

**THRELKELD VILLAGE HALL
COMMUNITY REGENERATION PROJECT**

**EVOLUTION OF THE PROJECT BY
THE THRELKELD COMMUNITY**



**Threlkeld Village Hall Trust
Updated to May 2014**

General

The project has evolved over the last seven years.

It started as a systematic attempt to renovate the Village Hall; evolved into a joint community centre/community enterprise project; and now includes broader elements of community development as a result of Big Lottery involvement.

A very ambitious Hall revitalisation scheme was deliberately selected at first, even though it was realised it might take some time to raise the capital finance needed. It was seen as a once in a generation opportunity.

Planning permission for the scheme as devised was obtained in July 2009. However, in late 2011, proposals were scaled back due to lack of success in attracting large scale funding, despite the considerable progress on planning and design.

Due to the Big Lottery emphasis on outcomes, the project has now developed a much firmer dimension of how the Hall will be used for the community benefit, with aspects other than the building itself being considered in some depth.

Background

Threlkeld's Village Hall (known traditionally as the Public Room) was built in 1901 on land donated to the Parish for this purpose two years earlier. It has functioned as a significant focal point for community life for over 100 years. Repairs, maintenance and limited improvements have been made to it over the years; a process which continues. However, the building was showing clear signs of its age – increasingly expensive repairs, expensive to heat, below acceptable standards of accessibility, energy efficiency and fire safety; and its general unattractive “feel” was finding increasing expression in “customer resistance”, even though bookings and use were maintained by very positive promotion.

This led to a major reconsideration of the future of the Public Room, by the Public Room Management Committee (now transformed into the Village Hall Trust Management Committee) and the Parish Council, with extensive involvement of the local community at every stage.

This project has thus evolved via a systematic and thorough process of consideration locally which is detailed below.

Threlkeld Parish Plan 2004

The Parish Plan for Threlkeld was produced in September 2004 following an extensive period of consultation and discussion. A copy of this document can be seen on the Threlkeld Community website <http://www.threlkeldweb.co.uk/threlkeld-info>.

The Parish Plan concluded that *there should be a comprehensive appraisal of the options for ensuring the Public Rooms continue to provide an appropriate and up to date level of service to the community*. It went on to say:

If the Public Room is to provide the vital and positive facility clearly required in Threlkeld, the time may have come for its thorough regeneration. The villagers of a century ago had the foresight to produce something which has served the community here well for over 100 years. It is now up to their successors to consider the needs of the next 100 years. What this involves is unclear, and will depend on a realistic appraisal of the actual and potential use. It may well be that a modest facelift is all that is needed. On the other hand, it may require a total modernisation of the existing building, or even its complete replacement. Any options would need to be based on a thorough assessment of what the functions of the Public Room are and should be - exactly what it should be providing for the benefit of the community.

Physical survey of the building 2006

During 2006, a professional survey was undertaken under the Cumbria Pro Help scheme, commissioned by the Public Room Management Committee.

This confirmed the extent of the physical problems. It indicated that although the structure of the walls and roof of the Village Hall are sound (NB subsequently, when structural engineers became involved, it was established that one wall has some structural weaknesses), there are significant problems relating to:

- condensation, ventilation and heating;
- access for disabled people, with clearly inadequate toilet facilities for disabled people, making it probably not compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act provisions;
- serious deficiencies in the toilet and kitchen facilities;
- fire and electrical safety matters;
- significant non-structural repair needs.

Consideration of options by the Parish Council 2006/07

In November 2006, since the Public Room Management Committee had virtually collapsed, the Chairman of the Parish Council called an informal meeting of Parish Councillors and others involved in the management of the Village Hall to discuss ways forward in the light of this report. This meeting broadly reviewed the options available, and asked a local resident who had previously chaired the Parish Plan Steering Group to pull things together. This took the form of a report to the Parish Council in January 2007, outlining the pros and cons of four options:

- carrying on much as at present, which seemed to lead inevitably to closure of the Village Hall at some stage in the not too distant future
- undertaking the extensive repairs specified in the surveyor's report but without any more fundamental change to the accommodation
- a major refurbishment to bring the village hall up to modern standards but retaining the key parts of the existing structure
- complete replacement of the Village Hall with a new building on the site.

Two other options were briefly reviewed but rejected as impractical:

- building a new Village Hall on another site, financed by sale of the existing site – no alternative sites are available (other than one possible option, development in association with the Threlkeld Sports Pavilion, which is in an inconvenient location separate from the main village and across a major trunk road, and unlikely to attract planning permission)
- demolition of the Hall without replacement, money from sale of the site being invested for community benefit – there was clearly sufficient present and likely future need for a base for community activity, and also there were legal obstacles to such an option.

The report also suggested that some associated commercial uses, including in particular a coffee shop/gallery, should be explored as a means of underpinning the finances of the Village Hall. This concept was subsequently developed, recognising the potential value of the Village Hall as an asset and source of income for the community in general; and evolved into a major component of the project.

The Parish Council organised a full public discussion of these options and proposals. Details were circulated in the monthly newsletter *Beneath Blencathra*, together with a questionnaire to assess public reaction. Replies to the questionnaire were received on behalf of about 40 people in the village (excluding members of the Parish Council). ***Without exception respondents were in favour of some major overhaul of the Village Hall. The overwhelming majority view was in favour of significant refurbishment while retaining the existing structure/facade.*** There was only minority support for total replacement. The Parish Council also organised a public meeting where the proposals were discussed and additional ideas generated. This was attended by 30 people (a very good turnout according to representatives of Voluntary Action Cumbria who attended the session). The view of the people attending was essentially the same as evidenced in the questionnaire response.

The outcome of this public discussion and consultation was fully reported to the Parish Council in February 2007. ***The Parish Council unanimously opted to promote a scheme of major refurbishment with retention of the key parts of the existing structure, and incorporation of a commercial coffee shop.***

Village Hall Revitalisation Action Group/Support Group

A meeting of interested people was called in February 2007, who formed the Threlkeld Village Hall Revitalisation Action Group, acting under the auspices of the Parish Council. This group has worked and continues to work on aspects of the scheme – 25/30 people (ranging in age from 17 to 84) have been actively involved, looking at community needs and the potential uses of the hall for local benefit; assessing the feasibility of various business options; setting up a website; engaging the local schoolchildren; getting input from a wide range of village organisations; reviewing the basis of the Village Hall management; organising publicity; establishing a brief for the scheme and then the detailed scheme design at various stages; conducting several surveys and much research; and operating a major local fund raising effort.

This project has engaged the local community in a big way – the process of change proving to be as important as the proposals themselves. Minutes of the Action Group give a flavour of how the project has been handled. Additionally, the fundraising effort notably pulled together the many different elements which constitute the local community.

It is difficult to sustain interest and commitment over such a relatively long period of time, but the Action Group managed to maintain a good level of momentum. In March 2012 it transformed itself into an independent Village Hall Support Group, with aims of supporting the aims and activities of the Village Hall Trust generally. This group continues and organises fundraising events etc, but plans are now taking shape for it to be disbanded and its functions handled in other ways.

Governance

The Village Hall governance was confusing, based on the original deed when the land was dedicated to this purpose in 1899. After discussion and consultation with the Charity Commission, a new governing document was established via a “scheme” provided by the Charity Commission. This became operative from May 2008 and can be seen on the [website](#).

The Threlkeld Village Hall Trust Management Committee (elected, appointed and coopted) are the charity's trustees, responsible for all aspects of the Hall's management, maintenance and development. They are all local people.

The Village Hall Trust is authorised by its governing document to work with other bodies in ensuring the Hall is utilised for public benefit, and it does this extensively. It works especially closely with the Threlkeld Parish Council, which is the main official representative of the local community and provider/potential provider of a range of services which rely on the Village Hall for their delivery.

The Village Hall Trust reviewed its legal structure again (July 2012) and resolved to remain unchanged as an unincorporated registered charity.

Possible changes in the structure are being considered so as to involve Hall users more directly in governance.

Study of Facilities and Services in Threlkeld 2008

In a separate but related offshoot of the Parish Plan, the Parish Council commissioned an independent study of the future of services and facilities in Threlkeld – the post office, newspaper supply, retail options (there is no shop), milk delivery, health services, recreation and social facilities etc. This was within the context of a broader remit concerning the economic future of Threlkeld. The study was conducted by specialist planning consultants Len Cockcroft and Haydn Morris, and was entirely financed by a grant from the Lake District National Park Authority Investing in Communities Fund, which approved the brief for the study, but otherwise left the details to the Parish Council and the consultants.

This study was completed in mid-2008. It involved among other things a detailed household questionnaire in Threlkeld and immediately surrounding areas. About 30 local residents were involved in distributing and chasing up the questionnaires, resulting in a very good response rate of 66%. This study is very important in independently assessing the need for the Village Hall and the facilities/services related to it.

The study looked at issues associated with use of the Village Hall. It established that:

- the Village Hall is far and away the most usual place for social/recreational activities with the exception of the pubs (of which there are two very successful ones in Threlkeld, both supportive of plans to revitalise the Village Hall)
- other than darts, cricket and outings, the Village Hall was the venue for all village adult leisure activities mentioned
- for children and young people, the Village Hall was the second most usual base for village leisure activity after the children's play area/field nearby (although the cricket club was also popular); however a high proportion of young people's leisure activities took place outside the village in surrounding towns, with journeys almost all by car (public transport is not ideal and in the evenings is limited)
- the Hall could well be the base for a range of services and facilities which seem to be needed in Threlkeld, especially since some of the existing services could be under threat.

The study recommended that the Village Hall be explored as a potential base for a number of community and commercial initiatives including:

- a coffee/tea shop aimed at visitors, to exploit the Hall's splendid location and bring money into the community
- a tourist information point
- an outlet for locally produced crafts and art (NB Threlkeld is the home to several professional artists)
- a convenience shop of even a limited nature (Threlkeld has no shop), possibly extending to take on the Post Office and newspaper supply if these cease for any reason
- a specialist food shop linked to the food distribution business based in Threlkeld
- an internet base for a variety of purposes, especially linked to the needs of young people and old people; and develop the coffee shop as an internet cafe on some evenings
- provision for a various recreational options not currently catered for in the village
- various types of educational provision
- increased use as a social centre for elderly people, parents of young children and teenagers (who are finding it increasingly difficult to travel outside the village).

All these suggestions were endorsed by the Parish Council and passed onto the Village Hall Trust Management Committee to incorporate into plans for the revitalisation of the Hall and its ongoing management.

This well researched background proved invaluable in supporting funding applications.

Scheme design/planning permission 2007-2009

The Action Group considered lots of suggestions which were generated via its own discussions, responses to the questionnaire survey, designs submitted by the children in Threlkeld School and visits to other village halls. These were looked at carefully, and distilled into a brief for architects to work on. *It is stressed that the scheme as proposed related to the brief as set by the community to its architects, it was not an architectural "pipe dream".* Notes of the Action Group meetings attest to this.

The architects worked to this brief and developed the plans in discussion with the Action Group – initially by six members meeting with them informally, then in a meeting of all the Action Group (plus other members of the Village Hall Trust Management Committee and the Parish Council), finally via a Public Meeting attended by 50 people. The scheme was deliberately ambitious, incorporating a two storey extension “wrapped round” the Main Hall, with the Community Coffee Shop envisaged as the main user of the upstairs. The community opted to pursue the scheme proposed, seeing this as a once in a generation opportunity.

Finance for the initial design and costing work was provided by a grant of £5250 from the National Lottery Awards for All fund. Subsequently the costs of developing the scheme as a planning application were offset by a grant of £5000 from the Cumbria Community Foundation. Other costs (about £2500) were met from locally raised money. All other input, very extensive, has been voluntary.

Planning permission for extension/refurbishment and for the change of use to include a cafe was granted in July 2009 – the permission was given a five year “life” instead of the normal three years specifically to allow

time for the necessary fundraising. The planning application was supported by a Biodiversity Survey and an Arboricultural Survey.

The total cost of the scheme as then proposed was about £740,000 in construction and £100,000 in fees (both figures excluding VAT).

Modified scheme 2011

Subsequently progress was considered at well attended public meetings in October 2008, October 2009 and October 2010. This last meeting (attended by about 50 people) was especially important, since after a very detailed discussion, it concluded that because we were not making any serious headway obtaining finance for the scheme as proposed, we had to consider scaling it back to something less ambitious and less expensive.

This change was implemented quickly by the Trust Management Committee in conjunction with the Architects. A revised scheme was prepared by the Architects and costed by the Quantity Surveyors; this scheme fulfilled most elements of the initial brief, but is smaller and only has a single storey extension.

The community was consulted on this via information in the newsletter and an exhibition over a weekend in January 2011, which was seen by about 80 people. Support for the revised scheme was widespread, and in February 2011 this scheme (which is the current one) was adopted by the Action Group, the Parish Council and the Trust Management Committee.

Full planning permission for the revised scheme was granted in March 2012, again with a five year "life". Largely financed by a development grant from the Big Lottery, the design was then taken forward to the Building Regulations stage, and an application for Building Regulations approval submitted (July 2012). Building Regulations approval was granted in November 2012.

Business Plan for the Community Coffee Shop/establishment of the Community Interest Company

Plans for the Community Coffee Shop have been developed since 2007 and continue. The anticipated proceeds from this community business operating in a community asset are potentially very significant,

Following advice especially from Businesslink North West (the Government advisory service for small business and social enterprise), the Threlkeld Community Coffee Shop Community Interest Company was established and incorporated (7186998 in England and Wales) in March 2010; this is owned by the Village Hall Trust, with a voluntary Board of Directors drawn from people in the village with considerable business experience. The CIC is the main vehicle for developing, promoting and then managing the Coffee Shop element of the scheme. The intention is to run the Coffee Shop on a commercial basis as a community enterprise, with eventually all profits dedicated to the Hall and to the village generally.

A very detailed Business Plan for the Coffee Shop was produced and is constantly updated as more research is undertaken and as plans evolve. In its early stages, this Plan was critically assessed by an external business adviser appointed by Cumbria Pro Help and by the Businesslink advisory service, with extremely useful consultancy input as part of this process. In 2010 it was subject to rigorous evaluation as part of consideration of funding applications to Communitybuilders and Rural Development Programme England.

It is clear that once established the Coffee Shop can deliver a significant income for the community (as well as providing other benefits, including jobs), making the village in many ways financially independent of external statutory and voluntary funding, and also less dependent on the shrinking pool of local volunteers. During the early part of 2013, the Plunkett Foundation paid for a focused consultancy assessment of Business Plans, and this resulted in a specific reorientation of the approach to business build up - the aim to develop slowly in response to demand was shown to be potentially risky, instead the approach was modified to "start as we mean to go on". This has cash flow implications in the early stages which have been assisted by a two year repayable loan of £10,000 from the Keyfund.

The Coffee Shop CIC has in its own right received a grant from the Big Lottery Village SOS of £42,050. This is to help with initial and working capital. The Coffee Shop opened on 1 March 2014, a week ahead of the Main Hall. It has a full time Manager paid £18000pa plus bonus and three Baristas on substantial part time

contracts. It has now been operating very successfully for almost three months and is hitting its key financial targets.

Applications for financial support

We received considerable financial support towards the initial development and design of the scheme (the LDNPA was especially helpful). We commenced applying for institutional funding in 2009, as soon as we had a reasonably finalised scheme. This attempt had only limited success. It coincided with the withdrawal of Northern Rock Foundation funding and the end of the Big Lottery Community Buildings programme, both previously important sources of money for our sort of scheme.

After we obtained planning permission in July 2009, we concentrated major fundraising effort on a few large trusts; Rural Development Programme England; and Communitybuilders (this last potential funding opportunity looked very promising for a while, but its organisation was really awful and we ended up very frustrated with the experience).

Only from December 2010 were we able to apply for the newly announced Big Lottery Reaching Communities (Buildings) programme, and we did so initially in January 2011. The Stage 1 consideration took until June 2011. We submitted the critical Stage 2 application in September 2011, which involved a great deal of community wide effort; this successfully completed its assessment in December 2011. From this point on the Big Lottery worked positively with us and financed the design work needed to submit Stage 3 of the application in June 2012. The Stage 3 application was supported by very extensive and detailed documentation including an Overall Business Plan; a Capital Project Delivery Plan; the Community Coffee Shop Business Plan; a Supplementary Business Plan covering supplementary commercial use; cost and funding information; several financial projections; detailed technical information; and risk assessments. Our success with this last application was finally confirmed in September 2012, which was the major breakthrough allowing the project to proceed to the tender stage and implementation. The success of the application was especially critical as the Big Lottery offered £80,000 more than had been requested, sufficient to allow the scheme to proceed without a loan (which had been the previous intention).

In March 2009 the RDPE programme promised in principle to provide a grant of £83,400 (approximately a third of the capital cost of the Coffee Shop element of the scheme), contingent on us getting other support. This money was to be spent in 2011/12, and the offer was withdrawn in November 2009 when it was apparent that the remainder of the funding was not going to be forthcoming in time. The RDPE was very positive about the scheme, and invited us to submit another application (with clearly no guarantee of success, especially since finance for this programme as a whole was uncertain). An offer of about £53,000 for the revised scheme was received in March 2012, dependent on us receiving a final confirmation of Big Lottery funding. An additional £5,000 from Cumbria Rural Infrastructure Programme was linked to this offer. Both grants became another major part of the funding package.

There are a series of other funders behind the scheme as implemented. The full funding package is shown below. This package represents an enormous amount of effort.

Big Lottery Reaching Communities (Buildings)	£428,143
Garfield Weston Foundation	£20,000
Hadfield Trust	£2,500
Keswick Lions	£1,500
Bernard Sunley Foundation	£10,000
RDPE	£52,938
Eden Rural infrastructure Fund	£25,000
Cumbria Waste Management ET	£12,000
Crisp 2	£5,000
W O Street Foundation	£5,000
Sport England Inspired Facilities	£30,000
Countess Peel Trust	£5,000
LDNPA Community Fund	£2,500

Cumbria Community Health & Wellbeing	£25,000
Cumbria members Capital	£10,000
Threlkeld Village Funds	£50,000
Total	£684,581

During 2011/12, applications were made for funding towards various additional capital items, furniture, equipment etc. These were very successful and allowed us to launch the building in March 2012 with top of the range furniture and equipment.

Local fundraising

Although money raised via traditional local fundraising efforts and smaller grants/donations will inevitably only make a small contribution to the overall total needed, the community appreciates that it needs to “do its bit”. An active fundraising effort was mounted from about March 2007, aiming initially to raise £15000 over two years. This target was achieved after little more than a year, and the Revitalisation Fund (which is now subsumed within the Village Hall Trust Project account) has now reached about £45,000, although about £4000 of this has been spent on professional fees etc. in the development phase.

Local fundraising efforts continued under the auspices of the Support Group, which pledged to have £50000 in place by December 2012 to contribute towards the construction costs and associated fees. This target was reached. Fundraising continues to ensure we have enough available to meet the retention payment in March 2015, and also for additional furniture and equipment.

The fundraising effort has been of great significance in keeping the community in general engaged with the project, and events such as a village fair, folk and blues nights etc have been very enjoyable as well as raising money.

Keeping the community informed and involved

Threlkeld is a small community and many people are actively involved in the Village hall operation directly and indirectly, so there is a good deal of informal consultation and discussion.

The main mechanism for keeping local people informed, over and above the Action Group, is via the popular local newsletter, *Beneath Blencathra*, which is circulated to all households monthly. This contains detailed updates in almost every edition. Examples are available if needed. There was a special edition entirely devoted to the plans for the Village Hall, circulated as the pre-cursor to the public meeting (held on 6 February 2008) where these plans were presented by the architects and discussed.

In addition to all this, a website established as part of the project development was transformed into a more general community website under the auspices of the Parish Council, www.threlkeldweb.co.uk. Details of the scheme and information updates were also displayed in the Village Hall. More recently a specific website for the Village Hall and Coffee Shop has been established. <http://threlkeldvillagehall.org>

Several public meetings have been held in connection with the scheme – March 2007 to consider the main alternative options, September 2007 to report on progress generally, February 2008 to consider the scheme then proposed and ensure that it had full community backing. This crucial meeting was attended by about 50 people, who voted 75%/25% in favour of progressing the scheme envisaged, recognising its ambitious nature.

Subsequently there were public meetings annually to review progress. It was a public meeting in October 2010 which agreed to reconsider the size and expense of the scheme proposed. There have been two exhibitions and an architect's presentation of the scheme proposals, most recently in August 2012. Full details of the scheme were on display permanently in the Village Hall.

From August 2011, a series of Action Groups was deployed in developing details of proposed uses, outcomes and benefits of the project, thinking beyond the provision of the building into the way in which it operate in the longer term. About 20 people, ranging in age from 15 to 75, were involved in these Groups.

In March 2012, the Parish Council resolved to build on the start made by these groups and establish properly structured voluntary organisations to implement the community dimension of the Village Hall revitalisation project, with a view to having things in place to “hit the ground running” when the Hall reopens.

This process has been very successful. The first group, the Threlkeld Activities Association, was established in 2012 and is well under way, running a range of community activities and programmes. Threlkeld Young People was established in 2013 and is running activities and services for children, teenagers and parents. These groups have both attracted substantial grant aid towards their activities, and have ensured that the revitalised Hall is being well used right from the outset.

Implementation

The Big Lottery grant offer in September 2012 meant the scheme could go ahead to the tender stage. This involved a great deal of work locally - finalising the design and specification in discussion with the Architects and other consultants, sorting out Party Wall Act agreements, dealing with a range of legal and technical issues, getting subsidiary planning approvals, confirming all the funding offers etc. The scheme eventually went out to tender, to six firms, halfway through December 2012. Tenders were opened on 18 January 2013. Even the lowest tender was considerably higher than the maximum funding available, so a tense period of review and negotiation took place between us, the Architects, Quantity Surveyors and lowest tenderer.

In March 2013, an acceptable package was reached. The full detail and documentation was sent to the Big Lottery, which approved everything to allow us to go ahead and sign the main contract. Terms were agreed with Postlethwaite Construction Ltd, the contract period commenced on 18 March 2013 with a projected end date of 20 December 2013, and work started on site on 25 March 2013. The project was managed by a professional Project Manager, Site Progress Meetings were held monthly with all consultants, the contractors and representatives of the VHT as clients. These continued until handover of the building in March 2014. A snag was encountered when the Architects (Green Design) went into administration, but the Quantity Surveyors Baker Mallett took on the remaining relevant functions (possible because of the stage the scheme had reached), an arrangement which worked well and satisfied the Big Lottery.

Work proceeded steadily. Most of the early work concerned services and structural work. Significant structural problems were encountered with the rear wall of the old Hall, but these were dealt with. The ground source heating system involved eight 300 foot deep boreholes under the car park, sunk in August/September 2013. to provide the ground source heating system. the building took shape towards the end of 2014, but various delays meant a re-arranged completion date of 21 February with the Coffee Shop opening on 1 March 2014 was agreed. This deadline was being achieved. However, an unexpected last minute problem relating to floor humidity (critical to the wooden floor in the Main Hall) enforced a late stage deferral, which caused a lot of disruption. The Coffee Shop opened at the advertised time, but the Main hall was only handed over a week later on the afternoon of 7 March 2014, just in time for the opening event, a concert by Manchester duo Blackheart, which took place from 7.30pm to an enthusiastic audience of about 70 in the Main Hall.

A local professional photographer kept a careful photographic documentary of the building project throughout. This photoblog and gallery are available on the Village Hall website.

The Hall and Coffee Shop have both operated successfully, Coffee Shop business has been good and is increasing, Hall bookings are developing fast in all categories, There were teething troubles in some of the operational systems, but these have been overcome. A couple of problems with the building are still being attended to by the contractors concerned, but overall the impact of the building in terms of appearance and as a facility has been fantastic and reaction of users/visitors overwhelmingly positive.

This update (19 May 2014) marks the end of this account, which will be available on the Village Hall website for anyone interested or who might wish to learn from our experience.

Trevor Roberts
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