

Statement by the trustees on sale of land at Caryford Community Hall

1. Caryford Community Hall's trustees announced today that the Association has sold the land which was the subject of a public consultation in the town last year. In the following statement they outline their reasons for concluding the sale.
2. The parcel of land comprises a strip roughly 58 metres by 7 metres on the northern boundary of the hall grounds and is currently road verge, hedge and grass. Disposing of it will not affect the way the hall is used or operated nor the experience of anyone who hires one of the spaces in it.
3. Since 2019, the Hall's redevelopment and extension project has been under way to enlarge the building by providing more rooms for hire and to make it more versatile. Two stages of this three stage scheme have been completed with hiring activity increasing by 71% as a result in the first 12 months after Stage 2 was completed in May 2024.
4. The trustees now need to raise capital to complete the third and final stage and selling this land will enable them to do so. The foyer will be extended by incorporating the former kitchen into it so as to create a new, welcoming entrance and circulation space, linking together the parts built during Stages 1 and 2. The disabled persons' and gents' toilets will be upgraded. Alternative energy sources will be installed to ensure that the new build complies fully with current Building Regulations and to reduce carbon emissions.
5. The trustees alone are responsible for managing the charity in accordance with the law, with Charity Commission guidance and the constitution of the organisation. They are obliged to act only according to the best interests of the charity.
6. Following the consultation, the trustees decided to proceed with the sale because they concluded that this was in the best interests of the charity. They judged that the sale provided a unique, never to be repeated, opportunity to raise capital from the proceeds of sale to benefit the charity.
7. They decided that the prospects of their being able to obtain so large a sum in the foreseeable future from any other source(s) was virtually zero. Without it, there was little chance of the redevelopment being finished in the near to medium future. This would be against the best interests of the charity and those who benefit from it now and in the future. The trustees were also acutely aware that, if they declined the purchaser's offer to buy, then the purchaser could simply pursue several other alternative options to achieve its objective and the benefit would then be enjoyed by another land owner, not by the Hall.
8. As charity law required them to do, they obtained detailed written advice from a suitably qualified valuer on the terms offered for this modest strip of land. The price and other terms offered were independently judged to be the best reasonably obtainable in the circumstances given the unconditional nature of the sale and current market conditions.

9. The sale is not contingent on any future event occurring – such as the grant of a planning permission for the land being disposed of or on any neighbouring land – and the whole net proceeds of sale amounting to nearly £345,000 have now been paid to the charity and will be available to be entirely spent on the final stage of the Hall’s Extension Project.
10. As required by law, before reaching their decision to proceed with the sale the trustees have taken into consideration the responses received to the statutory consultation. That consultation was conducted strictly in accordance with Charity Commission guidance (CC28). This process resulted in the following representations being received:
 - 14 written responses in total
 - 6 clear objections to the proposal from respondents who live in the charity’s Area of Benefit, 2 of whom are members of the charity
 - 7 comments or observations on the proposal not amounting to an objection, some with additional information or suggestion
11. Objectors opposed the sale because this would facilitate development of adjoining land for housing which was considered unacceptable and against the interests of existing residents. Also, it was said that the charity’s reputation would be harmed with residents and with hall users because they feel the town has had too many housing developments already and the presumed purchaser had obtained planning permission for housing on other land near Castle Cary station, which had been strongly opposed in the town.
12. Among other representations received, authors observed/stated that the consultation process was deficient due to a lack of transparency – which would also result in harm to the charity’s reputation; the sale was premature and the charity could obtain a higher price by delaying it; the trustees were asked if they had considered using the proceeds of sale to repay some or all of the grants they had obtained to finance Stage 2 construction costs.
13. In response to these criticisms, the trustees judged that the charity’s statutory consultation was not defective and indeed it exceeded the standards required by the law and expected in Commission guidance for a small, unstaffed charity such as Caryford Community Hall.
14. The trustees noted the very small number of objections to the sale and that only two of the 78 members of the charity opposed it. They also observed that no group or organisation regularly hiring the hall wished the trustees to abandon the sale. No representation had informed the trustees that the sale would be illegal or against the registered aims of the charity, nor had they been told either that the charity’s building or its operations or the benefit which they provide would be harmed by disposing of the land. No one had offered any practical advice as to how the trustees could raise all the funds needed to meet the likely costs of Stage 3 in the near future if this sale did not go ahead.
15. The trustees accepted that any decision to sell would not be supported by some residents of the town and that some short term harm might result to its reputation particularly among those residents who, in 2022, had not supported Stage 2 being partly

paid for from their council tax payments. However, they also understood that no one group or organisation in our growing town, with its population reflecting a wide range of interests and opinions, could expect to be universally supported in all that they do.

16. Furthermore, the objections and other representations were very far from sufficient to outweigh the self evident benefits for those using the hall now or in the future which would result from concluding this sale. Disposing of the strip of land would hasten the early completion of the hall's very protracted improvement scheme and result in a finished building. The trustees had no doubt that, if the land was sold, hirers would continue to hire the hall and that new hirers would be attracted by that finished building.
17. In addition, although the trustees acknowledged that a conditional sale made contingent on the grant of planning permission on some future date might increase the value of the land to be sold, such a process would be so fraught with uncertainty and with the potential for delays as to render it impracticable as a means of funding Stage 3 in the near future and this approach had not therefore been pursued with the purchaser.
18. The trustees noted that some residents might want the proceeds of sale to be used to reduce the loans obtained by the Town and Parish Councils from Central Government to finance grants to the Hall towards the costs of Stage 2. However, the trustees decided that the priority was to finish the long delayed extension scheme and to use all the proceeds for this purpose. Even if they were willing to consider repayment as an option the trustees were also aware that it was HM Treasury policy that grants paid in these circumstances were not, and could not be made into, repayable loans.
19. Lastly, the trustees considered that the planning control system would provide the proper means and appropriate place for objecting to any change of use of land. It was not for them to embark on an assessment of the merits of any future planning application and they were not equipped for doing so.

Date 24 March 2026