
Elmbridge Public Halls FAQs

Updated 18 December 2020

Why did the Public Halls close?

As part of the response to the pandemic outbreak of COVID-19, the 4 Public Halls (Elmgrove, Vine Hall, King Georges Hall and the Playhouse) closed to the public on 21 March 2020 in line with government guidance and remain closed today. This will be reviewed every 2 months (next review at the end of January) but given the current 'four tier system' restrictions, social distancing and increasing infection rates it is anticipated the halls are unlikely to open for some time. Even when the halls do re-open there is no guarantee that all the previous hirers will all return.

Why can't the Public Halls reopen in the short term?

At its meeting on 24 Sept, Cabinet agreed "that the Public Halls and Cecil Hepworth Playhouse remain closed and that decision be reviewed on a two-month rolling basis, in line with Government guidance" as part of the report considering the significant financial impact to the Council of the closure of the leisure facilities. This is next due to be reviewed again in January.

The additional cost to the Council at this time to reopen the 4 halls was in the region of £100,000 in increased costs and lost income. Whilst some activities are now able to run within Tier 2\ 3 guidance, the Council have to ensure a COVID secure facility, including signage, one-way systems, restricted numbers, increased cleaning and managing busy corridors\ circulation areas. This will increase operational costs but also limit the numbers and viability for many classes.

Many church halls and other places for hire have reopened and are in use again. So why can't the Public Halls be reopened now?

While halls were able to reopen under the Tier 3 COVID guidance they could only do so once venue managers have risk assessed their venue and can ensure a C secure facility. Under Tier 4 guidance community centres and halls must close except for a limited number of exempt activities. Whereas some local church halls can absorb additional costs through use of their volunteers to open and carry out the additional cleaning this is an additional contract cost to the council.

How much were the Public Halls used?

Prior to lockdown, Vine Hall was used 40% of the available time over the preceding 12 months with 11 regular hirers and Elmgrove was used approximately 52% of the available time over the preceding 12 months with 8 regular hirers.

Whilst midweek evenings are generally busy at both venues overall there are long periods during the days and weekends that demand is very low. Therefore, overall the halls have significant levels of availability to hire in the morning and afternoon during the week and in the afternoon during the weekends. The usage stats are based on the wider availability of the halls and calculate usage of both halls in their overall availability.

Can the community come together to manage Vine Hall\ Elmgrove instead?

We are committed to exploring any expressions of interest in the future use of the hall and/or site that might come forward and which have a viable business plan. We are aware of a number of views expressed that there may be interest in running the hall as a community-led facility and we will be pleased to consider viable proposals that may emerge in this regard alongside the public consultation.

We would be open to consider approaches from community organisations who want to manage the halls. Community groups would need to be able to form their own constituted group\ charity and would be responsible for all maintenance and upkeep of the venue together with all outgoings related to the property. The new constituted group would need to enter into a new lease with the council to formalise any arrangement. Both halls will be advertised at the end of the community consultation for any expressions of interest to manage the halls in the short term.

What would be the terms of any agreements if trustees do come forward to manage Vine Hall\ Elmgrove Hall?

Expressions of interest for Short term leases or licences will be explored and evaluated by officers from the council. An up-to-date survey will be carried out for both halls to determine the condition of the halls as this will form part of any discussion with a potential tenant taking over the hall.

The minimum outline requirements for taking a lease\ license on either hall will include the key terms:

- Council to act as landlord
- A formally constituted group to be the head tenant
- Hall to be self-managed by the group, at no cost to EBC
- Insurances, utilities to be the responsibility of the lessee
- All income to be retained by the tenant.

The details will be discussed with potential community groups following the public consultation.

What about the Scouts behind Vine Hall?

Any future redevelopment of the site would have to take into consideration the Scout Hut to the rear of the Vine Hall property and protection or re provision of their current facilities. As the decision to close the hall and investigate other options for the site had not been formally agreed prior to the meeting of the Council on 2 December the Scouts had not been consulted prior to this decision. An initial meeting will be organised with 2nd Molesey (St Paul's) Scout Group shortly to update them with the decision and any interest in community management of the current hall\ a potential new facility.

Why does Vine Hall need so much money spent on it?

Vine Hall would not be suitable for any long-term tenancy on the basis that significant capital expenditure would be necessary to address the extensive work required to the building and to meet the Council's aspiration of being carbon neutral by 2030. The cost of this could be upwards of £200,000, summarised as follows:

Preliminaries/surveys	£13,000
Building fabric works	£92,000
Mechanical and electrical	£10,000
Energy efficiency improvements	£45,000
Resurfacing car park and drainage repairs	£25,000
Contingency	£15,000
Total	£200,000

Is there asbestos at Vine Hall? If it was safe to use before, why is this a concern now

Asbestos within the hall is checked annually and any damaged asbestos is either encapsulated or removed, so the hall remains safe to use. In the instance that the hall is refurbished and upgraded as per above, we are legally required under the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 to undertake an intrusive Asbestos Refurbishment and Demolition survey, to identify any hidden asbestos before refurbishment works are carried out. A provisional sum for this survey and for dealing with any identified asbestos has been allowed for within the costs above.

What would a community group need to do to provide a COVID secure venue.

To help decide which actions to take prior to re-opening the building for permitted activity, a COVID-19 risk assessment should be completed, taking account of the core guidance on social distancing and the points set out in the latest [Government Guidance](#).

Future development plans (Vine Hall)

As a way forward, we are recommending to the Council that we explore possible options for how to make best use of the Vine Hall site over the longer-term. We would like to make it clear that any options we consider must include a replacement community facility, and also protect the position of the 2nd Molesey Sea Scouts, whose Scout Hut is sited at the rear of the hall.

At this stage the timescales for any future developments have not been determined but will be shaped by the responses to the consultation and discussion with the scouts.

What about King Georges Hall?

It is the intention for the hall to continue to be operated as a community hall and to be managed by the King Georges Hall trustees from August 2021. For the time being, the hall will remain closed to the public due to the ongoing social distancing restrictions.

What about the Playhouse?

Under the current COVID restrictions the ability for the Playhouse to operate fully and for the Playhouse Users to arrange productions is severely limited. Sadly, the venue will remain closed for now, but will be kept under review with latest Arts Council COVID guidance for user groups to host rehearsals and live performances. Regular updates will be provided through the Playhouse Users group. Further discussions are ongoing about management of the facility beyond August 2021 with the council continuing to explore options for a replacement Playhouse in the longer term.