

Stowupland Village Hall Report to Annual Parish Meeting 2025

The past year continued to be a challenging one for the Village Hall. A significant increase in running costs arising from increases in the minimum wage, insurance and utility bills meant we had to raise our hire charges for the first time in a couple of years. Even with that we continue to only just about break even. Looking ahead we expect further increases in costs and a significant drop in recycling income when glass will be collected with other household recycling in 2026. We anticipate that could cost us £1,000 a year as less people will use the bottle banks.

Our hires continue to be strong amongst our regular hirers but we have seen a drop in one off hires for events such as parties and weddings, We attribute this to the poor standard of the hall compared to other venues such as the High School 6th Form Centre (built with £2.6m of CIL funding) which is increasingly acting in competition by hiring itself out for events. The committee are working hard to reduce costs and push up hire income but long term we think the only way to boost income significantly and reduce running costs is through redevelopment of the Hall. That would provide a modernised facility which will be more attractive to one off hires for events and we will also have more flexible accommodation better suited to corporate hires, Finally vastly improved insulation and a new modern heating system and solar panels will significantly reduce our running costs and generate income from the excess solar energy we can sell back to the grid. As such redevelopment remains our principle goal to secure the future of the Village Hall.

Unfortunately MSDC turned down our revised planning application for a cheaper design for the redevelopment so we are forced to stick with the original design. However we are not deterred and are pressing ahead with fundraising and plan to start building this calendar year. We have applied for £100K from the MSDC CIL fund (the maximum allowed) and received positive feedback about our application. We have also applied to the Parish Council for £300K towards the cost. If we secure this funding it will allow us to start work this year and undertake the preliminary work on the site and start the actual building.

The Village Hall Committee continues to work closely with the Social Club, Cricket Club, Football Club and Bowls Club on the running of the Village Hall facilities. At the moment we are focusing on the how we can increase usage of the Social Club and Village Hall bars as these potentially could provide us with increased income.

During the year we had to crack down on non-patron parking as we were finding the car park used heavily by non-patrons meaning patrons were struggling to find space which ultimately led to us losing hire income. This clamp down gave rise to some negative coverage on social media but when we published an explanation it seems the vast majority of people agreed with our stance. We will continue to monitor the situation moving forward.

The Management Committee would like to thank the Parish Council for its ongoing support through its managing of the Playpark for us and other support provided throughout the year.

Andrew Edwards
Chairman Village Hall Trustees.