

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2009, Witchford Parish Council hired Muse Development to undertake a series of audits to assess both the state of the facilities in Witchford as well as the current usage and to investigate further where residents of the village would like to see investment in the future.

- 14 facilities audited including outdoor spaces, membership-only venues and solely commercial operations
- Facilities included: the Village Hall, Witchford Sports and Social Club, St. Andrew's Church, the Baptist Church, The Village Inn, Needham's Restaurant, Witchford Village College, Rackham Primary School, Millennium Wood, the Old Rec, Old Scenes, the Common, St. Andrew's Church Hall and the Scout Hut.
- These facilities were chosen after discussion with the steering committee based on the need to be both comprehensive in our approach and to build a true picture of the range and quality of the facilities in the village
- Methodology used was combined researcher-led, site-specific investigative walk throughs with photographic evidence taken as required and factual evidence assessed against a pre-agreed survey form
- Each audit took approximately 1 - 2 hours to complete, followed by cross-comparison and analysis of the forms in order to provide recommendations

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Following the facility visits, the views of the residents of Witchford were also captured using face to face interviews and self completion surveys. We then consulted a sample of organisers whose groups use facilities in Witchford.

- Witchford faces issues linked to the geography of the village and it lacks a true village centre.
- There are a lot of facilities available within Witchford and the majority are underused even though 40% of residents polled believe there are not enough facilities in Witchford.
- The provision of dedicated youth facilities is something the people of Witchford want as a priority.
- More sporting events and activities have been highlighted as a need.
- Dissemination of information is an issue in Witchford and all available ways should be exploited.

The project's findings will provide enough information for the Parish Council to make truly informed decisions about the way ahead for the provision and support of community facilities in Witchford.

- Most working residents work relatively close to home and are therefore available to take part in evening activities.
- 50% of residents have not taken part in village activities in the past 12 months but 27% do take part in activities outside Witchford.
- 64% of those asked thought The Village Hall would be the venue to support with funding.
- Improved physical access to community buildings is important to the people of Witchford

RESIDENTS' OPINIONS

The facilities audit was comprehensive but could not by its nature tell us about the feelings, needs or perceptions of local people as far as community facilities are concerned. There was only one way to gather this qualitative information and that was by talking to them face to face as individuals and in groups and to group leaders. These people were after all the consumers or end users of the facilities in Witchford.

We devised a simple questionnaire and set about gathering information from individuals in four ways. Firstly we had researchers on the ground in Witchford in high 'traffic' areas such as outside the Post Office, Rackham School and at football matches being played at the Village Hall playing fields at weekends.

In parallel with this we inserted a copy of the same survey form into the local free magazine, the Witchfordian and made arrangements for drop off boxes to be hosted at the village Post Office and at The Village Inn. We also left blank forms in these locations as well as in the Sports and Social Club. Finally we identified some well connected Witchford residents and asked them to email their Witchford friends with an

e-copy of the survey which could be completed then uploaded online. We also incentivised the returning of the forms by offering a £50 to the name on a form drawn at random after the closing date of Friday 18 September.

In total we had 205 forms returned, not all of which were complete but the exercise also netted the Parish Council 80 current email addresses which residents volunteered so they could be kept informed about new events etc.

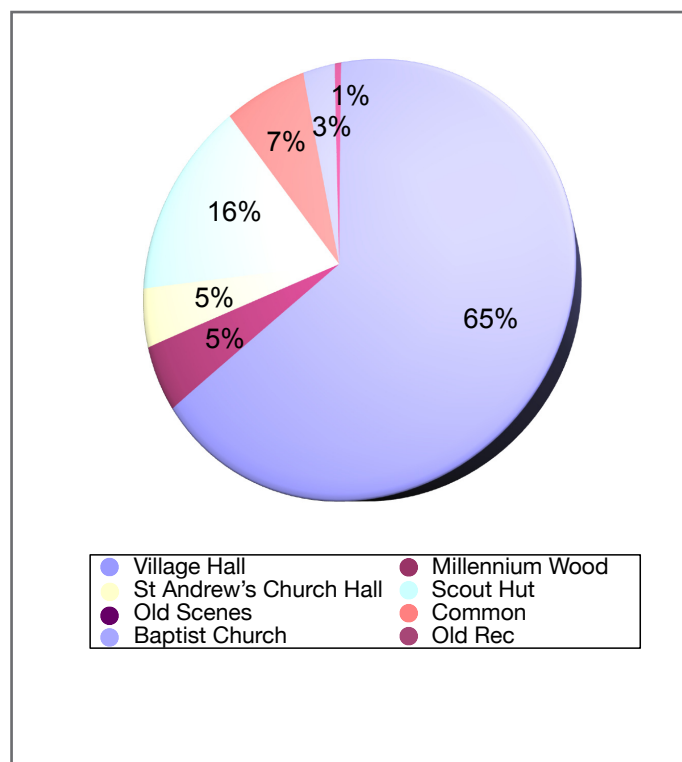
In addition we also met with a number of leaders who organise a cross section of groups and activities in Witchford for residents of all ages. These group organisers had a different and crucial perspective on the venues available in Witchford seeing them in a much more practical way.

The results were an exploration of attitudes, feelings, opinions, beliefs and experiences as well as fact. These sessions not only provided the locals' emotional response but also gave a sense of ownership and engagement to the participants.

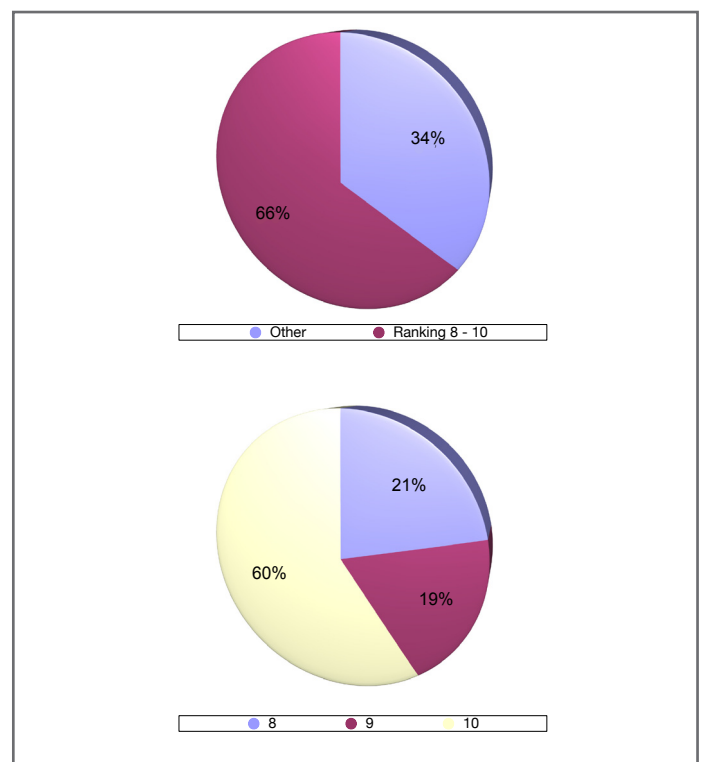
RESIDENTS' OPINIONS

% of respondents giving 8-10 out of 10	Improvement
66	Dedicated youth facilities for use by Witchford's young people
45	More types of sports events and activities
45	A joint calendar of events in Witchford available to all residents
40	Improved access for wheelchairs, prams and people with mobility issues
35	Increased number of leisure activities for older people
31	A space for public art exhibitions, music programmes and other types of entertainment
24	Improved space for hire for meetings, events and activities
18	A Witchford Environmental and Nature Awareness Centre
16	A Witchford Heritage and Education Centre
12	Witchford Parish Council Drop-In Office

Sample question: If funding were available, which facility would you choose to invest in?



Sample question: Dedicated youth facilities for use by Witchford's young people - Ranked 1 to 10 in order of importance



GROUP ORGANISERS' OPINIONS

Although the sessions with the organisers were based around a questionnaire, the meetings were open discussions about their experiences and opinions about the facilities in Witchford.

What percentage of your members live in Witchford

- 75% (Witchford Netball Club)
- 90% (Witchford Brownies)
- 100% (Open Spaces / Woodland Group)
- 100% (Witchford Youth Cafe)
- 90% (Witchford Guides)
- 100% (Witchford Toddler Baby / Music Tots)
- 75% (Witchford Scouts)

This was to ensure that the organisers were 'speaking' for the people of Witchford

Do you feel that you know about all the facilities in Witchford

- Yes
- Yes but not the costs
- Yes
- No but colleague does
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes

A generally high awareness of what is available as you would expect from organisers who may be on the look out for better or better value facilities all the time.

What facilities are missing in Witchford

- None
- A dedicated brick building with storage – Stretham is a good example
- A decent village hall, possibly an adaption of the existing one to provide a focus for the village which is currently missing
- Need a bigger space for different community groups. The village hall is costly and not user friendly – maybe the Parish Council could improve it?
- A venue for youth, an entertaining and socialising centre, a multi-room venue would be ideal for different activities.
- More for youth but what they have they don't use
- Café for the mums – there is no facility for people without a car
- Teenagers need a place they are good and should be rewarded.
- All weather pitch for all sports.

Again the message came through that there is a need for a dedicated community hall to provide a focus for many of these activities including youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research project came about as a result of the availability to Witchford of Section 106 Funding to determine what might be the best way to spend the funding and provide what the community of Witchford want and need.

The type of project that is eligible for Section 106 Funding is identified by East Cambs District Council as:

“Community Centres - For upgrading facilities which are the main community centre in a village and which provide for multi use by the wider community. This can include village halls and family centres. The funding can support works such as new build, extensions, refurbishment, provision of disabled facilities and provision of facilities which will enable the hall to diversify its use. Minor repairs and redecoration and movable equipment items are excluded from the scheme. It must be demonstrated that the need for these proposals has been fully researched and forms part of the facility's Business Plan.

Multi purpose sports and leisure centres which serve the general public. The works proposed can be new build, extensions, refurbishment and provision of disabled facilities. These works will only be considered for grant if the need for the project has been fully researched and forms part of the Centre's Business Plan. Repairs and maintenance are excluded from the scheme.

Play facilities - this can include play areas, teenage zones, skateboard facilities and similar, both new build and refurbishment. The need for the facility should also normally have been identified within the District Council's Play Audit and Strategy in order to be eligible. This strategy has identified gaps in provision across the District towards which grant aid needs to be focused. In addition we would expect to see evidence that young people have been consulted and have participated in the design of the proposed play facility.

Open Spaces – Grants are available to Parish

Councils only for the purchase of land for formal/ informal public open space, recreation and allotments. Grants are also available for improvement to existing open spaces that improve access, education and user facilities.”

With these guidelines and a detailed understanding of the facilities of Witchford, we are now able to highlight some aspects of the facilities in Witchford that the Parish Council might consider for support under Section 106. There is however some ambiguity about eligibility for smaller or part projects which the Parish Council will have to clarify with the District Council. We will suggest these projects first.

1 - The broad approach

Under this heading and as a result of our research we are able to identify appropriate buildings or facilities that would benefit from having some financial support so that the user experience will be significantly increased. We would suggest that a proviso of providing funding is that the operators are more proactive in their promotion of their facilities and that they participate fully in any endeavours championed by the Parish Council to improve communication and understanding of facilities in Witchford. This first direction of funding would see a range of facilities funded.

The Baptist Church

Used by toddler groups, the Church is in need of a new carpet and we would recommend that this is supported.

Millennium Wood

Under the Open Spaces section, the Wood would be an appropriate use of the funding to improve its access and education via new signage leading to it and a welcome orientation board.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Old Rec

Again under Open Spaces, additional funding could provide a community orchard, but only if the land is fully restored to the Parish Council.

The Scout Hut

If ECDC would permit this use, we would recommend a grant to the Scout Hut. A substantial percentage of the village's children are involved in scouting in some way and we think they make a very positive contribution to the community of Witchford. It is sad to see the damage that is routinely inflicted on their premises and we feel a useful contribution to reducing the Hut's vulnerability to vandalism would be by installing either concrete ramps or metal staircases that are indestructible. If the grant could help make the scout hut an ironclad then we would recommend that too.

St Andrews Hall

This is a well placed venue that still lacks one or two finishing touches. Consider supporting the installation of a smooth transition to ease the slight step up from the pavement through the gateway. Also look to support the installation of a baby changing unit in the toilet area.

The Village Hall

The remainder should be spent on redecorating the Village Hall, removing the nasty stained carpets and making it a more pleasant experience for its users, and by users we don't just mean the teams who use the changing rooms. The Hall could become a popular well-used community facility and with some of the money, a café trial could also be undertaken. Each weekend the chance arises to capitalise on attendance at the playing field by providing the families, supporters and players with food, snacks and drink, etc. This trial could be the start of a café facility that opens up more and more. The Hall would of course have to have a business plan before the money was provided.

2 – The Focused approach

This is the route that could bring the greatest benefits for the greatest number of Witchford residents and provide a much better fit for the eligibility criteria around Section 106 grants. While the first approach could not directly help the youth of Witchford – something that is being demanded by the residents – this approach could do that.

One of the ambivalent conclusions of this project is that Witchford is both well off and badly off for facilities that the public can use. There are a number of facilities available of a variety of shapes, sizes and conditions and they can be used for a variety of purposes. Many of them are compromises and are not ideal for the uses they are put to. Crucially, none of them are considered to be 'of the people for the people'. This research has led us to conclude that there is evidence of need and desire for a community building that would serve the youth of the village and provide a space for music, entertainment and arts activities while also being available for meetings and other uses. And it would have to be accessible for all. We believe that the underused and neglected Village Hall could be the answer to many of the issues and ambitions for Witchford.

As we have said earlier, we appreciate that the Hall is not the responsibility of the Parish Council but it is the building that could be remodeled to become the community centre flagship for Witchford. The ideal spot for a building of this kind would be in the middle of the village but there is nowhere to put it. The Village Hall exists, has all the infrastructure, including parking in place in place, is well known and has been identified by the people of Witchford as the venue they would like to see public money spent on. And, it is cheaper to convert than rebuild.

There are many grant giving bodies who are keen to support the redevelopment of community buildings but even some modest alterations could make the building attractive to a variety of users and set the building on the road to a sustainable future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We have, at no cost to the Parish Council or the people of Witchford, had a team of architects highly experienced in leisure, retail and public buildings consider the options that the Village Hall presents.

We have included three outline suggestions from the architects in the hope that they will stimulate debate and open up new avenues to explore for the benefit of the people of Witchford.

Scheme A

This is a basic makeover scheme for the building but one that would make it more appealing without costing a huge amount of money, and probably the amount of 106 money currently available. The East wall would be remodeled to let in more light and make the building more light and airy. A new verandah structure would make the outside area more pleasant to sit in in most weathers rather than the bland paved area it is currently. The ceiling could be altered too to include Velux-type windows to again increase light. With this and with all of these schemes, we would recommend the use of sustainable and recycled materials to build the Hall's green credentials.

Scheme B

This scheme shows how the changing room and toilet provision could be reorganised to fit more in while including a disabled facility and changing areas for match officials. The bar area would have to move forward slightly to accommodate the enlarged facility area. This scheme could include a 'green wall' to improve the look of the currently industrial building and would cost an estimated £100k

Scheme C

This is a major reworking of the space that sees the removal altogether of changing facilities. The Witchford Playing Field Association (WPFA) are exploring the possibility of building other changing blocks elsewhere on their land and this might be an opportunity to create more of the quality public rooms that are being asked for in Witchford.

The hall is large and rarely filled. This scheme is one that provides flexible spaces that can expand or contract as required and could include business incubation units (for office-focused sole traders) or hot-desking areas that could be another source of revenue for the Hall. The stage could be extended as required and could then become the home of the villages am-dram group, adding to the cultural air of the building.

It could also be used for cinema nights using equipment loaned by ADEC who are encouraging rural cinema. Notice that the kitchen has also moved to make way for the more lucrative office / meeting room space and the new kitchen is located more logically behind the bar / café serving area. This is a £200K+ scheme but like the other two, is an excellent candidate for very robust funding grant applications.

A common thread in all of these schemes is the operation of café in the bar area that will earn its keep rather well when the playing fields are all in use, especially in the winter when supporters feel the cold.

The café could be themed for different uses by day and evening hosting both tea dances for seniors and the youth club for younger people. We're not suggesting it will be like Starbucks but if it was done right, it could draw lunchtime soup and a sandwich clientele from Lancaster Way and host parent and baby mornings etc.



THE WITCHFORD VILLAGE HALL, CURRENTLY MANAGED BY THE WITCHFORD PLAYING FIELDS ASSOCIATION IS AT THE EDGE OF THE VILLAGE.

THE BUILDING WAS BUILT IN 1990





- 1. EXTERNAL VIEW FROM THE CAR PARK
- 2. EXTERNAL VIEW FROM THE PLAYING FIELDS
- 3. INTERIOR
- 4. INTERIOR

CONCEPT PROPOSAL - SCHEME A

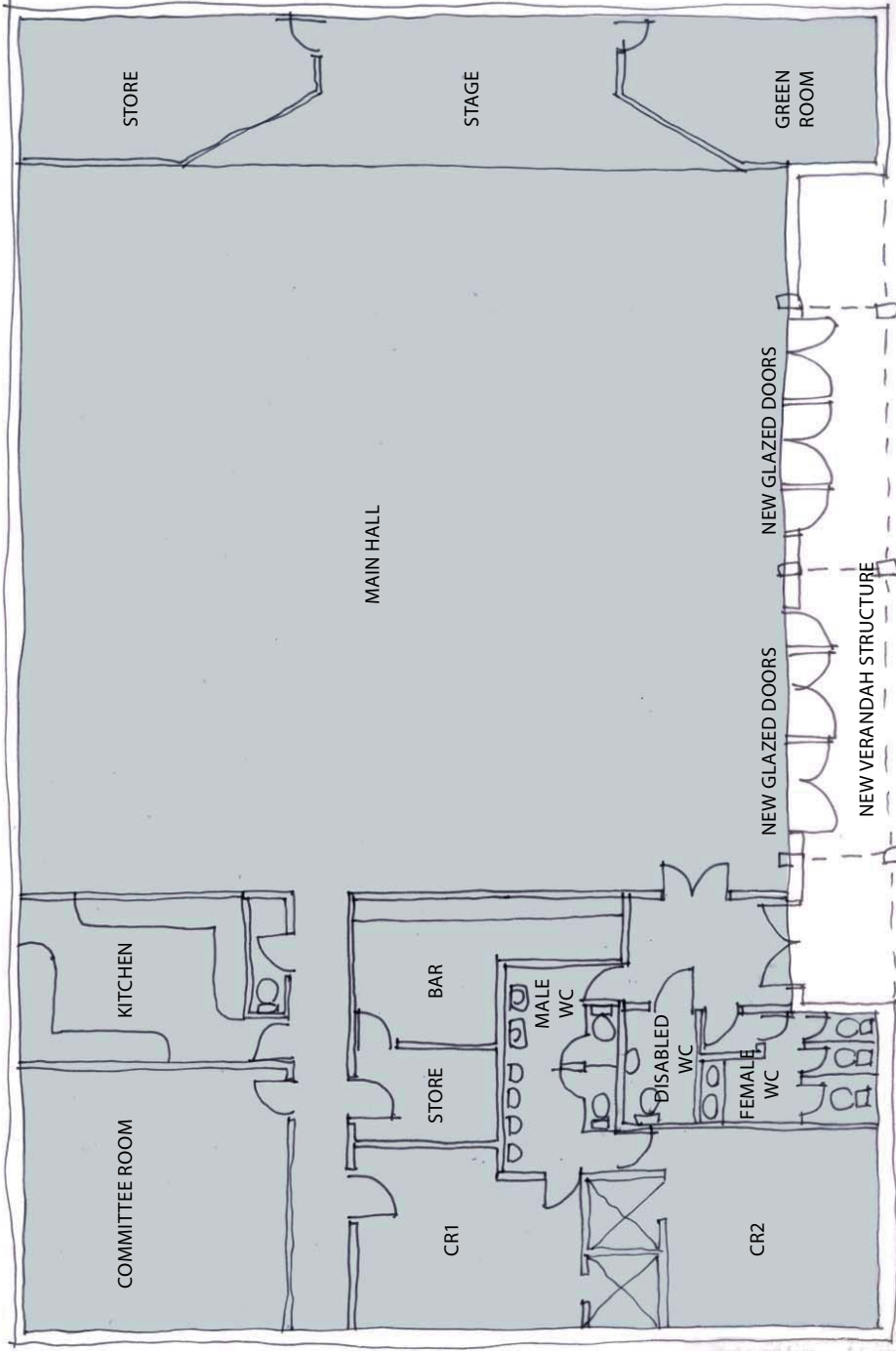
NEW FINISHES THROUGHOUT AND PLASTER AND PAINT FACEBRICK WALLS.

OPEN UP THE EAST WALL TO ALLOW IN MORE NATURAL LIGHT AND VIEWS ONTO THE PLAYING FIELDS.

INTRODUCE A LIGHTWEIGHT VERANDAH STRUCTURE AND BETTER QUALITY EXTERNAL FINISHES TO ALLOW PEOPLE TO SIT OUTSIDE.

EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY TO TAKE OUT THE CEILING, PAINT THE RAFTERS WHITE AND INTRODUCE NORTH LIGHTS TO LIGHTEN THE HALL AND GIVE IT A BETTER LIGHT QUALITY AND SPACE.

USE SUSTAINABLE, RECYCLED, TACTILE MATERIALS WHERE APPROPRIATE.



CONCEPT PROPOSAL - SCHEME B

NEW FINISHES THROUGHOUT AND PLASTER AND PAINT FACEBRICK WALLS.

THE PROPOSAL SHOWS HOW THE LADIES AND MENS WCs WITH CHANGING AND SHOWER CAN BE RE-ORGANISED TO CONFORM TO GRASS ROOTS FOOTBALL DESIGN GUIDANCE.

INTRODUCING TWO SEPERATE AMBULANT CHANGING ROOMS AND ENLARGING THE DISABLED WC TO INCLUDE A DISABLED SHOWER ALLOWS BETTER FACILITIES FOR DISABLED USERS AND POTENTIAL FOR SEPERATE CHANGING FOR MATCH OFFICIALS.

PROVIDE A NEW BAR COUNTER THAT IS TACTILE AND SCULPTURAL.

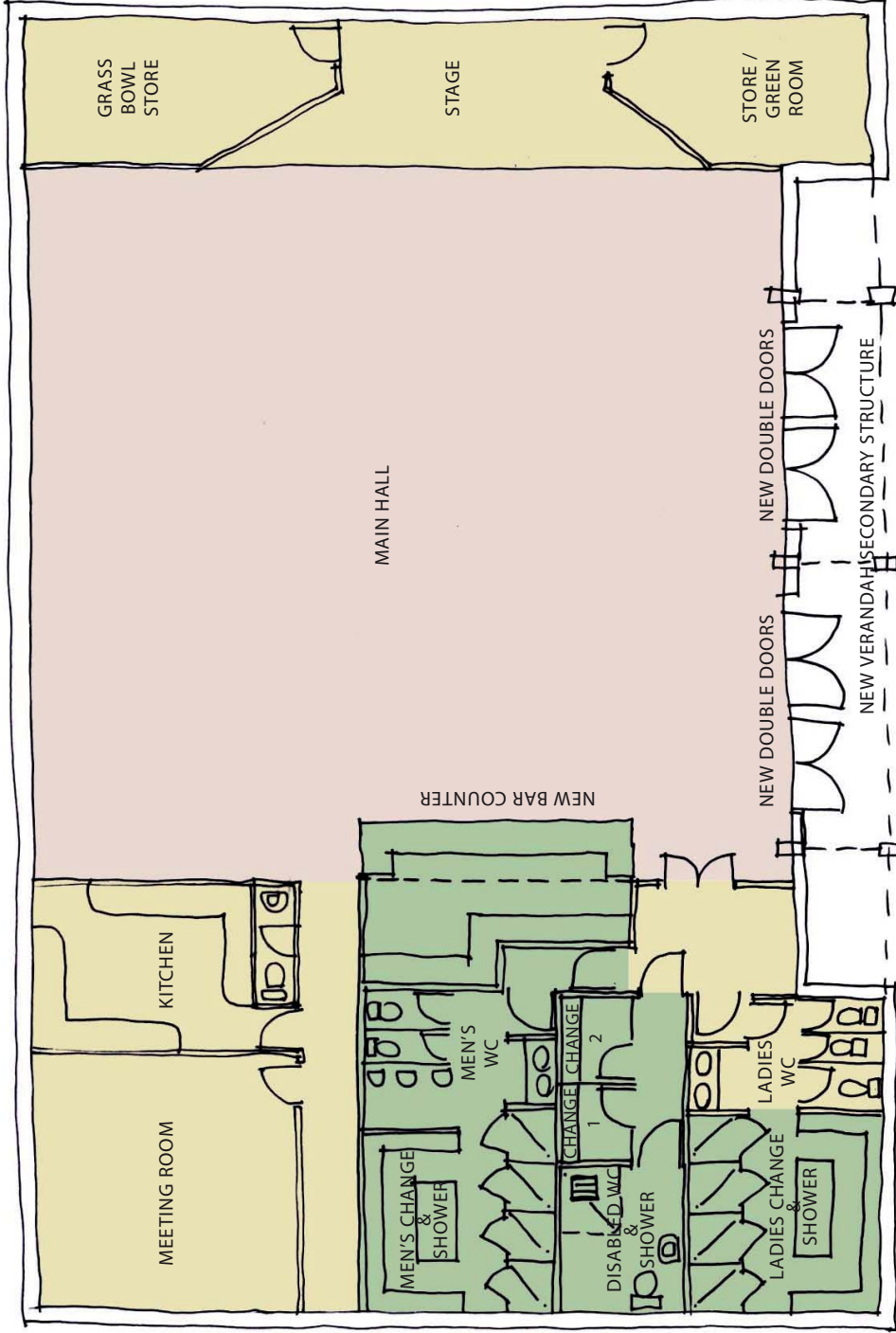
OPEN UP THE EAST WALL TO ALLOW IN MORE NATURAL LIGHT AND VIEWS ONTO THE PLAYING FIELDS.

INTRODUCE A LIGHTWEIGHT VERANDAH STRUCTURE AND BETTER QUALITY EXTERNAL FINISHES TO ALLOW PEOPLE TO SIT OUTSIDE.

EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY TO TAKE OUT THE CEILING, PAINT THE RAFTERS WHITE AND INTRODUCE NORTH LIGHTS TO LIGHTEN THE HALL AND GIVE IT A BETTER LIGHT QUALITY AND SPACE.

CONSIDER OVERCLADDING THE CAR PARK FACADE OR USING A GREEN WALL TO SCREEN SOME OF THE FACADE.

USE SUSTAINABLE, RECYCLED, TACTILE MATERIALS WHERE APPROPRIATE.



CONCEPT PROPOSAL - SCHEME C

NEW FINISHES THROUGHOUT AND PLASTER AND PAINT FACEBRICK WALLS.

ASSUME THAT CHANGING FACILITIES WILL BE PROVIDED ELSEWHERE, TO FA STANDARDS.

PROVIDE A NEW BAR COUNTER THAT IS TACTILE AND SCULPTURAL. MOVE KITCHEN TO FORM CATERING BLOCK.

PROVIDE FLEXIBLE MEETING ROOM SPACE ALONG WEST WALL.

PROVIDE AN EXPANDABLE STAGE FOR THEATRE PRODUCTIONS

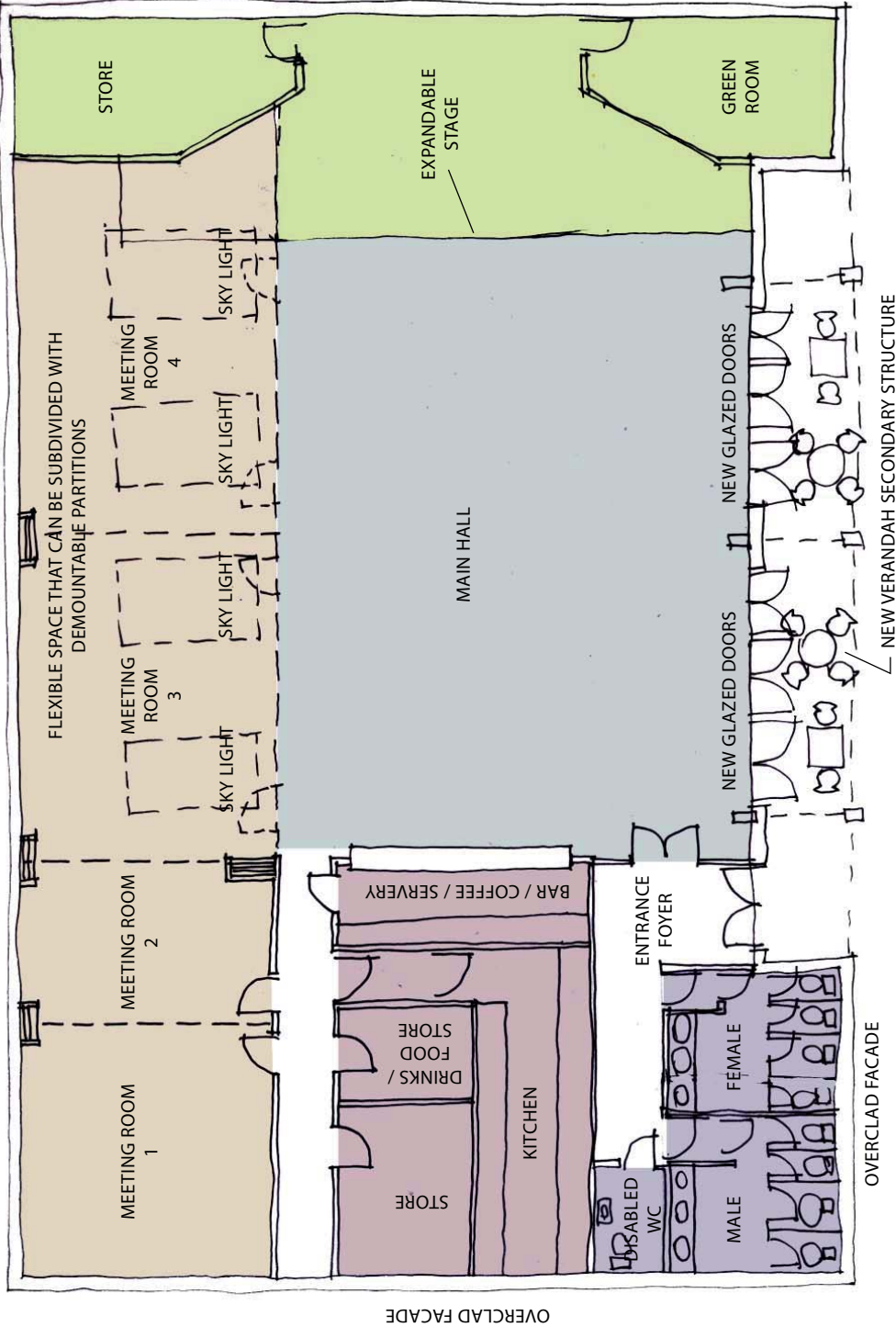
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CONSIDER OVERCLADDING THE CAR PARK FACADE OR USING A GREEN WALL TO SCREEN SOME OF THE FACADE.

USE SUSTAINABLE, RECYCLED, TACTILE MATERIALS WHERE APPROPRIATE.



OVERCLAD FACADE

facilities CULTURE
FAMILIES GROUPS
Lifestyles community
ACCESS
ENGAGEMENT activities
participation arts
HERITAGE youth seniors ENTERTAINMENT
development

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