

## Highnam Parish Council

### Old School Refurbishment Project Report

11 October 2022

**Current Position:** The Old School is a Grade 2 Listed building purchased in 1982 from the Gloucestershire Diocesan Board of Education using monies secured from local fund raising activities. It is now owned by the community. It forms one of three community buildings collectively known as the Highnam Community Centre Complex.

Highnam Community Centre Trust (HCCT), who manage the complex, will shortly complete phase 1 of a major refurbishment project costing £201,000. Funding for these works has been secured from a variety of sources including: £40,000 Parish Council Sec 106 contribution from the Lassington Reach development; £24,000 from the national Village Halls Improvement Grant; £69,000 from HCCT reserves built up from operational surpluses; £18,000 capital grant from Tewkesbury Borough Council; £40,000 from Enover; and £10,000 from the Bernard Sunley Foundation.

During the course of these works significant incidence of dry and wet rot has been uncovered throughout the building. A quotation from the project builders, King Contractors Gloucester, to deal with these additional works totals £110,000, including a prudent contingency provision to accommodate any additional as yet unforeseen work.

The building is currently being mothballed by the provision of a plastic roof canopy to help prevent further structural deterioration and until such time as additional funding has been secured to enable the refurbishment to be completed.

Refurbishment of the building will improve facilities for smaller groups wishing to meet in more intimate surroundings, meet the needs of a growing population, and create high quality space for entrepreneurs wishing to set up social, physical or cultural activities.

**Additional Sources of Funding:** HCCT, together with the Parish Council (HPC), have been investigating additional sources of funding. Subject to availability of the necessary funds to complete the work, the Bernard Sunley Foundation have promised a further £10,000; and HPC have provisionally resolved to set aside £10,000 from its Unrestricted Reserves on similar terms. This leaves a shortfall of £90,000. Despite strenuous efforts by HCCT all their recent endeavours to secure the balance have been unsuccessful. Whilst efforts to meet this shortfall will continue, it would be unrealistic, in the current economic climate, to expect significant additional grant funding to be secured.

**Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) Loan:** A loan from the PWLB was secured to help fund the construction of the Gambier Parry Hall (GPH) in the village in 2005. This is currently still being paid off, repaid from ring fenced HPC parish precept funds. Realistically, this is now the only potential source of funding to enable this project to be completed. Similar to the GPH, HPC, as Custodian Trustee of both buildings, has a legitimate legal interest sufficient to enable it to apply for a new loan. It is, therefore, recommended that an application in the sum of £90,000 be made for a loan from the PWLB, repayable over a twenty year period.

A number of alternative local fund raising initiatives have been suggested which could contribute to the shortfall. Councillors are invited to consider whether any of these should be pursued, and, if so, who will coordinate this work. Clearly, this will take time to progress and, if successful, any monies raised will enable other improvement works around the whole complex to be undertaken.

**Payback Provisions:** Clearly, this loan must be repaid over its duration. HCCT have advised that they will not be in a position to contribute to this requirement given the constrained financial position they find themselves in. The alternative is to increase the annual parish precept again to cover this. This will amount to £4,600 per annum including interest repayments, and would increase the precept from £50,000 to £54,600 p.a., a 9.2 % increase. This sum would be collected through additional council tax payments and would equate to £5.23 p.a. per Band D household. This sum would be ring fenced to ensure it is not used to finance other council expenditure.

**Consultation:** Before an application can be submitted HPC must be able to demonstrate local support for the adoption of this course of action. The attached Consultation Leaflet has been drafted, and this would be distributed to all village households by hand, returnable either to a specially designated “post-box” inside the Village Post Office and Stores or returned by e mail to the Parish Clerk. The actual logistics and timeframe for this needs to be decided. This will be preceded by Facebook and other means of publicity notification to residents. A Drop In Event will be arranged on a date to be agreed, attended by HCCT trustees and HPC councillors, to answer any questions residents may have about this. This evidence will be submitted as accompanying documentation to the loan application.

**Recommendation:** Subject to local support being forthcoming following formal consultation, Highnam Parish Council apply to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing, Communities, and Local Government for a Public Works Loan Board loan in the sum of £90,000 repayable over a twenty year period, and that the annual parish precept be increased by £4,600 per annum to repay this loan, amounting to an increase of 9.2 % on the precept, equivalent to £5.23 per annum for each Band D household.