

NORTON ST PHILIP PARISH COUNCIL

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Village Hall Survey

Introduction

The Parish Council (PC) undertook a 'Village Hall' survey during the fortnight 16-29 September 2017. The purpose of the survey was to seek views from the community on:

- (i) the Palairet Hall (PH), currently Norton St Philip's village hall;
- (ii) possible acquisition of the former RC Church (RCC) by a body independent of the PC; and
- (iii) whether it would be desirable for the Parish Church of St Philip and St James to be adapted so that it could play a larger role as a community space.

The survey results are set out at the end of this report. There were 91 responses. Thus the PC received a spread of views. A response of under 50 would have been quite limited whereas a response of, say, 150-200 would have represented strong engagement across the community: 91 falls in between, but is not a high response.

In addition to the replies to the questions in the survey questionnaire, we have also looked at further comments made in respect of Questions 4-7 to see whether, and if so what, themes emerged.

Survey Results

Q. 4. Some 33% of respondents were happy with the PH as it is, and a further 54% were also happy with the PH at present but wished the PC to consider additional options for the future. Thus only 13% expressed dissatisfaction with the PH. Nearly half of respondents (41) made *additional* comments. Issues which featured in several of these were – a desire for a purpose-built, well equipped, village hall (plus car park), other than either the PH or the RCC; lack of parking at the PH; the need for further investment in the PH; and some feeling that, despite its limitations, the PH had become integral to the life of the village.

Q. 5. Opinion was equally divided for and against possible acquisition of the RCC. Of the 50% in favour, nearly 30% saw the RCC as a potential *additional* community space: thus just over 20% thought that acquisition of the RCC as the main village hall should be explored. Of the 50% against acquiring the RCC, over 30% did not think that the village needed another community hall: just under 20% thought that it did – but not the RCC. Among some of this 50% opposed to acquisition there was a sense that, given the limitations of both the PH and the RCC, the community could end up with two white elephants: several people said that the village did not need both the PH and the RCC. The 43 additional comments on Q. 5 included some support for acquiring the RCC so that arts and crafts facilities and a café could be introduced; and also doubts on parking and vehicular egress onto Bell Hill and what the site would look like after redevelopment.

Q.6. Nearly 40% favoured using the church 'for activities appropriate to its use but [I] am unsure of the benefits it could provide.' Less than 20% supported changes to the Parish Church and re-modelling the space for broader community use. Nearly 43% did not want to see the church further altered. There were 28 additional comments, a number of which commented on secular activities appropriate for a church. Others wished to see the character of the church retained. As to those who commented on possible removal of some pews, opinion was divided.

Q. 7 gave respondents the chance to make any further comments. Nearly 25% chose to do so but no fresh themes emerged. Seven people thanked the PC for conducting the survey.

Conclusions

1. Despite a number of concerns about the PH being expressed, it should continue to be the village hall; but the possibility of having a new purpose-built village hall for the longer term should be on the PC's radar.

2. Acquisition of the RCC either as a complementary community space or as a potential replacement village hall enjoyed the support of 50% of respondents; but because 91 completed the survey, that support rested on 46 responses. This is a slender base on which to encourage the formation of an independent embryo trust which would assemble the necessary funding in a timescale acceptable to the RCC's owners (Downside). If, however, a group emerges fairly swiftly, ie by the *end of November* at the latest, who wish to pursue possible acquisition, the PC should facilitate a public meeting at the earliest opportunity to enable that group to put forward to the community:

- (i) its views on the uses to which the new space would be put;
- (ii) realistic funding proposals; and
- (iii) workable administrative arrangements (including a skeleton constitution and 3-5 year business plan).

Thus the group could gauge the level of community support, including financial commitment, before deciding whether to open negotiations with Downside.

3. With less than 22% of respondents, ie 20 people, in favour of exploring acquisition of the RCC as the community's main village hall, the PC will not be pursuing that option.

4. It is for the Parochial Church Council to consider the answers to Q. 6.

The PC wishes to thank those who completed the survey for their time and thoughtful engagement; and it also expresses thanks to the working group for its work on the survey, in particular to Vivienne Bolton who chaired the group and who worked closely with the PC throughout.