

Based on what is publicly known, **there is a credible case for Billinge Parish Council to nominate Birchley Hall as an Asset of Community Value (ACV)**, but it is **not guaranteed to succeed**. The strongest argument depends on demonstrating **community use**, not simply its historical importance.

Strengths of an ACV nomination

Birchley Hall has several features that support a nomination:

- It is a **Grade II*** listed Elizabethan Hall of exceptional historic importance. It was a centre of recusant Catholic worship and housed England's first post-Reformation secret Catholic printing press.
- For around 50 years it operated as the **Sue Ryder residential care home**, providing a valued local social care service and bringing residents, families, volunteers and staff into the community.
- The hall contains a historic chapel and has long-standing links with Billinge's heritage and religious history.
- Recent planning proposals suggest the site is continuing to evolve, with an application to convert an annex into a doctor's surgery, indicating the site may continue serving community-related purposes.

Potential weaknesses

The ACV test is **not** whether a building is historic or listed.

St Helens Council would ask questions such as:

- Was the **main use** of the property one that furthered the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community?
- Is there a **realistic prospect** that this community use can continue in the future?

If the hall is now privately owned and mainly used as a private care facility, private residence or commercial premises with little public access, the Council could conclude it does not meet the statutory definition despite its heritage value.

How Billinge Parish Council could strengthen the case

The nomination would be much stronger if it included evidence that:

- the hall has hosted community events, heritage open days or educational visits;
- local residents value it as part of Billinge's identity;
- there is support from local organisations, churches and heritage groups;
- there is a realistic proposal for future community use, such as heritage interpretation, community rooms, health services, cultural events or public access.

My assessment

If I were assessing the nomination against the statutory criteria, I would say:

- **Historic significance:** ★★★★★
- **Importance to Billinge's identity:** ★★★★★
- **Evidence of recent community use:** ★★★★★☆☆ (more evidence would strengthen this)
- **Overall chance of being listed as an ACV:** **reasonable**, provided the nomination focuses on the hall's **community value and future community use**, rather than relying primarily on its listed status or historical importance.

If there is concern that Birchley Hall could be sold or redeveloped, an ACV nomination is worth considering because, if successful, it gives the community a right to trigger a moratorium period before certain sales proceed. It does **not** prevent development or compel a sale, but it can give the community time to organise a bid.

ACV application specifically for Birchley Hall

Below is a draft that Billinge Parish Council could adapt for submission. It is framed to address the statutory ACV test in the Localism Act 2011 by emphasising **social wellbeing, community benefit, and realistic future community use**, rather than relying solely on the building's heritage value. St Helens Borough Council requires nominations to demonstrate that the principal use of the asset furthers (or recently furthered) the community's social wellbeing or social interests and that such use could realistically continue.

Draft Asset of Community Value Nomination

Nominating Body:

Billinge Parish Council

Asset:

Birchley Hall, Birchley Road, Billinge, St Helens, WN5 7QJ.

Statement of Community Value

Billinge Parish Council nominates Birchley Hall for inclusion on the St Helens Borough Council List of Assets of Community Value under Part 5, Chapter 3 of the Localism Act 2011.

Birchley Hall is one of the most historically significant buildings within the Parish of Billinge and forms an integral part of the area's cultural identity, social history and collective heritage. The Hall is a Grade II* listed building recognised nationally for its exceptional architectural and historic significance. It has been associated with the history of recusant Catholicism, education and charitable care for centuries and is widely recognised as one of Billinge's principal heritage assets.

The Hall has, for many decades, served a community purpose through residential care, providing accommodation, care, employment, volunteering opportunities and regular visits by relatives, healthcare professionals and members of the wider community. The building

has therefore contributed directly to the social wellbeing of Billinge and surrounding communities.

Its value extends beyond its physical structure. Birchley Hall is a landmark that contributes to the identity of Billinge, providing a tangible connection with the Parish's history and serving as an important focus of local pride. It is frequently referenced in local historical publications, educational material and heritage research and is recognised as one of the defining historic buildings within the Parish.

Social Wellbeing and Social Interests

The Parish Council considers that Birchley Hall furthers the social interests of the local community through:

- preservation of one of Billinge's most important historic landmarks;
- supporting local heritage, education and cultural understanding;
- providing an established location for health and social care services;
- creating employment and volunteering opportunities;
- maintaining a place with longstanding community associations extending across several generations of Billinge residents;
- contributing to the character, identity and sense of place within the Parish.

These activities collectively promote the social wellbeing and cultural interests of the local community.

Realistic Future Community Use

There is a realistic prospect that Birchley Hall will continue to serve community purposes.

The existing use as a care home already provides an important community service. In addition, proposals associated with the site indicate continuing healthcare-related uses, demonstrating that the property is capable of continuing to deliver facilities that directly benefit the public.

The Hall could also support additional community-focused activities compatible with its historic character, including:

- heritage open days;
- educational visits by local schools and colleges;
- local history events and exhibitions;
- meetings for voluntary organisations;
- health and wellbeing activities;
- cultural and charitable events.

The Parish Council believes these uses are entirely realistic and consistent with both the history of the site and its continuing role within Billinge.

Community Support

Birchley Hall is widely recognised by residents as one of Billinge's most significant heritage assets.

Its architectural importance, historical associations and longstanding contribution to health and social care have resulted in strong local attachment. The Hall contributes substantially to the distinctive identity of Billinge and represents an irreplaceable element of the Parish's historic environment.

Loss of this community function, or disposal of the property without allowing the community an opportunity to consider its future, would be detrimental to the social wellbeing and cultural interests of Billinge residents.

Conclusion

Billinge Parish Council considers that Birchley Hall satisfies the statutory definition of an Asset of Community Value because:

1. Its current and recent non-ancillary uses have demonstrably furthered the social wellbeing and social interests of the local community.
2. There is a realistic prospect that the property will continue to provide community benefit through health, care, heritage, educational and cultural uses.

Accordingly, Billinge Parish Council respectfully requests that St Helens Borough Council place Birchley Hall on the List of Assets of Community Value.

To make this application significantly stronger, I would recommend attaching evidence such as:

- A map showing the extent of the land to be listed.
- A copy of the HM Land Registry title plan.
- A short history of Birchley Hall, including its Grade II* listing and heritage significance.
- Statements from local organisations (such as history societies, churches, residents' groups, and healthcare organisations) explaining why the Hall is important to the community.
- Evidence of its long use as a care home and its continuing role in providing community services.
- Photographs and, if available, records of any public events, heritage activities, or community engagement associated with the site.

A well-supported nomination with these appendices is likely to carry considerably more weight than the