

Case Study

November 2021



ACTion
with communities
in cumbria

Bolton Memorial Hall



A well-informed plan for refurbishment

The ancient village of Bolton lies on a hill above the River Eden in the picturesque Eden Valley, 4 miles from Appleby and 11 miles from Penrith. There is a village pub, but the Post Office and shop closed several years ago. There is a thriving primary school and nursery, and the recently refurbished play area adjacent to the Memorial Hall is well used by residents and visitors from other local villages.

Background

Bolton Memorial Hall is well used by the community, with a range of activities including a weekly 'Community Exchange' get together, meetings and sport groups. Increasing pupil numbers at the local primary school mean the hall is also used as additional indoor space for school sports and other activities.

The hall was built in 1922 by extending two existing properties which date from much earlier, possibly the 18th century. Although well maintained, it is very dated and like many older halls, has poor accessibility. There's a ramp into the main hall but once inside it's stairs-only access to the kitchen, and to the ladies and gents' toilets, housed in a small 1980's two-storey extension.

Whilst efforts have previously been made to improve the hall's energy efficiency (including Thermafleece loft insulation, draughtproofing and solar PV panels fitted in 2011) the committee felt more needed to be done, including replacing the oil-fired boiler and old-style large metal pipes and radiators, to further reduce the hall's carbon footprint.

The hall also has inadequate storage and no off-street parking. However, land belonging to the charity to the side and rear of the hall (some of which is used as playing fields, children's play area and soon to be built pump track) provides the opportunity for extension and a car park.

The Project

An idea to demolish and rebuild had been discussed on and off for many years but hadn't progressed. New committee members provided the impetus to look at it again, form a dedicated sub-group, and contact ACT Development Officer, Hellen Aitken, to help guide through the process.

Hellen emphasised the importance of consulting with the local community to establish their needs, and to take professional advice about the current building condition and options for how to meet these needs. ACT recommended A. Muir Surveying for a combined building condition and energy audit report for the hall, and also provided assistance with a successful application for National Lottery funding to help with surveys, planning and consultation costs.



What has been achieved?

The building condition survey provided a health-check for the building. It reassured that the main building was structurally sound and able to be extended – confirming there was no need to knock it down and start again! The survey identified additional insulation options, reviewed the current heating system and also highlighted previously unidentified issues which could then be incorporated into the final project.

A household questionnaire asked what local people needed and wanted from the hall, helping to build a 'wish list'. Armed with the building report and community consultation results, chosen architectural designer Christopher Reed prepared draft plans and sketches, to show what was possible. These plans were then exhibited in the hall for the community to view and give feedback.

Plans were then revised, based on this feedback and a utilities report prepared by Cornerstone Projects, locating buried utilities such as electricity cables, water mains, sewers, etc. which would be affected by the development. The final plans have been agreed and are currently awaiting planning consent before moving on to the next stage of development when further advice will also be sought on renewable energy heating systems.

The plan is to first create the new car park and provide access, and then demolish the old two-storey toilet block and build a new larger extension all on one level. This will house a new kitchen and toilet facilities and additional small meeting room. The toilets will also be accessible from the outside play area. The floor of the old kitchen will be lowered to that of the main hall and will be converted into storage space.

The Learning

- With ACT's support we realised this is not a quick process, but it's important to plan properly and consult the community, to make informed decisions.
- Professional advice and reports helped to steer the committee in our decision making and identifying things which we wouldn't have otherwise considered. The architectural designer was particularly helpful, interpreting the community's wishes with the constraints of the existing building and land available.
- We're staging the build project to help with funding and make it more manageable. It also means the hall can remain open for longer, generating income and providing for the community.
- Be realistic and don't just go with the first idea. Previous plans were to rebuild a much larger sports hall, however, as well as being more expensive, similar facilities nearby meant the local need was questionable and would also have implications for accessing grant funding.
- The heritage of our building is important. The hall is a memorial hall and plans to refurbish and extend sympathetically, will maintain the much-loved character of the building whilst providing what the community needs.



Ladies toilets upstairs
–
Old two storey block extension



Want to know more?

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