

Building Audit Report for Boyton Village Hall



undertaken by Suffolk ACRE on 23rd January 2013.

Introduction and Methodology

Village Halls provide a vital service to their community. For most people they are the only non religious community building and as such have become the focus of village life. A well used hall can make a significant difference to the lives of those in the community providing a centre for social cohesion. Many halls are now finding their existence under threat as a combination of rising energy costs, coupled with the continued erosion of grant funding and an ever increasing legislative burden take their toll. Most halls are run by dedicated groups of volunteers, many of whom have full time jobs yet give up their evenings and weekends, to serve their community.

Suffolk ACRE is a charity established in 1937 to help communities in Suffolk identify and tackle their needs through community action. Its main role is to support community groups and voluntary organisations by offering information and advice to enable communities to take ownership for their own well-being. We have specially trained staff who can offer advice on legislation, small business start ups, funding, community building management, transport solutions, Good Neighbour schemes, Parish Plans and many other topics which affect rural communities.

One of the specific services that Suffolk ACRE offers is advice specifically tailored to Village Halls and other community buildings. Many committees are facing decisions on how to make the hall sustainable for future generations and need guidance on where to start. A building audit report by Suffolk ACRE will set out the work required with options that will allow the management committee to make informed decisions that are practical and cost effective.

Disability Discrimination Act

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 was designed to bring about the end of the discrimination that many disabled people face. In 2005 the act was further enhanced by another act of the same name which clearly defines the rights of disabled people in the following areas:

- Employment
- Access to goods, facilities and services, including larger private clubs and land-based transport services
- Education
- Buying or renting land / property, including making it easier for disabled people to rent property and for tenants to make adaptations necessary for their needs
- Functions of public bodies e.g. issuing of licenses

The second point listed is the most relevant part for village halls and community buildings. In essence it means that the management committee of the hall must consider making reasonable adjustments to the building to enable access for disabled people. All community buildings by the definition of their purpose, have a duty to be as fully accessible as possible.

Since 2004 halls undertaking new building works such as major refurbishment, extension etc. should ensure that the premises comply with the provisions of the Act. Part M of the Building Regulations, which apply to new building works, lays down requirements in terms of accessibility which include the need for induction loops in areas over 100m².

In order to achieve this compliance in a sensible timescale without causing panic, the act realises that halls need to assess what would be reasonable, e.g. if a hall has no funds surplus to meeting the day-to-day running and the cost of making the hall wheelchair accessible were to cost thousands and there was only one person in the village and area of benefit who is a wheelchair user then to make the changes, given the low number of beneficiaries, may be considered excessive. Therefore the Committee's non-compliance, if challenged, could be considered as reasonable, given the number of beneficiaries. However this does not mean that halls can be complacent and use a lack of funds as a reason for 'never doing anything'. As a matter of good practice, all measures possible should be taken to make the hall accessible.

Overview of the Building

Boyton Village Hall was built in 1904 as a reading room and is a solid walled brick building with a red pantiled roof. It is in generally good condition for a 109 year old building and has been modified and improved at various times. The windows are UPVC frames with sealed double glazed units. It is currently in need of updating to improve the level of comfort for the users

The simple building comprises a small entrance lobby, main hall, kitchen to the side, toilets and storage lean-to built on the back. The building is heated by 3 radiant heaters of different ages mounted on the walls. Outside there is a timber shed used for storage and a children's play area. There is limited space for cars to park off the road.

This building audit was undertaken by Robert Horn Community Buildings Advisor on 23rd January 2013.^h November 2009. Robert was shown around the hall by Richard Jesty and other members of the management committee.

The audit was conducted on a walkthrough basis with visible access taken at ground level. An investigation of the roofspace was not carried out. No account is made of the foundations or structural suitability. There had been a substantial snow fall, so it was not possible to assess the full surface of the roof.

External Audit

The building ridge runs north east / south west and is overshadowed by a large conifer at the north east corner. There were no obvious sign of subsidence from tree roots in this corner. The building is predominantly red stock bricks laid in English bond to make a one brick thick wall. There is no cavity. The kitchen and toilets are a flat roofed extension with pebble dashed and rendered walls. The roof tiles which were exposed at the gables and under the tree appeared to be in good condition. Ground conditions including paving, drainage etc. were not assessed because of snow coverage.

Front of building (South East)

- The lower brickwork shows signs of algae / fungal infection. There was no evidence of a damp proof course. This should be monitored and action taken if it continues to be a problem. (fig1)
- There are damaged brick to the exterior corner of the porch which need repairing. (fig2)
- A gutter end was missing at the east corner.
- Very narrow UPVC external door into Kitchen with raised threshold.

South West

- Build up of moss on centre area of flat roof. This needs clearing and monitoring for signs of bowing.
- Damage to tiled window sills suggests that they have been used to climb onto the flat roof. If this is a regular problem the use of anti-climb paint with warning signs could act as deterrent.

North East

- Earthing strap to building is loose.
- Guttering is clogged with pine needles from conifer.
- Lower barge boards appear to be solid.

Rear of building (North West)

- Chimney stack has been removed.
- Lean-to shed at back is made of cement board or similar.
- Build up of vegetation / pine needles on roof of lean-to likely to cause a leak in the roof as it rots. (fig3)
- Ground level against building is raised because of vegetation / pine needles etc. This needs clearing to prevent future damp problems.

Play area

- Safety surfacing rubber tiles were uneven.
- Swing missing from double swing frame.

Shed

- Used for storage of tables, chairs etc. There is evidence that the exterior wood cladding is in need of re-proofing.

Internal Audit

Entrance Lobby

- Compact with narrow door to main hall
- Uneven floor levels with (temporary?) wood sheet to floor.
- Threshold into main hall is approx ½" which is a trip hazard.

Main Hall

- A large room with open vaulted ceiling featuring exposed steel tie rods. There is a small loft space above, accessed by two small hatches (Fig4). This was not inspected but it is expected that the loft is under insulated, if at all. Creating a larger hatch and fully insulating the space is highly recommended.
- The sprung wood floor shows signs of moderate wear, though it has been revarnished in recent years. A doormat in either the lobby or the main hall would help to reduce minimise further wear. There is no evidence of any insulation below the floorboards.
- Smoke alarms mounted on the ceiling are out of reach for regular testing and servicing (Fig4). It was suggested that they may be out of batteries. These should be changed to ones which can be tested by a torch beam. Ideally they should be mains powered using the lighting circuit so that the batteries never need replacing.
- The brackets securing the old wall heaters at either end of the room were loose. These need replacing.
- There is no Fire Exit sign above the main door. This is urgently required and should be illuminated as it is the main exit.
- The room has panelling around the walls to approx 1m height. The fireplace has been boarded up. Furniture is a mixture of fixed and folding tables with hard plastic chairs.
- Radiant heater gives warmth to head & torso, but feet remain cold.

Lean-To

- Used to be a coal hole, now used for storage of crockery & cutlery. These need to be washed before use because the storage is not fit for purpose (Fig5).
- Unlined construction (exposed timberwork) and concrete floor.

Kitchen

- Layout has suffered due to being cobbled together out of different pieces of furniture. Tea urn is balanced a bridge of worktop over a void which is a serious injury hazard (Fig6).
- There is insufficient storage.
- Cracked tiled splashback behind sink is unsanitary.
- Evidence of damp on the walls. No heater in room.
- External door (emergency door) is not fit for purpose: It has a 2 ½" lip to step and a greater drop the other side; It is not wide enough for escape; The key is kept in a break glass container on the wall – this is not correct. It should be unlocked at all times when the building is occupied. There is a crack above the door which indicates that there may be movement in the lintel.

Toilets

- Comprising two cubicles and a shared vestibule with sink. There is no potential to enlarge either of these to accommodate a disabled toilet or baby changing facilities. Dimplex heater fixed to wall at a high level (not recommended)
- Floor paint is peeling up in many places.
- Tiled splashback to sink is in a poor state.
- Pipes are unlagged.
- Drainage is unknown. If there is a septic tank it has not been emptied in living memory. It is recommended that this is investigated before trouble occurs. Water bills may give an indication of sewerage method.

Energy & Usage

- Most lightbulbs are low energy, but a few tungsten filaments remain
- Radiant heaters offer a quick response, but the lack of insulation throughout the building means that they will never be efficient.
- The hall has a small group of regular users including monthly coffee morning , weekly whist drive, parish council, scouts and birdwatchers (RSPB reserve nearby).
- Hourly rate of is £5 to local groups. This was last increased 3 years ago but is reviewed regularly.
- No evidence of electrical testing of appliances in the building.

Summary

This is a charming hall which has been looked after by a dedicated group of volunteers. It is in generally good condition. The main structure of the building appears to be sound and there are no obvious major problems considering the age.

It is now at a point where significant improvements are needed to sustain the usage and offer the level of comfort which most hirers have come to expect. There are two main issues which need addressing:

- The kitchen needs a complete refit as it is not fit for purpose and contains a number of hazards. There is a spurious internal wall which serves no obvious purpose other than to restrict the layout of the room. All of the fittings and appliances should be replaced (sink, cooker etc) with a more practical and safe layout. Several user groups have said that the kitchen is causing them problems because it is unfit. More storage space is required so that items do not have to be kept in the lean-to.
- The lack of insulation throughout the hall is a serious problem. Any attempt to change the heating system for something more efficient and cost effective will be thwarted by the fabric of the building. The UPVC windows probably have the highest U value (heat retention) of any part of the construction. I would recommend that you consider looking at a project to insulate the whole building. This could be done with external cladding which would change the look of the building or by internal methods. There are many products available for internal insulation, and some can be found already attached to plaster board which simplifies the process. The walls and the pitched ceiling would need this type of treatment. The flat ceiling could be insulated from above. A ceiling fan would help to circulate the air and stop the hot air from collecting people's heads. It may also be possible to address the flooring and in some way insulate that by filling the void between the joists to complete the insulation, but this would require further research.

A third area which should be considered is the issue of DDA compliance. I have attached an ACRE Information sheet on Access to Village halls. Boyton Village Hall meets very few of the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 because it is an old building and would require substantial work to satisfy all recommendations. The following areas were noted as being a particular problem:

- Access to the main hall through the porch is through a very narrow doorway which would not be suitable for many wheelchairs.
- The kitchen is too small for anyone in a wheelchair and the external door is completely unsuitable.
- There does not appear to be a hearing aid loop amplifier system.
- The toilet facilities are also unsuitable.

Photos



Fig 1: Decay and damp to front wall



Fig 2: Damaged brickwork



Fig 3: Roof of lean-to



Fig 4: Ceiling of hall showing tie beam, loft access and smoke alarm



Fig 5 : Crockery storage in lean-to



Fig 6: Kitchen