



Partridge Green Village Hall Consultation Report – Action in rural Sussex – January 2024

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BACKGROUND

The village hall in Partridge Green was built in 1904 as the village continued to expand, largely as the result of the arrival of the railway line half a century before. The hall has remained busy throughout its life and was extended in 1975 to create additional toilet facilities and a meeting room. It is run by a registered charity which is in the process of transferring the building and all assets to a recently formed Charitable Incorporated Organisation which will make it more fit for the future.

The hall is home to a Pre School on weekdays in termtime, the Partridge Green Players put on regular productions making good use of the hall's stage and lighting gallery, and the hall houses the Parish Council office. There are many other regular users of the building.

The village is within the large parish of West Grinstead which contains the settlements of West Grinstead, Partridge Green, Dial Post and Littleworth. The Village Hall is the only public building in the village, but St John's Church and the Methodist Church also have rooms available for hire and community events. Dial Post has a village hall of its own which was built in 2011 as it is distinctly separate from Partridge Green.

An initial steering group was formed to explore the possibilities of replacing or upgrading the facilities. This group was made up of members of the village hall committee and the parish council, with other relevant local stakeholders and representatives invited and still welcome to join. Action in rural Sussex was approached to support them to create a public consultation on the village hall as a professional and independent body with experience in this field, but with no direct ties, allegiance or history with any one of the groups within the parish. Action in rural Sussex (AirS) is a fully independent and impartial registered charity that has been supporting rural communities across Sussex for over 90 years with a range of services including village halls and community buildings support.

The aim of the consultation and report is to provide the steering group with a clear indication of the opinions, wishes and needs of the local community. This will inform the different options for the future of the village hall and its services.

METHODOLOGY

At the end of September 2023 AirS supported the steering group to host a consultation which included direct engagement with the public and community groups to establish key topic areas to be covered in the survey and inform choice of questions to be included (see below). It was important to keep the survey relevant, and as brief as possible, but at the same time collecting enough data to provide information to enable understanding of the needs and wishes of the community. The questions were carefully formulated to avoid misunderstanding and ambiguity, and to provide meaningful data. A combined paper and online survey method was chosen, and this was delivered by hand to all 1200 households across the parish. Respondents had the choice of replying by prepaid post or online. The survey was also promoted through the parish council website, on social media, by the Pre-School on Facebook and on posters around the village. Since the response period allowed was slightly shortened because of printing delays and Royal Mail issues, the original closing date by which residents were encouraged to submit responses, 15th December, was extended to 31st December 2023. Results were processed and presented by AirS in the form of this report.

PREPARATION FOR THE SURVEY DESIGN

AirS attended a steering group meeting with other community representatives to ascertain what groups, activities and sports were already available to residents in all 4 local venues (Dial Post VH, Methodist Hall, Partidge Green VH and St John's Hall). All parties were surprised by the huge variety and number of regular events (over 50 different types). The hiring rates and size of halls were also discussed.

Two half day open consultations were then planned for Wednesday 27th September and Saturday 30th September. The first was mid-afternoon to early evening and the second in the afternoon, to allow as many residents as possible to attend depending on their availability. The aim of the open consultation was to find out the scope of residents' concerns and wishes for the project. The results of the discussions and comments could then be used to create a bespoke questionnaire that would be responding to public opinions. AirS designed a plan for the consultation days, and this was approved by members of the steering group. The consultation was interactive with themed boards for residents to vote for what they liked or disliked, and to add Post Its for new ideas. Topics included general questions, location, type of construction, activities (the list gathered from the earlier meeting was there to show what was already happening in the parish). Refreshments were available and children's activities were provided. Participants were encouraged to offer any skills they may have to help the project including being a member of the steering group. The events were publicised on local websites, social media and through posters in key locations in the village. The turnout was not high for these sessions (34 in total), but this afforded AirS and local representatives more time with each visitor to explain the consultation process and hear ideas. AirS also contacted the stakeholder groups that currently use the hall to ensure they had had a chance to feed in ideas at this stage. Groups contacted were The Women's Institute, Line Dancing, Exercise classes, Sports & Social, Acapella Group, Bird Club and the Partridge Green Players.

Several topics had already emerged as being key issues for many, one being the location of the hall if it were to be rebuilt. The other topic of major concern was whether the hall should be refurbished or rebuilt completely. As there was little known about the feasibility of refurbishment for a building of this age, AirS and the chair of the steering group contacted Duncan Baker-Brown of DBB Associates, a practise specialising in retrofitting, for a professional opinion on feasibility and therefore whether refurbishment should be included in the survey. The response indicated that it could be possible to

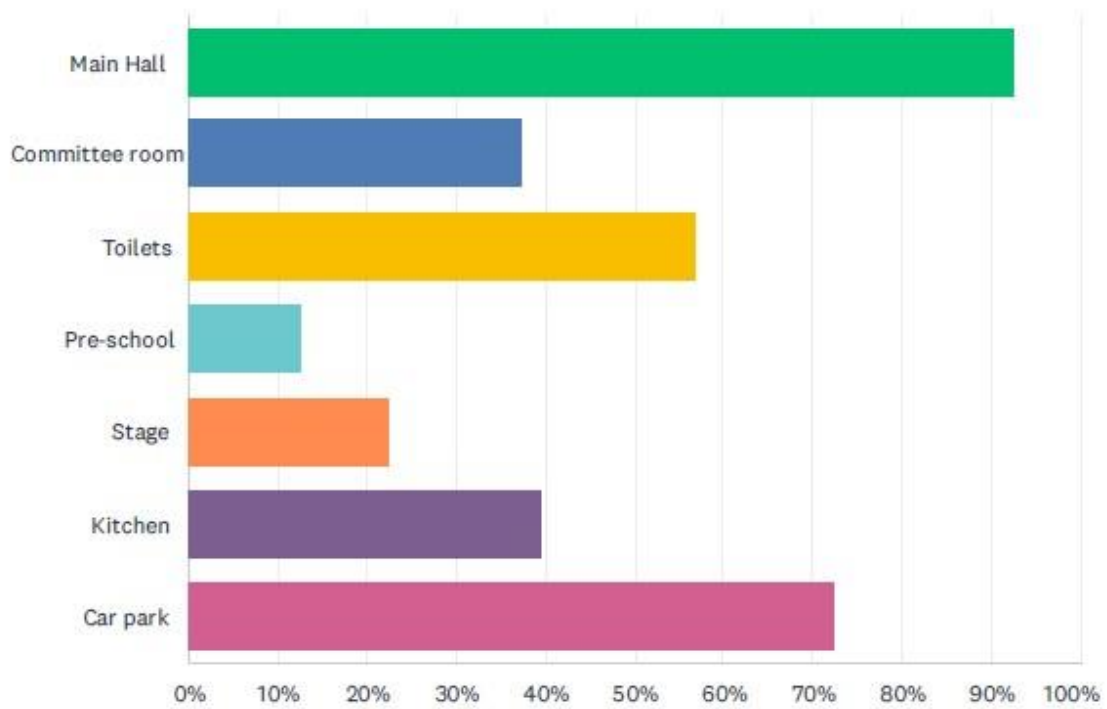
refurbish and extend the existing building, but additional funding would be required for any design details and estimation of costs. This option was therefore left in the questionnaire.

From these consultations, a questionnaire was designed to capture the range of ideas in a way that would offer clear data about what facilities would be welcomed by the community, where it could be placed, whether the project was supported, inviting offers of support for the project, and some general questions regarding accessibility and broader design. This was done using Survey Monkey online software as this would provide efficient data gathering. (see Appendix)

After delays with printing and Royal Mail, the surveys were printed and delivered to all households at the end of November 2023. Those surveys that were returned by post were received and manually uploaded to survey monkey by AirS.

RESULTS

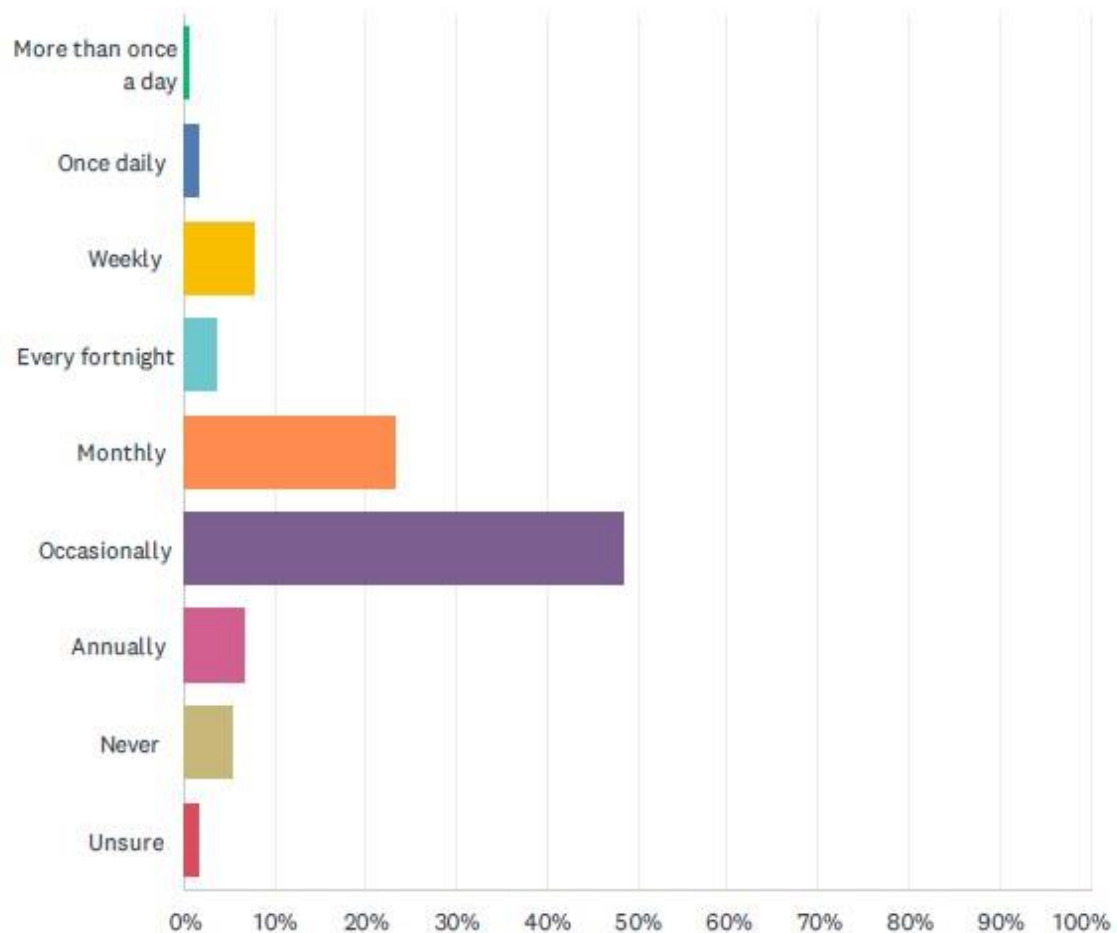
- 297 responses were collected from 1200 which is a 24.25% return rate.
- 87% of respondents had used the village hall in the past three years. Looking into the usage patterns the main facility used was the hall (93%), car park (74%) but all aspects were being well used. 22% reported using the stage which suggests that the Players have been well represented among respondents. The lowest category of usage was the preschool (12.5 %) which equates to 32 respondents which is still a strong figure.



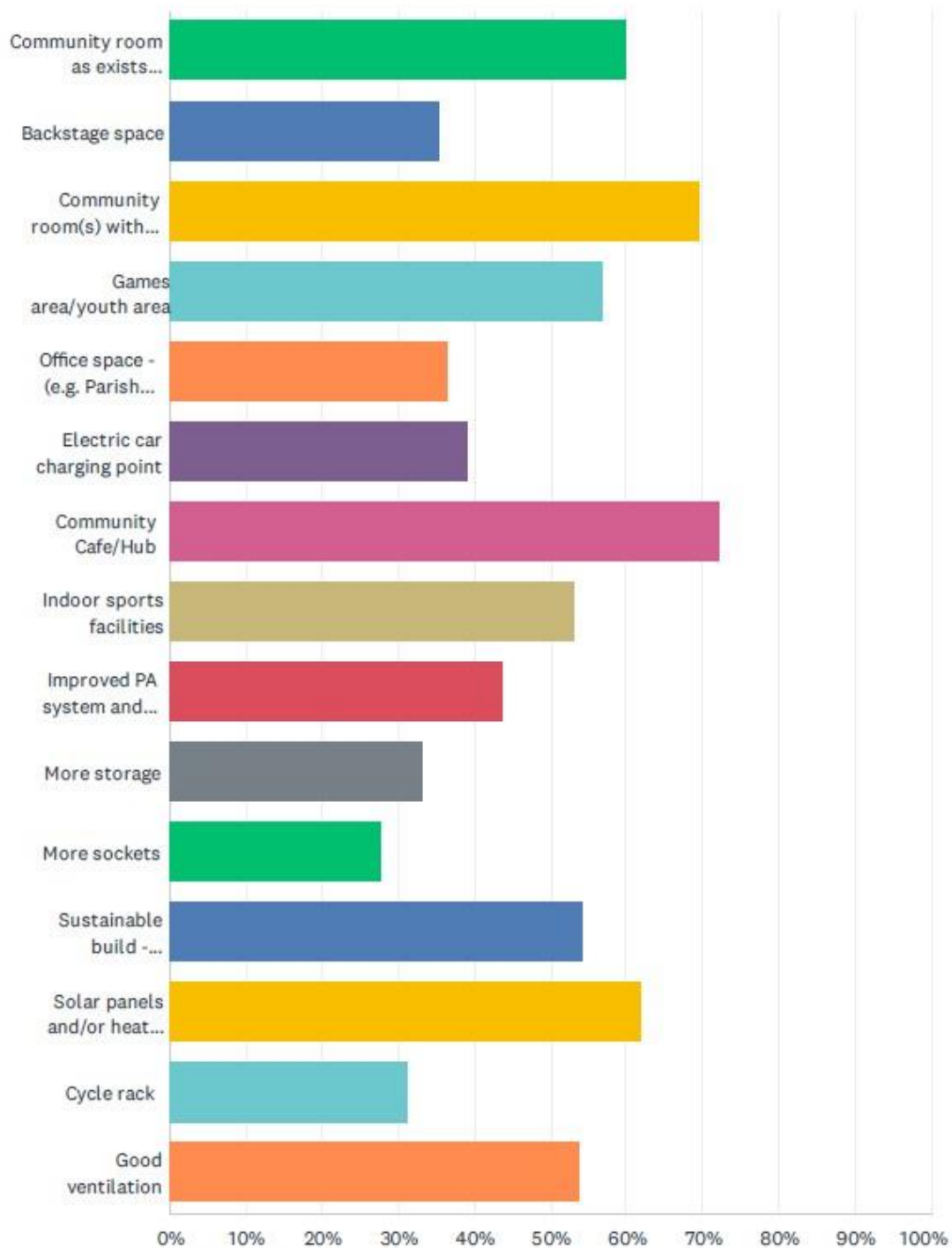
- The most popular activity at the hall (i.e. the one which was used by more people than any other) was its use as a polling station (57%), with the Players a close second at 43%. Most people use the hall for more than one purpose (the average was 2.6 different uses per person).

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
W.I.	8.87%	22
PG Players	42.74%	106
Pre-School	15.32%	38
Repair Cafe	38.71%	96
Parish Council meetings	20.97%	52
Parish Council Clerk's Office	13.71%	34
Elections	56.85%	141
Horticultural Society	23.79%	59
W. Grinstead Bird Society	1.21%	3
Line dancing	4.03%	10
Legs bums and tums	10.89%	27
Children's Parties	21.37%	53
Total Respondents: 248		

- 14% of respondents have not visited the hall in the past three years and the main reasons for this were being unaware or not interested in the activities on offer there. Only one person reported not being able to get there.
- The majority of people visit the building on foot. 83% of respondents live near enough to regularly walk though some of these also use their car occasionally (42%) and 13% report getting a lift to the building.
- Satisfaction scores were high with the majority of respondents being satisfied or very satisfied with access, size of rooms, temperature and general facilities. The biggest issues were 23% of respondents unhappy with the size of the main hall, and 20% not satisfied with the toilet facilities.
- Using wheeled vehicles like wheelchairs, scooters or buggies in and out and around the building does not seem to be causing a big issue but there are 4 people reporting difficulties moving around inside the building.
- The majority of respondents use the hall only occasionally (49%) with only 24% using it monthly and just 8% using it every week.

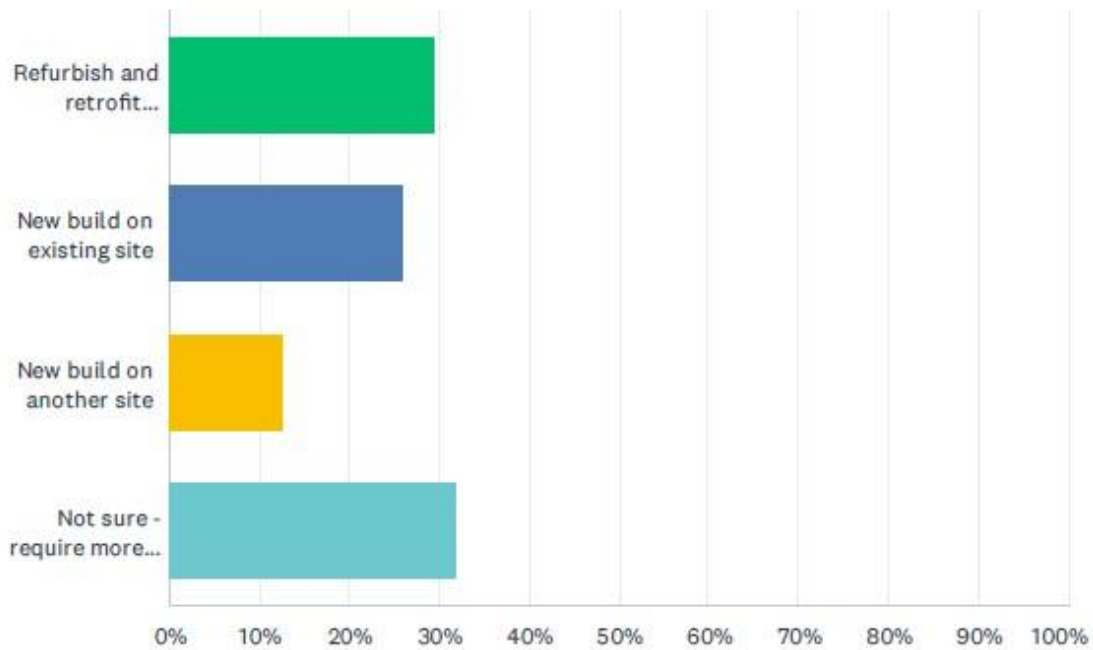


- An overwhelming 94% of respondents supported the project to review and improve facilities. Of the 19 who did not, 4 said that they never used the buildings, 7 said it was ok as it was.
- The most popular new activities that people wanted to try in the hall were film showings (74%), a café (72%), followed by parties, fundraising events and keep fit classes.
- There were 57 responses to the question about business facilities at the hall with over 60% of those responses interested in renting meeting rooms or shared office space.
- Looking at the possible new facilities in the new village hall (which could be a refurbishment or a rebuild) over 50% of respondents wanted to see a community café, a community room that could be used independently of the main hall and renewable energy like solar panels or a heat pump. Better insulation and sustainable building materials were also popular.



- 92% of respondents to the survey live in Partridge Green itself with just 7% coming from West Grinstead and 2% from Dial Post.
- Over 30% of respondents (98 people) offered a range of skills to help with the project with 28 people offering help with fundraising and 48 supporting with technical, business or administration skills. Not all these left contact details, but another call out could be made.

- Responses to the survey came from a wide range of households with different ages which shows no single group dominating. In age split the 20-65 age group were slightly under-represented at 40% as they make up 60% of the population.
- 56% of respondents support borrowing from the Public Work Loans Board with a minimal tax raise and a further 27% supported a loan without tax raise. 17% were against a loan.
- In terms of options for the hall, 30% were in favour of refurbish/retrofit, 26% rebuild, 13% new build elsewhere but 32% were unsure and needing more information.



- 53% of respondents feel that the current hall has enough space for their needs but that the layout needs to be improved, whilst 47% that feel that more space is needed.

CONCLUSIONS

- The response rate of 24%, while lower than the target of 30%, provides a large enough sample for the steering group to have confidence in the results. Households that responded show a wide range of ages and interests and there are no obvious gaps other than an under representation of youth voices. This could be addressed at relevant phases of the viability studies going forwards.
- The survey shows clear evidence of community support for upgrading the hall with a 94 % vote in favour, but with differing views about the best option and the committee need to explore this further with the community (see below).
- The figure of 87% of respondents using the village hall in the past three years is encouraging though the pattern of usage shows that the majority of this has been occasional rather than regular. This can be explained by the presence of the preschool which, as the primary user of the buildings - for 40 hours a week - and as such limits the availability to other groups and users. Support for the preschool was clear during consultation indicating it may be that additional space is needed to enable other regular uses.
- The primary booking also explains the slight skewing of the usage which shows polling station and Players as the most widely attended activities even though they are not regular.
- The location of the hall in the centre of the village has clearly helped its success. 83% of people regularly walking to get there is a higher figure than most halls achieve. This suggests that keeping to the same site would be both popular and good for the environment. Only 13% of respondents were in favour of a new build project on a different site.
- The majority of users seem to be content with most aspects of the building. Apart from the 23% of respondents being unhappy with the size of the main hall, the toilets were the next biggest issue which could be addressed in a refurbishment or rebuild project. It might be possible for activities needing significantly more space to use an alternative venue like Dial Post Village Hall. A refurbishment or retrofit might be able to enlarge the main hall by a small amount or if extending upwards could create the additional spaces required.
- There is evidence of demand for a second space that could be used at the same time but independently of the main hall. This could be for business meetings or shared office space, perhaps linked with the Parish Clerk's working space. Alternatively, it could be used for a community cafe or smaller bookings when the preschool is in session if it had its own separate facilities.
- Several of the questions have thrown up responses showing a community that is keen to try more social events like a community café, film night, exercise classes, parties, fundraising events, and the high response rate to the call for volunteers is encouraging. There is a clear appetite for more community events which redevelopment or replacement of the hall could deliver.

- The response to the funding question was positive showing 56% in favour of the Parish Council taking out a Public Works Loan to help fund the project set and were willing to pay a small increase in the precept to cover this. If there is further development in the parish funds from CIL paid by developers could also contribute to the funds needed to refurbish or rebuild the hall.
- One of the most interesting outcomes is the very even split between the desire for refurbishment/retrofit or replacement buildings on the current site. The biggest response was the request for more information. While this may seem inconclusive it allows the steering group to examine more thoroughly the options without going against public opinion. This offers the community the opportunity to learn about and compare the viability of these options.
- The steering group can now use this evidence to proceed with the backing of the community. While not every detail is clearly defined, the survey gives strong guidance on the primary questions of location, needs, funding routes, community support, with questions of the form of redevelopment, costs and environmental aspects to be explored further

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – Additional Comments

- 50 to 75% of the energy can be saved by refurbishing a building
- A bigger main hall space and potentially a 2nd hall of similar size would make it very versatile site and allow multiple uses at once
- A hall with enough floor AND roof clearance for badminton on would be great. Current hall facilities are very dated and tired. Not an inviting place.
- Access / ramp from car park needs improving for buggies / mobility scooters
- Additional soundproofing would be good.
- At the moment playschool takes up the space in the hall mon-fri. Another room is needed if cafe and sports facilities are there.
- Be great to modernise the space in the best possible way for community and keeping costs low
- Better indoor sports courts
- But a bigger space with given mover options.
- But can always use more space
- But could be improved
- Ceiling too low, hall needs to be bigger, new carpark, with better lighting and cctv
- Could be better but meets demand
- Could do with a second floor to allow for more available useable space.
- Could do with more groups using at one time
- Could do with update or new. If used to full capacity would pay for itself. Whole village would benefit on all levels.
- Dial Post Hall is a good model
- Dial Post Village Hall
- Don't have extensive knowledge of what else is available!
- Don't move it!
- Extra space is needed
- Go for it!
- Has an audit been carried out to determine the % of use of the existing building during reasonable hours? If a larger hall is required they are already available in Henfield, Steyning, Pulborough, Billingshurst etc.
- I don't know, what is the alternative?
- I don't know as I don't use it much. It's great it has so much parking which should be preserved!
- I feel the current village hall should be refurbished as it is part of the village's history and has character. Also, it is in a central position in the village, close to the shops and pub, meaning people are more likely to attend classes, events and meetings held there. It is vital that the car park should remain or, if possible be enlarged, especially as many new homes will possibly be built in the village in the future. The small village hall car park is the only one in the village and is very useful for parking when the shop car parking spaces are full. This is important because it enables people to park there for the shops rather than dangerously parking along the High Street.
- I have mentioned above that space limitations makes the activities restricted by the type of play we can put on and number tickets we can sell.

- I rarely use the hall but it works fine when I do
- I think the village population has grown massively since the hall was built years ago.
- I'd like it to be bigger
- If modernised and updated
- If new amendments required
- Insufficient storage space for Players and Pre-School
- It does but it would be much improved by modernisation. Needs to be bigger, layout improved, and more daylight. It's a mix of old and the additions from 60/70s. It would be a shame in a way but a rebuild would provide updated facilities and have a longer lifespan ultimately
- It does look old now and is quite dark. I am sure a fresher more vibrant space would be well used.
- It is a drain on resources, and the access road is dark and unwelcoming
- It needs an upgrade to make it more welcoming and modern
- It needs to be kept central and use car park and then area of old hall become carpark. Money previously raised should still be in bank.
- It seems a space that limits community events rather than inspiring and enabling the local residents
- It should be built on the park and have a multipurpose building that could have pre school with access to green area, a bar for sports and social, facilities for sports cricket, tennis, football, stool ball, able to do performances / shows. Would need to sort car parking. But all achievable. Then all community in one space and better usage vs running 2 buildings (village hall and sports and social club).
- It would be good to refurb existing hall. I do feel the pre school does monopolise the hall which may stop the hall being used by other organisations.
- It's time to sell the land on and develop another area like today's mill then rebuild in the park to encourage use in for inside and outside activities for all the community
- It's disgraceful that the PC have commissioned this survey. What a waste of money!" There is no prospect of a new village hall in the near future as the PC have no money to build it. The only possibility might be in years ahead when the finance may be accrued from money granted from new development.
- It's just so out dated and basic would be used much more if modernised
- It's too cold and bare to be inviting and not suitable for sports classes
- I've never been in it
- layout and extension to use second floor level
- Leave it alone
- Live at Littleworth
- Lots of money was raised in the past for a new village hall - the Hoppit centre. What happened to those funds and could they be used towards any improvements/rebuild?
- Lottery funding for new hall might be available
- Mere refurbishment would be ineffective due to age of present structure. Current location is satisfactory.
- More electrical points
- more events - more community
- Needs bigger more modern space though befitting something akin to the dial post village hall
- Needs modernisation
- Needs to be multifunctional and able to be adapted for different groups
- OK for events we have attended
- Old and not environmentally friendly.

- Our hall needs updating on so many levels that we think we need to have a new hall rather than refitting our existing hall. One cannot make a silk purse from a sows ear!
- Please note that I am house-bound, due to my old age and live on my own, so all the questions do not apply to me, in regard to the village hall, although I do live in Partridge Green
- Remodelling needed
- Significant increase in housing capacity may require a different outlook
- Small with deteriorating building fabric
- The building needs to be inviting as currently is old and uninviting
- The current hall is totally out dated for the needs of the village. We need indoor sports facilities and a space large enough and flexible enough for our villages varied needs.
- The hall is big enough at the moment but as The 'Repair Cafe grows it will become a squeeze to fit everything in. Also the doorway to the committee room means we have to keep a pathway clear for people when we use both the main hall and committee room.
- The space and facilities are adequate but tired and need updating. If there was scope to rebuild/refurb to extend and/or re jig the layout then subject to consultation I'm sure a vastly improved layout could be achieved.
- The ventilation is totally inadequate for large meetings/talks
- There are too many groups that have to adapt to shared space
- This seems to be a significant capital investment with no clear vision or requirement at this stage. It concerns me greatly that any money could be better invested. Review with new housing plans also, not in isolation.
- Too small
- too small for community or social functions
- Village Hall is in need of modernisation, but cost effectiveness is key to any refurbishment or redevelopment on the current site.
- We should try to reduce new build construction within our local community as this leads to the decline of a village community atmosphere and attracts large scale property developers to develop surrounding countryside. Soon fields and farmers will no longer exist in the south, our children will grow up urban dwellers rather than with rural appreciation.
- Yes but could do with updating

Appendix 2 – Survey template

Appendix 3 – Downloaded summary data with graphs

Appendix 4 – PGVH All data.xls (contains contact details)

Appendix 5 – Engagement boards

Appendix 6 – Consultation plan