

Little Milton Village Hall Site Visit

On 8 September 2008, with Mr Stuart McGill, Chairman of Little Milton PC and Hall Committee

1 Hall Building

Prefabricated wooden structure, roof clad in green shingles – see attached Pine Log fact sheet for fuller details – of 284 sq m. Built in 2005 at a cost of £ 1 000 p sq m, inclusive of all fixtures and fittings (kitchen, toilets etc) = £ 283 000. Pine Log advised SWT in Jan 2008 that the current cost of the same building would be £ 450 000 (excl site and VAT – though not applicable on new buildings).

Adjacent to a similar pre-school building, it greatly benefits by being located on a 4-acre site, embracing a comprehensive play area and two floodlit tennis courts. A football pitch is planned for 2009. A premier quality 'farm-style' shop and Post Office is to be added in a new extension also next year.

A small bar and committee room would be preferable and this could be easily accommodated at modest extra cost. The present hall will seat 150 people theatre style but would need to be enlarged by min two metres if a (portable) stage was required.

2 Interior

Internally the finishes were simple and practical but in a pleasing contemporary style. Stackable chairs and tables were outside the contract. The toilets were smart and the kitchen well equipped (by Wickes for £ 2 000, incl in total cost) with a large range cooker and two domestic dishwashers (a) for small functions and (b) in case of breakdown.

Though three years old, the floors and decorative finishes were all in very good condition, suggesting a high standard of maintenance.

It had been deliberate policy to create the highest quality facility that could be afforded. This has proved vital, attracting business from a wide catchment, in preference to other inferior local village halls, while inducing a sense of civic pride among Little Milton residents, the latter point manifested by a high level of volunteer support. Other villages contracting out all their services are regarded as less user-friendly.

3 Operations

A broad variety of activities is accommodated in the new hall, incl:

- functions – birthday/wedding/other parties
- village clubs/evening classes
- community meetings
- quiz nights – very popular and profitable - £ 7 pp incl supper.

Though not operated as a commercial project it is nevertheless producing good annual profits (accounts requested) due to:

- 1 The setting of the charges for non-residents at over twice the rate for local residents - £ 18 p hour versus £ 8 p hour, and
- 2 The use of a large core of volunteers to provide the bar and catering service.

As a result 25% of the 'clientele' are non-resident and generate 75% of sales. Conversely this means that 75% are local users, thereby ensuring that the hall remains essentially a community amenity. This policy is quite intentional and will be observed to avoid any suggestion that it becomes too 'commercial'. Electricity is charged out by selling £5 electricity cards to users to avoid cash on site.

The hall has clearly generated considerable local support, both in terms of usage and, importantly, a body of volunteer help with running events and providing 'home-cooked' food. If this was not forthcoming, an alternative might be to find a local person prepared to take it on (with help) as a franchise. There is little doubt also that the hall has greatly benefited from a far-sighted and hands-on, attentive management.

4 Funding

Apart from SODC funding, two landfill tax companies – **either** Trust for Oxfordshire Environment (TOE) **or** Waste Recycling Environmental (WREN) offer significant grants for such local projects (£ 44 000 to Little Milton). The Pine Log literature also refers to Defra assistance.

Fiona Danks at ORCC is a very helpful and able advisor in this field.

SWT/Village Hall
9 September 2008