

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF RETAINING GREAT WHITTINGTON VILLAGE HALL

You are probably aware of the proposal to sell Great Whittington Village Hall to the owners of the Queens Head public house in exchange for a newly built hall within a new extension of the pub with bedrooms above belonging to the pub. The hall element would be owned by the Village Hall Trustees on a leasehold basis whereas the current hall is freehold. It has been stated by those wishing to sell the hall that the prime reason for recommending this action was the high cost of securing the building structure of the existing hall. It was said that in order to achieve this, a sum of £184,790.00 was urgently needed and that no grants were available to do this work. Even the most ardent supporter of the Hall would blanch at the thought that approximately £500 per adult resident of the Parish needed to be spent if it was a fact rather than a fantasy.

Some members of the parish were informed of the proposal to sell the village hall on 5th March 2021 by e-mail. A presentation was made to the Parish Council on 9th March at which the Chair of the Village Hall committee made a statement to the effect that £184,790 was required and that no grants would be available. Veronica Jones, our County Councillor, responded immediately stating that in her experience grants were always available.

Following the disclosure of the plan to sell the hall in March 2021 many long-standing parish residents found the cost element hard to believe and questioned the facilities offered by the proposed new hall compared to the existing one. Specifically, the future plans for ownership, outside garden area, parking, child safety, noise considerations and location in the village were questioned.

As a result of these misgivings some residents decided to put themselves forward for election to the Village Hall committee as the EGM notice stated that the present committee were not intending to stand for re-election.

The EGM took place on 12th April when five members of the previous committee changed their minds and decided to stand. A committee of seventeen plus two parish council and two WI members were elected. A majority of this committee were in favour of pursuing every opportunity to retain the existing hall if possible. Prior to a much delayed first committee meeting held on 29th April all the group in favour of selling the hall e-mailed their resignations within hours of the meeting. This included the acting chair who resigned two and a half hours before the proposed time of the meeting.

A hand-over of documents from the previous to the new committee then occurred. One of these documents gave detailed the breakdown of the figure of £184,790. Although there were no quotations or estimates to back up this figure, the current committee carefully investigated each element in this document and, using estimates provided by businesses, information provided by committee members concerning work already carried out between 2014 and 2016, together with invoices and guarantees, has concluded that there is no evidence to support the claim that anything approaching this sum is necessary.

The details given below are an analysis of the estimated costs in the document. The items listed in italics (and enclosed in inverted commas) are verbatim copies of each item in the document which is now on the village halls website <https://northumberlandvillagehalls.org.uk/great-whittington-village-hall> with its suggested cost in red. The text that follows is our analysis and conclusion, including separation of work that is needed and its cost, and work that is not required.

1. *"Strip off existing slate roof coverings, ridge tiles and water tables. Re-slate over new breathable underlay with new vented ridge. Rebed existing water tables over lead flashings. **Expected cost £19,700.**"*

This was the only item which the new committee had heard of before the EGM and it raised immediate concerns about the validity of the cost estimate for essential work because it could be readily observed that the roof appeared to be in a reasonable condition. The modest amount of damp on the inner wood ceiling

appeared to be caused by condensation forming on the inner surface of the slates and dripping off. With no underlay this is bound to happen for any roof installed more than about fifty years ago when the material was invented and the same will apply to more than 50% of the homes in the parish. As there had been no heating on in the hall during the period of Covid this had not been able to dry out. We have contacted a reputable roofing contractor, in fact the same one who does all the roofing for Anvil Homes who built Briar Fields, and he has confirmed this. Minor work needed to deal with a few cracked slates and some flashing. **The contractor has quoted £480 including vat for this work leaving £19,220 not required.**

2. *"Make good existing roof timbers as required and apply timber preserve treatment. **Expected cost £5,000."***
As no new roof is needed and the timbers are sound the only requirement is for woodworm treatment and quotes will be sought for this. It may be possible to obtain grant funding for this, but, if not, **it is not expected to cost more than £2000 leaving £3000 not required.**

3. *"Strip off existing flat roof coverings to toilets and re-lay new single ply roof coverings. Make good existing roof timbers and apply timber preserve treatment. **Expected cost £4,550"***
The same roofing contractor has confirmed that the flat roof coverings are not leaking and that they show signs of recent repair. They do not need any further work at the current time although this type of roof does have a limited life and will need to be replaced at some stage in the future. The leak above the disabled toilet has damaged the ceiling and **the repair will cost £132 including vat.** This means that **£4,468 is not required.**

4. *"Refurbish existing guttering and down pipes, replace as necessary. **Expected cost £1,500"***
All the rainwater goods were stripped off, refurbished and replaced during the work completed between 2014 and 2016. There is one gutter joint with a leak going onto the wall by the front upper left hand window causing a small damp patch to that wall. **A quote for £168 including VAT has been received for this work leaving £1,332 not required.**

5. *"Rake out and repoint external walls and chimney with lime mortar pointing. **Expected cost £7,150."***
The rear wall of the hall was repointed during the work completed between 2014 and 2016. The front wall does not need any work. The chimney would probably be best taken down at some time although this is not essential as there are no working fires in the hall. This means the **£7,150 is not required.**

6. *"Lift existing timber suspended floor to main hall and dispose off site. Lay new floor screed over rigid insulation board over concrete sub floor with integrated DPM. Floor to be finished with engineered wood finish. **Expected cost £16,300"***
See comment for item 7 below.

7. *"Remove timber panelling and plaster to internal walls and dispose off site. Supply and fit insulated wall linings with plaster skim finish, fit new panelling and skirtings ready for paint finish. **Expected cost Main Hall and Dining Area £19100 First floor £8,740."***
The work against items 6 and 7 was all completed between 2014 and 2016 along with tanking the rear wall. Behind the panelling the walls were treated with a specialist damp proof chemical treatment and is still under guarantee before new panelling was applied. The areas of wood floor adjacent to the walls were also replaced and the floor resealed. This means a total of **£16,300 for the floor and £27,840 for the panelling is not required.**

8. *"Plasterboard and skim to existing main hall ceiling ready for paint. **Expected cost £2,350"***
We assume this is the area under the low portion of the hall as it is the only plastered area and nothing more than normal redecoration is needed. This means that **£2,350 is not required.**

9. "Test fully electrical installation including new lighting and power points to the main hall area. Change all lighting to LED lights where possible. **Expected cost £7,500**"

The hall was totally rewired just under five years ago at a cost of over £10,000. The five-year check is due in July and the same installer has been contracted to do the check at a cost of £120. This would be the same wherever the hall was located so is excluded from refurbishment costs. Thus, **£7,500 is not required.**

10. "Replace existing hot water and space heating to the property with sustainable heat source. **Expected cost £18,500**"

The hot water system was replaced during the work completed between 2014 and 2016. The space heating was replaced at the same time as new electric heaters were installed throughout, including the upstairs rooms. With the government now pushing renewable energy sources and heat pump technology the committee is progressing a grant application to cover the installation of a photovoltaic panel system over part of the car park, feeding part through heat pumps to increase the efficiency by a factor of between three and four. This will allow a constant heat source into the hall during the winter months warming the infrastructure to an acceptable minimal level which can then be enhanced during usage of the hall. During the summer months surplus electricity would be fed into the grid. This is expected to be fully funded by various grant sources and in addition would provide an ongoing reduction in energy costs. The time scale for this work is an outline plan by the end of June, costed proposals by the end of November and work starting in April 2022. As a result, the spend of **£18,500 is not required.**

11. "Take up existing concrete surface to car park, reduce ground level of the car park to the northern elevation of the main hall, cloaks and toilet area, form new retaining wall and install new french drain to surface water drain. Resurface car park and erect new boundary fence. **Expected cost £23,900.**"

The north wall was trenched, drained and tanked during the work completed between 2014 and 2016. This means that the lowering of the car park is not essential but from a long term point of view is desirable. It is believed that the cost of this work can be included in the plan to put photovoltaic panels in the car park at no cost to the hall. This means that the **£23,900 is not required.**

12. "Upgrade lead water supply to plastic. **Expected cost £1,200**"

There are no lead pipes on site to our knowledge. The last lead pipe was in an outside toilet which was converted to a store in the 1980's when it was removed. This pipe was capped at the time the brick staircase and internal toilet extension was built approximately eighty years ago. During conversion to a hall the water supply was changed and this line was removed. All water comes through alkathene and copper pipes. To make sure a water quality check will be undertaken at a cost of £16. This means that **£1,184 is not required.**

13. "Redecorate the property on completion of building works. **Estimated cost £6,500**"

As no major work is anticipated, redecoration would only be required on a normal periodic basis and this would be an ordinary maintenance issue, as in any other hall. In the mid 1990's the hall was redecorated over a weekend by volunteers including the children and photos of this are on the website. This may be something that could be considered again. This means that the **£6,500 is not required.**

13 again. "Prelims to include scaffolding, site supervision, health and safety, protection, plant and equipment, storage containers, welfare facilities, skips. **Estimated cost £22,500**"

As no major work is anticipated except for that covered by grants (which would also cover this type of expenditure) this cost of **£22,500 is not required.**

14. "Professional fees to include Architect, Structural Engineer, M & E Engineer. **Estimated cost £8,250**"

As above therefore this cost of **£8,250 is not required.**

15. "General contingency. **Estimated cost £12,000**"

As above therefore this cost of **£12,000 is not required.**

The above analysis of the **total refurbishment cost of £184,790** reveals that **only £2,796 is needed to be expended by the charity**. A total of £42,400 will be spent on improvement subject to grant approval but in the unlikely event that grants are not available, they are not essential. Thus, a total of £139,544 is totally unnecessary. These values are obviously based on the estimates submitted to the Parish Council to support the proposal to sell the hall and we have no supporting documents to verify their validity.

Work of a minor nature will be completed as needed but major work will be subject to the normal procedure of obtaining competing quotations. All major work will only be done subject to grant availability and their stringent procedures will be adhered to. In addition, some small works have been identified as having been left undone whilst the hall has been closed due to Covid. This work will be completed by local contractors and by committee volunteers and will not cost more than £500, mainly for materials.

In addition to the fact that there is no necessity to spend £181,944 of the £184,790 quoted by the previous committee there are other factors which would be detrimental to the usefulness of the hall if the proposal to sell the hall were to be actioned. These include:

- The change of type of ownership from freehold to leasehold with the curtailment of options that this implies.
- The lack of a secure garden area restricting popular outdoor functions.
- The problems which may occur if the Queens Head fails and closes down like so many local pubs. In the event that it does and converts to residential use there will likely be noise restrictions which will limit the type of functions that can be held in the hall and possibly the times it can be used.
- Limited parking areas if the hall is being used at the same time as a pub, restaurant and the bedrooms above are occupied. Parking may also adversely impact on the parking facilities for residents of the Main Street.
- Parking along the main road outside the Queens Head when events are underway may cause an increase in obstruction to agricultural machinery which needs to pass through the village.

In conclusion, while the committee wishes the pub every success, it rejects the proposal to transfer the village hall facility to the Queens Head. We believe the rebuttal of the cost projection for retaining the village hall at its present site is sufficient on its own without considering any other implications. We are in ongoing discussions concerning grants mainly to improve the environmental sustainability for the foreseeable future including renewable energy sourcing and heat generation.

This building which was converted from the closed school in 1972 has served the parish over the years as a venue for many activities and social functions. Previous committees and residents have given unstintingly of their time to enable it to provide a welcoming resource for the whole parish however it is your decision as residents to choose which option is best for the parish in line with the constitution.

Great Whittington Village Hall is the heritage of the past, the present and the future residents of the parish.

Great Whittington Village Hall Committee,
29 May 2021