section of the plan is based on information from these key sources:

⁶ Huntingdonshire’s Local Plan to 2036 May 2019 (under review) NB as part of this process 8 sites (up to 300 houses) have been put forward as possible developments in the villages. But this could take many years to mature.

⁷ Parish Population Estimates from mid 2011 – mid 2020. ONS November 2021

⁸ In 2012 the population was (app 27% under 25; 56% 25-45; 17% over65)

- A Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats (SWOT) analysis undertaken by a focus group⁹ - in particular the Weaknesses and Threats sections
- Energy Review (July 2023)
- Input/Feedback from Hall Users¹⁰
- Review of 2012 Business Plan

4.2 The hall sits on land owned by the Diocese of Ely and part-way through a thirty-year lease. However, this now requires action in order to ensure a secure future and access to grant funding as the 2040 expiry date approaches.

4.3 Generally speaking, the hall is in good shape as a result of ongoing maintenance and major upgrades in recent years. In particular, the majority of the priorities identified in the 2012 Business Plan, plus several others, have been achieved. The only major items not addressed were the extension work and division of the main hall. These have since been deemed unnecessary as well as financially unrealistic. Some further accessibility work requires completion from the 2012 plan. However, despite the improvements of the last few years, the hall, in common with all venues of this age, needs to be continually maintained and improved. In particular the hall needs to be fit to meet the challenges of high energy costs and to play a greater part in the green agenda.

4.4 The hall has in recent years had a sound financial basis; its income being derived mainly from lettings, fundraising events and annual donations from the Parish Council. However, amongst other threats, it now faces a real challenge in meeting the cost of energy (and indeed other utilities and consumables). In the past few years – indeed right up until Spring 2023, the hall enjoyed a very low cost of gas & electricity flowing from a fixed price contract. That has come to end and the new contract is significantly higher than before and does pose an existential risk to the viability of the hall. Hire costs no longer reflect that reality and will have to increase. At the same time, it is important that we continue to retain the range of hirers we have at the moment – as well as use our improved facilities etc to attract new clients. All of which means ensuring the facilities are well maintained and improved.

4.5 But it is the energy challenge which has emerged as our top priority. In fact, this goes back to our last Business Plan in 2012 when we were encouraged by a 2011 energy audit to look at matters such as renewable energy sources, better insulation and lighting fixtures, new doors etc. Although some aspects of this have been dealt with in the past five years, the potential for more significant upgrades (eg ground source heats pumps, solar panels, wall insulation) were not pursued – in an era of relatively cheaper energy costs. All this has now changed and these major investments need to be urgently reconsidered. Indeed, they have reemerged in a recent energy review¹¹. Equally significantly energy management/sustainability/climate and environmental issues all feature as top priorities in

⁹ See Annex A

¹⁰ See Annex B

¹¹ Energy Report See Annex C

County and District Plans as well as major funding bodies (eg National Lottery). And local community assets are being asked to play their part in all of this through managing their assets in order to contribute to a greener more sustainable world. All of this supports our own key priorities in this area.

4.6 Feedback from the recent users' survey was broadly positive. The hall is considered by most users to be a good and valued facility providing a range of opportunities and activities. There were naturally some suggestions for improvement. On the facilities side, this focussed on accessibility, the outside areas and especially, the toilets. These are the remaining parts of the hall not updated since 1981, and will become the top priority. On the social/events side there were some helpful suggestions for adding to our repertoire (eg adult education classes, antiques fairs and live music/drama).

Part 5 – Community Needs/Demand Potential

5.1 This section of the plan is based on these key sources:

- The SWOT analysis – in particular the Strengths and Opportunities sections
- County, District Plans¹²
- Input/Feedback from Hall Users
- Ward and village data

5.1 Offord Village Hall is in better shape to meet the needs of the community than it was back in 2012. It has been upgraded in various ways and now attracts a new range of users along with maintaining the traditional links to well-established local groups. But it needs to “keep at it” to make sure it stays ahead of the game.

5.2 Existing users are clearly very keen to continue using the hall. Despite the odd areas that still need refurbishment there are many features of the hall which are attractive to users – new and old. These include the hall's central location, its car park, its basic soundness and its range of events. As in 2012 therefore, part of the development strategy must therefore be to make the most of these advantages – especially when compared with other venues in the village.

5.3 As indicated earlier (para 2.10), District and local plans are under review. This is a long-term process and will take years to mature. So, although there could be anything up to 300 new houses in the villages¹³, it is not considered to be a major factor in influencing the priorities over the next five years of this business plan. Also, as mentioned at Para 2.10, the population of the Offords is currently predicted to be fairly stable over the medium-long term. This may change should the potential increase in housing come to pass.

¹² CCC Strategic Framework (2023-28): 2023 Proposals to update HDC Local Plan (to 2036)

¹³ See Out&About (Aug-Sept 2023) page 52

5.4 As in 2012, the Offords do not, relatively speaking, suffer much in the way of deprivation as measured by the ‘indices of deprivation’ published by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities - with the exception of the ‘domain’ called, ‘Barriers to Housing and Services’. This measures the physical and financial accessibility to housing and key local services. The Offords are, in this respect, in the 20% most deprived areas nationally¹⁴.

5.5 This evidence supports the continued need for an active community with access to a modern venue that can help alleviate some of the impact of this relative isolation. The recent use of the VH car park as a venue for the weekly mobile Post Office is one example of support. Others can be developed.

5.6 The key thing in seeking to support the community as much as possible through these difficult times, is to ensure the hall remains relevant, adaptable, up to date and most importantly, viable. That means upgrading and maintaining the facilities (in particular the older parts such as toilets and entrance), making the hall available to as wide a cross-section of the community as possible, attracting new users and uses, further developing our fundraising and events (eg film and drama) and addressing the challenges of energy costs in multiple ways - eg infrastructure changes/improvements, better usage management, and more accurate and appropriate charging structures. And one final vital matter is to ensure a long-term lease for the hall beyond 2040 – but in the near term so as to facilitate grant applications.

Part 6 – Priorities for the Future

6.1 The previous sections provide the basis for establishing and prioritising a development programme for the next five years. Elements will need to be fleshed out in detail, costed and, where necessary, obtain planning permission. Financial provision will also need to be made. Although each project will have its own discrete planning, management and timing, the phases may overlap. Thus there will also need to be an overall programme plan. In summary the phases and packages of such a programme *might* be:

Priority	Project	Elements	Timing
1	Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Energy management measures ➤ Enhanced Insulation (eg windows, walls) ➤ Solar panels 	Immediately Begin research immediately; 1 year Ditto Ditto

¹⁴ Indices of Deprivation, Dept Levelling Up, Housing & Communities 2019

		➤ Ground source heat pumps			
2	Main Toilets	Upgrade of toilets in vestibule to meet modern requirements			
3	Main Entrance	Doors, access issues			
4	Lease	Seek new or extended lease		Within 12-18 months	

Part 7 – Finance and Funding

Financial Risk

7.1 As mentioned earlier in the plan, the hall has in recent years had a sound financial basis; its income being derived mainly from lettings, fundraising events and annual donations from the Parish Council. However, it now faces a very real challenge in meeting the cost of energy (and indeed other utilities and consumables). In the past few years – indeed right up until Spring 2023, the hall enjoyed a very low cost of gas & electricity flowing from a fixed price contract. That has come to end and the new contract is significantly higher than before and does pose an existential risk to the viability of the hall.

7.2 We will need to ensure as much as possible that the Parish Council (the Custodian Trustee and Leaseholder), continues to provide financial support. Ideally this needs to be increased in order to reflect the heavy cost burden now confronting the hall. We will also need to undertake a much more robust review of our hiring charges to ensure they too reflect the new reality. And we will need to continue to tightly manage other aspects of our spending and only spend prioritised and budgeted monies. And of course, we will need to maintain and hopefully expand, the range of fundraising activities – ensuring amongst other things that they are properly costed and priced.

7.3 When it comes to funding the next development programme, it is clear that in future these major costs will need to come entirely from grant funding. A funding programme will therefore need to be developed alongside each of our projects, targeting such funders as the Cotton Wind farm Community benefit Fund, National Lottery (Awards for All), Council Funds (eg Cambs Priority Capital Fund), Bernard Sunley, Landfill Fund and many more. This will take considerable research and effort.

Part 9 – Action Plan and Evaluation

9.1 Detailed action planning and specific measures of evaluation will need to be developed as part of the programme and project management that will follow the formal adoption of this plan by Trustees. Measures of success will need to be built around the Aims and Objectives set out in

Section 3 of this plan. Essentially success will have been achieved if in five years time it is clear that the village hall is attracting and supporting a wide range of users from the community and in doing so is providing opportunities for personal development and growth as well as helping build a strong and vibrant community.

November 2023

Offord Village Hall Business Plan 2023

SWOT Analysis – conducted 5 July 2023

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good sized well-equipped hall with excellent facilities (including new kitchen, bar, floor, AVsystem, bicycle rack) • Attractive rural location • Car park • Comprehensive website and easy booking system • Wi-fi • Actively managed • Well used and considered by most users as a good facility • Some availability for hire 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main toilets not up to modern standards • Still some accessibility issues, in particular the front entrance, doors, front path • Trustee support limited • Lease now only 18 years left to run • Limited use and suitability of outside space • Limited public transport
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good consultation feedback and useful input for changes • Improvement in booking/invoicing process (eg Hallmark) • Potential for environmental and energy improvements (eg cavity wall insulation and solar panels) • Possible partnerships with local businesses • Greater /expanded usage due to improved facilities and limited local competition 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial risk/challenge due to significant increase in energy costs • Price structure • Loss of income/hirings • Loss/limited volunteer support to manage venue • (Changes in demography)

Village Survey Results and Analysis

(Survey conducted March-June 2023)

Overview

We received 107 responses to our village hall users survey. Thank you to everyone who took the time to respond. The results and analysis are shown below, but in summary, the general response was overwhelmingly positive, and contained within it useful and constructive ideas and suggestions to help us put together our business plan for the next few years.

In general the hall is considered to be a good facility, in particular the main hall, kitchen and technical facilities. Social events and adult clubs or activities are the most frequently attended, as well as public events such as voting. Out 'n' About is the most mentioned source of information about events, and 25% of responders use the hall more than once a week! Some lovely comments included:

“Thank you for the increase in variety of activities in recent years. Noticed and very much appreciated”

“the Village Hall is a great asset for our villages. it's good to see some of the younger people becoming involved in the running of clubs, committees and Parish Council.”

“We're very lucky to have such a lovely village hall with a vibrant and enthusiastic committee”

“We have a great variety of events, groups and occasions. Well done to all who work so hard to arrange all this”

35% of people would be interested in more live music and theatre – this is something we hope to build on with our collaboration with Creative Arts East.

Other suggestions included kids dancing groups, exercise classes in the evening or weekends, art classes, knitting, games nights, music classes, history, visiting speakers, antique fairs, lego, beavers and cubs, pilates, wheelchair sports, balls, car boot sales. These are things which we will keep in mind going forward with the business plan.

Also mentioned were a few groups or activities that we already hold – this suggests that we perhaps need to work on getting the message out to the right

people! Eg: Yoga (we do have a class on Wednesdays), baby and toddler groups (Mums and Tots is on every Friday morning in term time), craft (this is available once a month on Saturdays), Bingo (3 or 4 times per year), Kids discos, exercise classes.

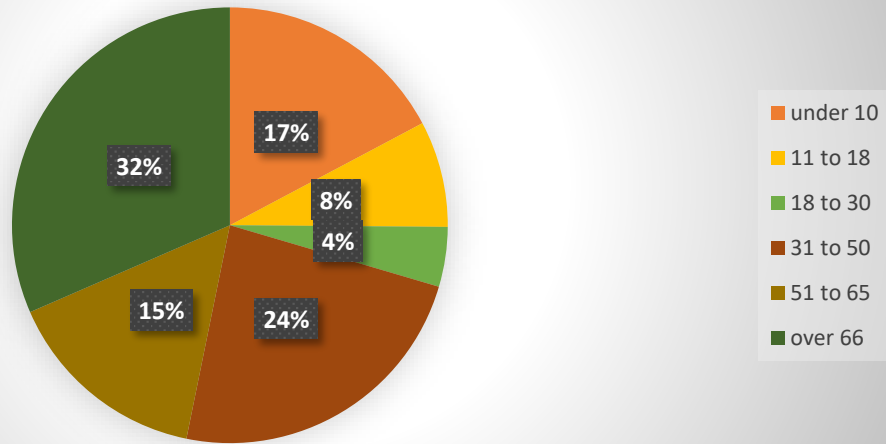
There are of course some things which although useful, are not possible for us to achieve. 22% of responders indicated that they would be interested Adult education in the hall. Whilst this is something we would love to include, at the present moment it's not available in our area. A community cafe also interested 23% of those surveyed; whilst this something we would love to provide, logistically it would need many more helpers and volunteers realise.

There are also areas beyond our control; the car park and land / hedges are managed by the parish council so suggestions here can be passed on.

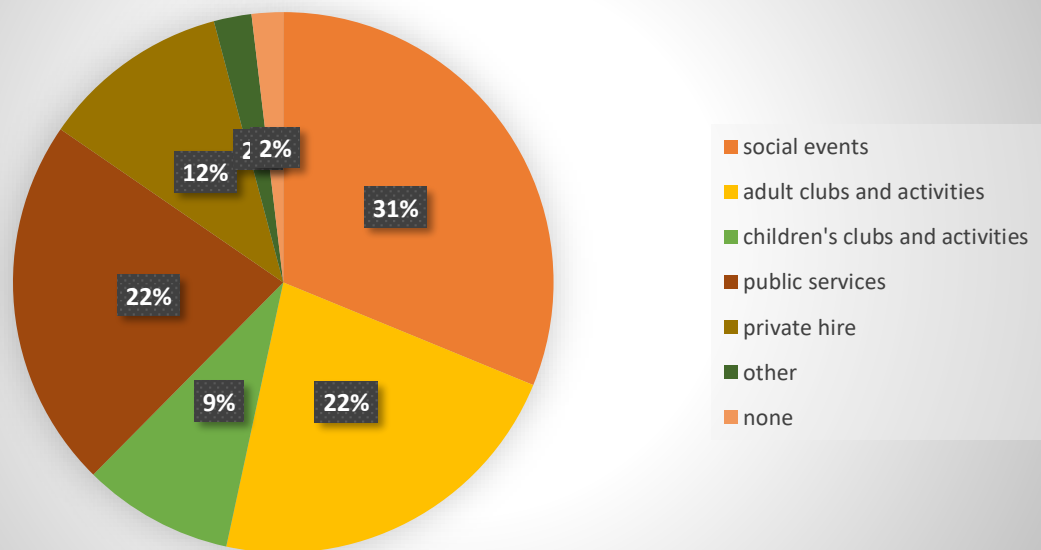
Regarding facilities, many comments referenced the need to update the accessibility, outside areas and toilets, all of which we hope to address in our coming business plan. Benches or picnic tables outside, larger toilet cubicles and updated gates and entrance area were the key features.

Survey Results

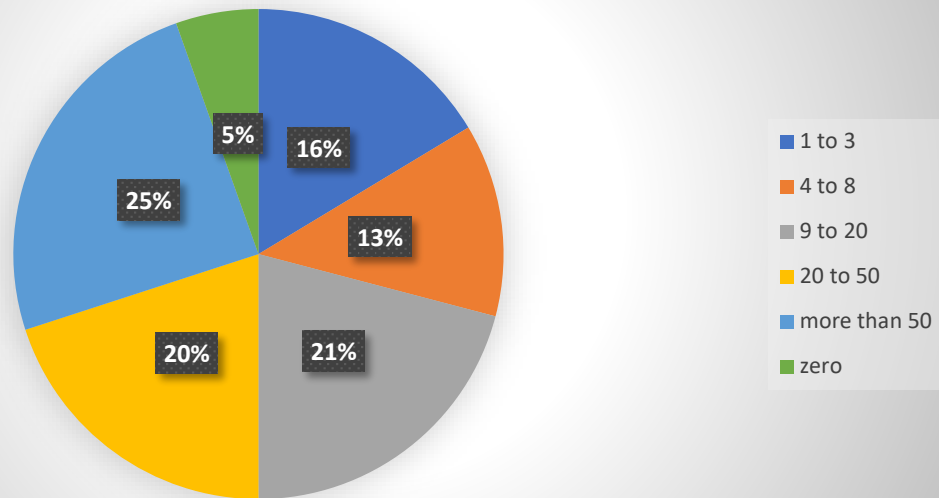
Number of hall users in household



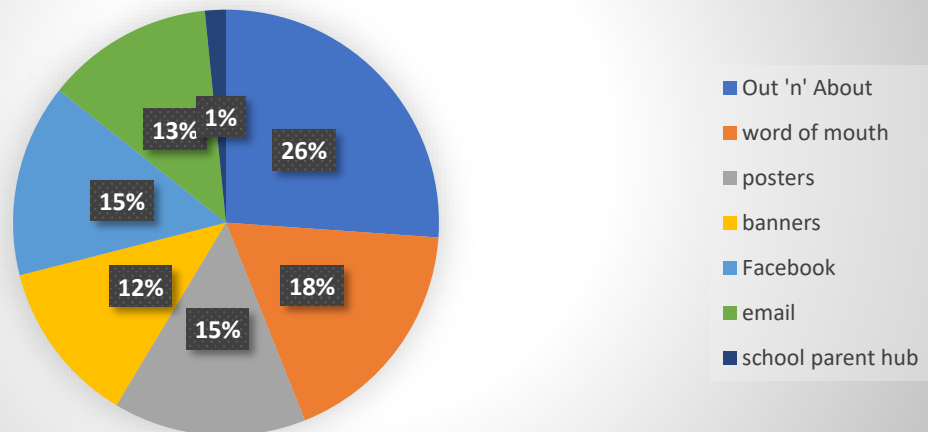
Types of events attended in the past year



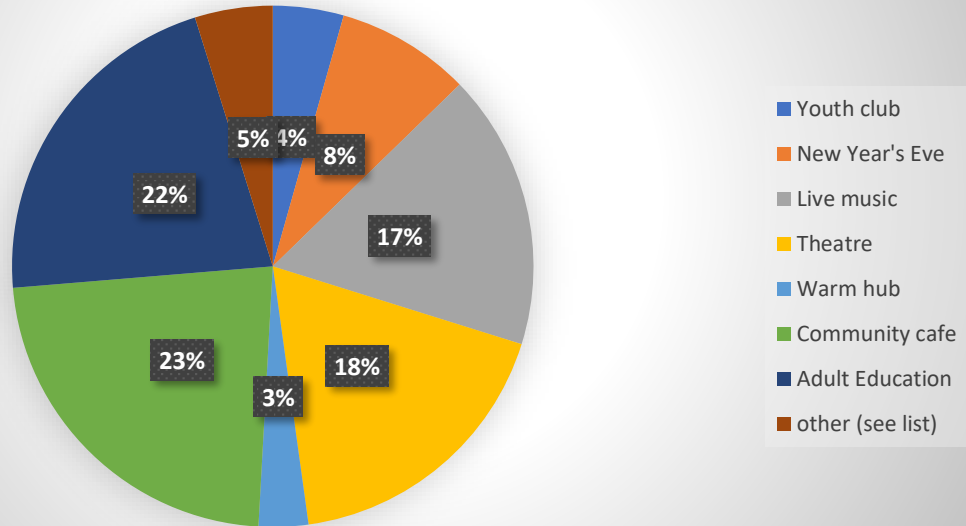
Number of visits in the past year



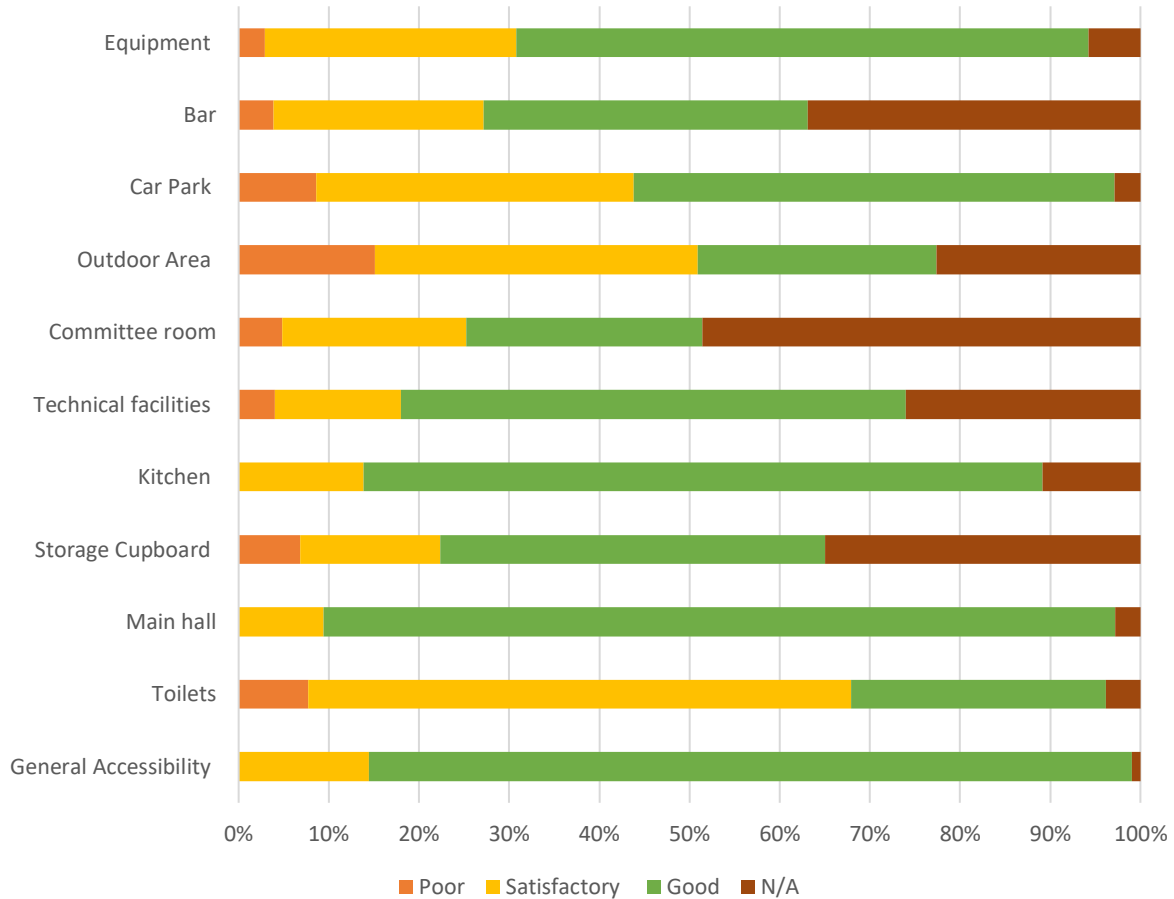
Where do you hear about hall events and activities?



Which additional activities would you be likely to attend?



How would you rate the facilities at the hall?



Report to Offord Village Hall, Management Committee

The Author

Stephen Birch is a retired electrical engineer who has worked in the energy industry all his life, in both the UK and abroad. Since 2000 he has been working in the energy efficiency and renewables sector. Stephen owned and ran his own business that provided technical audit services of national energy efficiency schemes for the large energy companies, housing associations, devolved government and private sector clients. He also formed a renewable installation business installing solar panels, heat pumps, and other energy efficiency measures in domestic and small commercial buildings. Having sold his business in 2016, he continued to provide energy surveys (EPCS) and associated services to housing associations, estate agents, letting agencies and private clients before retiring in 2021.

Methodology

The author was asked to review the previous energy audit (2011) and to undertake a high-level overview of the hall and produce a brief report to the hall management committee with recommendations for any further actions or improvements. A site visit of the hall was undertaken in June 2023 with Helen Ellis.

Property Description

The village hall is traditional build structure of concrete tile roof on brick cavity walls, with solid floors throughout. The hall, built in 1981 is well maintained and benefits from the following features:

- A modern condensing combination gas boiler supplying both space via radiators and water heating.
- Modern heating controls
- High efficiency LED lighting throughout
- Post 2002 double glazing
- Loft insulation to a depth of approximately 250mm.

Although there are cavity walls, the age of the build suggests that cavity wall insulation was unlikely to have been installed at the time of build and there is no evidence of retrofitted cavity wall insulation.

There is no Energy Performance Certificate on the EPC register for the building.

The floors are not insulated.

The main hall lies on a north south axis with mainly east west facing roofs. There is are tall trees to the west boundary of the hall. There is an opportunity to consider solar panels to the east facing roof and small south facing roof; although there is a tall tree to the east which would present shading issues.

Findings

The hall has been improved since the first energy audit in 2011, in particular the double glazing, new condensing boiler, and LED lighting. All of which will have improved the energy efficiency of the building.

The hall is well maintained and managed.

Recommendations

Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)

Commission an EPC for the building. These can be ordered on line through the EPC Register <https://www.gov.uk/get-new-energy-certificate>. You will need a non-domestic energy assessor to produce the certificate for you and it will include energy efficiency improvements recommendations for the property and indicate how much energy you can expect to save by implementing the recommended measures.

Cavity Wall Insulation

Firmly establish if cavity wall insulation exists, this can be easily done by drilling a pilot hole through the mortar course of the outer layer of the wall (approximately 100mm), and then peering into the hole (approximately 16mm diameter) to establish the existence of any material. The hole can then be back filled with mortar.

If there isn't any insulation then the author recommends getting the wall insulated as it will improve the energy efficiency of the building.

Solar Panels

Consider installing solar panels and a battery system to reduce your electricity expenditure. A solar system by itself will not necessarily gain the greatest benefit as the electricity generated is unlikely to be produced when the hall is use and electricity consumed and therefore a battery system will be able to store the excess generation for use when the hall is in use.

The author advises that three quotes are gained from reputable local installers.

July 2023