

Initial consultation on Methodist Church and Hall (working Draft)

All residents, organisations and businesses in the parish are invited to comment, and indicate their support or opposition to a proposition being considered by the Parish Council that it may wish to bid for the Methodist Church and Hall buildings currently for sale, particulars available on the RightMove website.

This is an initial “temperature check” to ascertain interest. Only if there was interest and this was the majority view, would the Parish Council bid. The survey will be undertaken electronically in order to reach people swiftly and efficiently and checks will be carried out to avoid duplication and multiple entries as was conducted by the Neighbourhood Plan consultations of recent years. Having said that, there will be paper copies made available at various locations in the village. This is not a referendum! Just an opportunity to gauge opinion.

Furthermore, if the Parish Council was successful in a bid, a loan or mortgage would be required and there would be a more formal consultation by letter drop, the reasons for this is that the lending body (Public Works Loan Board) would require evidence of a meaningful consultation and clear indication that a majority of residents wanted to see the buildings purchased and developed for community use, and understood the increase in the precept that would result.

Context

The buildings currently for sale are redundant and not used and have been so for over two years. Historically the hall was used by several community groups which have had to find premises for hire elsewhere, whereas those using the chapel have had to travel to alternative places of worship elsewhere in Colchester.

Initially the buildings were the subject of a low speculative bid by the Parish Council which was unsuccessful. A bid by a charitable organisation close to the asking price (at the time £350K) was successful, and the prospective owners spent many months working up their business plan. However, this bid was ultimately unsuccessful due to a change in the bidder’s personal circumstances.

An open day was held by the Parish Council pre-pandemic in the Church Hall in 2019 to explain the opportunity and invite ideas for possible usage. Notes from these drop-in meetings can be found on the website alongside the FAQs and this survey.

Much has changed since the pandemic, but the site is so centrally located and so strategic, that it may be suitable for community use for all manner of activities, further halls for hire, a coffee shop, an informal meeting place, a library or arts centre and many more potential uses. However, in order to secure the premises, the Parish Council would need to apply for a Public Works Loan (£max value £500K) and through the precept and/or income from hire of the premises, pay back the loan over a normal mortgage period of 25-30 years.

Although there are community buildings used, there is no central publicly available building open most times of the day for informal meetings and a café/coffee shop. Furthermore, existing buildings are extensively used with little scope for further intensive uses. It is thought that there may well be a demand for further informal facilities/activities for all but maybe families in particular, however in many ways this is the point of the survey, how do people see their village as having not only the facilities we enjoy today but perhaps others that require travel to other parts of the town to fulfil.

So this consultation asks several things:

1. Do you think further community facilities are required over the next 30-50 years over and above those available
 - Yes/No)
 - If no, no further questions should be answered
 - **If yes**, what manner of activities or facilities would you wish to see introduced? Please list or tick boxes
 - Coffee shop open daily
 - Informal meeting space
 - Small office space for hire
 - Gallery
 - Exhibition space
 - Indoor market
 - Hire of halls by small groups or organisations for exercise or crafts or any manner of other group activities
 - Facilities for younger people eg beyond that provided by the BYG (Bergholt Youth Group)
 - Community lending library (not necessarily only books)
 - Repair shop
 - Recycling shop
 - Longer term let to a community interest company
 - Micro-brewery!
 - Other please list

.....
.....
.....

2. Do you use the Orpen Hall, School, Scout Hut or Church Hall for activities presently?
 - yes/no.
 - If yes what clubs do you belong to and which activities do you take part in

3. Having considered these two questions would you on balance be happy to pay more via the precept (the precept is that part of the Council tax which you pay to the PC)
 - yes/no

Illustrative precept increases are as follows:

The purchase price would be the subject of negotiation but the maximum loan available through the PWLB is £500K. Illustrative analysis suggests the following

- Loan say £500K, annual interest payment £25K, increase in Parish Council precept 24% or on a Band D property rising from c£80 per annum to c£100 per annum.

NB your precept is currently made up of CBC, ECC, PC and Police and Fire Commission charges. Total PC % is c4% or c£80 currently, and the total cost of a Band D precept is c£1900 pa

The intention would be to bring the buildings up to a standard where some lettings could be offered and then gradually up to a higher standard, initially to address any current maintenance needs and to make the buildings attractive to users, and then over time to gradually improve and refurbish them using grants that may be available.

4. Would you be interested in being a volunteer or to offer your time or any skills to assist with making the buildings suitable for improving their use as community facilities or to act as a volunteer to operate these once these are available for public use?

Please use this space to add any comments.

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for your time

FAQS (to be added to)

- **What is the point of the proposal?** The proposal is to secure additional community halls and facilities which can be used to fulfil the requirements of a growing village and wider parish area for the next 50-100 years.
- **Why don't you just leave things to the commercial market.** This is largely what is happening now. However these buildings are difficult to remodel and repurpose and selling them takes a long time; clearly burial areas cannot be built on or disturbed and their usage cannot be changed without full planning permission. What the PC is anxious to avoid is standing by not showing interest and then for either the site to deteriorate if a buyer cannot be found or for the community to not to express its views on the future use of these prominent village buildings.
- **Why cannot more be achieved at the Orpen Hall?**
 - It could but another hall would be required to accommodate more activities. The two halls are mostly booked by regular hirers and not available during much of the working day during school term as they are used by Bluebells Playgroup. The Social Club is available during the day and has capacity for small meetings, but not in the evening or at weekends. It is not an adaptable space available for many uses other than small groups meeting
 - A further hall on the Hall footprint would impinge on parking or recreational space or require building into the roof
 - The location isn't quite so central for say an informal meeting place, community hub and coffee shop as has been suggested as being useful for the village
- **What about other locations?**
 - The church is considering a new church hall which is being designed for both secular and non-secular activities
- **Can I see the precept calculations as I am sceptical!**
The workings of the precept increase are shown below.

	2021-22	2022-23
Precept	£103,270.00	£108,757.00
Band D (West Bergholt) with no PWLB interest added	£78.38	£80.59
% Increase over previous year	2.6%	2.8%
Increase per annum	£2.00	£2.21
Actual Council Tax (Band D)	£1902.23	£1981.03
West Bergholt percentage of Actual Council Tax	4.12%	4.07%
PWLB interest added	£0.00	£25,000.00
Adjusted Precept for comparison purposes	103,270.00	£133,757.00
% Increase over previous year	2.6%	26.5%
Resultant Band D (West Bergholt) figure	£78.38	£99.12
Increase per annum	£2.00	£20.74

CBC Band D Precept (Council Tax) if PWLB interest added	£1902.23	£1999.56
West Bergholt %age of Council Tax if PWLB interest added	4.12%	4.96%

- **How will you judge whether you have a reasonable number of people responding and is this initial survey fit for the purposes of a loan application?**
 - Remember this is just a survey to ascertain interest, without interest no bid will be made. If there was sufficient interest for a bid to be made, it is highly unlikely that the PC would bid at the current asking price of £300K. any loan application would necessitate a thorough and meaningful consultation
 - For this initial survey at least 20% of households would need to respond (about 300 households) and a majority in favour would be required for a bid to be considered. Any bid is subject to a further all-household consultation by letter or by referendum or as it is called officially a “parish poll”

NB the bullet point below was proposed for deletion by the Finance Committee

- **What happens if the buildings are not purchased for community use**
 - If no bid is made the buildings will eventually be sold and may change in appearance.
 - It is not thought that there would be houses built on the site or significant demolition or change to the appearance of the existing buildings but neither are listed or protected so this cannot be guaranteed.
 - Potentially community use might be offered but this is not guaranteed