

Councillor Briefing Note: Request from Rotary Club to Install a Plaque on the Community Hall

Purpose of this briefing

To provide councillors with a clear, neutral summary of the considerations surrounding a request from the Rotary Club to install a permanent plaque on the Parish Council-owned Community Hall stating that “Rotary Club meets here”.

Background

- The Community Hall is owned by the Parish Council, with the Community Hall Committee (CHC) managing the building on the Council’s behalf. The CHC reports to the Parish Council, and any decisions outside its delegated authority must be referred back to the Council for approval.
- The Rotary Club has asked to install a permanent external plaque identifying the hall as a meeting place for their organisation.
- Plaques on public buildings are typically used to acknowledge capital contributions, grant funding, or significant donations that enabled improvements to the facility. They are not normally used to identify regular hirers or user groups.
- Any permanent fixture to the building constitutes an alteration to a Council-owned asset and therefore requires formal approval.
- The Council has previously taken a cautious approach to non-essential displays, including its decision not to install a portrait of HM King Charles III inside the hall, in order to maintain neutrality and avoid visual clutter.
- The hall already benefits from a large external noticeboard, which provides a suitable location for temporary community information and event notices.

Key considerations for councillors

1. Precedent and fairness

- Allowing Rotary to install a permanent plaque would create a precedent for other groups who hire the hall.
- The Council would need to consider whether it could reasonably refuse similar requests from:
 - Brownies
 - Yoga and pilates groups
 - Craft clubs
 - Social groups
 - Any future hirers
- This risks inconsistent treatment and potential disputes.
- It also blurs the distinction between plaques recognising financial contributions to the building and signage for routine hall users.

2. Neutrality of a public building

- The Community Hall is a civic asset held in trust for the whole parish, not the headquarters of any one organisation.
- Permanent signage for individual groups may give the impression of endorsement or preferential status.
- Signage indicating regular occupation by specific groups may unintentionally imply exclusivity or reserved use, potentially confusing visitors or deterring other hirers.

- The Council's previous decision regarding the King's portrait demonstrates a consistent commitment to maintaining a neutral, uncluttered public facility.

3. Visual impact and clutter

- Multiple plaques or signs would quickly lead to a cluttered exterior, detracting from the hall's appearance.
- The existing external noticeboard already provides a visible, managed space for Rotary to display meeting information without altering the building fabric.

4. Reputational and long-term considerations

- Permanent signage creates a long-term association between the Council and the named organisation.
- If an organisation changes name, merges, ceases operation, or adopts positions the Council may not wish to be associated with, the Council would need to remove or replace the plaque.
- This introduces reputational risk and potential future costs.

5. Maintenance and responsibility

- Permanent plaques require ongoing maintenance, cleaning, and eventual replacement.
- The Council would need to determine responsibility for upkeep and removal, adding administrative burden and potential cost.

6. Alternative supportive options

Councillors may wish to consider offering Rotary (and other groups) non-permanent alternatives, such as:

- Temporary freestanding signage during their meeting times, removed afterwards.
- Inclusion on a "Regular Users of the Hall" list on the website or noticeboard.
- A mention in the hall hire pack or welcome information.

These options maintain fairness and neutrality while still being supportive.

Suggested policy position for consideration

The Parish Council does not permit permanent or semi-permanent signage, plaques or promotional displays for individual clubs, societies or organisations on the exterior or interior of the Community Hall. This ensures the building remains a neutral, uncluttered public facility and avoids setting precedents that could lead to inequitable treatment of hirers. Plaques may only be considered where they acknowledge capital contributions, grant funding, or significant improvements to the building fabric. Temporary signage during a hire period may be permitted at the Council's discretion, provided it is removed immediately after use.

Decision required

Councillors are asked to consider:

1. Whether to permit the Rotary Club's request for a permanent plaque; and
2. Whether to adopt a formal policy on signage and displays at the Community Hall to ensure consistency in future cases.