Ollerton with Marthall: A Case Study

Ollerton with Marthall Parish consists of the 2 small semi-rural villages of Ollerton and Marthall with a joint population of around 488 people. It is located in the Borough of Cheshire East between Knutsford (4 miles) and Macclesfield (8 miles).

The Parish is bisected by the busy A537 with housing on both sides of the route. There is a very active church and 2 public houses. The school and post office have both closed and there is no village shop.

Nearly half of the population are over the age of 45 and 18.7% are over the age of 65. Communication is good through the village website and a monthly magazine. It is a ‘big hearted’ community and was runner up in the 2006 ‘Building Community Life’ competition. In this respect, the church hall and the ageing 1970’s village hall in Marthall, have been frequently used and have acted as the focal points for parish events.

The Ollerton with Marthall Parish Plan and Village Hall

The Parish Council agreed to produce a parish plan in July 2005 and approached Cheshire Community Action and Macclesfield Borough Council for grant funding. A Steering Committee and four action teams were set up and a questionnaire was delivered to every household.

Through this consultation it emerged that 65% of respondents attended events at the village hall. It was clear therefore that it was a much used and highly valued community resource. Despite this, people were increasingly unwilling to use the hall because of its low ceiling and it not being comfortable, particularly in winter when it felt cold and unwelcoming. The survey revealed however that 100% of respondents wanted the hall to survive and over 80% would be prepared to contribute something towards keeping it. When launched in 2007, the Parish Plan suggested that the village hall should...
therefore either be improved or a new village hall should be built within a timescale of 2 years.

A survey of the hall’s condition revealed that the wooden structure was indeed decaying and it was becoming unsuitable to meet the community’s needs in terms of health and safety, fire prevention and disability discrimination laws. A decision was then made to attempt to build a new facility. The Parish made contact with CCA’s Village Halls Adviser for advice and support and sought help from Cheshire County Council’s External Funding Unit. One of the most positive elements in applying for funding was the community’s strong support for the hall revealed during the Parish Plan process.

The Parish initially obtained a grant from the Big Lottery Community Buildings Programme for £20,000 to cover the costs of development, design, planning and professional fees. In September 2007, the Big Lottery awarded a development grant for the new hall of £306,000. A grant of £50,000 was also successfully obtained from WREN and £10,000 from local businesses/Manchester Airport Community Fund. In addition, the Parish was awarded a Parish Plan Implementation Grant of £3,000 by Cheshire County Council for the necessary A/V projection equipment.

The rest of the £440,000 project costs were raised by the community through donations, sponsorship and a wide range of events and fund raising activities. The Parish Council also played its part by donating funding. The formal opening of the Village Hall took place on 6th December 2009 and guests of honour were Sir Bobby and Lady Charlton and the Tatton MP and the then Shadow Chancellor, George Osborne and his wife Frances.
The new hall is larger than the original hall (304m²) and is expected to be used by well over 600 people and at least 14 different organisations. The new building includes a large hall and separate meeting room, a disabled toilet, a bar and a kitchen/preparation area. It can accommodate 140 theatre style and 110 seated at tables and there is parking for between 60 and 80 cars. Computers on trolleys, which can be wheeled away into lockable storage, are also available for use.

It is anticipated that residents from the nearby David Lewis Centre (a specialist centre for people with complex epilepsy and other neurological conditions) in Great Warford will be engaged in the running and management of the new hall as well as using it for off site meetings and activities.

The Big Lottery Fund is using the Ollerton with Marthall funding application as an exemplar case study. Members of Village Hall Management Committees, Parish Councils, Parish Plans and other community groups from all around Cheshire have found this success story inspiring and are using it as a fantastic learning/skilling up opportunity. In the true spirit of partnership working, the Ollerton with Marthall community is keen to share its knowledge, experience and the skills it has acquired along the way with other communities who may want to run similar projects.

The project is an excellent example of partnership working, bringing together a wide range of individuals, professionals, organisations and agencies over the 2 year+ period of the project. Some of those involved include:

- the MOW Vision Project Team;
- the communities of Ollerton, Marthall and Little Warford;
- individual & community volunteers, fund raisers, donors and sponsors;
- Sir Bobby and Lady Charlton;
- George and Frances Osborne;
- the Parish Council;
- the Village Hall Management Committee;
- the Bridge Club;
- the Church and Vicar;
- Builders P E Jones of Alderley Edge (Emerson Projects);
- The David Lewis Centre;
- The Karten Trust;
- Cheshire County Council through its Funding Adviser;
- Cheshire County Council through grant funding;
- Macclesfield Borough Council through its Planners;
- Planners at Cheshire East Council;
- The Village Halls Adviser at Cheshire Community Action;
- The Parish Plans Development Officer at Cheshire Community Action;
- The Big Lottery Fund;
- WREN;
- Manchester Airport Community Trust Fund; and
- Business Sponsors.