

Steep War Memorial Village Club Consultation

Summary

October 2021

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1. Executive Summary

1. In May/June 2021, the Steep War Memorial Village Club (SWMVC) consulted the residents of Steep about the future of their War Memorial land adjacent to the village hall.
2. In total, 87 respondents submitted their views for the consultation.
3. The questions within this consultation were found to be vague and leading.
4. Overall, respondents were keen to use the space to improve the mental and physical well-being of its potential users. Nobody challenged the importance of this and a lot of positive suggestions were made in order to achieve this.
5. Respondents overwhelmingly stated they did not want the Trustees of SWMVC to sell off the War Memorial land, nor to do a deal (“no deal”) with the developer of the adjacent land Steep In Need (SIN) land.
6. There is strong acknowledgement that improving the finances of the SWMVC is indeed important and essential. Respondents felt that not enough information has been provided on the past, current or future finances of the SWMVC. A significant number, however, expressed concern over selling the land outright. Instead suggesting alternative methods of improving finances by, for example: public funding, commercial use, fund-raising events, or by making better use of the Village Hall.
7. The majority of respondents said they did not believe the existing green space and the carpark should be reorganized.
8. There were numerous suggestions made regarding a name for the green space, but there was no consensus on what this name should be.

2. Analysis on the Consultation of the Future of the Village Hall Land

Note: There were a total of 87 submissions to this consultation. Many of the respondents made multiple comments of note within their answers to each question. These comments have been isolated and tallied up with other similar responses and this tally is noted in figure form within the analysis below.

Question 1

How important do you think it is to make better use of the Village Hall land as a mental and physical recreational space?

Respondents to question one seem very keen to suggest ways in which the village hall land could be used to the benefit of villages or users.

Overall respondents were keen to use the space to improve the mental and physical well-being of its potential users. Nobody challenged the importance of this.

Specifically, only two respondents commented that positives would be gained by working with the developer of the SIN land compared to a do-nothing approach.

It was pointed out that a recreational or open space already exists opposite the church (3). 4 comments were made relating to the lack of information regarding how the land might be used to improve physical and mental health and also how much any proposed changes may cost.

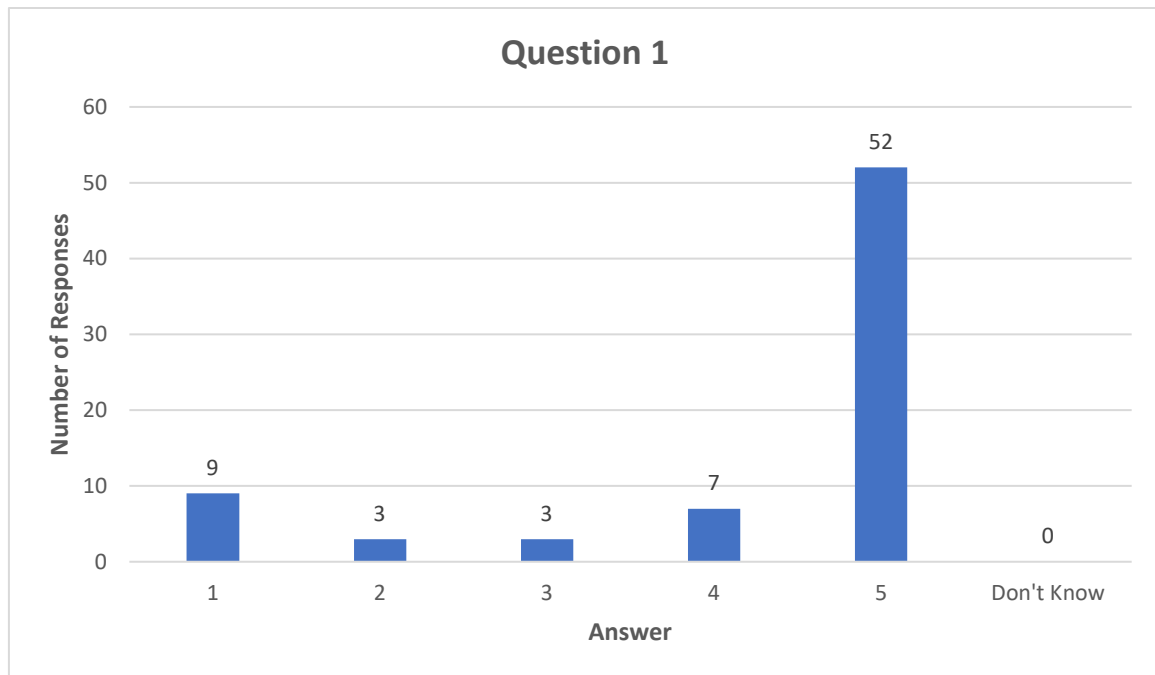
The majority of comments were made in relation to making it more inviting and accessible space. Benches, paths, enhanced planting and general basic maintenance such as grass cutting was suggested (31) along with utilising the Village Hall land for commercial enterprises like a cafe or village store. Enhancing directly in front of the village hall (3) to reflect the open space working groups three themes of reflection/nature, social interaction & environment, in touch with nature were mentioned.

With this in mind, 21 comments were made that stated “no deal” with the developer.

It was also noted that were there would be a negative impact on the well-being of parishioners with the increased density of homes on the neighbouring SIN land (2).

One respondent suggested that no covenant should be placed on the land if sold to the developer as this may take away any future opportunities for development or sale should this ever be necessary.

Another respondent asked for a community-led approach to the decision-making process.



1 is not very important, 5 is very important

Total = 74

Question 2

It is likely that the trustees will end up with a larger plot of open space after the Steep In Need (SIN) land is developed. How important do you think it is that the larger open space is one continuous plot?

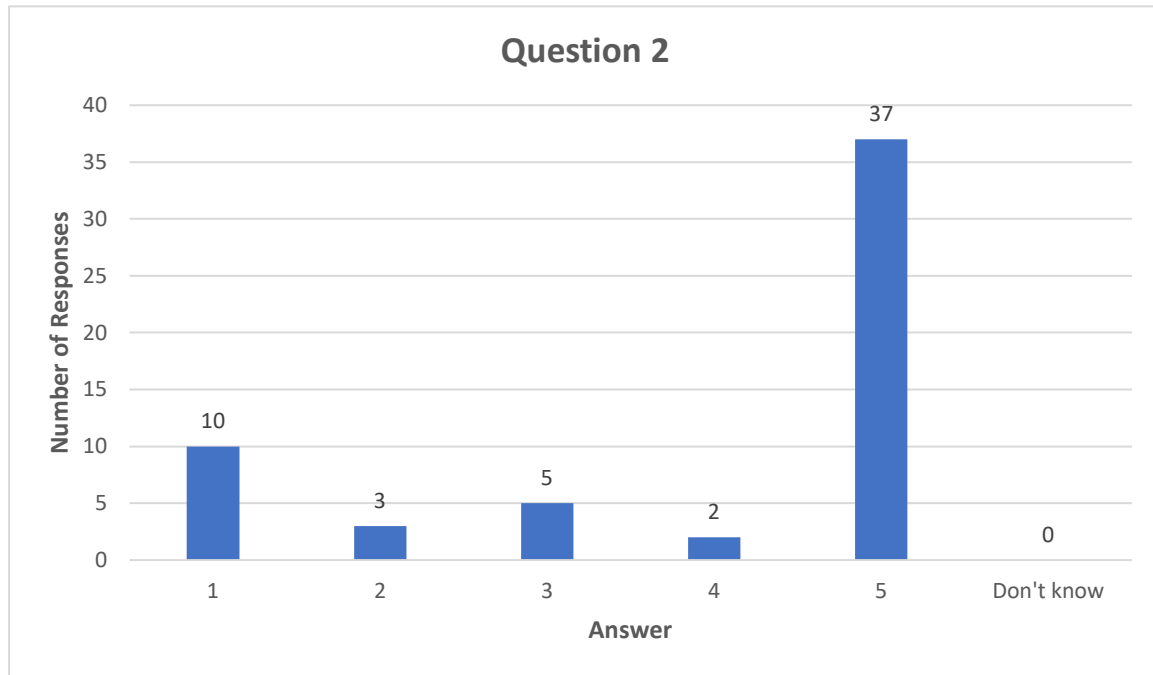
Respondents overwhelmingly stated “no deal” with the developer (18) that the question was vague or loaded or that they needed more information on the proposals before being able to give an informed answer (13).

One thought the covenant would be pointless while another suggested a cohesive master plan be produced to take out the need for a deal with the developer. Another point raised was that there should not be a deal with the developer if they do not give the agreed 20% of SIN land to the village.

There were 9 positive responses to this question - that having a larger open space as one continuous plot could be “a major benefit”, could “create a larger publicly accessible open space”, could “maximise the recreational space by doing a deal with the developer” and that “the opportunity to secure one large plot of open space should not be missed”, as “a smaller plot might get lost”.

It was suggested that this space could become the hub of the village (2) and even that the hedge alongside Church Road could be removed to make it more of a village green (1). There were 4 suggestions that the land, if at the front of the village hall, could be used commercially by putting power to the cabin (to replace the current gazebo), have a cafe or small store. Even use the space just for a seating area or for locals to grow vegetables/flowers in raised beds

13 respondents suggested that the SWMVC land and the SIN open space be kept separate but connected via path or green walkway. This would allow a diversity of spaces that can be enjoyed differently. The “preservation of natural environment and the enjoyment of the space by villages is what’s most important here”. One suggestion was that the housing development “might benefit from having its own open space” while another was concerned that “any open space must be accessible to all not just becoming a sub area for the new development”.



1 is not very important, 5 is very important

Total = 57

Question 3

How important do you think it is for the SWMVC trustees to strengthen the financial resources available to maintain and improve the village hall and its surroundings?

There is strong acknowledgement that improving the finances of the SWMVC is indeed important and essential. The positive comments with regards to this amount to approximately 3 comments were made within the 87 responses stating that this is a one-off opportunity to “piggyback” off the SIN development and should not be missed to secure the financial future of the village hall.

However, far outweighing this were responses ranging from:

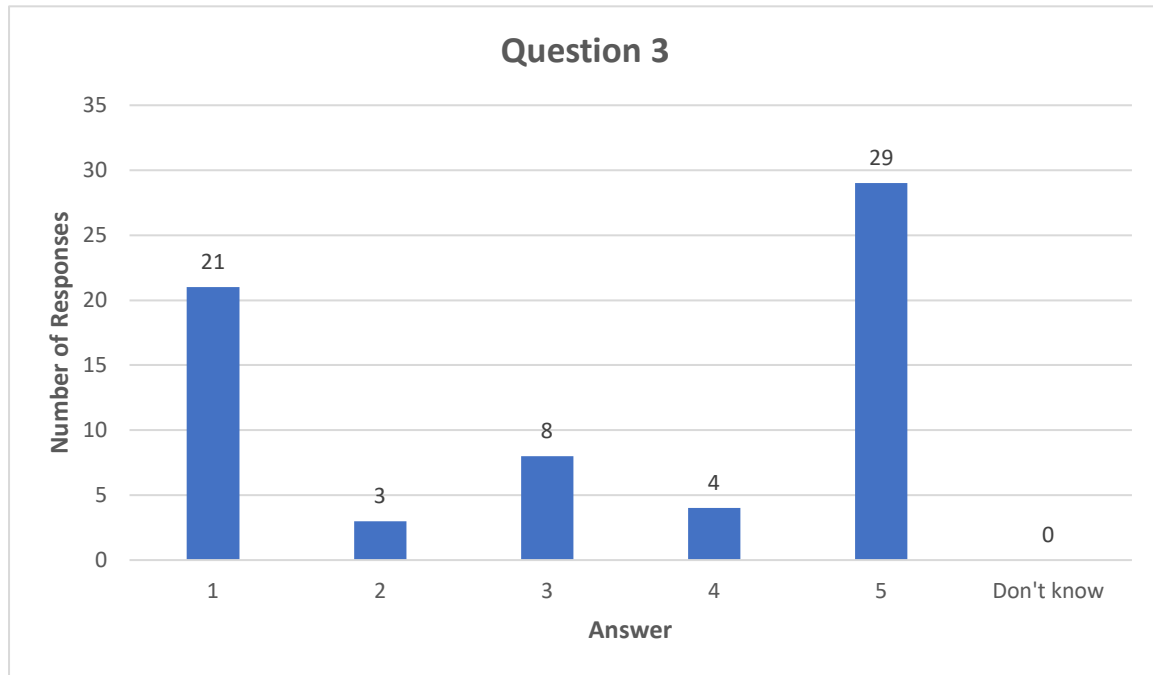
- No Deal (22)
- This is a badly worded question/unsure of question (8)
- What is the current financial situation of SWMVC? (8)
- How much money is needed or hopes to be raised? (3)
- What does the SWMVC plan to do with the money? (4)
- It is not important or a priority (5)
- Can the required money be raised via alternative methods (20)

A significant number of respondents expressed concern over selling the land outright. Instead suggesting that if finances needed to be improved, then this can be raised via alternative methods, for example public funding, commercial use, fund-raising events, or making better use of the Village Hall (20).

The importance of the lack of information provided by the SWNVC from which respondents could make an informed decision was very apparent.

A potential conflict of interest issue was also raised by the board of trustees for SWMVC should not contain 100% parish councillors it was suggested that 50% of the trustees should be beneficiaries and not parish counsellors.

Respondents, while wishing to improve the financial situation of SWMVC, overwhelmingly requested more information and showed a negative attitude about raising finances by “selling off” the War Memorial land or doing a deal with the developer of the SIN land.



1 is not very important, 5 is very important

Total = 65

Question 4

If the village hall site was reorganised to place the car park at the rear and create a green space adjoining Church Road, do you think this would improve the recreational opportunities of the site?

There was a small positive response (6) to the suggestion of reorganising the car park and the green space. Respondents stated that it would make the village hall more attractive, usable and welcoming and will increase the sense of community and thus increase its use. "Hiding the cars" to the back of the site and also "taking the parking off Church Road" would be seen as a benefit.

However, again, there was overwhelming strong opposition to the proposal to reorganise the site. 8 respondents stated "no deal" and "it would be a very bad idea/it was unnecessary" and "the net result would be the worst of all worlds" (5).

Reasons why respondents thought this way are listed below:

- Environmentally damaging (7)
- Waste of public money/hugely costly (3)
- Safer and quieter to have the green area away from the road (3)
- Opposes the three themes of the Open Space Working Group
- Might encourage older children to miss use substances
- Concerned about the impact of a carpark to existing nearby bungalows
- Recreational opportunities already exist at the Common
- Financially
 - This is a waste of public money (3)
 - This money should go to strengthening the village hall finances
 - Steep assets should not be used for the benefit of SDNP

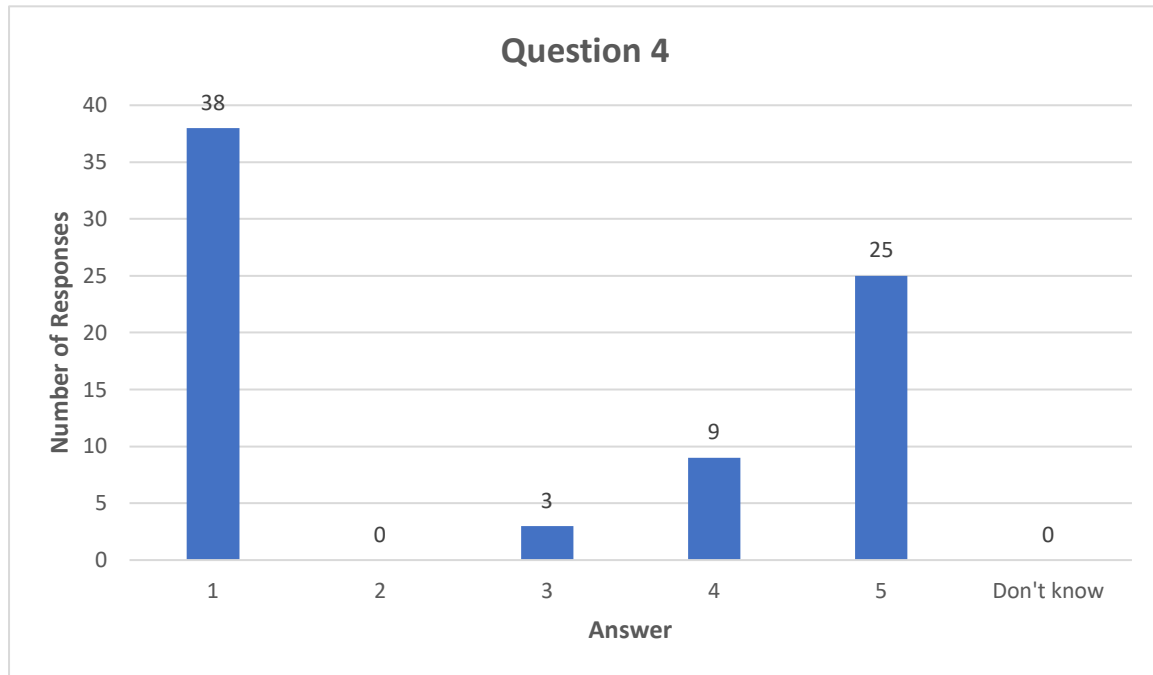
Concern was also expressed regarding this proposal in relation to the SIN development (3):

- Will this new car park be used as overflow parking for the new residence?
- Two access points at the bend of three junctions may impact road users
- This will enable increased flexibility on the SIN land, most likely resulting in more houses (meaning more cars, more traffic, more pets)

Further concerns were also raised regarding the layout of such a proposal (12), including:

- The need to retain space for deliveries/drop-off/disabled access
- Dangerous to have a road cutting between the garden and the hall
- Decrease tranquillity with a road cutting through the green space
- The access road should be away from the village hall door
- An access road will significantly reduce the land available for open space and car parking
- It will increase inconvenience for a lot of users and decrease the recreational opportunities of the site

However, in support of the access road, 1 respondent stated that it "may be helpful to divide between the area used by the Village Hall hirers and the public open space".



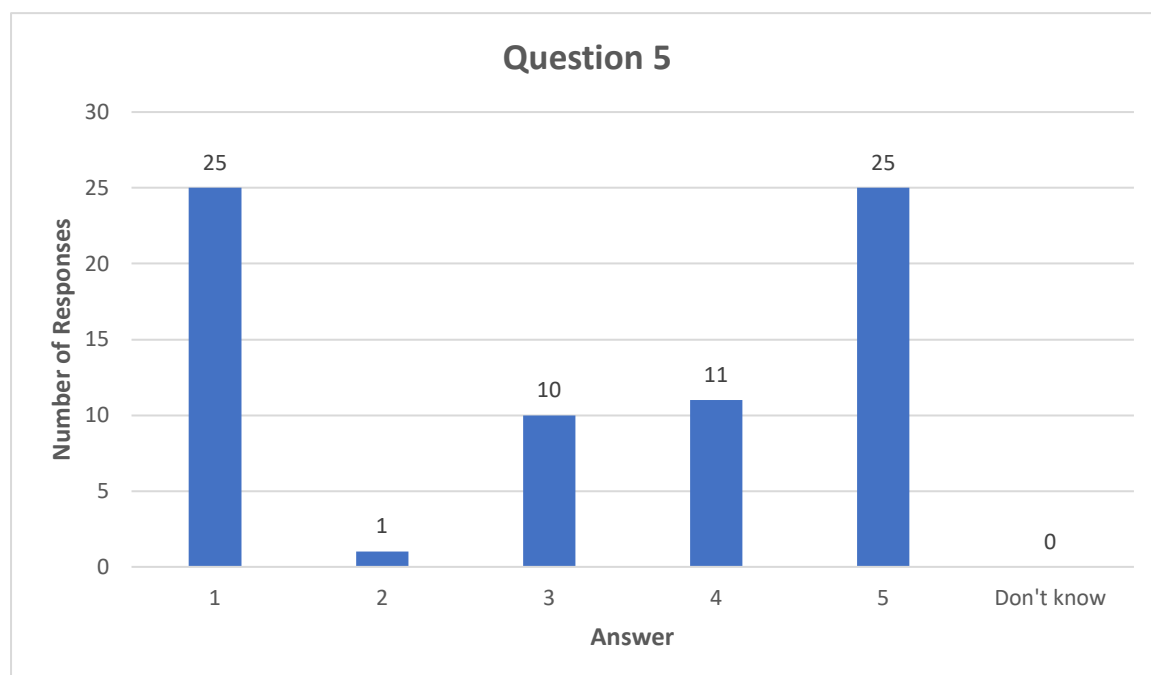
1 is disagree, 5 is agree

Total = 75

Question 5

Do you think the name 'Steep Memorial Green' works well for a new public space?

No name (8)
Not an important question/leading question/no Village Green needed/it is not a green (consider: harbour/meadow/glade) (6)
Consider later (4)
Steep Memorial Green (4)
No deal (3)
Steep Village Green (3)
Steep Community Garden/Green (2)
Steep Memorial Common (2)
Steep Green (2)
Need to see plans (1)
Steep Memorial Garden (1)
Badley Green (1)
Steep Village Memorial Field (1)
Steep Community Garden (1)
Edward Thomas Meadow (1)
Edward Thomas Park (1)
Steep Memorial Village Green (1)
The Triffid Field (1)
The Village Green (1)
State Memorial Meadow (1)
Steep Reflection Room (1)



1 is disagree, 5 is agree

Total = 72

3. Additional questions raised:

1. Were any handwritten responses submitted for this consultation?
2. Who is a trustee of the SWMVC and who is on the parish council (is there a conflict of interest)?
3. What other land does the parish council currently own or has previously owned?
4. Can we see the finances for SWMVC?
5. Can we see the finances for Parish Council?
6. How much money is needed to “strengthen” the SWMVC finances?
7. How much was the SIN land sold for?
8. What will the money be used for from the sale of the land?
9. How much will the Eames housing cost?
10. How much money will be left over after the Eames houses are purchased?
11. What is the aim of SWMVC?
12. What is the spirit of the original Badly gift?
13. What are the SWMVC short and long-term objectives?
14. Is the sale of SIN land legally binding?
15. How will all of the land legally come into SWMVC ownership after the SIN land is developed?
16. Steep Village Hall website states that there is no guarantee that of 20% SIN land being open space if the Village Hall land is not included.
17. Was there a response from the Parish Council to this consultation?
18. What are the options we explored regarding the development of other sites for affordable houses?
19. What evidence is there for the need for affordable houses in Steep?
20. Clarify if the South Downs National Park Authority will allow commercial enterprises on the SWMVC site post-development.
21. Clarify the South Downs National Park Authority rules regarding joining up these two pieces of open space (tree line/hedgerows must be kept in situ).
22. Is this the consultation that the Charity Commission said they had to do before they sell off the land?
23. In 2010 the parish voted 52 to 48% **against** any development – why has this been ignored?

4. Appendix

The Consultation

The consultation document was publicly available through the SWMVC website (<https://steepvillagehall.org.uk/consultation-questions/>), inviting responses until the deadline of Friday, 4th June 2021.

We want to hear your views on what the future holds for the SWMVC land. It is our responsibility as trustees to take the final decision, but your feedback is vital as you are the beneficiaries of the charity. Although this is not a referendum, we will take your views into account and will publish a summary of the information from the consultation.

For the questions 1-3 please choose a selection 1-5 (where 1, is not very important and 5, is very important):

Q1. How important do you think it is to make better use of the Village Hall land as mental and physical recreational space? *

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ Don't Know ☐

Additional Comments

Q2. It is likely that the trustees will end up with a larger plot of open space after the Steep in Need land is developed. How important do you think it is that the larger open space is one continuous plot? *

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ Don't Know ☐

Additional Comments

Q3. How important do you think it is for the SWMVC Trustees to strengthen the financial resources available to maintain and improve the village hall and its surroundings? *

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ Don't Know ☐

Additional Comments

For the questions 4 & 5 please choose a selection 1-5 (where 1, is disagree and 5, is agree):

Q4. If the village hall site was reorganised to place the car park at the rear and create a green space adjoining Church Road, do you think this would improve the recreational opportunities of the site? *

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ Don't Know ☐

Additional Comment

Q5. Do you think the name 'Steep Memorial Green' works well for a new public space? *

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ Don't Know ☐

Alternative Suggestion

Background Information

This information is gathered from a number of publicly accessible websites.

SWMVC: The Charity

Charitable Objects:

For the purposes of a club and place of physical and mental recreation and for educational purposes for the benefit of the inhabitants of the parish of Steep without distinction of sex or of political, religious or other opinion.

In 1920 the Badley family gave land on Church Road for a village hall, in memory of the men of Steep killed in World War I. A charity, the Steep War Memorial Village Club (SWMVC), was set up to provide a centre for social activities and “for all forms of physical and mental recreation and for educational purposes... for the benefit of the inhabitants of the Parish of Steep”.

To the east of the Hall’s land is the field of around 1.4 acres. This was assigned in the nineteenth century as “allotments for the labouring poor of Steep” and held since then as a charitable trust. This is now in the stewardship of Steep in Need, an independent charity created in 2015 to help people in financial need in Steep and the adjoining parishes (see Steep in Need website – www.steepinneed.org.uk – for full details). They are a separate organisation from SWMVC and from the Parish Council.

Since the 1930s Steep Parish Council has been the sole trustee of SWMVC, regulated by the Charity Commission. As trustees, Parish Councillors have a duty both to fulfil SWMVC’s charitable objectives and to secure its long-term future. This is done mainly by running the Village Hall, which is used by local clubs and organisations and is available to hire for events.

Steep Parish Council is the Sole Managing Trustee of the Village Hall and as such the SWMVC and its premises are held in trust to be “held, used and enjoyed” in perpetuity under the terms of the trust deed. The premises are the Village hall and the land upon which it stands.

The SWMVC governing document is the Deed of Trust dated 31 December 1920 amended by schemes of the Charity Commissioners of 22 September 1936 and 17 October 1966.

The Aim of the SWMVC is that it should be used as a place of physical and mental recreation and for educational purposes for the benefit of the inhabitants of the Parish of Steep and the neighbouring community.

In meeting the Charity’s aim, the Management Committee’s objectives are:

a. To provide the best possible facilities at an affordable cost for organisations serving the community and for individuals using the hall for recreational purposes.

b. To manage the budget so that, as far as possible, the cost of day-to-day running of the hall and maintenance of buildings and grounds is met from income. In short, as far as possible, to make SWMVC self-sufficient.

Prior to the pandemic, the Hall's income broadly covered its running costs, and it was no longer being subsidised by the Parish Council. But we have to think about the future. The Hall's last major renovation was 1999, i.e. 20 years ago. Recent surveys brought up various issues that will need attention, and there are things we could do to make the building work and look better.

It would also be great if we could 'future-proof' the charity financially, to make sure it is there for the next generation of Steep residents. We do not have a large endowment, and so have to consider very carefully any opportunity to put the charity on a more secure long-term financial footing. This is one aspect of the situation we are now facing.

As well as the Hall itself, the charity owns some land on the south side of Church Road. This consists of the Hall car park and just under half an acre of rough grassland, stretching back to the hedge line dividing the Hall's land from Bedales'. Although it is open to the public, we feel that as it is this land does not fulfil SWMVC's objects. It is also largely inaccessible for wheel-chair users, people with prams or buggies, or anyone with limited mobility or sight.

A previous consultation was conducted by Steep Parish Council in the Autumn of 2020. This was to find out the public would like to see on the 20% allocated 'Open Space' on the SIN land. 90 responses were submitted.



The South Downs National Park Local Plan was adopted during 2019. Within this, the land to the rear of the Village Hall as well as the adjacent field (held by the Steep in Need Charity) has been incorporated within the settlement boundary of Steep (focusing the area within the National Park where development may happen), therefore making development possible for the site. SWMVC Trustees sought legal advice in respect of the potential sale of this modest proportion of its land. The sale has the possibility of yielding significant value to help with improvements to the hall and assuring its long-term viability. However, no commitments had been made as at February 2021 and the Trustees continue to consider the balance of risk and benefit arising from this situation.

The Current Situation

Over the last three years Steep in Need and SWMVC trustees have been working together to see how both charities' land could best be used to help both charities' objectives: Steep in Need's for the relief of poverty, and SWMVC's for recreation. Together we decided to sell the land to the developer, who would build a mix of market and affordable homes on the site, while keeping around 20% as public open space. This would be returned to SWMVC ownership as a recreational space for the whole village.

Steep in Need's land makes up 85% of the allocation site and they took the lead in choosing a preferred developer and commissioning preparatory works, such as ecology studies and ground water monitoring. More details can be found on their website.

After discussions with the Charity Commission and concerns from some residents, SWMVC's trustees have decided NOT to proceed with the joint sale. Steep in Need can develop their land without our involvement and have recently signed an agreement with Wilson Designer Homes Ltd. We are now considering how best to make the Village Hall land work for its beneficiaries in this situation.

THE OPTIONS IN BRIEF:

1. Do nothing. We could simply leave the hall and its surrounding land as it is.
2. Sell the rough grassland to Wilson Designer Homes, the developer, with the final open space returned to SWMVC ownership.
3. Leave the hall and surrounding land as it is but covenant the rough grassland to be part of the final open space. The land would remain in SWMVC ownership and the developer would make a payment in return for the covenant.
4. As option 3, but with SWMVC land rearranged by moving the car park to the back and creating a recreational area along Church Road. This would be covenanted as part of the final open space in return for a payment from the developer.
5. Sell the rough grassland and use the whole proceeds to buy equivalent land as a like-for-like replacement elsewhere in the village. The current plot would presumably be included in the development and the final open space come back into SWMVC ownership

Option 4 creates a better space for recreation and reflection at the heart of Steep, in line with SWMVC's objectives and residents' wishes expressed in the open space consultation. We think this is the best way both to secure a green centre for Steep and to fulfil SWMVCs long and short-term objectives. It is important to realise that if the Village Hall land isn't included in the development, there is no guarantee of 20% of the Steep in Need land being left as open space.