

HADLOW DOWN COMMUNITY CENTRE

Monday, 7th January 2013, 7.30pm

PRESENT: Bob Lake (Chairman), Janet Tourell, Richard Boswell, Graham Terry, Paul James, Fiona Shafer, Vicky Richards, Don Smith, Michael Lunn, Barbara Ball, Rachel Lewis (joined the meeting at 8.00pm)

APOLOGIES: Kathy Cracknell, Sandra Richards, John Thompson, Lisa Scott, Lindsey Waddington and Nigel Harrison.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

BL reported that the meeting with the Wealden Planning Department representatives Doug Moss and Kelvin Williams on 17th December was constructive. (Notes from this meeting were sent to all Village Hall and New Community Centre committee members prior to tonight's meeting.) The aim had been to establish what we should be doing in the future with regard to building a new community centre because of the 7 km planning exclusion zone around the Ashdown Forest. Overall, the meeting had been more hopeful than anticipated and, as can be seen from the notes, the Committee had been advised to reduce the footprint of the main hall space and aim to submit a planning application during 2013.

What to do with the current site had been discussed and it was clear from the planners that no housing or commercial development on it would be permitted. However, it was suggested that it could become garages for Standen Mews or a green space. The upshot of this would be that there would be no 'seed corn' funding for reinvestment in a new centre.

PJ interjected that it was worse than that as the cost of disposing of the property would have to be borne too.

BL pointed out that the planners had agreed it would be possible to include the provision of essential facilities such as a kitchen, toilets including disabled, meeting rooms and adequate storage. If we were to proceed with accommodation for sport, changing rooms, storage and toilets also would be permitted in principle. The height of the building was not mentioned. The planners were asked about car parking and there would be no problem with 38 spaces. Reference was made to the findings of the Village Survey and not least the important fact that the majority of parishioners wanted a new building on the playing field site as opposed to the current one. Also **BL** pointed out that Kal Pegler from East Sussex Highways was concerned about access and egress from the A272 and that playing field site presented a much safer option. Also Sandra Richards had drawn the attention of planners to the current problems in Hut Lane.

BL then invited Michael Lunn to speak to the committee.

ML stressed that he was attending the meeting in his role as a WDC councillor rather than as a local resident. For the past six months there had been an ongoing debate within the Council about the 7 km exclusion zone and a small minority of councillors were very concerned about the effect it was likely to have. Recently he'd had conversations with the Leader of WDC, Bob Standley, and it is

emerging that the views of a number of WDC councillors differ to those of planning officers. In discussing the developing situation with the new hall at Hadlow Down, **ML** had been told by the Leader of the Council that the HDCC Committee should try to keep the footprint of the hall the same as the current one but there was greater flexibility with regard to ancillary facilities such as storage, toilets etc. **ML** advised that we need to demonstrate need and with regard to car parking, we should take photographs to demonstrate the current problems. **ML** said that given the much publicised developments with the Buxted hall, WDC elected members felt that it would be politically very damaging for the Hadlow Down community to be 'knocked back' in similar fashion simply because of trying to improve community facilities! The challenge for the HDCC would be to produce a workable scheme with an appropriate business plan and reduced main hall footprint to be the core of its planning application. Also it would be valuable to draw up a petition and get as many parishioner signatures as possible. Such a petition would have to be referred by planning officers to the elected members of the Planning Committee. This would pass the planning decision to the elected members and take it away from planning officers.

PJ asked where Localism fitted into this. **ML** said that it was relevant and in writing the business plan local needs must be emphasised: a contrast between conditions in the village when the hall was built, e.g. size of population then and now should be included.

RB clarified with **ML** that the current building would become a redundant building, - it would. **ML** said that it could be secured and boarded up as a brown field site pending the results of the nitrogen survey in 2015. **PJ** felt that this could be a problem for the Parish Council.

BL pointed out that the 2015 nitrogen deposition survey results might indicate either a rise in levels or holding at the same level. This could result in the introduction of more draconian measures so it is clear that we need to proceed with the planning application asap.

ML said he felt that this was 'hyp' and that any decision would be left to the members of council.

BL asked if it was **ML**'s advice to hurry up with the project. **ML** replied that it would do no harm and to use lobbying and the media as much as possible. Buxted had already started using the media to lobby in their interest.

PJ asked how Natural England fitted into this. **ML** said that he thought that the Government would not want Natural England to affect economic growth.

RB said that Kelvin Williams's attitude had been that we would need to be cautious in case everyone started doing it. **ML** agreed – get plans together quickly or someone else will get in.

JT asked how many other village hall projects in north Wealden were faced with the same predicament – **ML** said three to his knowledge and advised that we should concentrate of our own project.

There was some discussion about the contradictions in relation to generating nitrogen in the Forest area as many of the Ashdown Forest Centre's promotions and increased parking would exacerbate nitrogen deposits. **ML** said that the fact that the Hadlow Down Hall would be used by local people must be emphasised.

The role of the School in the bid was discussed and its need to have access to a better indoor space for the learning and teaching of PE, particularly gymnastics, dance and other activities. **BL** said how surprised he was at the view expressed by Kelvin Williams that WDC would try to restrict the rise of pupils in the more popular schools as often this led to a development of school facilities in order to provide more accommodation. Such a reaction seemed to indicate a lack of knowledge with regard to education policy and the right of every parent to be able to choose a school for his/her child.

BL then thanked **ML** for this information then briefly summarised the discussion and it was agreed that the playing field site would continue to be the preferred option as far as the planning application is concerned.

PJ thought that we should work on proposals for both sites and asked if we could afford to 'play the political game?' He continued by saying that he thought the village should now have two options to consider because in the light of the meeting with the planners and Michael's information the 'goal-posts' had moved and the current site should be brought back in for consideration. **BL** disagreed saying that, in his opinion, this would constitute a backward step and that we would have to consider buying land from either Paul & Vanessa or Mr Houseman. Also currently we are struggling to deal with one option let alone two.

FS said that she felt that Kelvin Williams had given the HDCC Committee a 'subtle opportunity'. **VR** agreed and asked if the Village Hall condition survey carried out by the Design & Build Sub-Group was ready. **RB** said that it was but needed costing and Paul had agreed to do this. **ACTION: The Design & Build Sub-Group (RB, NH and PJ) to meet with BL to produce costings re. current Village Hall by the end of January. The main committee will be concentrating on the playing field site**

RB said that he felt that the lack of funding from the current site would be the main obstacle to building. **BL** asked **GT**'s opinion about this - he felt that we should go 'full steam ahead' towards the playing field site – the possibility of using the Public Loans Board hadn't been considered yet. **ACTION: It was agreed by all that we should move forward with the project.**

BL said that the costs of the surveys were covered but we must make a decision about which option in terms of location, we are to pursue.

DS asked if anything had been done about drainage on the playing field. **FS** said that there was the possibility of receiving a significant amount of soil from Uckfield Community Technology College. **BL** explained that it is estimated that the volume is likely to exceed 2000 cubic metres and before agreeing to take the soil, we needed to know what height would be added to the existing football pitch level. Also we await the conducting and findings of the geo-tech survey – one thing it should tell us is whether or not the additional soil would enable the drainage to be improved. Unfortunately the surveyors hadn't been able to get on the field because of the very wet weather during October and saturated ground. The college project is due to begin this month and won't be completed until early April – the soil can be stockpiled on the UCTC site until the end of the project so we have sufficient time to carry out what needs to be done. **ACTION: If the weather improves, would aim for the geo/tech survey to be carried out in March/April.**

DS asked how much the new community centre would cost.

BL said that representatives of the Committee had visited three different types of build and had judged that our build would be in the region of £500,000. **FS** said that if **DS** wanted to know more consult the web site where information which should have been presented at the cancelled Village Fayre was displayed. **ACTION: It was suggested that this information should be displayed at the combined AGMs meeting on February 25th.**

DS asked about the availability of grants for the project. **BL** said that in the light of the current economic situation and the fact that Hadlow Down isn't situated in a 'deprived area', there weren't many available. One avenue to be pursued would be funding from the Landfill Communities Fund – geographically we would be eligible for consideration because of the Maresfield Re-cycling Centre operated by Veolia. The funding for sport, however, is much more promising with potential funding from with the Football Foundation, Sport England or both. Clearly there is no point in applying for these grants until we have in place an agreed design and lay-out of the proposed building, a firm costing, a viable business plan and planning consent. It goes without saying a huge collective effort is required. **ML** agreed that it was important that planning permission should be attained before serious fund-raising got underway.

DS said that the Bowls Club were under the impression that it would never happen!

FS asked if 'Community share offer' could be considered and cited Exeter St Hall in Brighton as an example. **ACTION: FS to send 'Get Involved Ltd' information to the Fund-raising sub committee.**

BL felt that it was important to increase the profile of our money – raising. **FS** suggested a 'Save the Village Hall Fund'!

PJ asked if sports grants were only applicable if the playing field was in useable condition. **BL** said no but we do need to create a partnership with an existing junior football club which is willing to state that it would wish to use the pitch if the drainage and changing facilities were to be improved. **PJ** said that when the Parish Council tried for Landfill Communities Fund (previously Landfill Tax), they were refused despite Scull Wood being in the parish.

RL said that when applying for a grant we must show increased usage. **BL** – agreed but we have to be careful about the matter of increased traffic as a result of increased usage and therefore, be guarded in terms of how much information we might include in the planning application. Also we need to check that the proposed changing room areas, showers etc are Football Foundation compliant as well as Sport England. **ACTION: Information re plans from BL to RB.**

RB pointed out that with reference to the conversation with the planners he would have to revise the original drawings and this would entail a fee. It was agreed that any additional work should be paid for but that the HDCC Committee would be obliged to secure costings from other design architects. **PJ** added that it is customary to receive three quotations.

ML said that photos would be needed to support the plans. **PJ** agreed that evidence of overflow car parks for the current hall would be needed. **ML** suggested that a 'diary' of evidence should be kept; he offered to critique the plans before they went to the Council. **ACTION: Need to arrange a design meeting – BL and RB**

BL said that writing a business plan was also critical, would anyone like to assist? **FS** said that it was vital that the Business Plan sub committee should have the figures from the Design Sub-Group (see previous comments!)

DS asked **RB** that when designing the Hall please bear in mind that the Bowls Club would like three mats. **ACTION: DS to send information to RB**

There was a brief discussion about measurements of the Hall and how they should be executed. **BL** said that height and capacity should be taken into consideration. He felt strongly that the school should get involved; its present hall was too small for a number of PE and sporting activities. **DS** questioned if the school would use the facility but the feeling of the majority of Committee members was that it would. **ACTION: BL to consult ESCC Children's Service involvement of school, ESCC Planners re the development of schools in light of the 7km exclusion zone and talk to Mrs Rivers about potential school usage.**

DS asked what date the planning application should be submitted? **ACTION: BL said that we should aim for 1st September 2013**

VR reiterated the need for publicity about the Centre and the future planning to be on display on the night of the combined AGMs and at the village Fayre.

PJ asked if it was realistic to expect an application to be ready in 3 months time? **ML & RB:** Yes – therefore decision by the end of the year! **FS** asked Business Plan and application by 30th June???

PJ and ML – No -would need tweaking. **ACTION: BL - need to start immediately. FS - first draft by June!**

VR suggested getting petition started at the AGM. **FS** asked if we could access residents' names – confirmed. **ACTION: BL to draw up draft petition and circulate to all for comment by the end of the week.**

GT asked for clarification with regard to a design meeting i.e. who and when. **ACTION: It was agreed that RB and BL meet during week beginning 28th Jan to review dimensions of main hall, changing rooms etc and BL report back to Committee members. A design brief could then be agreed and RB would be in a position to cost any future work.**

JT mentioned that at a Playing field Committee meeting before Christmas she'd been asked to investigate with AiRS the feasibility of merging village committees because there was a lot of duplication. She had been in contact with Louise Beaton who had suggested that the Playing Field and the Summer Fayre committees could merge and, when the lease on the Village Hall was sorted out, the HDCC and the Village Hall committees should consider merging. Possibly this is a matter that could be discussed at the AGM's in February.

Date of next meeting: 18.2.2013

The meeting closed at 8.55pm