

Funding Advice – Lavenham Village Hall

Objectives

The community of Lavenham in Suffolk has worked tirelessly to create a new £1m village hall. This award-winning project involved strong community consultation to deliver a building to meet the area's needs.

Lavenham is described as one of the finest medieval villages in England. Fine Tudor townhouses mingle with small crooked cottages along its historic streets. The village hall is thought to be one of the first large public buildings to be constructed in the past 500 years.

The local community were key to the success of the project. They helped pick the architects, shaped the design and lobbied for the funding to make the project a reality.

Where

The village hall is located in Church Street, in the centre of Lavenham. The village is located almost midway between Sudbury and Bury St. Edmunds, in Suffolk.

How was it Achieved?

The project was driven forward by Lavenham Community Council, a fundraising and non-profit group, which works closely with Lavenham Parish Council and other public bodies to improve facilities in Lavenham.

Community Council member Mr. Carroll Reeve explained: "In 2000, we did a village survey to look at the hopes and aspirations of the community. From the 64 per cent of villagers who responded, nearly all – around 95 per cent – wanted a village hall to be created.

"We also asked people where they'd want the hall to be, and what they'd want to do in the facility. In addition, we contacted local groups such as the parish council and local clubs, to gauge public opinion."

Mr Reeve said a key partner turned out to be St Peter and St Paul Parochial Church Council. It sold old church land to developers and contributed nearly £200,000 to the hall fund. In return, the community council pledged to allow the Church to have free access to the hall. One room is now called the St. Peter and St. Paul Room.

The Church also leased a piece of land to the group for the new hall to be built on. The hall committee pays just £200 a year, over a 40 year period, for the site.

Community consultation was key to the project going ahead. Six architects were asked to submit samples of their work. These were put on display in the village and local

people were asked to come along and say what they liked. Nearly 200 people turned up – helping to select the final architects Wincer Kievenaar, based in nearby Hadleigh.

Once appointed, the practice continued to be involved in public consultation. “A public exhibition was held to present the scheme and also gain valuable feedback,” said Paul Hammond from the firm. “The hall plans were refined following the public feedback and presented to the community committee for their final approval.”

Mr. Reeve adds: “The consultation was very important to get everyone to feel that it was their hall.”

The committee also approached a number of funders, particularly the National Lottery to pull together the money needed to build the hall. A local appeal – and private donations – also brought in significant sums of money. Eventually the £1 million needed was collected.

Building work started in the spring of 2004. The project was completed a year later and has been a huge hit with local people in the first year since opening.

Who Was Involved?

The project was launched by Lavenham Community Council.

The biggest donors to fund the scheme were the St. Peter and St. Paul Parochial Church Council, the National Lottery - the Community Fund of the Big Lottery Fund - and local people.

The project was also backed financially by Lavenham Parish Council, the local Diocese, which provided low cost land, Babergh District Council and Suffolk County Council.

There was also support, but no direct funding, from, The Charity Commission and English Heritage.

Latterly, a number of local firms came on board to build the new Hall. The architects, Wincer Kievenaar Partnership, based in nearby Hadleigh, worked with builders Brooks and Wood, quantity surveyors Gill Associates and building services consultants Johns Slater and Haward, the latter three are all based in Ipswich.

There was money from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to support the full fit out of the hall – from the kitchen and furniture to the mobile stage.

“Even though the Hall is now finished, we continue to involve user groups and use the feedback to plan the development of the service we offer here,” says Mr. Reeve.

Lyn Gurling, the chair of the Parish Council, said the opening of the hall was a “dream come true”. She said: “It gives us all the opportunity to join in village life.”

What did it Achieve?

The Hall was officially open on July 1, 2005 by local resident Elsie Hynard, who's in her 80s. Elsie's mother contributed half a crown to an appeal to build a hall 70 years ago. Villagers had been waiting for the hall to materialise ever since.

Mrs Hynard said: “I never thought this day would come. I am overjoyed.”

The new building is modern and accessible, with a high-specification to meet the needs of elderly and disabled people. It also aims to attract young people, with specific activities aimed at pre-school and school aged children.

There's a large main hall – which can be linked to one of two smaller meeting rooms.

Everything from carpet bowls and badminton to dances and film nights are held within the hall. Previously residents had to travel outside the village to access some of these services.

The village library also relocated to the hall, making it an even stronger focal point for the community. This in turn brings in a small rent, which offsets some of the running costs.

Comments from the people involved

Martin Weaver is chairman of Lavenham Community Council. He said: *“The village hall has proved to be a big success. Community consultation really helped us create the right kind of place for the village to use.”*

“In March this year, we had 111 individual bookings to use the hall – a record. This really demonstrates what a success this has been.”

Carroll Reeve from the Community Council adds: *“The hall is a really lively building. As more and more services get devolved to community level, you need somewhere like this. It’s incredibly popular.”*

Learning Points

Those involved site a number of learning points that came from the process of the Village Hall project:

Invest in consultation. The community council involved local people in the hall project throughout - to build in the things local people wanted. This community buy-in meant that local benefactors also topped up the funding.

Try, and try again. An initial bid for £250,000 Lottery cash was rejected. But the campaigners listened to feedback and simply put in a lower bid of just under £200,000. (The rest of the application remained the same.) This was successful.

Don’t be defeated. Instead of cutting back on the project when there was a £100,000 shortfall of funding, the hall campaigners looked to other avenues – and got a loan from the Charity Bank. “Don’t be defeated by problems, look at how you can solve them,” said Mr. Carroll Reeve from Lavenham Community Council.

Protect yourself. The community council became a company limited by guarantee in order to financially protect its members.

Play to your strengths. Although the Community Council invested in widescale public consultation, it also realised that it needed a small team with professional building and project management expertise was needed to move the project forward.

Mr. Carroll Reeve, who has a financial services background, worked with the chairman Martin Weaver, and another committee member, Geoffrey Lindsey-Smith, both with a building background, to “run” the project. Martin said: “We were able to talk to the architects in construction language and really drive the project forward. We were also able to keep on top of things and make sure that the elements we wanted in the project actually materialised.”

He said the small sub-committee also meant there was a clear direction for the architects and builders – helping to keep the project focused, and also helping to control project costs. Be aware of doing things by (a large) committee. As well as the core project team (detailed above), there was also support from a fundraising team and a

marketing / management team. In total more than 30 people from the community gave up their time and expertise to support the project.

Volunteering can be good for you. Reeve volunteered his consultancy and business skills to the project. He had the satisfaction of helping his community. The unpaid work also paid off in other ways. He's now been employed by another community to help them get a village hall. If you need extra staff, try to attract professional volunteers. Often the project can provide them with useful job skills to help their careers.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the project is an ongoing process, with hall user groups asked to fill in feedback forms.

The hall is used by around 30 to 40 different groups every month – for more than 100 different activities. The project's award-winning status has also made it a popular venue to hire for weddings and other private events.

The Hall costs £25,000 a year to run – this covers staff costs and other running costs. Currently the Hall is able to pay its bills and make a small profit – something the committee didn't expect in year one. Its usage levels have also surpassed expectations. The project won the Community Architecture title in the Spirit of Ingenuity Architectural Awards 2005, run by the Royal Institute of British Architects. The category was sponsored by Inspire East.

The judges described the project as “fresh bright and modern”. They added: “Involved a good community consultation process and has potential sustainability.”

Further Information

You can find out more by visiting the Lavenham website at www.lavenham.co.uk. It also has a special section on the Village Hall - <http://www.lavenham.co.uk/village-hall/>

Anyone interested in hiring the hall can contact Ellie Darling, Manager, Lavenham Village Hall, on 01787 248599, or email lavenhamvillagehall@tiscali.co.uk

You can contact Carroll Reeve from the Community Council on 01787 247674 or email carroll@reeve.eu.com

Main Contact

Lavenham Village Hall, Church Street, Lavenham, Suffolk. CO10 9QT

T: 01787 248599