

Hall aboard Benneydale!

BENNEYDALE residents feel short-changed.

At Waitomo District Council's August meeting the decision was made to hand over their rundown community hall to them (*Waitomo News*, September 11) or, find an alternative option.

Benneydale Residents and Ratepayers Association members are hoping for a good turnout to a meeting at the hall tonight where various proposals for its future will be discussed.

Hall custodian and long-time resident Graeme Reinhardt says people who are against retaining the hall tend to be those who are in transit and are nervous about rates hikes.

He says there is only a "hard core" of about seven or eight people who attend the association's meetings.

HISTORIC BUILDING

Mr Reinhardt says he has information from the New Zealand Historic Places Trust to put to the council that the hall is an historic building and should be preserved.

"It was built in about 1943, for the miners for the model village that was built here, and it has virtually remained intact without being altered, except for a new floor.

"There's really no other building that is in the same condition in Benneydale that relates back to that early period."

He says mayor Brian Hanna's first preference is to demolish the hall and build a new one for \$122,000, but Mr Reinhardt believes it would end up costing a lot more than that.

"I cannot see the point really, if the people think the rates are going to be less because of a new hall they've got another thing coming.

TE KUITI COMES FIRST

"It appears to me that there is a prefer-

ence for things in Te Kuiti when you read about the council's involvement in the Te Kuiti Railway Station and beautifying the main street."

Mr Reinhardt's opinion is rural halls are part of the community and everyone should fund them just as Benneydale ratepayers fund Te Kuiti's swimming pool.

He also takes issue with the council with respect to the costs for repairs to the hall.

"If I can get a quote for \$26,000 as against \$48,000 for a new roof, there's something not quite right."

These are things that should be looked at, according to him, before a decision regarding the hall's future is made.

BE INVOLVED

Monica and Maurice Louis, Benneydale residents for 10 years, say it is important their fellow residents are aware of this community issue, let their voices be heard, and be involved in the decision-making process.

"Everybody needs to know that we stand to lose the hall unless lots of people show support that they want to keep it."

Mrs Louis has a proposal to keep the hall. She says there are two issues.

"There is an issue of a building, then there is an issue of a community group.

"Living in Benneydale, we talk more or less with everybody and we know that there is enough community spirit that people do want to have a place where they can meet.

"So far the organisation has been lacking for us to get a consistent amount of activity in the hall.

"The other reason not much has happened in the hall is that it's freezing cold and it's simply not been maintained."

Mrs Louis believes the community should have one place, that's not privately owned, for the benefit of everybody, especially looking to the future prospects of the area.

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- Monica Louis



ON SALE: T-shirts featuring the slogan 'Don't knock me down' are on sale to help raise funds to save the Benneydale Hall.

She says it's an opportunity to put together a formal organisation structure that will prepare the community for the prospects of future growth associated with the Pureora Timber Trail.

In the meantime, in order to raise awareness of the issue a petition initiated by Mr Reinhardt and others has been circulating worded - 'We agree that the Waitomo District Council should preserve and maintain the Benneydale Community Hall for present and future generations'.

And t-shirts with a photo of the Benneydale Hall and the words 'Don't knock me down' are being sold at cost at the Benneydale store to further bring attention to the beleaguered hall.

COMMUNITY'S CALL

Mr Hanna says the council is reluctant to spend money on an old facility that requires significant capital upgrade work unless the community wants that to happen.

"We've asked the community to consider what the options are, what the future needs are going to be, and let's come up with the

best fit.

"If that involves upgrading the old hall we're going to have to look at how that is funded.

"At the end of the day it will be the community's call and we just want to move on with it."

Mr Hanna says the hall is a big building that was built when Benneydale had a much larger population and whether potential future economic growth justifies the retention of it needs to be worked through "very carefully".

Regarding maintenance, Mr Hanna says the council is prepared to assist financially if there is "significant community buy-in".

"We've got various grants that can be applied for. But, I feel the hall's not well used out there.

"And the community's got to signal to us that they're prepared to knuckle down and value the hall, and partner with the council significantly in bringing it up to speed.

"Otherwise let's look at some other options that will be more value for money and be of benefit for the future."

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