

The Harlington Development – FAQs

- 1. Q How have you come up with the repayment periods of the projects?**

A The indicated repayment periods are based upon the current monies raised as a consequence of the Town Council Tax increase **last year**. The additional money that we identified for the Harlington has been ring fenced and determines the annual amount available to repay the loan. This sum is fixed for the period of the loan and therefore will not increase over the period. The Town Council is not increasing the Local Council Tax this year. It will be the only element of your council tax bill with a 0% increase.
- 2. Q If you reduced the repayment period, would the overall cost of the projects be reduced?**

A As with any loan the repayment plan is a combination of repaying the capital and the interest. The longer the period of the loan the more interest you pay, the shorter the period the higher the regular payments but the lower the interest charges; so, it is a balance.

As a guide:
The current Local (parish) Council Tax to repay in the periods shown is £99.81/annum/B and D household.

Option 2 - If the Council Tax was raised to £109.21 (£9.40 increase) the loan would be repaid in 25 years
Option 3 - If the Council Tax was raised to £113.14 (£13.33 increase) the loan would be repaid in 25 years
- 3. Q How long will it take to implement these options?**

A Option 1 does not require planning permission, so it may be possible to design the project and go to tender in 9/10 months and start work within a year. Construction could take around 9-12 months.
Option 2 and 3 both require planning permission, site investigation works and site surveys, 12 months' design, 2-3 months tender and appointment and say 18 months construction
- 4. Q What will happen to the Youth Services and RVS.**

A Nothing initially, we have at least 12 months for Option 2 and in the case of Option 3, nearly 3 years to work with both organisations and third parties to find an alternative venue. RVS in particular is now reduced to a small, twice a week lunch club which can hopefully be incorporated into one of the other clubs that regularly meets in Fleet.
Opportunities for the youth facility are already being explored and this will continue.
- 5. Q How can you guarantee the Harlington ring fenced precept will not be increased?**

A. Until tenders are received from prospective contractors, an absolute guarantee on the final price cannot be given. As the detailed design work progresses, on the selected Option, the price will be reviewed constantly. The Council would come back to residents if there was any indication of a significant price increase. Otherwise the loan will be arranged, once a lease has been arranged and planning permission agreed, while interest rates are low and the amount of the repayment is fixed for the period of the loan.
- 6. Q How certain are you of the Estimated Cost?**

A. Architects, Mechanical and Electrical Engineers and Quantity surveyors specialising in this type of work have been employed to bring their expertise to bear. Both national data bases and each expert's personal experience have been pooled to obtain the best price prediction. Again, based upon experience, reasonable sums have been incorporated into the estimates to cover for contingencies. The estimates are considered robust.
- 7. Q Has a Business Model been developed to ensure we are not creating a white elephant?**

A The Town Council and in particular the Harlington Manager have 7 years' experience of running the Harlington and have progressively reduced running costs over time.
The Harlington is now running at an overall cost of around £160,000 per annum, down from the staggering £429,281 in 2007/8 and £506,200 in 2008/9 when the Harlington was managed by Hart District Council.

Investigations into how other centres are managed and financed have been undertaken and business opportunities discussed with consultants specialising in theatre and community facilities. A number of

operating costs will be reduced, particularly energy bills through improved insulation and heating equipment. Some costs will go up, such as staffing costs to support a greater number and variety of productions, but this will be offset by greater revenues. All the projections indicate that the overall cost of running the Harlington will go down.

New commercial opportunities that do not contribute to further long term reductions in operating costs will not be undertaken.

It has to be kept in mind that the Harlington is being developed as a community facility, not solely as a theatre.

8. **Q** **Will the Development of Gurkha Square and the creation of a civic space unbalance the high street?**
A The provision of a new facility should attract significant interest and as a consequence attract extra footfall to the benefit of the Town overall.
9. **Q** **Do these works reduce the cost of operations through energy savings?**
A Yes, it is estimated that energy consumption will go down by at least £20,000 per annum and this figure has been factored into the business plan.
10. **Q** **Are these the final designs?**
A No, these are all preliminary designs developed to the same level of detail to be able to identify major costs elements and likely extent of contingency sums. They are robust estimates. There will be further design stages that go into the fine detail of the selected scheme and can accommodate ideas and comments brought out in this consultation. Nothing is currently set in stone.
11. **Q** **What happens to the Harlington if Option 3 is adopted?**
A Should Option 3 progress we have been advised by Hart District Council that on the day that the Town Council occupy the new Harlington building all the keys to the current Harlington should be returned to the District Council who take over full responsibility for the building. All questions related to the longer term future of the Harlington Building should be addressed to HDC.
12. **Q** **What about W C Baker Limited**
A The Harlington Working Group has ensured that Mr Baker and his family have been kept informed of proposals as they have been developed.
13. **Q** **Are HCC and HDC involved in the project?**
A Negotiations with HCC Library Services to either jointly develop a scheme or share some facilities with the Library have been frustrated primarily on the grounds of cost. HCC Property Services wanted a major capital contribution to offer the library site for a joint development with FTC which made the project uneconomic. Locating some of the administrative functions in the library rather than in the Harlington again proved uneconomic – it is cheaper to build new space than rent. HDC Cabinet have recently elected to more positively support the project, primarily by identifying those costs that HDC will charge to the project for supply of additional land and lost parking facilities as a consequence of development and investigate possible s106 developer contributions that could support the project.
14. **Q** **Will Fleet Town Council own the Harlington in the future?**
A The latest indication from HDC is that they would offer FTC a long-term lease on either the existing or a new Harlington Building.
15. **Q** **Will the cost of these Options mean higher costs in future, for tickets or hires?**
A The capital costs of the selected project will be covered by the loan and the operating costs are predicted to be better than present, so there is no immediate reason to increase comparable costs.
16. **Q** **Will there still be the opportunity to use the facilities for community use?**
A Yes, virtually as now. The main auditorium and the Second Space in Options 2 and 3 will be highly adaptable versatile spaces that can accommodate an even broader range of community and commercial activities than can be accommodated now.

- 17. Q Is it true that only the residents of Fleet are paying for this project?**
A At present that is correct. It has to be remembered that the Harlington has been paid for solely by the residents of “greater” Fleet for many years. Hart residents stopped paying for the Harlington when HDC created a budget area called “special expenses” going back to at least 1980 and possibly about the time of the formation of HDC in 1974. When the three new parishes were formed in 2010, Hart District Council resolved to transfer the Harlington to the new parishes. Church Crookham and Elvetham Heath Parish Councils elected not to make regular contributions to the running of the Harlington. Fleet Town Council assumed sole responsibility for the Harlington to stop it closing. Because residents have been asking if anyone else will be contributing to the cost of development, the Town Council has written to adjoining parishes and the District Council and asked if they would like to contribute to the development of this facility which is enjoyed by a far greater audience than solely the immediate residents. Thus, far we have had three formal negative responses.
- 18. Q Has the Town Council taken a view on which Option they would like to see developed?**
A Simple answer NO. The Council committed to putting the facts, both for and against each option and the cost implications to the public and analyse their response. The result and analyse of your comments will be presented at the Annual Residents Meeting on the 28th March.
- 19. Q Have other means of financing been investigated?**
A Other possible sources of funding have been explored to various extents, such as Crowd Funding, Grants, Developer Contributions and investigations will continue. The current primary source is The Public Works Loan Board which has been a traditional source of funding for local parish council projects, offering a very straightforward financial service at competitively low interest rates, currently between 2.5% and 2.9% fixed for loans over 25 to 45 years.
- 20. Q Will Fleet Town residents who are subsidising this be given priority access and rates to use this facility?**
A We are not aware that this is practiced in any other areas where local communities have effectively paid for the facility, such as Princes Hall, Aldershot, Camberley, The Lights, Andover or the theatre in Eastleigh with whom we have had discussions. It does not mean that local concessions cannot be explored and they will be.
- 21. Q Why is there no option on the feedback form for Fleet Town Council to simply hand the Harlington Centre back to the district council?**
A We are not sure that is legally possible. We believe The Harlington has been much more professionally managed than it ever was under the District Council and as explained above at a much lower cost. It is regrettable that historically, before the Town Council took over the facility, there was no major investment in the building, it was literally a wasting asset. If nothing is done the core services in the building, the heating, the electrical distribution, the air conditioning and ventilation systems will fail and parts of the structure, especially the roof will fail. Option 1 is solely carrying out essential repairs and replacing all essential services.
- 22. Q Surely there should be a joined-up strategic review/plan considering all these buildings and the spaces town centre which they occupy, rather than just asking people to look at the Harlington Centre in isolation?**
A We could not agree more – it would be the ideal solution and probably bring the greatest benefit to the residents of Fleet. Unfortunately, following the collapse of Sainsbury’s proposal for redevelopment of the site, Hart District Council have not actively pursued any further development options. In conversations with Hart they have historically supported the Harlington initiative, but stated if we wanted it to be part of a larger plan we would probably be looking at a 10 year horizon. Regrettably we do not believe the Harlington will last 10 years without significant remedial work – effectively Option 1.

23. Q Will the Fleet Town Council element of the Council Tax be going up each year to pay for whichever option of the Harlington Development is chosen?

A No. The Town Council's element of your Council Tax was raised in April 2017 and this included a portion to be ring fenced for the development of The Harlington over the number of years stated in the presentation. There will not be any further increases to the development portion of the FTC Council tax for the period of the loan as this would be a fixed repayment loan.

24. Q I keep reading that there is a £160,000 loss. Can you explain what this is?

A The Harlington is very much a community facility in a similar way to the parks. The £160,000 is not a loss but is a public cost or subsidy towards the running of a community asset. The Harlington provides a community facility that supports a very broad range of non-commercial activity including the main public toilets within Fleet. If the same emotional language is used then how much does the library lose, or how much do our parks lose? The Harlington is not a commercial theatre. It puts on a range of commercial productions that help underwrite the cost of the facility and provide yet another form of community service.

25. Q Who will bear the cost of demolishing the Harlington?

A Only in Option 3, the building will be handed back to HDC and they will decide the future of the building and whether it is to be demolished or not

26. Q How many years will it take to pay back Option 3 as it has been stated on social media that it is 47 years?

A Option 3 is calculated to be paid off in 45 years. All three Options pay back at the same rate of 78p/week/Band D household equivalent. It is the period of the loan that varies.

27. Q Why is a small, localised group paying for the Harlington which is a regional facility

A The Harlington has never been a regional facility, it appears it was initially financed and built by Fleet Urban District Council prior to 1974.

From a date that appears hard to establish, but certainly since 1980, Hart District Council set up a separate budget allocation called "Special Expenses." This included the Harlington, the parks in and around Fleet, basically encompassing Fleet Town, Church Crookham and latterly Elvetham Heath. It was the equivalent of a Parish Precept and only the residents of the three areas paid for these facilities in addition to their Hart District Council Tax.

When the three new Parish Councils were set up in 2010, Hart District Council transferred a range of assets and liabilities to each parish. Initially Hart wanted the three parishes to run the Harlington, but at that time neither Elvetham Heath nor Church Crookham wanted to participate. Fleet therefore took on the facility to effectively prevent its closure.

28. Q Whilst this is an asset to the area the nature of the events should surely mean this is a commercial venture which should therefore be self-financing?

A The Harlington is not a commercial venture, it is a public facility supported by public funding, but the Town Council took the initiative to increase the breadth of activity that takes place within the facility including commercial performances which help to underwrite the cost of operation of the centre. The building supports many community activities, that would otherwise not take place if they were charged a full commercial rate. The vast majority of the major users like Decorative and Fine Arts Society, Women's Guild and U3A are residents of Fleet who are already paying a contribution to the facility. Community Groups hire the facilities at a lower rate than commercial organisations.

29. Q Who will be running this facility? Will controls be put into place to ensure it is run on a professional and competent basis? Will these controls be robust enough to ensure they cannot be corrupted by future councils?

A Prior to Fleet Town Council taking over the building from Hart District Council, the Harlington had cost local residents £429,281 in 2007/8 and budgeted at £506,200 for 2008/9. The immediate residents of Fleet paid 65% of that amount (proportionate to population) that is £280,000 to £330,000 per annum. FTC has operated

the Harlington at between £120 and £180,000 over the last seven years. That is an actual saving to Fleet residents of at least £100,000 per annum, compared with historic operating costs.

It is managed by a Commercial Manager who came from a professional theatre management background. It is much more professionally managed than when it was managed by Hart District Council employees most likely with a local government background.

30. Q I feel that the costs presented are slanted towards encouraging people to say "oh well if we've got to spend £6.3M minimum why not go the whole hog and spend a further £3.6M and "replace"... clearly, this is just my opinion?

A The principle behind the whole exercise is to present the most realistic cost of each option and set out the related pros and cons. It is the classic case of "you pay your money and you make your choice." If you prefer a do nothing route, then you have taken the decision to support the closure of the Harlington. The consequences of do nothing are set out on page 1 of the brochure.

31. Q Why are the costs out of control and higher than stated last year at the Annual Residents Meeting. We were told that the repair would be £1.5m and it has now risen to over £6m and the new build has increased from £7.5m to £9.9m?

A The estimated costs are much higher than expected. The very initial estimates were based on a mixture of information given to FTC by HDC and costs based on a square footage for building works developed by HCC architects for the development of the Sainsbury project. It was only when the independent Quantity Surveyors, Engineers and Architects had been engaged that the full extent of the deterioration to the building was assessed.

- Nothing, as intimated in social media, is out of control, in fact the complete opposite, very tight control of the project is being maintained.
- Construction costs are inflating at a much higher rate than general inflation, in the order of 7.5% per annum. This is a consequence of skills and material shortages in the industry. Since the Town Council put the first estimate together of £7.5m, two years ago, inflation alone has added £1.2m and to make the estimates presented to the public as robust as possible a further 7.5% has been added for the fact that construction work would not start for another year
- The exhibition carefully explained that the repayment periods were all calculated on the same basis of utilising the Harlington ring fenced money raised through last year's increased Town Council tax levied as part of the overall Council Tax.
- The repayment of Public Works Loan Board loans is fixed for the life of the loan.
- There is therefore no need to increase the 78p/week per Band D household tax isolated to pay off a loan.
- Some people may immediately comment that they had 87p per week in their mind. That was the figure carefully explained in the leaflet "Why do we need to raise the Local Council Tax for Financial Year 2016/17? The 87p was made up of two elements, 9p/week/household to balance the budget for all the other activities of Fleet Town Council and the 78p to be used solely for the Harlington.
- It is 78p/week/band d household that will be used to repair, refurbish or rebuild the Harlington

32. Q The exhibition and all info seemed unfairly biased towards the option of a brand new build losing most of Ghurkha Square.

A Of the 12 display boards, there were introductory boards, then each option had a plan, some isometric views and a 3D model, there was a board comparing the capacity and arrangement of the three auditoriums, a board presenting the summary table of all three options and then Option 3 had one additional board to illustrate the visual impact of remodelling Gurkha Square fronting onto a new Harlington building. Option 3 is the only option that has a significant impact visually and spatially and so it needed an extra presentation so that residents could hopefully appreciate the environment created by this proposal.

- 33. Q Not only that but there's no business plan. They say "hopefully" revenues will rise, and costs drop - but the only thing they showed was a £20k energy saving even that was a guess. They talk about 7 years experience - but over the past 7 years they've lost over £1.5m operating the centre, losing £160k just last year. Great events, poor financial management.**
- A** Based upon 7 years of experience FTC now appreciates the cost of operating a significant community facility, the largest one in Hart after the new Leisure Centre. FTC has had a constant dialogue with local user groups and has compiled an understanding of what facilities these groups would like to see provided. The type of commercial production has been carefully monitored and what types of production are well supported and what are not has become apparent. The limited range of productions is dictated by the facilities available.
- A conservative Business Plan has been developed based on known success and known demand, but a much improved auditorium, together with a multi-functional second space as provided by Options 2 and 3, allows a much broader variety of both community events and commercial productions. Because some of these events will be new, the income stream is not as predictable as the current proven programme. The plan therefore projects more of the same plus a conservative estimate of the costs and income from new events, both community and commercial. New commercial opportunities that do not contribute to further long term reductions in operating costs will not be undertaken. It has to be kept in mind that the Harlington is being developed as a community facility, not solely as a theatre.
- 34. Q "There's a definite need to update the centre and many residents feel that it could, and should, be done much more cost effectively."**
- A** Option 1 is the maintenance option that replaces all the failing infrastructure within the building. Probably along with many residents FTC was surprised at the high cost of repairs. The costs have been developed by an independent firm of Quantity Surveyors working together with Mechanical, Electrical, HVA and Structural Engineers. There is a significant 12.5% contingency allowance in Option 1 because the full extent of the work will not be revealed until extensive investigations into the state of all services has been carried out. This detailed work is outside the scope of the current stage of design.
- 35. Q Why is the Harlington redevelopment costing so much more than the Library refurbishment which is currently taking place at only £1.5m?**
- A** Compared with the proposed Harlington refurbishment work the Library work is relatively superficial. Firstly, it is a much smaller area, principally just the ground floor of the library compared with the Harlington. The library is not replacing the heating system including the boilers or double glazing the windows or insulating the building. They are not replacing the roof. They are not extensively refurbishing and extending toilet facilities. There is a significant difference in the quantity of work.
- 36. Q I understand that the Library walked away from working with FTC as the project was inappropriate for them to get involved.**
- A** Reference to Hart District Council's Cabinet Paper of July 2016 will reveal that HCC placed a capital value of £3.6 million on the Library Building. If HCC had requested a capital payment from FTC for £3.6m for the library site for a joint development it would have made the project totally unviable and therefore discussions did not proceed any further.
- 37. Q It is being said that Fleet Town Council has not taken into consideration the requirements of the youth?**
- A** Fleet Town Council has continued to support the Point Youth facility after the withdrawal of HCC Youth Services from the tripartite agreement between HDC, HCC and The Fleet and District Community Association, a charitable group very similar to Fleet Phoenix, except they employed no paid staff. All the staff costs were originally born by HCC, HDC and Fleet, Church Crookham and Elvetham Heath residents through the Special Expenses managed by HDC up until 2010. When HCC withdrew their services from Fleet youth in 2011, FTC allowed the continued use of the Point at no cost except for a token charge to Fleet Phoenix for their exclusive use of an office. Fleet Town Council supports a broad range of youth activity across the whole of the Town Council's area. The Point is only one facility, but it serves some special needs and The Town Council will explore ways of maintaining the support of those special needs.

- 38. Q If I live in Church Crookham, will you take into account my preference or are only the Fleet Town residents' views being taken into account.**
- A** If you live in Church Crookham, but are a user of the Harlington and therefore may have some valuable comments on the facilities', then those comments will be taken into account into the overall review of which Option is progressed.
- 39. Q Whose votes will be taken into account when making the final decision. Will it only be the Fleet Council Tax Payer?**
- A** No, a balanced view of all returns will be taken.
- 40. Q You state you are neutral about the options, yet the option to retain The Harlington is described in negative terms – why is this?**
- A** Option 1 solely refurbishes what exists, brings the building and its services up to modern day building standards and reasonably ensures a further 50 year usable life for the building. All the current constraints and limitations of the building are retained.
- 41. Q If Option 2 is £9m and option 3 is £9.9m, why is the repayment period different. Is there something hidden here in the actual cost of Option 3?**
- A** The repayment periods are based upon repaying the loan using the money raised in last year's Town Council Tax increase and ring fenced for the Harlington Development. This was explained as being the equivalent of 78p/week/ Band D household. The repayment for all three Options is based upon repaying 78p/week and is fixed for the duration of the loan. The greater the loan the longer the repayment period
- 42. Q If it is decided to replace (Option 3) will the new building provide heating for the library?**
- A** This detail has not been resolved at this time. The library can elect to be self-sufficient or ask FTC to request provision from the New Harlington.
- 43. Q What would be the cost/saving to Fleet Parish residents if the parish council hand back The Harlington to Hart District Council then build a simple community centre/hall without an auditorium. This would allow most clubs and activities to continue but means large commercial shows could not be put on. Should this not be Option 5?**
- A** No specification has been drawn up to allow the size of this type of building to be estimated. It would be a new option that would need to be scoped and designed to the same level as Options 1 to 3 and costed. A new site would have to be found for the facility which could add land costs to the development. Hart could agree to allow the facility on Gurkha Square, but that will still attract a cost. The only potentially free land in the town centre would be on The Views.
The Harlington regularly hosts large seated community groups, up to 300 people at a single event. Established Community Groups such as the Cinema Club and Jazz Club would need a space similar to the existing main hall. The savings would potentially be in the omission of the stage and some back of house facilities.