

Area North Committee – 17th December 2008

10. Supporting village and community halls in Area North

Head of Service: Charlotte Jones, Head of Area Development (North)
Lead Officer: Les Collett, Community Development Officer
Contact Details: Leslie.collett@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01458) 257427

Purpose of the Report

This report is to give Members an up to date appraisal of progress made with the improvement and replacement of village halls in Area North over the last 10 years and information on current services to support voluntary management committees to develop and enhance village halls and community buildings.

Recommendations

That Members:-

- (1) Note and comment on the report.
- (2) Endorse ongoing support for the management and future improvement of local village and community halls and buildings, as indicated in section 9 (future support).

Background

Village halls play an important part in the life of rural communities, are largely owned and managed by charitable trusts, and host a wide range of activities and services from post offices to yoga classes, pre-schools and bridge clubs.

Many village halls are held on a model trust deed, approved by the Charity Commission, and are sited on land gifted to the village from a benefactor, often dating back to the early part of the twentieth century. Others were built later on land acquired by a local council, or provided by a developer in connection to a housing development. Some were originally chapels, or schools, others just temporary huts, and a few purpose built.

The key features of a model trust include both user group and wider public involvement on the management committee as charity trustees and the in perpetuity nature of the trusts aims (generally for social, educational and recreational benefits). Charities are also required to make annual reports and produce accounts. Further details are available on the Charity Commission website:-

<http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Library/publications/pdfs/gd2text.pdf>

In addition there are a considerable number of other community buildings used for similar purposes, managed by volunteers. which include youth and community centres, church halls, school rooms with public use, town and parish halls owned by local councils.

SSDC has a strong tradition of supporting village halls, and all types of other community buildings, and in the past 10 years the Area North Committee has witnessed and supported the transformation of many old halls into modern, flexible, efficient and accessible buildings.

This report does not include reference to the investments into sports and changing facilities, however if a similar report would be of interest, this can be provided.

1. Village and community halls in Area North

The table below includes parishes and towns who have access to a village hall, or a range of other community buildings (including church halls) open to the public for a variety of activities and events.

Aller	Ash	Barrington	Beercrocombe	Chilthorne Domer
Compton Dundon	Curry Mallet	Curry Rivel	Drayton	Fivehead
Hambridge & Westport	High Ham	Ilton	Isle Abbots	Langport
Long Load	Long Sutton	Martock	Montacute	Norton Sub Hamdon
Pitney	Seavington St Mary	Seavington St Michael	Shepton Beauchamp	Somerton
South Petherton	Stocklinch	Stoke Sub Hamdon	Tintinhull	Bower Hinton
Huish Episcopi	Lopen	Puckington	Kingsbury Episcopi	

Larger settlements including Langport, Huish Episcopi, South Petherton, Martock, Somerton and Stoke sub Hamdon, have more than one hall, sometimes several.

From the information held (supplied in part by the Voluntary Sector Support Officer), it appears that in Area North only Muchelney and Isle Brewers have no immediate local provision for a community hall.

2. Investment into major village and community hall projects

The table below provides information (taken from historical records) of grants from SSDC and Somerset County Council to community halls in the last 10 years (1998-2008) under the Joint Village Halls programme.

Members will be aware that the Blake Hall South Petherton was recently successful under this programme for 2009/10. SSDC has also allocated £50,000 towards a new community hall for Martock.

The column marked 'other' includes local fundraising, sale of old halls, and external grants other than those from SSDC/SCC.

Table 2: Grants to Village and Community Halls

Hall	Project	SSDC	SCC	Others
Seavington	New Hall	£39,500	£2,800	£87,500
Pitney	Refurbishment	£5,500	£3,000	£13,500
Compton Dundon	New Hall	£35,000	£35,000	£245,000
Chilthorne Domer	Major refurbishment	£12,500	£12,500	£235,000

Stocklinch	Refurbishment	£22,116	£22,116	£44,231
Norton Sub Hamdon	New Hall	£35,000	£35,000	£303,000
Aller	Refurbishment	£6,235	£6,235	£26,749
Fivehead	New Hall	£35,000	£35,000	£512,109
Barrington	New Hall	£50,000	£50,000	£350,000
Ilton	New Hall	£50,000	£35,000	£141,000
	TOTALS =	£290,851	£236,651	£1,958,089

Total investment – approximately £2.5m.

Members may wish to note that the actual final expenditure is often higher than the planned figures, which the table above represents. The actual investment over 10 years is likely to be nearer to £3m in total.

3. Small – medium size projects – grant aided by Area North

In addition to the major grants through the Joint Village Halls programme, the Area North Community Grants programme has catered for the needs of many smaller projects in halls such as kitchens, refurbishment of properties and storage requirements. Due to match funding requirements, these projects will also generate additional investment from external funding or from local fundraising and parish council contributions.

Some examples of supported projects are included in appendix A

4. Evaluating the success of new halls

The table below shows the final approximate costs of the last four halls to be built in Area North:

Village Hall	Year	Actual Cost
Norton Sub Hamdon	2003/4	£300,000
Fivehead	2004/5	£650,000
Ilton	2006/7	£245,000
Barrington	2005/6	£729,000

The Community Development Officer has spoken to representatives of the last four new build halls in Area North

Criteria used by the CDO to gauge the relative success of the hall, against the former hall are as follows:

- The Hall caters for the needs of the community and the community supports the facility
- Whether there is spare capacity for future groups and events
- There is the opportunity for all sections of the community and visitors to hire the hall on a one off basis
- Income exceeds expenditure
- Strong management committee
- Maintenance and repair schedule

All committees have reported that all have had a marked increase in bookings by the community and from outside. However, all of the new halls still have some capacity for

further bookings. They also have management committees that are dedicated to the future success of the hall, which includes pre-planning for maintenance and repairs. All are running where income is in excess of expenditure.

5. Services and support to village halls and community buildings

The Community Development Officer (north) acts as the single point of contact for enquiries relating to village and community halls.

Access to funding is not the only service provided to support village halls by SSDC, one very important aspect is the advice and support to volunteers to develop their project, obtain the necessary consents, and to collaborate with local partners to a successful conclusion. This may require involving other services to provide direct support.

A number of support services are also provided by organisations such as the Community Council for Somerset, and Vista (training agency for the voluntary sector): -

- The Village & Community Halls Advisory Service run by the Community Council for Somerset provides advice and support to hall committees across a wide range of areas including applying for grants to help meet the cost of improvements, charity law, management and committee issues including hiring charges and agreements, insurance, equipment sources and record keeping, compliance with legislation and licenses. An annual conference is held in October each year along with shorter information evenings during the year. During the first six months of 2008/09 we had contact with 34 halls in South Somerset of which 9 were in Area North.

Managing trustees and committees may seek support for a number of reasons – including funding advice: -

- law and good practice affecting health, safety and welfare of users and volunteers
- steps to address local needs and priorities
- taking decisions, updating constitutions and managing finances
- new projects to develop and enhance facilities
- help to start up and equip new activities
- trustee / charity law issues

6. Seeking and achieving funding for village and community halls

The apparent unavailability of funding for major capital projects can act as a real barrier to progress projects, and is often the first concern before a project is even developed. In providing support at an early stage, community groups are encouraged to first start to develop their project, and think ahead towards sources of funding. Until there is at least an outline for a project, there is no need for funds!

Larger projects (over £20,000) will generally require detailed business plans, and supporting evidence of need. Lottery funding will require strict procedures to be followed particularly relating to tendering and the involvement of building professionals.

There is a wide range of types of funding which could be included, ranging from local donations and fund-raising; grants; loans; share issues and sponsorship. Extensive projects, may need to consider all forms of funding to produce a robust funding strategy.

7. Meeting local needs for a community hall in the larger settlements

Members will be aware that each of the four larger settlements in Area North are actively considering the long term future provision of community halls to better meet the needs of their residents, often after many years of housing growth without a similar investment into community buildings.

Somerton – has a range of community buildings for hire, including a wide range of community activities, Somerton Town Council have recently acquired a substantial building and are currently making modifications to equip it for meetings and functions, drama and wider community activity. SSDC owns the Wessex Rooms, leased to youth club and leases part of the parish rooms for the Community Office. Funds are about to be invested to improve the kitchen facilities at the Wessex Rooms, and in recent years the Management Committee of the Parish Rooms have completed a range of improvements to the hall and facilities.

South Petherton – David Hall – currently carrying out a major refurbishment, and recent winners of a £50,000 award from the Peoples Millions programme. The Blake Hall committee are also working on a major project, with funding awarded from the Joint Village Halls programme.

Martock – Martock Parish Council have conducted significant feasibility work to review and appraise each of the main community buildings, and are currently developing concept plans for a purpose built community centre. The Market House is soon to be completed creating a new community office and enhanced upper floor using grants from the Heritage Lottery and SSDC, Martock Youth Centre has also been refurbished to greatly enhance the provision for young people.

Langport & Huish – The new community space at the Great Bow Yard is now open for use, and has a range of community activities and events taking place. Langport and Huish Episcopi have a range of smaller buildings, and share concerns for capacity and quality. Huish School 6th form may present further opportunities, together with investment from planning obligations of developers. The local councils have identified improved community hall facilities to be on of the local top community priorities.

8. Planning and Development – Planning Policy Guidance 17

The planning system now allows for provision for extra community buildings to be taken into account during the planning stage of any new development. Advice on how to secure this is set out in PPG 17 methodology for assessing need and auditing provision for community halls.

9. Future support to village and community buildings

The future extent of funding from the National Lottery is not always clear. Where major grants programmes exist these can be instrumental in securing new hall or major project. A more staged approach for applications may be needed in the absence of major funding, and for smaller projects Awards for All with a qualifying factor of £10,000 over a 2 year period can be ideal. **A creative approach to fund-raising is needed, emphasising the wide range of benefits and outcomes which village halls can deliver.**

The Village & Community Halls Advisory Service run by the Community Council for Somerset provides a huge range of advice and support to volunteers and management committees to manage and develop their facilities. **This work is supported by an**

annual grant from SSDC, through a service level agreement, managed by the Voluntary Sector Development Officer.

For the newer halls – the future includes the need to support and enhance services and activities; and it is likely **we will continue to see an increase in wider types of services provided from village and community halls** – for example ICT access points and outreach services from Post Officer Ltd.

Many villages have achieved new build village halls, and others can improve their halls through a series of medium scale projects. However in the larger settlements the need may be significant to compensate for many years of growth without an associated investment into community buildings. **More support and effort will be needed to develop strategic plans for longer term investment to address deficiencies, using the guidance included in PPG17.**

Area North grants including the capital programme have proved highly effective at either pump priming a project fund, or providing the final grant to complete funding. **Continuing to provide opportunities for local access to funds would appear essential.**

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications from this report.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

Corporate Objective 9 – Identify and address the particular issues affecting rural parishes

Corporate Objective 16 – Maintain above 80% the people satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live

Background Papers: *Area North Community Grants files*
