

Community meeting Saturday 18th November 10.30am Horseman's Green Community Hall

Meeting chaired by Barbara Weeks, also in attendance Lucy Fuchsbichler (LF), architect from Lawray, Gareth Edwards (HWG member) Andrea Porter (secretary). Also present from HWG Colin Porter, Joe Smith.

Community attendees 24

Barbara Weeks (BW) opened the meeting; firstly, I'd like to thank you all very much for coming along this morning to hear what we've done and processes we've gone through. BW noted the meeting would be recorded. We have a special guest here today, Lucy Fuchsbichler from Lawray; Lucy is the architect who has drawn up the plans and during the course of this morning we will be looking at these. I have notes because there's an awful lot of information to get through. Another group of people I would like to thank are those on the Hall Working Group (HWG), which was first established in August 2021. BW asked the HWG members to raise a hand, noting they'd put a lot of time into thinking about the Hall, plus meetings, research and on visits, and thank them for the work they'd done.

In June 2022 there was a meeting where we went through some of the problems and issues with the hall; just to refresh your mind, the low-grade asbestos roof has created many many problems, not least of which is damp. Before we re-opened after Covid in August 2021, Colin painted the ceiling and a couple of guys painted the back wall, that wall is already showing damp and mould is coming through, the same in the far corner, mould is growing. The roof space, as we all appreciate isn't insulated. Lucy went up a ladder to look into the loft area and was astonished there was no insulation at all. This week there have been 5 or 6 activity groups in the hall, the bill for electricity is £65 and we're not yet into winter. Other issues, the cloak rooms are below standard on size and are not exactly welcoming; the kitchen is horrendous, visitors are usually in the hall and don't see the condensation there, the uneven floor and the cold we have to deal with. We need a ramp outside to access the hall. There are lots and lots of different issues. You may have come in today and thought, "what are they bothering about". We do try and make it welcoming and a lot of work goes into trying to make it welcoming, for example a volunteer popping down in winter an hour before an event to switch the heaters on so it's more welcoming. There's a lot of work carried out by a small number of volunteers who do the painting, try to make it looking good. We do need to try and do something. Someone did say to me, so the roof could drop down, the floor could go – because we also have woodworm, we hope we have this under control, but we don't know.

What I want to do today is to get across all the different processes and different things the HWG have done in the last two years so we can understand where thoughts were going and how thoughts were developing. I do want you to understand some of the processes we have gone through.

Lucy will talk to you about the plans, and if you would like to see the plans, they'll be on the tables later and members of the working group will be around to answer any questions

Two big key things, nothing can be achieved without getting grants whether for a rebuild or a renovation. There is no way we can afford to do either without grants; but if we don't try anything in about 5, 10 years the hall won't be looking like it looks now. The roof has been on around 70 years, asbestos has a life of about 30 years; repairs to guttering, fascia boards have hardly been done due to the asbestos issue and I wouldn't want anyone within our community to do any work on the dangerous asbestos.

We've only had a community hall in the hamlet for a few years before it was shut due to Covid, but we've grown to enjoy coming here. Enjoying what it can offer the community, how it can improve quality of life; I can understand people thinking, if they're going to start doing this and

that, what's going to happen to us. Already we have a Continuity Group thinking about a continuity programme. So, when we do something, everything in the hall won't all grind to a halt, we are coming up with ideas of where furniture can be stored, or where we can do things so we do continue. There are two main issues at the moment, costs, these have to be covered by grants, so why not go for the best solution for the hall and our community, and secondly maintaining support for the community during the work.

In 2022, the first survey we had done was the structural survey. Yes, he pointed out the roof, we wanted him to look at the foundations and Greg Walker helped with the inspection hole. He said they looked OK, for a light weight roof; the floor, a sprung floor, but as I understand it the floor is on shock absorbers and these have gone past their life span; the rear area, the condensation and flat roof is starting to fail. There was some good news, he didn't condemn the building, we are safe for a few more years. The surveyor also said there'd be a lot of surveys we'd have to do whichever way we go and also suggested a timber survey because of the woodworm that we know we have in places; we haven't gone down that route. But these surveys will cost but are hopefully things we can claim back. At the meeting after the structural survey the group considered the latest rules and regs for a rebuild or a renovation. At this point I had a lengthy talk with Wrexham Council Planning Department, what I gathered from them was that the main hall space had to remain the same size. You will have noticed either side of the main door we store the tables and chairs which takes away quite a bit of the working area of the hall, due to our storage area being too small. Basically, the shape of the building will remain the same whatever we do. They also suggested putting in a pre-planning application which we decided to do for a rebuild as this would show any issues, we'd be likely to come across with either option. The group drew up a wish list; BW asked Gareth to go through the wish list.

Gareth noted discussions on a wish list were fairly early on along with what we wanted to achieve: a larger kitchen with easy access to the hall, possibly with two hatches for bar and food service; storage space as its always an issue trying to find space to store anything, this has also been a main issue in other halls we've visited; possible scope for a small meeting room; improved acoustics of course; a large blank wall for a film night and consideration of some form of staging; two disabled toilets both with baby charging facilities; level access to the building; a porch/shelter whilst waiting to enter the building and for school children waiting for their bus; access to the rear of the building from inside and a large patio area at the rear. In addition, efficient and cost-effective heating, a major issue, with minimal maintenance, cleaning and upkeep. So basically, a building that would be future proofed and last for future residents of HG to use and enjoy.

BW continued; so, we submitted a pre-planning application in April 2023, it had taken some time to get the application together. We'd been offered pro-bono support but pressure of work stopped him completing the application, but Stan Colquhoun, from Hanmer, finished this off for us and the application went in in April 2023. We were told we'd get a response in 4 weeks but it actually took 8 weeks and a lot of pressing for a response. This was a disappointment as it was basically a generic response. Nothing came up as being a major issue but it did state we would need a number of surveys, but they didn't think there would be any major issues. Highways department hadn't responded, which to me was a key one, so I emailed them but nobody responded. I did ring Planning and was told they had met their obligation, that Highways were very busy, but if there had been any issue, they would have let us know.

We were beginning to get clear idea about our needs; how many events have you been to here where there wasn't food of some sort, so the kitchen was important. We began to realise the need for a bar as well, basically access to serving drinks; food and drinks being served in the hall takes up space where tables and chairs could be. By August 2023 we'd been working at it for two years and gone through various processes, and had also been out to see Tilstock VH, yes it was a new build, but the local refurbished halls all tended to be extensions to existing buildings rather than work on the main hall; other group members went to smaller halls and

reported back, we then drew up for's and against for a rebuild and a renovation. On the renovation and keeping the hall, we realised there was an emotional attachment, it's been here for 70 years and some had come here as youngsters. There have been a number of houses knocked down and rebuilt, so this is not the first to go, but we do appreciate the emotional attachment. Generally, with renovation projects they are smaller than what we propose and could continue to operate but here the roof will have to come off and we can't continue without one. The rear needs demolishing, so that would leave us without toilets and kitchen and we couldn't open without these, so doing it in stages isn't an option. You could argue that the renovation timescale might be shorter, but it was interesting, when we went to see the village halls, to hear their builds had taken less than 12 months. Renovation might be shorter but not by a huge amount, and don't forget we are also looking at carrying on having our socials, carrying on with the activity groups. Also, if it was renovation, the grant funding would have to be got in stages from a number of different funders and all that might not fall into place. It would be a big job renovating, but would we get what we actually want? Would it satisfy a lot of those points on our wish list? The site itself has a lot of constraints, it goes narrower down the side and that would restrict our extension so we would be building on the same layout. Renovating an older property has a lot of hidden costs, living in one of these in HG I dread having to have work done because you don't know what you're going to find, then its what's it going to cost have we got the money? Whilst a renovated hall will be more cost effective than what we have now, would it be as efficient as a new build. How much longer will the foundations last and when will the floor need replacing? What if renovation pushes other issues further down the line? It might push issues 10 years further down the line. What we want is a legacy for the future and future residents of HG. No 'I'm all right Jack, let's just carry on', we want to leave a legacy. 1957, just after the war, and not a lot of money around, but they built this building the best they could with the funds they had; 70 years down the line they've left us a legacy that we have enjoyed. If they had built cheap, we probably wouldn't have the community hall. Renovation costs would be cheaper, obviously, but where do we get the funds from, there is a significant cost to getting what we want. We have got plans of a renovation for you to see. Gareth is now going to go through the points we thought of for a rebuild.

Gareth noted some of the main reasons for a rebuilt are speed, quick to build, with estimated time around 12 months; meeting all regulations for public buildings for the foreseeable future; a more heat efficient building, thermally insulated for the lowest possible running costs; a new build provides the most environmentally friendly building with no un-told surprises, essentially less risk as you know what has to be done; minimal maintenance, you might remember Barbara noted in the newsletter we were looking for support with different work in the hall, as obviously the two who do the majority of the work here - Chris and Colin – are not always going to be around but no one has stepped forward, this isn't a criticism but a reality people have other things to do obviously; Heating will be more suitable for our needs; solar panels on the roof would help reduce heating costs; new hall will be easier to clean; we can incorporate the layout we feel will work best for us. Grant funding is possibly easier to manage in preference to smaller applications, as costs are clear from the outset, with no surprises so easier to budget, a new building will be more comfortable and welcoming and likely to attract more people and interest, no VAT is a massive saving, it would also create a longer lasting legacy for the community and future proof a community hall in HG. My understanding is with the grants there'll be no additional costs on the community so with this opportunity, why don't we do it.

And finally, looking at options for groups to continue during the down time, this is something Barbara has already mentioned, this is something we are really conscious of. That for around 12 months in a village where there are lots of things going on and then suddenly it stops, everyone would be worried about that, but this is the sort of thing the Continuation Group hopes to address and have already started talking about and have come up with some really good ideas that will help keep things going.

Barbara thanked Gareth.

So having looked at renovate and rebuild and two years down the line, we can't keep going down the line, we've got to start thinking what we've got to do. There was a vote at the HWG and a recommendation put forward to the Trustees, we can't please everyone, the recommendation was for a rebuild. We still have to have a feasibility study. We tried and tried not to have one because its expensive, but to get the grants we need one. Perhaps – and I hold my hands up, as I've not been here before - with hind sight we shouldn't have taken a vote until after the feasibility study, but we took a vote because we wanted to start moving on, we're all getting older and a lot of us here want to see something set up, building something good for now and the future.

Before looking at the plans and getting feedback, BW asked if there were any questions:

Yvonne Wood: is the footprint of the hall staying the same?

BW responded the size of the main hall has to remain the same.

LF asked that the plan could be seen before people asked for their views. Renovation and Rebuild options were set out on each table along with a current floor plan.

Following a 15 minute slot to review the drawings, BW addressed the meeting. BW noted the rebuild plan isn't complete but gives you an idea of what we're looking for and where the building will be positioned on the site. The renovation plan obviously keeps the building in the same position and the hall space., Lucy will now talk with you.

Lucy noted she would go through what is proposed for each of the two options. I was asked to develop an option for renovating what you have, improving the thermal performance and also improving access were the two main things and adding more scope for the things on the wish list. The thought was to keep this the hall more or less as it is, and then to provide extensions, a kitchen at the front, so you can have the two hatches, then we were thinking of taking down the single storey extension you current have and extending the existing roof line all the way back which would replace and extend the current space. We have included disabled toilets and a larger store room, plus an exit out into the rear area with a patio space. For access to the hall itself we've replaced the front doors and moved access to the side, which I think you'll agree is an improvement on what you have already. If you look at the elevations, what is proposed to improve the thermal quality of the building is to wrap the entire external walls with insulation and rendering. This will make things a lot warmer. Lucy asked for any questions on the renovation: David Andrews asked if the external rendering would have any effect on condensation. Lucy responded it does but this usually happens when you have the insulation internally. She had worked with projects before and this hadn't been an issue and it should improve conditions provided we have a cavity wall.

Cyril Cliff asked, with a metal roof, if there would be any corrosion issues, would we be looking to replace the roof in the future because of corrosion of the panels? LC noted there are roofs with a 40year warranty, and she wouldn't expect anything more than the odd spot of damage but this shouldn't be a concern; we can't use a tiled roof because of the structure of the building.

Edith Hockenhull asked if there would be any noise issues internally with a metal roof. Lucy noted, the layers of insulation we would have should be enough and this system had been used in schools where acoustics are important and it's not been a problem.

Lin Smith asked if there was sufficient space at the side for the entrance. Lucy responded there was and a ramp would be included but she'd not had time to include this in the drawing. There would be space for wheelchairs turning.

Julie Jones noted there were no car parking spaces shown at the front of the building. Lucy noted on referring to our pre-planning application that Wrexham Council say we don't actually have any parking, the area isn't big enough to be called such, (current front area is really only a

'pull inbay'. Having the front extension leaves you in the same position. The larger kitchen area has been requested and the front extension is the only place this can be provided.

LF moved on to the new build option, this shows the building set a little further back which would allow cars to 'park' at the front. We have also looked at lowering the floor level so ramps aren't needed. It's a very similar layout to the other option. This looks at building the walls out of pre-constructed panels, a cavity block, then a brick, and still have a brick gable façade, you'd have a larger loft space, kitchen at the front with two hatches and improved storage at the rear and access through to the garden and a large patio area. The entrance would be on the side with a porch for shelter. The roof is the same as for the renovate and in metal.

Greg Walker asked what sort of shelf-life the wall panels had; they are a relatively new building material a bit like a prefab to build. Quicker to build but if we want to leave something here for the future, he didn't think this a good method. Colin Porter asked if the same could be case for a metal roof. Lucy said this is not set in stone and can be discussed further down the line, this is quite an early stage in discussions.

Julie Jones asked if there would be any additional noise from metal roofs that might affect close neighbours. Brian Gilbert had experience of a building with a corrugated roof and because of the insulation no neighbours complained and it didn't seem to be an issue even in heavy rain.

David Andrews asked if a metal roof was weight bearing enough for solar panels, Lucy confirmed it was.

Brian Gilbert noted we seem to be getting bogged down in details and we should really be looking at the general overall design. Brian did note it would probably be nice to have direct access to the rear garden rather than having to go through a corridor. Lucy noted there had been an option with the hall at the back but this couldn't accommodate a larger kitchen area and two hatches. Brian also asked who owned the land on the right of the building and if they had been approached. CP confirmed this had been considered but wasn't a possibility.

Lucy noted a big plus of this design was the space for 'parking' at the front and a modern up to date building with the layout you want it, without the strange nooks which would occur in the renovate

Peter Lawrence asked what the different in costs where for the two options. Lucy noted this is out for pricing at the moment and would be discussed when they came back noting it will be more expensive for a new building.

BW asked everyone to remember that we can't do anything without grants, we need to have them. BW asked if people would like a few more minutes to look at the plans again and members of the HWG would be round to answer questions if they can.

Following a further period reviewing the plans and speaking with members of HWG, BW thought this had been a good discussion and noted having received a number of points from those present. She thanked everyone for coming along and for their thoughts and the interest shown in what the group has been doing; She particularly wished to thank Lucy for coming along on a non-working day, applause from the audience. BW noted this process is not a sprint it's a marathon, we're off the starting block but we still have a long way to go. It's going to take time. We'll carry on maintaining the hall, and doing what we can to keep the hall going. The HWG will carry on, now as the Continuity Group, the members have changed over time, if anyone would like to join them, and you're very welcome to do so. Anything people can contribute the better, but we have to start moving things forward. We can't stop here thinking it's alright, I'm alright, we have to think further forward. My personal thoughts are, grants are essential, the Trustees had the vote, the recommendation was to go for a rebuild, so let's go for it, see what grants we can get, Andrea is a whizz at getting grants in, from the initial grant to buy the building from the scouts up to the most recent one for our new chairs and tables. If we don't

get the grants for a rebuild, then we fall back on the renovation but we've got to do something. We are a small community and one of the charities I discussed this with suggested making the building multipurpose. This might increase chances getting money. But we don't haven't the option to make a multipurpose building on this site. There could be issues, but we'll go for a rebuild, target grants; doing it as quickly as possible is another factor, we're taking into consideration that we don't want the hall shut down for a long period. But we've got to do it, we don't want to lose the hall. In 1957 they left a legacy; we want to do the same. If you're interested in joining the Continuity Group, please speak to one of us.

Thank you everyone for this morning

Meeting closed 11.45am