

Opening, or Re-opening, Your Village Hall or Community Centre

Before building work starts and the professionals are getting on with their side of things, thought needs to start to be given to making the hall ready for use. This Topic Note provides a checklist of tasks, some of which will become folders.

These headings are put into groups to provide an indication of priority and timing. The first items should have been thought about during the design process, but now require more detailed thought.

Reference is given in italics to ACRE Information Sheets and publications and AirS Topic Notes which provide further information. These are available from Harry Forster at AirS Lewes office (free of charge to Tier 2 subscribers).

Group One – Top Priority (before building work starts)

1. **Internal Fittings** - Decisions about internal fittings not yet finalised eg heating system, kitchen hatchway, equipment and layout for catering, toilet fittings, decorations, floorings, external landscaping. Check decision process for these and any approved alterations to building specifications. *ACRE The Village Hall, Plan, Design and Build (eg Chapter 8)*
2. **Licensing** – Become familiar with requirements for a Premises Licence (needed for public entertainments) and set in train application process. Decide whether or not the Premises Licence should include sale of alcohol. (note: layout plans will have to be provided for a new or altered building.) *ACRE VH Information Sheets 9 – Premises Licence and 10 – Alcohol.*
3. **Insurance** – For building work and subsequently for the building, public liability and other cover required for community buildings. There are insurance companies which provide specialist cover, details available from AirS.
4. **Purchase of equipment** – Essential items will need to be ordered for delivery in time for the hall to be used (ie from handover from builders), eg tables, chairs, cups and saucers, brooms, fire extinguishers. Bearing in mind that equipping a hall can cost around £20,000 and that grant payments in phases may cause cash flow problems, if there is not immediate need for them less essential larger items might be postponed until the actual build cost is known and grants paid eg curtains, projector, screen, dishwasher, fridge, staging, computer(s). A sample equipment list is attached as Appendix 1.

Group Two – Research and Prepare

5. **Hiring charges, policy and Agreement** – Obtain hire charges for halls in the vicinity and draw up your own scale in the light of projected costs, discuss and record the hall's hiring policy (eg which activities have priority), prepare a Hiring Agreement. *ACRE Model Hiring Agreement, AirS Topic Note 6 Hire Charges.*
6. **Other Statutory Requirements** – The hall will need a Health and Safety Risk Assessment and a Fire Safety Risk Assessment (These can be prepared together. A sample risk assessment is in ACRE Village Hall Information Sheet 15 and a sample Fire Risk Assessment can be obtained from AirS). If this is thought

- about before or during building work possible snags, (such as trip hazards for elderly people, positioning fire extinguishers out of reach of young children) can be dealt with rather than becoming an issue. As any hirers which prepare food at the hall on a regular basis will need to be registered as a Food Business, the hall should also check whether the kitchen and toilet facilities proposed will be adequate for this purpose. *ACRE Village Hall Information Sheets 15- Health and Safety, 20 - Health and Hygiene, 37- Fire Safety in Village Halls.*
7. **Policies** – It is good practice to prepare a Health and Safety Policy (*ACRE Village Halls Information Sheet 15 - Health and Safety*), a Vulnerable Persons Protection Policy, an Equal Opportunities Policy, an Environmental Policy and a Lone Working Policy. Examples can be obtained from AirS.
 8. **Employment of staff/Recruitment of volunteers** – Put together a list of the skills available within the committee or among volunteers who might be willing to help with tasks, as there will be a lot to do before and after the hall opens. Until the hall is on a firm financial footing it may not be able to afford to pay someone to undertake them all, but some paid staff is likely to be needed, for example to clean after late night events or lock up. If the hall intends to employ staff (eg a cleaner, caretaker, booking secretary or groundsman) the obligations of becoming an employer need to be checked. *ACRE Village Halls Information Sheet 22 – Village Halls as Employers.* Times for a thorough clean need initially to be matched with when the hall needs to be really clean (eg for Pre-School, wedding receptions rather than Parish Council meetings), but a clean hall helps encourage use so interim checks will be needed. Some of this might initially be done by volunteers until the pattern of use is established. If funds are tight the Parish Council might be asked for a grant to cover the cost for the first year, until cash flow is established. This could be money well spent: Fishbourne Community Centre sought feedback from those hiring the hall for events in its first two years of opening and hirers scored highly the friendly reception from staff who helped set things up, and recommended hiring the hall to others.

Group Three – Other items

9. **Finances** – Check the Business Plan and cash flow forecast for first years of operation and update in the light of any new information. Use updated figures to prepare proposed schedule of hire charges.
10. **Committee Structure** – Check whether any changes will be needed as hall management is taken on eg establishing sub-committees, working parties etc.
11. **Training** – identify whether the management committee has any training needs, for example, basic food hygiene, first aid, licensing, marketing, financial management, roles of trustees. AirS, CVS and local colleges run workshops and training courses at modest cost which may be suitable. Alternatively AirS may be able to provide bespoke training, for which a charge would be made. Draw up an Information Pack about the hall for trustees, for which a sample is given in the *ACRE publication Your Village Hall Management Committee.*
12. **Marketing** – this will need to be in place by the time the hall is ready for use, so as part of the marketing plan for the hall it is essential to have prepared a draft publicity leaflet (enclosing hire charges and how to hire), issue a regular newsletter about progress or features in the parish magazine, posters and business cards. **The opening ceremony is a key marketing opportunity** at which people can be brought in to enjoy taster sessions of activities which will use the hall, see displays and take part in entertainment, so thought needs to be given to this. A press release with an eye catching strap line “eg First zero

carbon hall in Arun” will help to gain radio, press and TV coverage. A hall website can provide easy to access information. However, the committee may also need to actively set about starting up activities which people asked for during consultation, for example recruiting volunteers and setting up first “taster” events to see if they prove popular. *ACRE Village Halls Information Sheet 19 – Marketing Your Hall. AirS Topic Note 8 – Some ideas about marketing village halls.*

13. **Noticeboards** – External and internal – will need information about how to hire the hall, charges, a “calendar” showing regular activities, how to contact organisations using the hall, how to contact trustees (and who they are), and space for “information” eg where to find items, employer’s liability certificate etc. Prepare notices for hirers (eg In case of emergency instructions, lighting controls) and obtain standard safety notices (eg No Smoking). *ACRE Information Sheet 15* contains some sample notices, standard versions can be obtained from DIY stores. Consider facilities for smokers.
14. **Keyholders** or swipe card system, security arrangements and policy for opening up/closing/in case of emergency. Sussex Village Hall Advisory Group members have kindly shared their experience, which can be obtained from AirS staff or by contacting them directly.
15. **Catering arrangements** – Consider points such as: How can food and drink safely be served to different meeting rooms? Can hirers book the kitchen so that no other user can gain access and, if so, how do other users make drinks? If a hirer wants to engage someone to provide refreshments, who can provide this service? Are local caterers interested in advertising on the hall website or in the foyer (for a charge?) Can crockery, glasses, tables and chairs and tables be hired separately from the hall?
16. **Ambience** – Consider what local photos, community awards or aspects of the local heritage (such as the Parish Map) might be on display to provide the message that this is the “community’s hall” .
17. **Storage policy** – which organisations can store equipment and where? Marking out the store room and providing a photo inside the door can help show how items should be stacked/stored.
18. **Telephone** – a landline is not essential but hiring forms should make it clear there is no telephone and warn of any signal problems affecting particular mobile networks. Arrangements to access a telephone in case of emergency need to be displayed in the foyer.
19. **Involving the more isolated members of the community** – Consider how the committee will reach out to very elderly, young, disabled or other people who might be isolated and would benefit most from attending events at the hall. A personal invitation to the opening ceremony and allocating people to make them feel welcome, or asking them on the doorstep what activities they would attend, should both be considered.

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AirS
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Sample Equipment List

Note: This does not include specialist equipment needed, for example, for running a luncheon club for older people, or equipment for particular user groups.

Audio visual equipment (PA, microphone, amplifier, speakers).

Buckets

Brooms

Bowls for washing up

Blinds

Chairs: stacking, capable of linking together for performances.

Chairs: with cushioned seats and arms for older, frail members of the community.

Clock

Coat hooks

Computer (s), WiFi, printer

Cooker (recommend 6 hob where lunches are to be served. Obtain Env Health Officer advice)

Crockery (cups, saucers, mugs, small plates, large plates, bowls, jugs, glasses, teapots)

Curtains, curtain rails and fittings

Cutlery (knives, forks, dessert spoons, teaspoons, kitchen equipment such as serving spoons)

Cupboards (lockable, for storage areas, cleaning materials etc.)

Doormats (recessed)

Dustbins and recycling bins

Dustpan and brush

Exit signs

Electric floor polisher

Handrails by steps and in toilets for infirm people

Induction hearing loop for the hard of hearing

Fittings (for toilets and kitchen, eg toilet roll holders, towel rails/dispensers, soap dispensers)

Fire Extinguishers

First Aid kit

Kettle (s)

Kitchen waste bin

Lavatory brush

Microwave cooker

Mirrors

Notice boards

Piano

Photocopier

PowerPoint projector
Refrigerator

Stepladder (to reach guttering)
Screen
Stage equipment (eg lighting, curtains etc.) and/or demountable staging

Tables: trestle style, stacking.
Tables: small card/café style
Tablecloths
Trays
Trolley (kitchen)
Trolley (for moving furniture)
Tower scaffold (to change high level light tubes/redecorating)

Vacuum cleaner

Wall mounted hot water boiler (safer than an urn)
Water heaters for sinks and handwashbasins