

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## The future of the Evanton Victoria Diamond Jubilee Hall

April 2023



## About the Project

The Victoria Diamond Jubilee Hall has served the community in Evanton for over 120 years. The original building was completed around 1898, although there have been some more recent changes, such as the development of a toilet block and kitchen block. The DJ Hall was transferred to Evanton Community Trust in 2021, and day to day management has been carried out by a Hall Management Group.

Because this is an older building, there are now some challenges with the Hall such as accessibility, heating, and the layout of the building.

An opportunity has come up for the Trust to purchase some land to the North of the Hall. This extra space would mean that the building could be extended and upgraded, so that it provides modern facilities which meet the needs of the community in Evanton.

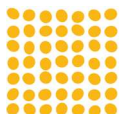
The Trust has appointed Community Enterprise to consult with local people and identify the community's wishes and aspirations for the future of the DJ Hall. John Gilbert Architects have also been appointed to produce some designs for an upgraded Hall.

This document is a summary of the full research report.

## What We Did

Stage	Description
Raising awareness	This included an article in the Rosshire Journal, posters around the town, and promotion on social media.

Demographic and Policy Analysis	Study of key statistical trends in the local area. Analysis of key national and local policies to make sure future developments fit with these.
Survey	A community survey ran from the end of January to mid March 2023. In total, 239 people filled in the community survey, estimated to represent the views of around 720 people.
Public meetings	Open drop-in events were held in the afternoon and evening of Thursday 16 <sup>th</sup> February 2022, attended by over 30 people.
Youth consultations	We gathered feedback from the Primary 7 class at Kiltearn Primary School and spoke with Evanton based pupils at Dingwall Academy.
Stakeholder and Hall user interviews	10 interviews with representatives of 8 other organisations active in Evanton or representative of the community. Interviews and email feedback was gathered from a further 11 groups which use or may wish to use the Hall.
Market Research	Desk-based research, including research into potential for competition and/or partnership.
Governance and management	Review of the strength of the Trust board; and review of the current governance structure.
Funding and finance	Review of potential sources of funding for redevelopment of the building, and outline financial projections for an upgraded Hall.
Research report	A report setting out the findings of research, and options for future development of the Hall.



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## What We Found Out

### About the community:

#### Positive aspects to build on:

- Broadly, a good community spirit.
- Good history of community involvement and activity, with some active local groups.
- Some good facilities in the village such as the Primary School and Evanton Wood.
- Natural environment and green space around the village.
- Quiet.
- A safe community.
- Generally, high proportions of people who are economically active, have degree level qualifications, and work in managerial or professional/associate occupations.
- Not an area of deprivation. Lower rates of people who are out of work and receiving workless benefits.
- This is a popular place to live – the village is growing and new families moving in (although this brings some challenges also).

#### Challenges to address:

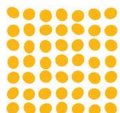
- Poor public transport. 911 people in the area fall within the most deprived 10% in Scotland in relation to geographic access to services.
- A lack of job opportunities locally – most residents commute out of the village to work.

- Some factions in the community, and better communication required between some community groups.
- A need for more integration across the community – including between longstanding and newer residents, and between generations.
- Lack of parking, including around the DJ Hall.
- A need for improved promotion of community activities and improved communication by local community groups.
- There are pockets of deprivation and some people locally are struggling with the cost of living.
- Concern that infrastructure is not keeping up as the village grows.
- Loss of some local amenities, especially the post office.
- Few activities or facilities for young people.

### About the DJ Hall:

#### Views on the Hall currently:

- There is real affection for the DJ Hall. The character of the old building is highly valued. There is a strong desire to retain the exterior of the building.
- The large main hall space is seen positively.
- The location of the Hall is positive. It is central to the village.



- There are some challenges however. These include the relatively drab interior, lack of disabled access, the heating, the layout of the building, the storage benches, and the doors near the toilets.
- There is a lack of parking at the Hall.
- The current booking system is too informal. It needs to be clear how the Hall can be hired. Activity at the Hall needs to be promoted more so people know what is happening there.
- Most people who replied to the survey use the Hall only occasionally - work to increase use of the Hall by local people needs to continue.
- The split of responsibilities between the Trust and the Hall Management Group needs to be made clearer.

#### Support for upgrade and extension of the Hall:

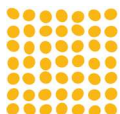
There is community support in principle for the purchase of land to the North of the Hall so that the Hall can be extended and upgraded.

- 81% of people who completed the survey (169 people) support the purchase of the land, followed by 13% who are not sure. 6% of respondents (13 people) do not support the purchase of the land to extend and upgrade the Hall.
- There is a view from a small minority of people that it would be sensible (and for some of these, the preferred option) to look at building a new community space on a different site – for example, community facilities as part of a new community school. A new community school is unlikely to be a Council priority however.

#### Services which could be offered at the Hall in future:

The most frequently requested services were:

- Concerts and performances.
- Events and parties (including ceilidhs at the Hall).
- Community cinema.
- Classes and learning opportunities. A number of suggestions relating to arts & crafts classes/ groups were received.
- Community café / drop-in space (not a commercial café). Related suggestions included a drop-in warm social space; weekly coffee mornings; supper clubs and soup lunches.
- Activities for children and families, including holiday activities for kids; and a play group / toddler group.
- Activities for young people. Young people at Dingwall Academy requested a youth drop-in space, as well as opportunities for the young people to lead activities for younger children.
- Activities for older people.
- Localised services for people to access banking, healthcare appointments etc was suggested.
- Co-working space or office space (supported by around half of the people who responded to the survey, although 10% were opposed to this idea).
- There was support for the Sharing Shed. Related suggestions included repair and reuse activities, and a food larder to share surplus food (which the Shed is already delivering).



### Views on new facilities or changes to the building:

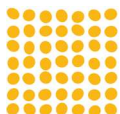
- There is real emotional attachment to the Hall and strong feelings that any restoration must be sympathetic and preserve the character of the building (especially the original exterior).
- There are mixed views on specific elements of this however – such as whether the fixed stage and wood paneling in the main hall should be kept, and whether the Jackson painting should continue to be displayed.
- The main hall and its flooring needs to be kept. It is important that there are no obstacles jutting out into the main hall.
- There is desire for a more flexible, multipurpose building, with less wasted space.
- Toilets need to be upgraded; with good changing facilities.
- More natural light would be positive.
- A modern kitchen is required.
- The existing storage boxes need to be removed, although alternative storage facilities are still needed.
- The layout needs improved to enable flow of people through the building (without passing through the main hall).
- The building needs to be made accessible.
- Improved heating and energy efficiency measures are required.
- An outdoor area, covered, with seating was also requested.

### **Governance and management:**

- The Trust board and Hall Management Group are capable although it would be useful to continue to develop skills around asset development, managing a capital project and marketing.
- The community survey identified a number of potential hall volunteers, and people wanting to join the Hall Management Group which can strengthen this group further.
- In relation to governance and management of the Hall, the split of responsibilities between the Trust and the Hall Management Group needs to be made clearer.
- More transparency around governance would also be positive. This could include more clarity on who is on the Trust Board and Hall Management Group; more regular communication with members of the Trust; and publishing meeting minutes and policies for the Hall.

### **Funding and finance:**

- Initial financial projections showed that a well-used Hall could be financially sustainable and would generate a small surplus. This is on the basis that the Hall is managed by volunteers (rather than a paid staff member).
- Raising money to purchase the land to the North of the Hall should be achievable. The Scottish Land Fund is likely to cover the bulk of this.
- Raising money for the upgrade of the Hall is likely to be more challenging (although this is still possible). This needs to be reviewed when costed designs have been produced and the funding target is clearer.





## Options appraisal

The options at this stage are:

1. Do nothing: Do not purchase the additional land to the North of the Hall; and do not upgrade the Hall.
2. Upgrade the Hall, but do not purchase the additional land.
3. Purchase the additional land and use this to upgrade / extend the Hall.

**Option 1: Do nothing: Do not purchase the additional land to the North of the Hall; and do not upgrade the Hall.**

i.e. the current position. Some improvements can still be made however, such as improved promotion of activities at the Hall.

Pros	Cons
<p>No major building project to manage.</p> <p>The Hall doesn't need to close due to building works.</p> <p>Most of the new services suggested by the community could be delivered from the existing space.</p> <p>Possibility that another community space could be developed somewhere else in the village.</p>	<p>The chance to purchase the additional land may not come around again. That may restrict options for the Hall in future.</p> <p>The building would still be energy inefficient and expensive to run.</p> <p>The current challenges with the inside of the building (such as the layout) would still be there. This impacts on the local community's willingness to use the Hall.</p>

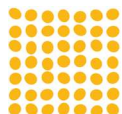
Community Enterprise doesn't recommend this option. Usage of the Hall needs to increase, but this will be less likely if the current challenges with the building's interior aren't addressed.

**Option 2: Upgrade the Hall, but do not purchase the additional land.**

This is the 'middle' option – do not purchase the land, but still upgrade the building within the existing site.

Pros	Cons
<p>No purchase costs and professional fees to buy the land.</p> <p>A smaller upgrade could still address many of the challenges with the current building (the heating etc) and include space for some of the desired new activities.</p> <p>A fresh, improved facility can be a more welcoming place for local people and increase use - which supports the financial sustainability of the Hall.</p>	<p>The chance to purchase the additional land may not come around again. That may restrict options for the Hall in future.</p> <p>Likely to be challenging to include the desired new / upgraded facilities within the existing site – especially the improvements to the layout of the building.</p> <p>Securing funding for the upgrade could be difficult.</p> <p>Challenging to manage the building project.</p> <p>The Hall is likely to be out of use during the building work.</p>

Community Enterprise doesn't recommend this option. This still involves a major building project, but there is the risk that the upgrade is less ambitious, and ultimately doesn't meet the community's needs expressed in the consultation.



Option 3: Purchase the additional land and use this to upgrade / extend the Hall.	
Pros	Cons
<p>Potential to address the challenges with the current space (other than parking).</p> <p>The space would be designed to deliver the services requested by the community through the consultations.</p> <p>A fresh, improved facility can be a more welcoming place for local people and increase use - which supports the financial sustainability of the Hall.</p>	<p>Securing funding for the upgrade could be difficult.</p> <p>Challenging to manage the building project.</p> <p>The Hall is likely to be out of use during the building work.</p>

Community Enterprise recommends this option. When it is available, the land should be purchased to support an upgrade of the site.

Whether or not that upgrade takes place in the short term will depend on the costed designs – securing funding for the upgrade (rather than the purchase itself) may be challenging.

Regardless, we recommend that the Trust should move forward to purchase the land to allow the possibility of a full future upgrade, even if this is not possible in the short term.

## The way forward

An open drop in event is being held at the DJ Hall on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> April – between 2.30 – 4pm in the afternoon and 7 – 8.30pm in the evening.

This is a chance to provide feedback on the results of the consultation and contribute any other views on the future of the Hall.

John Gilbert Architects have produced three ‘options’ for the design of an upgraded DJ Hall. These will be on display, and feedback on the drawings is welcomed.

Everyone in the community is welcome and please do come for as long or short a time as you are able. All views will be listened to and respected.

If you are unable to attend but would like to contribute views, you can email [andrew@communityenterprise.co.uk](mailto:andrew@communityenterprise.co.uk)

