

# **Alderley Edge Festival Hall**

## **Business Plan**

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# 1. Summary

The Festival Hall is a unique facility within Alderley Edge and its surroundings. Newly refurbished, with a brand new Medical Centre, it presents both an opportunity and considerable challenges to the Parish Council.

## 1.1 Strengths and Opportunities

The Festival Hall's positive features are:

- The Hall is an **attractive, newly refurbished building – with an interesting history.**
- It provides a **unique combination of facilities:** a large 300 seater Hall, together with (subject to completion of the current refurbishment program) three meeting rooms: one ground floor with disabled access and two on the first floor, a large bar and kitchen facilities.
- A **favourable location** – close to Manchester and its southern fringes, but also offering a semi-rural location adjacent to the National Trust owned Edge
- **Good communications:** The Hall is five minutes walk from Alderley Edge railway station, with direct links from there to Manchester Airport and Manchester City Centre. It is also well served with local motorway connections.
- The **name of Alderley Edge** may not always have the most positive of reputations, but it is well-known and has a distinctive cachet, which can add to its appeal, for example as a wedding venue.
- **High local wealth:** Alderley Edge residents tend to enjoy higher levels of disposable income than other areas, which opens up potential for the use of the Hall as a venue for private social events.
- **Local Business:** The Hall has a number of local businesses and is located close to a large number of substantial business parks, such as the Atlas Business Park at Manchester Airport and the Towers near Cheadle.
- **Alderley Park:** The new bioscience park at Alderley Park is bringing in new leading edge businesses into the area, though the potential of these to bring new visitors to the Festival Hall is as yet not easy to assess.

## 1.2 Weaknesses and Threats

The challenges that the Festival Hall faces are:

- **Financial Resources:** The Festival Hall is currently loss-making and has to be funded by the local taxpayer and through voluntary fundraising.

In addition, the Parish Council has had to deal with the consequences of severe under-budgeting for the construction of the Medical Centre and the Festival Hall. This has resulted in the need to increase borrowings by £0.5m, and to engage in time-consuming fundraising activities to complete the Festival Hall. These financial constraints have as a consequence placed limits on the ability of the Parish Council to invest in the marketing and development of the Hall.

- **Management and Staff:** The Hall currently employs a Festival Hall Manager, supported by a caretaker and casual staff. This is not sufficient management and staff resource to deliver sustainable success in the future.
- **Internal Processes:** There is a need to introduce more formal internal systems to handle the processes from inquiry through to delivery of services to ensure that a consistent service is provided to customers, with an acceptable financial return to the Hall.
- **Marketing:** The facilities offered by the Festival Hall are not widely recognized, including by local residents. We need to do more to increase awareness, through more effective marketing, including to local businesses.
- **Car Parking:** The car park provides space for 41 cars (including two disabled spaces), with further adjacent on-street car parking. To match the capacity of the Hall, the Hall should have a minimum of 100 spaces – ideally more.
- **Seasonality of Demand:** The Festival Hall currently suffers from severe seasonality of demand, with peaks in Spring and in the months leading up to Christmas, and troughs in the New Year and over the summer months. Special action will be required to manage these seasonal effects.
- **Hall facilities:** Additional work is required to upgrade the Hall’s facilities if it is to deliver the objectives set out in this Plan. These include:
  - Kitchen facilities
  - Hall curtain
  - Stage
  - Storage
  - Sound and lighting
- **Green space:** Although the Hall faces the Heyes Lane allotments it does not have any green space of its own. For the most part this is not a major problem, but it means that the Hall lacks an attractive location for photos to be taken. This is especially relevant for the Hall’s use as a wedding reception venue.

### **1.3 Longer term management of the Site**

The Hall is owned and managed by Alderley Edge Parish Council. The Council comprises 9 Parish Councillors, all part-time and unpaid, supported by a part-time Clerk. We believe that this is not sufficient resource to manage and develop a facility of this scale and complexity.

### **1.4 Purpose of this Plan**

This Plan considers what is unique about the Hall within its local market and how we might build on that to make it both financially stronger and increase its role in village life. This Plan also identifies the constraints that the Hall faces and how these might be addressed.

### **1.5 Vision**

Our objective is to make the Hall a commercially self-sustaining space for music and dance, and an attractive venue for weddings, parties and corporate events.

We also want to raise the Hall's profile within the village, so that it becomes a popular and well-used venue for local groups and societies, who will be able to use its facilities at lower rates than our standard public rates.

We believe that it is important that the Hall remains a high prestige venue, maintained and developed to professional standards.

## **1.6 Financial**

### **Action Plan**

The focus of the Business Plan is to address as a priority three main areas, which we believe are critical to delivering the vision:

**1. Internal systems and procedures:** We shall implement more formal and standardised procedures to cover core processes, including:

- Bookings
- Pricing
- Stock management
- Hall maintenance
- Reporting

**2. Management and staffing:** We shall review current staffing levels and skill requirements and recruit where necessary. As a priority we need to recruit a full time supervisor reporting directly to the Hall Manager.

**3. Marketing:** Principal areas for development focused on the key target markets identified in the Vision:

- Website
- Leaflets and other promotional material targeted at
  - Weddings
  - Parties
  - Corporate events
- PR to promote the Festival and its events program through online media, press and Parish Council newsletter
- Social Media: Continue and develop marketing via social media

## **2. Introduction**

### **Scope of this Plan**

#### **Festival Hall**

For the most part this Plan covers the Festival Hall only.

#### **Medical Centre**

This Plan does not directly address plans for the Medical Centre, which – with the exception of shared parking - operates largely as a separate entity from the Hall.

#### **Longer Term Management of the Hall and Medical Centre**

However, this Plan does include consideration of the medium and long term challenges for the Parish Council of managing what is an exceptionally complex facility, comprising a large number of different users.

The management of such a facility would be testing for a well-funded professional private business, specializing in managing Medical Centres and Leisure Facilities. For a cash-restrained Parish Council comprising 9 unpaid part time Councillors and a part time clerk, it is unsustainable, and this must be addressed as part of the planning for the Festival Hall.

## **3. Background**

### **3.1 History**

The Festival Hall was built in 1928. Over the years it has provided the main venue for the annual Alderley Edge Music Festival and has acted as a community hall, hosting many other events such as weddings, dances and concerts.

The Hall was sold to a private buyer in 1938, who then re-named it the "Regal Assembly Rooms". For a time it was used as a cinema and ballroom and on occasion was also used as a venue for wrestling matches.

Subsequent financial problems resulted in the Hall being taken over by Macclesfield Borough Council. Over the ensuing years, the original Festival Hall developed a number of structural problems. It also became increasingly outdated, with an unappealing interior layout, limited facilities a shabby exterior.

In 2006 Macclesfield Borough Council agreed to transfer the Hall to Alderley Edge Parish Council for a nominal sum, together with a 'dowry' of £300,000 to cover the identified refurbishment costs. That sum was not transferred to the Parish Council until 2015, by which time renovation costs had increased substantially – to more than twice that sum.

### **3.2 Renovation**

In 2015 works began on the Hall to renovate it. The front of the Hall was demolished and a new Medical Centre built in its place.

The existing Hall at the back of the building was reconfigured to provide a large level floor area, with a new bar at the back of the Hall, a new entrance foyer and new toilets, included a disabled unit. The windows of the main hall were opened up again, having been blanked over during the Hall's period as a cinema.

This has created an appealing bright, open space. The addition of electric blinds to the windows allows the Hall to be darkened when required.

Through the generosity of the Emerson Foundation a ground floor meeting room was also constructed alongside the entrance foyer, with a linking door through to the bar.

### **3.3 Friends of the Festival Hall**

In 2015 the Parish Council invited a number of local residents with relevant skills to form an Advisory Group, designed to help take the Hall forward.

That Group has developed a number of funding initiatives, including forming a Friends of the Festival Hall group, which is working to encourage local residents to contribute to the success of the Hall through donations and fundraising events.

So far the group has successfully raised a total of over £80,000:

- £30,000 from the Alderley Edge Institute Trust to fund electric blinds, stage lighting and additional staging
- £7,000 from private donors to fund acoustic panels and to cover architects fees
- £42,000 (net) from WREN to cover most of the costs of refurbishing the first floor at the rear of the Hall
- £1,320 from private donors to purchase historic photographs to display on the walls of the Hall

### **3.4 Current Facilities**

The new Hall measures 24m x 12m, giving some 290sqm (or 3000sqft) of floor space,) with a seated capacity of 250 at tables and a total capacity of up to 320 people, with space for a stage.

The Emerson Suite can accommodate up to a further 50 people.

The large bar area at the back of the Hall can readily service 300 or more guests with generous space for staff to move freely behind the bar. An adjoining utility area provides for food serving via a hatch to the Hall. The bar also has a door leading directly to the cellar, which is located on the same level. A further linking door from the bar to the Emerson Suite also allows customers there to be served from the bar. The small kitchen area currently provides only limited facilities.

All the above facilities are wheelchair accessible.

The upstairs first floor at the rear of the Hall is currently still in need of refurbishment, and – because of constraints imposed by the structure and layout, it is not part of the current plans to make that area usable for wheelchair users. There will however continue to be full wheelchair access on the ground floor.

### **3.5 Strengths & Opportunities**

The Hall enjoys a number of advantages, which it needs to make full use of:

#### **Attractive newly refurbished building – with history**

The Festival Hall has benefited from a recent process of refurbishment and now offers attractive facilities, with the added benefit of a history dating back to the 1920s. Whilst the Hall has lost its distinctive frontage, the main Hall does retain some of the interior features in its curved ceiling. It is important the Hall's marketing emphasizes these aspects.

#### **Unique combination of facilities**

Once the final refurbishment of the Festival Hall has been completed the Hall will be able to offer a large Hall, together with three meeting rooms (one ground floor with disabled access and two on the first floor), a large bar and kitchen facilities. No other venue in Alderley Edge can match this.

In particular we believe that the generously sized bar, located within the Hall, is a significant asset which should be fully exploited in the future management of the Hall.

### **Favourable Location**

Like Alderley Edge itself the Hall is well located – close to Manchester and its southern fringes, but also offering a semi-rural location adjacent to the National Trust owned Edge, accessible within ten minutes walk from the Hall.

### **Good communications**

The Hall is five minutes walk from Alderley Edge railway station, with direct links from there to Manchester Airport and Manchester City Centre. It is also well served with local motorway connections.

### **Village Name**

The name of Alderley Edge may not always have the most positive of reputations, but it is well-known and has a distinctive cachet, which can add to its appeal, for example as a wedding venue.

### **High local wealth**

Alderley Edge residents tend to enjoy higher levels of disposable income than other areas, which opens up potential for the use of the Hall as a venue for private social events.

### **Local Business**

The Hall is located close to a large number of substantial business parks, such as the Atlas Business Park at Manchester Airport and the Towers near Cheadle.

### **Alderley Park**

The new bioscience park at Alderley Park is bringing in new leading edge businesses into the area, though the potential of these to bring new visitors to the Festival Hall is as yet not easy to assess.

## **3.6 Weaknesses and Threats**

### **Financial Resources**

The Festival Hall is currently loss-making and has to be funded by the local taxpayer and through voluntary fundraising.

In addition, the Parish Council has had to deal with the consequences of severe under-budgeting for the construction of the Medical Centre. This has resulted in the need to increase borrowings by £0.5m, and to engage in time-consuming fundraising activities to complete the Festival Hall. These financial constraints have as a consequence placed limits on the ability of the Parish Council to invest in the marketing and development of the Hall.

**Management and Staff:** The Hall currently employs a Festival Hall Manager, supported by a caretaker and casual staff. This is not sufficient management and staff resource to deliver sustainable success in the future.

### **Internal Processes**

There is a need to introduce more formal internal systems to handle the processes from inquiry through to delivery of services to ensure that a consistent service is provided to customers, with an acceptable financial return to the Hall. Problems relating to the operation of the EPOS system also require urgent attention.

**Marketing:** The facilities offered by the Festival Hall are not widely recognized, including by local residents. We need to do more to increase awareness, through more effective marketing, including to local businesses.

### **Car Parking**

The car park provides space for 41 cars (including two disabled spaces), with further adjacent on-street car parking. To match the capacity of the Hall, the Hall should have a minimum of 100 spaces – ideally more. The only location for placing such a car park would be on the adjacent allotments.

### **Seasonality of Demand**

The Festival Hall currently suffers from severe seasonality of demand, with peaks in Spring and in the months leading up to Christmas, and troughs in the New Year and over the summer months. Special action will be required to manage these seasonal effects.

### **Kitchen**

The kitchen is currently under-equipped and has only basic facilities – sink, fridge and a second-hand dishwasher. This represents a constraint when seeking to attract events, such as Wedding Receptions and Parties, which typically require facilities for food reheating and serving.

### **Hall acoustics and curtain**

The Hall's acoustics have been improved by the addition of a number of wall-mounted acoustic panels funded by a private donor and by a second hand stage curtain donated by Alderley Edge School for Girls (AESG). This curtain is viewed as a stop-gap until a new curtain – possibly with star lighting can be acquired.

### **Stage**

The Hall has some staging but this is not adequate for orchestras or other larger staged performances. Additional staging would be required for such events. In addition, sound and lighting, though adequate, fall far short of leading venues.

### **Storage**

The Hall has only limited storage space within the building. It has the use of a storage unit located at the back of the car park, but this is of limited capacity and arguably detracts from the appearance of the building.

This lack of storage means that chairs and tables have to be stacked within the Hall, creating an impression of clutter. Refurbishment of the meeting rooms at the back of the Hall would free up space for storage in the room currently occupied by the Parish Clerk.

### **Sound and Lighting**

Investment in new ceiling mounted lighting has provided useful illumination of the stage but the Council should provide for additional lighting in the future, together with the replacement of the currently fairly old sound system

### **Green space**

Although the Hall faces the Heyes Lane allotments it does not have any green space of its own. For the most part this is not a major problem, but it means that the Hall lacks an attractive location for photos to be taken, and whilst most of the allotments are well kept, others are not.

This is especially relevant for the Hall's use as a wedding reception venue.

### **Longer Term Management of the Festival Hall and Medical Centre**

The Hall and Medical Centre are owned and managed by Alderley Edge Parish Council.

Currently its only full-time employee is the Hall Manager, Catherine Jones. In support she has a part-time caretaker and casual staff to man the bar.

The Hall, together with the Medical Centre, is an exceptionally complex facility, comprising a large number of different users. These range from the NHS to private businesses and community groups:

- NHS Medical Centre
- Pharmacy
- Pregnancy Services
- Pilates
- Fitness & Physiotherapy
- Festival Hall hosting a wide range of users:
  - Community groups
  - Public concerts and dances
  - Fitness, Yoga and Slimming Classes
  - Bowling
  - Private parties (children and adults)
  - Private Weddings
  - Corporate Events

Each of these uses has its own unique requirements and places heavy demands on those managing the facility.

The management of such a facility would be testing for a well-funded private business. For a cash-restrained Parish Council comprising 9 unpaid part time Councillors and a part time clerk, it is unsustainable and this must be addressed as part of the longer term planning for the Festival Hall.

## 4. Vision

The Festival Hall has a unique history as a dance and music performance venue, and we believe that there is scope to build on this heritage.

In the recent past the Hall has solely been let out as a rentable space to third parties, with very limited extra services offered. It has been left to users to provide such additional services themselves. We believe that there is scope to increase the Hall income by improving and extending the services on offer.

***Our objective is to make the Hall a commercially self-sustaining space for music and dance, and an attractive venue for weddings, parties and corporate events.***

***We also want to raise the Hall's profile within the village, so that it becomes a popular and well-used venue for local groups and societies, who will be able to use its facilities at favourable rates.***

***We believe that it is important that the Hall remains a high prestige venue, maintained and developed to professional standards.***

There are a number ways in which we believe we can achieve this Vision:

1. By developing packaged services for specific customer needs. This means that instead of simply renting out the Hall on a per-hour basis we would also offer more comprehensive services, making the venue more attractive and profitable.

In the case of weddings this could include offering wedding customers not just use of the Hall, but a package of catering, decoration, flowers, chair covers, bar services and photography.

2. By focusing on key market sectors where we believe the greatest potential lies for the Hall, based on its unique combination of facilities.
3. By staging events organized by the Festival Hall's management. This would entail organizing a mixed programme of events through the year and might include 1960s music nights, theatrical events, concerts and craft fairs. Such events could not only bring in income from ticket sales, but also allow increased bar revenue.

From 2022 on we believe that there should be scope for the Medical Centre to generate a financial surplus that can be used to support the Festival Hall, which is currently loss-making. This is however not covered within the scope of this Plan.

## 5. Market

The Hall is currently used on a regular basis by local bowling clubs, dance schools and societies, and fitness groups.

One-off events include specialist exhibitions including Food & Drink; and Mind, Body and Spirit, as well as dances and other music events (eg Revolution Dance)

It is also used for Parties and, to a limited degree for Wedding Receptions.

We believe that there is scope to build on these and other markets. The potential opportunities are analysed further in Sections 5.2 and 5.3.

### 5.1 Competition

Whilst the Hall offers a unique mix of facilities within Alderley Edge there are other local venues which provide similar or overlapping services:

**The Alderley Edge Hotel** provides full-service wedding facilities for up to 120 guests, with function rooms, bar and restaurant and accommodation (50 rooms).

It also caters for the corporate market by offering a Conference Room which can hold up to 90 attendees in a theatre room style and 30 attendees in board room or u-shape format. It also offers two syndicate venue rooms, which are suitable for 10 to 18 delegates.

**Mottram Hall** is a member of the QHotels Group which comprises 26 four-star hotels across the UK. It is an 18th Century Georgian country house hotel set in 270 acres of parkland and offers a wide range of facilities including a championship golf course, health club and spa, conference facilities, champagne bar and an AA rosette restaurant. It also offers 120 bedrooms. The hotel has a dedicated team of wedding organisers and packages start at £5000 for a minimum of 60 and maximum capacity of a 140 guests for a Wedding Breakfast and 180 guests for an Evening Reception..

**The De Trafford Arms** is a Chef & Brewer pub, with 31 guest bedrooms, restaurant and bar. It also has a meeting room which can accommodate up to 15 people. The pub lets this room out to regular patrons at no charge.

**The Union Club** is a member-only venue providing darts, snooker, crown green bowling and bar facilities. It runs regular comedy and music nights and an annual beer festival. The Club does have a single meeting room which it lets out on occasion for a nominal fee and which can accommodate up to 30 people. Facilities are relatively basic rather than luxurious.

**The Drum & Monkey** is a Robinsons owned pub, which offers bar and restaurant facilities and a single upstairs meeting room let out for a nominal fee. The room is compromised by structural pillars which limit its use for presentations.

**Alderley Edge Methodist Church** hosts music concerts in the church and has a meeting room at the rear, with catering facilities. The Alderley Edge Orchestra regularly performs in the Church.

**Alderley Edge Scout Hut** provides limited facilities, with some off-road parking, in a traditional wooden scout hut. It is regularly used for fitness classes, Mums and Tots and as rehearsal space for the AE Orchestra.

**Wilmslow Leisure Centre** is primarily a fitness venue offering swimming, gym and fitness classes. It is operated by Everybody Sport & Recreation, which is ultimately owned by Cheshire East Council. Everybody is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity and is governed by a board of trustees who act in a voluntary capacity to ensure that it is governed in accordance with its charitable objectives. The board has 11 members, of which 2 are representatives of Cheshire East Council. Trustees serve on the board for a term of up to three years.

The Leisure Centre's Evans Theatre is mainly used as a sports hall, but can be converted into a theatre with banked seating and stage facilities. Its tiered seating can accommodate 299 people with space for additional ground-level seats in front if required. It is regularly used for concerts, shows and selected sporting events (notably boxing).

The Evans suite alongside the Hall also offers meeting facilities for up to 42 people. There are no bar facilities.

**Mottram St Andrew Village Hall** is a traditional village hall located two miles from the Festival Hall.

### **5.1.1 Positioning the Festival Hall in relation to Competition**

The Festival Hall provides a unique and stylish performance space within the village of Alderley Edge.

No other local venue can match its ability to accommodate over 300 people seated in the main Hall, with a modern, spacious and well-stocked bar. The addition of further meeting rooms will add to its appeal as a venue for corporate events.

At the same time it must be recognized that the Festival Hall cannot offer facilities on a par with the most prestigious hotels as a wedding or corporate venue. It has neither the grounds, the accommodation nor the other leisure activities, such as golf, that are offered by the high-end wedding venues. It also has limited car parking and no suitable settings for photography.

## 5.2 Existing Markets

Current business can be split into three categories:

1. **Recurring Events**, ie events which are held weekly or monthly on a regular basis
2. **One-off public events**, ie events organized by third parties and open to the public
3. **One-off private events**, ie events organized by individuals and restricted only to invited guests

These are examined further below.

### 5.2.1 Recurring Events

These include Indoor Bowling (from end September to end March), as well as regular Dance classes, Fitness classes, Children's activities, dog training classes, etc. Current recurring users of the Festival Hall are listed at Appendix 1.

**Bowling:** The Hall is used in winter months by a number of organisations: Wilmslow Probus, Wilmslow Ladies, Alderley Edge Probus, Alderley Edge Ladies, Knutsford Probus, Tatton Probus and U3A. The Hall is also used on two evenings a week for local bowling league competitions.

This is a steady revenue earner, which makes good use of the Hall during daytime hours. There is little scope to extend this business and the main challenge is to operate it in a more efficient manner to make best use of our limited manpower - for example, in serving refreshments and collecting bowling fees.

**Action:** *Review charging structures and introduce a more stable subscription basis for bowling charges to reduce manpower input, eg for set-up, collecting fees each week and serving refreshments.*

**Classes:** The number of groups using the Hall has recently increased significantly due to marketing efforts by the Hall Manager and we believe there is additional potential to pursue this market.

Currently the Hall hosts regular classes organized by third parties covering Yoga, Pilates, Slimming and Dance. We believe that both the Hall and the meeting rooms offer scope to extend the Hall's use for activities of this kind, including for dog training classes.

**Action:** *Explore scope for Wilmslow Guild to offer classes in Alderley Edge. Also explore additional childrens classes, eg Kumon, as well as other class organisers.*

### **5.2.2 One-off public events**

These include the Alderley Edge Music & Drama Festival, Concerts, Dances, Exhibitions and Fairs. Many of these are well-established, but many function only once a year. Examples are:

#### **Alderley Edge Music & Drama Festival**

The Alderley Edge Music & Drama Festival is an annual event, which runs for one week in May. The Festival Hall was originally constructed to host this event and it celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> staging in 2016. It draws in children and families primarily from schools in a 10 mile radius of Alderley Edge, though some participants come from further afield.

The Parish Council does not currently charge the Music Festival for the use of the Hall and related facilities, and it does not intend to change this arrangement in the foreseeable future.

The Festival Hall does however have the ability to generate funds from the event through:

- Bar income
- Promotion of the FH's facilities to visitors for other events
- Extending the Festival (under a different name) to accommodate for a similar event devoted, for example, to the visual arts or popular music
- Organising events featuring past Music Festival performers
- Donations in money or kind from the Music Festival Committee. The Music Festival Committee has expressed a willingness to help the Festival Hall to improve facilities, for example through funding items such as a new curtain for the back of the Hall.

Such donations will help facilitate the running of the Festival or reduce its annual costs (for example by eliminating the need to hire in equipment). These facilities will at the same time be available to other users of the Hall - providing a gain for both the Hall and the Festival.

#### **Concerts**

In December 2016 the Hall hosted a successful charity concert staged by Alderley Edge School for Girls and the Alderley Edge Orchestra. However this event did also highlight the shortcomings of stage and lighting for a full orchestra.

The Hall has also hosted Cheshire Acapella, Lions Brass Band and Cheshire Light Opera.

There could be an opportunity for the Hall to host its own shows, but clearly this carries greater commercial risk as the Hall would have to bear marketing costs and carry any losses that might result from poor ticket sales.

As an example the Manager has investigated is a Motown evening, for which the cost of band and lighting are estimated at £2,000. An estimated ticket cost of £18 per ticket would provide breakeven at just over 100 tickets sold (against a capacity of 250), with additional revenue from bar sales.

At say 200 tickets sold and an additional £15/person bar spending then net income from such an event would be £3600 (ticket sales) + £3000 from bar sales

= £6600. Deducting band and bar supplies would provide net income of some £2800, excluding costs of bar staff and marketing the event.

Given the commercial risks of such an event the Hall Manager is currently exploring joint venture opportunities with experienced event promoters. An example was the recent Beer Festival, which was run by an outside company, with the Festival Hall only earning revenue from letting the space. The Festival was poorly marketed and was not successful, but the Hall earned a guaranteed revenue from the hire.

***Action: Identify how the Festival Hall might be promoted as a Concert venue***

### **Dances**

The Hall currently hosts some 20 dances each year, including salsa, tea dances, line dancing and modern jive.

***Action: : Identify how the Festival Hall might be promoted as a Dance venue***

### **Exhibitions and Fairs**

The Hall currently hosts a number of exhibitions each year, including Art, Food & Drink, and Mind, Body and Spirit. It also hosts the annual Allotment Society Show.

There is additional scope, with appropriate marketing, to attract exhibitions covering other topics, such as Wedding, Antiques, Crafts, etc

Consideration should also be given to exhibitions and fairs organized by the Festival Hall itself, for example a Christmas Fair. The Hall could host up to 40 stalls @ £20 per stall, with additional space in the Emerson Suite. Together with revenue from bar and other refreshments income of £1000-1500 could be achieved. Arguments against such a move include:

- Resource required to organise and promote the event
- Past experience of the Farmers Market at the Festival Hall
- Risk of overlapping other third party events held at the Hall

***Action: Identify how the Festival Hall might be promoted as an Exhibition venue***

### **5.2.3 One-off Private events**

The Festival Hall has provided a venue for a limited number of weddings, but we believe that there is scope to build on this and increase income accordingly. The Hall has also proved to be a popular venue for parties, especially children's parties.

#### **Wedding Receptions**

Competitor analysis shows that there are a number of highly professional established wedding venues around the area, which can offer catering, accommodation, attractive grounds for photography, parking and an appealing 'ambiance'. Mottram Hall and the Alderley Edge Hotel are prime examples.

The Festival Hall cannot match these. We are not in a position to provide accommodation, our parking is limited and the adjoining allotments do not provide an attractive backcloth for photography.

However we have hosted one or two weddings and we believe that the Hall has potential as an attractive and cost-effective venue offering space for 150 guests, with space for dancing, together with additional rooms for relaxing in (notably the Emerson Suite and, in due course, the upstairs meeting rooms at the rear of the building.

By offering a package of services to include flowers, catering, decoration and entertainment, provided by identified 3<sup>rd</sup> parties the Festival Hall could cater for those seeking a distinctive venue priced below the prime local venues.

The Hall Manager believes that revenue per event of £1800 (excl VAT) plus related bar income, is achievable.

***Action: Investigate potential suppliers of complementary products and services (florists, caterers, etc) and draw up a range of packaged wedding solutions.***

#### **Parties**

The Hall's reputation has grown over the last six months as an appealing and spacious venue for birthday parties, particularly for children. It appears that the Hall is attractive because it combines space in the Hall with an attractive bar for parents to relax at, whilst they are still able to supervise their children's activities.

The Hall Manager believes that there is scope to increase sales in this sector of the market by

- building the package to add food
- have contacts in place for parties eg Entertainers, DJs, decorative elements as well like balloons and age decorations
- offer additional facilities such as a soft play area and small indoor bouncy castle
- promote the Hall as a uniquely parent and child-friendly party venue

The minimum birthday party hire charge is currently £84, rising to £120 with bar.

### **5.3 Potential New Markets**

In this section we consider activities and events which the Hall does not currently cater for, but which it potentially could, given its existing facilities, or with low-cost additions.

#### **Corporate Events**

To date the Hall has only been used by businesses for Christmas Parties by the Emerson Group, or for limited social events by Chess. The addition of two further meeting rooms at the back of the Hall, together with improved catering facilities, should increase its appeal for corporate users.

#### **Theatre**

The Hall's attractiveness as a theatrical venue is constrained by lack of back stage space, limited lighting and sound systems. However there is scope to attract touring theatrical groups, which do not generally require back-stage facilities, or groups who perform in the round. The same can apply to stand-up comedy performances.

***Action: Explore potential of Cheshire Rural Touring Association and other touring theatre companies***

#### **Film**

Entering this market would pitch the Hall against commercial cinemas, including the Curzon in Knutsford, all of which offer theatre-grade seating with high quality sound systems.

At present the Hall is not resourced to cater for this market, but a bespoke offering, for example featuring classic films and including dinner and drinks, might open up an alternative market.

At the moment, without further definition, this remains a low priority, speculative market.

#### **Childrens' Holiday Schools**

The Hall tends to be underutilized over the summer months, so this could be an attractive market for organisations offering a mix of different indoor activities targeted at children.

***Action: Explore potential Hall users in this market and promote for 2018***

## 6. Marketing and Promotion

### Website

The existing Festival Hall website is a stop-gap. It is a high priority to redesign it to create a professional site focused on the key markets that the Festival Hall serves.

To this end it should have sections devoted to

- Weddings
- Social Functions
- Exhibitions and Fairs
- Corporate Events
- Classes
- Description of Facilities
- Events calendar
- Disabled access statement
- Online Booking Form
- Contact information

Budgeted cost: £5,000 in September 2017

### Social Media

- Twitter
- Facebook

It is important that any social media presence is maintained on a purely business-like basis, with any one-to-one discussion handled separately by phone or email.

### Press (including online media)

Regular articles should be submitted to local media, notably alderleyedge.com and the Wilmslow Guardian. A limited budget should be retained for this purpose.

### Printed materials

The Hall requires a leaflet pack similar to that produced by Sandbach Town Hall to promote its services as:

- **A Wedding venue:**  
<http://www.sandbach.gov.uk/sites/sandbach.gov.uk/files/docs/stc-promo-pack-leaflets-dl-wedding-nov14.pdf>
- **A Corporate Events venue:**  
<http://www.sandbach.gov.uk/sites/sandbach.gov.uk/files/docs/stc-promo-pack-leaflets-dl-corporate-events-nov14.pdf>
- **A Community Activities venue:**  
<http://www.sandbach.gov.uk/sites/sandbach.gov.uk/files/docs/stc-promo-pack-leaflets-dl-community-nov14.pdf>

- **A Party and Special Events venue:**  
<http://www.sandbach.gov.uk/sites/sandbach.gov.uk/files/docs/stc-promo-pack-leaflets-dl-occasions-nov14.pdf>
- **A general venue guide** (Leaflet setting out room sizes and layouts):  
<http://www.sandbach.gov.uk/sites/sandbach.gov.uk/files/docs/stc-promo-pack-leaflets-dl-room-layouts-nov14.pdf>

The same content should be included on the website.

### **Programme of Events**

For 2018 the Festival Hall should produce an Events listing for the coming half year, which will include public events booked by third party organisations, including the Music Festival, together with any events which the Festival Hall itself plans to organise.

## **7. Operations and Resources**

### **7.1 Operations**

The growth in the Hall's business over the last 6 months has highlighted a number of serious shortcomings in its internal systems. In particular action is in hand to address setting up robust systems for

- Stock control
- Pricing
- Recording of Wastage
- Hall bookings
- Utilisation levels of the Hall and Meeting Room(s)
- Operations Manual
- Key-holding records

### **7.2 Resources**

#### **7.2.1 Management and staffing**

The Hall currently employs a full time manager, supported by a part time caretaker and casual bar staff when required for specific events.

The Hall currently has insufficient staff to meet the needs of a growing business and the Plan calls for the employment of a full time Assistant Manager with experience of bar work and administration. The Plan assumes that such an individual will command a salary of up to £20,000pa and be recruited by October 2017.

#### **7.2.2 Other Resources**

Currently identified additional requirements for the Festival Hall are as follows:

- Seat covers for weddings
- Kitchen equipment
- Additional staging
- Drinks dispensers
- New curtain for end wall of Hall

These will be acquired through funding provided by the Parish Council, as well as through the fundraising activities of the Friends of the Festival Hall.

Longer term, as traffic through the Hall increases, then opportunities for sponsorship of individual rooms, or of the Festival Hall bar, could also be explored.

## 8. Finances

### 8.1 Five Year Forecast

Five year sales and cost forecasts for the Festival Hall are set out in detail in a separate Excel spreadsheet titled 'Festival Hall Forecast'

In summary the figures are as set out below. Note that these are for calendar years, not for the Parish Council years, which run from April to end March.

	<b>2017 Jan-June Actual</b>	<b>2017 Full Year</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
<b>Sales</b>	£23,812	£50,812	£64,000	£74,000	£83,000	£91,500
<b>Costs</b>	£48,077	£116,742	£127,010	£131,030	£136,900	£144,470
<b>Net</b>	-£24,265	-£65,930	-£63,010	-£57,030	-£53,900	-£52,970

Assumptions underlying this forecast are

1. Recruitment of an Assistant Manager at a salary of £18-20K in Q3 2017
2. Implementation of process improvements in Q3-4 2017 to ensure consistent order handling, higher pricing, better stock control, reduced costs for managing events and more effective financial controls
3. £8,000 spending on marketing 2H 2017 to produce leaflets and a new website to promote the use of the Hall as a venue for:
  - a. Weddings
  - b. Corporate Events
  - c. Private Parties
  - d. Entertainments such as Comedy Nights, Concerts and Dances
  - e. Trade Fairs/Exhibitions

### 8.2 Capital Value

The Festival Hall and Medical Centre are currently valued as follows:

Medical Centre:       £3.5m (Insurance value)  
Festival Hall:         £2.2m (Capital Value)

Note: It is unlikely that these reflect actual market values.

## 9. Action Plan

### 9.1 Short Term Action Plan

The Action Plan is set out in a separate document, which addresses key management issues for the Festival Hall over the coming 12 months.

The Actions in this plan focus particularly on:

- Improving financial and accounting systems together with reporting
- Improving internal operating processes to ensure greater consistency and cost effectiveness
- Improving the control of stock
- Management resources
- Marketing

Councillors will – if they agree - support the Hall Manager as follows:

- Accounts: Myles Garbett
- IT systems: Myles Garbett
- Marketing: Geoff Hall, Mike Dudley-Jones
- Internal Processes: Rachael Grantham, Ilana Higham

### 9.2 Longer Term Action Plan

It is our assessment that the management of a large facility such as the Festival Hall and its associated Medical Centre is beyond the normal scope of a Parish Council of such limited resources.

The Council must therefore consider all options for the longer term ownership and management of the facility.

These could include (but are not limited to) the following:

- **No change** to the current arrangements, with the Hall and Medical Centre continuing to be directly managed by the Parish Council. For this to be sustainable the Council will need to be clear that it can guarantee the necessary management resources to make the facility viable.
- **Creating a separate management structure** for the Festival Hall. This body might comprise Parish Councillors and volunteers from the village with relevant business skills. This will require an exceptionally high level of commitment and professionalism from the volunteers concerned.
- **Create a partnership** similar to that operated by Cheshire East's Leisure Centres, which operate under the Everybody name. (Everybody Sport & Recreation is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity - governed by a board of trustees who act in a voluntary capacity, bringing their skills and knowledge from many diverse professional and personal

backgrounds to give the trust its strategic direction and to ensure that it is governed in accordance with its charitable objectives. The Chief Executive of Everybody is accountable to the trustees to deliver the Trust's objectives through the management team. The board has 11 members, of which 2 are representatives of Cheshire East Council. Trustees serve on the board for a term of up to three years).

- **Sell the Medical Centre** to a third party which specializes in the management of GP surgeries (eg Assura, Primary Health Properties) – with appropriate provision to ensure that the Festival Hall is properly protected for future generations.

## **10. Risks**

The following risks are identified under this Plan:

### **10.1 Income**

Whilst Festival Hall Income has grown over the last 12 months, we do not yet have a stable trading record to draw on.

There have been a number of positive signs, notably the success of recent events, such as the Pink Floyd Tribute night and the Jason Manford Comedy Club, but further work will be required to build on this to the point where the Festival Hall can stage its own events and so improve its income from them.

### **10.2 Internal Systems**

Recent sales growth has highlighted shortcomings in internal management systems and the success of the plan hinges on resolving and improving those issues over the next 6 months.

In particular action is required to resolve ongoing bar stock and till operating problems.

### **10.3 Costs**

Employment costs represent a substantial proportion of total operating costs. In the half year from January to June 2017 employment costs were as follows:

Salaries	£11,967
Tax/NI	£3,932
Pensions	£4,281
Casual Staff	£4,334
Total	£24,514

These employment costs represented 51% of total costs over the same period, of which Casual staff accounted for 18% of total costs. The Plan has been produced on the conservative assumption that this ratio will not improve over the Plan period.

Other costs – notably marketing – are discretionary.

### **10.4 Parish Council Reserves**

Any requirement for the Parish Council to increase its reserves could adversely impact on the availability of funds to invest in the ongoing development of the Festival Hall.