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Potton Hall for All Committee

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**Feasibility Study  
for new a Hall for Potton**

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September 2012

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 About this study**

This study has been carried out by Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity on behalf of the Potton Hall for All Committee. The purpose of the study is to assess the feasibility of a new Community Hall for Potton as part of a new development to the south of the town.

The views expressed in this study are those of the author on behalf of Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Potton Hall for All Committee.

## **1.2 Background**

There has been a desire from people in Potton for a new Community Hall for a number of decades. BRCC possesses archive documents dating back to 1946 concerning various proposals for a new Hall for Potton, none of which came to fruition, although the old Fire Station was converted into a Community Centre in the 1970's.

In January 1994, Potton Town Council arranged for a committee to be formed to explore the construction and operation of a multi-purpose hall. It was recognised early on that it would be impossible to raise enough money both to buy the site and to pay for the build, so the committee concentrated on opportunities to obtain land at no or little cost. Seven opportunities were considered in the years up to 2001, but all proved unviable for a variety of reasons, generally related to planning or ownership. While the committee continued to exist, no opportunities to obtain land for a new hall then emerged for a number of years.

This changed recently when a major site to the south of Potton (Land East of Biggleswade Road) was brought forward for development. Central Bedfordshire Council's Site Allocations Policy for this development includes a requirement for a Community Hall, which correspondingly appears in the draft Development Brief dated June 2012. This is likely to represent the only opportunity to build a new Community Hall in Potton for many years.

## **1.3 About Potton**

According to the Potton Town Council website, "Potton is a thriving town of approximately 5000 residents in the heart of rural Bedfordshire...Potton is a friendly town with a strong artistic community...There are many theatre groups and choirs, sports clubs, community groups ..."

The town sustains a wide range of retail and catering/hospitality outlets, as well as a post office, library and GP, dental and veterinary surgeries. There are many other small businesses. Further information on existing halls and rooms to hire is provided in 2.3.

Potton is a relatively prosperous town, falling well under the national average for most deprivation statistics. The proportion of people working full-time, as well as those in professional or managerial occupations, is relatively high – as are levels of car ownership and out-commuting. According to the national Place Survey in 2008, 89% of people in Potton ward (which includes a number of surrounding villages) claimed to be satisfied with the local area as a place to live, above to the Central Bedfordshire average.

## **2. Rationale for a new Hall**

### **2.1 Why a New Community Hall for Potton?**

Potton currently has a number of halls available for community use (see 2.3). However, many of the existing groups in Potton do not believe that the current facilities meet their needs, for the following reasons:

- Size – most of the halls are relatively small
- Availability – halls are not always available when they are needed (particularly the two school halls)

A number of options have previously been looked into without success, including extending existing facilities, or converting an existing building.

The availability of land and money arising from the development of the 'Land East of Biggleswade Road' site provides the opportunity to design and build a purpose-built facility from scratch to meet the identified needs of Potton's thriving community. The Hall for All Committee (made up of representatives from community groups in Potton) has a commendable level of ambition for a large, high-quality community facility that will attract a range of users from Potton and further afield.

### **2.2 Benefits**

The intended benefits of the new Hall are as follows:

- There will be improved availability of high-quality facilities to meet the needs of the wide range of community groups represented in Potton
- Additional new facilities will be available for people in Potton, such as a gym and badminton courts
- The Hall will act as a community hub to provide a focal point for community activities for all ages
- As a purpose-built facility, the Hall will have reduced running costs for its size (compared to running a number of smaller halls) and offer better value for money
- The Hall will create new employment opportunities and support local businesses
- The new facilities will be better placed to cater for the needs of groups such as disabled people and parents with young children

### **2.3 Current provision in Potton**

Table 1 shows the existing halls and meeting rooms available for hire in Potton of which we are aware. It can be seen that there are a number of smaller halls and rooms scattered around Potton. Regular community use of these facilities appears relatively low, particularly during the day. It is understood that the Community Centre and the Mill Lane Pavilion each made a loss of in excess of £6,000 in 2011/12 (we do not have figures for other halls).

Most of the venues identified belong to an existing organisation (e.g. school, church, library) which has priority use and hires the venue out when not in use. Despite being valuable in providing space for local groups, it is arguable that these halls and rooms are not 'community buildings' in the sense of being equally available to all; neither were they purpose-built for the needs of community groups or the wider community.

We do not possess recent data on user satisfaction levels with existing venues, other than anecdotal evidence that they do not meet the needs of all organisations. A number of groups have indicated that they would definitely move to a new Hall if it met their needs.

We are aware that access/facilities for people with disabilities is a problem with some existing facilities – not just wheelchair access (which is also likely to cause a problem for parents with very young children using pushchairs), but also people with arthritis, sight or hearing impairments etc. This is an important consideration when reviewing the needs of the whole community.

Unlike some settlements of similar size (e.g. Arlesey, Toddington, see 2.9), there is no dedicated Youth Centre in Potton, which may mean that there is a gap in facilities for younger people in particular, although a Youth Club is now up and running at the Mill Lane Pavilion.

The nearest large hall suitable for a range of uses is the new Gamlingay Eco Hub (2-3 miles). For sports facilities that could feasibly be accommodated within or near the Community Hall, such as a sports hall, gym, or all weather playing surfaces, people currently have to travel to Sandy Sports Centre (4-5 miles) or further away (although Burgoyne Middle School is currently raising funds for a new all-weather pitch.) The nearest theatre is also at Sandy Sports Centre.

**Table 1 Existing halls and meeting rooms in Potton**

Hall	Location	Size / facilities	Community Usage / Availability	Charges per hour
Community Centre	Brook End (town centre)	Main Hall 14 x 3.5 metres with kitchen Upper Hall 5 x 5 metres with kitchen Floor not suitable for Tap Dancing Lack of parking	Regular bookings Wednesday morning and evening, Thursday and Friday evenings (Main Hall); Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings (Upper Hall)	Weekdays: up to 5pm £6.90(MH) / £4.30 (UH), 5pm until 10.30pm £8 (MH) / £5.40 (UH). Weekends and Bank Holidays £10 (MH) / £6.40 (UH).
Mill Lane Pavilion	Mill Lane (west of town centre)	NB floor not suitable for some dance groups	Regular bookings on Tues, Wed and Thurs evenings and Thurs, Fri and Sat mornings.	Weekdays: up to 5pm £7.50, 5pm until 10.30pm £10.60. Weekends and Bank Holidays £14.50.
Burgoyne Middle School	Mill Lane (west of town centre)	Data not yet available	Generally only available in evenings and in school holidays	£40/hour
Potton Lower School Hall	Mill Lane (west of town centre)	Seats up to 90. No tea/ coffee making facilities	Generally only available in evenings and in school holidays	£60 for 4 hours in summer, £80 in winter
St Marys Church	Hatley Road (east of town centre)	Data not yet available NB lack of toilet facilities	Data not yet available	£100 donation for concerts
St Marys Church Hall	Hatley Road (east of town centre)	Seats around 60	Data not yet available	£30 per evening
Scout Hut	Hatley Road (east of town centre)	Main Hall 15 x 8 (estimate) Small kitchen and a smaller meeting room also available	Used mainly by Scouts (busy every weekday evening except Friday plus a regular booking on a Wednesday afternoon). Occasional weekend bookings for parties.	£8.50/hr (£12.50 Friday and Saturday after 6pm) Minimum booking fee of £25 for one off bookings.
Potton & District Social Club	Station Road (west of town centre)	Main Room (c. 24m x 6m) seats up to 150 plus with small fully equipped kitchen Snug Bar (c. 7m x 5m) seats up to 30	Primarily for members. Not available on Saturdays or most Fridays/Sundays.	Regular users need to become members and then pay min £50pcm for use of hall. One-off events are charged at £15/hr.
Clock Building (Potton Library)	Market Square (town centre)	Small library on ground floor Meeting room on first floor  NB lack of disabled access to first floor	Used by Children's Centre when library not open, otherwise not available for community use, although potential for additional out of hours use has been identified. 1st floor meeting room leased to Town Council, although this is due to be reviewed.	n/a
Potton Bowls Club	Sandy Road (west of centre)	Building constructed of 6 portacabins bolted together – hold up to 75	Used by Club Fri and Sat evenings during summer – more available in winter	
Sports & Social Club (Potton FC)	The Hollow (south of town centre)	Holds up to 100. Bar provided	Primarily run for and by the football club. Hall used by playgroup during the day, there is also a dance class. Generally only hired on Fri/Sat/Sun nights.	£80 per 4 hours

## 2.4 Community Consultation

### **Survey July 1994**

A questionnaire was sent out to organisations in Potton in July 1994. 24 out of 26 were returned. 23 organisations said that a new hall was needed, and 21 said they would use it. The groups least satisfied with current provision were performing groups. There was also a desire for playing space around a hall.

### **Potton Town Plan 2009-2019**

A survey was carried out as part of the production of the Potton Town Plan, with a response rate of around 50% of households. 46% of respondents agreed that there was a need for a self-financing, larger, additional hall in Potton.

Also identified was a need for additional sports facilities (e.g. multi-use games area, gym) and an indoor youth meeting point.

### **Survey March 2012**

A further survey of all households in Potton was carried out in March 2012, with 143 responses received, representing around 3% of Potton residents or 7.5% of households. 86% of responses were in favour of a new hall.

44 respondents (31%) identified arts activities that they would like to see provided in Potton, including concerts, theatre/drama, film, dance and arts & crafts. 41 (29%) identified sports activities including badminton, gym, exercise classes, swimming, football, cricket, trampolining and sports for young people.

4 respondents (3%) were interested in hiring the hall, and 44 (31%) only in visiting – however, 59 respondents (41%) claimed that they would do both. 9 (6%) would do neither, and 25 (17%) did not answer the question.

Regarding frequency of use, responses were as follows:

	Daily	Weekly	M'thly	Ann'ly	Less	Never	Other	No resp.
Large Hall	0	44	22	13	12	10	6	35
Meeting rooms	2	14	24	7	34	17	2	43

According to this, there was more demand for the large hall than for meeting room space.

Respondents marked a number of facilities out of 5 (where 0 = not important and 5 = very important) – the average score for each was as follows (in descending order of importance, nil responses have been ignored):

Car Parking	4.5
Disabled access and toilets	4.5
Kitchen	4.5
Changing Rooms	3.9
Stage	3.9
Storage	3.7
Bar	3.2
Café	3.2
Showers	3.2
Wi Fi	2.7

Respondents were willing to pay an hourly rate for the hall as follows:

£15	£20	£25	£30	Other	No resp.
23	39	25	10	11	35

Respondents were asked how much per month they would be willing to pay on their 'rates' (i.e. Town Council precept) for such a facility:

Nothing	£1	£2	£5	£10	No resp.
12	2	53	56	4	16

Concerns expressed by respondents included that a new hall was not needed; that there were better uses for the money; and that it was in the wrong place.

### ***Community Consultation on Land East of Biggleswade Road development, July 2012***

The developers of the Land East of Biggleswade Road site ran an open consultation in July 2012. There were 73 responses – this appears to be a reasonable response rate for a consultation of this type, although it only represents around 1.5% of Potton residents (or 4% of households).

Question 5 asked: "Do you support the provision of a new community hall and if so, what facilities should it provide?" Answers were as follows:

Yes: 31 (42%)

No: 22 (30%)

No response: 20 (27%)

Suggested facilities included:

- Gym / other indoor sports facilities
- Multi-purpose hall large enough to accommodate shows/concerts/exhibitions.
- Staging, lighting & sound / cinema screen
- Large sprung dance floor
- Swimming pool
- Ice rink
- Small meeting rooms
- Changing rooms
- Bar
- Kitchen

Concerns expressed by respondents included how it would be financed in future, including possible impact on council tax; number of existing halls, and possible negative impact on them; and the location, including impact on nearby housing (particularly noise).

## **2.5 User requirements**

The potential regular hirers identified so far comprise principally a number of local choirs and other performing arts groups; two sports clubs; and a few local community groups. Table 2 shows their requirements.

**Table 2 Identified user requirements**

User	Large Hall	Small Hall / Meeting Room(s)	Other
St Mary's singers	Concerts (3 per year) need to seat 200 plus 100 performers on stage. Weekly evening rehearsals for 80. Need moveable staging, raked seating, good acoustics, lighting.	Occasionally required for smaller group rehearsals	Changing rooms (occasionally) Storage for music, speakers, keyboard, stands, some staging etc. Catering / bar
Shannon Express	Concerts (6 per year) need to seat over 200 plus 80 performers on stage. Weekly evening rehearsals for 80. 4-tier riser staging, good acoustics.	Small Hall required for rehearsals 3 Meeting Rooms each c.6 x 6m	Changing rooms Storage 6 x 6m
Locrian choir	Concerts (2 per year) need to seat over 200 plus 30 performers on stage. Raked seating. Piano.	Required for rehearsals (approx. 20 evenings per year)	
Phoenix choir	Concerts (occasional) need to seat over 200 plus 80 performers on stage. Wall mounted screen; ceiling mounted projector, wifi, DVD & large TV	Required for rehearsals	Changing rooms 4 meeting rooms
Amici singers	17m by 11m for weekly rehearsals [no concerts info as yet]		
Potton Playhouse	Productions (2 per year) need to seat over 200 plus stage and backstage area. Raked seating, lighting, stage, sound system, curtain tracks.	Required for rehearsals (approx. 18 per year)	Changing rooms Storage
Spellbound / Widdershins / cinema	Seat up to 180 people for each activity once a month (so 2-3 times per month). Raked seating. Complete black-out.		Backstage area Access to kitchen and pre-performance area for drinks etc
Jodie Robertson Dance	Required [no more detailed info as yet]		
Good Neighbours	To seat 60+ and allow space for dancing [no info as yet on frequency]		
Womens Institute	To seat around 60 in small groups around tables, once a month. Screen/projector and tables/ chairs.		
Vineyard church	To seat over 100 – sole use on Sundays	Frequent use midweek	
History Society	Need to seat 80 – 100 once a month. Screen, tables and display boards. Could move to Small Hall?	Want 'Heritage centre' room, bigger than 32 square metres – would be used 2-3 times per week, by members and visitors	Storage for heritage centre archives etc Access to kitchen for serving light refreshments
Cricket Club	Use for indoor cricket nets (31m x 10m x 4m). Possible use for events (3-4 per year).	Required for teas (approx 25-30 people), Sat & Sun late April to early Sept. Meeting Room (Occasional use only)	Changing rooms 5m by 5m (min 2, pref 3 or 4), ideally accessible separately, showers separate.
Tennis Club			Changing rooms for 12-16 people, twice/wk Catering facilities for after match teas and committees, twice/wk

Potential uses for hall spaces that are likely to introduce additional requirements include sports such as badminton and five-a-side football.

This gives a combined picture of the principal requirements as follows:

**Large Hall** – to seat 250 audience (many in raked seating), and accommodate 100 performers as well as theatrical productions, probably on moveable staging. Lighting and sound equipment would be required, as well as good acoustics. It would also be desirable to accommodate sports uses such as badminton and five-a-side football.

**Small Hall / Meeting Rooms** – many users require smaller spaces for rehearsals, meetings or social events. Up to 3 spaces of different sizes would be required, and would need to be multi-functional.

**Indoor cricket nets** – these would be specialist facilities that would require a great deal of space, and might well attract a fair amount of use.

**Changing facilities and showers** – 4 changing rooms would probably be required in order to meet the needs of both the performing groups and the sports groups.

**Catering facilities (Kitchen, Café / Bar)** – a kitchen would be required. There could either be a specific café/bar, or refreshments could be served in a small hall or reception / foyer area.

**Toilets** – one male, one female, and one disabled.

**Storage space** – required by a number of groups. Should not be under-estimated.

**Parking** – up to around 100 spaces would normally be required, sometimes this might go up to around 200.

These facilities will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

## **2.6 Demand for hall hire**

Assuming that the Hall is available for hire daytime (8am to 6pm) and evening (6pm to 12am) every day of the year, the total number of possible hiring hours for each space in a year is  $16 \times 365 = 5,840$ . Realistically, no hall is ever used to anything near to full capacity, and the feasibility needs to be assessed at a much lower level of occupancy.

63 respondents to the consultation in March 2012 indicated that they intended to hire the Hall. Even allowing for some cross-over (i.e. more than one respondent per group), this suggests a reasonable market within Potton for hiring the hall.

We will look at both regular and occasional hires in more detail.

### ***Regular hires***

The regular hirers of the hall are likely to be the Potton-based groups whose needs are not being met currently by other venues in Potton. These users form a major part of the rationale for a new Hall and will provide much of the regular income.

Based on our analysis of user requirements analysed so far, the management committee could expect regular usage of a Main Hall, Small Hall and Changing Rooms to be as follows:

	<b>Morning</b>	<b>Afternoon</b>	<b>Evening</b>
<b>Main Hall</b>			
Monday			
Tuesday			Phoenix Choir WI (1 <sup>st</sup> /month)?
Wednesday			St Mary's Singers
Thursday			Shannon Express / Amici Singers?
Friday			Spellbound?
Saturday			
Sunday	Vineyard Church	Vineyard Church	Vineyard Church
<b>Small Hall</b>			
Monday			Playhouse (18/year)
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			Shannon Express / Amici Singers? History Soc (4 <sup>th</sup> /month)?
Friday			Locrian Choir (20/year)
Saturday			Cricket Club (April-Sept)
Sunday			Cricket Club (April-Sept)
<b>Changing Rooms</b>			
Monday			Tennis Club
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			Tennis Club
Friday			
Saturday	Cricket Club (April-Sept)		
Sunday	Cricket Club (April-Sept)		

In addition, the History Society is interested in the use of a Community Heritage Room if it can attract suitable grant aid for the project.

The number of bookings that could be expected per year for each space from users that already appear highly likely to use a new Hall can be estimated as follows:

Main Hall: 170

Small Hall: 130

Changing Rooms: 130

Nearly all of the user groups identified so far require the facilities regularly during weekday evenings. It will be important to attract regular bookings from groups meeting during the day (e.g. lunch clubs / coffee mornings, some older people's groups, playgroup / pre-school / parent and toddler groups), and this will need to be reflected in the pricing strategy (see below). For example, some larger community halls (e.g. Gamlingay Ecohub; Regen Centre in Ricall, Yorks) provide a base for a local day nursery. Other regular uses could include a Youth Club, lectures and adult educational classes, art groups, exercise classes, dancing (ballroom, tap, belly, line etc), carpet/short mat bowls, and other indoor sports. These groups will generally need smaller spaces. It is recommended that further research be carried out with as many existing groups within Potton as possible.

The weekend is more likely to be suitable for occasional hires (see below).

## **Occasional hires**

Most of the performing arts groups each require occasional use of the Main Hall for performances – this might total around 20 per year. Given the regular usage during weekday evenings, availability for performances is more likely to be at weekends, with Saturdays likely to be most popular. It will be important for the groups to co-ordinate between themselves to avoid clashes if the space is to be used to the maximum.

Performing arts groups and companies from outside Pottton might also be attracted to the facility if of high enough quality, particularly if there were local ‘producers’ to organise this – alternatively bands, comedy nights etc could be booked by the Hall itself in order to make a profit on the door.

The Community Hall could also accommodate the following:

- Civil wedding ceremonies (licence required) and wedding receptions
- Parties (adults’ or children’s)
- Business conferences / meetings
- Public meetings / Town Council meetings
- Fundraising events
- Clinics / blood donor sessions

Weddings and parties are most likely to take place at weekends, although increasing numbers of weddings now take place during the week). The attraction of the Hall for these events would be increased if a marquee could be erected (either hired or owned) within the main space. There is also the potential to generate further income while supporting local businesses, by offering catering packages for weddings and functions in partnership with local caterers. If a larger (commercial) kitchen was provided, this could also be hired out to small catering businesses or food producers. A dedicated bar area would also add to the offer and could be hired out, however both of these options would add to the construction costs.

Business conferences / meetings could form an important element of ongoing viability, as they are most likely to take place during weekdays when there will be more availability, and prices can also be higher for commercial use (see 4.3). Again, partnerships with local caterers could be developed to offer conference packages. The Bedfordshire Tourism Growth Strategy 2007-12 highlighted “the business tourism market, particularly the conference and meetings sector” as one of its five opportunity areas for development, and there appears to be a relative shortage of more affordable conference venues in the Pottton area. Set against this is the comparatively rural location (although only 5-10 minutes from the A1) and the relatively poor performance of the conference sector at present due to the recession.

It may be necessary to restrict non-community use of the Hall if the new building is to be zero-rated for VAT (see 3.3).

## **2.7 Other potential facilities**

Based on examples such as Gamlingay and Arlesey (see 2.9), there are often advantages in clustering uses and facilities within one building or location (see also ‘multi-use centres’, 2.8). Possible additional uses that should be explored to increase the viability of a new Hall are as follows:

### **Office(s)**

As well as providing a base for the management of the building, office space could also be rented to the Town Council and/or other local organisations. This would bring in a reliable rental income as well as a regular presence on site in addition to any hall staff.

### **Library / IT suite**

While being a valued community library, Potton Library has a relatively low number of active users. Meanwhile, there are two main challenges for the Clock Building in which the library is based: the amount of available floor space, and the lack of disabled access to the second floor; the building also requires some internal and external maintenance<sup>1</sup>. With local authority budgets coming under increasing pressure in the coming years, there may be scope to explore locating the library within the new Hall at some point in the future, in order to contribute to the viability of both. This could dovetail effectively with the desire of the History Society for heritage/archive space, as well as the possibility for adult and community learning activities.

In addition (or instead), there might be potential to provide an IT suite together with wi-fi access, which might particularly attract use by young people.

### **Gym**

Potton no longer has a gym, one having recently closed. The closest gyms are in Sandy and Biggleswade (see 2.3). Meanwhile, the Leisure Strategy (see 2.8) has identified a shortage of fitness stations across Central Bedfordshire. Private gyms are currently operational in smaller settlements such as Ampthill, Shefford, Clophill, Stotfold and Fairfield Park, so a small gym within the Community Hall might be feasible (guidance from CBC is that 20-30 fitness stations would be appropriate).

### **Other sports**

The Tennis Club has expressed an aspiration to become part of a sports association based at the Hall, with new courts in the park area. Given that the Cricket Club and Football Club are also adjacent to the site, there is the potential to develop the Hall and surrounding area as a Sports Hub for Potton.

All of the above would of course increase the build costs, and so may need to be considered as optional extras at this stage.

Tenants would need to be found to rent out the office space and the gym if they are to be provided – expressions of interest would need to be registered well in advance of construction in order to have confidence that these would be taken up.

## **2.8 Needs and opportunities in the wider area**

### **Sports/leisure facilities**

Central Bedfordshire Council is currently producing a Leisure Strategy. An initial assessment of the current levels of sports facility provision in Central Bedfordshire was produced by Neil Allen Associates in April 2012. This concluded that Central Bedfordshire has a lower than average level of sports hall provision, and that, while demand is generally being satisfied, the main centres (including Biggleswade and Sandy) “are operating well above comfortably full levels and in some cases at capacity”. While “there is insufficient demand to justify a new sports hall (in the format of a conventional four court hall)”, and the report suggests that “consideration might be given to providing additional capacity in the peak period at other sports halls to reduce the pressure on these facilities”, the provision of a multi-purpose hall in Potton that

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<sup>1</sup> Potton Library Road Map (Central Bedfordshire Council 2012)

could accommodate sports and exercise classes would seem to present a good alternative for the eastern part of Central Bedfordshire.

The report also identified an under supply of 400-600 fitness stations (equivalent to up to 100% of existing 'accessible' stations in Central Bedfordshire); given that there is no gym in Potton at present, it is reasonable to assume a need for this. There is also an under supply of up to 13 indoor tennis courts, although given that one court alone requires 37.7 x 21m minimum, this is unlikely to be a realistic option.

### ***Multi-use Centres***

BRCC carried out a feasibility study in 2008 (on behalf of the Investing in Communities programme) into the development of multi-use centres in Bedfordshire as a way of reducing barriers to access to services, which identified a number of sites where this approach might work (including the then Gamlingay Community Centre, which was to become the Ecohub).

This theme was incorporated into the Greensand Ridge Local Development Strategy, which we were developing around the same time, under the heading of 'Swiss Army Knife Centres'. The aim was to create a network of multi-use centres across the Greensand Ridge as a means of supporting micro-enterprises and arresting the decline in rural services. The Working Woodlands Centre (in Maulden Wood) and the Gamlingay Ecohub are the two major projects funded under this theme.

### ***Libraries***

Central Bedfordshire's Big Library Debate in 2011 confirmed a high level of support for keeping local libraries. A significant number of respondents wanted to see different or extended opening hours, which could potentially be delivered in Potton by co-locating the library with other services, as well as more events/activities in the space. The vision of local stakeholders for the libraries of the future was a community hub with one-stop shop services, education and training focussing on local need, local studies and outreach (both physical and virtual).

### ***Conference facilities***

The area around Potton is generally lacking in day conference facilities at the more affordable end, targeting the small business and public and voluntary sector markets. In Central Bedfordshire, two of the most commonly used comparable facilities appear to be the Rufus Centre, Flitwick (around 20 miles away), and the Forest Centre, Marston Moretaine (also around 20 miles away).

Although Potton's position at the edge of Bedfordshire, 3 miles from major trunk roads and main line train stations, may count against it to some extent, it would appear reasonable to assume some level of demand for conferencing given the right level of facilities, and effective promotion and customer care.

## **2.9 Facilities available in comparable settlements in Central Bedfordshire**

We have researched community facilities available in a few other rural settlements in and around Central Bedfordshire of a similar size to Potton in order to provide a point of comparison for the potential facilities scoped out above.

### ***Amphill***

Amphill is a rural town of around 7,000 population. It has received considerable housing growth and is still growing. The main community building, Parkside Hall (Main Hall 18 x 12m, seats 257 theatre style), is on the edge of the town; a smaller hall, the Nottingham Rooms, is on the same site. (The trustees have recently decided to build a replacement hall on the site.) Next to this is the Alameda Sports Hall (owned and

managed by the Middle School and available out of school hours). Other venues available for hire include the Rugby Club, Redborne School, St. Andrew's Chapter House, two churches, the Wingfield Club, the Masonic Centre, and the Scout Hut.

### **Arlesey**

Arlesey is a rural town with a population of around 6,000. It is due for considerable housing growth. In the centre of Arlesey a number of facilities are co-located on the same site. This includes the Village Hall (15 x 9 m + stage 9m x 4m, seats 220 theatre style), and the Resource Centre (managed by the Town Council, housing a Library Access Point supplied by Central Bedfordshire Council), which is available for hire when the library is closed, including the evenings. The Town Council Offices, a Lower School, a doctor's surgery, a nursery school, a Children's Centre, and a Youth Centre are also on the site. Other venues available for hire include the Women's Institute Hall (next door), Scout Hut, Social Club, Football Club, and two churches.

### **Gamlingay**

Gamlingay is a large village with a current population of around 4,000, just over the border in South Cambridgeshire, also destined for more housing growth. Gamlingay's old Community Centre at the edge of the village has recently been considerably upgraded and extended to become the Gamlingay Eco Hub. This has a Main Hall (10.6m x 16.4m, seats 210 theatre style), which is divisible into 2 smaller halls; a smaller hall; a meeting room; and an IT suite. It also has a large reception area doubling as a community room. The Eco Hub hosts the Gamlingay Parish Council office, the community library, Stepping Stones Children's Centre, Gamlingay Youth Clubs and Gamlingay Day Nursery. Other venues available for hire in Gamlingay include the WI Hall, two Church Halls and two schools.

### **Shefford**

Shefford is a rural town with a population of around 6,000. It has a Community Hall (Main Hall 15 x 9m), which has regular bookings for most of the week. There is also the Shefford Town Memorial Hall (Main Hall 23.8 x 10m, seats 200 theatre style) and grounds, used by a number of sports groups – a campaign has recently been launched to raise £1.5m for a replacement hall. Other venues available for hire include the Methodist Church Hall, Scout Hut, and Middle School.

### **Stotfold**

Stotfold is a rapidly growing rural town with a current population of around 8,000. Halls for hire include the Memorial Hall (Main Hall 14.6 x 8.6m, seats 196 theatre style), and three smaller halls at the Roecroft Centre; the Council Chamber at the Simpson Centre (8m x 7m) is also available for hire (the Library is also housed in this building). Also available are four local schools, two church halls, a Salvation Army Hall and the Ivel Room at Stotfold Mill.

### **The Wixams**

The Wixams is a new settlement on the Central Bedfordshire / Bedford Borough border, which will be made up of 4 separate villages, one of which has been built so far. The population of Village 1 will eventually be around 3,000. A new Village Hall, Wixams Lakeside Hall (Main Hall 17.6m x 11.7m) has just opened in Village 1. Adjacent are / will be shops, a day care centre, a multi-use games area, a lower school and a medical centre.

### **Toddington**

Toddington is a large village with a population of around 5,000. It has a Village Hall (main hall 12.5 x 10.5m), incorporating the Parish Council Office – the Youth Centre is adjacent. Unusually, it also has a small theatre (a former church hall owned by the local amateur dramatic society).

## 2.10 Income generated by other venues

The established Halls mentioned in 2.9 (where we have figures available) typically generate between £10,000 and £20,000 in hires per annum, in keeping with many larger Village Halls across the country. However, it is possible to generate more income from hires: one large Village Hall in Bedfordshire regularly generates over £60,000 per annum.

Venues that are much more geared up for commercial and private hires attract considerably more income. For example, the Forest Centre in Marston Moretaine (see 2.8) typically turns over more than £500,000 per annum (this includes a café and shop in addition to conference and meeting facilities).

## 2.11 Options Appraisal

The main options under consideration are as follows:

No.	Description	Approx. cost	Advantages	Disadvantages
Option 1	Do nothing	£0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No cost incurred – no fundraising required</li> <li>No need for ongoing management</li> <li>No financial risk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Needs of a significant number of users not met</li> <li>Benefits to Potton not achieved</li> <li>Continue to subsidise under-performing halls</li> </ul>
Option 2	Extend or convert an existing building (e.g. Mill Lane Pavilion)	£500K?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No need for a new building to maintain</li> <li>Cheaper than option 4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has been considered previously but never viable,</li> <li>Significant planning constraints</li> <li>Unlikely to meet the needs of all users</li> <li>Section 106 funding will not be applicable</li> </ul>
Option 3	Build a small hall only at the new site	£500K?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Land available for free</li> <li>Should be fully paid for by S106 – no fundraising required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Needs of a significant number of users not met</li> <li>Duplicates function of existing venues</li> <li>Would require ongoing volunteer effort to run</li> <li>May be less sustainable financially</li> </ul>
Option 4 (preferred)	Build a large hall at the new site with spaces for additional uses	£1m+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet main user requirements not currently being met</li> <li>Potential to generate more income and attract hires from outside Potton</li> <li>Land available for free</li> <li>Major financial contribution from S106</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Would require significant additional fundraising and ongoing volunteer effort</li> <li>Could require closure and sale of at least one existing venue</li> <li>Ongoing financial risk</li> </ul>

Option 4 is being taken forward as the preferred option.

### 3. Designing and Building the Hall

#### 3.1 Outline design options

Based on the needs identified in the last chapter, we have provided two illustrative options to form the basis of an outline design brief. For both, the total internal building footprint would be roughly 30 x 24 x 6.1m, with total floor space of up to 1120m<sup>2</sup> (including 1<sup>st</sup> storey).

It is clear from the needs analysis that, while having a large hall forms the principal driver for building a new hall in the first place, much of the need is likely to be for smaller spaces for which hire rates would be lower. A key principle behind both designs therefore is the incorporation of sound-proofed partitions to enable flexibility in the use of the space.

#### *Option A*

Space / approx. dimensions	What provided
Large Hall (18 x 18 x 6.1m)	Seat up to 360 (some in retractable seating) plus demountable stage 2 badminton courts, 4 table tennis tables or 3 bowling carpets plus other indoor sports e.g. five-a-side Sound-proofed partitions enable space to become 2 (or 3) smaller halls as required (e.g. both 9 x 18)
Meeting room (10 x 5 x 2.5m)	Tables and chairs
Kitchen (5 x 5 x 2.5m)	
Reception / foyer (18 x 6 x 2.5m)	Potential for serving area, tables & chairs, shelves etc – could accommodate small library later
Gym (12 x 7m x 2.5m)	15-20 fitness stations
Office (5 x 6 x 2.5m)	3-4 desks
4 x Changing rooms (each 5 x 5 x 2.5m)	Ideally accessible both from within and outside the Hall <sup>2</sup> . Showers could either be entirely separate or screened off at the end of changing rooms.
3 x Toilets (10 x 5 x 2.5m in total)	One male (1 WC + 4 urinals), one female (5 WCs), and one disabled (based on max 300 hall users at any one time)
Storage (c. 100m <sup>2</sup> )	At least 2 separate store rooms

#### *Option B*

Space / approx. dimensions	What provided
Large Hall (23 x 10 x 6.1m)	Seat up to 260 (some in retractable seating) plus demountable stage 1 badminton court, 4 table tennis tables or 3 bowling carpets Sound-proofed partitions enable space to become 2 smaller halls as required (e.g. 12.5 x 10 and 10 x 10)
Small Hall (10 x 8 x 6.1m)	Seat up to 120
Meeting room (10 x 5 x 2.5m)	Tables and chairs
Kitchen (7 x 5 x 2.5m)	

<sup>2</sup> Safeguarding and security issues would clearly need to be addressed

Reception / foyer (10 x 10 x 2.5m)	Potential for serving area, tables & chairs, shelves etc – could accommodate small library later
Gym (14 x 7m x 2.5m)	15-20 fitness stations
Office (8 x 6 x 2.5m)	5-6 desks
4 x Changing rooms (each 5 x 5 x 2.5m)	Ideally accessible both from within and outside the Hall. Showers could either be entirely separate or screened off at the end of changing rooms.
3 x Toilets (10 x 5 x 2.5m in total)	One male (1 WC + 4 urinals), one female (5 WCs), and one disabled (based on max 300 hall users at any one time)
Storage (c. 100m <sup>2</sup> )	1 large store room

Indoor cricket nets, which require 31 x 10 x 4m space, could potentially fit into Option B if the Large and Small Halls were adjacent and separated by a partition rather than a wall, thus creating the possibility for one long space. One drawback of this would be that this would use both Halls at a time (weekday evenings) when they are required by other users. An alternative would be to attach a dedicated space to one side of the building, possibly as a later phase.

### 3.2 Design & build considerations

These are provided as an introduction – an architect will be able to advise on these in more detail.

#### ***Environmental performance / BREEAM rating***

Ensuring excellent environmental performance will add to the cost of the building. However, in our view it will be essential for the ongoing viability of the building. For many community buildings, utility costs are by far their highest expense, and this is only likely to increase in future. Typically, 85% of energy costs go on heating. The Committee should therefore aspire to as high a BREEAM rating as possible within its budget.

Possible environmental measures for consideration include ground-source heat pumps, solar panels (thermal / voltaic), heat recovery ventilation, rainwater harvesting and greywater recycling.

#### ***Materials***

According to Sport England’s Design Guidance Note for Village and Community Halls, “traditional domestic construction is often the most appropriate method for village and community halls. The clear span and height of the main hall are usually the usually the only aspects that demand upgrading of normal domestic building techniques. Timber frame construction is worth considering as an alternative to load bearing masonry.”

#### ***Noise and acoustic performance***

Although the Hall will be at least 50-100m from the nearest residential properties, the nature of the likely usage at times means that noise levels may be an issue. Good insulation will help to reduce noise, and, since windows will need to be kept closed, maintain a comfortable temperature (air conditioning will also be important). This will also help to keep out noise from outside.

Given that many of the regular users will be performing arts groups, ensuring excellent acoustics is critical to the success of the project. This will also increase the attractiveness of the venue to external hirers.

### ***Parking***

Land for a car park has already been indicated on the draft site layout. The car park will need to accommodate at least 100 cars to meet the user requirements most of the time. For concerts etc it is likely that more space will be needed, and the possibility of being able to park in the nearby industrial park (or on the adjacent green space if necessary) should be investigated.

### **3.3 Outline costings**

It is difficult to give even a rough idea of costs given the number of variables involved. However, experience elsewhere suggests that community halls (particularly using timber frames) can be delivered for a total of around £1,000 per m<sup>2</sup>. Based on the options in 3.1, this would suggest that the Hall (once equipment etc is included) could be built for between £1m and £1.5m (excluding VAT).

### ***VAT***

A new building can be zero-rated VAT (currently 20%) if it will be used solely for a 'relevant charitable purpose', for example "as a village hall or similarly in providing social or recreational facilities for a local community" (HMRC). A building falls within this category when "there is a high degree of local community involvement in the building's operation and activities; and there is a wide variety of activities carried on in the building, the majority of which are for social and/or recreational purposes (including sporting). NB: Users of the building need not be confined to the local community but can come from further afield."

Any part of the building which cannot be used for a variety of social or recreational activities cannot be seen as being used as a village hall for VAT purposes.

It is likely therefore that parts of the Hall as currently proposed (e.g. gym) would be eligible for VAT – but it may be possible to gain zero-rating for VAT on the principal community spaces. It is recommended that professional VAT advice be sought at the earliest opportunity.

### **3.4 Potential funding sources**

#### ***Section 106***

The feasibility of a new Hall rests on the availability of Section 106 contributions, without which it is highly unlikely to be possible to raise sufficient funding. Early indications are that somewhere between £500,000 and £700,000 might be obtainable: our understanding is that the bulk of this would be from the Land East of Biggleswade Road development and Land East of Sutton Mill Road, however there is some already in the bank from previous developments that could potentially be allocated, as well as the possibility of further draw-down from later developments.

#### ***Sale of Central Bedfordshire Council assets***

Central Bedfordshire Council currently owns at least two buildings in Potton. One option worth exploring would be whether any of these assets could be sold, with the proceeds going towards the new Hall.

#### ***Potton Town Council precept***

As a parished area, Potton has the ability to raise significant funds of its own through the precept. Many funders (see below) would probably expect to see a contribution from the town's own resources.

The majority of respondents to the March 2012 survey were prepared to pay £2 or £5 per month on top of the existing precept for the use of a new Hall. If this was to be

implemented, between around £55,000 and £140,000 per year could be raised towards the building. This would represent an increase on a Band D equivalent property of between around 35% and 87% on the precept itself, and an increase on the overall Council Tax bill for the same property of around 1.5%. Even as a one-off this would be likely to require widespread community support and potentially, as the Town Council has indicated, a community referendum.

At £69.30 on a Band D property, Potton's precept is currently higher than most villages in Central Bedfordshire, but lower than all the other towns (bar Stotfold).

### ***Charitable Trusts and Foundations***

The Potton Consolidated Charity contains within its objects "the general benefit of the inhabitants" of the parish of Potton, and allocates 39% of its funding each year to this object. Its total funds currently stand at around £3.5m. However, most of its grants are currently for less than £10,000, and presumably an exception would need to be made for a grant of £50-100,000.

Other trusts with a local focus include the Wixamtree Trust, which distributes most of its funding within Bedfordshire (in 2010/11 it made grants totalling just over £1m); and the Steel Trust, which distributes around 30% of its funding each year within Bedfordshire (in 2011/12 it also made grants totalling just over £1m).

Major national trusts may also be worth approaching, such as the Garfield Weston Foundation, which has funded recent capital projects in Bedfordshire. The Landfill Communities Fund is still available through Biffaward (grants up to £50,000).

Trust funding would only be available to registered charitable bodies.

### ***Lottery funding***

The site sits within the E01017429 Lower Super Output Area, which falls within the 2% least deprived areas in the country. It would therefore not be eligible for the Big Lottery Fund's Reaching Communities Fund for buildings.

Sport England's Inspired Facilities programme will invest in modernisation of, and/or environmental improvements to, existing buildings; outdoor lighting or surfaces; equipment; and community club buildings. It is not immediately clear whether a new Community Hall might be eligible.

Arts Council capital funding tends to be targeted at established arts organisations, particularly those that it already funds. However, community/voluntary organisations can apply, and it is possible to receive up to £100,000 and more in exceptional cases. A strong case would have to be made regarding the need for a venue and the artistic quality of what would take place there (e.g. residencies from professional performing arts companies).

### ***Greensand Ridge Rural Development Programme***

This programme (managed by BRCC) disperses funding in the Greensand Ridge area for rural development projects, through the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). It contributed over £200,000 to the Gamlingay Eco Hub project. The Programme has nearly finished and very little funding is still available. However, it is possible that similar funding will be available in the next round of RDPE between 2014 and 2020.

In order to be eligible for this funding, the project would need to demonstrate that it was helping to boost the local economy as well as increasing access to services. This

funding source carries particular burdens in terms of project management and administration.

### ***Fundraising and sponsorship***

Usually, with a large scale project such as this, the local community needs to raise some of the cash themselves – and funders may expect to see this if they are to put their own funding in. Traditional approaches to fundraising include street or door-to-door collections, appeals, seeking donations and sponsorship from local companies, “Buy a Brick”, 300 Club, personal donations (registering for Gift Aid will enable tax to be reclaimed) and fundraising events.

Another approach which is gaining credibility is Community Share Issues. According to the Asset Transfer Unit, “Community share issues are a way of raising inexpensive capital and at the same time mobilising a community behind a building project. A successful share issue gives the organisation credibility and recruits volunteers.” Shares will be more attractive if a dividend is offered, although this will impact on the operational budget – an alternative would be to offer discounted rates to shareholders. In order to issue shares inexpensively, an Industrial & Provident Society would need to be set up.

### ***In-kind funding***

In the case of Gamlingay Eco Hub, much of the materials were provided at cost or even free. Given the town’s association with Potton Timber, it would be worth approaching Kingspan plc to see whether a similar deal could be secured in Potton, as well as other local companies.

Another good example of this recently is Potton Bowls Club, which greatly reduced the cost of its new pavilion through being given (or sold at low cost) materials as well as time and skills by local people and companies.

### ***Loan finance***

Sometimes a loan is taken out to help finance the construction of a new hall. In the case of Gamlingay Eco Hub, Gamlingay Parish Council took out a ‘bridging’ loan of around £500,000 in the expectation that this would be repaid out of future Section 106 monies.

This might be required for the Community Hall, depending on how the timescale for the build relates to the release of Section 106 contributions. The Town Council would be best placed to take out this loan on behalf of the Potton community, and would be able to apply to lenders such as the Public Works Loan Board, and repay the loan over a period of many years. This could be one alternative to direct capital funding (see above).

If a loan was to be repaid out of future operating income, this would be reflected in higher hire charges and could threaten the ongoing sustainability of the Hall. This would therefore need to be approached with great caution.

Smaller loans (usually up to £20,000) are offered by the Rural Community Buildings Loan Fund, managed by Action with Communities in Rural England. This is currently oversubscribed and a waiting list is in operation.

### **Overall funding package**

For illustrative purposes only, the funding package for the new Hall could look something like this:

Section 106 contributions	£600,000 (some potentially 'forward-funded through a bridging loan)
CBC contribution from sale of assets	£200,000
Potton Town Council	£50,000
Charitable trusts and foundations	£100,000
Local fundraising and sponsorship	£100,000
In-kind funding	£50,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,100,000</b>

Greensand Ridge Rural Development Programme and Lottery funding are currently too uncertain to include here.

### **3.5 Project Management**

The Project Management skills and capacity required for a project of this scale are considerable. There are also likely to be significant demands on the Committee during the development phase, and a skills audit should be undertaken at this stage to find out which skills are possessed by Committee members that might be of use.

A budget for professional fees will be needed for the Project Manager, the architect (providing a comprehensive and clear brief at the outset will be critical to keep these costs down), and a Quantity Surveyor. Professional fees for this type of project would typically be in the range £20,000 to £30,000.

### **3.6 Timescales**

There are too many variables to be able to predict a timetable for the building of the Hall with any confidence, however the following gives a rough illustration of what might be possible:

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Timetable</b>
Fundraising starts	2013
Tender exercise to appoint architect / project manager	2013
Draw up initial designs	2013
Consult with users and wider community on initial designs	2013/4
Finalise designs	2014
Planning permission submitted	2014
Planning approval	2014
Fully serviced site transferred by developers to new entity or other organisation	2014/5
Funding package in place	2015
Tender exercise to appoint contractors	2015
Builders start on site	2015
Build completed	2015/6

The key deciding factor may be the speed at which the Land East of Biggleswade Road development is built out and occupied, thereby releasing the necessary Section 106 funds.

## 4. Operating the Hall

### 4.1 Ownership / legal structure / governance

There are two principal options for the ownership of the Hall:

#### ***Option A – set up a new entity***

Around 98% of the community halls in Bedfordshire that BRCC deals with (this does not include Community Centres in the large towns) are owned by independent charitable organisations set up for the purpose. Arguably, this is the best way of ensuring that the hall is run for the community, by the community. While the community shoulders the risks involved in maintaining a viable building, it also has control over the governance and management.

Charitable status would help in raising the necessary funds and ensuring community benefit in perpetuity. The legal structure could either be a charitable trust (most common), a charitable company, or an Industrial & Provident Society (see Community Share Issues).

In nearly all cases where a Hall is an independent charitable organisation, it is governed by volunteers from the local community. (The exception of which we are aware is Stewartby Village Hall, a charity managed by the Parish Council with Councillors as Trustees, which is therefore closer to the council-owned model, below). Under this option, therefore, it would make sense for a board of trustees to be formed, largely from members of the existing committee.

#### ***Option B – an existing organisation takes ownership***

This option could be explored if there are not sufficient people willing to take on the governance responsibilities of acting as trustees for the new hall. Most likely candidates for ownership would be the Town or Parish Council (there are a few examples of this elsewhere in Central Bedfordshire, namely Arlesey, Stotfold and Henlow) or Central Bedfordshire Council (perhaps in exchange for the community building it currently owns in Brook End). It should be considered that a council-owned building will be liable for payment of full rates and will not attract any charitable funding.

The Halls owned by their local Town or Parish Councils (above) are also governed and managed by those Councils.

One of the user organisations could potentially take on ownership of the hall, provided that funders and stakeholders were satisfied that this arrangement would still benefit the whole community.

We would recommend option A, and specifically a Charitable Company. The new Charitable Incorporated Organisation structure being introduced (awaiting final assent, probably in Autumn 2012) will be a company, but will only be registered with the Charity Commission, not Companies House as well.

It is worth quoting in full the Charity Commission's guidance on Attributes of a successful village hall or community centre:

“As a general rule, active, vibrant governance and an active, vibrant village hall or community centre go hand in hand. Our research revealed a clearly identifiable link between the ability of village hall and community centre charities to attract users, their ability to attract trustees and other volunteers, and their ability to generate funding...the charities that thrive are those in which trustees are pro-active in understanding their

responsibilities and in ensuring that their charity provides activities that meet local needs.

Our research shows that a successful village hall or community centre charity usually has:

- A governing document that is workable and up-to-date, containing provisions for everything that the trustees need to do.
- A trustee body that is diverse, knows the extent of its role, responsibilities and powers and presents potential new trustees with a realistic picture of what is involved.
- A building that meets legislative requirements and that can facilitate a range of activities.
- An effective means of communicating and consulting with the local community to ensure that its needs and interests are understood and that the community knows about the charity's activities and plans.
- A funding regime that is sustainable and diverse enough to allow trustees sufficient flexibility to direct their activities in accordance with local needs and interests.
- A strategic plan, however simple, that takes account of the impact of proposed changes on all aspects of the running of the charity.”

#### **4.2 Management and Staffing**

Whoever takes on the ownership and governance of the new Hall, there are a number of options for how it is managed:

##### ***Option A – Hall managed by trustees and/or volunteers***

Most Village Halls are run on a voluntary basis with the only paid staff (if any) being a part-time cleaner and/or caretaker. This has the advantage of keeping costs (and therefore hire charges) down; the main disadvantages (particularly for a large hall) would be the amount of volunteer time required, and that customer service levels are likely to be lower.

Although the need will depend on the level of usage, an assumption will be made at this stage that a cleaner and caretaker would be required for 14 hours/week each. At £8/hour, each would cost somewhere between £5,500 and £6,000 per annum. In addition, a handyman to undertake maintenance work might cost between £1,000 and £3,000 per annum.

##### ***Option B – Hall managed by directly employed staff***

Larger venues can have anything from a part-time Manager up to a large team of paid staff. A paid Hall Manager could be in charge of promotion, sales, showing round prospective hirers, administration of bookings, and book-keeping, in addition to some caretaking responsibilities. Having a part-time or full-time Manager would introduce considerable extra cost, but would enable higher charges to be levied (due to better customer service); increase the number of bookings (due to more promotional and sales activity); and decrease the burden on trustees.

At £12/hour, a part-time Manager (21 hours/week) would cost around £15,000 per annum and a full-time Manager (35 hours/week) would cost around £25,000 per annum. There would also be increased office costs.

### ***Option C – Hall management contracted out to another organisation***

Many larger venues are contracted out to private companies, typically in larger towns – in Central Bedfordshire this includes four leisure centres (managed by Stevenage Leisure Ltd) as well as the Grove Theatre in Dunstable (managed by Leisure in the Community Ltd and Leisure Connection Ltd). This might be an attractive option in the case of Stevenage Leisure Ltd in particular, given the potential for cross-promotion with its leisure centres in Biggleswade and Sandy. This option (if viable) would decrease the operational risks for the trustees and introduce corporate expertise to the management of the Hall; however the hire charges would be likely to be higher than with the other options. If this option was chosen, the contractor would need to be brought in at an early stage in order to influence the design of the facilities. The management contract would have to be drawn up very carefully, and managed actively once in force, to ensure that the facilities are accessible to the whole community (according to the vision for the Hall).

We are not aware of any examples of the above model operating for a Community Hall in Bedfordshire. However, we have found a similar example in Kington, a town of around 3,500 people in Herefordshire. The Lady Hawkins Community Leisure Centre was built by the community, and is used jointly by the school and the local community. The facility was until recently managed by Herefordshire Council on behalf of the Lady Hawkins Community Leisure Centre Trust, however in summer 2012 this was contracted out to Halo Leisure (a private company) in order to be consistent with the Council's other leisure facilities.

Alternatively Pottton Town Council, even if did not take ownership of the Hall, could be approached to manage the venue, as it already does with the Community Centre and the Mill Lane Pavilion.

There could be a mixture of the above options, for example the management of the gym alone could be contracted out to a private provider.

Under this option, either the contractor could take the income in return for an annual rent of the facility; or a fixed management fee could be paid; or a shared risk/profit arrangement could be found.

Even if Option B or C is chosen, it is likely that a fair amount of volunteer effort will be required in order to keep the hall running within existing resources.

## **4.3 Income generation**

### ***Pricing***

Decisions on pricing will be essential in order to generate sufficient income while also attracting hires and ensuring that the hall is accessible to the local community.

The main factors in setting prices will be:

- What the market will bear, in relation to the main user groups and local competition
- How to make best use of hall capacity, given that some times will be more popular than others
- Being able to cover the total cost of running the building (see 4.5) while also contributing to an on-going maintenance fund

There are a number of different ways of pricing hire charges. Typically, rates will be differentiated according to a number of variables such as:

- *Type of use – commercial, private or community*

For most community buildings there is a considerable differential in charging between these types of use, which commercial hires often being at least twice the price of commercial hires. Any grant funding secured to subsidise the Hall is likely to require affordable rates for the local community.

According to the March 2012 survey, most respondents were prepared to pay between £15 and £25 per hour to hire the building, with some prepared to pay £30. It is assumed that this would be for community or private use.

Charges for commercial use could be considerably higher. For conferences, the Rufus Centre Flitwick charges around £46/hour for its main hall (the Lockyer Suite), £40/hour for its next largest space (the Davis Suite), and down to £22 for smaller rooms (minimum booking 4 hours for all spaces).

- *Whether the hirer is based locally*

It is common practice to offer discounts or a cheaper rate to groups, businesses or individuals living within the 'area of benefit' of a community building.

- *Peak / off-peak times*

Charging policies can help to manage demand, reducing it at peak times and channelling it more towards off-peak times. This is current practice with existing halls in Potton (see 2.3).

As with most halls, evenings are clearly likely to be in higher demand than daytimes and will accommodate higher charges, while lower day charges would help to attract use during these times. As noted previously, demand for regular hires is higher during the week, whereas larger occasional events are more likely to take place at weekends.

Venues such as the Community Centre and Mill Lane Pavilion (roughly equivalent in size to the envisaged Small Hall) charge between £5 and £10 per hour before 5pm during the week.

- *Length of booking*

(either having a minimum booking length, or offering a discount for longer bookings)

### ***Indicative charges per hour***

Based on the above principles and a basic assessment of market rates in the area, the following is an example of a charging structure for a Main Hall, a Small Hall (the latter could also apply to partitioned spaces in the Main Hall) and a Meeting Room:

	<b>Weekday daytime</b> <i>(min. length 2 hrs)</i>	<b>Weekday evening</b> <i>(min. length 3 hrs)</i>	<b>Weekend</b> <i>(min. length 4 hrs)</i>
<b>Community</b>			
Main Hall	£20	£30	£40
Small Hall	£10	£15	£20
Meeting Room	£5	£7.50	£10
<b>Private</b>			
Main Hall	£30	£40	£50
Small Hall	£15	£20	£25
Meeting Room	£7.50	£10	£12.50

<b>Commercial</b>			
Main Hall	£40	£50	£60
Small Hall	£20	£25	£30
Meeting Room	£10	£12.50	£15

Under this model there would be a discount of 25% for Potton residents / groups / businesses.

Discounts could also be introduced for regular/block bookings and long bookings (e.g. over 5 hours).

### ***Income forecast***

Based on hall and room hire, on average 2 time per day, using the above rates, and making some reasonable assumptions about usage levels based on regular and occasional hires, the annual earned income once the hall is fully operational might work out as follows:

<b>Space</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Income</b>
Main Hall	Assume 5 minimum length bookings per week on average. Around 2/3 usage at Community rate and 80% by local people (25% discount).	c. £20,000
Small Hall(s)	Assume 10 minimum length bookings per week on average. Around 2/3 usage at Community rate and 80% by local people (25% discount).	c. £20,000
Meeting room(s)	Assume 2 minimum length bookings per week on average. Around 50% usage at Community rate and 80% by local people (25% discount).	c. £2,000
Office(s)	Assumes at least 1 external tenant	c. £2,000
Gym	Assumes rented by external organisation	c. £5-10,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>c. £49-54,000</b>

It might take at least one or two years to reach these usage levels.

Another way of presenting these figures is to look at income from community and non-community hirers:

<b>Hirer type</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Income</b>
Community	Usage as above, around 2/3 usage at Community rate and 80% by local people (25% discount).	c. £24,000
Private / commercial	Usage as above, around 2/3 usage at Community rate and 80% by local people (25% discount). Plus office and gym rental.	c. £25-30,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>c. £49-54,000</b>

Achieving these private/commercial rates would be likely to require a considerable amount of sales and marketing activity.

## **Grant funding**

Many village or community halls across Bedfordshire have some form of subsidy, typically from a local town or parish council. In some cases, local council subsidy explicitly funds reduced rates for local residents. Some level of financial support from Potton Town Council (even in the form of 'seed funding' in the early years of operation) would inevitably reduce the level of ongoing risk to the viability of the Hall. (As noted in 3.3, a high level of financial support funded through an increase in the precept would require consultation with the community, or potentially a referendum).

We imagine that Central Bedfordshire Council is unlikely to agree to grant-fund the Hall at a time when funding for existing leisure centres etc is under severe pressure.

## **Feed-in Tariffs / Renewable Heat Incentive**

These are the two government schemes that make payments to building owners for the energy they produce through renewable sources. If certain environmental measures are installed in the hall, these tariffs will provide an ongoing income stream.

Feed-in tariffs are payments for renewable electricity generated through technologies such as solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and wind turbines, whether the electricity is used by the Hall or exported back to the National Grid. Although the levels of the tariffs have been reduced for new entrants, this could still represent an income stream of a few thousand pounds a year depending on what is installed.

The Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) is the equivalent for heating, described by DECC as "the Government's principal mechanism for driving forward the transition to deployment of renewable and low carbon heat over the coming decades". Initially only certain technologies will be supported through the RHI including certain biomass boilers, ground Source Heat Pumps and Solar Thermal. However, other technologies are being considered for inclusion in later phases, such as air source heat pumps.

## **4.5 Operating and maintenance costs**

The two main operating expenses will be staffing costs and running costs.

### **Staffing costs**

These will depend on the management and staffing arrangements (4.1). Option A would cost between £12,000 and £15,000 per annum. Option B would cost between £27,000 and £40,000 per annum. It would be possible in principle to revert to Option A from Option B (or a half-way option) if income levels fell short of expectations.

### **Running costs**

The running costs of the building (particularly utilities but also insurance, licensing fees, electrical inspections, fire inspections etc) will depend greatly on usage levels and the degree of energy efficiency of the building. However, experience from similar sized buildings (e.g. Gamlingay Ecohub, Woodside Hall in Hitchin) suggests that they could be somewhere between £15,000 and £20,000 per annum.

In addition, there should be a clear aim to put aside money into a 'sinking' fund for future maintenance. £5,000 a year would be an indicative amount once the Hall has reached a reasonable level of usage.

At the usage levels forecast in this study and the indicative pricing structure suggested, sufficient income would be generated to cover the running costs, employ a part-time Manager and potentially make a contribution to a sinking fund.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1 Rationale for a new Hall

Potton is clearly a thriving town in terms of community activity, particularly when it comes to performing arts and sports. However, the needs of many of these groups are not currently met by the facilities available, which are relatively small and not always fit for purpose. The Land East of Biggleswade Road development probably represents the best opportunity for decades (and for years to come) to meet much of this need in one large, purpose-built community building.

The proposal for a new Hall in Potton cannot be considered in isolation, as it raises the wider strategic issue of what community facilities are needed in Potton as it grows, as well as what will be sustainable in times of austerity. Building a large community hall in addition to what already exists will create more capacity than is needed, and threaten the viability of all venues. Since there is good evidence that co-location of facilities and services in rural areas helps to ensure sustainability, consideration should be given by all local stakeholders to 'consolidating' a number of facilities within the new building. Any community buildings made redundant through this process could be sold to raise funds for the new Hall.

**Recommendation 1: that a strategic approach to community facilities in Potton be taken by all key local stakeholders working in partnership, with consideration given to 'consolidating' existing facilities within the new building.**

Opinion in Potton is not unanimously supportive of the need for a new Community Hall, and, while the community consultation activities so far consistently show more support than opposition from respondents, the number of respondents (with the exception of the Town Plan) has been relatively low. This may be largely because the existing halls do meet the needs of some users, while many others do not generally use such facilities and so are not interested, or would prefer to see money spent elsewhere. The Town Council is happy to support the project but is not currently prepared to back it financially, which may hamper its success in gaining funding elsewhere.

Given the strategic importance of this issue to Potton, there is a need to gain more widespread community support for the proposed new Hall, particularly if some existing facilities were to close or be relocated to the new site. The Hall for All Committee has a high level of ambition for the Hall, and the enthusiasm to bring more of the community on board with the proposals.

**Recommendation 2: that further engagement (linked to Recommendation 1, above) be undertaken with the community in order to gain wider community support for the project.**

A number of options for moving forward have been considered, and the preferred option at this stage is to build a new large multi-purpose hall at the new site being provided, as this is the only feasible option that delivers the benefits desired.

The location of the new Hall may be a stumbling block for some people, although by foot it will only be around half a mile from the Market Square if a new footpath is provided – the same or less than other existing venues, and equivalent to other comparable buildings elsewhere. It will be important to ensure good transport links with the new development as identified in the draft Potton Local Area Transport Plan.

**Recommendation 3: that the Committee proceed with its preferred option (subject to Recommendations 1 and 2, above).**

## **5.2 Designing and Building the new Hall**

The preferred option of building a large hall on the identified site has a reasonable degree of feasibility. Although the specification required to meet the identified needs is larger and more demanding than with most community buildings in the area, the land is being provided for free, and a good proportion of the funding already has a high likelihood of being provided.

Success will depend heavily on a number of factors:

- Being able to demonstrate to potential funders strong community support and a wide community benefit (see 5.1)
- The amount of funding released through Section 106 as well as through the sale of existing assets – the bigger the shortfall, the less likely it is to be bridged through other fundraising
- The willingness and ability of local stakeholders to accommodate financial risk, particularly if loan finance is being considered
- Being willing and able to make some compromises over the design and build specification if necessary, without sacrificing the overall vision for the building
- Building the Hall to a sufficient size and quality to meet the needs of Potton users while also attracting hires from elsewhere
- Finding a clever design solution that enables multi-functional space and high environmental performance whilst being affordable to build

While it is too early to stipulate a cost for the building, the likelihood is that a building meeting the various user requirements would cost well over £1 million. In the current financial climate, where open funding for this type of project is very thin on the ground, it is likely that over half of the cost (i.e. at least £600,000) would need to be met through Section 106 contributions. Central Bedfordshire Council (possibly through sale of assets), Potton Town Council and trusts with a Potton or Bedfordshire focus would all probably need to contribute, in addition to a fundraising campaign led by the local community.

## **5.3 Operating the new Hall**

We are satisfied that, provided the community in Potton gets behind it, the new Hall can be a viable ongoing operation. If a part-time Manager is to be employed, the Hall will need to generate considerably more income than most community buildings in Bedfordshire; however, there are a reasonable number of groups already intending to use the Hall, and good potential to bring in more custom from community groups, individuals and businesses. Success will depend on staff, trustees, volunteers and other stakeholders working hard to promote the Hall and helping to attract hires.

Based on the prospective users currently identified, as well as the market for occasional hires, there appears to be a high likelihood of the new facilities being well used at evenings and weekends. However, very few users have yet indicated so far that they would hire the facilities regularly during weekdays, and this needs to be addressed if the Hall is to generate sufficient income.

**Recommendation 4: that further consultation and market research be undertaken to secure prospective regular users of the Hall during the day (this could include co-locating with a business or community service).**

The operational feasibility of the Hall would be increased if additional facilities were provided, such as a gym, office space, and (at some point) the library. This would contribute rental income while helping to ensure a presence in the building at all times. However, this would also increase the build costs, and so could be considered as optional extras at this stage.

The aspiration is for the Hall to be self-financing. This may be realistic provided that sufficient investment is forthcoming at the outset to make the Hall both high-quality and environmentally efficient. However, it should be noted that there will be financial risks for the Hall as it establishes itself, and that it may need some kind of 'seed funding' or guarantee against losses in its early years.

**Recommendation 5: that the need be addressed for 'seed funding' for the Hall in its early years as it establishes itself.**