

**C/o Dave Smith,  
Ringshall Parish Council Clerk,  
Maple Cottage, Offton Road, Ringshall,  
Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 2JD.**

**15<sup>th</sup> September 2020.**

Dear Ringshall Parish Council Chair,

**Ref: Ringshall Village Hall, Lower Farm Road, Ringshall.**

You are aware that Ringshall Village Hall sewerage pipework was recently severed and capped by Ringshall Primary School contractors installing a new sewage treatment works (STW) at the school. It means that the village hall cannot be used for village functions or hire as it has no outflow for sewage and waste water.

This will have serious financial implications for village hall funds if the building cannot reopen promptly after the easing of Covid-19 village hall closure policy.

According to the minutes of Ringshall Parish Council dated 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2019, your representative organisations were aware of this looming problem. More than a year later, the school authorities dealt with the problem for themselves. However, it seems that the parish council has yet to choose and appoint contractors to install a new STW for the village hall.

When asked, the parish organisations seem reluctant to provide me with a clear and coherent reason as to why this has occurred. In my view, there has been little public transparency and only a select few are fully briefed about this wider village matter.

The use of the old treatment plant was shared for 25 years between Ringshall Primary School and Ringshall Village Hall. Under a *quid pro quo* arrangement for parents, the school has had beneficial rights to use the village hall car park for school drop off and collection and school events.

As a resident of Ringshall, I was, until very recently, unaware of the significant problems and how and why this situation came about. I have spent considerable time trying to establish the facts and am baffled by an air of secrecy around the situation.

For those who might not be aware, it follows on from a decision to replace the primary school's STW by Suffolk County Council/Local Education Authority as the running of the school was ceded to Asset Education (formerly Ipswich Primary Academies Trust) in October 2019.

In view of this, in November 2019, Ringshall Village Hall Management Committee (RVHMC) decided to seek funding for a new standalone self-contained system for sewage and waste water, to be installed on the village hall site. I appreciate that the RVHMC had little option but to accept the situation. In my opinion, it offers the best long-term solutions for the school and the village hall.

After trawling through the parish council minutes, I read that on 30th June 2020, the parish council was informed by a school governor that the existing pipework would be cut and sealed off from 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020 (*Published online in the minutes of the extraordinary meeting of Ringshall Parish Council on 30th June 2020*). Effectively this prevents the village hall from reopening until the issue is resolved.

This statement raises more questions than it answers, especially as to why the village hall was cut off from its waste facility during lockdown in what feels like an unceremonious way and without time for joint consultations between all parties.

I understand and appreciate that the situation is complex and has involved the Ringshall Village Hall Management Committee, Ringshall Parish Council, Ringshall Primary School, Suffolk County Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, Asset Education, Hitchcock Farms as landlords, and potential contractors. I am informed that difficulties might have been exacerbated by delays in responses due to the Covid-19 lockdown and home working of staff and representatives.

However, in my opinion the village has not been kept up to date with the situation. Little information has been provided in the public domain about this important and expensive STW replacement project, which might cost up to £25,000 and have a potential knock-on impact on village hall finances.

The village hall is an essential amenity for the community, providing a hub for various local clubs, societies, wedding receptions and other celebratory occasions, special events for senior citizens, public meetings, a statutory polling station, and so on. I acknowledge and appreciate the dedication of those who are responsible for running the hall.

Nothing about this situation or any reference to it has, to my knowledge, appeared in the local '*The Four Parishes magazine*' or in the 'News' section of the village hall website ([www.ringshallvillagehall.org.uk](http://www.ringshallvillagehall.org.uk)). I would have thought publicity would be advantageous. Many local groups who use the village hall have yet to be informed of the possible consequences.

I am not a member of RVHMC or Ringshall Parish Council. The minutes of the parish council meetings published online do not offer a comprehensive level of information or access to the background to this.

**I have four specific questions for Ringshall Parish Council and the RVHMC:**

- 1) Why has it not been able to formulate a more collaborative effort between the school and village hall to ensure a mutually agreed timetable for the work to be carried out on both sites around the same time to avoid the current situation?**
- 2) I wonder if the parish council or RVHMC have sought legal advice on the way the 25-year agreement to share facilities was ended and whether any compensation should be awarded to the RVHMC for loss of income and resultant additional incidental expenditure for the village hall.**
- 3) Will Suffolk County Council or Asset Education voluntarily recompense the RVHMC for any lost revenue and additional expenditure caused by the disruption, which could include the cost of hiring temporary toilet facilities for events including regular club meetings?**
- 4) I also ask that the RVHMC and Ringshall Parish Council publicise information about the future plans for those who do not have access to the internet or prefer reading information in '*The Four Parishes magazine*'. I would encourage regular updates to be included in the magazine and on the 'News' section of the RVHMC website.**

As local Council Tax payers, we contribute to the funds that the RVHMC and parish council use for the benefit of the community. I have lived in Ringshall for nearly 20 years and would welcome more transparency and accountability regarding this matter.