

FAQ: The Harlington Renovation

1. Why spend money on The Harlington, rather than somewhere else?

- The building is ageing, and several systems are failing. There are leaks (roof, etc.), poor insulation, outdated mechanical & electrical systems, and growing maintenance costs.
 - Unless repaired/refurbished, The Harlington risks serious decline in usability, safety or possibly closing, which would mean losing an important cultural, entertainment and community facility in Fleet.
 - Also, there is a climate / sustainability drive: improving insulation, updating heating / cooling systems, replacing inefficient systems, reducing carbon footprint are key priorities. The Harlington is part of Fleet Town Council's environmental commitments.
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2. I don't understand the need — what precisely is wrong with the current building?

- Condition surveys show many internal & external elements are “beyond their sell-by date”.
 - The building does not meet current building standards / regulations in many respects — mechanical/electrical systems, insulation, energy efficiency.
 - Leaks (roof), poor heating and ventilation, lack of insulation, probably poor acoustic / performance facilities, outdated lighting/sound, substandard toilets etc have all been flagged.
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3. How will the refurbishment be paid for?

- Fleet Town Council is arranging a refurbishment of the existing building (rather than building a wholly new one). We have secured a long lease (99 years) with Hart District Council, which gives the Town Council more control and certainty.
 - The precept was raised in previous years, and funding has been put aside specifically for this project. The remaining funding needed will be applied for via a Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) loan. It has always been the plan to use a combination of existing earmarked funds and PWLB borrowing.
 - Fleet Town Council will also receive £1million in contributions from the Hartland Village Property Developers.
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4. What benefits will the refurbishment bring?

- Better and more reliable facilities: modern heating / ventilation, better electrical/mechanical systems, improved insulation, etc — making the venue more comfortable, energy-efficient and safer.
 - Lower running costs over time (once inefficiencies are fixed) — fewer energy losses, less maintenance, fewer emergency repairs.
 - Potentially more/better events, more flexibility in use of spaces, improved audience experience (sound, lighting, seating, amenities).
 - Environmental benefits: reduced carbon emissions, aligning with the council's climate goals.
 - Securing The Harlington's future: ensuring this community resource remains viable for many years under the 99-year lease.
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5. Why is Fleet Town Council (FTC) paying / leading this rather than Hart District Council or local parishes?

- The Harlington is managed by Fleet Town Council under a commercial full repairing lease, which means FTC is responsible for all maintenance and running of the building. In March 2025, Fleet Town Council agreed a 99-year lease with Hart District Council, giving the Town Council long-term control and responsibility for The Harlington.
 - Hart District Council are landlords but the day-to-day operations, programming, venue management etc are the Town Council's responsibilities.
 - Fleet Town Council cannot direct or influence how other parishes spend their funds. Each parish is responsible for managing its own community halls or facilities, so their budgets are not available to support The Harlington.
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6. How has the public been involved in decision making?

- The Council's website contains information on this project going back years to current date.
 - Stakeholder engagement meetings were held in April -May 2025 to get input into requested changes.
 - There have been regular social media communications via Facebook and Instagram welcoming resident views and input alongside in person Councillor Coffee Mornings and Annual Residents Meeting.
 - The council intends to hold further public consultations at appropriate stages of the project.
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7. Will residents have reduced ticket prices (i.e. will the refurbishment make events cheaper)?

- There's no commitment so far that refurbishment will automatically lead to reduced ticket prices for residents.
 - What the refurbishment will do is reduce operating costs (energy, maintenance).
 - The updated Business Plan being prepared will consider these aspects (how to balance revenue and community access) to ensure The Harlington remains accessible.
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8. Should The Harlington make money, or should it be treated purely as a public service?

- This is partly a philosophical question, but the business plan being updated aims to find a balance.
 - While it is a cultural/social/community facility, it must also be financially sustainable: it will still need to generate some income (from ticket sales, venue hire etc) to cover operating costs.
 - The model is not one of profit-making private enterprise but of a public service with revenue generation to cover costs: facilities need to be sufficiently used, events scheduled, hire taken etc.
 - Even with revenue, there may still be a subsidy or support needed for certain community-oriented events or free/low cost access.
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9. Why have the council ignored the results of the referendum?

- In 2015 Fleet Town Council ordered a feasibility study and began exploring options to 'Repair, Refurbish or Replace' The Harlington, 53% voted to replace the building, leading to an increase in the Precept.
 - The referendum held in 2018 asked residents whether they supported building a completely new Harlington on Gurkha Square. The result was 60% "No."
 - Fleet Town Council has not ignored this outcome - the decision was made not to proceed with the new build option.
 - Instead, FTC focused on maintaining and now refurbishing the existing Harlington, in line with the outcome of the referendum and the need to protect the community's facility for the long term.
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10. Why wasn't something done years ago when the precept was raised?

- When the precept was increased, the intention was to put funds aside for future improvements to The Harlington. This money has been ringfenced for the project.
- The 'Repair, Refurbish or Replace' consultation took place in 2015, at a time when Fleet Town Council occupied the building without a lease. After the

referendum in 2018 ruled out “replace” FTC entered negotiations with Hart to secure a long-time lease on The Harlington’s existing building which would make FTC investment on renovations worthwhile.

- Long-term certainty over the building’s future was only secured in March 2025, when FTC signed the 99-year commercial repairing lease with Hart District Council. This gave the Town Council the security needed to invest in major refurbishment.
- The Feasibility Study is now being used to ensure those funds, together with grants and a PWLB loan, are spent wisely to achieve the best outcome for residents and the future sustainability of the Harlington.