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**October 2006**

**A New Village Amenity? A Discussion Document – Autumn 2006**

Please take the time to read this important letter about the future of Helmdon.

The Helmdon Parish Plan was drawn up after a comprehensive questionnaire survey of residents in 2004, and a monitoring group (PPMG) was set up to coordinate efforts to take forward the expressed wishes of the community. In April 2006 a newsletter reported on progress and called for further views, including on the expressed need for a new village amenity.

***“the expressed  
need for a new  
village amenity”***

The July 2006 meeting of the PPMG received a most helpful report on the progress of the Helmdon Sports Club's plans to replace their now inadequate pavilion with a larger building that could offer the village a wider range of sporting activities and also provide a meeting place for other events, whilst at the same time comply with new government requirements on changing rooms. The planning authority (South Northants Council) has reservations about the size of this proposed new building and particularly the need for the multi-purpose room, measuring 13 x 9 metres. The opportunity for the community to gain this space will be lost if the Sports Club has to seek to meet its urgent need for better facilities with a reduced plan. Thus Helmdon now has two important questions to answer:

**1) Do we still want a new amenity/meeting place?**

and

**2) Is supporting the Sports Club's current plan the best way of getting it?**

The Parish Council has asked for consideration of this matter to be taken forward and the PPMG has prepared this document in the hope that it will facilitate discussion by the village's 35 organisations and other stakeholder groups within the parish. The PPMG will also be delighted to receive the views of individuals before preparing a position paper that will go to SNC.

Your views will be used to inform **a public meeting to be held at the school on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November at 10:00 a.m.** Please respond to Chair of PPMG, Danny Moody at 30 Church Street or by e mail to parishplan@helmdon.com. Please **send us your comments no later than 10<sup>th</sup> November.**

**VILLAGE MEETING PLACES**

The Parish Plan identified clearly that some residents felt **there was a need for a new village amenity** to augment the existing facilities provided by the Church, the Reading Room, the School and, up to January 2004, the Baptist Chapel. The Sports Club's preliminary discussions with SNC have shown that the planning officers have doubts about the strength of this need. Thus this discussion should begin with a review of the existing provision.

## 1. The Church

Recent developments have improved the heating, added a toilet and a kitchenette facility, and made the pews moveable. The church is a proven good venue for music and drama, provided of course that the programme is in keeping with the religious purpose of the building. Thus there are limits on the uses of this venue.

## 2. The Reading Room

This space is well used for a wide variety of activities; its central location is an advantage for those who can reach it on foot. Parking is very limited and disabled access, although Disability Discrimination Act compliant, is not good. The room is in fact divisible in two and with the recently refurbished kitchen this is an excellent venue for events where meals are provided. The lack of parking is a drawback and noise must be limited out of consideration for the neighbours. The Reading Room Management Committee is actively considering a programme of improvements.

***“The Reading Room Management Committee is actively considering a programme of improvements”***

## 3. The School

The school hall is used regularly for village activities, notably the Christmas pantomime, which has a huge cast and plays to packed houses. A large marquee on the school field recently housed a second very successful summer ball; the central location was a major factor as the 250 guests were able to walk to the event. Parking at the school is not generous and the availability of school facilities for village uses is inevitably restricted.

## 4. The Baptist Chapel

The chapel was for many years a thriving place of worship and housed a range of children’s activities as well as rehearsal space for the drama group. Unfortunately the Baptist fellowship had to close the building in January 2004. It was judged to be structurally unsound and was therefore uninsurable, also it is beyond economic repair as the estimated cost to make the building safe and usable was over £130,000. The building has now stood empty for two years and has decayed further. Parking was always a problem and the recent kerbing and resurfacing of the road has removed the little verge parking that had been used.

Redevelopment for housing is now the only realistic prospect for the chapel site but it seems that SNC are not yet convinced of this fact. This discussion of other options for fulfilling the village’s needs for meeting places could help to bring into sharper focus the only realistic future for the chapel site.

***“Redevelopment for housing is now the only realistic prospect”***

## 5. The Sports Pavilion

The pavilion provides a space for refreshments during cricket and football matches and is also used for teas etc during the carnival. The billiards team use it as their base. The proposal to redevelop the site with a larger, multifunction facility has been challenged by SNC on the grounds that the existing meeting place provision is adequate.

A broader base of village support for the new pavilion could be built by looking at the potential there would be for a wider range of sporting activities. For example at present there is no village provision for indoor carpet bowls which requires lanes that are 11 x 6 metres. Other healthy lifestyle activities such as aerobics and dance classes could also use this space.

## Summary

The above review shows that the closed chapel should be discounted from further consideration. Each of the other four existing venues has clearly identifiable merits and drawbacks; but there is also confirming evidence for the village plan finding that an additional venue is needed. The requirements are for a good-sized hall with toilet and catering facilities, and with more parking space than is presently available at any of the existing venues. A location not too close to residential properties may be preferable as many enjoyable events involve music and transport noise. The proposed redevelopment of the sports pavilion would largely meet these needs, whilst not precluding other developments in the future, and the additional sporting and entertainment facilities to be gained would make a useful contribution to the village amenities and provide a welcome arena for the youth of the village.

## A NEW VILLAGE AMENITY

Providing a new build venue for the community would be a huge undertaking and require a major effort, but might be the better option for the long-term. Without making any approaches to land owners, the PPMG members have noted several possible sites on which a new hall might be built within the village. A developer might be persuaded to give some space for a village amenity as a planning gain, but for the gain to be big enough for a village amenity the development would have to be substantial.

## THE WAY AHEAD

Your views will be used to inform **a public meeting to be held at the school on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November at 10:00 a.m.** Please respond to Chair of PPMG, Danny Moody at 30 Church Street or by e mail to [parishplan@helmdon.com](mailto:parishplan@helmdon.com). Please **send us your comments no later than 10<sup>th</sup> November.**

Best regards,



Danny Moody  
Helmdon Parish Plan Chairman  
01295 768090

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*Sent to all village groups  
Posted on the notice boards  
Available on the web site  
Copies at the pub, the shop and the Reading Room*