

New village hall plan gets the green light

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A new village hall to be built in Monks Eleigh was given the go-ahead by councillors at a planning meeting on Wednesday.

Monks Eleigh Parish Council has been given the green light to build a £300,000 hall on the village's playing field and recreation ground on Church Hill.

It will replace the village's 60-year-old Coronation Hall which has concrete cancer – a problem where concrete degrades over time.

The new hall, with 26 car parking spaces, will mean a football pitch will have to be moved, but councillors at Babergh District Council voted unanimously to approve the replacement, which will be built next to children's play area and consists of a main hall, committee room, kitchen and toilets.

Committee members were told that, taking into account the numbers of objections received and letters of support, the village was “more or less divided” on the application.

Parish councillor Jaqueline Cooper-Clarke said Coronation Hall was much loved and well-used by the village but the option of rebuilding a new hall on the current site in Church Field had been hard to achieve.

District councillor Clive Arthey said: “It would provide a much-needed facility in the village.”

Councillor Bryn Hurren echoed these comments. He said: “The village needs a new hall for the future and, if we approve this, it will have one firm proposal to take forward. I think we should wholeheartedly support it.”

But resident Norman Towers, who runs the village's youth club, spoke out against it.

He said: “I ask the committee to consider the safety of users who have to cross Church Hill twice for access.

“In the winter months, this is likely to be undertaken in the dark. Here, serious collisions and possible fatalities can happen easily.

“I genuinely believe that if this plan is approved, someone is going to be killed.

The plan was put forward as an alternative to another scheme – seven years in the offing – to build a community hall in the grounds of Monks Eleigh Primary School.

But that proposal was put in serious doubt when the school was placed in special measures after an inadequate Ofsted report.

Suffolk County Council, which pledged £185,000 towards the project, has said it cannot commit to backing the scheme with the future of the school in jeopardy.

And with planning permission for the school community hall running out this month, the group behind the rival bid is set to meet on Monday.

Councillors were told the village will hold a referendum to give residents the opportunity to vote on which hall they want built.

Mr Arthey told councillors: "I am sure you have picked up an element of conflict, which is unfortunate.

There are effectively two camps, and a local referendum will let people choose."