

# PRESTEIGNE MEMORIAL HALL

REPORT OF FACILITATED MEETING

September 2006

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## REPORT

This report, by Resources for Change, sets out views ascertained at a facilitated meeting about the future of the Presteigne Memorial Hall held in September 2006.

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## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Memorial Hall was built in 1953. It stands on land on Station Road, Presteigne, Powys. It is a one-storey community hall, comprising a space for functions with a small stage, and adjacent bar and kitchen areas. The Hall was built with the help of Canadian servicemen and is a memorial to the dead of the two world wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- 1.2 The Memorial Hall is owned by Powys County Council, but held on trust for the benefit of the people of Presteigne and Norton. The Hall is managed by a local management committee. The committee found that they had two areas of difficulty. One was that they were unable to attract new, younger, members to join the management committee. The second was that they were still, after several years of discussions, being pressed by Powys County Council to sign a full repairing lease of the Hall. The management committee accordingly approached the Town Council to ask them for help in September 2004.
- 1.3 Since then, the Town Council has taken four steps. The first was to obtain a survey of the physical condition of the building. The second was to carry out an opinion poll about what the people of Presteigne wished to do with the Hall. The third was to clarify the legal status of the Hall. And the fourth was to instruct a consultant to ascertain the views of users and other community groups. This would include a review of the facilities provided by other community buildings in the town.

- 1.4 **Condition Survey.** The survey was carried out by Mr W.B Morgan MRCIS MCIOB of Marches Conservation Services, Gatehouse Mill, Bircher, near Leominster, HR6 OAX in January 2005. The survey showed that the building would need to have substantial work carried out on it by 2015, costing £100,000 at 2005 prices.
- 1.5 **Opinion Poll.** This was conducted by the Town Council in April 2005. It was carried out by leaving voting papers on various options with households and collating the results. The Town Council was assisted by an emeritus fellow of Nuffield College Oxford with many years' experience of polling from working for the BBC on election nights. The response rate was 25%, the majority from the over 60s. 97% said they wanted the town to have a Memorial Hall, with 87% against refurbishing the existing hall and 89% wanting a new hall to be built.
- 1.6 **Legal status.** Investigations by Cobbetts, a firm of solicitors in Birmingham specialising in charity law, showed that the Memorial hall was held on trust and explained the implications of that status. Powys County Council obtained advice from the Charity Commission. On 1<sup>st</sup> February 2006 Powys County Council attended a meeting with the management committee and the Town Council. The County Council acknowledged that they should not have sought to ask the management committee to take a full repairing lease, and said that they had no plans to press for transfer of formal ownership.
- 1.7 **Ascertaining the views of users of the Memorial Hall and other community groups, both about the Hall and about other community buildings.** The Town Council believed that these opinions would give a good basis for deciding what facilities could best be provided in a new or refurbished hall. The Town Council preferred this to a public meeting, as the public had already been polled, and the views of those most concerned needed to be obtained. The Town Council were grateful for the assistance of Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations (PAVO) in finding consultants able to advise on how this should be done and able to conduct the exercise, and PAVO found some funding to help to pay for the exercise. PAVO advised that the exercise should be run, as far as possible, independently of the Town Council. The Town Council were grateful for the administrative assistance of Presteigne and Norton Community Support ("Community Support") through their co-ordinator, Lesley Wootton. Following interviews, Resources for Change, acting through Helen Fairweather, were appointed to run a facilitated meeting for the purpose of obtaining these views and reporting back afterwards. This document is the report.

## **2. PLANNING THE FACILITATED MEETING**

- 2.1 **Who was invited.** Resources for Change discussed the planning of the event with a steering group composed of Lesley Wootton and members of the Town Council. It was agreed that representatives from all the community buildings, and groups using the buildings, should be invited to the meeting. Representatives of the nine known community buildings and seventy-six groups using the buildings were invited. A list of all the people and organisations who were invited and who attended is set out, together with an example of the invitation letter, in Appendix 1
- 2.2 **The Community Buildings.** These are listed, with a brief description of each, in Appendix 5.
- 2.3 **Style of the facilitation.** It was agreed that those attending would have an opportunity to express their views on the buildings by walking round an exhibition style display, placing notes and scores on the boards, considering their own requirements, and finally discussing options for the future in groups. At the end of the session a form would be handed out for groups to set out their detailed needs for community buildings. An example of the form and the responses received is in Appendix [3].

## **3. THE MEETING**

- 3.1 The meeting took place, on Wednesday 27th September 2006, between 7 and 9.30 pm., appropriately in the Memorial Hall.
- 3.2 Thirty-five people (see Appendix [1] ) attended the meeting, with representation from all sectors: sport, other leisure, arts (including literature, film, music) business, government/local government, education, voluntary support, and others including church and environment  
Four of the community buildings considered were represented e.g., by management committee members. Young people were under-represented, and to a lesser extent, men. The business sector also had few representatives.
- 3.3 The meeting started with a brief introduction by Lesley Wootton following which Helen Fairweather explained how the evening would be run and directed those attending in the various stages as set out above in 2.3. The event then followed that plan.

## 4. REVIEW OF DATA

### 4.1 Audit of community buildings

Nine community buildings were represented by a photo and chart:

1. The Judge's Lodging,
2. Memorial Hall,
3. St Andrew's Church Hall,
4. Assembly Rooms,
5. Youth Centre,
6. Scout Hut,
7. Baptist Chapel,
8. Methodist Chapel
9. British Legion.

Participants recorded their views on how well each of the nine community buildings met the needs for all the main functions of a community facility, as follows:

Community Facility	1 = not at all 5 = extremely well					
	1 Not at all	2 Slightly	3 Fairly well	4 Well	5 Extremely well	Don't know
Small meetings						
Big meetings						
Performances						
Rehearsal space						
Interviews						
Training courses/learning opportunities						
Licensed events						
Weddings, parties						
Catering facilities						
Young people friendly						
Disabled access						
IT uses						
Car parking						
Other:						
Don't know this building						

Other uses added by participants were markets, sales, lunch club and church services, but there were not enough responses for these uses to draw conclusions.

All the participants recorded their views on each of the buildings by marking each appropriate box with pins. They also recorded comments on what they liked best and least about each building, which was useful to bring out the 'feel' or atmosphere of each one. A few found the process difficult or unhelpful, apparently because they were unfamiliar with some of the buildings.

The numbers of responses in each box were added into a total 'score' for each function. The purpose was to establish which functions are well met by existing community buildings, and which are not, to reveal the gaps and give an overall

picture of community facilities in Presteigne. It was not the intention to 'score' each building, but there may have been some who felt their building was being judged and tended to inflate their responses accordingly – the results seem to show this may have been the case for the Memorial Hall.

The overall score was established by adding the number of responses in each box and multiplying by the number at the head of that box. For example, five responses in the box 'fairly well' would be multiplied by three to give 15, but five responses in the 'extremely well' box would be multiplied by five to give 25. The numbers in each box from 'slightly' to 'extremely well' were added, while responses in the 'not at all' box were treated as negative and deducted, to give a final score. The figures do not reflect a scientific or statistical process, and were of course influenced by the points of view of those present. For example it seems likely that a relatively large number of those opposed to rebuilding the Memorial Hall attended, a conclusion which emerges from the very high 'scores' of the Memorial Hall for all functions. The figures therefore must be treated with caution. The comments recorded for each building (What do you like best and least about this building?) provide a useful source of balancing information. (See Appendix 2).

Overall, the process produced a reasonably realistic picture of the relative position of each building function.

#### **4.2 The main strengths**

Six functions show up from the analysis as being relatively well provided in the town.

##### *1. Small meetings*

Most buildings were rated well for this provision. The need appears to be well met, but there is demand for this kind of space indicated in group requirements (Appendix 3) and in some of the comments on individual buildings (Appendix 2), though it is not clear how high the demand is.

##### *2. Performances*

Most buildings were rated well or reasonably well, only the Youth Centre and Scout Hut, perhaps predictably, being rated poorly. However, looking more closely, the two which scored best were the Memorial Hall and Assembly Rooms. There were several comments that the Memorial Hall's acoustics are poor, it has an 'unfriendly' shape and lack of atmosphere; while the Assembly Rooms are limited in the numbers it can accommodate, has poor parking and no catering facilities. In the future it is likely that a new space suitable for large performances would be welcomed.

##### *3. Rehearsal space* seems well catered for, six buildings being rated well and only three poorly. Any large meeting space with good acoustics is likely to provide reasonably well for this use.

##### *4. Young people friendly.* Most are rated well here, but this result should be treated with caution as there was only one person present under 25, and few under 50. Of the two rated best, comments on the Youth Centre include 'It needs serious upgrading' 'grubby' 'outgrown its usefulness'. The County Council has identified a need for better youth provision and has plans to replace the hall. Their requirements for appropriate provision would need consultation focused on young people.

5. *Disabled access.* Most buildings are rated well here. Legal requirements make a high standard of accessibility a necessity for any new or refurbished building in any case.
6. *Car parking.* Overall there is good provision, but in this case the position of each building individually is more important than a combined position. Several buildings are poorly rated: The Judge's Lodging, St Andrew's Church Hall and the Methodist Chapel. These buildings may therefore be most useful for functions which will not need numbers of people to arrive by car. For example, as noted below, lack of parking near St Andrew's limits its usefulness for weddings and parties.

#### 4.3 The main weaknesses

1. *Interviews.* This function appears to be poorly provided for overall, but there is a wide variation, from four buildings rated very low to three quite well – St Andrew's, Assembly Rooms and the Baptist Chapel. The groups represented didn't show a high demand for interview rooms, (see Appendix 3) but more detailed information awaited from groups may change the picture. Small rooms for private interviews would be a useful feature of a multi-use building.
2. *Licensed events.* These appear to score poorly, apart from the Memorial Hall. The result is distorted because several buildings would be unlikely to host such events (Youth Centre, Scout Hut, Methodist & Baptist Chapels). However, apart from the Memorial Hall only the British Legion was rated well, and both attracted some negative comments, e.g. 'smoky', 'down at heel' 'no atmosphere'. This function therefore could be considered under-provided in the town, unless hotels and pubs are clearly providing the community need.
3. *Weddings and parties* were rated fairly poorly in most buildings. St Andrews' Church Hall was well rated, but has little parking provision. The Memorial Hall was also rated highly but the more negative comments, such as those noted under 'Performances' above, would detract from its attractiveness for this purpose. Groups represented at the meeting indicated a high demand for 'Large meetings', and a space suitable for such uses could well also be suitable for weddings and parties. This demand would come mainly from individuals rather than community groups, so was unlikely to feature significantly at the meeting.
4. *IT uses* were rated the worst provided of all uses. This may be reflect little existing IT activity in community buildings, and participants' assessment of the likely suitability of the buildings, rather than direct experience. Unless this need is well met elsewhere, for example at a dedicated IT centre, there is an unmet need for suitable spaces for this use. IT capability would be essential if planning for conference use, for example.

These four uses are the main gaps in existing provision which emerge from analysis of the data, but the other functions are worth looking at in more detail:

*Catering facilities* are rated fairly well overall, but only the Memorial Hall has both good parking and good catering facilities – both important features of a multi-use building.

*Big meetings* came out quite well, but the three buildings rated best for this purpose (Memorial Hall, Assembly Rooms, British Legion) all have significant drawbacks. Similarly for *training courses and learning opportunities*.

#### **4.4 General assessment of community facilities**

Overall, most of the buildings being considered have a specific purpose and are not in constant use, reflected in the few groups using them. All the buildings could be booked for one-off uses, and the extent of this type of use is not directly shown in the data. One can make an attempt at deducing the extent of one-off uses from the ratings for examples such as weddings, from some of the comments about the buildings, the number of people who didn't know the building, and their popularity with regular user groups.

Looking at this data, the Youth Centre, Scout Hut, Baptist Chapel and Methodist Chapel seem to fall into the category of having limited general community use. It is possible that they could be more extensively used. Comments on the Youth Centre have been recorded above, but the other three attracted positive comments and no negative ones. They were however not well known, so the comments could have been those of a small number of regular users and supporters.

The Judge's Lodging is well known but has no regular user groups and the comment was recorded 'Very restricted for many uses'.

Four buildings therefore could be described as having general community use, the Memorial Hall, St Andrew's Church Hall, Assembly Rooms and British Legion. Each has their strengths and weaknesses, which have already been noted above. It is notable that the Memorial Hall has by far the largest number of regular user groups (27) followed by the Assembly Rooms (11). The others have four each, though church groups at St Andrew's have been counted as one. St Andrew's has been recently refurbished so may be in the process of being discovered or rediscovered, but events there have to finish by 10 pm which will restrict its use.

The Memorial Hall is currently meeting particular needs for big events, and has good catering facilities and parking which may be part of the reason for its general popularity. It is affectionately regarded as 'clean, warm and useful' in spite of its drawbacks in terms of appearance, shape and atmosphere. It was also noted in the later discussion that it is the only building with stage facilities, the best place for dancing, and it pays for itself on a day to day revenue basis.

#### **4.5 Group needs**

Each participant reflected on and recorded separately their own group's needs, to feed into later discussions. Results are shown in appendix 3. Participants took away a group record sheet to record detailed meeting and event needs for their group after the meeting. Few of these have yet been returned, but as they are received the information can be used to assess demand for the functions recorded above.

## 5 MAIN OPTIONS FOR THE MEMORIAL HALL

In groups of five or six the participants considered the pros & cons of each of five main options for the future of the Memorial Hall, taking each option in turn.

The options were prepared by the steering group, to cover all practical alternatives (Appendix 4).

- Option 1: Do nothing to the Memorial Hall, abandon/demolish after 5 years
- Option 2: Repair the Hall, spending about £100,000 in 5 years' time
- Option 3: Demolish and rebuild the Hall on this site
- Option 4: Build a new Hall in association with the remodelling of the school
- Option 5: Build a new Hall at Wentes Meadow

The meeting format allowed participants to explore and express their ideas and opinions fully, giving enough opportunity for the range of feelings and ideas to be expressed. Feedback and the intensity of discussion indicated that they enjoyed sharing their thoughts and learned from listening to each other.

Strong feelings could be openly expressed and recorded. In addition new ideas were developing, and some long and thoughtful comments recorded, which will help develop criteria for particular options in the future.

### 5.1 The main findings

- No other options were put forward at the meeting, confirming that these are the realistic options
- No one option is very strongly supported over others.
- Considerable numbers of concerns were expressed about every option, giving a wide range of opinions.

The two options which were best supported are:

- Option 3: Rebuild on the same site
- Option 5: Rebuild at Wentes Meadow

Though reservations were expressed about both options.

#### *Option 3: Rebuild on the same site*

The positive responses were summed up in the comment 'Chance to have .. a modern, multi-purpose, flexible Hall to suit whole community'. There were general negative comments e.g. 'nothing beneficial', 'not yet' without explanation, and others on detail such as 'we would need PCC [Powys County Council] support' The only specific negative comment was 'limited site'.

#### *Option 5 Rebuild at Wentes Meadow*

This was seen positively as giving scope for a multi-functional building on a site in community ownership, with plenty of space. It would be well located for residents of Norton who have no community building at present. There were relatively few negative comments. Some were general nay-saying 'bad idea – rubbish' but specific concerns were that it is too far out of town, could affect local residents, and concerns about security and safety. A measured response was 'Needs more information and comparative costing with building ..on original site'.

## 5.2 Other options

The other options generated stronger negative than positive comments. There was some interest in *Option 4 Build a new Hall in association with the remodelling of the school*, where positive comments included: 'Good location' 'Could be a very good option' 'Possibly easier to get funding' 'Could include good theatre space'. There were significant concerns, however, about the sense of ownership, summed up by the comment 'School would gain more than community', and about access, parking, and taking space from the school.

Discussion on *Option 1: Do nothing to the Memorial Hall, abandon/demolish after 5 years* drew out some strong feelings about the Hall from its supporters, including 'Degrade memory of Memorial Hall', 'remember the dedication to our Servicemen'. The comments reveal anxiety about lack of respect for what the hall represents, and that future redevelopment may threaten some users' identification with the hall's history. These concerns may reflect underlying divisions between the 'oppositional' group and others, and need to be taken into account in the future planning process.

## 5.3 Criteria for the success of the new community facility

There are marked differences of opinion on the options for the future of the Memorial Hall. Taken together they can be used to generate a set of criteria of desirable attributes for a new community facility, as set out below.

- Large building with stage facilities
- Good for dancing
- Attractive to a wide range of people
- Pays for itself and its upkeep
- Respects memory of Memorial Hall and remembers the dedication to Servicemen
- Plans for the future
- Up-to-date building: a venue for whole community
- Clean, comfortable, warm and welcoming
- Concert space
- Consider impact of development on other public buildings and their regular activities
- Well-designed modern, multi-purpose, flexible Hall to suit whole community
- Independent of County Council and School
- Community owned, run by all interested groups
- Opportunity for outreach
- Good parking
- Security and safety for children
- Attractive and accessible to young people
- Suitable for all ages
- Attractive to funders
- Good value – consider cost
- Could include good theatre space
- Licensing easy
- Reasonable cost

Relevant to Bypass site only

- Move by-pass to other side of car park which would overcome parking problems
- Central location

Relevant to Wents Meadow only

- Good relationship to external events on Wentes Meadow
- Minimal disturbance to neighbours
- Good access for Norton residents

These are presented above with no attempt to prioritise. A future consultation exercise, as preferred options are developed, would give an opportunity to test the criteria for their relative importance.

## 6. Conclusions

### 6.1 Attendance

There was a good spread of representation of the community buildings and user groups. In terms of the community generally, the business sector and young people were under-represented, and there was a predominance of women, but this balance reflects the nature of most of the user groups.

### 6.2 Audit of community buildings

#### 6.2.1 Advantages

According to those present, Presteigne's community facilities provide **best** for:

- Small meetings
- Performances
- Rehearsal space
- Disabled access
- Young people friendly space
- Car parking

However, the rating for 'performances' is qualified because the two buildings rated as best have significant drawbacks (para 4.2). Car parking is good at some buildings but poor at others, including one of those rated best for performances and big meetings. The ratings for young people friendliness must be treated with caution as only one person under 25 was present and no children.

#### 6.2.2 Disadvantages

Presteigne is provided **least** well for:

- Interviews
- Licensed events
- Weddings and parties
- IT uses

It is not clear whether there is likely to be a significant demand for interview rooms, and more research would be needed among local agencies to establish the demand. Licensed events are not well provided for, but hotels and pubs may pick up the demand. The demand for weddings and parties will come from individuals across the

community, rather than organised groups, but it was nevertheless identified as poorly provided for, and is likely to be constant in future. IT uses are particularly poorly provided for, and would be usefully provided in any new or refurbished building. Catering facilities, big meetings and training courses were rated as fairly well provided for, but the buildings rated well for these have other drawbacks (para 4.3).

### 6.2.3 Economic use

Some existing and potential future uses were not considered, especially economic or tourist related functions, such as markets, sales, fairs. Some of these were indirectly covered, for example the events of Presteigne Music Festival will be covered by performances. Existing user groups would not necessarily have a perspective on economic aspects, so separate research would be needed. This aspect may be important for future sustainability.

### 6.2.4 Community facilities generally

Of the nine community facilities considered, only four have any substantial general community use (para 4.4), including the Memorial Hall, which is by far the most popular. Its particular strengths are its size, good parking and catering facilities. Additionally it has a stage and is good for dancing.

## 6.3 Options for the Memorial Hall

Five options were considered, of which two options emerged as preferred (para 5.1).

Option 3: Rebuild on the same site. This was seen as an opportunity for a modern, multi-purpose building, with the only specific drawback being the limited site.

Option 5: Rebuild at Wentes Meadow

Similarly this gave scope for a multi-functional building, with plenty of space and a relationship to events on the meadow and better access for residents of Norton. Drawbacks included the site's distance from the centre of town, and security and safety concerns.

All the comments made about the five options have been reworded as criteria for success (para 5.3), to help test the detail of the selected options as they develop further. They will need further refinement and testing in consultation. Some of them demonstrate the specific feelings and objections which need to be overcome to win over, where possible, the opposition to the option eventually chosen. Any new proposals could include elements to deal openly with the issues of respect for and involvement of the older users of the hall, the long use of the hall, and its original dedication.

Clearly local sensibilities need to be respected in making new plans, while minimising energy and time spent on opponents who are fixed in their views.

**In summary**, the wishes of most of those present were broadly for a new building which fulfils the function of the present large, well-used and popular hall, but overcomes its disadvantages of poor design and acoustics, and extends its attractiveness to new users. Some participants were understandably concerned about a possible negative impact of a new facility on existing ones, perhaps especially by available funding being monopolised.

#### **6.4 Limitations of the exercise**

There have been no recent detailed community surveys, but the opinion poll referred to in para 5.1 has raised interest in the question.

There was no opportunity, because of lack of time, to discuss the different functions of the buildings in more detail, for example to explore how young-people-friendly existing buildings are.

Those present were existing users of community buildings. Inevitably it is harder to find and consult those who are not using existing facilities or not in organised groups. As the preferred options are developed consultation will need to be widened to include potential new users as far as possible.

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9<sup>th</sup> January 2007